
1200 ML

BLACK MOUNTAIN
BLACK GOLD — OIL SPILL
DARK EXTRACTION, WHITE DUST — GHOST TOWN

ABUNDANCE / EXTRACTED

"Welcome to Mufulira: The Place of Abundance", a sign on the winding and pot-holed road expectantly greets you as you enter this mining town. For decades, Mufulira mine has been among the top copper producers in the Zambian mining industry. Its exceptional copper wealth directly inspired the town's slogan. Copper wealth built spacious houses in lush suburbs such as Eastleigh and Fairview, quality hospitals, and a lavish boating club sponsored by the mine – in its former tailings facility that it converted to a recreational lake, no less. Extraction has also generated undeniable and notorious environmental fallouts: a 13 million tonne waste dump (popularly called the Black Mountain), suffocating air pollution, and water that is far too acidic to drink. Because of its proximity to the smelter and the non-stop emissions of sulphur dioxide fumes, activists are fighting to have the neighbourhood of Kankoyo declared a zone unfit for human habitation. Located in the shadow of the Black Mountain and its toxic dust, Kankoyo appears as the sacrifice zone of this abundance.[1]

In the Niger Delta there are similar tensions between wealth and waste, prosperity and pollution. When Shell drilled Oil Well 1 in the Niger Delta village of Otuabagi in 1956, optimism about the potential of 'Black Gold' prevailed. Parents named their children after British and American oil prospectors, while chiefs appeased the spirits of the land so that oil would flow freely. Oil indeed flowed abundantly. With an astounding 37 billion barrels of crude oil reserves remaining, Nigeria still prides itself as Africa's largest oil producer. Over the years, oil wealth filled the pockets of businessmen and government officials in Lagos, Abuja, and London with millions of petro-dollars. Yet there has also been an abundance of oil spills – estimates put the total figure at over 10 million tonnes of oil spilled. This covers the region's creeks, fields, and once-bountiful mangroves under a thick blanket of black crude. With over 7,000 oil spill sites littered across the 70,000 km² landmass of the region, there is hardly a morsel of land that does not bear a visible sign of this devastation. Whereas the Niger Delta previously boasted lavish yam harvests and an abundance of all kinds of fish, today cocoyams, plantains, catfish, and periwinkles can no longer thrive. Shrivelled tubers, ailing crops, and frail fingerlings are all that remain.

1. Iva Peša, 'Anthropocene Narratives of Living with Resource Extraction in Africa', *Radical History Review* 145 (2023), 125-138.



With the departure of Shell to more promising deposits elsewhere,[2] communities in Otuabagi and Eleme are left only with barren fields, polluted creeks, and a set of inexplicable diseases.[3]

Johannesburg, Egoli, Place of Gold – a city with many names, reflecting its many identities. Scholars have typified it as the 'elusive metropolis.'[4] One thing is certain: Johannesburg was built by and for gold mining. Over the years, gold mining produced all kinds of abundance: sparkling jewellery and shameful wealth for a select few, along with an excess of waste, ultradeep shafts, and toxic materials that completely metamorphosed the city's environment for the rest. The discovery of gold in 1886 attracted labour migrants from as far away as Zambia and Angola. The lure of gold wealth transformed Johannesburg into a megacity of almost 15 million inhabitants, with consistently high population growth figures. The city is also literally built on gold. Most houses stand either on top of mine shafts, whose tunnels run as arteries at an unfathomable depth of 4 kilometres underground, or are built adjacent to one of the city's numerous mine dumps. Their benign light-yellow colour makes mine dumps resemble natural mountains – or even beach sand. These toxic dumps are the price paid to enjoy gold abundance: to recover 22 grams of gold, one tonne of rock needs to be hauled from the depths of the earth. This rock is laden with heavy metals, such as lead and arsenic, and it contains dangerous traces of uranium. While living next to this toxic cocktail would be considered an unacceptable health hazard in most places on earth, in Johannesburg it is an inescapable reality for millions. Still, some bear higher risks than others, as exposure to toxicity is differentiated by complexly layered histories of class, race, and locality.[5]

One place that has been particularly affected by the toxic waste from gold mining is Ghost Town. Part of the Soweto township of Diepkloof, Ghost Town epitomises the promises and perils of gold mining. Without the lure of gold and the labour necessary to bring this precious mineral to the surface, migrants would have never ended up in Ghost Town. The name refers to haunting spirits, but perhaps also to the toxic dust from the towering mine dump. Pollution from the mine dump is

2. In March 2025, Shell sold its onshore oil production facilities to a Nigerian consortium (Renaissance Group). Shell continues to engage in deepwater (offshore) drilling and gas extraction in Nigeria.
3. Jackson Tamunosaki Jack, '(Mal)Adaptation to Environmental Pollution: Oil and the 'Livelihood Dysfunction Trap' in Nigeria's Niger Delta', *Africa* 95:2 (2025), 158-182
4. Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe (eds.), *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2008).
5. Gabrielle Hecht, *Residual Governance: How South Africa Foretells Planetary Futures* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2023).



exacerbated by the festering municipal waste dump that grows daily at its feet. Still, the people of Ghost Town work hard to live a dignified life – by diligently sweeping their homes clean of toxic dust, building community and offering support in shebeens, and by asserting their right to a clean and healthy environment through grassroots NGOs. These are all acts of what Tholithemba Lorenzo Ndaba calls 'Township Environmentalism', which emphasises that "Black communities in townships have a long history of environmental engagement" as their "daily survival" is in itself "an act of resistance."[6]

This book explores these tensions between abundance and extraction, wealth and waste, prosperity and pollution through visual and poetic means. Using images and words, we seek to tell stories that question and unsettle understandings of mining and oil drilling in Africa. Concurring with Carl Death, we believe that "[s]tories can challenge dominant discourses, imagine alternatives, and envision new relationships in climate-changed futures."[7] Our stories portray how people in Johannesburg, the Niger Delta, and Mufulira live with extraction, pollution, and dreams of abundance every day. While showcasing the damage and suffering that mining and oil drilling have wrought, we also highlight their powerful – if often elusive – promises. Most importantly, we centre the everyday resilience and strength of the women and men who have lived with extraction for decades.

1886. 1923. 1956. 2026.
ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORIES OF EXTRACTION IN AFRICA

Extraction has a long and chequered history in these three localities. This history is firmly rooted in colonial structures of exploitation. Johannesburg's gold rush after 1886 animated the rapid growth of a mining town, where migrant labourers lived in cramped accommodation and everything from water provision to beer halls was dominated by the mining company. Peter Abrahams describes these living conditions in his seminal 1946 novel *Mine Boy*. The protagonist Xuma ends up in "Malay Camp. A row of streets crossing another row of streets. Mostly narrow streets. Mostly dirty streets. Mostly dark streets." But notwithstanding the filth and the overcrowding, Xuma was captivated by Johannesburg. He marvelled at:

6. Tholithemba Lorenzo Ndaba, Madoda Mkhobeni, and William Matlala, 'Exploring the Impact of Diepkloof's Mine Dumps on Community Resilience, Environmental Practices and Resistance', *Grassroots – Journal of Political Ecology*, forthcoming (2026).
7. Carl Death, *African Climate Futures* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2025), 3.



> The warmth in the air even on a cold night. The warmth of living bodies; of living, breathing, moving people. A warmth that was richer than the air and the earth and the sun. Richer than all things. The warmth of life, throbbing. Of hearts pounding. Of silence and sound. Of movement, and of lack of movement. A warm, thick, dark blanket of life. That was Malay Camp. Something nameless and living. A stream of dark life.[8]

Even with hugely exploitative labour conditions, a violent system of racial segregation, and toxic mine dumps that grew in height every day, Johannesburg retained its magnetic attraction for Xuma and countless others.

The construction of Mufulira followed Johannesburg's blueprint. South African miners and British investors moved north once copper was discovered there in 1923, taking their experience, money, and visions for urban planning with them. Kantanshi, Kankoyo, and Butondo are quintessential mine neighbourhoods, with standardised straight rows of small one or two bedroomed houses. The unimaginatively named House 1, Section 1 still stands today, connected through a road directly to the mine shaft and smelter. Residential proximity to the mine also meant that toxic smelter fumes would blow right into the lungs of those who called Kankoyo home. Whereas many initially welcomed mining for its promises of wealth and modernity, the constant coughing, skin rashes, and deep cracks because of underground blasting punctured this optimism.[9] Copper mining entered a protracted period of decline from the 1980s onwards, resulting in a painful process of privatisation and mass layoffs. Today, Mufulira residents are bracing themselves for the inevitable end of mining that will leave only another 'ghost town' behind.

In the Niger Delta, decades of frantic yet frustrated prospecting preceded the striking of commercial quantities of oil in 1956. Companies such as Shell, Chevron, and ExxonMobil flocked to the Delta in the following decades, all lured by the prospects of making quick profits. Oil wells – in contrast to the centralised shafts of gold and copper mines – popped up everywhere in the middle of the bush. Their effects transformed environments, but urbanisation did not always follow.

