

HISTORY RETOLD

Papermoon Puppet Theatre's Mwathirika by Kate O'Connor

In this theater, what looks like a wooden block or ball, a bundle of rags, a thin silhouette of perforated leather, assumes a voice and personality. ... All acquire different souls and spirits, all have different stories to tell. They are able to enter into our histories, and reenact our histories.

– Kenneth Gross, *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life*¹

The problem of history—its relativity and ambiguity—is particularly apparent in the work of the Indonesian multidisciplinary art group Papermoon Puppet Theatre, founded in 2006 by co-artistic directors Ria Tri Sulistyani (b.1981, Jakarta) and Iwan Effendi (b.1979, Yogyakarta). Their puppet performance *Mwathirika* (2010), offers a deeply personal account of the 1965–66 genocide in Indonesia. The performance follows the story of two young brothers performed by puppets, Tupu and Moyo, as they face displacement, starvation, and the loss of loved ones during the political upheaval and mass killings. The idea for the performance came about after Effendi discovered that his grandfather, a traditionally trained *dalang* and dance teacher, had been jailed by the Indonesian Army for thirteen years without trial in a court.² Throughout the production process for *Mwathirika*, Sulistyani—the daughter of a former member of the Indonesian Air Force—and Effendi realised that the impact of the genocide extended to many of those around them, including other members of Papermoon Puppet Theatre. The gravity of lost knowledge became the focus of their performance, stating it is “a play that tells no stories of who killed whom. This is a story about the history of loss (and the loss of history) in our lives.”³

This paper focuses on Papermoon’s experimentation with puppetry in *Mwathirika*, which I suggest enables them to critique the conditions of commemorating history in contemporary Indonesia and its relationship to a deeper, collective trauma. I argue that, while *Mwathirika* references highly specific historical content, Papermoon’s work carefully balances the tension between individual oral testimonies and the more complex realm of collective suffering. This is achieved through the use of puppets, which are the vehicle through which Papermoon can communicate the complexities of how Indonesia’s history is written, remembered, and documented. Significantly, the artwork’s operative role is not to mimic or replace history but to build imagined alternate worlds. This is precisely why puppets were used: their performative wooden bodies are not intended to be analogies for the actual human victims, and survivors of genocide. The mutable and transformative nature of puppetry allows for a critical distance that at once empathises with the specific atrocities of the events experienced by individuals while also expanding the performance to access a broader state of collective suffering. Papermoon shows how the use of puppetry, silence, symbols, and intimacy can offer alternate ways of dealing with the problem of communicating history, which is always constructed.

1965–66 GENOCIDE

The official military account states that the mass killings and subsequent political takeover of Suharto’s New Order were in response to the kidnapping and murder of six commanding officers of the Indonesian Armed Forces by a group who called themselves 30 September Movement (G30S: *Gerakan*

Tigapuluh September).⁴ The movement claimed to be protecting long-standing President Sukarno—who had held his presidency for twenty years prior—from the right-wing army generals accused of planning a coup d'état against Sukarno. The response to the kidnapping and murder of the generals was swift. On the morning of 1 October 1965, the army already began sweeping Central Java of civilians believed to be involved with or in support of a communist uprising, even before most Indonesian civilians were aware of what was taking place.⁵ Since the horrific events commenced on 30 September 1965, the Indonesian military has continued to conceal its involvement in the lead-up to the mass killings, which scholars have estimated resulted in the massacre of between half a million to one million people.⁶

During the Suharto era (1968-98), history books were published to support the official narrative told by the military.⁷ There were some attempts to challenge the New Order's historical script; however, many of these books were banned. According to Gerry van Klinken's assessment of the Human Rights Watch 1998, over two thousand books were banned during the Suharto era under the attorney general's advice that the "works 'inverted the facts,' which could 'lead the public astray' and ultimately 'disturb public order.'"⁸ In 2018, Jess Melvin's book, titled *The Army and the Indonesian Genocide: Mechanics of Mass Murder*, became notably the first historical text to reconstruct the events with access to the army's articles. Sorting through some three thousand pages worth of confidential military documents, Melvin found an alarming discrepancy between the military's depictions of the events, claiming it was the result of a "'spontaneous' uprising" and their top-secret documents outlining their plan of attack "as an 'Annihilation Operation' (*Operasi Penumpasan*), which it launched with the stated intention to 'annihilate down to the roots' (*menumpas sampai ke akar-akarnya*) its major political rival, the Indonesian Communist Party."⁹ For this reason and more, Melvin argues the killings fall within the legal definition of genocide. Melvin's text reveals the staggering detail that had been concealed and much of which still remains unapologetically silenced by the Indonesian government.

