

SHE CREATES  
NIGHTMARES  
AGAINST  
COLONIAL  
DESIRES

revenge ~ avatars and manyness \*

conversations

Oreet Ashery, Suza Husse, Verena Melgarejo Weinandt

re.act.feminism #3 – polyphonies. interferences. drifts

Le Petit Combatant  
Le Petit Combatant

You're hiking East  
You're walking West  
You're running pierced  
You're hiding breast  
Sky to earth  
Earth to birth

Le Petit Combatant  
Le Petit Combatant

You are so scared  
You cannot breath  
East to west  
West to breath  
Breast to kneel  
Kneel to heal

Le Petit Combatant  
Le Petit Combatant

All is bad  
Doom is here  
The-powers-at-play  
Bring up the fear  
No where to hide  
From the shame  
Because inside  
There is no frame

Le Petit Combatant  
Le Petit Combatant

You're a man  
You're a beast  
You have a breast  
You need to  
Feed  
Between your legs there  
nothing much  
And no one cares  
Once you've hatched:

Baby birds  
And baby queers  
Baby thoughts  
And baby deer  
Baby lamb  
And baby rats  
Bad ideas  
And stupid hats

Le Petit Combatant  
Le Petit Combatant

Excerpt from: Oreet Ashery: Song of Le  
Petit Combatant (##-How Can I Own That  
Which is Stolen-##.), 2022

# REVENGE IS LIKE TIME TRAVEL

she creates nightmares against colonial desires, part 1  
a collaged conversation from online meetings, voice messages, phone calls,  
texts and voice memos exchanged between late February to early May 2022.

Verena: My performative alter egos help me understand and articulate different forms of racism and discrimination that I have faced from a different perspective. A lot of it is reappropriating stereotypes and playing with them in a way that causes joy to me. The methodology I would describe with Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of autohistoria-teoría. She describes how you start digging in your own history and then create a narrative and an understanding that is also connected to a broader frame.

In the German-speaking context there is a big contradiction in relation to the representation and imagination of indigenous people and especially of indigenous women. On the one hand there is this form of overrepresentation through racist, colonial and sexualised stereotypes in cultural representations for example in costumes or famous children's books. And on the other hand, there is this imaginary of total absence of indigenous people in real life – the common belief that indigenous people got all killed, that they did not survive colonialism. Indigenous people are not imagined as part of a contemporary modern society. The recognition of indigenous identity is only related to people who fulfil imaginations of traditional indigenous identity. This gap is really disturbing and particular for the German-speaking context.

A lot of what I deal with is very specific to how the images of indigenous identity, and colonial stereotypes in general have formed German identity. And that is something that is not at

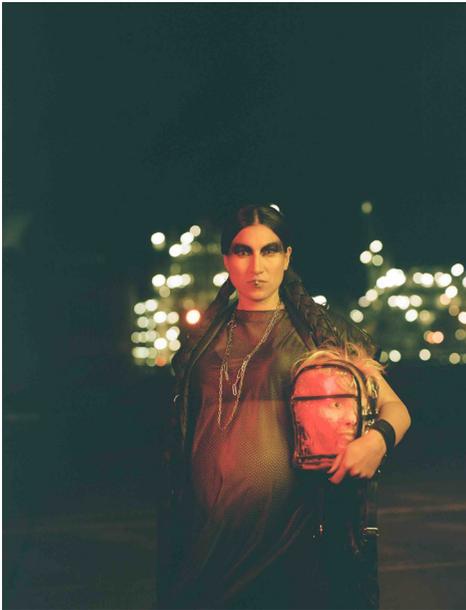
all looked at in the German context, it is not a topic, not even in antiracist discourses and analysis here. On the other hand, there are Indigenous Studies coming up in the universities here, and there is more sensibility for indigenous self-organisation and political struggles now. I would say Standing Rock really made a difference, its presence on social media and the fact that most of the political debate was in English.

I grew up in Berlin, my mother is German and my father is Bolivian with Quechua roots. My performative alter ego is inspired by the Disney figure called “Pocahontas”, because my life really changed when this Disney movie came out. I was nine years old then. Before that, Asian stereotypes were projected on me and I was insulted with anti-Asian racist comments, but this changed with “Pocahontas.” When this movie came out, people who saw me on the street in Berlin were so surprised to see someone in their local context, who mirrored what they now recognised as indigenous features. I was constantly stopped in the street by strangers who told me: “You really look like Pocahontas.” or “Oh my God, there is a living Pocahontas.” This really changed my racial marking in the early 90s in Berlin where I grew up.

The alter ego Pocahunter is based on that experience, which then became more complex through other levels of that story, for example the real story behind the Disney character Pocahontas. Her name was Matoaka. There are a lot of different stories around her life, but she was sold to English people, was forced to marry and was brought to England, where she was renamed. Her grave is in England, and online I found information about a protest advocating to bring her remains back to her land.

And this is where the whole revenge story comes in. I take this figure and make her zombiesque: she is a warrior who comes back from the grave, and she has killed John Smith, instead of saving him. She takes on the level of dreams and the imagination – she is not a physical fighter – and she creates nightmares that work against these colonial desires and the colonial imagination.

Pocahunter hasn’t been very present in my life lately, but now things have been coming up. I feel there are several callings “Pocahunter needs to come back, Pocahunter needs to come back” and they are really random



Verena Melgarejo Weinandt: Pocahunter, 2020, photos: Kurt Prinz

and are coming from very different angles. Suza who instigated another activation of her, giving her another context, is one of these callings. For the work for re.act.feminism #3, I thought of a performance in form of a ritual that would give her strength for becoming what she is, a recapturing of the elements that brought her into existence, the elements that give her power. To bring them together and honour that, use that as a point to look back and reflect on what she actually is about and what is it that gives her strength. But it also is a search for a way to reconnect with her, calling her into presence yet again.

This work is also a mirror of my current state: I am taking care of my very young child in my queer family. I do all this creative work while doing a lot of care work and redefining and changing as a person, too. I am in a moment where I feel quite sensitive in general as a being. My skin is very thin and it is not easy for me to work with people I don't know at all. So trust is really important for me and having people around I know. I am into deepening working relations in a world that I feel makes intensive short relations that don't have the chance to be long-term structurally. Right now, I need to stay focused on a smaller group of people, work on a longer time frame and deepen the connections. I want to enjoy collective processes and trust and learn in the creative process, not letting it all be decided only by my rational individual thought process. I want a process that nourishes me and everyone else who is participating in it with me and I let the outcome be influenced by that.

Suza: I feel you. I realise more and more that my practice comes from an embodied space of relationships, intuition, concern and pleasure rather than authorship. So to invite you two into this constellation for re.act.feminism #3 is an expression of the desire to continue the modes of friendship and working together that connect me to each of you for quite some time. I feel that it is especially grounding in this context where the space we create together manifests in the internet, the online archive of feminist performance art that Bettina Knaup and Beatrice Stammer have assembled over many years and through many collaborations. We will most likely not get to interact much with the people who will witness this work, or maybe only over a long time and many feminist loops.