In Otuabagi, Shell built its very own 'city' – where surrounding villagers would come to admire electric lights and hear music playing from gramophones in the 1960s. Yet the constant gas flaring also killed entire swarms of pollinating bees

8. Peter Abrahams, *Mine Boy* (London, Faber & Faber, 1946), 111-112.
9. Jennifer Chibamba Chansa, 'Houses Built on Copper: The Environmental Impact of Current Mining Activities on 'Old' and 'New' Zambian Copperbelt Communities', in: Miles Larmer et al. (eds.), *Across the Copperbelt: Urban & Social Change in Central Africa's Borderland Communities* (Woodbridge, James Currey, 2021), 233-264.



and it upset spiritual lifeworlds, leading to rumours of a strange light that haunted people at night. Once Shell had exhausted its deposits in Otuabagi it packed up and left. The workers' camp was completely dismantled and only the tarmac of the air strip remained behind. For all the wealth Otuabagi's soils generated, its residents are still begging for boreholes now that their aquifers, creeks, and rainwater have become so dangerously polluted.

In the decades after these discoveries, extraction steadily expanded. Indeed, as Timothy LeCain aptly notes, mining and oil drilling caused 'mass destruction': these activities generated gigantic waste piles, rivers suffused with toxic chemicals, and levels of air pollution that imperilled all living beings.[10] As an anthropogenic activity, extraction is unrivalled in the history of the Earth: its environmental effects are inescapable and will outlast pretty much anything. That is why scholars of the Anthropocene have identified extraction as one of the main markers for this proposed geological epoch.[11] Yet amidst devastation, life endures. Elizabeth Miller points out that extraction also creates new ecologies, marked by the sturdy *ulunsonga* plant and by women drying cassava chips in the heat of gas flares.[12] Alongside the drilling, digging, and blasting and the sheer volumes of toxic waste streams that disturb and destroy environments, this book also pays attention to the environmental lifeworlds that are generated in these localities of extraction.

1886, Johannesburg – 1923, Mufulira – 1956, Niger Delta. These histories, too often singled out as discrete events of discovery, reverberate into the present. That is what Farhana Sultana characterises as 'climate coloniality.' Across Africa, colonial histories of extraction endure, projecting inequalities and vulnerabilities into the now and the future. It is no coincidence that communities such as Ghost Town or Kankoyo, located right next to toxic waste dumps, or Ogale with its nine oil wells, remain impoverished today. Colonial histories of environmental racism cemented "uneven and unequal" forms of marginalisation and vulnerability that continue to govern and structure daily lives.[13] These histories proved almost impossible to escape.

Stories of extraction have rarely been told from the perspective of those who live through its ambiguous yet momentous consequences. Powerful multinational

10. Timothy J. LeCain, *Mass Destruction: The Men and Giant Mines that Wired America and Scarred the Planet* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2009).
11. Jan Zalasiewicz, Colin N. Waters, and Mark Williams, 'Human Bioturbation, and the Sbterranean Landscape of the Anthropocene', *Anthropocene* 6 (2014), 3-9.
12. Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, *Extraction Ecologies and the Literature of the Long Exhaustion* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2021).
13. Farhana Sultana, 'The Unbearable Heaviness of Climate Coloniality', *Political Geography* 99 (2022), 102638, 3.



corporations refuse to disclose their archives, thereby restricting the narratives that can exist. In the five-year AFREXTRACT research project, we have tried to pluralise the stories of extraction through oral histories and by centring on the lifeworlds of those in Mufulira, Johannesburg, and the Niger Delta.[14] In this book, we take a slightly different approach, inviting engagement with the environmental changes that mining and oil drilling have brought about through photographs and poems. Through these mediations we expressly seek to broaden "who is able and permitted to imagine and narrate stories,"[15] by including grassroots poets and collaborating with photographers who grew up in these localities. In this way, we seek to complicate narratives of harm and thriving in the Niger Delta, in Johannesburg, and on the Zambian Copperbelt. Let us provide three examples.

The football club Mufulira Wanderers is surprisingly successful in the Zambian league, having won 49 trophies. The stadium of the Mighty Wanderers is located just by the mine plant. The belching smelter is the field's backdrop. When toxic sulphur dioxide smoke would be released from the chimney during a game, Wanderers fans cheered. They were convinced that local players were so habituated and hardened to the smoke that they could withstand its effects. But this was different for visiting teams, who were not used to breathing toxic air. If they swerved or got dizzy because of the fumes, surely Mufulira's players could take advantage of the situation by quickly scoring a goal. This anecdote is today cheerfully recounted by many residents of this mining town, always accompanied by a healthy dose of humour and profuse laughter. What does it tell us that people make sense of their toxic living conditions through humour? Does this say something about resilience and coping beyond what the environmental humanities have theorised?[16]

In Diepkloof, women deal with daily dust through the careful act of sweeping. Again, we encounter the use of humour to make sense of toxic environments. In the novel *69 Jerusalem Street*, Lindiwe Nkhuta gives a comical rendition of the violent August dust storms:

> Even the semi-senile in our township knew what month it was, thanks to the ever-present, back-to-back dust volcano eruptions, prancing about as if to a tune played by an arthritic fiddler. August was the month of this

14. Iva Peša, Tholithemba Lorenzo Ndaba, Jabulani Shaba, and Jackson Tamunosaki Jack, 'Pluralizing Archives for Histories of Extraction in Africa', *Africa Bibliography, Research and Documentation* 3 (2024), 14-33.
15. Death, *African Climate Futures*, 4.
16. Mark Vardy and Mick Smith, 'Resilience', *Environmental Humanities* 9:1 (2017), 175-179; Massih Zekavat, *Leveraging Satire for Environmental Advocacy: Creative Arts in the Chthulucene* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2026).



spectacle. … All of August's days were cruel, but for our reprieve.[17]

Laden with mercury, lead, and uranium, mine dump dust pierces chests, it causes incessant coughing, skin rashes, and multiple varieties of cancer. In this setting, sweeping away toxic dust is an example of 'township environmentalism.' But why would sweeping be a form of environmentalism? If one breathes toxic dust day in day out, without respite and without the ability to escape, acts of care for family members and concern for their wellbeing are important expressions of environmentalism. Wanting children to be as healthy as possible by protecting them from metallic dust then becomes a political act. Even under constrained circumstances, such as apartheid South Africa, women practised environmental tactics that, through their everyday repetitiveness and collectiveness, held political power.[18]

In the Niger Delta, well-known for its environmental activism – both the peaceful advocacy by Ken Saro-Wiwa and the militant campaigns of gun-wielding members of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta – environmentalism equally manifested in more subtle ways. Here, people hung bottles of crude oil on their doorways to ward off evil spirits. Oil held such power that it was also believed to prevent seizures. In a puzzling attempt to safeguard wellbeing and health, elderly women and men drink teaspoons full of crude oil to protect themselves from medical conditions. This speaks to the layering of crude oil onto previous histories of palm oil and its healing, spiritual powers. Even more importantly, such practices underline the great power of oil in the lifeworlds of the Niger Delta.

Through photography and poetry this book offers multiple – uncommon and sometimes contradictory – perspectives on extraction, environmental change, and everyday lifeworlds in the Niger Delta, in Johannesburg, and on the Zambian Copperbelt.

17. Lindiwe Nkhuta, *69 Jerusalem Street* (Johannesburg, Modjaji Books, 2020), 25.
18. Ndaba, Mkhobeni, and Matlala, 'Exploring the Impact of Diepkloof's Mine Dumps'.



IMAGES AND WORDS

The relationship between photographic images, mining, and extraction is as old as the medium itself. Metals such a silver, gold, and mercury were vital to the production of early photographs in the nineteenth century and so was the crude oil product bitumen. Cotton – another material intricately linked to extractive histories of colonialism – was required to produce photographic papers and celluloid film stock. In our present digital world, photography depends on rare earth minerals that are all too often extracted – once again – under violent conditions, producing an abundance of toxic waste.[19] Artistic photography projects increasingly question and respond to these material conditions of mining.[20] Such artistic and visual production adds to the longstanding documentary photography tradition by African – and more often non-African – photographers that addresses and questions mining, both extensively and fragmentarily.[21] Contemporary photographs by Sammy Baloji, for example, respond to historical photographs and images that were used to celebrate mining as a source of labour and economic welfare in colonial Congo.[22]
Such an approach is also reflected in the following pages, which include propagandistic booklets and stamps from South Africa, Zambia, and Nigeria. Images are, of course, cultural products. Photographs, however, are good at naturalising: they appear to give a direct, transparent view onto reality. In a relatively simple and nowadays widely accessible gesture, photographs respond to and produce 'culture.' The transparency of the photographs commissioned from Madoda Mkhobeni and William Matlala in South Africa, Lucas Deinma in Nigeria, and Danny Chiyesu in Zambia is interrupted in digital collages produced by Andrea Stultiens. Overlaps and drop shadows emphasise that what you see is a construct, afforded by a person with a camera and the opportunity or task to photographically record what things look like. The commissioned photographs are complemented by pictures produced by members of the AFREXTRACT collective during research trips.

19. Siobhan Angus, *Camera Geologica: An Elementary History of Photography* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2024).
20. For instance, Congolese artist Sammy Baloji produced work about the mining and circulation of copper; Zambian artist Stary Mwaba, who was born and raised on the Copperbelt, works with communities in Kitwe in his long-term project on the Black Mountain; British photographer Lisa Barnard's project *The Canary and the Hammer* reflects on the role of gold mining in humanity's pursuit of wealth; whereas German artist Susanne Kriemann investigates the ecological footprint of photography.
21. Famous examples are the aesthetically pleasing documentary photographs by Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado on gold mines in Brazil and the *Diamond Matters* project by Dutch photographer Kadir van Lohuizen which traces "the story of diamonds."
22. Sammy Baloji, *Mémoire/Kolwezi* (2006 exhibition; Stichting Kunstboek, 2016).



