

## Row: a thinkivist art intervention\*

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**Abstract:** *Row* art project by Ozhopé collective consists of performances and temporary sculptures with dugout canoes used by fishers on the shores of Lake Malawi. The sculptures and performances feature the ephemeral, play, bricolage, and site-specificity to engage the lake as a space for contesting extractivism, and for dealing with issues of the ecosystem. Using the lens of *racial capitalocene*, *Row* plays with the ongoing wrangles around Lake Malawi, fuelled by the spectre of oil speculation on the lake. Through temporary sculptures the work seeks to read the dugout canoe as text by focusing on the sedimentation of paint, tin, plastic and tar on the canoe's body as traces of the histories of its transformation. The dugout canoe is considered an artefact of contemporaneity on which can be read narratives of biography, aid, trade, and capitalist extractivism and the ecosystem. Besides racial capitalocene, *thinkivism* and *biopolitical collectivism* underpin Ozhopé's subject-centred, collaborative production.

**Keywords:** Dugout canoe, Lake Malawi, Thinkivism, Biopolitical Collectivism, Patois Bourgeoisie, Extractivism, Racial Capitalocene

\**Row* is funded by Virginia Commonwealth University.

### Introduction

*Row* is an ongoing series of site-specific art projects created from January 2017 on different parts of the shores of Lake Malawi. The project, which features sculpture, photography and performance, is created by the Ozhopé collective in collaboration with fishing communities along the lakeshore (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> *Row* has diverse thematic

<sup>1</sup> The Ozhopé collective includes a photo and videographer, Tavwana Chirwa; a writer, Emmanuel Ngwira; and two visual artists, Paul Chimbwanya and Massa Lemu. The name (which derives from a Yao word “wosope” meaning “all of them”) was adopted by the

aspects but the dominant one concerns the issue of oil extraction in Lake Malawi. Various Malawian environmental activists, journalists, and academics have voiced concern over plans to drill for oil, and the direction the government has taken with the project. Many activists, both local and international, fear that the project may destroy “a pristine aquatic ecosystem” that “would take 700 years to replenish” (Hajat in Maeve *et al.* 2016). Besides the environmental danger, people are also collective when a boy of Mchemba Village in Mangochi mumbled “wosope” in reference to the group. The term thus resonates with the collectivist ethos of the group.

sceptical about the prospective gains of the project because of the stifling corrupt environment obtaining in the country at the moment. Already, there are fears that the government is not transparent enough regarding deals and contracts signed so far making this project not different from other mining projects (like the Kayelekela uranium mining project in the country's district of Karonga) which have brought very little benefit (if any at all) to the general public (see Oxfam 2017). *Row* was conceptualised to add a critical voice to this mentioned debate from an aesthetical-cultural perspective.

As a project, *Row* is driven by a three-pronged conceptual framework which draws on insights from “racial capitalocene”, “thinkivism” and “biopolitical collectivism”.

The concept of “racial capitalocene” sheds light on the politics of *Row* and the racial asymmetries that underpin extractive capitalism vis-a-vis livelihoods and the ecosystem in Malawi. The *Row* project involves the creation of life-affirming art influenced by everyday practices of those threatened by the ravages of capitalist extractivism. In this regard, the essay shows, *Row* is an anti-capitalist intervention through artistic research, collaboration<sup>2</sup> and activism (or rather “thinkivism”, to borrow from Kayla Anderson [2015]). Subject-centred collectivist art production, or what we call biopolitical collectivism, informs *Row*. Through biopolitical collectivist art production, the project points to imagined

<sup>2</sup> We have extended this collaborative ethos in the writing of this essay.



Figure 1. Members of the fishing community of Senga Bay, Salima working with Ozhopé. 2018. Courtesy of Ozhopé.

possibilities suggested in the creativity of those at the margins of an unequal globalisation. The essay firstly outlines the politics stimulating the *Row* project. Thereafter, it describes the artistic processes involved in *Row* focussing on four artworks titled “Wake”, “Row”, “Loud mouth”, and “Catch”. Lastly, the essay examines thinkivism and biopolitical collectivism as the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning the aesthetics of Ozhopé.

