

AFRICAN CITIES READER

A creation of Chimurenga and the African Centre for Cities

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Ntone Edjabe and Edgar Pieterse (editors)
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P.O. Box 15117
Vlaeberg, 8018
South Africa
Tel: +27 (21) 422 4168

Email: chimurenga@panafrican.co.za

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Preface

PICK UP any academic or popular publication that deals with urban life in Africa and be prepared to be overrun by caricature, hyperbole, stereotypes and moralistic hogwash. Urban Africans are either bravely en route to empowering themselves to attain sustainable livelihoods or the debased perpetrators of the most unimaginable acts of misanthropy. Explanations for these one-dimensional distortions vary from historical dependency perspectives, to the vagaries of the peddlers of neoliberal globalisation agendas, or to the glorious agency of dignified actors who persist with their backs straight, chin up despite the cruelties bestowed by governmental neglect and economic malice. Amidst these registers it is almost impossible to get any meaningful purchase on what is actually going on in the vibrant markets, streets, pavements, taxi ranks, hotel lobbies, drinking halls, clubs, bedrooms, rooftops, gardens, dump sites, beach fronts, river edges, cemeteries, garages, basements, and other liminal spaces of daily life and the imaginary.

The *African Cities Reader* seeks to call this state of affairs to order. We are not interested in comprehensive explanations or answers. Instead, we are attracted to an aesthetic agenda that can capture something about the stylisation of thought and practice as it emerges from the complex indeterminacies of city-making, city-burning and city-dreaming. There is such an overproduction of thought, intention, agendas and relations in African cities that all discursive accounts that seek to capture this mobile intensity come up short. The *African Cities Reader* cannot solve this epistemic problem, but it can provide one forum where new voices and perspectives that respect this complexity can be served up. The result is exhilarating.

What follows is a wide-ranging ensemble of genres, perspectives, and forms of representation that provide crucial glimpses into how African identities and spatialities are being crafted at a moment when both urban theory and policy is experiencing its worst existential crisis. Again, in this volume there are no ready-made “solutions” but rather a confirmation of the multifaceted and expansive repertoires of city-making amidst profound neglect that demands fresh readings, interpretations, dreams and desires for sense-making. We hope this assemblage and juxtaposition of the emergent African city in all of its diasporic richness will enrich a larger moment in which Africans take responsibility for their own representations, on their own terms, and in the process further densify *cityness*, Africa-style.

This volume results from an alliance between Chimurenga Magazine and the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town. The collaboration is borne out of a shared commitment to new forms of autonomous knowledge production and intellectual insurgency. The product of our collaboration is mainly financed by The Rockefeller Foundation and a related programme supported by the Africa Centre. The support and openness of these institutions is greatly appreciated. Most importantly, we want to express gratitude to the contributors who have made their creativity available for broader engagement. Enjoy the ride, argue with what follows and keep the debate burning. Africa’s cities certainly need more fire in the belly.

Ntone Edjabe and Edgar Pieterse

Lagos

A Pilgrimage in Notations

Chris Abani

IT BEGINS LIKE THIS.

In London, in a Turkish restaurant, peering into the thick sludge in the bottom of my coffee cup, nine years since I have been home, I say: I miss Lagos. The next day, my friend Safak Pavey sends me a poem she translated by Turkish poet Orhan Veli Kanik. It is titled, 'I Am Listening To Istanbul'. Here is the first stanza:

I am listening to Istanbul with my eyes closed
First a breeze is blowing
And leaves swaying
Slowly on the trees;
Far, far away the bells of the
Water carriers ringing,
I am listening to Istanbul with my eyes closed.

Years later, in another restaurant in downtown Los Angeles, over dinner in Little Tokyo, Gaby Jauregui tells me how much the Lagos I write about in my novel *GraceLand* makes her yearn for her Mexico City. In that moment I realise how much cities are not just geographical locations but psychic spaces of existential melancholy and desire. That we are always listening to the city inside us: Lagos-London-Istanbul-Los Angeles-Mexico City. There is only one city in the world and I guess Italo Calvino is right: it is an invisible city.

And yet these invisible cities of the melancholic soul are geographical places of real joy, of concrete despair and of inventiveness that people who live away from the urban will never fully understand. This is Lagos.

*

My first memory of Lagos is one I cannot trust. I was four, maybe five years old and my family, my mother and my four siblings, had just returned from London where we had fled in 1968, as the war in Nigeria raged for its second year.

Ikeja airport in 1970 had few amenities to offer us, particularly since my mother had been a vocal pro-Biafra activist in England, one of the many war wives who spoke up against the British government's support of the Nigerian side. We were held for questioning in a hot tin-roofed hangar for hours. This is only what I remember.