Our book pairs photography with poetry with a view to amplify the compelling and intersecting forces of lived experience and creative imagination in framing environmental stories.[23] While capable of evoking imaginaries, poetry weaves experiences into art to reflect on and commemorate collective encounters with the natural world. Poetry helps develop knowledge, ideas, and emotions about the environment, and it contributes to new narratives and frameworks of thought.[24]
Through poetry, "some of the most creative and urgent perspectives on ecological change are generated."[25] Featuring historical poetry, by Johannesburg grassroots theatre producer John Ledwaba and David K. Chewe in Zambia, alongside contemporary and acclaimed works by authors such as Obari Gomba, Sophia Obi, and Uhuru Phalafala, we present an eclectic patchwork that consists of a variety of responses to extraction and environmental transformation. Poems incorporating Pidgin English by Chinweike D. Okwu – The Lyrical Pontiff, iciBemba verses by Suzyika Nyimbili, and isiZulu phrases by Sphamandla Xulu engage with the linguistic and epistemic versatility that is required to make sense of Abundance/Extracted. By talking back to the alien language of imperialism, these poems gesture towards a decolonial imagination. We present poetry by unpublished authors, such as Lucas Deinma, Thomas Chisengantambu, and Siphamandla Mzolo alongside authors who have experience publishing their work, such as Mweo Kondolo. What unites all these authors is that they have long and intimate experiences living in these localities of mining and oil drilling. The unique perspective, which emerges from lived experience, complements the visuality of the photographs to depict the diverse environmental lifeworlds of mining and oil across Africa.

23. One author who has written compellingly about collaborations between artists and academics from the perspective of the environmental humanities is Harriet Hawkins. See particularly, Harriet Hawkins and Anja Kanngieser, 'Artful Climate Change Communication: Overcoming Abstraction, Insensibilities, and Distances', *WIREs Climate Change* 8 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.472; Harriet Hawkins, *Geography, Art, Research: Artistic Research in the GeoHumanities* (London, Routledge, 2020).
24. Cajetan Iheka, *Naturalizing Africa: Ecological Violence, Agency, and Postcolonial Resistance in African Literature* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017).
25. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan (eds.), *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities:* Postcolonial Approaches (New York, Routledge, 2015), 13.





PRIVATIZATION
O JEHOVA MODISANA!

BY M.J. LEDWABA, 09

EVERYTHING AND ALL ELSE
IS GETTING PRIVATIZED
LAND IS PRIVATIZED
ELECTRICITY IS PRIVATIZED
WATER IS PRIVATIZED
AND AIR IS SOON TO BE PRIVATIZED
O JEHOVA MODISANA!
SAFE US THE GREED
OF THE FREE MARKET ECONOMY

GLOBALIZATION IS A NEW BRAND NAME
FOR UNIVERSAL RESORCE PLUNDERING
TO GET THE RICH RICHER
AND THE POOR POORER
THE WEAK WEAKER
AND THE STRONG STRONGER
O JEHOVA MODISANA!
SAFE US FROM THE FREE MARKET
ECONOMIC ONSLAUGHT


POST CARD.
Real Photo.
EMPIRE EXHIBITION
JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, 1936
The things which look like Mountains in the back are Gold mines
Published by Beanes Photo Service, P.O. Box 6954, Jhbg
118.
JOHANNESBURG LOOKING SOUTH.




WE NEED TO
CREATE JOBS
HH
VILL FIX



MY MUFULIRA

Mweo Kondolo

My Mufulira, my Mufulira,
The place of abundance, where mines reside,
From shafts to surface, our mine's great might,
Our town's resolve, like copper, strong and bright.

In Mufulira's air, a pungent shade,
Senta's presence, we can't subdue.
A byproduct of mines, that bring us gold,
A reminder of progress, with a toxic hold.

In Mufulira, our spirit never fades,
Resilient, labouring and joyful – with beer aplenty,
Though challenges come, and times may be tough,
Mufulira stands proud, never undone.

My Mufulira, a melting pot, where unity's bond remains,
A community tied through indestructible metal wires,
A town that's warm, beneath Copperbelt's sky,
Its beauty rooted, in its people's hearts, passing by.

From our *ulunsonga* fenced homes,
To the feet thumping miners underground,
To the mining residues called the Black Mountain,
A constant reminder of our wealth in the earth,

My Mufulira, forever my pride.


MUFULIRA MUNICIPAL COUNCIL
WELCOME TO
MUFULIRA
THE PLACE OF ABUNDANCE









DOOM IN BOOM

Sophia Obi

Yakata!
She opened her legs
Like a bionic woman
She opened wide
Long endowed legs
Spreading from Nun River to Forcados
She opened for their drilling pleasure

They drilled
All manner of drillers
Drilled deeper than she could bear
Exploring her crevices
Like riled miners
Seeking treasure
Plunging deeper for their pleasure

Daily they come
Daily they drilled
Obnoxious drillers drilled
Licking fingers
Smacking lips
Savouring sweet moments
In her state of despair

Sore and weary she has become, a bleating lamb
At the mercy of her offspring for respite
But open wider they urged
Avaricious children bellowed their consent
Aiding strange fellas for her descent
So she opened wider to Brass Rivers
Baring her fortune to cruel looters

She aches from monthly flows
Spilling noxious tears
Eroding her flora, her fauna
Now *Opuru, Ofingo, Isam, Gbou* mourn
Not for their offspring
But for the endowed
Who prune their generations for pittance

From Forcados to Nun, Santa Barbara to Bonny
Songu, Singhi, Ikoli even *Agbara* gnash their teeth
Convulsing the waste of Escravos and Orashi
As St. Bartholomew wails gulping
Bitter-chocolate taste
Tasty to her drillers
Still, they drill

They trawl her boom. She sprawls in gloom
Grieving her waning generation
To wipe her ruinous tears
Deaf they are to her pleas
Pleasing self over common interest
While drillers drill
Leaving her livid in her resource-curse

Causing aches, wants in abundance
Oh! Niger Delta
Aging sweet wine for their glory
Her doom in boom for her story
Daily they come, daily they drill
Daily they come, they still drill
Until her offspring refrain as people-pleasers

They will still come and they will still drill









UTHULI LWEGOLIDE

Sphamandla Xulu

Ngaphansi kwelanga…
Beneath this burning sun…
The city breathes dust, *uthuli*
A shimmer of ghosts
Rising from the belly of the earth
Where dreams were buried
With broken bones.
They called it gold,
But what it really bought
Was silence
Pain, polished and sold
In London vaults
While hunger grew roots
In the shacks of Soweto.

Johannesburg
Kwandonga ziyaduma, kwanyama kayipheli, idolobha legolide,
Idolobha lamaphupho aphukile,
City of broken ribs and golden lies
Built on backs that never glittered
On lungs that coughed
Until the night swallowed their breath.

Men went down
Behliswa ngaphansi komhlaba,
Behliswa ezimayini,
And the earth swallowed their names
While the wind above
Learned to whisper in yellow
Carrying secrets
To streets paved with promises.

Look, *bheka*
The mine dumps still stand
White and tired
Like old men who've seen too much
They hum at night
Ziyakhuluma zikhuluma ngezinkathi ezedlule
They remember the sweat
The blood
The prayers that never reached the sky.

Children play in their shadow
Breathing in the stories
Their textbooks forgot
Coughs become lullabies
And mothers sweep dust
From the same corners
Where promises used to live
uMama uyathandaza
Ngokukhala okuthule
Hoping the wind
Won't bring more sorrow tomorrow.

And still
The city grows
Glass towers shining over bones
We call it progress
We call it home
But whose home?
Whose progress?
Whose bones lie beneath these streets?

But listen closely…
The gold is gone
And the dust remains
Uthuli alupheli
It settles in lungs
In dreams
In poems like this
Where the earth still speaks
And the wind refuses
To forget.

Because this city…
This city was built
On dust
That once glittered
Like hope
Idolobha elakhiwe ngothuli
Uthuli olukhuluma izindaba ezibuhlungu




SOCIAL
RELIEF TEAM





THE COPPERBELT

David K Chewe

The Belt, seven scattered dumps
of rusty metal, concrete and flesh.

Seven dumps of cacophonic metal-timbre
And myriad fluorescent lamps.

The Belt, of windy, plasma-drenched roads,
strewn metal and crystals over its countenance.

On the Copperbelt, I, the miner
Mole down earth's intestines
Extracting the green bile
And often extracting my bile.

I have seen it
The bloodmiscegenated
Flinthearted
Crocodile-redeyed Copperbelt.