There is no shortage of historical books covering the chronological events of 1965–66, yet this does not mean the information is not ideologically presented. Discussing the ongoing conflict surrounding the historical credibility of the genocide, Effendi says, "the right wing try to whisper it every year...Even now if you make something about that, someone will smell it. It can be trouble."¹⁰ And indeed, Papermoon offers a very real example of the trouble these kinds of artworks can attract following a performance in Jakarta. Despite Papermoon's attempts to distance itself from both assignations of blame and nationalist agendas, anti-communist supporters continued to rally throughout Indonesia, and, as a result, Papermoon experienced backlash during their early tour of *Mwathirika*. The play was first shown in December 2010 at the Institut Français Indonesia, Yogyakarta. The performance was supported by the Empowering Women Artists grant from Yayasan Kelola, HIVOS, the Ford Foundation, and BIYAN. It toured the Goethe-Institut Indonesia, Jakarta, in January 2011 as part of a three-day conference themed "Indonesia and the World in 1965." During the conference proceedings, Papermoon, other performers and presenters were met with a crowd of Islamist demonstrators who accused them and other groups of supporting the neo-communist ideology.¹¹ In response to these conflicting issues in Indonesia, Lieutenant-General Agus Wijoyo, the son of one of the senior officers murdered on the morning of 1 October 1965, spoke to the problem of reconciliation at the beginning of the conference:

We are failing to settle the task of dealing
with our history, and we will leave it behind

for our grandchildren ... Putting the events of the past into proportion indeed requires sacrifice from all the sides of those involved. Reconciliation is not a process of producing a zero-sum game, because, as we will see in this exhibition, there is not one side that could claim itself as merely the victim, and the other side as wholly the oppressor... What I want to say here is that readiness to enter the process of reconciliation requires the destruction of the myth that victims were the monopoly of one side and the perpetrators of the violence were the other side.¹²

Here, the importance of remembrance and communication triumphs over the binary approach of resistance. In order to begin the process of healing, Wijoyo suggests less focus on the truth of the events and more focus on communicating how the events continue to impact the community and future generations.

The complexity of communicating the ongoing impact of 1965 bleeds into the work of many contemporary Indonesian artists, as indicated by Wulan Dirgantoro, who discusses the link between trauma and aesthetic practices in the work of Dadang Christanto (b.1957) and Tintin Wulia (b.1972). In comparing these artists' work, Dirgantoro explains how the problem of "traumatropism" can occur through the artistic narrativisation of individual trauma, which often fails to "rearticulate trauma beyond the trope of unrepresentability."¹³ Dirgantoro states, "representation of the topic [1965-66 mass killings], particularly in the visual arts, is often limited by the frame of a singular type of traumatic memory, namely the direct memories of the victims. Consequently, the predominant artistic strategy on this subject matter is to rely upon testimony and pedagogy to deliver political messages to audiences. In doing so, these strategies highlight elements of "traumatropism" as exemplified by the work of Dadang Christanto."¹⁴ In response to these concerns, Dirgantoro looks to the work of Tintin Wulia, who "reconstructs the memory of 1965 through connective memory work,"¹⁵ allowing it to be situated "within a broader collective memory."¹⁶ Dirgantoro states that while Christanto's work "illustrates the challenges of translating individual into collective trauma, where mimetic strategy is always in tension with ethical spectatorship," Wulia's work centres instead "on the movement of memory that is not constrained by the past, and can thus be seen as a reflection of the "art" of witnessing. Her work reimagines the memories of the past as something mutable by building an emotional copresence with tertiary witnesses."¹⁷