An okra and palm oil stew that nearly burned my lips off is my second memory of Lagos. It was 1980 and my mother, my sister and I were on our way to London. My first time since we had left after the Biafran war in 1970. Ten years. We were on our way to Lagos by car because the flight we were supposed to take from Enugu to Lagos had been cancelled – and then rebooked at twice the price to other passengers. So my brother had accompanied us by road and after an eight-hour trip in a nauseously hot taxi, we had stopped in Shagamu, fifty miles outside Lagos, for a roadside café lunch. Even then, Lagos had sprawled out to Shagamu.

My third memory of Lagos is about my Uncle William. I didn't know I had an Uncle William until he died when I was fifteen. Two men appeared on our doorstep claiming to come from my Uncle William's congregation. It turned out that having failed and left school in Germany and not returned to the village for my grandmother's funeral, William was exiled not just from the family, but also from the memory of the family. And yet he haunted it, from his small Santeria-based church in the worst ghetto of the city, Maroko.

It was in search of this uncle, this memory, this loss that I couldn't even shape my tongue around that I went to Lagos for the first time as an adult: hitchhiking alternately by train and lorry; a stupid but exhilarating journey. It was in Maroko that I found the Lagos inside me.

*

When we arrived in Lagos, by the tollgate out near Mile 12, the sign by the roadside simply said: This is Lagos.

Not welcome to, or enjoy your stay. I remember even then thinking it sounded like a warning. I may be lying, of course.

*

Somewhere in another Lagos slum, a child is peeping through a crack in the wooden wall of a shack built on stilts in a swamp. In the distance, a line of skyscrapers rise like the uneven heart of prayer.

*

There are more canals in this city than in Venice. Except here they are often unintentional. Gutters that have become waterways and lagoons fenced in by stilt homes or full of logs for a timber industry most of us don't know exists. All of it skated by canoes as slick as any dragonfly.

*

The two street children begging on the freeway take a break. Sitting in the middle meridian, they look like an old couple making do with a poor lunch as they wind down to death.

*

Christ Church Cathedral rises from the slump of land between the freeway and the sea and Balogun market, like Monet's study of Rouen Cathedral. In the shadow, in the motor park that hugs its façade is the best 'mama-put' food in Lagos. Its legend travels all the way across the country. The seasoned Lagosian gastronomes can be heard chanting their orders, haggling with the madam – *make sure you put plenty kpomo* – or – *no miss dat shaki. No, no, no. Dat other one.* There can be no sweeter music, no better choir. In the distance, bus conductors call like Vikings from the prows of their ships, testing the fog of exhaust fumes – *Obalande straight! Yaba no enter!*

*

In the shadow of highrises, behind the international money of Broad Street, the real Lagos spreads out like a mat of rusting rooftops.

*

In Ikoyi Bay, boats dot the sea, sails like lazy gulls catching the breeze. Across the bay, the millionaires' village that was once Maroko sits in a slight mist. I think it is the ghost of that lost place haunting the rich to distraction so that even their twelve-foot high walls, barbed razor wire or broken glass crowning them, or the searchlights, or the armed guards, cannot make their peace with the moans of a woman crying for a child crushed by the wheels of bulldozers. Or maybe it is just the wind sighing through palm-fronds.

*

Like in any world city, there are so few original inhabitants that they wear their Eko badges like honour.

*

If Lagos is a body, and the oil pipelines crisscrossing it are veins, then the inhabitants are vampires. This vampirism is new. It started slowly. Someone somewhere bored a hole into the pipelines to steal some oil – a drum here and there. Then it began to grow and the people like hungry mosquitoes began to drill more and more holes, taking greater and greater risks.

The city bled thick sweet crude into containers that were sold and resold and then the city rebelled and the veins, tapped too much, too quickly, too dangerously began to explode. Like a victim reclaiming its body from a deadly virus, the city began to kill its parasites, its succubae.

This is not a fairy tale. Thousands of Lagosians die annually.

This city must go on.

*

Badagry unfolds lazily into the sea, a stretch of land so beautiful that when the local king traded it in a bad treaty with the English, his regret named it: bad agree. Badagry. This is true. Lagos is a land of myth. It never existed before the naming.

*

There is nothing like Bar Beach on a Sunday afternoon. The sand is white, the diamond-shaped all-glass Bank building across the street reflects the water and makes you think it is a wave frozen in time. Children ride flea-infested horses, squealing with that childish delight that is a mix of fear and awe. Slow roasting lamb-suya blankets everything with desire. A cold Coca-Cola here tastes like everything the ads on TV promise – I shit you not.