I am excited about what is emerging from this space between us and also to use this opportunity to work with you on instances within the long-term trajectories of your practices that feel important to you at this moment. Verena we are in continuous and intensifying conversation in relation to Gloria E. Anzaldúa and your incredible work with her writings, visions and methods over the last three years at District\*School Without Center, a queer, antiracist feminist art and community space in Berlin that we both care for. And we talked a lot recently about the continuities of racist cultural appropriation of indigenous cultures in Germany. As I grew up in Dresden and the Lausitz region in East Germany, I have been feeling an increasing urge to address colonial pop cultures and the supremacist fictions that continue to constitute whiteness in these environments.

For example, in and around Dresden the legacy of the colonial writer Karl May, whose racist explorer and white hero stories popularised militarist and extractivist ideologies in a parallel timeline to the German colonialism and fascism, is celebrated in a public museum and yearly open air theatre festivals. For me this is one of the ways the revival and mainstreaming of colonial cultures and narratives articulates itself, narratives that East Germany but also Germany in general have seen concurrent with the historical post-socialist transformation period from the late 1980s onwards. Karl May's books are part of – and continue to foster – a performative tradition of cultural appropriation of indigenous realities that reaches from the 19th century until today. In a way, they prepared the ground for the racist stereotyping you experienced with the Disney “Pocahontas.” Therefore, to work with you on modes of interfering with the colonial desires and dreams that circulate and, I would say, intensify in the landscapes I grew up in is an urgent kind of pleasure.

Reconnecting with Oreet was also in part carried by a desire to together think and feel through a landscape in East Germany that I am in a process of becoming friends with, or maybe it's more like a crush that's going on. The socio-ecological fabric that I mean by landscape is a queer feminist and migrant collectivity of people, animals, earth,

how can I call you?  
zombie – Pocahunter  
nightmare – Pocahunter  
wandering ancestor  
with wandering names

you haven't found rest in the underworld  
are haunting people in their dreams  
the head of John Smith is dangling on your belt

you wander through all times  
not belonging to the past, to the present, nor the future  
still you inhabit all of them at once

wandering the inbetween, the liminal space  
where all contradictions concur  
you move in constant transformation

you're neither death nor life  
continue to die  
and awaken

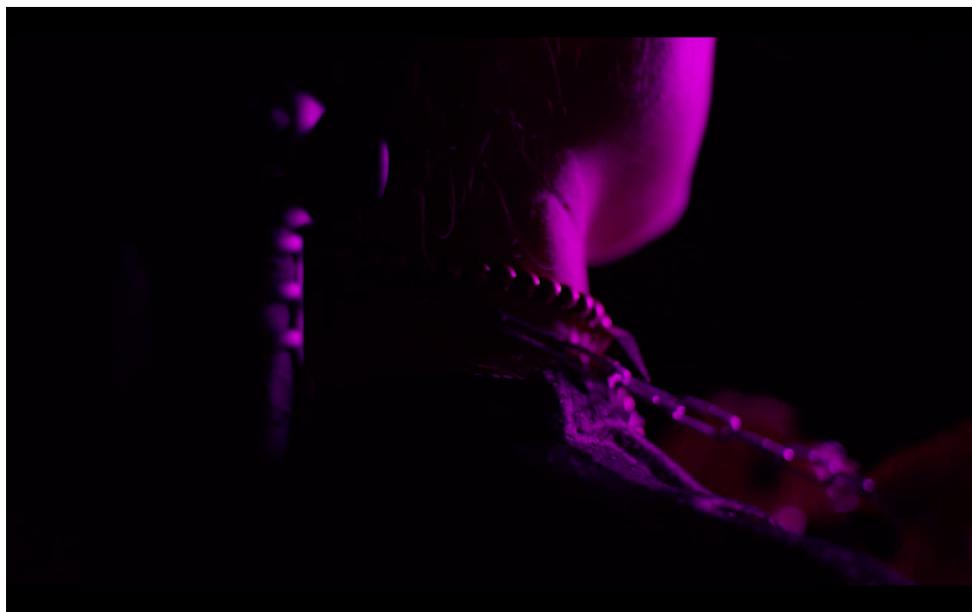
it was 1995  
Disney's Pocahontas was released  
gazes and questions full of violence  
renewed  
made you  
pierced through me

in your first life, your name was Matoaka,  
daughter of the Powhatan  
they kidnapped you, abducted you, changed your name  
I don't know which atrocities you had to live through  
don't know what your resistance was like

zombie – Pocahunter  
nightmare – Pocahunter  
wandering ancestor  
with wandering names

I am your body, your soul, your mind  
we are one, and also not

now you are here  
you were always



Verena Melgarejo Weinandt: Conectarse en la Oscuridad. Invocando Pocahunter / Connecting in Darkness. Invoking Pocahunter (Part I), video, 6:43 min, 2022

forest, plants and layers of life, desire, knowledge, history at a collectively run farm in Neuendorf in rural Brandenburg. When you and I first talked again after years we had not been in contact things clicked into place like the cosmos does it sometimes. We found a connection in our recent movements into the rural and got excited talking about land, ownership, farming and collective counter-colonial and antifascist approaches. You were just setting up a studio in the English countryside, saying that you're exploring your being there as a form of countercolonising the British landscape. Another connection is in your current interest in the relationships between land and ancestry in the context of Israel and Palestine through an autoethnographic queer lens and my getting entangled with the multiple layers of dreams and traumas in Neuendorf. In the early 1930s the place had been a Jewish agricultural school, part of the Zionist Hachshara Movement, in the 1940s the Nazis turned it into a forced labour camp and deported and killed many of the people who were living and working in Neuendorf. In the Landwerk Neuendorf agricultural knowledge became an ambivalent technology of survival and necropolitics at the same time. As trained agricultural workers Jewish people were able to obtain visas for countries outside Europe such as Palestine and Argentina more easily, and thus escape from German Nazism and genocide. In Palestine, where most of the refugees from Neuendorf travelled, this knowledge was often put to work for the settler colonial project under the flag of Zionism.