Building on Dirgantoro's argument, I would argue Papermoon's work also moves away from narrativising individual trauma and aims to build "an emotional copresence with tertiary witnesses." In *Mwathirika*, this is achieved by removing language from the performance and mediating the re-enactment through puppetry. Papermoon co-director Sulistyani says, "as soon as you use puppets, people really believe it's their story, because they're not acting. ... What happens on stage is actually their life and people believe it. And through that people invest their trust more into the performance rather than to the actors."¹⁸ Puppets are critical to engaging and critiquing themselves as truth-tellers and the audience's belief in the history presented on stage. Just like the constructs of history, puppetry relies on the audience's belief in the puppet's (or history-teller's) ability to communicate some degree of truth. Papermoon deploys its puppets as translators of the trauma, loss, and displacement of the genocide while simultaneously

allowing the re-enactment to be accessed by a broader collective memory. As with Dirgantoro's discussion of Wulia's practice, Papermoon invites its audience "to consider a different kind of spectatorship in the face of historical trauma, namely one that does not rely on spectacle, but on emotional copresence."¹⁹

Devoid of dialogue, the carved, mummified and mask-like expressions of Papermoon's puppets uncannily come to life through gesture. Their hollow, glassy eyes express deep trauma and remorse through slow pauses and long, distant stares. This is significantly different to having human actors perform the emotions of victims and survivors. Here, emotion is projected onto the puppets through a combination of puppet design, lighting, and shadows. Additionally, removing language provides a metaphorical link to the silencing of history that continues throughout Indonesia. Papermoon's *Mwathirika* also reveals how creative re-enactment can afford the artist a vast degree of agency over the history they choose to reconstruct. Whether history is remembered as being littered with unprecedented violence and suffering or whether it is filled with examples of strength and survival, the way the past is remembered is always in a state of flux. It exists merely as a thin, shadowy reflection in the perceiver's memory, neither dead nor alive. History carries many guises and survives only through its re-enactment, altering its role from person to person and between communities of people, not dissimilar to puppets themselves.

FIG. 1



Papermoon Puppet Theatre's studio in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Photo by the author; Courtesy Papermoon Puppet Theatre.

OLD METHODS, NEW NARRATIVES

Located just on the outskirts of Yogyakarta's main city centre in Bantul, Papermoon's studio appears at the end of a long dirt path, leading to a tall triangular outhouse with a steep roof laced with thick green vines. The large wooden doors, painted pale yellow and turquoise, open wide onto Papermoon's studio shop, littered with puppets watching from the shelves and leaning gently against the low window. The shop is filled with objects and memories from past projects. To the right of the shop is Papermoon's studio space, a large brick industrial-like building with concrete foundations. A steel beam runs from floor to ceiling next to the wide wooden doorway, painted yellow, blue, and green. Inside, above the doorway, are eight skeletal puppet torsos hanging high up against the wall; all but one are twice the size of human figures. The skeletons are open wooden frames with thin webbed material stretching across their ribs. Their arms hang limp and fractured by their sides, with some of their hands and limbs missing. Large turquoise shelves with glass doors are set against the far wall to the left of the entrance. The shelves are crowded with puppets of all shapes and sizes. Some of Papermoon's earliest designs from 2008 are seated at the very top. They have goofy, exaggerated faces, some grinning with wide open mouths and sharp pointed teeth. Next to them stands a group of ghostly clothed figures, their faces painted white with hollow eyes and mouths.

FIG. 2



Papermoon Puppet Theatre's studio in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Photo by the author; Courtesy Papermoon Puppet Theatre.

When asked if they had experimented with other forms of puppetry before they arrived at a variation of the Japanese *bunraku* that they are currently

known for, directors Sulistyani and Effendi nod with enthusiasm:

EFFENDI: Yes, we did!

SULISTYANI: For the first four years.

EFFENDI: Hand puppets, string puppets, human-sized puppets.

