

CHIREMA CHINE MAZANO CHINOTAMBA CHAKAZENDAMA MADZIRO

By

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ABSTRACT

This mini-thesis has developed as a practice-based supporting document to the exhibition *Chirema Chine Mazano Chinotamba Chakazendama Madziro*. The exhibition responds to how people become innovative in finding alternative means of survival and staying relevant in an economically depressed country. Zimbabwe is often the first country that comes to mind when people talk about hyperinflation; the situation was and still is intolerable, but somehow its citizens find means to pull through. Unemployment and poverty are the main causes of physical and mental problems for an individual. With this thesis, I highlight the innovations employed by Zimbabweans as a way of keeping themselves busy. I approach this through analysing the Zimbabwean general public's creative reactions, and by tracing Zimbabwean visual artists' use of found objects as a reaction to the country's economic hardships. As people have been pushed to find alternative ways of survival, Zimbabwean artists in particular also shifted from using conventional art materials due to their unavailability. They began to redefine what art material is by employing objects in their artworks that previously had a non-art function. As such, there is a growing need to recognise, classify and document the shifts and establish platforms to generate growth of these innovations. In this mini-thesis I discuss my own practice, and I analyse the works of Moffat Takadiwa, Gareth Nyandoro and Serge Attiku Clottey.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete bibliographic references. This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Art at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at another university.



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INTRODUCTION

My MFA submission comprises this mini-thesis and the fine art exhibition titled *Chirema Chine Mazano Chinotamba Chakazendama Madziro*. *Chirema Chine Mazano Chinotamba Chakazendama Madziro* is a Shona proverb that loosely translates to the various ways subaltern people (Ureke and Washaya, 2016) in dire straits finds ways of surviving and negotiating their predicament in ways that denote survival tactics.

Together this thesis and exhibition engage with and focus on people's creative reactions, adaption and improvisations to life's challenges. Using a comparison with food packaging, I analyse the ways in which people 'package' themselves in order to be a marketable 'brand' as a form of survival. This study's emphasis is on innovation during Zimbabwe's economic turmoil. The study also attempts to understand the Zimbabwean visual art shift from conventional art mediums to contemporary art mediums within this economic meltdown.

Since 2002, Zimbabwe had been under sanctions, which has been said to have crippled the socio-economic structure of the country. For more than 20 years, the Zimbabwean government has been pointing to sanctions as the major contributor of the country's current condition. However, we cannot brush aside corruption, which was born out of sanctions, as a debatable indicator for worsening the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe. People in positions of power became greedy; they started stealing from the state and blamed it on sanctions (Grebe, 2010). This lengthy process gradually turned the Zimbabwean economy into an extremely bad state. I understand sanctions, together with corruption, brought about most of the socio-economic challenges that Zimbabwe is facing currently, but this mini-thesis's interest and focus rests more on creative reactions of survival (Wallace and Gruber, 1989) from the majority of the Zimbabwean people in a disempowered civil society. In 2004, Zimbabwe started witnessing signs of food shortages, a high inflation rate and a lack of medication in hospitals. These were the lean days that marked the start of the economic meltdown in the Zimbabwe. The employment rate began to lower and the informal sector became popular. People began to find alternative means for survival, given that there was no formal employment. Through this research, I consider inventions in informal spaces such as churches, where people emphasise healing, prosperity and seeding¹. Although there were churches that performed miracles in Zimbabwe before 2004, I believe poverty and the crippled economy

¹This involves giving money, expertise or time to the church.

contributed to the rapid increase of new churches packaging themselves under the prosperity banner (Ijaola, 2018). There are many more manifestations of other informal spaces which surfaced and were fuelled by poverty. In these spaces, a series of activities for personal gains take place.

During this time Zimbabwean visual artists started using found objects which typically had a non-art function. These objects, such as wire, bones, empty bottles and cutlery were mostly picked up in dumpsites and along the roadside. I will unpack fully the prevalent use of found objects in Zimbabwe in Chapter One in which I look at the rise of found objects, and then analyse the work of two artists, Moffat Takadiwa and Gareth Nyandoro whose careers arose from that period. The use of found objects was aggravated by a cleanup campaign, popularly known as ‘Operation Murambatsvina’, which was initiated in May 2005, perpetrating the removal of all illegal structures which had been erected as alternative places to do business. Some structures were built as shops and some as homes. The operation left a lot of families homeless and without any source of income. Considering the lack of employment and income, life was tough for the majority of the people. For artists, buying art material was considered to be luxury, so Operation Murambatsvina left a lot of material for artists to work with. All the sweat, oil, fingerprints and the small, meaningful traits within the remains from the operation connected with broader details to tell a distinctive Zimbabwean narrative. This chapter scrutinises the connection between materials used for making art and the functionality of the artwork, the object’s previous use in relation to the artwork, and the ways in which the use of these found materials has created a trend for Zimbabwean visual artists. Outside of Zimbabwe, I analyse the works of a Ghanaian artist Serge Attukwei Clottey who is a multi-disciplinary artist. He works with photography, painting, installation and performance. In this thesis I concentrate on his artworks that emphasise materiality and lack of water in Ghana in relation to my work.

In Chapter Two I turn my attention to my own art practice. I define the meaning of packaging and metaphorically fit it within the context of the ways in which groups such as churches package themselves to gain more supporters. I then strip this down to individual entrepreneurs, considering how they package themselves to attract more customers. In this context, the rising political parties and churches seemed desperate; they assure people of better living conditions in the future and a wealthier life respectively. They paint a picture of an impossible future.

I feel it is imperative that I contextualise my artistic practice before I attend to the above issues, through providing a background of the practical research and how this exhibition *Chirema Chine Mazano Chinotamba Chakazendama Madziro* has evolved.

Background and methods

For the past two decades, Zimbabwe has been struggling politically and economically. This affected the social status of the Zimbabwean people. Since 2000, many companies closed because the economic situation in the country kept worsening and this resulted in many people losing jobs. As a reaction to the tense economic state, people who could not relocate to other countries for different reasons began buying and reselling goods as a means of survival. They could go to nearby countries like South Africa and Mozambique to buy groceries, accessories and bales of secondhand clothes. Some would go to Dubai and Tanzania in search of quality, classy and trending fashion. Due to expensive shop rentals, some vendors setup their little pop-up markets on pavements of the city centre. Others avoided the risk of getting arrested for doing business in prohibited spaces, and therefore sold goods to their friends and to friends of friends. Vendors' customer bases inevitably grow from there, because friends support them by spreading the word. It is always a fight between vendors and town council police because vendors sell their goods in illegal spaces. The council police arrest and confiscate the vendors' goods, so vendors started doing business in the evening, when the council police have finished working. Lack of necessities made people vulnerable and it became easy for Zimbabweans to believe in anything that anyone could come up with, hoping to benefit from it. Beyond the business side of these coerced responses to economic hardships, I contextualise the creative packages designed by vendors and Pentecostal denominations and ministries when marketing themselves to lure more clients and followers.

As most people in Zimbabwe resorted to vending, it was common to see a lot of people at the same spot selling the same things at the same time. Naturally, this led to competition; people competing for sales to every passing person the vendors thought would be a potential buyer. Even though there are spaces like Mupedzanhamo Flea Market in Mbare (Harare) where stalls are allocated for a fee charged per day to vendors by the town council for selling secondhand clothes, these spaces do not accommodate everyone, therefore some vendors set up their stalls on the immediate entrance of the Mupedzanhamo boundary. The business of importing bales of secondhand clothes has clothed and fed many families, both the sellers' and the buyers' families. There are health

concerns that were raised by the government which announced a ban on the importation of these clothes, but poverty still drives people into this business. Despite the health challenges accompanying the wearing of these imported secondhand clothes, people still buy them because it is a question of value for money. One can get five pairs of jeans from the informal traders versus one pair of jeans from a legal boutique shop.

The stalls are arranged in a similar way to a tobacco auction floor with multiple sellers. Vendors shout at the top of their voices from every corner advertising what they have in stock. The way in which they advertise their wares on sale is creative and poetic. Some vendors compose songs with beautiful rhymes and rhythm as a way to entice customers to their stall. These chants can only be heard clearly when one is close to the person singing. To the vendors, these songs are only marketing tools that create a centre of attention to potential clients passing by. Only the country's economic condition limits provisions for this kind of originality to be further pushed into professional occupations and to be perceived as significant by the public. People concentrate only on the supplies being sold; hence this overshadows every other thing that can come out from such a space. I am inspired by the way vendors display their stalls, therefore I employ similar arrangement and rhythm of the displays in my own artwork.

In high density areas, repackaging food stuff into smaller packages became popular. People who were fortunate enough to have avenues for buying basic food like cooking oil, rice, maize-meal and flour in large quantities during those hard times were the ones who ran these small repackaging businesses . They realised that most people were struggling to buy standard food in the supermarkets so they found an opportunity of providing the basic goods in small and affordable packages that supermarkets could not provide. The smaller repackaged food stuffs are known as *tsaona*, a term which describes urgency and call for action. *Tsaona* is a Shona word which directly translates to 'accident'. It is a perfect metaphor describing the act of buying small repackaged goods while waiting to buy the standard packages in a supermarket. The metaphor reflects that the *tsaona* situation is impermanent, as if maize-meal or cooking oil in the house just ran out unexpectedly so as the family waits for shops to open, it only buys what is necessary for that moment. The concept originated from the accident scene where the victims are only given the necessities to survive while waiting for full diagnosis and treatment of injuries at the hospital. The *tsaona* situation was a long stretch in Zimbabwe as the economy is taking time to stabilise. Although *tsaona* was common between 2006 and 2016 in high density areas of Zimbabwe, it

continues to remain an option for many as the economy is still struggling and in some ways getting worse. A 10kg packet of maize-meal can be repackaged into smaller units using a plate or a cup, and a bar of washing soap can be cut into four small pieces for resale and life goes on. Some survival modes which rose to fame in the past two decades are sports betting, housing cooperatives and pop-up car selling spots.

Faced by all these challenges, people became more and more desperate. They needed some kind of relief and hope. Churches stood out as being one of the platforms where consolation and hope is found. They act as a compass in a person's life, giving direction when one is lost and broken either physically or spiritually. From 2008 onwards, there was a notable change in the increase of Pentecostal denominations and ministries. Most of them are founded by young charismatic male leaders who preach deliverance, healing and prosperity. These new denominations of churches challenged and distorted the values of Christianity in Zimbabwe by channelling and basing people's hope in miracles. Their presence in public spaces while performing miracles and putting emphasis on prosperity attracted huge numbers of followers. Some of the leading Pentecostal movements which rose to prominence during this time include Emmanuel Makandiwa's United Family International Church (UFIC), Uebert Angel's Spirit Embassy (rebranded as the Good News Church in 2015) and Walter Magaya's Prophetic and Healing Deliverance (PHD) Ministries. The way in which miracles are performed is real to the congregation and every other person watching. Although some of the leaders of these churches declare that when they pray for people, chronic diseases, poverty and barrenness disappears instantly, I argue that some of these miracles are stage managed as a way to attract more followers to the church. Because of poverty, people follow where there is hope of being saved from problems, and in response to that there is a breed of fake prophets who exhibit and publicise their abilities for lessening poverty and grief in people's lives.