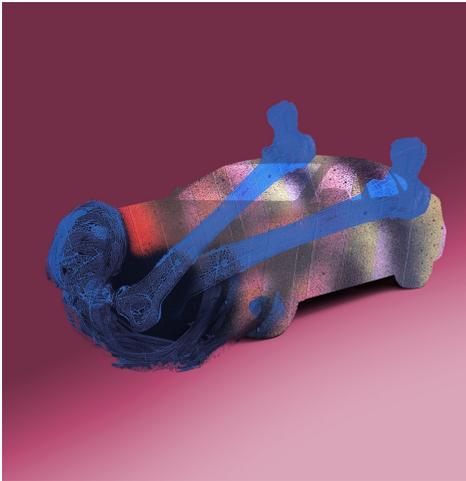
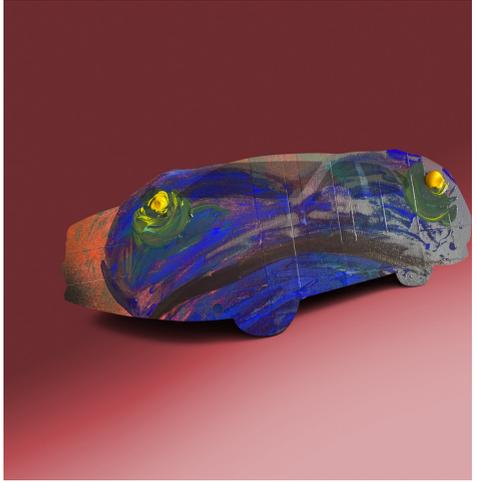
Oreet: It's great to listen to you both and to hear you talk about your work, Verena. A mutual thing that came to mind was that I wrote a song called *Le Petit Combatant*, a small soldier. You talked about somebody almost like a fighter, or somebody with power. And in my case that character, the small fighter, is exhausted. I loved the way you talked about how your character needs nourishment. My petit soldier is tired and lost which is how I feel politically. I've gone through decades of political rage and came to a place, especially in relation to identity politics, where there is a sense of withdrawal. Especially with the move towards an almost barbaric extractivism that goes beyond party politics. A crisis I hope our planet will emerge out of with new forms of political.

I love how your fighter is looking for offering and agency. Mine has no current agency, she / they are in a place of reflection, rest, she just tells you "oh, I am tired." It's kind of honest and continues my interest in withdrawal and grief as circular modes of resistance alongside action. Maybe I can revisit the song in relation to your work. Maybe that would be something that gives them a bit of power, I don't mean parasitically, just in terms of the connection we make in allegiances. There is exhaustion which operates as renewal and there always a way forward with this narrative.

Talking about conditions and what we normalise, I think about how we have normalised the use of English as the language in the art world and at large. I am now in my office in Oxford, where I teach. It is a space, where I have a sense of an ambiguous belonging; historically, Jews were expelled from Oxford for 400 years; I am an immigrant from a former British Colony and an Israeli born (not by affiliation) to a settler colonial state that receives arms from Britain as well as other forms of support, including cultural. I can't wait for us to reach a time, where everyone can speak any language and be understood.

I am working on a larger body of research that I call ###-How Can I Own That Which is Stolen-##. I am looking at several roads in Israel Palestine and how they work in relation to the colonial project of Zionism. One, Road 90, is about rewilding, and, in a Zionist context, rewilding the desert. Another, Route 60, designed to control and displace Palestinian populations and Palestinian green spaces while affording further access between Jerusalem and Jewish settlements. Materially the roads manifest the colonial settler project as mimetic. The take-over of Palestine reproduces itself globally as a systemic oppression that operates in various modes of control such as security apparatuses, roads, arms, data and more. The film is commissioned by KW Berlin and will be titled "Selfish Road" (after the Selfish Gene).

I was interested in what you were saying, Verena, about the ideas of indigenous people being perceived as almost fantastical in Germany, that maybe they're all dead and not with us right now doing things. What you



Oreet Ashery: Carskins: embryo, bones, breast, spray paint (##-How Can I Own That Which Is Stolen-##), image series presented as gif, 2022

were describing, how people were pointing to you when they thought they recognised a Disney character, reminds me of what I am looking at with the relationship between the meme and colonialism. They recognised an image as a replication of something that they have already seen. It is familiar through the mimetic, not the personal, like colonising itself.

Revenge is an anecdote that came back to haunt me when I started looking at roads. I don't know which came first, the memory of the performative revenge actions I acted as a teenager, or my interest in the Israeli apartheid road project. It started with remembering situations that happened to me when I was on the roads, in and around Jerusalem, when I was a teenager. One of them was that I was kidnapped for a few hours and one of them was a kind of revenge that happened before the kidnapping. In my work for re.act.feminism #3, I look at these two incidents of what happened to me growing up in Jerusalem. Incidents that relate to being objectified by men because of my perceived gender as a young woman person. I had been hitchhiking and then been kidnapped inside a car over several hours. A series of surreal rituals were performed. It's something that I have not really looked at or dealt with in depth as a trauma or a post-trauma. But it's something that I really want to do now. I've decided to look at it from the perspective of the driver as well. Kidnapping is like hijacking control, it's like structural violence in the way colonialism is. What made the incident more difficult was that afterwards when we went to the police station in Tel Aviv, we were told that it was our fault because we were hitchhiking dressed with shorts and vests. It is very typical of the patriarchal attitude of the time I grew up in. I don't think the police officer would say it today, but they might still think the same.

The structural violence of the police reproduced what happened when we were kidnapped. It is making me think of the space of the car, of claustrophobia, of ownership. Who owns who? And how can you own yourself when you are stolen? In that time, for that period in the car I was stolen. In a meta sense I am thinking around Palestine being a stolen land and the stealing of Palestinian people's lives, deaths, and cultures. How can I own my childhood roots in Israel? I am not comparing the two, rather, they both exists as questions of violence and belonging in my mind.

During that period of my upbringing as a teenager, men were staring at

my budding breasts. I was annoyed about it so my revenge was to go to a busy road in Jerusalem and perform a striptease with the idea that if men drivers wanted to look at my breast, they would put their lives in danger and die or have a car accident. Nothing like this happened, nothing bad happened. But I've been reflecting on it. What does it mean to revenge in an endless patriarchal cycle?

There are a number of drawings on surfaces that I have been working on with the idea of making them into car skins. So, there is a kind of embryo car skin, bones car skin, breast car skin, blue spray car skin. I was trying to spray the person who kidnapped me and then they sprayed my legs so there is a blue spray car. And I guess the bones and the embryo are the visceral embodied feeling of both stories really. The bodily sensations and fears that clash and collapse together in the experience.

In terms of notions of my ancestry and indigenous thinking, the whole process of the film has been a journey of self-discovery of my specific voice, which is always a plural. I have always been politically clear about my relationship to the occupation and the Zionist project at large. I thought, I would be looking at my roots; my dad's side of the family living for many generations in the Muslim quarter of old Jerusalem and me identifying as a Jewish Palestinian. But then when I looked at my story more, I felt that owning my white Israeli colonial part is the task at hand.