SULISTYANI: Giant ones. And that one up there [*pointing to the puppets on the top shelf of their studio with wide open mouths and large pointed teeth*] we produced them in 2008. From 2006 to 2010 we did a lot of experimenting, trying to make different types of puppetry. Then we fell in love with *bunraku* or tabletop puppets because you don't need string, you don't need rods, you don't need any other materials in between the puppeteers and the puppets.²⁰

Formed in seventeenth-century Japan, *bunraku* features highly stylised puppets, typically dressed in Japanese garments such as robes and kimonos, that are half the size of their human operators. The puppeteers' work is intimate, their hands reaching from beneath the puppets' sleeves to manipulate the small wooden limbs.²¹ Similarly, Papermoon's puppets are built to operate like an extension of the puppeteer's body. However, the design is much more simplified than that of *bunraku*. Gesturing towards the joints of the puppets used in *Mwathirika*, Effendi explained how originally they had used heavier wood but they changed the design to plywood, which is lighter and therefore allows for greater movement. Even the joints between the limbs are connected by simple mesh cloth. They use papier-mâché on the face and hands, which Effendi says are in constant need of repair. The puppets have one thick rod joining the back and the head and three horizontal rods fanning from the neck to allow the puppeteer a firm grasp. They are held from behind the neck, "like holding a pen," Effendi explains.²² When manipulated in this way, the puppets feel both fragile and malleable, every movement simultaneously accidental and intentional.

As the visual artist of the pair, Effendi designs the puppets and props for Papermoon's performances and installations. Effendi studied visual art at the Indonesia Institute of the Arts, Yogyakarta, in 2004. He has since exhibited his works of performance, drawing, and sculpture locally and internationally in various solo and group exhibitions.²³ He often draws on the material of charcoal, burning paintings and sculptures as a way of exploring trauma and history. For Effendi, the charcoal symbolises the omitted fragments of history that have been turned to ash.²⁴ The use of charcoal also serves a practical purpose for his work with Papermoon. Many of his ideas for Papermoon's productions develop from his visual art practice. Previously he had worked more with paint, before relying on charcoal for its immediacy. "Everything has to be quick," he says, "because we have to coordinate with other groups, with production, with the script, the direction. So charcoal is more suitable for me now, the immediacy of the medium gives me more space to conceive what I want."²⁵ Effendi also relates the immediacy of charcoal to Papermoon's decisions around puppet design. He explains how "the medium [of charcoal] is more emotional ... the contact is more direct," suggesting that the medium removes the desire to edit or interrupt the process. The same goes for their use of puppets. Sulistyani says, with *bunraku* "it's direct contact, we can express our emotion directly through the puppet."²⁶

Beyond *bunraku*, Papermoon's work could be broadly contextualised alongside the philosophy and storytelling techniques of Javanese shadow puppetry known as *wayang kulit*. The uses of *wayang* are dynamic and

broad, in the same way that the term *wayang* broadly covers various types of live theatre and performance including puppet theatre. *Wayang kulit* refers specifically to shadow puppet theatre, traditionally performed by one *dalang* who would sit cross-legged behind a long white screen.²⁷ The link between Papermoon and *wayang* is loosely based on its Indonesian context, in addition to Effendi's grandfather who was a shadow puppet master. In addition, Sulistyani had previously studied traditional *wayang* under the advisory of *dalang* Ki Ledjar Subroto.²⁸ However, Effendi never learned *wayang* from his grandfather and never saw him perform.²⁹ Sitting across from Effendi in Papermoon's studio, his brow furrows as he contemplates why it would be a common tendency for audiences to immediately relate their work to the tradition of *wayang* or to understand their work through the lens of *wayang*. "It's a really strong, really long tradition," he says. "If you read about the word 'puppet-history' they always mention *wayang*. They have to mention Indonesian *wayang*. When there is puppetry popping up in Indonesia with a different form, it means that it's an anomaly or something, but for us, no. We digest the same information these days, everyone, everywhere. The discipline in puppetry is always the same. The way you hold a puppet is the same ... the belief in the puppet is the same."³⁰ Again this statement emphasises the broad accessibility of puppetry, in all its forms, as a highly approachable conduit that extends beyond the local context and opens communication up to a much wider collective audience.