SAFEMINING
Arts
Council


MTN
Send & Receive Money
Here
Dial:
airtel
Mobile
Money







BY THE SIDE OF THE BLACK MOUNTAIN

Suzyika Chizenge Nyimbili

It was by the side of the Black Mountain that my feet first hugged soils
It is here that I made my first strides
Above the richness and abundance of the land
It is here that my story begun and still revolves
My dreams and aspirations shaped here
Here, by the side of the Black Mountain
My definition of mountain forever guided
Black and towering

Here what became familiar were the stories of mining and possibilities
While our possibilities faded in the fumes over the Black Mountain
The stories of the riches beneath are still being told
The sounds of mining might fade but the extraction continues
The fumes might change colour but the extraction continues
Promises and governments have changed but the extraction continues

The extraction continues but our stories remain the same
Stories of limitation and lack
The extraction continues and our suffocating and choking continues
Here sulphur choked the life out of everything we knew
Senta nga yafuma Nobwafya bwaisa
Wewafifuba fyakufwasa Icingilile fyala fwasa

Senta yafuma!
Words now so familiar
We have always known *senta*
Our lives now centred around it
A roof grinding stranger who overstayed their welcome
Our roofs are witnesses to the ever-falling *senta*
Our yards lie bare
Our gardens stare at us empty
Our fences embraced only by the ever familiar *ulunsonga*

Ours is a story of survival
No freedom to choose the life we have reason to value
If not from above, then the danger comes from below
Another familiar stranger who overstayed their welcome
Blasting away not only the copper but our dwelling places
See my humble abode cracking?
One crack there, another crack there
Crack! Crack! Crack!
They blast and we crack
Like our bodies, our houses cracking and sinking

The old ways of mining they said
Now the new ways brought a new form of acid
From the air, now to the water
Melting the ore with acid
Acid banked right by our noses
What a breath of fresh air
One that runs through our water too
Here, take a sip
Refreshing!









THE CLAP OF POISONED WATERS

Lucas Deinma

Once, the river clapped in joy,
its waves applauding dawn,
its laughter scattering light
across the backs of fishermen.
Children bathed in its rhythm,
and even the herons danced
to its silver percussion.

But now the clap has changed.
It strikes dull against the shore,
a tired hand of blackened foam.
The current coughs instead of sings,
its palms slick with oil,
its applause turned elegy.

Each ripple tells a secret:
of villages sleeping in fumes,
of crabs crawling through sludge,
of women washing sorrow from cassava leaves.
The river no longer blesses,
it warns.
It stings like memory,
burns like inheritance.

At night, when the flares bloom
and the sky wears fire for stars,
the water murmurs to itself,
clapping faintly,
as if trying to remember
the sound of purity.

And the fisherman listens,
hands still, eyes hollow,
knowing the river's song is now his own:
a rhythm of endurance,
a music of mourning,
the clap of poisoned waters
applauding their own survival.








OLOIBIRI OIL WELL 1
OTUABAGI OGBIA LGA
DRILLED: JUNE 1956
DEPTH: 12,008 FEET,(3639m)
DRILLED BY: SHELL PET. DEV. CO.
REHABILITATED BY: FED. MIN. OF CULTURE
TOURISM & NAT. ORIENTATION
(2013)
BAYELSA STATE COLLEGE OF
HEALTH TECHNOLOGY
OTUOGIDI OGBIA TOWN
PMB 131
BAYELSA STATE
2KM



OUR BLEEDING WOUND

Chinweike David Okwu

Na dis same salt water
wey I land yesterday,
I dey proud say I be pikin of di mangrove.
My papa na canoe carver,
dis wide angala na our wari,
where heaven and ocean dey kiss.

But wetin I go do wit dis wahala?
Why my hand full of black stain?
Crude oil don pour reach our kitchen,
e done dey rewrite our story
with black ink, on top black pages.

Our shore don stain, wave don black,
Life dey wave us bye bye,
dey run comot, we dey kpai small small
Dis river wey before dey shine
like egg white,
don turn nightmare for broad daylight.
Oil spill don colour our beach black
fisherman throw net,
na empty dem dey draw,
as nature dey cry
Even chekelake white sef follow stain.

Every oil wey spill dey reflect
The wicked black heart wey we carry.
Our water na natural mirror of our life.
Fisherman dream don sink inside pit.
Dark shadow don cover our river.
Enjoyment don waka go,
Happiness don turn to cry and fear.

Wahala dey echo inside empty canoe,
Di river wey be our mama,
giver of life, don sick, she dey die.
But we dey gallant,
we no go gree.

Who go heal dis wound for our water?
Who go bring life back to dis land?
Who go wash dis black from our shore?
Who go plant hope for dis darkness?
I go dey ask, I go dey shout,
till solution go born
from di belle of dis question.









WE, THE UNDERGROUND PEOPLE

Uhuru Portia Phalafala

My mind
holds a fleeting body
Whose final embrace scents my brow
A working ancestor haunts
The corner of my eye –
Our last touch a preserve
Of passing life sequestered
Behind glass displays
Of our aching hearts

You leave
A timeless caress…
The root of prayer
Pressed against our palms
Becomes a passage to
Memory and desire of
Kin skinned like lambs
Sons, fathers and husbands
Phantom like limbs
We continue to see
And feel after they are
Blown off by mine/fields.
The injury conjures
Memory dysfunction.
The injury is a living memory
Of me outside of me.
The injury holds a memory,
Extends me to where
I cannot be –
I kneel at the
Amputated altar

Forehead to the ground
That spaces out
From where I am
To where you are
Knees to the ground
Mound of cow dung
In my hand
Buries you in rhythmic patterns
When I lay down flooring
Like engravings on the skin
Of earth, under which
You lie in constant prayer
Groveling in the gravel
Hovelling the hole
Humming and breathing
In the casket without a blanket
That entombs you

Ke kgopha boloko
Ke bina malopo
Ke letša manaka
Ke bina dinaka

Ke kgopha boloko
Ke bina malopo
Ke letša manaka
Ke bina dinaka

We gravitate to the soil
Sink our fingers deep in
Excavate bones and living flesh
Listen to the ground
There our fathers, brothers
Husbands and sons live

Latent and fungible
Pregnant women eat the soil
To keep sons safely buried
In their wombs
Away from the tomb of the mines
Maternal instinct to protect
The disfiguring of black labour

You leave
A timeless embrace
That sings our lineage song of tomorrow
Songs of the lineage put futures in our mouths
As we work the soil of our mothers
I, tilling with a hoe
You, drilling for foe
Who raided the village

Assigned to pillage the earth
You hold sacred
You close your heart
To crimes against your maker
To take, take, take
Without making offerings
To go against your form
Your nature, your reverence
For all that is living

Echoes of your worksong in my throat
My song in the coil of your ear
Resounding the pit, the gut, the gutter
Resurging to rupture the silence
Giving shape to feeling across space
You missing the harvest of your land
On your plate

Us pining for your hands and heart
Moving in unison to cycles of the sun
We rejoice as it rises from your underground
To light us, to remind us that
It is in the darkest night that we will meet –

We, the underground people


FIFA 2010 FIFA WORLD CUP SOUTH AFRICA
TSOTETSI
Winkie
South Africa
SV12







THE RIGHT TO OWN

Obari Gomba

Every blade of grass
Every inch of the mangrove forest

We own this place

Every grain of sand
Every drop of water

We own this place

The sun and the moon
The moon and the stars
Land to sky – sky
To ocean floor

We own this place

The wind that blows
The air we breathe

We own this place

So, wake up and stand up, dear
Sleeping ones
Your land is not free
Not yet free, not yet free

Death is on your eyelids
Death has tightened its jaws around
Your hearts

Death is on your eyelids
Because
You are wounded; yes you are wounded
Your blood loss has not
Been stopped
New knives are raised
Against you

Stand up, oh dying ones
Do not drop your heads in their baskets
Stand up and fight and fight and fight
Fight for your lives and fight for your land

We own this place

The sun and the moon
The moon and the stars
Land to sky – sky
To ocean floor

We own this place

Everything that crawls
Everything that walks
Everything that runs
Everything that swims
Everything that flies