I am thinking through where in that lineage am I, about my ancestry in Jerusalem, Palestine pre-Israel, pre-1948. I am thinking of Jewish people, who feel indigenous in Palestine – because they lived there for few or many generations, or because other Jews have – they will go through great length to prove that connection due to nationalistic agendas. I cannot be part of this kind of indigenous nationalistic reclamation. I am indigenous to Jerusalem and the land of Palestine, but once the colonial project has been realised, there is a rapture in my identity and I become an occupier, part of a settler colonial regime. This inability to feel my roots as mine – but rather as stolen for my national identity's sake and at the same time stolen from me as indigenous

to a land that isn't occupied by my people, leaves me on the crossroads of dis/belonging.

**Suza:** Is this what the slug alien hybrid channels in the road side performances?

**Oreet:** I filmed this slug alien character with Amanda who has been a researcher and driver on my film project. She looks out of place in this makeshift costume, she is dressed military (most people in Israel have served in the army), she got this kind of alien flashing lights. She steals a driver's phone. She is definitely lonely and isolated – one of the things that the roads and the occupation do is physically separate Israelis and Palestinians, as well as separating Israelis from themselves and Palestinians from their land and families. This clip is not a piece of work, it is more like a thought bubble.

**Suza:** Just before we started talking today I looked up the etymology of the English word revenge, it comes from old French and then old Latin among other things means to come back to something – so there is this return inside of it – and to reclaim, to claim something back. As it emerged as a connection between your works, I am excited to explore revenge as something we can recuperate from the Christian / patriarchal / colonial taboo, something that we can repurpose. We have a right to resist and interrupt violence – revenge is a form of that.

You both deal with structures and histories of dispossession, of kidnapping. Kidnapping is an act of creating an object, of taking a world hostage. Part of the revenge then seems to be to return to these acts and infrastructures of dispossession but not for a simple reversal – not to insist on subjecthood or unbecoming object – but to inhabit a collectivity of in-between beings, zombiesque, alien bodies that are alive and dead at the same time, human and not human. I read this as an acknowledgement of the fact that the experience of violence that is individuated is refused as an individual matter, and the whole notion of singularity along with it. And then in the costumes and attitudes of both the slug and Pocahunter there is this drag appropriation



Oreet Ashery: A-MAN-DA (##-How Can I Own That Which Is Stolen-##), video clip, 1:39 min, ,2022

of military masculinities – a plurality made singular too in the body of the soldier.

Thinking about revenge with your works in the making has inspired many conversations with lovers and friends over the past weeks. In a long chat I had with Emma Wolf Haugh and Promona Sengupta in my kitchen, we talked about revenge as a form of self-defence is completely made taboo. Feminised and racialised people are not allowed to take revenge. It is only god, only the state, only the law of the white male who can impart justice, who can take revenge, who can rectify. The counterpart is this feminised form of forgiveness. Emma says feminised people are expected not only to turn the other cheek, but to heal the perpetrators before they heal themselves, make them feel better about themselves. The violence should just pass, things should just go on. There is something in what that says about the way we understand history and time. If we see how self-defence and resistance can happen from any point in time towards any point in time, we can understand history and resistant agencies less linear.

**Verena:** Listening to you and reflecting on myself it brings a lot of really great things together. Thank you for making the effort to search all these commonalities in our works. I find it very inspiring and a great mirror to look back into. And I see a lot of shared methodologies in the way we work. I think that's very beautiful and very funny also, coming from these totally different backgrounds, lives and languages. I think a lot about methodology right now. As Suza said, I work on Gloria Anzaldúa as a method for decolonial art and education and I find a lot of overlaps between that and our conversation here too.

I really like the approach to redefine what revenge is from the moment I am at. I feel I have spent a lot of energy in what you say is the enemy, the projection, combatting. Right now, I want to use and guide my energy in a different way. In what I hear from your work there is a change of perspective, a self-reflective view that is really important for me, too. I relate to that recognition that there was this moment of confrontation that was important because it gave me insights and understandings. It is in connection with this moment of my life and something I can go back to again. But now we give ourselves permission to look back and position ourselves differently in connection to the moment we are at now.

**Suza:** It is really inspiring to hear your processes of understanding and search for your historical persona, how you are grappling with where you are located within these complex fields shaped by colonialism. Both of you develop your avatars from points in your pasts which are both biographical and historical, political and spiritual, and the characters are like a form of turning back to confront moments of racialised and sexualised abuse and transforming them. Maybe your alter egos act like revenants of the teenage experiences you described, and come to counteract it from the future. A bit like another version of self in time that claims something back, for example the infrastructures of colonial and patriarchal extraction such as pop movies and roads.

I love that your figures are so ambivalent and complicated, so queer. The exhausted revolutionary and the exhausted coloniser collapse into one another, the Disneyfied Pocahontas, the historical Matoaka and the migrant indigenous warrior do too. The roadside slug alien embodies a tit flashing teenage revenge self as well as a military presence gauging the land – it's unclear what is happening. Where will they direct their agency? Just lay down and dream, give up? Withdrawal, rest, dreaming, not knowing are also a form of revenge. And then there is this sense of displacement or maybe it's more an inhabiting several worlds at once. Pocahunter emerges from a cosmic in-between space. The twilight-coloured landscapes that appear in both your works make places that can't be fixed to one particular time and space.

I am quite interested in is this thing of revenge as a form of non-linear temporal practice. I am fascinated by the zombiesque quality of your figures, there is the returning from the grave, there is death and exhaustion, and a moment of coming back, in a not completely functional or coherent embodiment. They are like glitches carrying temporal and ideological dissonances, born from the resistance to letting violence pass and time progress. They factually manifest that time is not linear by returning to and from a moment of trauma and changing it in the present, changing it in the past and changing it in the future. Revenge is like time travel.

**Verena:** I think a lot about how coloniality is related to time. There is this work by Johannes Fabian called “Time And The Other.” For me it is a major reference for understanding colonialism, which I started to understand through photography and the image. Anne McClintock refers a lot to Fabian and that’s how I got to him. Time plays such a big role in how indigenous identities are understood and created – how the indigenous woman and the woman of colour in general – are located to a past, are bound to a temporality while white subjectivity is not bound to time. I think the revenge idea in the way we are dealing with it, the way we talk through it now is really cool because it gives you the possibility to overstep time and fight against it, or articulate revenge in that crossing with temporality.

What has come up a lot in listening to you both is what I named in my notes the power of projections. The question is how to understand my own indigenous identity. My father came from Bolivia. His whole family has deeply internalised colonialist structures. I lived in Bolivia part time but always as someone who has been socialised and formed in Western centred contexts. What does it even mean to be indigenous for me? There is a point where I cannot separate, where indigeneity is even made of this colonial imagination. There is not this true indigenous identity of myself and then there are these projections about me. Like my indigenous identity also comes from these projections and is tightly woven to these colonial imaginations about myself. It feels much more true in some ways to be this fake zombiesque character. Oreet you said it is difficult because you are also the enemy within your own story, and I feel in some way I am too. Things are not that easy, and it’s important give space to that, let that be part of my identity and not have to erase part of myself.