RE-ENACTING SILENT HISTORY

For the production of *Mwathirika*—meaning "victim" in Swahili—Papermoon primarily experimented with adapting traditional styles of Japanese puppetry. They drew specifically upon a variation of *bunraku* known as *kuruma ningyō*, meaning cart puppets. In *kuruma ningyō* the puppeteer is seated on a small box-cart with wheels, making it easier for them to control the large *bunraku* puppets. The puppeteer places the pointed heel of the puppet's shoe in between their toes, so as the puppeteer takes a step, so does the puppet. In *Mwathirika*, six of Papermoon's members take part in performing as masked actors or puppeteers. The Papermoon performers are each dressed in dark brown, the material on their sleeves and legs blend to a pale gold colour, creating an optical blur between where the puppeteer ends and the puppet begins. This is important as, unlike in *bunraku*, Papermoon's puppeteers do not hide their hands beneath the clothes of the puppets. Instead, the puppeteer would grasp the long wooden neck of the puppet with their right hand and operate the puppet's left hand with their own. In an interview with Umi Lestari, Sulistyani says, "we were adapting *bunraku* and *kuruma ningyo* from Japan because we see that there is an intimate feeling when playing with these puppets. The puppeteers can touch the puppet directly without using sticks like in *wayang*, or using strings, like with a marionette. This kind of intimacy is what we need to tell intimate and personal stories."³¹ This is important as the intimacy present between the performers and the puppets offers a nonverbal narrative in the absence of a scripted dialogue. On the topic of the puppet's muteness, Kenneth Gross states, "silence and speechlessness indeed seem natural to the puppet. This is partly because puppets are more like words themselves—abstract yet object-like things with an intractable life of their own—and so do not need words ... There is something in them of the voices of animals and children, the inarticulate sounds of joy, hunger, and rage, a gestural sound that keeps close to the motions and breath of the body."³² In *Mwathirika*, Papermoon combines the intimacy of *kuruma ningyō* and the puppet's propensity for silence, which together allows the puppet to produce a gestural "sound" that

is capable of transcending the boundaries of a singular, contextual language, to access a broader collective language.

Papermoon adopted a variety of other artistic devices to further communicate the narrative without contextualising the performance so much as to be inaccessible outside of Indonesia. This was achieved through the use of colour, symbols, and the names of the characters written in Swahili.³³ One of the main characters, Haki—meaning “right” in Swahili—lives in the greenhouse on the right of the stage. Haki’s name, Effendi confirms, is a nod to Haki’s conservative political preferences.³⁴ As the play continues, it becomes clear that the colour green is representative of those associated with or in favour of supporting the army’s agenda to combat communist groups. The colour red and the triangle appear again and again throughout the play as symbolic identifiers of members of the Indonesian Communist Party. Effendi mentions that his use of colour was an aesthetic device to help make it “easier for people to define the situation.”³⁵ After researching the history of the 1965–66 mass killings, he found that religion was often “used to provoke people against Communism ... and the symbol for Islam is green.”³⁶ By using the colours green and red, Effendi was able to develop an arbitrary link to those major political parties while also maintaining a certain degree of distance from the specifics of politics. The use of symbols throughout the play also works to make the performance more general and to expand its reach beyond Indonesia and towards a more diverse audience.

Baba—meaning “father” in Swahili—lives in the red house on the left. The houses are built like small tents. The bricks are made from scraps of material, different shades of red and orange or green and yellow layered in small pieces like thick dabs of paint. Each of the houses has one window and a door opening onto a small boardwalk with a short ladder leading to the ground. Baba has two sons, a four-year-old boy named Tupu—meaning “emptiness”—and his older brother Moyo—meaning “heart.” The boys carry red emergency whistles around their necks, their main form of communication. All other communication is made through movement and body language. Sometimes, the puppeteers laugh or exclaim on behalf of the puppets, but for the most part, the play is silent.

FIG. 3



Papermoon Puppet Theatre, *Mwathirika*. Installation shot of performance at Asia Society, New York, October 2012; Courtesy Papermoon Puppet Theatre.

The first half of the performance is cheerful. The boys play outside until their father returns home with a red balloon. The boys fight over it. A circus appears in their front yard, covering the stage with yellow and red confetti.