### Dugout Canoe as Contemporary Artefact

The dugout canoe, which is made by hollowing out a single tree trunk, is an important object among the people living along the shore of Lake Malawi. From time immemorial, the dugout has been used as a vessel for fishing and for the transportation of people and goods. At the moment, the dugout is on the verge of disappearance as it is being replaced by the faster, safer, capacious, and therefore more profitable motor boats. In *Row*, the dugout canoe becomes a complex sculptural object upon which the aesthetic, poetic, and conceptual elements of the art project are hinged. It is deployed as a vessel with which to make discursive journeys into historical-cultural transformation, global capitalism, and the ecosystem.

*Row* is not the first Malawian art project to feature the canoe as a central motif. Examples of paintings, photographic images and sculptural objects abound

of the canoe represented in its various manifestations. The canoe has also been featured in a number of novels and films. However, rather than represent the canoe, *Row* presents it in its physicality as the locus of meaning. Through diverse artistic means, *Row* focuses on the aesthetic transformations of the dugout canoe due to its long exposure to the elements and also due to repair. In time, the rotting canoe accumulates thick layers of paint, tar, felt, metal, nails, and plastic in repair processes. These various materials, which are used to seal and hold together the rotting canoe, eventually seem to almost replace the wood. Most importantly the sedimentation of various recycled materials represents the depositing on the body of the canoe of various histories of transformation that turn it into an archive of sorts. The diverse materials create variegated textures on the skin of the canoe, while also making it texturally layered (see Figures 2 and 3).

Perhaps, Renu Bora’s (1997) concept of “texxture”, which is contrasted to “texture” in the ordinary sense, captures the complex nature of the surfaces of the dugouts. Bora defines “texxture” as “the stuffness of material structure” (Bora 1997: 99). As Eve Sedgwick notes, texxture “is dense with offered information about how, substantively, historically, materially, it came into being. A brick or metal-work pot that still bears the scars and uneven sheen of its making would exemplify texxture in this sense” (Sedgwick 2003: 14). In the case of the dugout, USAID oil tin cans, for example, signify the politics of humanitarian aid that tremendously

shape Malawi's economy;<sup>3</sup> vegetable oil jelly cans imported from Mozambique speak to dynamics of cross-border trade; the tar made from burnt rubber tires, and reused felt from Chiperoni blankets by a colonial Italian blanket maker point to asymmetrical globalisation and the politics of make-do. Sometimes the owners of the canoes paint their names and other information on the canoes such as proverbs and sayings which mark their thoughts, wishes, and aspirations. This information adds a textual layer to the canoe, turning it into a thick text, a complex artefact of contemporaneity on which personal histories can also be read personal histories. The dugout canoe thus transforms into something beautifully textural and richly textual. However, while these various materials add beauty and colour, *Row* is not a fetishisation of the canoe. From a materialist perspective, these different surfaces open ways of reading histories, economies, and ecologies that the different commodity products bring onto the body of the canoe.

On the dugout are thus sedimented narratives about the transformation of Malawian societies from pre-industrial to post-industrial, from pre-colonial to neocolonial. *Row* seeks to mine these narratives in art making processes that centralise collaboration, play, bricolage and reuse. Collaboration and collective production are central in the art making process, involving not only the professional

photographer, writer, and artists of Ozhopé, but also the local fishermen and women.<sup>4</sup> Site-specificity and collective production with the local fishers hinges the work in the locales in which it is made. But most importantly, through collaborative production, the creative processes involved in the project provide a forum for debates on issues around art, fishing, and the consequences of capitalist oil extraction in the freshwater body.