In one corner, as though they stepped out of a Soyinka play, a gaggle of white-garbed members of the Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church dip themselves in the water, invoking the Virgin Mary and Yemeya in one breath.

Gleaming cars – BMWs, Lexus – line the waterfront, spilling out young people giddy with money and power and privilege and sunshine.

All of this belies the executions that used to happen here in the '70s. Families gathered to cheer the firecracker-shots from the firing squads dispensing with convicted robbers.

*

The complex network of spaghetti-bridges that make up the Berger-built freeways limns Lagos like the cosmopolitan whore that it is. Driving at night across them, you end up on Third Mainland Bridge and the dazzle of lights on the water is more breathtaking than anything you can imagine.

*

Lagos never sleeps. Ever. It stays awake long after New York has faded in a long drawn-out yawn, matched only by the vigil of Cairo. With a population of over 15 000 000 people, it is one of the largest cities in the world. On the Internet, the tourist board promises:

There is something for everyone in Lagos. If your interest is sport, we have it. Soccer (football), tennis, swimming, golf, sailing – all within easy access. If you enjoy volunteer work, it's here – International Literacy Group, the Motherless Babies Home, the Pacelli School for the Blind -- just to name a few opportunities. Perhaps you are a collector. You'll have plenty of chances to search for artifacts of

West Africa. Masks, trader beads, artwork, woodcarving, drums, fabrics, walking sticks. You can find it all in Lagos. Own your very own beach but on one of the local beaches. We have various clubs – both social and business – representing many nationalities. Have you ever wanted to go on a safari? Lagos is your gateway to East Africa. We offer culture in the MUSON (Musical Society of Nigeria) Centre, the German-sponsored Goethe Institute, and many other venues.

*

The way a man sits smoking on the hood of his burned-out Mercedes Benz it is clear he wants you to know that this is all temporary. He will be rich again. By his feet, a rat skulks for cover. In the street in front of him, dead rats thrown from houses litter the street like a fresh rash of dried leaves from fall.

*

In front of the National Theatre, shaped like an old Yoruba crown, the statue of Queen Amina of Zaria, on horseback, sword drawn, face pulled back in a snarl, reminds you that here women will not bow to men, I don't care what the propaganda says.

*

In Victoria Island, there are houses that even the richest people in the USA cannot imagine owning. In Ikoyi, the money is quieter: the thing here is not the house, it is the land and the fescue lawn and the trees and the quiet swish of water against a boat docked at the end of the garden.

The poor go out of their way to drive past them. Everyone can dream.

*

Underneath the government-sponsored billboard that says Keep Lagos Clean, a city of trash, like the work of a crazy artist, grows exponentially.

*

Even when under Abacha there were no stamps in the post office and almost no landlines, mobile phones and Blackberrys never stopped working, and online banking was never more than a click away. This is the thing here. With or without the government, life goes on and goes on well. Maybe in spite of the government.

*

Lagos is no place to be poor, my brother.

*

Even though the rich don't know it or see it from their helicopters and chauffeur-driven cars, for most of the poor, canoes and the waterways are perhaps the most popular means of travel. That and the rickety molue buses.

*

The sign over the entrance to the open-air market announces: Computer Mega City. This is no joke. There is everything here from a dot matrix printer and the house-sized Wang word processors of the '80s to the smallest newest Sony VAIO. In Lagos it is not about what is available, only about what you can afford.

*

The Hotel Intercontinental looks like something out of the Jetsons. It would be more at home in Las Vegas. Inside here, you could be in any city in the world.

In Idumota, the muezzin at the Central Mosque has to compete with the relentless car and bus horns, the call of people haggling, the scream of metal against metal and the hum of millions of people trying to get through a city too small for them.

And yet, hanging tremulously in the heat, there it is, that call to prayer. And all around, in the heart of the crowd, as though unseen snipers are picking them off, the faithful fall to the ground and begin praying. As though it is the most normal thing in the world, people, buses and cars thread around them.

*

Really? There is a large fountain in Tinubu Square?

*

The Lagos Marina looks like the New York skyline. Don't take my word for it. Check Google Images.

*

Far away from where the heart of the city is now, you can still find the slave jetty and the slave market. Don't be fooled. A lot of Lagosians got rich selling slaves. It was a trade, remember?

*

Today, in Los Angeles, on National Public Radio, I heard a programme that was expounding on the world-class gourmet restaurants of Lagos.

Later, as dusk falls over the city, listening to Fela Kuti on my iPod and drinking a soothing *latte*, I am listening to Lagos with my eyes closed.

*

I am listening to Lagos with my eyes closed.