A performer wearing a clown mask hands out small red flags to members of the audience, he then jumps back onstage and hands a flag to Baba. The circus leaves and we are introduced to the Haki's daughter, Lacuna. She is a small, wide-eyed puppet in a wheelchair. Lacuna appears from within the green house. She holds in her hands a music box that plays part of an old French song on repeat. Sulistyani explains how the song represents the feeling of being lost—it is stuck on one section and never plays to completion.³⁷ Just like her name, Lacuna exists in the gap between the two neighbouring sides, red and green, left and right. While her father is very conservative, she cannot help but befriend her neighbours in the red house on the left.

FIG. 4



Papermoon Puppet Theatre, *Mwathirika*. Installation shot of performance at Asia Society, New York, October 2012; Courtesy Papermoon Puppet Theatre.

After the music box plays, the story grows darker. A dark-red light spills over the scene and another short film projects at the back of the stage. Masked figures loom over the streets and houses at night. They wear pointed pirate hats, folded like origami. Their mouths are curled into snarls with large, hooked beaks, and their eyes are large. Significantly, the members of the army are depicted with the compound eyes of an insect, as though they are all-seeing surveillance soldiers. By comparison, the defenders of the Indonesian Communist Party are depicted with just one eye. In a discussion following the 2012 performance of *Mwathirika* at Asia Society, New York, Effendi explained that the singular eye represents the one objective vision of the communists: revolution.³⁸ The projection shows the one-eyed communists—white static figures marked with a red triangle painted on their chests—as they are plucked from the crowd, one by one. The circus performer reappears on stage then quickly escapes out of sight. A desperate masked performer runs across the stage and paints a red triangle on the window of Baba's red house. All the while, as the masked performers manically run across the stage, sinister staccato music plays, cut through by the deep booms of the bass. The music is reminiscent of *gamelan* instruments, xylophones, gongs, and chimes—but is sharper, more metallic and abrasive, instilling a sense of fear and intrusion.

The red-light fades and the music trickles to a quiet creep. Baba appears in his window and checks the street, not yet noticing the red triangle painted on his window. The next morning Haki appears and begins sweeping up the mess of confetti left out on the street. He notices the red mark on Baba's window. When Baba appears, Haki quickly begins to back away and disappears into his green house, frightened to be caught in contact with his neighbour. Baba then notices the mark on his window. Haki lurks by

the corner of his house and continues to sweep as though minding his own business, but he continues to nervously glance at Baba's house and his tainted window. A masked performer enters the stage, holding a rifle and wearing a green pointed hat. He checks the mark on Baba's window and waves his arm at another soldier off stage to call him over. They surround Baba and begin to escort him away until the sound of whistles is heard off stage. Baba's sons, Tupu and Moyo, march onto the stage blasting their whistles unaware this would be the last time they would see their father. Baba gestures goodbye and they wave to him in a slow movement that could only be interpreted as confusion.

The stage is dark except for a low red light illuminating the red house. The screen behind the stage shows a tally of the days the boys have spent alone without their father. Marianna Lis describes the temporal effect of this artistic device: "at a certain moment, the whole stage seems to be filled with marks symbolizing the flow of days, months and years, as well as millions of others, waiting for their relatives to come back, as indefinite imprisonment without trial was the norm."³⁹ Lis alludes to the collective suffering portrayed by the two young puppets. They are at once performing as individual characters orphaned by the loss of their father and representative of the very real victims and survivors of violence and suffering. The reality of their circumstance sinks in when we catch a glimpse of their days spent catching frogs to eat. Tupu groans and clutches his stomach, eventually refusing to eat. The children huddle together behind a low yellow light, like the glow of a fire, and four puppeteers group behind them, squatting down with their heads hung like ghostly spirits as if to protect the boys. Slowly the puppeteers stand and hold the boys in their arms. Tupu and Moyo's chests rise and fall as one with the minute movements of breath. This moment of intimacy between the puppeteers and their puppets has a curious effect, almost granting the puppets an element of self-awareness. The puppets appear more real, more tangible than the ghostly group of puppeteers behind them. In this instant they are able to signify a broader, human state of suffering that transcends the individual experience of trauma. A clock ticks and the stage falls dark.

FIG. 5



Papermoon Puppet Theatre, *Mwathirika*. Installation shot of performance at Asia Society, New York, October 2012; Courtesy Papermoon Puppet Theatre.