*Row* is a double entendre referring to row as "paddle", and "wrangle" to gesture towards both the movement of the canoe on the waters of the lake and the disputes caused by the oil project. Besides the earlier noted disagreements between local activists and the government, oil prospects on Lake Malawi have rekindled a border dispute that may compromise peaceful relations between Malawi and its northern neighbour, Tanzania, who claims part of the lake earmarked for oil drilling. Landlocked Malawi shares maritime borders with Tanzania in the north. While the people of Malawi and Tanzania have shared the lake for ages through fishing, transport and recreation, the two countries have been in an on-and-off dispute over ownership of the northern part of Lake Malawi since 1967. In fact, just as the boundaries that demarcate these present-day African countries, the wrangle is also a

<sup>3</sup> The relationship between aid, skewed trade relationships and their negative effects on the economy on the African continent has been dealt with in Dambisa Moyo's (2009) book *Dead Aid: Why Aid is Not Working and how There is Better Way for Africa*.

<sup>4</sup> Firstly, contact was made with community leaders asking for permission to work in their area. Dugouts had to be secured, some were donated others bought. Participation was mainly voluntary even though in some instance a token of appreciation was offered in the form of a shared plate of food or money. Since the art production sessions were hugely informal, many participants joined in the work out of their own interest and curiosity.

colonial inheritance. According to Malawi, the boundary is the shoreline of Lake Malawi as established by Article 1(2) of the 1890 Anglo-German Treaty and therefore claims that the entire lake belongs to Malawi. On the contrary, Tanzania claims that the boundary is the median line of the lake based on principles of customary international law (IBRU Center for Border research 2017). This dispute was reignited in 2012 with the exploration for oil, particularly with the speculation of oil and gas reserves in the northern part of the lake. As of July 2018, mediation talks that were suggested to resolve the dispute had not yet to taken place. Meanwhile, the Malawi government granted licences to several companies to explore for oil across the six blocks in the country. At the moment, there is no meaningful update on the project compounding the earlier mentioned air of mistrust around the project (Jere 2018).

Some scholars reckon that Malawi's internal peace could also be at stake. For example, Malawian Law Professor Danwood Chirwa (2017) has argued that if not handled carefully, oil drilling in Lake Malawi poses a threat to the stability of the country. Pointing at experiences elsewhere on the continent, Chirwa observes that

*“The oil resource in Africa is associated with the notion of the oil curse for a good reason. In most African countries where oil has been discovered and exploited, oil has been the major cause of internal conflict, political instability, endemic corruption and general economic malaise. Far from providing the impetus for development for local communities and their*

*countries, oil exploitation in Africa has been linked with environmental pollution and the marginalisation of the communities located where oil extraction and related activities take place.”*

Row reiterates Professor Chirwa's warning that “without both a sound policy and suitable enabling legislation, Malawi is embarking on an oil exploitation path that predictably leads to the oil curse” (ibid). Examples abound on the African continent where oil extraction ventures have been followed by such curses. The most notorious ones include oil rich Cabinda in Angola and Niger Delta in Nigeria which have been marred by violence due to corruption and “unfair sharing of oil revenue, unemployment, and the destruction of the living and productive environment” (Barnes 2004). Recently, Mozambique has seen a new spate of violence as an Islamic terrorist group called *Al Sunnah wa Jama'ah* (Arabic for “people of the Sunnah community”) tightens its grip on the oil rich Cabo Delgado province in the northern part of the country (Morier-Genoud 2018). The socio-political causes of this “oil curse” need to be taken into account (Clarke 2008). As demonstrated below, this “oil curse” is not due to unfathomable mysterious phenomena but can be attributed to environmental racism and greed which deems certain lives and ecosystems “cheap” and disposable.