The Colour of Night

Achal Prabhala

TRAVELLING TO JOHANNESBURG LAST YEAR, I made an unscheduled stopover in Nairobi. I was flying in from home, India, and had missed my connection. My interregnum lasted only 15 hours, but it felt interminable.

First, the frayed straps of my sandals gave out. Then I had to endure the company of some similarly stranded Indians. Gopal liked his Africans cussed and mocked, missing no opportunity to hurl insults at passing strangers. Cleverly, the insults were in Hindi, thus unintelligible to anyone but us. Bhavna supplied the obligatory giggle. “Ten years. Then, I leaving South Africa,” Gopal said, “It all going to dogs. Too many *blex*.” Bhavna grunted understandingly.

We arrived in Johannesburg at 3 am. After being mildly harassed by Immigration for entering the country barefoot, I exited, and nodded to the first taxi driver who caught my eye. As I followed him out, a Pakistani taxi driver, also competing for passengers, caught hold of me. “Don’t trust these people, they’ll rob you,” he said in Urdu. I pretended I didn’t understand him and carried on, though what I really wanted to do was stop, duck into a corner and quietly shoot myself.

By the next afternoon, all violent impulses had subsided. Walking the streets of Yeoville on a sunny summer afternoon has that effect. It’s the only place I know which affords a degree of racial anonymity. As much as I appreciate that progressive South African Indians have made my acceptance and entry into South Africa much easier, constantly belonging to a race is a bit of a strain.

In Yeoville, the man selling shoes is a Senegalese Christian, the cigarette stall next to him is manned by an Azerbaijani Muslim, and both of them are equally uncurious about my accent or my features -- an atmosphere that’s more up my street, and in fact, literally is.

And then there is the House of Tandoor. Its entrance on Rockey Street is innocuous and easily missed; once inside, the ground floor hosts remarkably filthy toilets and narrow iron steps that lead up to the main spot. It’s a small, crowded bar, with ample seating and dancing space, some pool tables, an indifferent kitchen and a really bad sound system that cranks out really good dancehall. Adding that healthy touch is a fruit shop in the middle of it all, run by a polite German youth who wears a permanently entranced smile.

Tandoor is open-air and a favourite spot is the area overlooking the lights and traffic of Rockey Street. The air is dense with dagga, desire and Caribbean dreams. I’ve met people from St Kitts, Soweto, Harare and Houghton. I’ve had free beers and free herbs thrust on me by strangers, and I’ve been sweet-talked by Joburg’s black gay hipsters and her weekend poets. The name, rather wonderfully, bears no relation to the space (Tandoori food went off the menu about the same time as the swish set went off Yeoville), and the only concession to theme is the spirit.

But in this city of the plastic fantastic, it is perhaps no surprise that the tentacles of thematic décor have gripped places as far afield as Soweto. The *New York Times* recently gushed over the Backroom (in Pimville), and its adjoining parking lot, replete with BMWs and Mercs. The Backroom, like Herman’s Place in Protea, is for oldies; the difference being that the Backroom wants you to show up in a suit and a Teutonic automobile, while Herman’s Place would be happy if you just showed up.

Neither place is as trendy as the Rock, a high-class watering hole in high-class Rockville. I was introduced to it many moons ago by Niq Mhlongo, whose literary career was born in neighbouring Tshiawelo, as was he. On Wednesday, Friday and Saturday nights, the Rock is packed tighter than a suburban train in Bombay, except that the ambience is better and the body odour nicer. Sure, the Rock has its fancy touches, like the ice embedded in the bar so that your beer stays cold, but it's a pretty basic place. The music, mainly kwaito and house, is freshly mixed and pumping, the sound system is excellent, and dancing is encouraged everywhere. And it really doesn't matter that I'm usually the only Indian in the place.

Sometimes in Soweto, it's quite amusing. I'm regularly assured when eating out that my food is halaal. It's well intentioned but bizarre, given that I am Hindu, a bit like me asking a Zulu adolescent from Durban if he enjoyed his circumcision ritual. Once I was introduced to a friend of Niq's, whose name, it turned out, was Nkululeko. I dropped my keys as he introduced himself, so I didn't hear what he said. I asked him if he could repeat his name. "Just call me Freedom," he replied, offended. I asked him if he could pronounce my name. He shook his head sullenly.

It's a simple truth: the more you hang around places where your race is scarce, the more natural it becomes. I haven't been to white clubs, possibly because I don't know what or where they are, but I have been to a so-called "coloured" nightclub – Cantina Tequila in Rosebank, which was more of a fightclub really, given the three brawls in 20 minutes.

There is no particular ideology at play here, just circumstance – and the fact that I have to go to places that accommodate my income.