**Suza:** You just reminded me of this book I have in my kitchen. There is a really interesting part in it that also speaks to this entanglement of indigenous and colonial that you are talking about. It is a novel by Brandon Hobson called “The Removed”. It’s about, I guess, the deep implications of colonialism and genocide within a community of Cherokee people, and about police violence against indigenous people in the US. The protagonists are different members of a family, who are survivors of police violence and colonial violence. One of them is an ancestor who is dead, who



Verena Melgarejo Weinandt: Pocahunter. Collective Performance with Feminismus und Krawall & maíz, Antropofagische Prozession, 8th of March 2014. zoe\*fotografie

is a spirit talking. There is one part in which this character speaks about their dances, which in a German context are such a part of colonial culture – here, these North American Native dances have been appropriated and re-performed at least since the 19th century. I want to read to you these three lines from the ancestor character who, for me, seems to allude to another idea of zombification and to revenge as an act of healing:

“We imitated the Europeans who invaded us by dancing a foolish awkward stomp to show their clumsiness. More importantly, the dance healed us by weakening the other races who were responsible for harm or sickness. It was also used to heal the sick of our own people.”

Brandon Hobson, *The Removed*, 2021

I just find it amazing how this whole projection of a supposedly authentic dance has already the zombie inside, has already the history of the encounter with the colonial inside and is reproducing that kind of zombie force, these kind of zombiesque moves. This is then used for casting a spell and also for healing. There is so much inside of this idea that Hobson describes that is interesting to think with in a German context: cultural appropriation as a form of sickness. Like a spell that is continued on and on, a zombified part of culture. I don't know.

I am only beginning to realise how the zombie figure can represent parts of ourselves that frighten us and ask us to look at them. There was this piece in the German newspaper taz recently, in which a woman who had fled from the south east of Ukraine to Dresden was talking about how Russian soldiers had been very present in this region since quite some time. That region has been occupied by Russia for years. She talked about the everyday level within all that violence, describing how there are hook ups, sex, conflicts, friendships, people getting married, all kinds of things that happen by being together in the same space. She said that not all Russians are zombified. With zombified she meant people who are indoctrinated with the ideology of nationalist supremacy and imperialism, the greatness and superiority of white Russianness. That really stayed with me, it made me think about a lot of stuff like internalised racisms, internalised supremacist thinking, internalised ableisms, internalised sexism and

transphobias, how they come to speak and how they come to act within my proximities, within my family, within myself. And I thought how these zombified things come to return, and my fear of them returning.

If we think of revenge as a resistance to letting violence pass, of stopping it, it can take many forms including non-engaging, or leaving behind the extractivist subjectivities that cause it. As such healing can be a form of revenge, and unlearning can. I think of unlearning also as a process of returning to an injustice in the past such as these internalised biases, phobias and violent projections that we inherited and not letting it pass within ourselves, building up counterforces in some way. And I often think about the figure of the traitor as someone to inhabit from a position of privilege, the traitor to whiteness and supremacy, the traitor to patriarchy, the traitor to the occupier mentality, to the heterosexist as much as the homonationalist or queercorporate system. I feel we can inhabit different figures within the stories that we are living, which is why I am so interested in avatars as autohistorioteoria and autofiction as performance practice the way you suggest them.

**Oreet:** I think I am now really hooked on this idea of revenge. It kind of makes sense because my work kind of always deals with taboos and it is a taboo. But within that it's probably the only taboo that I feel shame about. It's interesting to think about who gets to do the revenge. And like you said, Suza, it's the figure of the patriarch, the white colonialist that is allowed to revenge. I mean god is a massive revenger basically. Even from genesis, like Adam and Eve, it's all revenge really. In a sense revenge is also the way the state punishes. Punishment is a form of revenge. But if revenge comes from reclaiming, then we are also reclaiming revenge itself and what it can be. I was gonna say, it doesn't have to be violent, and Verena you were saying with your character, it is not physically a super power, but then to change people's dreams, that's also extremely violent. In a way in what we imagine there is no peaceful revenge. I guess the taboo of it is the notion that you might be causing harm. And it was so interesting in what you were saying about non-linear time and coming back to things. There is something about undoing what was done to you rather than hurting somebody. Maybe the result is hurting somebody but it's almost replaying something ... precolonial, anticolonial, decolonial. It made me think of my family being in Jerusalem for so many generations

also under Ottoman rule and then British. It's been under colonial rule for so long, then they themselves became colonial. You know it could have turned out differently.

It's really interesting this sense of time and also how we might do something and then reflect on it and want to undo that or look at it differently. Like in the Theatre of the Oppressed kind of way with all the different endings to a story and because the system isn't right nothing is really right, just different endings. I really like this idea of undoing a story, of retelling a story in a different way. Philosophically that probably is related to revenge, in that you are trying to undo something, change the course of something. But we're always coming up against the idea of violence, of inflicting violence. Are we using the same tools as what's been done to us? It just made me think about this Palestinian social worker I met who set up this community centre for children in Dheisheh, a Palestinian refugee camp. He said that when he was a teenager, he wanted revenge so he threw stones at soldiers and ended up in prison. He said it wasn't worth it, so now he teaches that to the children. He says it's not gonna do anything for you if you throw a stone, what's going to help is if you learn other skills. He was undoing his own revenge and undoing this story so these children wouldn't do what he did. I am not judging throwing stones as an invalid act. I am just saying for him it wasn't serving him and that's what he is teaching.

**Verena:** I really connect to when you say, ok what the Pocahunter does is also violence on the level of the imagination. I think it is interesting to consider, in what context revenge is or is not perceived as an act of violence. What the Pocahunter is trying to do is to expose violence, and sometimes the exposing of violence gets called violent while what it is doing is to show what the violence actually is. That's the mechanism we all probably know, like this mirror. But then what happens if you actually are this mirror? When you take that action.

Another thing that came up hearing you talk about the kids throwing stones is this link to childhood and how the huge world of imagination

that comes with childhood is seen as innocent. Similarly the “Pocahontas” Disney movie is seen as something innocent. How does that relate to the violent imaginations it recreates? How are they taken seriously? The stone story also resonates with the idea that a lot of indigenous cosmology and indigenous methodology are called fiction, are called children’s stories. But they are not innocent at all and they are not fiction at all in many places. Looking back at our own childhood it becomes less and less innocent the longer we look at it.