## **Row and “Racial Capitalocene”**

The concept of “racial capitalocene”, which can be defined as “racialised environmental politics,” sheds light on how minorities, people of colour and those living in the Global South – who have historically been deemed less than human and therefore disposable – bear the brunt of a violent and environmentally destructive racial capitalism (Vergès 2017: 74). The notion of “racial capitalocene” critiques the concept of the Anthropocene as a totalising theory to account for the dynamics of race, gender, class, and colonialism in climate change. The anthropocene was conceptualised as a geological term by the Dutch chemist Paul Crutzen and American geochemist Eugene Stoermer to describe the present era of “the human dominance of biological, chemical and geological processes on earth” (quoted in Vergès 2017: 74). However, sociologists, postcolonial and decolonial thinkers prefer the concept of racial capitalocene introduced to critique the Western-centric biases of the concept of anthropocene and to highlight the importance of capitalism and race in issues of world-ecology. For instance, for Argentine decolonial thinker Walter Mignolo, anthropocene is “nothing other than a scientific narrative fiction of the unilineal universal “history” of humankind” (Mignolo & Walsh 2018, 117). While the anthropocene perpetuates Euro-modernity’s age-old fictions of universalism, and faults humanity in general for climate change, racial capitalocene recognises that the impact of the imperialist Global North on the environment is far much greater than that of the Global South.

Moreover, those who benefit from the economies of capitalist extraction – the rich whites of the Global North – are the last to feel the negative impact of capitalism on the environment. Thus, in racial capitalocene “environmental racism becomes a site of struggle” (Vergès 2017: 72).

Racial capitalocene also sheds light on the dynamics of gender imbalances and sexism in extractivism. In the patriarchal setup where men dominate in decision-making, women are sidelined and are the last to be consulted on political and socio-economic issues. Therefore, in case of oil spillage in Lake Malawi, women, who are caregivers and who have depended on the lake for domestic use, would suffer the most. As has happened in Mwabulambo in Karonga, Malawi, where water pipes were destroyed and rivers and wells were contaminated by coal mining by Eland mining company, women and girls would have to travel long distances to fetch clean drinking water. As the Human Rights Watch warns, this “can expose women and girls to danger and leaves them with less time to attend school, earn money, or simply to rest” (Human Rights Watch 2016a: 65). Women and children, who are the last to migrate, would also suffer the most due to exposure to health risks from spillages. Racial capitalocene thus reveals the racism and sexism of profit-driven, neoliberal, multinational corporations, and the disregard that they, in collusion with corrupt postcolonial elites, have for black lives. This disdain for lives is behind the devastation wrought on the people of Cabinda in Angola, Niger delta in Nigeria, and Kayelekela and Mwabulambo in Karonga, Malawi. It is also evidenced in

the drive to drill for oil in the fragile waters of Lake Malawi. *Row* picks on these issues to make a statement using the dugout canoe on the marginalisation and treatment of local communities as expendables in the oil project. We are interested in the hierarchies of power that play out in the oil project and the position local Malawian communities occupy in that hierarchy and how these communities respond to their marginalisation.

### **Row as “thinkivist” intervention**

In a departure from traditional activist strategies, *Row* takes an approach that seeks to engage audiences in creative thinking (and making) regarding the dangers posed by the oil project. In her article “Ethics, Ecology, and the Future: Art and Design Face the Anthropocene”, Kayla Anderson (2015) discusses how “critical, conceptual and speculative” artworks can be useful in addressing problems faced by humanity. She concludes that “art initiatives that stimulate critical thinking rather than simulate action have the potential to be the most constructive” (Anderson 2015: 339). Such work dwells much on “propositions rather than solutions” and may be considered “*thinkivist* as opposed to activist” – art that “depicts ‘movements of mind’ rather than calls to action” (Anderson 2015, 339; 342). Such work does not “indulge in easy solutions but engages radical imaginings: inviting us to re-envision our development ... our political and social structures, and our relation to others in a broader ecology” (ibid: 346). This is precisely what

*Row* endeavours to achieve through the collaborative approach to art production as well as the work that is produced.

In “Wake” (Figure 2), a canoe whose wooden body has been completely covered by plastic recycled from yellow jelly cans through repetitive repair is turned into sculpture by attaching plastic plates and cork for fish nets. While the cork is spread out in a net that covers the mouth of the canoe, the plastic plates are tied and spread on each side of the canoe. The plates seek to foreground the canoe as vessel, both physically – as carrier of goods, and metaphorically – as carrier of poetic meanings, and also to represent the threatened households that depend on the lake. In “Wake”, the abandoned dugout is transformed sculpturally into a colourful temporary monument – or, an “unmonument” – to draw attention to issues of the ecologies and economies of fishing in which the canoe is vital. Thus transformed, both by time and by artistic intervention, the canoe, as an object on the verge of disappearance, has been documented for posterity.