The last time I went to the Rock was with Valentine Cascarino, the Cameroonian-born chronicler of Joburg's down and desperate. On our way back, we decided to stop in Hillbrow. Valentine was in the mood for "research". I was the sidekick.

First, the good news. There is at least one place in South Africa where non-racialism actually exists; where miscegenation is not only possible, it's the norm. The bad news: it's a strip-club in Hillbrow.

Hillbrow is a vivid, national hallucination; its racial oddities a distraction from the den-of-vice theme. Sex, beer and money collide at the Royal Park 'hotel', in an atmosphere that mimics Sandton City. Its ladies were out in full force, some of them dancing distractedly on stage, others circulating with nervous Indian and black college kids, and with what looked like a big group of white executives.

The considerably less spiffy Moulin Rouge wore a tired look. One of the sex workers was noticeably Indian, and I could hear her loudly abusing an overzealous client in Zulu. It was 2 am, and even the working girls just wanted to go to sleep. Two of them, in particular, wanted to go to sleep with us. They came up to talk, friendly and shy, "just to meet". An Indian man, chewing a toothpick and playing pool, looked up at me and drew a finger across his throat. "You're not from here. Be careful who you are with." He cast a sinister glance sideways.

I was puzzled, and looked around in confusion until I realised he was warning me about Valentine. I shook my head miserably and Valentine laughed out loud. But as we drove off into a rainy night, the comic, disquieting honesty of that moment lingered.

Blood Money

A Joburg Chronicle

Valentine Cascarino

I

IN NIGERIA THEY HAVE A SAYING: 'He who ventures into the land of the dead must be ready to dance with night spirits.' It's a phrase that seems custom-made for Hillbrow's overcast drug underworld.

And any valiant heart that has dared to linger along this Joburg inner-city slum's tapered thoroughfares after 10 pm, especially over weekends, would agree that this dance could have intricate — and often fatal — choreographies.

As I cruise along Louis Botha Avenue into Empire Road, I wonder what the many people do who hang out next to the closed-down Mimosa Hotel and the nearby petrol station.

Adorned in sterling bling-bling that could bring eyesight to the blind, I can't help noticing them. They're mostly garbed in imported fancy blue jeans, tight-fitting silk shirts to display their muscles and scare off smash-and-grab thugs, and heavy Caterpillar boots or sparkling white Puma, Adidas or Nike takkies.

To round it off, they're usually leaning against something, feet and hands crossed, eyes scanning their environment as they speak in loud voices.

Along Jagger Street, a rifle shot away from the Mimosa Hotel, are more buildings haunted by those night spirits. Down Bantek Street, close to Louis Botha, is the Safari Hotel. Night spirits reign supreme outside its curio doors. I continue down Twist, across Van der Merwe, passing an endless succession of closed-down residential hotels and high-rise apartment buildings. We all know who the area boys are around here.

Down Pretoria Street, then east into Abel, past Tudhope to the intersection with Lily; around the corner into Soper. The pattern continues: hotels and apartment buildings that are 'closed' yet occupied, like many other buildings in the area, mostly by Nigerians.

The truth is, drug peddlers have mapped out Hillbrow. It's theirs and they won't be leaving it anytime soon. Many of the buildings are owned by Nigerian drug barons and they let them out only to pushers, pimps and prostitutes. Shutting down the buildings won't solve anything. Ask the city council and they'll agree. The drug peddlers mutate.

I had met a Nigerian after Mass at the Catholic Cathedral of Christ the King, in Doornfontein, and asked if he could connect me with a drug peddler I could spend a night with to see how business is done.

The Nigerian goes as James, although his real name is Iyke. He owns a TV repair shop from which he earns his keep — legit, or so he says. After arriving in South Africa in 1995 he peddled drugs at the notorious Statesman Hotel on Joel Street, made a killing — and decided to go straight.

Many of his compatriots hankered after straight lives too but, alas, they weren't smart enough to dance with spirits. Their remains now lie in some cemetery, never to see home again. Others are stuck deep inside Diepkloof prison.

James's contact is Emmanuel, who sells rice and stew next to the Mimosa Hotel. Everyone's scared of being set up, so we slate a rendezvous at Emmanuel's place. James tells me we're down for Wednesday 7 pm.

Wednesday night. Emmanuel — real name Chibike — lives in a flat in the Park Lane Hotel. He used his South African girlfriend's ID to get the place after the hotel's management purged the Nigerians a few years ago, blaming them for the building's poor hygiene. The management also claimed that the cops had repeatedly broken down the door to look for drug dealers — all at the expense of the hotel.

Inside his bachelor flat on the seventh floor, Chibike kills the lights and lights a candle. He opens the drawer of a small table and pulls out a sleek 9 mm pistol. My heart starts dancing on my tongue. I am alone; Iyke left shortly after introducing me to Chibike.