Suza, you were pointing towards what these zombies mean for us in different moments in time. The last time I was in personification of Pocahunter it was really by coincidence. It was shortly before I gave birth and I totally felt how the embodiment of that character gave me access to a source of strength in my own body, a sense of strength that I have in myself, which I later was able to use as a tool during giving birth. That’s something I didn’t expect at all and it’s not really related with the story that I intended for Pocahunter to carry. That came from the experience of embodying her. Something that I take from this conversation is also to acknowledge that we don’t have so much power and control over these figures although we create them. They do things on their own and we can try to put it in words but they still keep changing. There’s a lot of ambiguity and there are unpredictable continuities. I want to let that be and take this serious, because it opens up so many things.

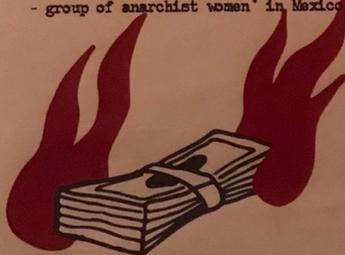
**Oreet:** Probably the notion of pacifism is some white male invention. I would generally identify as a pacifist but I also question this notion that comes up especially in relation to Palestinian modes of resistance: whatever you do, don’t result to violence, throwing stones is violent. It comes with a huge condemnation and collective punishment of the people who do that, even from Palestinian people. At the same time, it seems to be radicalising the Palestinian resistance movement. Obviously on the world stage this kind of stones throwing is one of the symbols of the Palestinian youth, often put in a negative light. But then if you think of the state violence that Israel is employing and the David and Goliath relationships of that. Like you said, you have to look at revenge in context. And even if perhaps it does not achieve positive results, in terms of gender I think it’s a kind of reclaiming some power and control that has been taken away, even if only for a moment. There are certain moments like when Palestinian children are slapping an Israeli soldier. Where I was like oh my god, they slapped the soldier. That childhood thing. It’s not just an Israeli soldier



**violence in  
the hands of  
the violated  
is self-defense**

In every cause that has the objective of freeing us from this shitty system that systematically abuses us, it was all of us and we will always be on the side of those that attack, destroy, torch, are imprisoned or killed. We will not back down. Our slogans are firm. We want to make them a reality with all the fire that burns in our hearts.

- group of anarchist women in Mexico



**MARXIS**

that got hurt but it's a humiliation of the global settler colonial patriarchal white story that got hurt.

**Suza:** There is this poster in one of the bathrooms on the farm in Neuendorf, the place I was talking about earlier. It's one of the first things I saw when I arrived there. It says "violence in the hands of the violated is self-defence." I think it's super interesting to think about what is considered violence. What is considered undue violence? What is considered self-defence? How do we interrupt violence? Structural violence always shows itself through individual acts. How do we interrupt those moments and the whole structure? Especially when it is the inability to actually repair the injustices, when it is the perpetuation of violence that is such a big part of the so called democratic structures we should employ. The stories of oppressed people, of womxn and queers, of racialised and disabled people taking action towards their own ways of seeking justice or repair have long been silenced.

When we think about revenge in popular culture, in movies for example, for a long time it has been the story of white men seeking revenge on the back of the violated and dead bodies of their wives and children. This is how we are told that violence has to be the beginning of the story, it is normalised and at the same time legitimises the white man to take action outside the law. It makes me think that we need to be careful about how we let our stories begin. An example of a representation of anticolonial revenge is this movie "Bacurau", which came out a few years ago. It is the story of a rural community in Brazil who defends itself against a group of neo-colonial white people playing some genocide game. Their revenge, their self-defence is a return of a historically rooted collective body, who, as becomes clear, survived because of histories of indigenous, Black and queer anticolonial resistance. I am interested in how these acts and imaginaries of not taking it are portals to different temporal spaces.

Verena, I loved that thing you said about you becoming the avatar of your alter ego and the uncontrollable manyness of her, the many lives and spirits and political moments she channels.

REVENGE IS A MULTIPLICITY  
A MANYNES IN RESISTANCE



Teresa María Díaz Nerio: Hommage à Sara Bartman, 2008  
courtesy: re.act.feminism

# AFTERLIFE COMMUNITY CENTER

she creates nightmares against colonial desires, part 2

a chat record of speaking nearby the companion works for revenge ~ avatars and manyness \*: Teresa María Díaz Nerio's performance Hommage á Sara Bartman, from the archive of re.act.feminism and, as a proposed future edition to that archive, Bartolina XiXa's Ramita Seca. La Colonialidad Permanente. The following conversation took place in a chat via text and voice messages in the beginning of July 2022.

Teresa María Díaz Nerio: "The performance and video work Hommage à Sara Bartman elucidates the life, death and afterlife of the South African Khoisan woman Sara Bartman. Under the iconic name "Hottentot Venus", Bartman was exhibited in England and Paris at the beginning of the nineteenth century as part of a popular entertainment industry. The fascination that the Khoisan women's genitalia and large buttocks (steatopygia) held for biologists was indeed one of the reasons why Sara Bartman was kept as an object at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris after her death. Her skeleton, a cast of her body, her brain and genitalia were on display until the 1970s, when feminists' protests against this exposure succeeded. In 1995, Nelson Mandela requested the repatriation of her remains, which received a final resting place in 2003. Hommage à Sara Bartman touches on the fact that Blackness has a history of being performed in a denigratory way. The artist performs as a living sculpture, wearing a full body

costume and remaining motionless, suggesting a helpless state of objectification of the Black female body – raped, exhibited and voyeuristically illustrated throughout the centuries as another trophy for “Man”. In the piece, Sara Bartman does not depend on the audience to recognise her humanity. She is acknowledging herself in that historical context, only this time she doesn’t bow, doesn’t look, doesn’t dance, doesn’t play a stringed instrument, she just doesn’t.”

Teresa María Díaz Nerio: Hommage à Sara Bartman, re.act.feminism:

<https://www.reactfeminism.org/entry.php?l=lb&id=238&e=a&v=&a=Teresa%20Mar%C3%ADa%20D%C3%ADaz%20Nerio&t=>

**Suza:** Hey dears, are you still up for having our conversation around our revenge companion works on Thursday?

**Verena:** Hey you two. Antay is still sick and I have a conference talk to prepare for Friday... So maybe I could do Thursday but I can’t promise for now. What do you think about sending each other voice messages in this chat and start thinking and exchanging that way?

**Oreet:** I’m sorry to hear that Antay is still unwell. I’m happy with voice messages. Starting - In the works of Bartolina XiXa and Díaz Nerio there is a sense of fabulation. Combining realism with magic, fantasy and horror. I see it too in Verena’s and my contributions. Perhaps because **the** extraction of land and bodies is a continuous horror story that is also very real. In all the works we have in this context the (political) imaginary isn’t only referencing the ills of the world we live in, but also to the world we want to live in by the power of myth.