The monumentalised dugout is a “thinkivist” intervention which seeks to pose such critical questions as: What is the significance of the transformed canoe? In the wake of the spillages, what would be the destiny of the canoe? What would happen to livelihoods of communities which have depended on the lake for ages? Who would be responsible?

“Row” performance (Figure 4), features two men dressed in suits standing waist deep in the waters of the lake.<sup>5</sup> The men hit the water with canoe paddles in alternating

<sup>5</sup> See video at <https://vimeo.com/218473394>.



Figure 2. Ozhopé, "Wake", 2017. Canoe, plastic plates, cork, string. Courtesy of Ozhopé.



Figure 3. Canoe detail. Courtesy of Ozhopé.

strokes while uttering two Chichewa words *eya* (which translates as ‘yes’) and *ayi* (translating as ‘no’). The action goes on for a couple of minutes with growing intensity in voice and strokes. Playing with the common saying “to beat about the bush”, the performance re-enacts the dispute, local and international, ignited by Malawi’s oil plan. At the international level, the performance seeks to dramatise the earlier noted lake ownership dispute between Malawi and Tanzania with the two gentlemen representing officials from the two countries each arguing for their position.

At the local level, the performance brings to play the debate between government and activists. The two gentlemen therefore represent the two polarised views on the matter: on the one hand, there is the

government which sees benefit for the nation in the project and downplays any environmental disaster and, on the other hand, the environmental activists who see the project as an ecological disaster waiting to happen and whose impact will be more catastrophic in relation to the anticipated profits.

The fancy dress code and the actions of the two men wading in the water is absurd and at best ridiculous. What one reads from such is the fact that the debate on the lake is by ‘gentlemen’ in suits, whether this is at national or international level. Massa Lemu (2018) calls the besuited postcolonial African elite “the patois bourgeoisie”. According to Lemu, the patois bourgeoisie are the local agents of neocolonialism who collude with Western multinational corporations in the plunder



Figure 4. Ozhopé, “Row”, 2017. Performance with paddle. Courtesy of Ozhopé.

of African resources. The Malawian patois bourgeoisie have already shown how untrustworthy they can be with the way they handled coal mining in Mwabulambo or the Kayelekela Uranium Mining project in Karonga which has since been placed under “maintenance and care” due to collapsed uranium prices on the market. But as the 2017 Oxfam report notes, even when it was fully operational, there was very little financial benefit on the part of the Malawi government mainly due to corruption. All the Malawi citizens especially the “disposable” residents of Karonga gained from Kayelekela mining are polluted water sources and exposure to radioactive waste (see Chareyron 2015). Unfortunately, the oil story seems to follow a similar trajectory because “it is a story of secret oil contracts signed days before the 2014 elections where those representing the citizens of Malawi made the same mistakes of Kayelekela once again” (Oxfam 2017).

Ostensibly the local people who are likely going to be hugely affected by whatever project takes place on the lake are nowhere in the picture. Here the performance seeks to draw attention to the exclusion of the local people whose input is not valued.

The performances took place on the shore which is a public place for the people of the lake. The shore is many things: it is a place of both trade and recreation; it is also a place where people clean their utensils, clothes and bodies. Some shores are transitory places for travellers. Bringing the performances into such a space with different people mingling for different reasons made the work public, counter to the secrecy surrounding the oil deals, and afforded the Ozhopé collective diverse and

spontaneous reactions not just to the nature of the work itself but, most importantly, to some of the questions we raised.