In this mini-thesis, I observe the society and the ways in which people package themselves to be marketable images. I achieve this by questioning and employing the survival modes of people through trade, survival, resourcefulness and innovation. I liken the information on food packages to the character of a person marketing their own image. Growing up and living in Zimbabwe most of my life, my research grows out of personal experience and the observation of conditions and behaviours in Zimbabwe. My engagement with artists such as Moffat Takadiwa (face to face) and Gareth Nyandoro (through email and whatsapp) has thus been long-term and sustained, and in July 2018 I interviewed them specifically for this research project.

For the duration of my MFA studies I lived in Makhanda, South Africa, and being in a different context impacted my perceptions of the cultural and visual aspects of food, consumption and packaging. I have chosen to exhibit my MFA work at the Rhodes University squash courts in Makhanda. As I discuss further in the thesis, this is a carefully considered choice that repurposes and repackages space in a way that reflects the strategies employed in the everyday lives of the majority of Zimbabwean citizens. The first chapter of this mini- thesis focuses on found objects in contemporary Zimbabwean art and the second chapter discusses urgent strategies of survival and the redeployment of space, which generate creative outcomes. In the second chapter I analyse my own practice, which is to be read with this mini-thesis as one MFA submission.

Chapter 1: FOUND OBJECTS IN ZIMBABWEAN ART

1.1. Operation Murambatsvina and found material

A lot of people migrated in search of greener pastures from the year 2004 when they noticed the economic meltdown. Some moved from rural to urban areas and some moved to neighbouring countries. Those who moved to urban areas had to find a place to stay and work from in order to survive. Due to the demand for accommodation, people who already had houses in the urban areas saw a business opportunity to extend their houses and make extra rooms for renting out. The practice of extending houses and settling wherever there was an open space became popular. Bogus housing co-operatives surfaced and took advantage of the fact that a lot of people who migrated to the city needed their own spaces to stay rather than renting from a landlord (Samukange, 2013). These housing co-operatives illegally allocated housing and business spaces to people without approval from the town council. The city planners had left some spaces for recreation purposes. Other spaces were swamp lands, so construction of residential structures was not viable (Masikati, 2016). Those were the spaces targeted by people who did not own a house. Sewer systems started bursting regularly, either because they were not designed to service the growing number of people in the city or perhaps just because the systems were old. In some parts of the cities there was no routine of refuse collection so there were outbreaks of cholera every now and again. In a country with a crippled economy, health became problematic.

In 2005, many of the people in the cities were running informal businesses and some were residing in illegal spaces (Newsday, 2012). They could not be blamed for that because a lot of companies were retrenching employees and there was no employment. The only way out for the people who had been retrenched and the urban dwellers was to settle for vending, prostitution, beer brewing and other income-generating activities; otherwise, they had to leave Zimbabwe for South Africa or any other country, depending on their connections. During this time, the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), was gaining momentum; they were gaining more followers who had been disappointed by the leadership of the ruling party. The opposition had a stronghold of supporters mainly in the urban areas. As a response to the unorganised settlement in urban areas and fast growing population, most of whom were supporters of the opposition party, the government of Zimbabwe launched 'Operation Murambatsvina'.

Operation Murambatsvina is the code name given to the programme of demolition of informal structures in Zimbabwean cities. It is also known as ‘Operation Restore Order’. Murambatsvina is a word which was born out of two Shona words *muramba* and *tsvina* joined together. *Muramba* means ‘one who rejects’ and *tsvina* means ‘filth’.

The first operation was initiated by the government of Zimbabwe on 19 May 2005. Murambatsvina was carried out against people who had allegedly settled in spaces which they were not allocated by the town council. By then, I was a second year student at the National Gallery School of Visual Arts and Design (NGSVAD), an art college run by the National Gallery of Zimbabwe in Harare. I witnessed groups of armed riot police guarding the people who were driving mechanised graders that were demolishing houses and shacks that were said to have been built without following the city council by-laws. A lot of people were left homeless. They were also left jobless because most were making a living out of unregistered entrepreneurship based in these informal structures. The operation impacted the economy because the informal sector had successfully turned out to be the economy of the country (Musoni, 2010).



Fig. 1. *Operation Murambatsvina* (2005), Mbare Musika, Harare, Image by Mafaro.

At NGSVAD we were taught the basics of art. It was a two-year course and during the first year we were introduced to painting, sculpting, batik, printmaking and art history. In the second year we could choose to major in one of the above-mentioned disciplines and would be examined in it

at the end of that year. Institutions like the Peter Birch College, Chinhai University and Polytechnic Colleges which offer art diplomas and degrees in Zimbabwe were also affected by the crippled economy. Things were getting tougher as each day came. We got to a point when there was no food or fuel in the country. With the deteriorating economic conditions, there were no substantial attempts by the government to keep the visual art sector active. People were concerned about food only; anything outside that was considered to be luxury. There was no money to buy canvas, paint, paper and pencils; everything that we knew as art material became scarce. Visual artists who studied art during the period of 2004 to 2009 (regardless of where they studied) redefined the notion of art materials. Out of necessity, Zimbabwean artists found their voices through using the residue materials from Operation Murambatsvina, which were scattered around. The economic hardship brewed a new creative cultural connotation that I will unpack in the following section.

The 2005 Operation Murambatsvina was the first, but it has become a recurring event because soon after the operation, people rebuilt what had been demolished by the government to resume trading as before. Lack of employment required people to erect these structures again so that they could make a living. Throughout my practice, I have been collecting objects from the trash which I find useful and relevant to use in my practice. The government of Zimbabwe executed another Operation Murambatsvina on 20 February 2019. Soon after the operation, I collected an 11 metre long piece of old tent from a heap of trash by the roadside, which I believe was once someone's shed. I cleaned the tent and made an artwork from it which I titled *Kudzoka Kumba*.

1.1.1 Kudzoka Kumba

Kudzoka Kumba is a Shona phrase that translates to 'returning home'. A lot of Zimbabwean people have migrated to other countries in search of greener pastures. The work centres on how individuals from Zimbabwe in the diaspora always find a reason to return home (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011). What matters most to the Zimbabwean people is to ensure that their families have food, education and healthcare. However, these immigrants either end up doing business in undesignated spots or accepting jobs that do not match their academic qualifications in order to earn some money to provide for their families.



Fig. 2. Wallen Mapondera, *Kudzoka Kumba* (2019), waxed paper and thread on tent, 1100x300cm, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera.



Fig. 3. Wallen Mapondera, *Installation View*, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera.

There is the pressure of upholding the values of where one comes from. The sense of belonging and expectations of what a home is supposed to be is what pushes people to their extreme in finding provisions to cater for homeliness within a failing economy country (Baffoe, 2010).

In the artwork *Kudzoka Kumba* (2019) I liken home to that piece of tent. Looking at the tent you can see that text was, at some point, written on it, and as such I read the found object as a piece of material that was once used as a banner. Home can have multiple meanings and at times I stammer to respond when I am asked ‘how is home?’ Although I respond ‘home is fine’, it makes me question the word ‘home’. Where is home? What is it that makes it a home? Beyond where one stays, eats and sleeps, at times I feel like home is who you are. I feel like home is time and energy spent on a property which in turn elevates its importance to that individual who spent time on the property. Having all these thoughts of what defines a home, I came to a conclusion that home does not mean the same thing to all people; it is a place and a multifaceted idea (Cresswell, 2014). Personally I have sentimental and nostalgic attachment to the place I come from, Zimbabwe, and to the people I have shared a life with. I feel a sense of belonging and have the freedom to be in every other part of the country without anyone asking for my identification particulars. That to me is home. If that freedom to move around without any restrictions or fear is lost, or if the people we have close relations with are scattered around the globe and are no longer residing in that same space where profound memories and energy have been made, will that place still be home? Political and economic status is the major contributing factor for people to leave their homes in pursuit of better life and yet still, there is always a reason to find ourselves back home.

The condition of the tent is an apt representation of Zimbabwe and its citizens. Although the tent may look ragged, I can still identify interesting details on it. Zimbabwe is a peaceful country and its culture is still intact. There is a lot I can compliment Zimbabwe on, but all has been overshadowed by the awful leadership that it has been through over the past two decades. The social and the personal have both been affected by politics; therefore one cannot talk about the personal or social without mentioning state politics. In relation to Zimbabwean citizens making an effort to rebuild it, I link the rebuilding process to that of renovating the tent. While this tent bears traces of being used, handled and later discarded (just like the Zimbabwean condition), the tent requires renovation, which is why I slowly stitched pieces back together and fixed patches over holes to retain a better state of the tent.



Fig. 4. Wallen Mapondera, *Kudzoka Kumba* (detail) (2019), waxed paper and thread on tent, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera.



Fig. 5. Wallen Mapondera, *Installation shot*, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera.

1.2. Reaction to economic hardships by Zimbabwean visual artists

Lack of provisions was sufficient motivation to drive creativity and innovation within artists. This led artists to notice the abundance of interesting found objects, which they began to utilise. Content and expression of contemporary art started changing across art genres in Zimbabwe around the year 2000. In music, this was the period when new music genres like *Urban Grooves* and Zimdancehall emerged and they continue to exist at a time when the country is struggling with socio-economic and political misgovernance. The new music genres stood out as a variant and pastime due to the high unemployment rate. Musicians of this time were listened to because there was a development which was passed by the then Minister of Information and Publicity, Jonathan Moyo, which legislated a 75% local content on Zimbabwean radio and TV. This then implied that media became a platform where old and new local musicians and theatre practitioners could be seen, heard and appreciated. What of other art forms like visual art? How did they stay significant within this dry environment where visual art was regarded as luxury? Artists play a crucial part in reflecting society's experiences. Regardless of the art genre, artists play a noteworthy role in detailing and documenting life experiences, survival strategies, questioning daily cultural practices and influencing change in these aspects of life through their work. Whether music or visual art, the language is similar, but the execution is different. As part of this research I interviewed Moffat Takadiwa and Gareth Nyandoro in order to evaluate how they endured the economic hardships as full time Zimbabwean visual artists. Among others, these two artists never looked for alternative careers. They shifted between materials until they found their artistic voice through their manipulation of the material they used in art making. Their practices were shaped by the political and economic state of the country, and their choice of material in art was partly influenced by the Operation Murambatsvina.