**Verena:** I highly connect to what you are writing Oreet. It of course reminds me of Gloria Anzaldúa. I am sorry to be repetitive, but she has this very beautiful theory about the imagination and myth-creating as realism per se. These realities are a necessary contribution in order to make

change and transformation happen. Where I also see a connection specifically to the work of Díaz Nerio is in this creating of a relation to these people or figures or representations that is possible and impossible at the same time, a relation also to the way they were represented and how that shaped a cultural imagination throughout time. To connect and search for ways of how to do that at the same time, trying things out. It is also a gesture of appropriation that comes from a need to connect to these figures today, to reinvoke them again and again, to incorporate them and make that connection physical and real. That is very powerful as an experience; to let that transform myself and live with how that unfolds. And I think that we all share, Bartolina XiXa, Díaz Nerio, you Oreet and me, this physical activating of corporeal knowledge, performative experience and lived knowledge that we use for our work and the power of that. Each of our ways of doing that is very different, but still it is connected in that sense.

**Oreet:** I relate to that sense of a search for connection that never really ends. It seems that the figures we re-enact seek belonging that isn't attainable and for which there is a need to worldbuild. The belonging is situated in conflicts, loss, grief, memory, imaginations and alienation.

I like the activation of corporeal knowledge that you mention particularly in relation to gender. Gender becomes a material that has to escape and ooze out of patriarchal constraints. It slips out and becomes exaggerated and even celebrated in its mythical otherness.

**Verena:** I've probably told you that already but I've had this Pocahunter enlightenment shortly before I gave birth. I realised that the incorporation of Pocahunter, this reactivating of her, made it possible for me to source a feeling of power that is inside of me that I was able to use during giving birth. This corporeal knowledge is so beautiful because it is so outside of what I can control mentally, outside of rationality. It is able to bring processes and transformation that are outside of all these categories of race and gender and everything. And then I also remember a beautiful talk I had with a film maker Onyeka Igwe on a podium during a film festival. She was using dance movements in her video and told me that this was a way to ad-

dress a certain audience. I thought that the corporeal movement is also a language that communicates beyond what we know as spoken language. Therefore, it is such a beautiful way of creating connections with people. It is very powerful that all of these performances and works rely on that language. The base is movement and presence, the corporeal existence. Sorry if you can't hear me well, I am cooking and taking advantage of Antay's nap.

**Oreet:** I'm inspired to hear you talking about power and strength. With all the works we have in this constellation the body takes centre stage. I always want to escape the body in spiritual terms, but off course there is never an escape. Dominant regimes bring us back again and again to corporeal realities of gender, race, ableism biases and punishment. The question you raise of where we find strength is beautiful to me. Revenge can be simply cultivating inner and outer strength

**Verena:** It is!!!!

**Suza:** Hello you two, sorry for coming in a day late and thanks for the many resonances spiralling out from your chat already. I have read a bit about Sara Bartman, the person, images and histories that Díaz Nerio incorporated in their performances. And I want to tell you about some of the stories I found in a work by Yvette Abrahams, a South African farmer, activist and scholar who has researched and written extensively on the representations of Sara Bartman and their role in shaping the colonial imaginary. I came across Abrahams' amazing work through conversations with the researcher Memory Biwa who works with performative approaches to colonial histories and anticolonial memory, too. In Abrahams' text "Images of Sara Bartman" I found a lot of things that create further relations between Díaz Nerio's performance and your two works, things that have to do with histories of kidnapping and occupation, with traditions of racist performance and exhibition, and also with nightmares and mythmaking.

One of the things that struck me was that Abrahams in talking about the history of Sara Bartman, **right from the beginning she talks about resistance.** Sara Bartman was a woman of the Khoisan people, indigenous to the southern eastern territories of the African continent. She lived during Dutch and British colonial occupation and was brought

to London in 1810 to be put on display. Abraham writes “The reason she was exhibited, that is the primary object of interest to the general public, was what was perceived to be the abnormal size of her buttocks.” Apparently, there was a court case against the enslavement, exploitation and racist exhibiting of Sara Bartman by evangelical abolitionists. That is important, because I feel that in many of the narratives, academic and not, the violence and victimisation is put at the beginning of the story and the concurrent histories of resistance and intervention are rarely told. They are often so erased that it is, as you said earlier, on the level of the imagination that the historical facticity, or materiality of these exists.

Yvette Abrahams writes that this particular objectification of Sara Bartman in 19th century London was happening precisely at a moment when the British were debating the abolition of slavery. “Scientific racism developed as a means of countering the perceived threat to social stability created by emancipated Blacks.” And she says that “the myth building around Sara Bartman became an increasingly conscious, and public, process. Before the exhibition of Sara Bartman, sexual analysis of Black people may have been a minor topic in dominant discourses. Afterward, ideas about the essentially deviant sexual nature of the Khoisan spread to include all Africans.”

I feel this question about when these racist cultural images appear or reappear is translatable to “Pocahontas” as a representation of indigeneity. Why does this Disney movie appear in the early 1990s? How does it relate to the actual position, the political movements of indigenous people and the effects of their anticolonial resistance in the United States and the Western societies at that time? I feel it’s important to pay attention to the moments in which these myths are created – whom or what do they serve?

In analysing the images that were created of Sara Bartman, Abrahams says that they do not bear any relation to her as she was in real life. For example, there is anecdotal evidence that Sara Bartman resisted any attempts of undressing her completely. Yet there are so many illustrations positioning her nude, as this Black deviant venus. Abrahams calls these representations “sketches from the nightmares of the melanin-deficient” and, you can imagine, I was very excited to find in Abraham thinking with the notion of the nightmare. She found that idea in the work of researcher Simon Schama in relation to a series of Dutch bourgeois portraits of

vagrants, which he calls “sketches from the nightmares of the propertied, rather than any reliable social document.”

It's such an interesting bridge to Pocahunter, who too is a nightmare of the propertied and melanin-deficient, and another trace of the white colonising mentality that created its own nightmares based on extraction, kidnapping and enslavement. A connection between all four of works that we are thinking with here, is that somehow the nightmare becomes an armour, the nightmare is worn as a kind of shield and brought into battle. Thinking about the body, thinking about drag, and the inflation of gender and race, the exaggeration of projection and social construct, that you were mentioning Oreet, this nightmare as armour is so powerful. Apparently, Sara Bartman wore a dress that Abrahams says probably shaped her body in a certain way. And then Díaz Nerio makes the dress of the representations, a dress of “the minds of those who made and viewed them”, making a body of the nightmare that looks back at the white audiences in white museum institutions.

**Oreet:** I like how the notion of a shield and a protection that you mentioned is used in Nerio's Bartman work. The nightmarish fantasy projection (kidnapping) of the coloniser into racialised and gendered bodies is then appropriated within an artistic context as a (revenge) shield, as protection, a weapon, a mirror. Faisal Abdu Allah's work from the early 90s, “i wanna kill sam cuase he aint my motherfucking uncle”, of young black men holding a gun and looking straight into the camera, employs similar strategies of empowerment by asking who is holding the gaze? **Who** is the person we presume is seeing the image? These two works speak to a binary gender materiality as a racialised construct to rapture and dispel the colonial gaze. When Nerio is inflating and exaggerating the bigger than life Sara Bartman, she exposes colonial darkest fantasies for what they are.