The first iteration of the *Row* project was conducted in 2017 in Mchemba village in Mangochi district at the southernmost tip of the Lake. The second iteration was done in 2018 at Senga Bay, in Salima district in the central region of the Lake. Conducting artistic research in these different parts of the lake revealed to us the similarities and difference in fishing practices of the two regions. For instance, one predominant feature of the fishing communities of the central region is the traditional *Gule Wamkulu* mask or “the Big Dance” of the *Nyau* secret societies of the Chewa people, which we incorporated in the art projects as a politically loaded aesthetic device. “Loud Mouth” (Figure 5) is a performance featuring a red mask wearing a grey suit. In *Gule Wamkulu* lore, masks, which are beings from the spirit and animal world called *virombo*, are not created by the hand of man but rather “fished” from the lake or the river.

In the pantheon of *Gule Wamkulu* masks, the red mask called *Simoni* parodies the white man through the red face, long hair, mannerisms, and attire. Purportedly borrowing its name from the Biblical Simon Peter, *Simoni* is an example of masks that emerged at the intersection of indigenous culture, colonialism and Christianity. In “Loud Mouth”, the apparition is *Simoni* recently fished from the lake and cocooned in an upright canoe supported by paddles. This besuited and wildly gesticulating spectre thus represents the face of multinational corporations that pontificate about the economic benefits of

drilling but who do not have the welfare of the poor people at heart. “Loud mouth” is thus a bricolage which mixes elements from *Gule Wamkulu*, fishing, and aspects of Western modernity to comment on neocolonialism, greed and the racism that underpins capitalist extractivism.

“Catch” (Figure 6) imagines a post-apocalyptic scene in which six boys donning vintage Russian military gas masks tussle over an old dugout canoe in the muddy waters of the lake.<sup>6</sup> The kids drag to the shore this “catch” they have fished from the muddy depths of the lake. For the children of post-apocalyptic communities that have

<sup>6</sup>See video at <https://vimeo.com/253124864>

long forgotten the practice of fishing, the dugout is a curious object arousing wonder and puzzlement. A dugout canoe affixed with floats is an absurdity considering that the canoe does not need floats to stay buoyant. Figures in vintage military gas masks in the waters of Lake Malawi are also a surreal spectacle. The image created is therefore ominous - some dark foreboding hovers on the horizon of the lake. As a performance, “Catch” contemplates upon this ominous presence. It is a performance which portends a possible singular event in the gloomy future brought forth by greed.



Figure 5. Ozhopé, “Loud mouth”, 2018. Performance with mask and canoe. Courtesy of Ozhopé.



Figure 6, Ozhopé, “Catch”, 2018. Performance with six children, gas masks, canoe and floats. Courtesy of Ozhopé.

## Reflections on life-affirming collective production

In contexts where racial capitalism colludes with corrupt postcolonial states in the destruction of the environment and the immiseration of multitudes, it is imperative to pay attention to how the poor resist dispossession. In *Row*, working with the fishers drew our attention to the communitarian ethos at the heart of their everyday practices, such as village assemblies, in the actual fishing, in hauling fish laden nets to the shore, and in maintaining the boats. Communitarity also manifested through eating together, in sharing the staple meal of *nsima* and roast fish. Even in stormy weather, when lives were threatened, collective organisation was instrumental to

rescue stranded fishermen on the hostile waters. What Lemu (2017) calls “biopolitical collectivism” in contemporary African art, which shuns individualist production of commodity art objects for collectivist subject empowerment, sheds light on the collectivism that underpin *Row*. Influenced by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s Foucauldian theorisation of biopolitics as life-affirming practices that resist capitalist biopower, Lemu uses the term to describe forms of socially engaged African art collectivism such as Gugulective and iQhiya of South Africa, and Huit Facettes of Senegal which are critical of global capitalism and seek to empower subjectivities (Hardt & Negri 2000). The term “biopolitical” seeks to highlight the people-centred, life-politics of the art which

challenges art that places primary value on disengaged, commodity art objects located in art galleries and museums. Rather than encountering a readymade, completed art object for contemplation, the audience/community participates in the art making and therefore meaning making processes.<sup>7</sup> Biopolitical collectivism as a form of life-promoting collectivism is thus crucial for appreciating the critical agency of political art in the contemporary neoliberal moment. In Walter Mignolo's (2018: 228) words