"Do you want to bicom a huzzuler, my men?" he asks, his fiery red eyes piercing mine as he tries to decipher my motives.

"Only for one night," I stammer, scanning the room for the nearest exit. He flings the gun at me. "Have you fired one before — I mean at somebody?"

Before I can respond he gestures for me to hand it back. Then he begins demonstrating. On the street, never hold the gun with two hands — only gays or women do that. Never hold the gun with one hand, the other supporting it underneath — it shows you had some military training.

Because the street is so vast and unpredictable, and you might find yourself surrounded, you should hold the gun with one hand, spraying bullets at the person who set you up, while using the other hand to ward off other advancing attackers, all the while using your head to look for a way to get out of the mess.

Chibike then walks up to me and feels my arms. About 2 kg of raw muscles each. My chest, about 6 kg. My height: 1.83 m. "My men, Iyke told me you used to play soccer. Huzzuling is like soccer. You have to out-muscle the other guys if a jonkie pulls over," he says, adding that with good physique you can gain area control.

After cross-examining me to make sure I'm not trying to set him up, Chibike finally agrees to take me to the street on a Friday — month-end. We've spoken in Pidgin, English and some Ibo. As I dash out of the room, he warns me once more about what happens to people who set other people up.

I spend several hours in the gym on Thursday. Friday morning I read Chinua Achebe's *Eze Goes to School* to prepare myself mentally and to polish my knowledge of Nigerian society.

The door swings open on a chilly Friday night. Chibike is busy cutting chunks of rock cocaine into smaller pieces (atuke in street Ibo and orgu in real Ibo). Each costs R50. The loading begins.

Chibike lies down on his stomach on the bed. His girlfriend lines little white rocks tied in blue plastic bags along his spine. Then she plasters them down and applies iodine to the plaster.

It's a trick to fool the cops. They usually do not search people's backs, so that's where peddlers hide 'kommodity'. If they do happen to search a back, the cops get the smell of iodine. The peddler tells them that he's just out of hospital after a back operation. To get your hands on a rock, simply pretend to scratch your back and peel off a batch.

Next are Chibike's shoes. The soles come off and rocks are hidden inside the cavity. He slips the 9 mm inside his socks and hands me a revolver.

"I hear you're Catholic and sings Latin kantor during the 11 o' klok Mass. I love hearing Latin at Mass. Say some prayers in Latin — it might be our last," he says as he tucks in an expensive blue-black shirt and reaches for a black leather jacket.

I pant and then stammer: "Deus in adjutorium meum intende. Domine ad adjuvandum me festina. Amen." ("Oh God come to my assistance. Oh Lord make haste to help me. Amen.") We all shout "amen" and make the sign of the cross.

"Let's make monie, my men."

We flag down a cab in front of the Hillbrow Inn. Chibike says peddlers at the Inn cater for the prostitutes and pimps there as well as for clients from the Summit Club. He points to two guys leaning against a wall outside the Inn. "They're South Africans. They huzzule ganja."

As the cab waits for traffic to clear along Claim, Chibike points to a group of kids under a tree next to the Twilight Children street shelter at the corner of Van der Merwe. He says they're selling mandrax.

A fact of the Hillbrow scene is that the various drug dealers all stick to one type of drug. Cocaine is left to the Nigerians. Mandrax and ganja are sold by South Africans. Don't try asking the wrong dealer for the wrong drugs — especially at night.

Cocaine peddlers will tell you there are two types of junkies: clean and dirty. Corporate types are clean junkies. The peddlers say they're usually white or Indian. Prostitutes, pimps, strippers and members of Hillbrow's new black and coloured gay community are called dirty junkies.

How do they get their names? It's simple: clean junkies don't waste time asking for discounts or for peddlers to sell them half of a R50 rock. They don't attempt to swop takkies or black-and-white TV sets or sex for drugs. They don't even enter Hillbrow without first making a few phone calls. In short, like the Nigerian drug peddlers would say, "Clean jonkies pai flat."

In Hillbrow there are very few new junkies. If you were to encounter a new one, he would most likely be accompanied by an old bird who knows the terrain and already has a supplier.

It's a big gamble to buy or sell drugs, even for seasoned dealers and their clients. Nobody rushes to meet a car. You wait for a car to slow down and the driver to lower his window and signal '5' or '10' with his fingers to indicate how much cocaine he wants to buy. 'Five' is a R50 rock and '10' is two R50 rocks. Not knowing this code has cost lives.

Clean junkies are drug peddlers' best payers — and their worst nightmares. It's very easy for clean junkies to set the dealers up or to orchestrate a big bust. However, it is fascinating to see how clean junkies are approached by the dealers.