**Suza:** There is one last quote I want to share because it connects so strongly between the stories of Sara Bartman, the stories of colonised

indigenous lands in what is today North America, and the stories of colonised Palestine, “Less than five years after the second British occupation of the Cape, Sara Bartman could be viewed as one of the spoils of war. She also provided an early object lesson, showing the states of the indigenes in Britain’s newest colony. The contrived savagery in which she was shown created a generalised picture of the savage people that British troops were at that moment trying to ‘civilise’ – all this without a word being said.” Abrahams also writes that the representations of Sara Bartman marked a turning point toward exhibiting the “savage” as raw sexuality. She also mentions one of her successors to be the so called “Venus of South America” or “Tono Maria”. I couldn’t find much yet about this person or also the representations of her but I wanted to mention it also in relation to the counter-representations of gender and race in Pocahunter’s wanderings and Bartolina Xixa’s dance. I guess this thing of sexual objectification being inseparable from colonial techniques and how they continue to work in and through the body is related to what you two were mentioning earlier. These corporeal knowledges, the images and knowledges from inside the body, speak from and against that.

**Verena:** Hey you two. I am in the train that is about to leave. Wow, there are so many things in what you were saying Suza that I would like to respond to. Actually, I think this is a great set for part two of Invoking Pocahunter. I would love to read that text about Sara Bartman, to think these two together makes a lot of sense. I have too many impressions, but one of the thoughts I had was about the sexual objectification you were just mentioning and how different this works for indigenous women and for Black women. In that sense Pocahunter is an interesting exception of how indigenous women from the territory now called the United States became such a sexualised image in contrast to indigenous women from Abya Yala. I think there are these differences in all these stories.

You mention these stories of resistance and that is something that I don’t know about Matoaka at all. I will probably include that in my text because that is a really important point. That’s also one of my strategies; not to refer to the actual person, but more to the way her representation shapes our identities, our imaginations and how these images are used to create a base for violence. It is about creating a space where there is agency although it may be in the imagination, but it is still real in the sense that this is space of dealing with every-

thing that is undealt with, that is suppressed, the subconscious. In that sense I relate to Díaz Nerio, because she inflated her, she made this already crazy imagination even more absurd. She exposes dieses aufgepumpte, wie du sagst, nicht real existierende Bild. That is something that the Disney Pocahontas also created, this absurdity that is taken as a normal representation.

**Suza:** Oreet, I love how you describe that shield that works to rapture and dispel the colonial gaze. Taking these cruelties close to the body and turning them around. It's a hard and interesting thing and works in different and complex ways with all the different avatars we have now assembled here. This morning in the kind of half awake state I had this beautiful vision of Nerio's Sara Bartman, of the slug alien, of Pocahunter, of the skin and form shifting car bodies, the dancing figure of Bartolina XiXa and the exhausted combatant, which had a ghostly looking shape, all roaming together. I think there is something really fabulous in how in our chapter, in this space we created together, there is a real gang of avatars that have all these superpowers in different ways. I really love how they found each other and what they might do together.

I am happy to hear that you're already thinking about part 2, Verena, and how to incorporate Yvette Abraham's narrative strategy of making the resistance part of the story. You are saying that you don't know the cruelties that Matoaka had to suffer, but we also don't know the ways in which she fought. I hope the three of us will see each other soon and continue the thickness of all these connections and friendship.

**Oreet:** Thank you both and much love to you both as well. I feel that we will meet soon in the flesh, which takes me to this gang of avatars you mentioned Suza and the delving into the depth of the human imaginary and subconscious that you mentioned Verena as forms of absurdist inflatables. This makes me again think of our conversation, or about our practices and other practices of soft resistance, that employ the form of the inflatable, the thought bubble, the costume, the exaggerated, the per-

formative, the dance, the song and how they vulnerably rely on presence, their own and the viewers. Bringing all those presences into the archive is my favourite concept of an afterlife community centre.

**Suza:** I love this Oreet!!! Afterlife community centre.

**Verena:** So good to hear and read you. I am sure we will continue but I am a little bit sad because I really enjoyed this. It was a really beautiful exchange and not so common for me because often times it's difficult to have that kind of access to interact with people because of my limited time resources. So, thank you for getting into this space through messages via phone. It makes it really easy to take part. I love this crowd, these imaginative presences, hybrids, aliens, slugs, whatever. This coming together of all of them. And I also like this idea of a shield. I wonder what shape it would have, maybe it could be a slimy shield, because we take all this stuff in and then we transform it and then we spit it out in different ways. It is beautiful to have that image. I am looking forward to anything that comes out from this little group we have created. And I think what you said Oreet about revenge being the cultivating of inner and outer strength is such a strong idea. **Revenge is taking care of myself. Revenge is healing. Revenge is transformation.**

Bartolina XiXa's video work Ramita Seca, La Colonialidad Permanente can be found on youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2-wFmNnFDc>

“Xixa is a tribute to the Bolivian revolutionary leader Bartolina Sisa Vargas (c.1750–82), an Aymara woman who fought alongside her husband Túpac Katari (c. 1750–81) against the colonial occupation of present-day Peru and Bolivia in the eighteenth century and was eventually executed by Spanish troops. Through Xixa, Mamani evokes Indigenous struggle as a foundation for undoing patriar-

chal and racist paradigms, while also paying homage to the women of his family and the people of the Quebrada de Humahuaca valley in Jujuy. This region has been persistently subjugated by hegemonic power structures that have denied local Indigenous peoples visibility and access to resources through the imposition of white culture and capitalism. The music video *Ramita Seca, La Colonialidad Permanente* [Dry Twig, The Permanent Coloniality, 2019] shows Xixa dancing in the middle of a dumping ground in a self-created choreography. The music and lyrics are by folk singer Aldana Bello. Dressed in traditional attire amidst worn-out mattresses, garbage bags, and dust, Xixa uses movements that suggest ancestral remedies to colonial extractivist violence. The work functions as a call for the dissident bodies affected by the predatory systems in place in the former colonies to take a political stance and to combat socioeconomic inequalities and structural violence as a means of healing colonial wounds.”

Beatriz Lemos, bb11, 2020

<https://11.berlinbiennale.de/participants/bartolina-xixa>

To be continued.

she creates nightmares against colonial desires  
a zine publication to accompany  
revenge ~ avatars and manyness \*  
with new works by Oreet Ashery and Verena Melgarejo Weinandt  
curated by Suza Husse, 2022

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