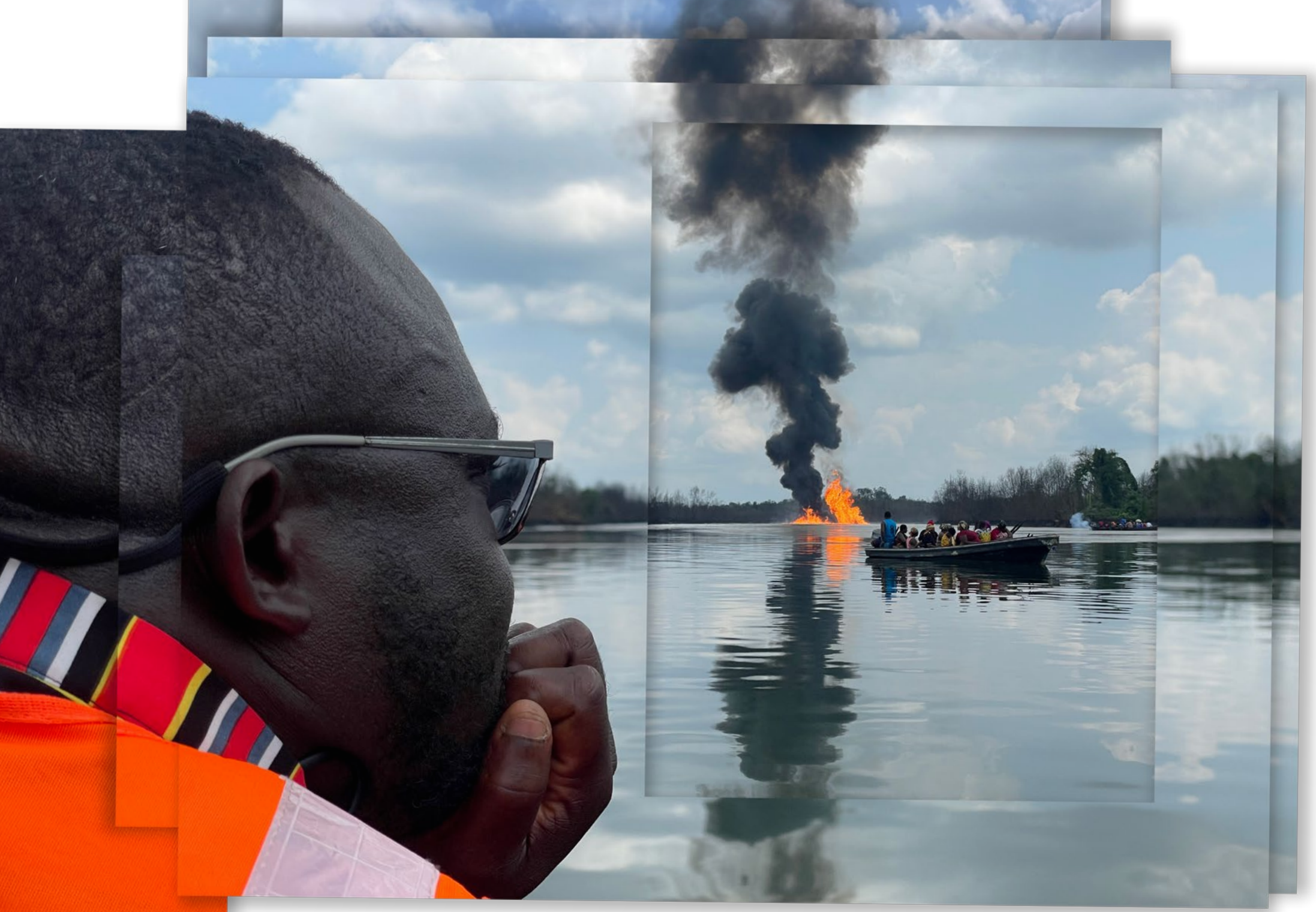
We own this place

Every life that breathes
Every life that grows
Every life that dies

We own this place

And we must defend it.









BOOM, BOOM, KA' BLAM!

Thomas Chisengantambu

The Copperbelt blessed with vast resources
yet, we've left them to foreign forces
to plunder at will under our very noses
and leave us with no voices
but countless curses.
Boom, Boom, Ka' blam!
OFF go the eXpLoSiVeS
down herded men with pickaxe and shovels
UP comes the belly of the earth
Away sails our treasure across the great sea
Within lie the ruins of progress

A town once peaceful and decent
harboured workers who, in their tasks, were efficient
but it was treated to an unfortunate incident
though management called it an accident
they were somewhat negligent.
The streams polluted with poisonous effluent
which seeped from a dam so ancient
and caused vegetation to go extinct.
Boom, Boom, Ka' blam!
OFF go the eXpLoSiVeS …
and down goes Chambishi

Another, adorned with flowers from time, made a great impression
its appearance was a delight without question
but it was treated to a massive land degradation
open pits and seismic blasts for exploration
caused a huge subterranean depreciation
it became a horror scene of a land formation
and a nightmare for any vegetation or tourist attraction
Boom, Boom, Ka' blam!
OFF go the eXpLoSiVeS …
and down goes Chingola

Another was a charm on the countryside
a home for the mighty Mufulira Wanderers side
a squad, once on an unstoppable winning ride
armed with great Kalu and Charlie Cool, opponents cried
Dennis Liwewe ever on the commentary guide
and local supporters gushed with pride.
But it was treated to that toxic sulphur dioxide
which drifted from the mining divide
and ruined vegetation far and wide
Boom, Boom, Ka' blam!
OFF go the eXpLoSiVeS …
and down went Mufulira and the Copperbelt




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WILL I EVER LIVE?

Siphamandla Mzolo

It is not a dream
I live amongst thieves
I live among thieves disguised as businessmen
I live among the exploits of my homeland

They took with no remorse
They dug all the treasure
They left no trace of gold
They took it all like a wild beast
Capturing a helpless prey
They took from my homeland
Then retired in Queensland

They left an empty earth
They left these voids
They left a beast
A hunting beast
An endless reminder

The beast swallows everything
It took our homes
It took our children
It took our lovely mothers and fathers
It took our sisters and brothers
It is a hungry beast with no limits

As a child, I loathed the dark
As a child, I slept with my hollow eyes
As a child, I longed for dawn
As a child, I loved these voids
As a child, I played with the beast
As a child, I longed for the underground beast

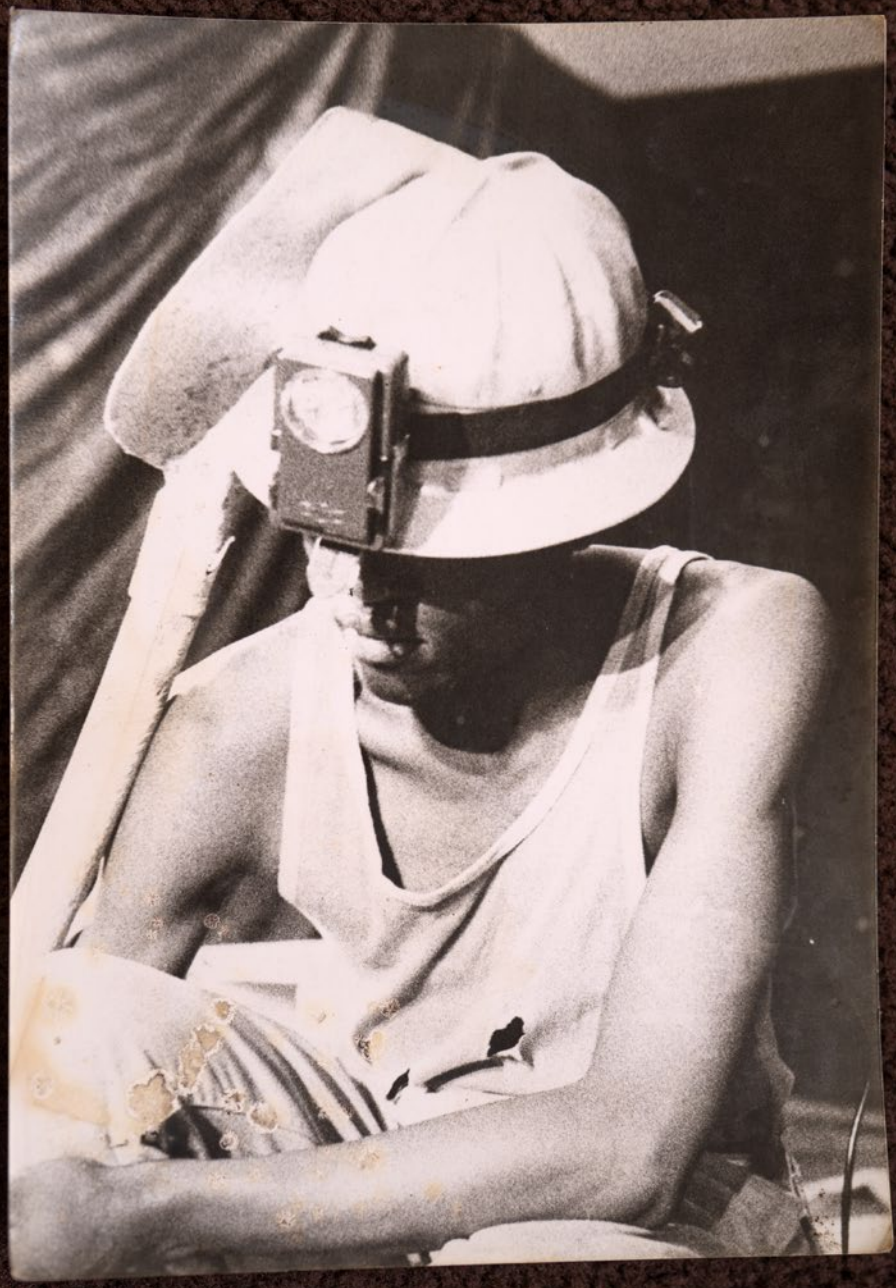
As a child, I did not fear
As a man, I am scared, terrified
I hate the hollow grounds
I hate these voids
I hate the soft earth
I walk with fear

My homeland is scarred for life
My home is wounded for life
My people are anxious for life
I should have known this
I should have known better

How can I live
In these empty spaces
Waiting to swallow one of us
Waiting to drag us down
Like an underground beast

We sleep and dream in fear
We move and talk in fear
I hate these horror spaces
I hate these holes
I hate the beast

Can someone tame the beast?
Can someone calm the beast?
Is the beast childless?
I do not want to imagine this
Will I ever live without fear?




Chiyesu


MANGROVESTUDIOS.NG



FURTHER READING & WORKS WE LIKE

COPPERBELT

Miles Larmer, Enid Guene, Benoît Henriet, Iva Peša, and Rachel Taylor (eds.), ***Across the Copperbelt: Urban & Social Change in Central Africa's Borderland Communities*** **(Woodbridge, James Currey, 2021).**
An edited volume studying the Copperbelt from various angles. Jennifer Chibamba Chansa's chapter explores the intersections between copper mining, urban planning, and environmental change. Iva Peša and Benoit Henriet's chapter provides a socio-environmental history of Mufulira.

Suzyika Nyimbili, ***Iseni ku Migodi – Senta Yafuma*** **(2025), https://vimeo.com/1090545156 .**
A one-man multi-act play performed by Suzyika Nyimbili. The script is inspired by interviews conducted in Mufulira in March 2024. Through a life history approach to environmental change, Nyimbili critiques the mining industry's promises of modernity. The play highlights the lived experiences of *senta*, blasting-induced cracks, and polluted water in powerful ways.