To circumvent a potential set-up, a peddler puts a R50-rock in his mouth, his index finger on the trigger of the 9mm in his jacket and his right hand on the roof of the car as he talks to the buyer. When the junkie passes R50 the hustler spits the drugs into the car.

The risks are always there. A peddler might trick a junkie by selling him soap wrapped in plastic.

Or a junkie might give the dealer counterfeit money and speed off with the drugs. Quite rarely do they pull tricks on each other at the same time. If it does happen, the dealers say: “When a crook crooks another crook, the devil smiles.”

Cops often grab peddlers by the throat to prevent them from swallowing the drugs — but then the dealer could pull a gun. Peddlers used to put their hands and head into a car to collect money and chat to a client, but this has often proved fatal.

Outside the petrol station on Louis Botha, Chibike introduces me to a group of hustlers. Some are wearing balaclavas to ward off the cold. They all call me “nigga”.

As Chibike rushes to a client in a black Mercedes-Benz, a hustler called Chinedu approaches me. “If you’re new in dis bizinezz I tink you must start tolkin with di dirty jonkie. Some of di dirty jonkies will one day bring you a clean jonkie and if you treat dem nice, money will start rollin in within a munth’s time.”

Chinedu says he’s from Abba in eastern Nigeria. He tells me that the thought of spending the rest of his life behind bars is the one thing that scares drug peddlers like himself to death.

“Nigga, I tell you, do whatever is possible not to go to jail in this kountry. Our people are prepared to pay thousands of bush [dollars] to avoid jail. If you go to jail, pay it to the cops. After all, you can make 10 000 bush in less than a munth’s time.”

I also find out from Chinedu that drug peddlers are damned superstitious. For example, they believe that if you kill someone, you must not allow the victim’s blood to touch any part of your body, as the killer will inherit all the victim’s sins.

Soon Chibike comes back, takes me behind a lamppost and gives me R300 to hide inside a special black cap he’s given me. He says Hillbrow police have become clever. “They know we always hide money in our socks or inside our shoes. To survive in Hillbrow you have to be a step ahead of di police all di time.”

Then he reaches for his shoes, rips open the right sole and empties its content into his big palm. He hands me a razor blade and asks me to split the rocks in half.

“It’s after midnight,” he says. “Dirty junkies are soon coming. Strip shows in di hotels around here start at 1 am. You have to start huzzuling them dirty junkies. Oya, let me show you how tu do it.”

He asks me “not to listen to stories from dirty jonkies and to be aware of the cops” — whom I’ve now learnt are called snakes (eke or aguo in street Ibo).

Selling to dirty junkies requires a different method. After slicing each R50-rock into two R25-pieces, we hide the drugs under pebbles on a nearby pavement.

When a dirty junkie approaches, you chat amicably, collect R25 — some junkies swear they have only R20, only to pop out another R20 after they finished “drawing” the first rock — and point to a particular pebble. The junkie lifts the pebble and heads off with the merchandise. This way hustlers can’t be set up.

My first client is Amanda, a Summit Club stripper. Her tousled face tells the story of someone who’s been in and out of rehab before finally succumbing to the lethal sting of crack cocaine. She’s nearing 40 and Chinedu tells me she used to work at Hillbrow police station.

“Where’s Tony? I’m talking to no one but Tony,” squeaks the dirty brunette. Chinedu begins to bark, pointing at me, “Here’s Tony’s brodda. You can buy from him. Don’t we have di same stuff like Tony?”

Cocaine peddlers are known to their clients as Mike or Tony. Chinedu says it often happens that a junkie who’s new to the scene would walk into a crowd and ask for Tony — not knowing that he’s staring at a whole bunch of Tonys.

“Tony treats me nice. He supplies me with a pipe free of charge. Are you Tony’s brother?” she asks, drunk and irritable. She hands over R15. “This is all I have, but I promise you I’ll be back with the rest. I’ll bring my friends.”

I decide to gamble without telling Chibike. Amanda staggers off into the dark. By 3 am she’s back. For once a junkie told the truth. She has three girls with her.

“This is...”

“Nigga, Tony’s brodda,” I finish her sentence. One of the ladies pops out R100, saying she doesn’t want to have to come again because it’s too cold. The other gives me R20 and Amanda waves R50.

They’re back half an hour later.

By 5 am I’ve lost track of the amount of cash I have on me. It’s beginning to drag me down.

Chinedu and some other hustlers approach me. They’ve heard that I speak a few languages. They’ve been looking for an agent to be stationed in Brazil (Obodo Pele in street Ibo).