1.2.1 Moffat Takadiwa

My first encounter with Moffat Takadiwa in an art space was when I was taking printmaking lessons at Harare Polytechnic College under the supervision of Chikonzero Chazunguza. I was one of the students who volunteered to take the printmaking lessons offered and by then I was doing my honorary third year² at the National Art Gallery of Zimbabwe (NGZ) in Harare. Chazunguza

²This indicates the year of study when the student is free from exams, and the National Gallery of Zimbabwe supports the student with art material, studio space and an exhibition at the end of the third year.

was Takadiwa's lecturer and he always encouraged his students to scout for alternative materials to work with because conventional art materials were expensive. By then, the streets and dumpsites were flooded with remains from the Operation Murambatsvina. Because conventional art materials were difficult to obtain, Chazunguza's students had an easy shift adopting and employing found materials in their work which was abundantly available, Takadiwa included. Takadiwa graduated in 2008. For his sculptural artworks, Takadiwa uses computer keys and other remnants of consumables such as bottle tops and perfume containers (Gilhooly, 2017). He weaves these materials into different organic shapes. With a limited palette of colours, Takadiwa plays around with form and size to create big pieces of artwork. His choice of material in his artworks was born out of challenges he faced during his college days (Davidzon, 2011). I imagine Takadiwa would be doing a different style of work if he grew up in a different environment. In his earlier work, while he was studying, Takadiwa combined ceramics and other materials like electric cables and light bulbs. My personal experience during the socio-economic hardships in Zimbabwe was different from other artists. Everyone has a story of how they negotiated through these difficult times. Most of my colleagues from Art College dropped art and pursued other careers they thought could bring quick returns. In personal communication I had with the artist, Takadiwa reflects on the ways he stayed significant as an artist and shares with me what motivated him to keep making art during these trying times:

Even in the days when I was working with ceramics, ready-made ceramics from shops were difficult to find, so I had to use clay found in swamp areas. I crushed and ground it, preparing it for moulding. The hardships defined my medium, stretched my limits and challenged my abilities as an artist. As a student, I had to balance exhibitions and assignments. The scarcity of traditional art materials pushed me to the bins and dumping sites to look for something else which I could use as art materials. Economic challenges are still there. Experimenting and working with material that I prefer over others for a longer period has helped me to understand the material. I have established a bond or connection with it. Now I understand the vocabulary perceived by the medium and how it connects with my past³.

³ Personal communication with Moffat Takadiwa, July 2019.

Takadiwa's work developed into a social commentary reflecting his society. His use of objects can be interpreted as a reflection of inter-relations between Zimbabwe and the globe at large, as well as the suppression of other cultures and the imbalances within trade of goods through adversity. His artwork, *Zimbabwean bird smell like plastic dragon* (2015) (Fig. 6) engages with relations between Zimbabwe and China. The Zimbabwean bird⁴ and the plastic dragon represent Zimbabwe and China respectively. The title of the work seems to suggest that there are vast amounts of imported goods coming from China to Zimbabwe based on the Look East policy⁵ (Youde, 2007) (Ojakorotu and Kamidza, 2018) that Zimbabwe established with China and other nations. Because of the weak Zimbabwean economy, China continues to manipulate and take advantage of the situation because Zimbabwe has no other friends and allies⁶ to collaborate and negotiate with from an even platform. In the work *Made in China* (Fig 7), Takadiwa comments on how Chinese products were flooding shops and the streets of Zimbabwe and various other parts of Africa. While various scholars (Giovannetti and Sanfilippo, 2016) have written about this phenomenon in complex ways (Polus and Kopinski, 2011), Takadiwa's focus is specifically on products with the label 'Made in China'. This label erases any doubts whether the product is or is not from China.



Fig 6. Moffat Takadiwa, *Zimbabwean bird smell like plastic dragon* (2015), Spray tops and cut beverage flasks, Photo courtesy of Tyburn Gallery.



Fig 7. Moffat Takadiwa, *Made in China* (2012), mixed media, Photo courtesy of First Floor Gallery.

⁴The Zimbabwean bird is the national emblem of Zimbabwe.

⁵This policy aimed to expand economic and trade relations with China, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Vietnam, South Korea, India and Russia with the intention to boost economic integration and forge security cooperation. The policy, however, is often associated predominantly with China.

⁶ Even though there were some people such as Julius Malema who supported Robert Mugabe, it was not the same as having support from trading partners.

Cheap material is used to make gadgets like radios, watches, computers and even clothes which are then sold cheaply in Africa. Takadiwa used electric cables, masking tape and broken-down parts of a computer from these products with the label 'Made in China' to create his artwork.

Lack of production and hardships makes the country import huge amounts of goods like foodstuffs and medication. When all these goods are used, the containers are discarded to the dumpsites where most artists who use found objects scout their material and give them another life. There is life within the dumpsites because not only visual artists look for materials there. A lot of people collect recyclable material like plastic, bottles and bones to resell as a way to make a living. Takadiwa used similar material in the work *Circumcised Bombs* in (fig. 8). He might have bought a few things to use on the work but to me, it appears as if most of the material he used has been discarded. Circumcision is said to reduce the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STI). I am intrigued by the contrast between the hygiene benefits of circumcision in relation to where Takadiwa found his material for this particular work. There are six individual pieces, four of which have ceramic heads and the other two do not have heads. To me these pieces represent men who brag about the advantages of circumcision (as if circumcision were a protection against STIs), leading them to have intercourse with multiple partners. This work seems to suggest that if someone were sleeping with multiple partners without protection, he would be a circumcised bomb to himself and to the partners he engaged with.



Fig 8, Moffat Takadiwa, *Circumcised Bombs* (2011), Metal, plastic, glass, dimensions vary, Photo courtesy of First Floor Gallery.

Gareth Nyandoro is another artist who studied art during the time when things were particularly tough in Zimbabwe, and his artistic voice gradually grew stronger. He obtained a National Diploma in Fine Art from Harare Polytechnic in 2003 before pursuing bachelor's degree studies in Creative Arts and Design at Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT), Zimbabwe, in 2008. Nyandoro established a name in the arts while he was still studying at Harare Polytechnic and has been a regular exhibitor in galleries within the country. Nyandoro was part of the *Redefinitions* exhibition series together with Masimba Hwati and the late Munyaradzi Mazarire.

The exhibitions *Redefinitions 1, 2 and 3* were opened at Gallery Delta in Harare in 2008, 2009 and 2011 respectively. Personally I acknowledge that the *Redefinition 1* exhibition officially marked the dawn of art in Zimbabwe that used found objects. Considering that 2008 was one of the worst years in terms of hardships and the political landscape in Zimbabwe, the exhibition established and set a meaningful direction to both emerging and established artists in Zimbabwe. This is the year that the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF), lost elections to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) for the first time since independence in 1980 (Masunungure, 2009). The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) had to call for an election re-run because the first election results took time to be announced. The Human Rights Watch alleged the results were likely to be ‘deeply flawed’ hence the run-off, which was to be held three months after the announcement of the first round results. The three-month period

was marked with heavy political violence. So the *Redefinitions 1* exhibition was a true reflection of the Zimbabwean situation at that moment and a representation of how artists were responding to the political violence and the abuse of power. The artworks in all three exhibitions were created out of found materials like old shoes, pieces of wood and metal.

Nyandoro's work in particular, focuses on ordinary subjects of societal developments as a way of confronting economic hardships in Zimbabwe. Nyandoro exhibited works such as *Rude Puppet* (Fig. 9) and *Angelica* (Fig. 10) among other artworks in *Redefinitions 1*. *Rude Puppet* (2007) is a portrait made out of wood, metal, keys and copper wire. The portrait displays a sad facial expression. Considering the period in which the artwork was made, I interpret the work as representing followers of ZANU–PF who are living in poverty. The followers see no good coming out of the party yet they are still loyal to it. The keys represent other opportunities that can come outside ZANU–PF but the rude behaviour of the puppet is blinding it to seeing the opportunities.

In *Angelica* (2007) I read the portrayal of a lady who is trying so hard to show an impressive image to other people. As difficult as it was for ordinary Zimbabweans in 2007, Angelica can afford to do her hair and probably to buy a make-up kit. This seems to suggest that she might be one of those women who resorted to prostitution to make ends meet. The artwork was made from joining together pieces of wood, spring wire, nails and paint. In his recent work, Nyandoro displays his work in a makeshift and impermanent manner whereby the fragility of his work appears to be temporary. He employs a technique he dubs '*Kucheka cheka*' (Simbao and Hwati, 2017). Nyandoro describes *Kucheka cheka* as a technique he borrowed and improvised from printmaking. The word *kucheka* means to cut, and cutting is very much involved in diverse styles of printmaking like relief printing and etchings. Instead of using a cut-out template like in printmaking, Nyandoro makes shallow cuts directly into the paper. He then inks it, peels off some layers and glues them back on the paper as a process of creating the artwork. On the artwork, Nyandoro is interested in achieving lines and effects similar to that of an etching print without using a stencil. *Musika WemaOrange nemaLoliepopu* (2014) (Fig. 11), (which means a market store of oranges and lollypops) paints an accurate picture of people's desperation, to the extent of arranging a stall only of oranges and lollypops with the aim of profiting out of that. It is interesting to me that the ware is three dimensional whereas the woman is in relative 2 dimensional. The woman's head is resting on her hand, in Zimbabwean Shona culture the posture indicates that someone is in deep thought.

Among other artists⁷, Moffat Takadiwa and Gareth Nyadoro are inspired by the same environment and their focus in art is on trade, survival, resourcefulness and innovation. The Zimbabwean people have been resistant and patient in response to the misgovernance by the ruling party ZANU–PF for a long time. Core issues addressed by various artists are the everyday things that Zimbabwean people have endured, such as multi-currency, hyperinflation and operation clean-up in a nation where the employment rate is low. It is effortless for artists to bring out their feelings on the political and economic issues in Zimbabwe because they are living very much in the moment.



Fig. 9. Gareth Nyandoro, *Rude Puppet* (2007), mixed media, Photo courtesy of Gallery Delta



Fig. 10. Gareth Nyandoro, *Angelica* (2007), mixed media, Photo courtesy of Gallery Delta

⁷ Victor Nyakauru, Gedion Gomo and Anthony Bumhira are some of the artists who employ found material in their artworks to comment on the socio-political landscape of Zimbabwe.



Fig. 11. Gareth Nyandoro, *Musika wemaOrange nemaLoliepopu* (2014), mixed-media 110x144.5x55cm, Photo Courtesy of the artist and SMAC Gallery

1.3 Disconnection and connection between functionality and materiality through artistic creative practice

As I have mentioned, at art college we were introduced to the basics of art making through conventional techniques and medium, and we spent time perfecting those techniques. I had no relationship with the material I used besides the subjects portrayed in the artworks. Canvases or paints (at least in the form of conventional art materials purchased at art shops) were someone's invention, and as such there is no meaningful narrative to tell about the medium itself.



Fig. 12. Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, (1917),
Image source Succession Marcel
Duchamp/BUS.

As artists in Zimbabwe using these conventional materials, we were, in a sense, packaged in foreign ideologies of art allusion. In terms of medium and content we were largely inspired by the old masters in Western art history. For Zimbabwean visual artists who dominated before the year 2000, only a few individuals like Keston Beaton (Murray, 1999) mixed different mediums such as wood, plates and spoons to make sculptures. At this time there was never the urgency to use other material besides either stone or wood for carving or paint and canvas for painting. Because of our Westernised educational background, the artists we focused our studies on were from Europe and North America. We knew very little about our own African artists. We were encouraged instead to study artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Paul Cezanne, Pablo Picasso and Jackson Pollock.

The artist from this well-worn canon who is the most relevant to this mini-thesis is Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). Duchamp started off as a painter then later shifted to what he called ‘readymade’ (Goldsmith, 1983) art by taking common household objects, putting them in the gallery and calling it art. One of his most famous artworks is titled *Fountain* (Fig. 12) (Camfield and Hopps, 1989). It is a urinal he purchased from the hardware store, signed and displayed on a plinth resting on its side. He opened up a discussion through his sculptures whereby art was not only what an artist physically creates, but also what the artist chooses to call art. Duchamp did not have particular connections with the objects he used; rather he emphasised the power of art through an idea. Duchamp used the word ‘readymade’ to describe artworks he assembled from manufactured objects and ever since then, the term has been applied to artworks made in this way by practising artists for over a hundred years.