Iva Peša, 'Mining, Waste and Environmental Thought on the Central African Copperbelt, 1950-2000', ***Environment and History*** **28:2 (2022), 259-284.**
This article traces environmental policies on the Copperbelt through archives and oral histories.
How did mining companies view their environmental impact? Were any measures historically put in place to curtail pollution?

NIGER DELTA

Jackson Tamunosaki Jack, '(Mal)Adaptation to Environmental Pollution: Oil and the 'Livelihood Dysfunction Trap' in Nigeria's Niger Delta', ***Africa*** **95:2 (2025), 158-182.**
Jack traces the adaptation strategies people in the Niger Delta deploy to live in lethally polluted environments. Beyond examining the impacts on farming and fishing, Jack also highlights artisanal oil refining (*kpo-fire*) as a maladaptive response to pollution.

Jackson Tamunosaki Jack, Raimi Lasisi, Jabulani Shaba, and Iva Peša, 'Oil, Environment, and Lifeworlds in the Niger Delta', ***Niger Delta Research Digest*** **3 (2025).**
This special issue presents diverse research into the histories of oil extraction and environmental change in the Niger Delta. From oil spill litigations, to the role of Chiefs and gender-sensitive analyses, the articles centre on the lived experiences of environmental change.

Omolade Adunbi, ***Oil Wealth and Insurgency in Nigeria*** **(Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2015).**
Omolade Adunbi's ethnographic insights from the Niger Delta show how severe environmental pollution has impacted on the social fabric of oil-producing communities. Through what Adunbi calls 'the social death of the environment', the land is no longer a provider of health and wellbeing, but a source of pollution and disease.

Tech4Rural, *Niger Delta: Oiled and Abandoned* **(2025), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sZpufhvyW0**
This documentary reveals the human costs of oil drilling on the land, rivers, and livelihoods of the Niger Delta. Through testimonies from Bayelsa and Rivers state, this film depicts how the promise of oil resulted in poverty and marginalisation for the population of the Niger Delta.

JOHANNESBURG

Sylvia Vollenhoven and Fredrik Gertten, ***Jozi Gold*** **(2020).**
This documentary follows Mariette Liefferink, an environmental activist focussing on gold mining pollution in Johannesburg. Her struggles for environmental justice involve speaking up for socio-economically marginalised communities living next to toxic mine dumps.

Catherine Meyburgh and Richard Pakleppa, ***Dying for Gold*** **(2018).**
Poignantly interrogating the price paid for gold extraction, Catherine Meyburgh accompanies former gold miners from Johannesburg to Lesotho. The documentary zooms in on debilitating and lethal lung diseases such as tuberculosis and silicosis. Workers' struggles to obtain monetary compensation and lead dignified lives after retirement are all too often thwarted in a system that continues to prioritise mining profits over health and wellbeing.

Gabrielle Hecht, ***Residual Governance: How South Africa Foretells Planetary Futures*** **(Durham, Duke University Press, 2023).**
Through evocative images and chilling prose, Gabrielle Hecht examines the environmental impacts of gold mining in Johannesburg. From Acid Mine Drainage to mine dump dust and uranium risks, Hecht situates Johannesburg's experiences at the heart of a planetary condition of unsustainable, self-devouring growth.

ON PHOTOGRAPHY AND EXTRACTION

Kevin Coleman and Daniel James (eds.), ***Capitalism and the Camera: Essays on Photography and Extraction*** **(London, Verso Books, 2021).**
Siobhan Angus, ***Camera Geologica: An Elemental History of Photography*** **(Durham, Duke University Press, 2024).**
Two publications discussing the intricate relationships between the history and present conditions and properties of the medium of photography in relation to mining and various forms of extraction.

PHOTOBOOKS

Sammy Baloji, ***Mémoire Kolwezi*** **(Stichting Kunstboek, 2016).**
Congolese artist Sammy Baloji's long-term work on the mining industry in Katanga and the people who made it possible. One of the book's series connects photographs from the mining company's archives to the present. The other documents artisanal mining.

Lisa Barnard, ***The Canary and the Hammer*** **(MACK Books, 2019)**
A multi-modal visual inquiry into the troubled history of gold mining on four continents.

Ernest Cole, ***House of Bondage*** **(Aperture, 2022), first published in 1967.**
In this book the living and working conditions of miners in South Africa are documented under the harsh reality of Apartheid.

Julian Germain, *Steel Works,* ***Consett, from Steel to Tortilla Chips*** **(Why Not Publishing, 1990).**
An early example of how various historical visual sources, ranging from private snapshots to national and local newspaper archives, can complement contemporary documentary photography to provide an insight into the history of a mining town in the UK.

Ed Kashi and Michael Watts, ***Curse of the Black Gold: 50 Years of Oil in the Niger Delta*** **(New York, powerHouse Books, 2008).**
George Osodi, ***Delta, Nigeria: The Rape of Paradise*** **(London, Trolley, 2011).**
Photobooks that document the effects of oil extraction in the Niger Delta, from different positions and perspectives.

Ilan Godfrey, ***Legacy of the Mine*** **(Johannesburg, Jacana Media, 2013).**
Landscape photography that gives an idea of the grand scale on which mining affects (natural) environments.

David Goldblatt and Nadine Gordimer, *On the Mines* (Cape Town, C. Struik, 1973).

David Goldblatt and Peter Magubane, *On Common Ground* (Johannesburg, Goodman Gallery, 2018).

With 45 years between their respective publication dates, these books provide wide-ranging insights into the lives of miners and their living and working environments.

Jason Larkin, *After the Mines* (Johannesburg, Fourthwall Books, 2013).

A book focussing on life around the mine dumps in South Africa.

ARTISTIC PROJECTS

Stary Mwaba, *Black Mountain Studio* (ongoing).

Zambian artist Stary Mwaba is currently based in Lusaka. But he also runs a studio in Kitwe right next to one of the Black Mountains. Mwaba was born and raised in Kitwe. From this studio, he develops art works, often in collaborative settings, which address the social structures, health challenges, and environmental change resulting from copper mining.



PAGE ON THE PHOTOS AND POEMS

1. Mid-twentieth century rubber stamp, map of Africa, meant for educational contexts.

3. Digital collage roughly indicating the three localities central to this book (the Niger Delta, the Zambian Copperbelt, and Johannesburg).

5. Assemblage made of commemorative stamps.
South Africa, Pouring Gold, 2 cents, issued 1961 - Zambia, Copper Miner, International Labour Union 1919-1969, 3 Ngwee, issued 1969 [edited] - Nigeria, Oil Industry, 8 Kobo, issued 1973.

7. Flora Ramuwele and her husband. They are among Diepkloof's first residents.
Photograph by Madoda Mkhobeni, Diepkloof, March 2023.

9. Stevania Makasa, born and bred in Kankoyo, Mufulira. Through the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, Makasa mobilised her neighbours to speak out against copper mining pollution.
Photograph by Danny Chiyesu, Mufulira, March 2024.

11. Chief Wilson Obi Mark, land owner of Oil Well Number 1 in Otuabagi. Born in 1955, he was named after an European Shell engineer J.J. Wilson.
Photograph by Lucas Deinma, Otuabagi, Niger Delta, June 2024.

13. Mama Mapulealebye, a resident of Ghost Town, Diepkloof.
Photograph by Madoda Mkhobeni, Diepkloof, March 2023.

15. Chief Johnson Obe, an elder and community leader in Ogale, holding a bottle of crude oil. He keeps crude oil at home to dispel evil spirits and uses it to cure various ailments, such as convulsions in children.
Photograph by Jackson Tamunosaki Jack, Ogale, Eleme, Niger Delta, July 2025.

17. Charles Mwila, a former mineworker and resident of Kantanshi, Mufulira.
Mwila practised boxing in his younger years.
Photograph by Danny Chiyesu, Mufulira, March 2024.

19. Enamel pot and basin, owned by an elderly woman and purchased from the money she earned doing piecework for Shell.
Photograph by A. Chukwudumebi Obute, Otuogidi, June 2024.

20. Mrs. Ledwaba in front of her house in Ghost Town, holding a photograph of her late husband, playwright, actor, and activist, John M. Ledwaba.
Photograph by William Matlala, Diepkloof, March 2024.

21. **"Privatization" by M.J. Ledwaba, 2009.**
Reproduced from Mrs. Ledwaba's personal collection. John Maolusi Ledwaba († 2017) was an actor, director, playwright, and anti-apartheid activist who grew up in Diepkloof.
His works include *Township Boy* (c.1987) and *Egoli, City of Gold* (1982).
This poem is part of his private, unpublished, collection.

22. View of Gold Reef City theme park. The city's gold mining history has profoundly shaped entertainment and social life.
Photograph by Andrea Stultiens, Johannesburg, July 2024.

22-23. Inserted: Front and back of a postcard produced in 1936.
The text reads: "The things which look, like Mountains in the back are Gold mines."
The writing is probably more recent. Acquired through Ebay, 2025.

23-25. View of Ghost Town with the mine dump in the background.
Digital collage based on photographs by William Matlala, Diepkloof, March 2024.

26-27. Edwin Muchindu and his wife, in front of their house in Butondo.
A former mineworker, Muchindu now puts a lot of care in maintaining his garden.
Digital collage based on photographs by Danny Chiyesu, Mufulira, March 2024.

28. Laurent Bwalya, holding a historical print of Mufulira town centre (c. 1960s) from his personal collection.
Photograph by Andrea Stultiens, Mufulira, May 2025.

