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*We should not enclose what we deem to be our racial or ethnic cultural heritage within the walls of Jericho.*

– Kgalema Mothlanthe, 2012

The socio-political events of late, such as the nation-wide call for the *decolonisation* of tertiary education systems and the *Africanisation* of existing knowledge bases, has encouraged South Africans to look back upon their ancestries. This grandiose attempt to unravel the labyrinthine processes of colonisation that still holds our country in its suffocating grip has driven us to re-examine our individual places in history and rediscover our sense of ethnographic and cultural belonging during this tempestuous period.

These events, too, have prompted the recurrence of the notion of *diasporic indigeneity*. Social theorist Erich Fox Tree (2015) describes this concept as a burgeoning understanding of the self that amalgamates the migrant's claim to his "new place(s) of residence" and his standing within the homeland of his ancestors. This creates a mental "re-territorialization" of two separate geographic locations into a single, conceptual "super-territory". Here the migrant sets himself apart from the colonist in the sense that he does not harbour a desire for a social or political reunification or the repossession or domination of this new super-territory.

However, *diasporic indigeneity* does not serve as the anathema to colonialism that we may be seeking: In *Performing Indigeneity: Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences*, Mark Watson (2014:408) suggests that it should rather be perceived as a "'force' that is able to act in spite of the ravages of history [...], a compulsion to remember: the capacity [...] to retain knowledge of the past, a framework that allows the present to exist at all." It is indeed a *force*, a mode of identity that is made visible through commemorative action and can only truly be understood with reference to the *body*. *Diasporic indigeneity* does not typically recognise an established sense of self or is concerned with contentions of authenticity; rather, it invokes the vocabularies of dynamic *lived experience* that have ordinarily been silenced, disregarded or *dis-remembered* within the context of the modern urban world.

To me, the *body* that represents this notion most articulately can be rediscovered within the very context of the colonial past: that of Yasuke (彌介), born circa 1555–1566. His existence is mentioned in the letters written between Jesuits Luis Frois and Lorenzo Mexia in 1581, in the Annual Report of the Jesuit Mission in Japan (1582) and in the sixteen-volume-long compilation of the "The Nobunaga Chronicle" (Webb & DeSenoo, 2015).

Even though his origins are shrouded in mystery, the general consensus seems to be that he was a Mozambican slave of the Makua tribe taken to the East in 1579 by a Jesuit missionary, Alessandro Valignano. Originally named *Yasufe* (*Yasuke* being the phonetic Japanese adaption), this 6-foot-tall youth caught the attention of Daimyo Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582). Nobunaga was reportedly curious about Yasuke's black skin and is known to have ordered him to take a bath and scrub himself to prove that the colour was not a result of ink (Strom, 2017). Nonetheless, his respect for the compassionate and charismatic foreigner soon grew, and he

appointed Yasuke to his personal guard in 1580. In 1581, Yasuke was promoted to the rank of Samurai and stationed at Azuchi Castle. This prompted the warlord to invite Yasuke to a banquet with him and his family, which was a privilege rarely afforded even to far more senior samurai. During the same year, Yasuke was promoted to the coveted position of Nobunaga's sword-bearer and was allowed to carry his own *katanas*. Despite his profound skill in combat, he was also revered for his linguistic abilities: within only two years of his arrival, Yasuke was able to speak fluent Japanese. After Nobunaga was overthrown and killed in a coup by Mitsuhide – the general under which Yasuke had served – in 1582, the Mozambican returned to Valignano and his company of Jesuits. Valignano reportedly “thanked God” (Strom, 2017) for Yasuke's safe return and acknowledged the role that he had played in the nascent struggle for the unification of feudal Japan. Yasuke consequently disappeared from historical record.

Five centuries later, Yasuke has become the catalyst that compels us to remember the magnificent feats of an African deep within the colonial world at the very beginning of European expansion. This is my embodiment of commemorative action that augments the strength of community rather than any singular identity: this Yasuke survives beyond official history in a *super-territory* – he exists purely as a compulsion to remember where we came from and what we have done together in the face of the acrimonious forces of colonial occupation. He is the framework of our contemporary feelings of nationalism, the heritage that we often feel we are no longer able to trace.

As the fifth instalment of my *No Man's Land* series (2015), this Yasuke dons the flowing layers of a kimono instead of the traditional samurai armour. He is the *migrant* rather than the *colonist*, re-territorialising a vast mental *no man's land* that stretches from Africa to the Far East instead of participating in a conquest to reclaim an extraneous (home)land. Laden with the weight of his costume of inner tyre tubes – possibly one of the last tangible vestiges of colonial cruelty as it was exemplified on the rubber plantations of Africa – Yasuke destabilizes notions of authentic cultural origin and practice that, in the colonial mind, were fixed in place and time. In this turbulent socio-political climate, Yasuke becomes the border between the colonial past and the *de-colonial* future. His *diasporic indigeneity* restores a sense of common cause in a transitional time when the need of this country truly is most dire.