Fig. 13. Keyston Beaton, *String Instrument* (2000), found objects, Photo courtesy of Gallery Delta



Fig. 14. Keyston Beaton, *String Instrument* (2000), found objects, Photo courtesy of Gallery Delta

Objects or products that have a non-art function but are modified to create art are known as ‘found objects’. These objects may be bought or picked up from somewhere, and are modified, but rarely beyond recognition. Unlike ‘readymades’, the physical appearance of found objects includes more artistic creation or invention than just a signature. Employing an object from the real world and considering it as a finished piece of art from the point which the artist found it without any modification of the object is known as ‘ready-made’ art. Juxtaposing the objects can create specific meaning yet still the objects can be categorised as ready-made art. These objects will then shift their classification to ‘found objects’ if they are modified or attached to other surfaces which the artist would have prepared (Kearney, 2016). The relationship between using found objects and readymades in art is that they both shift an object’s implication, which in turn changes how people see and interpret the object. The meaning associated with the object before it was used in an artwork changes in terms of its function, lifespan, or status.



Fig. 15. Edgar Degas, Replica of *Little Dancer of Fourteen Years* (1881), Bronze and fabric, Photo by Paul Mellon

Although Duchamp's *Fountain* becomes a reference point when talking about ready-made and found objects in art, the culture of repurposing everyday objects into artefacts was already present before Duchamp's ready-mades. Edgar Degas produced an artwork titled *Little Dancer of Fourteen Years* (1881) for which he used coloured wax to mould the work. He put a wig of real hair on the head of the artwork and dressed it in a real bodice, tutu and ballet slippers (Wallace, 2014). There are replicas of *Little Dancer of Fourteen Years* which were cast after Degas was dead, but with different bodice and tutus. Mixing conventional art material with everyday objects as Degas did in this particular work was new during that time, so the work was rejected by the exhibition committee when Degas submitted it for a show.

This sparked dialogues and shifted the way art material was perceived, and *Little Dancer of Fourteen Years* is regarded as the earliest work that expresses artistic experiment in this way (Henderson, 2014). Because there has not been substantial documentation from other continents prior to Duchamp's conceptualisation of the art of readymade, it is perceived to belong to Western art history. Outside the European canon, there are other artists from Africa such as Romuald Hazoume (Benin), Moustapha Dime (Senegal) and El Anatsui (Ghana) whose artwork materials are variations of the readymade and found object concepts. While the dominant art history might not frame it as such, this type of work most likely existed in various contexts before the work of Marcel Duchamp.

Ready-made art and found objects in Zimbabwe heightened due to the struggling economy. Artists started manipulating ordinary everyday objects into art commenting on social, political and economic issues in symbolical codes. Beyond Zimbabwe, I am drawn to Serge Attiku Clottey's (Ghana) practice in terms of how he utilises found materials. I will briefly analyse his work to

establish and understand his connection with the material he uses. I aim to contrast the driving force behind Clottey's use of found objects to that of Zimbabwean visual artists and place my work *Pahukama* within that framework.

1.3.1 Serge Attiku Clottey

Clottey is a multidisciplinary visual artist who works with sculpture, painting, video and performance. In his sculptures, Clottey utilises a type of plastic jug known as 'Kufuor gallon'⁸. The jug can be in any colour but the most common one in Ghana is the yellow gallon (Mmonatau, 2015). His interest in the country's history of trade and daily struggles prompted him choose to work with the 'Kufuor gallons'. These gallons were originally used as containers for cooking oil that was transported from the West to Africa. Ghana is struggling with water shortages, therefore these gallons have been repurposed as water storage jugs (Wagner, 2013). I can relate to the repurposing of these gallons because it is a common practice in Zimbabwe too. People in the rural areas fetch clean water from a distant place using these gallons, and those in urban areas use the gallons for water storage as there is shortage of clean water in the country (Kunambura, 2017). Clottey found this material in abundance in Accra's dumpsites and he decided to use them in his artistic practice. The gallons represent water struggles and angst within people in Ghana and to those in Africa as a whole facing the same dilemma.



Fig. 16, Serge Clottey, *Untitled*, (2019), Kufur gallons, Photo by Nii Odzenma

⁸The gallon was named after former Ghana president John Kufuor because of serious water shortages in Ghana when he was president.

Clottey installed the work (Fig. 16) on a building which seemed to be under construction or abandoned. He arranged the 'Kufuor gallons' like a puzzle in the opening, which was divided into two by a line of bricks creating two similar rectangle shapes. These spaces were meant for fitting windows in the building. Considering the primary use of the gallons for transporting cooking oil and its repurposed use of storing water, the placement of the gallons on these repurposed window spaces shifts the context of the material he used for this artwork. Windows are for ventilation in a building: although the building that Clottey chose for this installation is unfinished, putting the gallons in place of windows triggers questions such as; Why the gallons, why in that space, and what connection does it have with the artist and the community that identify the gallons in a different context? Clottey's installation falls under the readymade category because he did not modify the gallons and the building other than arranging the gallons in that space. Apart from the installation, Clottey transforms the Kufuor gallon in many various forms through cutting, painting and stitching.



Fig. 17, Serge Clottey, *Live Long* (2016), Plastic, paint and copper wire, 93x58cm, Photo courtesy of the artist and Gallery 1957



Fig. 18, Serge Clottey, *Social Sculpture* (2016), 179.7x119.4cm. Photo courtesy of the artist and GNYG Gallery

Live Long (Fig. 17) is an artwork in which Clottey cuts the Kufuor gallon into small square and rectangular shapes. He painted a few individual pieces before joining them together with copper wire. There are characters imprinted on the work which appear to be Chinese. Apart from the Chinese characters, I recognise the word ‘*Yesu*’, a word found in many Bantu languages such as Xhosa, Swahili and Ndebele. *Yesu* translates to ‘Jesus’. I have learnt that in Chinese, Jesus is ‘*Yesu*’ and the Chinese characters in Clottey’s work translate to ‘*Yesu*’ as well. There is a repetition of both the Chinese characters and the word ‘*Yesu*’ which harmonises the process of joining the small cut pieces of Kufuor gallon. Through analysing the relationship of the material used in the work *Live Long*, I interpret that the work is commenting on how people always turn to Jesus for guidance and protection for them to have a long life. I connect the repurposed use of the gallons as a symbol of life as they are used for carrying and storing water. In a Christian context, water is used for baptism therefore it represents purification of soul.

Looking at the work *Live Long*, the visual appearance is similar to the fabric that Clottey uses in most of his performance artworks. One of the works in which Clottey used a fabric with similar motifs to *Live Long* is *Social Sculpture* (Fig. 18). It is a photographic work with Clottey covering his body with a fabric known as ‘kente’. He covers his face with a mask made from the Kufuor gallon and he used the kente fabric for the backdrop. The fabric is Ghana’s national cloth, worn by different Ghanaian peoples. Historically, the kente fabric was woven and worn by the Akans, an ethnic group in Ghana which Clottey belongs to. Kente was the cloth of kings. In the present day, this Akan royal and sacred cloth is only worn in times of extreme significance.

The phrase ‘social sculpture’ was coined by a German artist named Joseph Beuys (Biddle, 2014). He used language, thoughts, actions and objects to create interactive structures in public spaces and referred them as ‘social sculptures’ (North, 1990). In relation to Clottey’s use of the term ‘social sculpture’, I am drawn to the value and the role played by the cloth and the Kufuor gallon in society.

1.3.2 *Pahukama*

I approached my work titled *Pahukama* in a similar way to Clottey by placing it in a space where it shifts its meaning into a broader context. *Pahukama* is a Shona phrase which denotes a state of connection when there is a common ground between people or things. In this instance, the artwork is a green, bruised ready-made road sign with the name R. Mugabe Rd. It was part of an installation in an exhibition titled *Converge* which took place in June 2018 at the Raw Spot Gallery, Rhodes

University. The exhibition was curated by Ruth Simbao and Brunn Kramer. I collaborated with the artist Stary Mwamba from Zambia to create this work. Through this work, we tried to express a common ground that we experienced in relation to the shared histories between Zimbabwe and Zambia (Scarritt and Nkiwane, 1996).

I obtained the road sign during the coup d'état⁹ which took place in Harare, November 2017. People were invited to march peacefully to the State House where Mugabe was kept hostage. The protest was organised to make Mugabe aware that he had overstayed his welcome. There was a massive connection between people who were fighting together to solve a common problem. The Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) argued that it was not a coup d'état (Jordaan, 2017). Judging from the looks of the road sign, the scars suggest that it had passed through the hands of a mob of angry and violent people. In the following paragraphs, I will classify and contextualise Robert Mugabe firstly as a person, looking at what impressions he left within his country and how he is perceived by the Zimbabwean people. Secondly I look at Robert Mugabe the actual road and activities that take place along this road as people hustle for survival, and lastly I look at R. Mugabe, the object I collected during the mass demonstrations in 2018, then outline the added or shifted meaning to the object due to its change of environment.

⁹The coup d'état was staged by the military of Zimbabwe with the aim of overthrowing Robert Mugabe from power.



Fig. 19. Wallen Mapondera. *Pahukama* (2017), 76x18cm. Photo courtesy of Lifang Zhang.

Robert Gabriel Mugabe ‘the person’ is considered to be the man who led the forces who put a stop to white minority rule and brought independence to Zimbabwe in 1980. He was the first Prime Minister for seven years before he became the President in 1987 and was in power until 2017. A lot happened under his leadership. To some people he is a hero, to some he is a villain and to some people who once supported him at independence he has been both a hero and later a villain. He staged the Gukurahundi Genocide in Matabeleland (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012; Rwafa, 2012), and he allowed the fast-track land grab in 2000, which impacted on Zimbabwe’s economy to date. The work *Pahukama* potentially evokes all these recollections and encounters to different individuals of different generations. My connection with Mugabe for example, is different to my father’s connection with him.

‘R. Mugabe’ or ‘Robert Mugabe’ is the name of various roads found in different big cities in Zimbabwe. There is a road named ‘Robert Mugabe’ in Bulawayo and one in Mutare, and many others in Zimbabwe as well as in other countries¹⁰. My focus here is on the one in Harare, because I have known and walked in this particular road ever since I was 14 years old. Many activities take place along this road. There are illegal vendors, street kids and foreign currency dealers popularly

¹⁰For example, in Windhoek, Namibia there is a road named after Robert Mugabe.

known as 'Change Money'. Along this road, there are three public transport ranks which are conveniently positioned by the town planners. Therefore there are a large number of people who use the road. *Pahukama* refers to the connection that these ordinary people have established. Most of the people who do business along this road are prohibited; hence they alert each other when police approach to arrest them. Some days they are unlucky and the police take away what they are selling, and some days they get away with it. The struggle for survival is real along this road. Though there are similar activities in other streets, Robert Mugabe Road has the highest population of illegal entrepreneurs and homeless people in town. They work so hard and risk their lives, sitting by the roadsides to sell things like phone accessories, books and secondhand clothes. Lack of employment forces them to sell illegally. Relationships, bonds and grudges develop through spending a lot of time together.