29. **"My Mufulira" by Mweo Kondolo, 2025.**
Mweo Kondolo is a Zambian author, born and raised in Mufulira.
His novels include *The Riddle, The Election*, and *Jerabo*. This is his first published poem.

30. Signpost and officious town slogan at the road entrance to Mufulira.
Photograph by Andrea Stultiens, Mufulira, May 2025.

31-33. Kankoyo, Mufulira's oldest mining neighbourhood (c. 1930s), with the giant slagheap (Black Mountain) in the background.
Digital collage based on photographs by Danny Chiyesu, Mufulira, March 2024.

34-35. A woman from Ogale, pointing towards the Nsisioken stream, a severe oil spill site.
Digital collage based on photographs produced by Lucas Deinma, Ogale, Eleme, Niger Delta, June 2024.

36. Oil Well 1, drilled on 15 January 1956 in the Itokopiri forest, Otuabagi, by Shell Plc.
Photograph by Lucas Deinma, Otuabagi, Niger Delta, June 2024.

37-38. **"Doom in Boom" by Sophia Obi, 2024.**
Sophia Obi is a poet and children's author born and raised in Oloibiri, Bayelsa State.
Her poetry collections include the acclaimed *Tears in a Basket* and *Floating Snags*, which comment poignantly on themes of oil and environmental change in the Niger Delta.
Opuru, Ofingo, Isam, Gbou, Songu, Singhi, Ikoli, Agbara: seafood/fish common in the Niger Delta.

39. Boys drying cassava chips, locally called *kpo-kpo garri*, in the heat of a gas flare.
Photograph by Tife Owolabi, Eruemukohwarian, Ughelli North, Delta State, March 2025.
Tife Owolabi is a multimedia journalist and crisis communication strategist.
Originally from Lagos, Tife resides in the Niger Delta where his lived understanding of the region's environmental crisis informs his work on environmental journalism, narrative control, and conflict management.

40-41. Oil stained soil and the reflection of the oil wellhead in the water.
Digital collage based on photographs by Lucas Deinma, Otuabagi, Niger Delta, June 2024.

42-43.| The polluted water running at the foot of the mine dump is used for spiritual and healing purposes.
Digital collage based on photographs by Madoda Mkhobeni, Ghost Town, Diepkloof, October 2023.

44. Resident of Springs, pointing towards the water table during floods.
Photograph by Andrea Stultiens, Springs, Johannesburg, July 2024.

45-46. **"Uthuli Lwegolide" by Sphamandla Xulu, 2025.**
Dust of Gold / *Uthuli Lwegolide* explores the haunting legacy of Johannesburg's mine dumps, monuments of extraction that still breathe into the lives of nearby communities.
The poem blends English and isiZulu to honour the layered histories of those whose labour built the city, yet whose lungs and land still carry its cost. It reflects on memory, identity, and the persistence of hope beneath the dust.

isiZulu text fragments	English translation
Uthuli Lwelogide	Dust of Gold
Ngaphansi kwelanga…	Beneath the sun…
Kwandonga ziyaduma, kwanyama kayipheli, *idolobha legolide,* *Idolobha lamaphupho aphukile*	Where the walls echo with sound, A place of hustle, bustle, opportunity, and abundance, while there is plenty of 'meat' (opportunity/resources), the hard work and challenges can wear a person down, The so-called city of gold
Behliswa ngaphansi komhlaba, *Behliswa ezimayini,*	Lowered into the mines, Lowered beneath the ground,
Bheka	See
Ziyakhuluma zikhuluma ngezinkathi ezedlule	They speak of past times
uMama uyathandaza *Ngokukhala okuthule*	A mother prays, with a quiet, breaking cry
Uthuli alupheli	The dust does not disappear
Idolobha elakhiwe ngothuli *Uthuli olukhuluma izindaba ezibuhlungu*	A city built from dust, Dust that tells painful stories.

47. An everyday view of the mine dump. Despite the toxic dust, residents put effort into watering their lawn.
Photograph by Madoda Mkhobeni, Ghost Town, Diepkloof, October 2023.

48-49. Cleaning away mine dump dust is an everyday routine that residents put much care into.
Digital collage based on photographs by Madoda Mkhobeni, Ghost Town, Diepkloof, March 2024.

50-51. The electricity cables, the Black Mountain, and the barren soils of Kankoyo.
Digital collage based on photographs by Danny Chiyesu, Mufulira, March 2024.

52. Mufulira mine plant and machinery, seen from Kankoyo.
Photograph by Danny Chiyesu, Mufulira, March 2024.

53. **"The Copperbelt" by David K. Chewe.**
Originally published in *New Writing from Zambia* Vol. 10, No. 2 (June 1974).

54. Mufulira's Little Theatre.
The mining industry has long provided funding and support for theatre and arts on the Copperbelt.
Photograph by Andrea Stultiens, Mufulira, May 2025.

55-57. The Black Mountain seen from Kankoyo. Note the open sewerage that carries dirty water towards households.
Digital collage based on photographs by Danny Chiyesu, Mufulira, March 2024.

58-59. A straight road leads from Kankoyo's dilapidated and damaged houses to the towering mine plant and its imposing Black Mountain.
Digital collage based on photographs by Danny Chiyesu, Mufulira, March 2024.

60 & 63. Maize and groundnut harvest drying on a roof in Butondo. In all likelihood, acid rain and sulphur dioxide fumes affect these crops.
Photographs by Andrea Stultiens, Mufulira, May 2025.

61-62. **"By the Side of the Black Mountain" by Suzyika Chizenge Nyimbili, 2025.**
Suzyika Nyimbili is a researcher, playwright, and theatre director. In 2024 he conducted interviews in Mufulira with the AFREXTRACT collective and based on these interviews he wrote and performed *Iseni ku Migodi* (2025). These interviews also inspired this poem.

iciBemba text fragments	English translation
Senta nga yafuma Nobwafya bwaisa	When the senta comes out, trouble comes out too
Wewafifuba fyakufwasa Icingilile fyala fwasa	You who suffer from respiratory problems, shield yourself, a blockage is coming
Senta yafuma!	Sulphur dioxide has come out!

64-65. In neighbourhoods such as Kantanshi, mining pollution and constant sulphur dioxide emissions make it almost impossible for vegetation to grow. Only the hardy *ulunsonga* plant (pencil cactus, *Euphorbia tirucalli*) survives. Used as a hedge, *ulunsonga* is itself toxic. The white sap that it secretes irritates your eyes and can cause temporary blindness.
Digital collage based on photographs by Danny Chiyesu, Mufulira, March 2024.

66-67. Fishermen setting up their fishing nets (dragnets) at the bank of an oil polluted river. In the Niger Delta, fishing used to be a common livelihood practice. Persistent oil spills pollute rivers and kill fish, making it almost impossible for fishing to thrive.
Digital collage based on photographs by Lucas Deinma, Bakana, Niger Delta, June 2024.

68. Women showing visibly polluted water in plastic buckets.
Photograph by Lucas Deinma, Alakiri, Okrika, Niger Delta, June 2024.

69. **“The Clap of Poisoned Waters” by Lucas Deinma, 2025.**
Born and raised in the creeks of the Niger Delta, Lucas Deinma writes poetry which is inspired by the Delta’s landscape.

70-73. Oil pipelines run alongside a church and bustling market. Women use the pipelines to dry their freshly washed laundry, ignoring the warning signs to keep away from the hazardous pipelines.
Photograph and digital collage based on photographs by Lucas Deinma, Okrika, Niger Delta, June 2024.

74-75. The signposts towards Oil Well 1. While the first oil well carries the name of Oloibiri, which was the administrative headquarters of the colonial Oloibiri district, the well is located on Otuabagi land.
Digital collage based on photographs by Lucas Deinma, Otuabagi, Niger Delta, June 2024.

76. *Kpo fire* (artisanal oil refining) produce being transported by river on canoes.
Photograph by Lucas Deinma, Port Harcourt, Niger Delta, June 2024.

77-78. **“Our Bleeding Wound” by Chinweike David Okwu, The Lyrical Pontiff, 2025.**
The Lyrical Pontiff is a poet and slam artist from Port Harcourt.

English translation of the Pidgin English poem

It’s this brackish estuary
that I arrived yesterday,
I’m a proud child of the mangrove.
My father is a sculptor of canoes,
this vast mangrove is our home,
here, heaven blissfully embraces the ocean.

But what do I make of this trouble?
Why are my hands soiled with black stains?
Crude oil has over spilled into our kitchen,
It’s audaciously retelling our story
with black ink, over dark pages.

Our shoreline is polluted, the wave eerie,
Life’s bidding us farewell,
It’s taking flight, and our death has become attritional
This river that sparkled in the past
like the albumen,
has turned a horrorscape in real time.
Oil spills have bleached our beach black
Fishermen cast their nets,
but they pull emptiness ashore,
as nature grieves
even the spotless egret bears the crude residues

Every site of oil spill reflects
the wickedness of our vile hearts.
Our water is the mirror of our life.
The fisherman’s dream has sunk into the abyss.
An ominous silhouette has overtaken our river.
Pleasure has abandoned us,
Happiness has turned to grief and anxiety.

Trouble reverberates upon the waterscape,
The river, who is our mother,
our source of life is frail; she is dying.
But we’ll stand strong,
and spurn this atrocity.

Who shall heal the infirmities of our water?
Who shall restore life to this land?
Who shall scrub this pollution from our shore?
Who shall plant hope in this turmoil?
I’ll keep asking, I’ll keep bellowing,
until a panacea emerges
from the womb of this defiance.