Finally, Moyo searches for his father, leaving Tupu alone in the house. Tupu slumps down on the deck, quietly blowing his red whistle, deflated. A masked performer carries a tall contraption on stage. He pulls small white figures marked with triangles from a bucket, lines them up at the top of the horizontal plank, and then swipes his arm sharp across the contraption, releasing the top plank. The figures fall to the ground, executed. The streets, now dark, are filled with the low howl of wind as performers creep past, seated on small wooden box crates with wheels. They are not accompanied by puppets; instead, their arms hang low and limp, rendered useless. Their legs reach out as they pull themselves slowly across the stage. Like Death, they stop and collect the fallen white figures. Tupu tries to grab their attention, but it is as though he is trying to reach across worlds to contact the dead. Silenced by violent political upheaval, Tupu appears unable to communicate his experience and incapable of accessing the in-between world of puppets and ghosts.

Tupu's young neighbour Lacuna appears, still carrying her broken music box. She leaves it with Tupu as he continues to blow his whistle. His head shakes and quivers as his puppeteer picks him up and caresses him in their arms. Effendi explains how witnessing the role of the puppeteers on stage was critical to encouraging audiences to relate to the puppets.⁴⁰

Witnessing the level of closeness between the puppeteers and their puppets on stage allows audiences to empathise and grasp a sense of the puppet's fragility. Lacuna returns to find her music box abandoned and Tupu's hat and whistle left on the ground. Soldiers march in the background, and the music box plays as the stage falls dark. A low spotlight reveals Lacuna's wheelchair abandoned and turned on its side. After the performance for Asia Society in New York in 2012, an audience member questioned why the performance ended in despair rather than hope. Sulistyani explained how the ending indicates that the process of healing in the aftermath of the genocide is still incomplete. She says it is still difficult to access information, and the victim count continues to rise with new generations being born into systems that are the product of the genocide.⁴¹

INCOMPLETE ENDINGS

While Papermoon's message is primarily that of unresolved healing, perhaps what is more powerful to *Mwathirika's* ending is the phenomenon of witnessing and believing in the life and death of a puppet. Puppets, of course, cannot live or die, but they are still capable of exhibiting the trauma of death and loss, just as they are capable of exhibiting breath and life. Gross explains the curious nature of puppets in death, stating, "still, one wants to ask—keeping one's mind on the puppet—what kind of death can these things have, after all, that are never really alive, insentient things both hard and fragile? Their power to survive is not that of perfect substances such as gold or diamonds, but of material things that are always liable to be broken, abandoned, dismembered, repaired, and reused, undergoing the most unpredictable of metamorphoses."⁴² Gross parallels the puppet's relationship with survival to that of material things that inevitably decay. Puppets exist somewhere between life and death, yet their expression of life and death fills onlookers with a sense of awe and despair. Gross continues, "I am still not certain what it is that survives *in* the puppet, what spirit or what forms of possibility preserve themselves along with the material substance that shapes the puppet. Its hunger is not entirely a human hunger. The one thing that seems clear is that there is uncanny force inherent in the very poverty and transformability of the puppet, in how readily it offers itself to use, offers itself for a dangerous relation to the world."⁴³ Here Gross alludes to the volatile nature of puppets in their "dangerous relation to the world." Perhaps, by this, Gross means to draw our attention to the frighteningly autonomous nature of puppets in a way that causes us to wonder how we involuntarily project sentience onto them. This leads us to question what puppets are capable of, particularly when part of their creation and animation appears out of our control. For this reason, puppets cause a deep self-reflexivity, which is also precisely what Papermoon's puppets provide. Following the production of *Mwathirika*, the puppets were toured in exhibitions. Many people who had seen the play were mesmerised by the concept of meeting the puppets.⁴⁴ It was as though they were able to make contact with the ghosts of their characters, whether or not their ghosts remained as victims of genocide or were able to transcend this context to represent a broader collective trauma. For puppets are indeed creatures of trauma with their fragile and involuntary quivering, sudden lifelessness and their uncanny ability to inherit all manner of personalities and behaviours.

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