*“The alienation that Western knowledge created by conceptualising and celebrating competition and individualism (which destroys the social fabric), has to be overcome by visions and conceptions of communal praxis of living that puts love and care as the final destiny of the human species and our relations with the living universe (including planet earth).”*

In a context of intensified alienation, dispossession, and destruction of the planet, Ozhopé adopts biopolitical collectivism to foster communities for sharing and creative thinking together. Communal thinking and creating is exemplified in collective artistic production. But it also features in such acts as the sharing of a plate of fish whereby a mundane act of bodily sustenance becomes

an opportunity for intellectual nourishment (Figure 7). Since what we term biopolitical art shifts the emphasis from contemplative objects to art-making processes and the interhuman relationships involved therein, even mundane acts such as eating together are meaningful creative instances. Rather than compartmentalizing production and valorising certain aspects of the process at the expense of others, which is the norm in gallery-bound art practices that conceal process and human interaction, in *Row* we seek to de-hierarchise the stages of production. Inspired by such conversations, fishers, most of whom were experiencing conceptual art for the first time, would exclaim “I have never seen anything like that in my life!” Later, in moments of clarity, in conversations where art was a vessel with which to venture into sociopolitical issues, this would be followed by “I never looked at it that way!” In the process, we, artists from the city, also learned so much about fishing. Thus, *Row*, as biopolitical collectivist and thinkivist production, provides opportunities for sharing, being, doing, and thinking together. It needs to be mentioned that the people expressed mixed feelings regarding oil drilling in the lake. Some fishers were allured by the prospects of new jobs promised by the oil industry. Others, including Chief Machelamba of Mangochi, recognised the dangers that this posed to the ecosystem and to the cultural practices of the people of the lakeshore.

<sup>7</sup> Participation in the art making processes was on voluntary basis. There were few locals who we used as our contacts and who helped us source the canoes to work with. To these contacts, it was explained clearly and carefully what our intentions were and that they were free to participate or not. Since the art production sessions were hugely informal and spontaneous, many participants joined in the work out of their own interest and curiosity. Some participants gave us the canoes for free but mostly we had to buy the canoes from the owners, and after use the canoes were left on the shore or given back to the community to use as firewood.



Figure 7. Members of Ozhopé sharing a meal of *nsima* and roast fish. Courtesy of Ozhopé.

## Conclusion

The marginalised and excluded of the world market engage in alternative economies of resistance and existence that involve collaboration, creativity, and making-do. These activities have tremendously shaped the aesthetic vocabulary of the Ozhopé collective which adopts the tactics of collaboration, bricolage and play in life-promoting art practices set in capitalism's margins. Art is created in solidarity with the marginalised in anti-capitalist projects that imagine other modes of being. By making collaborative site-specific work whose centre of meaning making resides in the production processes and exchanges

that occur at the site of production rather than in the final product, Ozhopé promotes a thinkivist and biopolitical aesthetics which strives for self-empowerment. This is not to say that there are no objects produced in projects such as *Row*. As we have seen, the canoe is an object of central importance. However, the disused canoe is briefly turned into a sculptural object, it is documented, and is thereafter left on the shore to continue its disintegration process or turned into firewood.

As a thinkivist endeavour, *Row* aims to inspire a new kind of thinking. The project allows the fishers new ways of imagining their relationship with the lake and the threats, both local and otherwise, that

militate against such a bond. It inspires in the artists new ways of creative thinking in terms of community engagement in the face racial extractivism. In Ozhope's multi-disciplinary aesthetics self-empowerment is central in interventions and resistance against capitalist dispossession and dehumanisation. While multi-disciplinary oriented art practices such as these exist elsewhere on the continent, for example in the case of Gugulective or iQhiya mentioned above, such forms of art are not yet common in Malawi. Ozhope therefore seeks, not only to use art to tackle social issues, but also to expand the vocabulary of art-making in Malawi. We are not offering a template for art-making – different circumstances will offer different challenges. We only seek to inspire and encourage fellow Malawian artists to seek new and innovative modes of artistic expression.

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