79. Even though Shell left Otuabagi in 1978, pollution is still visible. Oil drilling and oil spills have left permanent marks on the area’s water and vegetation.
Photograph by Lucas Deinma, Otuabagi, Niger Delta, June 2024.

80-81. In Ogale, drinking water is visibly polluted by severe oil spills.
Digital collage based on photographs produced by Lucas Deinma, Ogale, Eleme, Niger Delta, June 2024.

82-83. Decades of mining on dolomitic ground cause unpredictable subsidence and sinkholes. This also affects the homes of people, which they refer to as ‘sinking houses’.
Digital collage based on photographs by William Matlala, Khutsong, Johannesburg, March 2024.

84. A crack in a ‘sinking house’.
Photograph by William Matlala, Khutsong, Johannesburg, March 2024.

85-87. **“We, The Underground People” by Uhuru Portia Phalafala, 2022.**
Uhuru Portia Phalafala is an acclaimed writer and researcher at the University of Stellenbosch. In 2023, she published the epic poem *Mine Mine Mine* which offers a personal narration of her family’s experience of the migrant labour system brought on by the gold mining industry in Johannesburg. “We, The Underground People” is a non-excerpt from *Mine Mine Mine* – the part that did not make it into final publication. This is to say, it is in the same breath with *Mine Mine Mine*.

88-89. Photograph of the Marimba Dance Group performing the Gumboot dance by miners in a private house.
Photograph by A. Chukwudemebi Obute, Johannesburg, April 2025.

90-91. Sinkholes can unpredictably swallow streets and houses. Clean up and repair is often slow and haphazard.
Digital collage based on photographs by William Matlala, Khutsong, Johannesburg, March 2024.

92-93. Growing crops in an unremediated oil spill site is impossible, but still this woman tries. The roots of the palm trees have been so severely affected that they risk falling down.
Digital collage based on photographs by Lucas Deinma, Ogale, Niger Delta, June 2024.

94. Oil well in Otuabagi.
Photograph by Lucas Deinma, Otuabagi, Niger Delta, June 2024.

95-96. **"The Right to Own" by Obari Gomba, 2025.**
Obari Gomba is a multiple award-winning writer. His accolades include the Association of Nigerian Authors Prize, the Nigeria Prize for Literature, and the PAWA Prize for African Poetry. An International Writing Program Fellow of the University of Iowa, he has been TORCH Global South Visiting Professor and Visiting Fellow at All Souls College, University of Oxford. He is a Professor of English and Literary Studies at the University of Port Harcourt (Nigeria). His latest books are *Grit* and *Free Troubles*.

97. Shell's oil drilling bits are used as construction material in the house of Thompson Adumo, the first indigenous Shell engineer from Opume community.
Photograph by Jackson Tamunosaki Jack, Opume, Niger Delta, July 2025.

98-99. Comrade Allen Gabriel, Speaker of the Ijaw Youth Council 5th Mobile Parliament, inspecting a blowout from an oil well and ruptured underwater gas pipeline in Ofiominama - Alakiri, Okrika. The fire has continued to burn since 26 February 2024, raising serious environmental and health concerns for the community.
Digital collage based on photographs by Lucas Deinma, Okrika, Niger Delta, June 2024.

100-101. The Black Mountain in Mufulira. Despite the omnipresence of pollution, drinking spots emerge everywhere. Alcohol has long served as a coping mechanism in times of difficulty.
Digital collage based on photographs by Danny Chiyesu, Mufulira, March 2024.

102. Two young girls, strolling past Mufulira's Black Mountain.
Photograph by Danny Chiyesu, Mufulira, March 2024.

103-104. **"Boom, Boom, Ka'Blam!" by Thomas Chisengantambu, 2025.**
Thomas Chisengantambu is a young author from Chingola, Zambia.

105-107. Scene in the football stadium of Mufulira Wanderers F.C. The copper mine and its giant infra-structure are the field's background.
Photograph and digital collage based on photographs produced by Danny Chiyesu, Mufulira, March 2024.

108. Close-up of the mine dump next to Ghost Town, Diepkloof.
Photograph by William Matlala, Ghost Town, Diepkloof, Johannesburg, March 2024.

109-110. **"Will I Ever Live?" by Siphamandla Mzolo, 2025.**
This poem was inspired by true events resulting from the sinkholes caused by abandoned, derelict, and poorly rehabilitated underground mining operations in Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa. Siphamandla Mzolo carefully crafted this message of hope for the affected residents. Written in parts from October 2025 to November 2025.

111. Photograph in the personal collection of Mrs. Ledwaba from John Ledwaba's *Egoli* performance.
Reproduced by Andrea Stultiens, Ghost Town, Diepkloof, July 2024.

112-113. *Paintified artwork by Danny Chiyesu, based on photographs he produced in Mufulira, March 2024.*

114-115. Mangroves polluted by oil spills. Widespread mangrove degradation and deforestation in the Niger Delta is primarily caused by repeated oil spills.
Photographed and edited by Lucas Deinma / Mangrove Studios, April-May 2024.

116-117. Digital collage based on photographs of a statue erected in 1988. It commemorates the discovery of gold by the prospector George Harrison. Harrison 'discovered' the Witwatersrand Main Reef in 1886, leading to the development of Johannesburg.
Produced by Andrea Stultiens, Johannesburg, July 2024.

118. Edson Mumba and his wife in front of Kankoyo's *Kachema Musuma* Catholic Church. Mumba is one of the main organisers of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace who mobilised Kankoyo's population over issues of pollution.
Photograph by Danny Chiyesu, Mufulira, March 2024.

122. A young man posing in front of the mine dump in Ghost Town, Diepkloof.
Photograph by Madoda Mkhobeni, Ghost Town, Diepkloof, Johannesburg, March 2023.

132. Editors' biographies.

133. Photographers' biographies.

134. Rotary club logo encountered in a photocopied version of "Mufulira Directory, Your Guide to Mufulira, Presented by Lions Club Mufulira, 1988." Personal collection of Laurent Bwalya.
Reproduced by Andrea Stultiens, Mufulira, May 2025.

135. Colofon.

All poems, unless otherwise stated, have been commissioned for this book.
Digital collages by Andrea Stultiens.

ON THE EDITORS

Jackson Tamunosaki Jack is an environmental sociologist whose research focusses on resource extraction, environmental politics, and Indigenous environmentalism. His writing draws on extensive ethnographic work in the oil-rich Niger Delta. He is a postdoctoral research fellow on the AFREXTRACT project and a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Federal University Otuoke.

Tholithemba Lorenzo Ndaba is a PhD researcher on the AFREXTRACT project, working on gold mine townships within social and environmental history. With a background in sociology, his research examines how systems of extraction produce forms of marginalisation across race, gender, and space and time.

A. Chukwudumebi Obute is a scholar of Anglophone literatures and cultures, whose work focusses on ecocriticism and transatlantic relations. Between 2024 and 2026, he was a postdoctoral fellow in the AFREXTRACT project. He is an Assistant Professor of American Studies at the University of Tübingen.

Iva Peša is a social and environmental historian, whose work is grounded in long-term research, primarily in Zambia. Between 2022 and 2027, Iva was the principal investigator of the ERC-funded project AFREXTRACT: Environmental Histories of Resource Extraction in Africa. She is an Associate Professor in Contemporary History at the University of Groningen.

Jabulani Shaba is an interdisciplinary researcher with strong interests in resource extraction, environmental history, and gender in southern Africa. He was a postdoctoral research fellow in political ecology within the AFREXTRACT project. Jabulani holds a PhD from Stellenbosch University. He is commencing a critical historical study of the Just Energy Transition in Zimbabwe.

Andrea Stultiens is an artistic researcher whose work focusses on photographic images and imaginations of Uganda and 'Africa' at large. Stultiens was an advisor on the production and use of photographs in the AFREXTRACT project, and involved as a curator and designer. She holds a PhD from Leiden University and is a senior lecturer at the Royal Academy of Art in the Hague.

ON THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

Danny Chiyesu is a Zambian photographer and visual artist. Based in the Copperbelt town of Ndola, Chiyesu works with Mission Press, particularly on the *Speak Out!* youth magazine. In his creative post-production process, Chiyesu digitally overpaints photographs. Chiyesu believes that the illustrative use of cameras reinforces visual storytelling.

Lucas Deinma is a photographer who was born and bred in the Niger Delta. He runs *Mangrove Studios* in Port Harcourt, a name that refers to his beloved Niger Delta environment. A multi-talented artist, Deinma also works with television, radio, and he has contributed a poem to this collection.

William Matlala is a South African documentary photographer, born in 1957 in Limpopo province. Having worked in a gold mine and various factories in Johannesburg, he got a camera in the early 1980s. He offered photographic services to his colleagues, co-residents of the hostel in which he lived, and residents of Katlehong township. These form a unique collection of photographs of everyday Black life during the last decade of apartheid. In 1988, Matlala became a full time photographer, committed to photographing the struggle of workers and their labour conditions.

Madoda Mkhobeni is a South African documentary and street photographer from Soweto. His work portrays the daily life struggles of the people living in the inner city and in the township. He was trained at the Market Photo Workshop 2008 (Foundation Course) to 2009 (Photojournalism and Documentary Photography course). Mkhobeni's oeuvre includes *Trolley Pullers* – a project focussing on the lives of the Johannesburg's migrants who comes from the neighbouring countries.



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