'R. Mugabe', is the word written on the sign that I collected, which was named after Robert Mugabe soon after Zimbabwean independence in 1980 as a way of acknowledging the man who had been the main strategist who saw Zimbabwe out of the liberation struggle. The current state of the battered road sign indicates that during the 2017 protests it had been stoned, dragged against tar and hit with various weapons on a range of surfaces. It was in the hands of a lot of different people who were angry with the Mugabe's leadership so they were showing their anger through hitting the road sign. In my view, I categorise these acts as performance art (Howell, 2013). 'Performance art' has many different definitions (Carlson, 2013), but in its historical context, performance art can be referred to as actions which may be a live or recorded arrangement. These actions can be executed by objects, artist or other participants spontaneously or scripted. The object derives meaning from the accumulated processes and gestures of the angry mob registered on the road sign. The initial function of this object was simply to recognise



Fig. 20. *Protesters stoning the Robert Mugabe Road sign* (2017), Image by Philimon Bulawayo/Reuters

Robert Mugabe ‘the person’, at the same time forming part of the street name and address. When I rescued the road sign, I left it in the same state I found it with the aim of exhibiting it in a different space from the street. The road sign is a good example of ‘readymade’ art as I did not modify it.

The artwork *Pahukama* is the first piece one sees upon entering my MFA exhibition. The fact that I am showing the road sign in my exhibition adds significance to the work. It sparks conversation with the audience, and might initiate questions such as: How did this object get here? Of all the road signs in Zimbabwe, why focus on the Robert Mugabe Road one, and why is the road sign so worn out? The primary use of the object that everyone knows it to be might shift so it can be viewed through a broader lens and in an open-ended engagement.

I liken Mugabe to other presidents who have acted in a similar manner. I perceive him as a symbol similar to those who shifted from being revolutionaries to dictators. Siad Barre, former president of Somalia; Macias Nguema, former president of Guinea; and Paul Biya, president of Cameroon since 1982, are some of the people whom have been labelled as dictators during their time. They were involved in authoritarianism, murder, human rights violation and genocide (Chigozie, 2014).

CHAPTER 2: Packaging, Urgency and Innovation

2.1 Defining packaging and unpacking the influence of packaging

‘Package’ is a noun which refers to any wrapped or boxed object or group of objects, or a combination of items considered, offered, or sold as a unit. The process of covering a package is referred to as packaging. A package can be covered in paper or plastic designed to fit its size. Colour, brand name exposure, labelling, added value and print style are some of the major contributing principles to packaging which attracts a consumer to a particular brand. Every marketer aspires to be the best above the rest so they reach their extreme in re-approaching packaging designs.

Packaging is everywhere in our daily lives. We see it from vendors selling tomatoes or second-hand clothes in the streets, a politician concerned about people’s votes or a large scale car manufacturing company. They entice people in buying their ideas. From small narratives and individual perspectives, people desire to look and feel good, therefore they make sure they are presentable in their surroundings. It is not about self, but about how one is being perceived by society. People are afraid to be judged negatively, so they strive to look important. This is how creativity originates. By knowing what the public wants, people tailor packages in response to demand from the public then work accordingly so as to profit out of it. I wonder how much we are consuming that is designed to lure our attention only, yet the product does not match with the packaging. I analyse packaging as a metaphor for how people present and represent themselves as individuals, entities or as collectives by looking at how they strive to communicate, advertise and sell an idea or an image through looks. The notion of judging a book by its cover is often a reality in everyday life, as consumers are typically attracted to products when the packaging appeals spectacularly. Reliability, honesty and consistency are the services that people constantly search for in a product, and if they find these characteristics then they tend to become loyal to it (Cherry, 2019). This is why people put a lot of effort into packaging. Together with other materials such as canvas, old tents and thread, I create artworks using food packages from milk, juice and pizza boxes. By using found material in my work, I recognise the value within discarded objects which feeds into the description of resourceful repurposing and product labelling out of necessity. The deliberate decision of using my preferred material in my artwork and the approach is a response to either empty or deceiving information written on the food packages, which reflects the fake promises made by different individuals and entities like political parties and churches as a way to

lure followers. Be they on television, in shops, newspapers or social media platforms, I argue that most of the information and images presented are not equally as good as the product; instead they are merely used for creating a perfect marketing purpose of the brand. Upon identifying these innovations for survival, images and packaging presented politically and socially, I incorporated them in my work in an attempt to differentiate positive result which people are intended to see over the ulterior motives of the images.

‘Liqui Fruit’ is a famous South African juice brand manufactured by Pioneer Foods. Among other food brands, I scrutinised the information on the Liqui Fruit ‘Orange’ juice package and found out that people are directed into what the brand owners want us to believe. On the container is written ‘100% FRUIT JUICE BLEND’, which means everything in the container is extracted from fruits to make the juice. The writing is visible enough to draw people’s attention. Ingredients are printed in a small font on the sides of the container together with the company address and other contact information such as website and email address. I then verified if the ingredients were 100% fruit juice, only to find out that the juice is made from reconstituted concentrates¹¹ and flavouring. How can the juice still be 100% fruit juice when it is made from concentrates, water and flavouring? The ‘100% fruit juice’ becomes the image we are meant to see and on the other hand, in the fine print is hidden the true image which the brand owners may not wish people to notice.

Nowadays it is easier for representational fake images to go viral in Zimbabwe as almost everyone born after the Zimbabwean independence in 1980 is well versed in technology and social media platforms. Anything posted on these platforms can move fast and be known or seen within minutes. Individuals are living two lives, one on social media platforms and the other in reality. I am drawn to how people consciously disguise their lives into a ‘100% fruit juice package’ yet there is a fine print which denotes their actual life. For different reasons, people wear designer clothes yet they live in slums. To them, their status matters more than where they live and what they eat. They are given names such as ‘gods of clothes and pride of our area’ by people from the society they come from. The Congo Dandies spend lots of money buying clothes display a life they wish to have akin, for example, to the ‘Congo Dandies’(RT Documentary, n.d.), a society of people known as ‘La Sape’¹² from Brazzaville who are obsessed in wearing

¹¹ When making a concentrate, watery juice from the fruit is removed and the process yields a product which is seven times stronger than the initial juice. Water added to the concentrate equals to reconstituted concentrate.

¹² The Society of Ambiance and Elegant People



Fig. 21, *Liqui Fruit juice container*, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera

designer clothes to stay relevant and maintain that status in the community. They use their savings and sometimes loans from banks to buy clothes. In the documentary ‘The Congo Dandies’, one of the Dandies confessed that he would have bought a piece of land but instead, he bought a pair of shoes. This comes at the expense of not providing enough for the family because the Dandy will be saving money for buying designer labels such as Giorgio Armani, Louis Vuitton and Gucci.

2.2 Responding to context and materials around us

My choice and response to the material I use in my artwork is directed by what I consider as ‘memory of objects’ (Amato, 2017). Memories are awakened by objects, which make people relate to them more and in turn give the objects meaning. To me, it could be the object’s shape, scent, reference or purpose that triggers memories of how I may have engaged with the objects physically, psychologically or spiritually in the past.

Whether historical or modern objects, they can both be used to narrate stories of a particular people, space and time. In my artworks, I am drawn to discarded materials that spark a memory within me, so I am constantly looking through heaps of trash. It is easy for me to scan a community or someone's lifestyle through looking at what he or she throws away, therefore the trash is where my subject narratives emerge from. The trash is charged with energy from its previous use and the urgency to make art is what drives me towards picking up a particular object like the 'R. Mugabe Rd' sign (Fig. 22).



Fig. 22. Road sign consigned to the bin.
Image source is Times Newspaper

I employ the same approach when choosing art materials; I am of the opinion that it is how societies react to changes around them. They adapt and move on. Zimbabwean people always find ways and opportunities to pull through situations such as load-shedding, inflation and poverty. They make jokes even in the hardest times just to ease and laugh the pain out. People take advantage of the smallest opportunity they can find to make ends meet. Currently there is massive load-shedding programme in most Zimbabwean suburbs where power cuts last up to 18 hours and power is only available from midnight until around 5a.m. (Samaita, 2019). Some businesses that afford generators are using them for power to operate their businesses. Because phones have become part of our daily lives someone came up with the idea of setting up a shed with a generator where people can charge their phones for a fee. This is only one example; there are many more examples of people who are reacting to the opportunities through innovation as a survival tactic.

Although many Zimbabwean people have sought and are still seeking a better life in other countries, some people who have remained in the country are observing what people want, and reacting to those needs through tailoring packages accordingly. One would notice that only a few people are affording to buy new shoes so he or she would settle on repairing and polishing people's shoes for a fee. These jobs such as polishing shoes bring small returns and the profit can hardly keep up with the family's daily expenses. The reason that they keep doing what they do is probably because they are stuck in their kind of trade. They too might be willing to seek a better life elsewhere but besides making small profits from their trade, another issue holding them back from potentially relocating is that the Zimbabwean passport office stopped printing passports because of lack of material to use for printing (Macdonald, 2019). As such, people have to keep on with the struggle. All the informal businesses that have dominated the streets of Zimbabwe are a response to survival conditions.

2.3. Chirema Chine Mazano Chinotamba Chakazendama Madziro

2.3.1 The Exhibition Space

I identified the squash courts at Rhodes University to stage my exhibition. I chose the space as a representation of how buildings can be transformed and multi-purposed for different reasons in Zimbabwe. In better economic days, there were designated spaces for vegetable and other markets which were designed for that purpose only: I saw these spaces transforming when I was growing up. They were partitioned into small offices by the city council for small indigenous businesses like hair salons, barber shops, boutiques and housing cooperative offices. Before the new rising churches had enough money to buy their own stand, and they temporarily used spaces like school classrooms during the weekends when there were no students in attendance. During week days they held church services in the evenings when all lessons are done.

Traditionally, the cultural spaces for physical art exhibitions are galleries and museums. In choosing the squash courts for my exhibition, I have challenged the perception that art exhibitions are only installed in cultural spaces, furthermore I engaged a conversation prior to what spaces do to artworks. The concept of transforming and repurposing buildings that had other functions into art spaces is not entirely new; there have been artfairs across the globe such as the Lyon Biennale in France that have been staged in old factory shops and warehouses. For my exhibition,

repurposing the squash courts marries the idea of how Zimbabweans are converting spaces which had a different function into a totally different purpose.

The space has three courts and each court has its own entrance which squash players use. When inside any one of the courts, a person cannot see activities from another court. Besides these three entrances to the courts, there is one elevated entrance on the side of the same building designed to be used by spectators. From this entrance, people can have a view of the courts one after another as they move further away from the entrance towards the other end of the aisle. I have laid a carpet of cardboard boxes and pasted some advert posters on this aisle, mirroring the materials I used to construct the artworks in the squash courts. The entrances to the courts present an impression of an insider–outsider situation where players cannot be spectators at one given time and vice-versa. There are advantages and disadvantages that either the players or spectators can encounter. For instance; spectators will never understand how tiring it feels running up and down the court when playing squash unless they join. They can only imagine. On a personal and general level, the spectator will never understand how someone lives his or her own life. Only the people they share a life with might know. Putting my work in the space and being able to stand back and contemplate the work situates me in the shoes of both the spectator and the player. A lot of judgmental and stereotypical comments have been expressed about Zimbabwe by non-Zimbabweans without a deeper understanding of the Zimbabwean situation. Non-Zimbabweans analyse Zimbabwe and often simplistically base their judgment on media reports, which sometimes misrepresent the truth.

2.3.2 Process and the Artworks

In this section, I contextualise my working process and expand more on the artworks that I have worked on which form the exhibition *Chirema Chine Mazano Chinotamba Chakazendama Madziro*.

Cardboard is one of the important materials I use in my art work. Before I examine this within a theoretical frame, I first list the basic properties and characteristics of cardboard, and then position them within my artworks. Cardboard is a heavy duty paper which is more durable than ordinary paper that people use for writing or printing books. Its thickness and strength varies depending on how many layers are used for its construction: many layers make a stronger sheet. Most cardboard I use in my artwork is a combination of corrugated and flat layers of paper in which the ridges formed by the corrugated paper create small air spaces, making the cardboard light in weight. Neat and easy packaging has been achieved through using boxes made from cardboard. Cardboard is vulnerable to water, as it disintegrates and tears easily when wet. It is also highly flammable therefore it can be used to start up a fire. All the above attributes point towards the impermanent state of cardboard.

Besides packaging and storage of goods, cardboard has been repurposed in many diverse ways in Zimbabwe and around the world. The most common use of cardboard that I recognised since I was young is for advertising. People use cardboard to write for example ‘*Dovi Pano*’ or ‘*Tinoruka Musoro*’ which directly translates to ‘peanut butter here’ and ‘we plait hair’ respectively. The written piece of cardboard would then be tied on the most visible space at the gate of people’s yard. This is a way of informing potential clients passing by that this is what we do here. Most people in high and medium density areas opt to advertise their products and skills in this way because cardboard is cheap to obtain. Its cheapness is what people take advantage of and some used it to construct impermanent structures, which were destroyed during the time of Murambatsvina. Some use it as placards during protests, so in a way, cardboard is a powerful communication means. Vendors use cardboard as tables for arranging their products and as stools by heaping cardboard to sit on. Cardboard is also sometimes used as blankets by the homeless; therefore it provides warmth and can be comfortable if it is the only option that is available.

I do not use brand new cardboard in my work; all the narratives and memories that the cardboard endured are what adds weight and meaning to my artworks. Other materials I use in my artwork

are toilet paper, egg crates, distressed tarpaulin and paper that I collect in the same manner as cardboard. The materials help me convey and explore the concepts I am drawn to through building up on the narratives that the material already holds before I alter it into an artwork. I work intuitively with the material so that it leads me into the best possible effective outcome as I connect and engage in a conversation with the material through researching its past and present purpose. The process may take hours or days, and sometimes it can take months to years depending on how rapidly the material and I link.

By cutting, folding, twisting, sewing and bonding pieces of my preferred material to a surface or one on top of another, it transforms the material that has been or would have been thrown away into diverse forms and patterns. There are a lot of repeated processes when constructing my artworks. The preparation of the found material is in itself a ritualistic act because I always have to clean and treat the material before cutting, sewing and folding it. These repetitive acts are tiring and severe but the outcome is fulfilling. They symbolise repeated daily acts such as cooking, showering and washing dishes. The repetition also alludes to the frequency of a persistent salesperson who shouts out when calling customers in spaces like Mupedzanhamo Flea Market, a marketplace in Mbare where bales of secondhand clothes are sold (Mukorera and Mahadea, 2014). The owners of the bales hire untrained people with natural selling expertise. Some of these vendors even compose songs to attract customers (Chivivi, Moyo and Mapuwei 2014). The notion of survival, creativity and packaging is crammed into this one place. Registering these repetitive patterns in my work and in reality, one of the artworks I created is titled *Nhereka Nhereka*, it portrays an informal chaotic space where vendors carry on their daily trade.

2.3.2.1 *Nhereka Nhereka*



Fig. 23. Wallen Mapondera, *Nhereka Nhereka*, 2019, cardboard, paper, rubber, wood and metal, 239x115x71cm, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera.

Nhereka Nhereka is an installation that includes sound and objects depicting a disorderly space where vendors sell different goods. *Nhereka nhereka* is a Shona phrase that means ‘slowly slowly’ or ‘bit by bit’. The work is a commentary on the daily hustles of a Zimbabwean in finding provisions.

Because of its repetition of the same word, the phrase ‘*nhereka nhereka*’ puts emphasis on the repeated processes which people undergo to make ends meet. It has also become a famous phrase over the past years among the Zimbabwean people when they meet and ask each other how they are doing; the response might not be in exactly the same words as *nhereka nhereka* but the meaning is precisely and constantly the same. A typical example similar to *nhereka nhereka* but with different wording in Shona is ‘*mbichana mbichana*’. There are many variations of phrases like *nhereka nhereka*, all of which mean the same. The repetition and emphasis of these words weave together the notions of persistence and trying again and also mirror my working approach to material. Besides the repeated fascinating patterns and harmony in the goods displayed by vendors, there is also repetition in the way they announce and market their products. In a cramped space

with a lot of people selling the same stuff, one has to be innovative in packaging to create a visually appealing stall and also creative in finding means of luring appreciators and buyers to your space.



Fig. 24. Wallen Mapondera, *Nhereka Nhereka*, 2019 (detail), cardboard, paper, rubber, wood and metal, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera.

Recycling plays an important role in the daily life of Zimbabwean people. The work *Nhereka Nhereka* is a detailed summary of the means they use to earn money through recycling and repackaging. On a greater scale, dumpsites have been a mining ground for many people who can find different objects to recycle and sell. They gather plastic containers, copper wire, aluminium and bones, then thoroughly clean them to sell. Twelve kilometres away from Bulawayo, the second largest city in Zimbabwe, lies a place called Ngozi Mine. It is a garbage dumpsite where families have settled in makeshift structures. There are hundreds of families there who make a living from scavenging in the rubbish thrown away. From the found materials, some use wire from old tyres to make fencing, some make papier mâché which they use for moulding wild animal sculptures, and some use old leather shoes to make soccer balls (Mgodla, 2017). These people make low returns so sometimes they exchange goods to obtain what they cannot afford to buy; if they have something that the next person wants and vice versa, then an exchange is possible.



Fig. 25. Wallen Mapondera, *Installation View*, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera.

I classify acts that save money instead of pumping it out as ‘primary’ recycling and those that bring in profits as ‘secondary’ recycling. For the installation, I give attention to both primary and secondary recycling details. Using directory pages as toilet paper or as paper cones for packaging snacks like ground nuts is an example of primary recycling, while using the same directory pages for making papier mâché to mould sculptures is secondary recycling. The initial plan was to use objects such as a broken chair, plastic containers and a pushcart to create the work. I had pictured myself placing edibles such as bread, and a Coke container of water around the chair as a way of setting up a real-time mood in the space besides pushing the notion of repurposing.

The pushcart is a representation of vendors and each partition in the pushcart was meant to symbolise how vendors arrange themselves in the streets. One vendor selling floor polish could be next to someone selling sadza¹³ and the next could be selling secondhand shoes. These goods might not usually be found in the same space but there is no vendor who is superior to the other in these

¹³Sadza is corn meal mash without any flavorings. It can also be made out of starchy grains such as millet or ground maize and is commonly eaten as dinner, served with vegetables or gravy.

kinds of spaces. Instead of putting partitions inside the pushcart, I then used discarded old directory pages to cover the base of the pushcart. I cut the pages into thin strips of paper then rolled them as if I were rolling a cigarette. Most people start smoking with the stereotype in mind that cigarettes relieve stress. Zimbabwean people are in a stressful phase, hence I symbolised vending as a vent for stress through likening it to smoking a cigarette as a form of relief.

The torches I used for lighting around the pushcart represent the massive power cuts in Zimbabwe. With the shortage of power in the country, torches have become useful for lighting in the evening, not only for vendors but lighting in different homes and shops as well.

I mostly recycled the material I used to construct the pushcart. Materials such as a metal bed base as a frame for the pushcart, wood and cardboard box. The wood I used on the side of the pushcart was previously used as two crosses in an exhibition titled *Transcendence Through Flight* by Aaron Mulenga. As he explained to me, the two crosses were a representation of two disciples of Jesus, Andrew and Phillip, who were both crucified but in different places and seasons. Besides the deliberate use of recycled wood, there is no conceptual link between the wood's previous function and its current use. I would have preferred the wood to have natural marks that occurred over time through touching, indicating that the pushcart has been in use for a long time, but the wood was still relatively new so I covered it completely with flakes of cardboard that I pasted thickly onto the wood. The denseness of the flakes of cardboard can be read as a denseness that reflects the crowdedness of typical vending spaces.

Part of the installation is a sound piece in which I recorded the early morning sound; voices and city sounds of moving and hooting cars at Mupedzanhamo market on separate occasions. I then combined these recording to make one compact sound piece depicting a crowded place. I tried to minimise objects that I used for installation in this room because I am drawn to the contrast between the sound piece which fills the space and the emptiness of the physical space.

2.3.2.2 *Kange Mbeu Kurima Kwandikona*

In Zimbabwe, up until the year 2000, street vending was perceived as a pastime that brought in extra cash, but some people took it professionally. Vending was categorised as an occupation for those who did not have a profession, hence we were told to study hard in order to have a brighter future if we specialised in a certain profession. In a politically and economically stable country, it is true that those who specialise stand a much greater chance of getting a proper job that will pay

enough to secure all their basic needs. Often, people would consider company benefits such as retirement packages and health insurance as being enough benefit to make a job look attractive. Individual street vendors do not receive such benefits, and therefore vending was deemed a waste of time.

Things, however, have radically changed. The photograph below (Fig. 26) depicts a former University of Zimbabwe graduate who has been jobless for more than seven years since he graduated (Njikizana, 2018). Wearing his graduation gown and hood is a form of protest in response to the high unemployment rate in the country. Vending for many people, even those with university education, is the only way out. In this context and these times of economic hardship informal trading continues to grow, providing most Zimbabwean people with very small profits to survive on.



Fig. 26. *Vending Graduate* 2018, Image by Jekesai Njikizana/AFP/Getty Images

Informal trading and unemployment is not only a Zimbabwean predicament, and there are other African countries like Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya where people have found vending to be a solution to unemployment. The previously well-known statement, ‘go to school, get a degree and get a job’, is fading away significantly, as there is no guarantee, and in fact little chance, that jobs will be available after one has been to university. This makes me question if having a degree in Zimbabwe is worthwhile. Employment and experience come first before a person establish companies and create jobs for others. Where could people get experience in their areas of speciality if there is no employment in the country?

With that question in mind, I created an artwork titled *Kange Mbeu, Kurima Kwandikona* which means ‘roasting seeds for I have failed to harvest through farming’. It is an artwork constructed from small round balls tied next to each other using clear fishing line to create a curtain-like tapestry. I used papier mâché to mould the balls. Rhodes University destroys documents which are no longer considered necessary. They use a shredding machine to cut the papers into thin fine strips and put the shredded paper into big plastic bags. I collected these bags then added water to the shredded paper to make the papier mâché. I kept wondering about the depth of confidentiality and sensitivity of the information being destroyed and why it was created in the first place. From a broader perspective, I link this to education systems and knowledge use and dissemination in Africa, with a focus on Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is one of the countries rated highest on literacy rates in the world. In the artwork, each ball represents educated individuals yet there are no platforms to practise and apply their education. While knowledge can be acquired anywhere in all stages of life with or without formal recognition and rewards, I focus here on knowledge accomplished at school, college and university which endorses a person with an authentic document when their studies have been successfully completed. In the next stage after the academic programme is completed, it is not unreasonable to expect that the sleepless nights studying would result in the fruits of a decent income. That was the fantasy of many Zimbabweans before the economic turmoil.

In the artwork, *Kange Mbeu, Kurima Kwandikona*, each ball has patches of visible colour and text with no distinctive meaningful picture or words. This signifies confusion to an ordinary Zimbabwean person whereby studying hard equals to street vending. There is no difference between a person who has professional qualifications and one who does not, which makes the future a blur as far as Zimbabwean education is concerned. The small balls in the artwork form a curtain when joined next to each other, alluding to veiled future of Zimbabwe. Curtains are used for blocking either sunlight or water during a shower, suggesting a blinding of perception in this artwork. Under normal circumstances, in my opinion, the professional specialisation that people undergo in different institutions is not a pastime. It is supposed to package and prepare a person to earn a living using the acquired skills and to face the world by critical analysis, engaging with others and making valuable decisions.

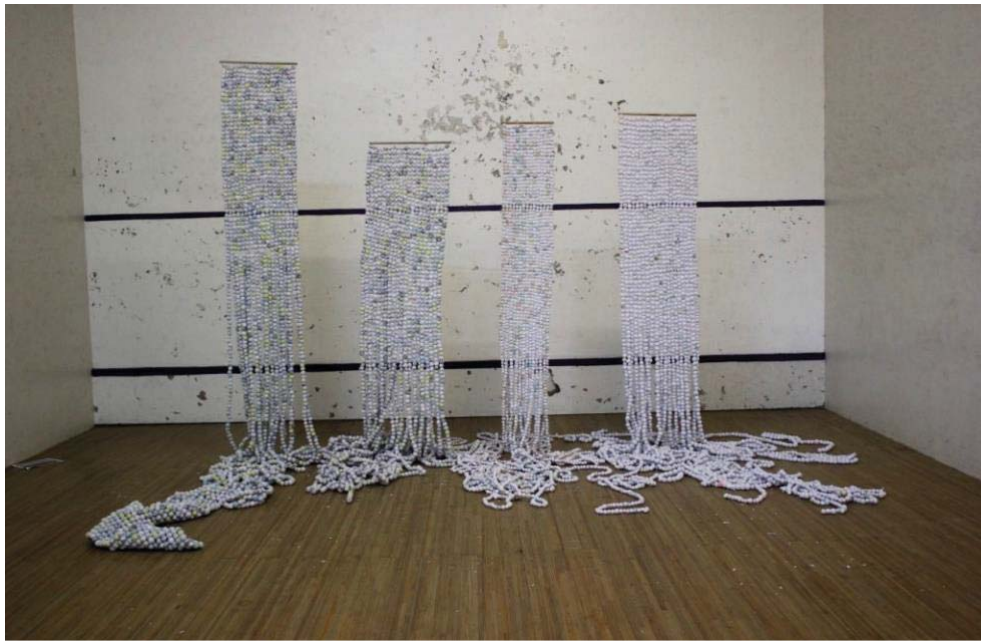


Fig. 27, Wallen Mapondera. *Kange Mbeu Kurima Kwandikona*, 2019, papier mâché and fishing line, dimensions vary, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera



Fig. 28, Wallen Mapondera. *Kange Mbeu Kurima Kwandikona*, 2019, papier mâché and fishing line, dimensions vary, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera

In Zimbabwe, the value placed on this kind of education has been severely fractured by the economic failure in the country. A lot of architects, engineers and doctors from Zimbabwe are working in other countries because that is where opportunities are and also they are appreciated

more than in their own country. In this work, I am drawn to the ways in which Zimbabwe seems to be producing labourers in different fields of professions to other countries.

The process of moulding the balls from papier mâché is similar to that of making a ball of sadza just before it is dipped in stew or vegetables, then put in the mouth to be chewed and swallowed. I liken sadza to the fruits of education as it is regarded as the most filling meal in Zimbabwe, yet the fruits seem rotten in a Zimbabwean landscape. Hope is the only thread left that is holding people strong; otherwise a lot have given up trying.



Fig. 29, Wallen Mapondera. *Kange Mbeu Kurima Kwandikona*, 2019, (detail) papier mâché and fishing line, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera



Fig. 30, Wallen Mapondera. *Kange Mbeu Kurima Kwandikona*, 2019, (detail) papier mâché and fishing line, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera



Fig. 31, Wallen Mapondera. *Installation View*, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera

2.3.2.3 The *Tuck Shop* series

The Tuck Shop is a series of artworks that comments on the continued existence of tuck shops in Zimbabwe during and through the hardest situations. Through these artworks, I observe how these tuck shops managed to supply and satisfy their customer's needs when there was no commodities in the country. I focus on the time of economic meltdown in Zimbabwe commenting on the endurance and hope that the tuck shop owners had. Originally, a tuck shop was a small room packed with food for sale. In the United Kingdom, 'tuck' is an old-fashioned slang phrase for food; therefore these small shops selling food were named 'tuck shops'. The concept of tuck shops became popular in countries such as Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe because they were formerly British colonies.

The 'tuck' part in the name tuck shop is unrelated to what these small shops are primarily known for because there was no food stuffs on the shelves of the shops. As the situation in Zimbabwe got better, shop owners were able to import basic commodities and make a profit out of it. The practice of shelving different goods for sale in tuck shops became popular. The idea was to create a one-stop kind of shop where clients can buy almost everything they want, and up to today, Zimbabwean tuck shops still operate in this manner. The tuck shop structures are considered as illegal by the city council. However, even if they are demolished in one of the Operation Murambatsvina, the owners rebuild them because they provide a source of income.

Most of the tuck shops in Zimbabwe are common in high density areas and are makeshift structures constructed by landowners in their residential areas. The landowners either rent out the structures or they occupy the space themselves. Besides the food section in the tuck shop, there are other sections where a variety of goods such as toiletries, stationery and small electronic appliances are stocked. The space still bears the name 'tuck shop' even if goods on sale are not only food, because it is a colonial term which was introduced to us (Zimbabweans) and no one was anxious to change it. The tuck shop owners do not follow a strict timetable for business hours but they make sure they open very early around 5 am and close late around 12 am. At times they leave the shop unattended during the day to catch up on their sleeping time, because business will be low during the day. People do their shopping in bigger shops during the day because goods are cheaper there than in tuck shops, so when the bigger shops close, that is when tuck shops make more profits.

Not all of the tuck shops closed down during this period of hardships. Some of them continued business as usual even if toilet paper was the only product on the shelf. In *Tuck Shop 1* (Fig. 32), I used wood to make shelves of different sizes, representing tuck shop shelves where goods are arranged. By gluing the toilet paper rolls one next to the other, I carefully arranged different brands in those shelves after I had removed the cardboard tube at the centre of the toilet paper to make the roll more flexible.



Fig. 32. Wallen Mapondera, *Tuck Shop 1*, 2019, toilet paper on wooden frame, 130x87cm, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera.

The arrangement and compression of the toilet paper in shelves distorted the original perfect circle shape of the toilet paper. To me, the deformed, liquid-like circles give an impression of a tired society in which people are only concerned with what happens to their immediate needs, at the same time without control of the future because of the bad state of the economy. They are flexible to anything and easy to manipulate.



Fig. 33. Wallen Mapondera, *Tuck Shop 1*, 2019 (detail) toilet paper on wooden frame, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera.

Class is another issue which I comment on through this work. There are some people who think they are more special than others so they only want to be in the company of people who are like them or better than them. Some brands of toilet paper are more expensive than others; therefore in this piece of the series, *Tuck Shop 1*, I used two brands of toilet paper and allocated each brand its own shelf as a reflection of how people group themselves. The stock within these shelves suggests the location of the tuck shop and the clients within the vicinity of these tuck shops. Having a cheaper brand next to an expensive brand of toilet paper creates a distinct difference between the two brands, which I liken to how each group in a society brands and values or devalues itself. Even though the toilet paper in *Tuck Shop 2* (Fig. 34) shows a different tuck shop with cheap toilet paper only, the rolls are arranged in an inviting way that makes them interestingly valuable to me.



Fig. 34. Wallen Mapondera, *Tuck Shop 2*, 2019, toilet paper on wooden frame, 171x95cm, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera.



Fig. 35. Wallen Mapondera, *Tuck Shop 2*, 2019 (detail), toilet paper on wooden frame, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera.



Fig. 36. Wallen Mapondera, *Tuck Shop 3*, 2019, egg crates, 90x60cm, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera.

The artwork *Tuck Shop 3* (Fig. 36) comments on ways of chasing mosquitoes away, which people discovered because of a lack of money to buy sprays and insect repellents. From a tuck shop owner who became a friend, I learnt that burning egg crates produces smoke that drives mosquitoes away. The smoke produced from burning these egg crates indoors might be dangerous to health and there is a risk that the fire might grow, yet we still burnt the egg crates because we wanted a quiet sleep. We collected the egg trays mostly from tuck shop owners. I am fascinated by the visual illusion from the patterns that the egg crates create, which I liken to the aesthetics employed by the tuck shop owners when arranging goods in their tuck shop shelves. When the egg crates are compressed, the pattern they create seems to allude to smoke, which creates its own curling pattern as it burns.



Fig. 37, Wallen Mapondera. *Tuck Shop 4*, 2019, cardboard and plastic, 200x95cm, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera

The work *Tuck Shop 4* (Fig. 37) can be read as a diary of what I consume daily. One can easily describe my lifestyle through looking at this artwork. It falls under the *Tuck Shop* series because most of the packaging I used in the artwork is from foods that are ready to eat. I pasted these packages of what I consumed in no particular order or size, leaving a rough surface of suspending and hanging folds. The folds represent pages of a book/diary, and also symbolises the passage of

time. Writing in a diary every day is something that takes a lot of time and some might even say it is a luxury to be able to reflect on oneself and one's activities every day. In this diary, it is the basics of survival (everyday eating and consumption) that fill the pages of the diary; so again, the emphasis is on getting through the everyday acts of surviving. Subsequently, I also used packaging to map changes in my own lifestyle. I had been used to eating with my family in Zimbabwe but staying alone as a student in Makhanda led me to favor fast foods instead of cooking for myself. Registering this shift, I collected my own 'trash' generated from what I eat, and I use this 'trash' as found objects in my artwork. This makes me fully aware of my existence and what I consume when I am in different spaces.

2.3.2.4 *Huchi neMukaka*

Huchi neMukaka (Fig. 38) is an artwork made from pieces of cardboard originally used as milk packaging; wax paper on canvas, and waxed thread. I deliberately used these materials as a representation of the phrase *huchi nemukaka* which translates as 'milk and honey'. There are different kinds of wax which vary depending on the source. For instance, wax made by bees is called beeswax which then in my work links with the honey. Some of the thread on this artwork was coated with beeswax. The phrase *huchi nemukaka* or 'milk and honey' has different layers of meaning. In most explanations, it is referred to as a very fertile piece of land, a paradise where its people have everything in abundance and wholesome gratification (Cohen, 2002).

For the artwork, I cut the milk package cardboard into small pieces, then sewed them on to a loose piece of canvas with waxed thread. I then attached the loose piece of canvas to a plain surface of canvas that I had laminated with dirty sheets of wax paper. The loose piece of canvas with small pieces of milk packaging sewn on protruded from the laminated canvas, forming a shape like beehive or a round calabash container. The negative spaces between different small pieces of cardboard created shadows and depth which made it easy to visualise the movement and patterns which these pieces of cardboard formed. The base of the round calabash shape is broken, suggesting that something can easily slip out from the broken part.

Huchi neMukaka bears a resemblance to a mismanaged asset losing value due to human greediness. Visually to me, the background of the work gives a feeling of a surface filled with molds. Instead of the asset being improved and maintained so that it benefits the owners, it is abused and in the end it seems valueless and dilapidated. In the case of Zimbabwe, the country

was flourishing soon after its independence in 1980. Transport, energy, recreational and health facilities were functioning properly. It was viewed as a perfect, fertile land flowing with milk and honey. Greediness took over and cases of fraud and corruption began to rise. A notable case of corruption was the disappearance of US\$15 billion in diamond mining revenue from Marange Mine in Mutare (African News Agency, 2016). I can imagine how that amount of money could change the country for the better, but to date, no one has been held accountable for its disappearance. This is just one case among many others. Zimbabwe is a land of milk and honey but the carelessness and corruption of the people in positions of power cripples it and makes it a begging bowl.



Fig.38, Wallen Mapondera. *Huchi neMukaka*, 2019, cardboard, waxed paper and thread on canvas, 226x143cm, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera

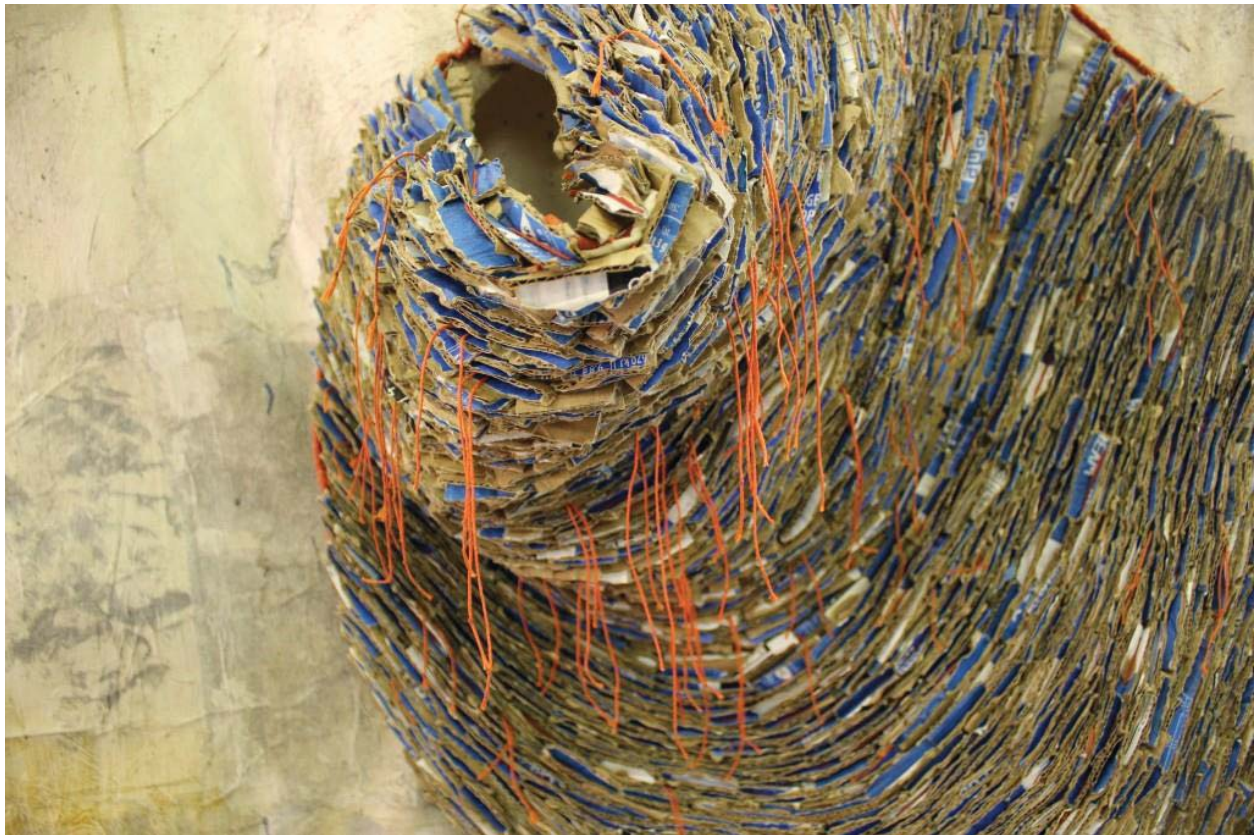


Fig. 39. Wallen Mapondera, *Huchi neMukaka*, 2019 (detail), cardboard waxed paper and thread on canvas, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera.

Beyond the land's minerals, tourist attractions and resorts, there are vast numbers of professionals who received a globally recognised education in Zimbabwe and are migrating with their professionalism to improve other nations. I also consider these people as the milk and honey of Zimbabwe; unfortunately the country is not able to employ them because of the poor economy, and hence they slip abroad in search of greater opportunities. Currently, the prices of goods are rising in Zimbabwe, yet there are no efforts made to increase government workers' salaries to cope with the current prices. As much as people want a reason to stay, it is proving to be difficult in this kind of inflation. I foresee the Zimbabwean nation repeating the 2008 hyperinflation situation. We have mineral resources and we have a lot of professionals in different sectors who can improve our living conditions as Zimbabweans, but corruption rules. Life becomes smooth only for the elite while the majority suffers. Milk and honey is there but through our leaders' mismanagement, it has become difficult to access.

2.3.2.5 *Pahasha*



Fig. 40. Wallen Mapondera, *Pahasha*, 2019, waxed paper and thread on tent, 337x163cm, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera.

‘*Pahasha*’ (Fig. 40) is an artwork I created using a discarded tent which was used as a shade for a vegetable market somewhere in Harare. I also used wax paper and thread to construct the piece. *Hasha* is derived from the English word ‘harsh’ which can also be referred to as ‘hostile’. *Pa* from ‘*pa-hasha*’ points out the mood, character, place or condition which the person is in. For instance if a person is wounded on the eyelid, we say ‘*paziso*’, ‘*ziso*’ is the eye and the eyelid.

Pahasha is a slang Shona word which has multiple meanings depending on the situation it is being used in. There are many different situations in life in which people can be harsh, but in this work I focus on the aggressiveness that people can show when doing business. In some cases, *pahasha* refers to the unsympathetic mood that people have in their approach to survival tactics, which in Zimbabwe is mostly vending. A product can have different prices depending on the buyer. Some vendors price their goods according to the looks of the buyer. If the vendor perceives someone to be a person who can afford a higher price, then they will charge a higher price than normal. There is a Shona saying, ‘*pane mapurisa ndipo pane mari*’ meaning ‘where the police are, that is where the money is’. This indicates that if the police are securing a space so much, or prohibiting people

from trading in a particular space, it is most likely that the spaces prohibited are the ones that bring big profits. Some mining sites in Zimbabwe, such as the Marange diamond mine in Mutare and Fungold mine in Bindura are some of the prohibited spaces where minerals are found. There are also spaces in Harare where hawkers are not allowed that are the spaces with more people passing. These spaces are referred to as *pahasha*.



Fig. 41, Wallen Mapondera.
Pahasha, 2019 (detail),
waxed paper and thread on
tent, Photo courtesy of
Wallen Mapondera

The artwork depicts the chaotic scenario in these kinds of spaces where the police keep disrupting the smooth running of trade. The small framed tent represents a space where every trader wishes to be because it brings higher returns than the surrounding areas. Red thread (see detail in Figure 41) represents opposing forces like the police and yellow thread represents possibilities of high returns.



Fig. 42, Wallen Mapondera. *Installation view*, Photo courtesy of Wallen Mapondera

Lastly, I have selected artworks with materials that relate to each other and installed them in the same room. *Pahasha* and *Kudzoka Kumba* are constructed from tents which I picked up during the recent Operation Murambatsvina in February 2019. *Kange Mbeu Kurima Kwandikona*, *Tuck Shop 1* and *Tuck Shop 2* are also made from relatively similar material. They are made from soft paper as compared to the room with art works such as *Nhereka Nhereka* and *Huchi Nemukaka*. The artworks, working process and the choice of material have summed up an exhibition which denotes survival, resistance and negotiation of individuals when faced by hardships.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have outlined living conditions that provoke creativity and the evolvement of materiality within visual arts in Zimbabwe. After people have been left homeless and jobless by the forced execution of Operation Murambatsvina, it led me to notice the abundance of found materials that I and other Zimbabwean visual artists started employing in their work. I also have managed to unpack activities meant to be alternative survival tactics and placed them in different categories of art forms through analysing the operation's effects on people's livelihood. However, there is a need to identify, accommodate and support the artistic developments that materialise unintentionally from everyday responsibilities. As much as people respond to life's hardships differently, some migrate to other countries to start a life. There are extreme cases in which foreign nationals are being persecuted and attacked in South Africa (Simbao, 2016). Nigerians, Somalians and Zimbabweans who seek refuge and better life in South Africa work hard and are tempted to accept any amount offered as payment to make ends meet. Therefore employers favour foreigners over locals, hence South Africans perceive these foreigners as dominant in their country and taking over jobs through working for low wages, and this mindset links to abuse and violent reprisals. The greater cause of the migration of Zimbabwean people is the sheer greediness of politicians who are power hungry and have exploited and weakened the country's economic state instead of building it. Zimbabweans are tired and have no hope for a brighter future, therefore individuals are now interested in serving their interests first, before anything else.

In response to the coerced innovativeness of the Zimbabwean people (in and out of the country) and other nationals like Ghanaians, whose economic crises have indirectly prepared a breeding ground for inventiveness, through this thesis I have managed to contextualise my practice. In the course of analysing artworks of other artists such as Moffat Takadiwa, Gareth Nyandoro and Serge Attiku Clottey, I have positioned my artworks within a similar framework as their work.

There has not been much documentation and written context about the drive behind Zimbabwean found objects specifically in comparison with creativity for survival in real life. As such, I believe this mini-thesis together with the exhibition have unpacked the foundation, and progression of creativity and contribute to a deeper analysis on the contemporary visual arts in Zimbabwe. Through this MFA work, I have also acknowledged other unrecognised creative expressions such as those of arranged bananas or tomatoes on stalls as well as songs composed by vendors for luring clients to buy their wares.

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