Chinedu says because he and the others can speak only Ibo and a bit of English, they have difficulty controlling business from Portuguese-speaking Brazil. As a result the flow of drugs into South Africa has been punctuated by mishaps — dealers have been set up in South America and cartel representatives have run off with huge sums of money.

“If we had our own guy there we’d be able to start our own group and kut out di middleman who always let us down,” says one of the hustlers. And they’re willing to pay.

They’re always on the lookout for “pipole who’re serious about bisinezz” — legal representatives, dealers, agents to be stationed in Latin America, drug distributors, trustworthy bankers, club owners who’ll let them sell to patrons.

But before I can be lured by their promises of big money, Chibike arrives. “It’s six o’ klok. Let’s go. Another group is coming now.”

Back at the Park Lane we count our takings. I’ve made over R1 000 while Chibike has made about R4 500. His girlfriend, meanwhile, has prepared huge pots of rice and stew for Chibike to sell on the pavement. A plate costs R5. This operation makes them over R2 000 a day.

Two plates are served. We wash them down with soft drinks. Chibike will get two hours’ sleep; he has to be ready to sell rice and stew by 8 am. He knocks off at 3 pm, goes to the supermarket to buy stock for the next day — and then he heads for “the Blackies to change rands to bush”.

The drug peddlers name each currency they trade in after that country’s leader. “Bush” is their parlance for dollars; British pounds are called “Thatchers”. Countries are named after great personalities, which is why Brazil is called “Pele”.

These names are used both to fool the cops and to determine who’s coming to set you up.

“Blackies” — black-market dealers — are Senegalese who change rands into other currencies. Chibike wants me to come along.

The world of the Blackies is intricate and murky, perhaps even more so than that of the drug peddlers. That’s why their story has not yet been written. The dance of the spirits never ends.

II

HAVE YOU EVER FELT THE SUB-ZERO CHILL OF A GUN BARREL on your skull — execution style? When you have a gun to your head, thinking seems impossible. No coherent answers come in response to the queries your assailants pose. Your brains vaporised — like 10 minutes ago.

Then the unmistakable happens. You develop a splitting headache. I call it the omega headache. The kind that crowns all the headaches you've ever had on earth, as if to say: your earthly headaches are over.

I've had a gun to my head twice. Kingston, a few years ago outside some ghetto club. Two knock-around Jamaicans thought they'd found the tooth fairy in me. They wanted a Rolex watch, credit card, coins and anything sellable. We wrestled in the dark. The Uzi spewed no bullets. It wasn't loaded. Jerks.

Fast forward. Kempton Park. The gun's loaded. It's South Africa. Don't fumble. They are Russian black market dealers. Three of them with drawn guns stand around me like a pack of starving wolves over a bull calf. I'm helpless, half naked on a soft pink duvet — the one on which moments before, a Russian blonde was massaging me. Soon it may be covered with blood. I know the end is near. I can smell it. I'm certain my name's already inscribed on a tombstone.

With guns gaping at me inside a love nest filled with the sweet fragrance of air freshener and the blonde's Chanel, my emotions become horrid premonitions as I try to recollect the odyssey that has brought me here.

It's true: At the point of death, your past hustles and bustles at you at the speed of light.

Like many scribes, I refuse to be inoculated with a vaccine the ancient Greek scholars called Elected Blindness, or what crawlers of the underworld call 'mind your own business'.

If I hadn't taken an interest in the restless people around Hillbrow's defunct Mimosa Hotel and the nearby petrol station, I wouldn't have met the Nigerian drug peddler Chibike. After meeting him, I could have resisted the temptation of accompanying him to change his rands into dollars on the black market. In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe writes: 'What kills a man begins like an appetite.'

Inside a room at the Park Lane Hotel, I watch Chibike count the money we'll be trading. R70,000. He's hoping to get \$11,000 from his pile of rands. It will be the second time in four months he'll be changing rands to dollars. He says he intends going home this Christmas with no less than \$35,000. He changes money when he has a rand equivalent of \$10,000.

I urge him to check the news for the exchange rates so that he can bargain better. He refuses. On the black market it's R6>\$1 and it will remain so until the rand appreciates. Then the Senegalese will adjust their prices to about R5.50 to the dollar. After some persuasion he agrees to watch the news. The rand's trading at R6.42 to the dollar. No luck.

We pack the R70 000 in several pairs of black socks. We top up the medium-sized handbag in which we pack the socks, with shoes and other clothing items. Then we place fruit on top to discourage cops from searching the bag too thoroughly.

"Karri dis," Chibike says to me, handing me a 9 mm pistol. "You know di rules," he says. Then he whispers something to his South African girlfriend, Thandi. She walks slowly out of the room.

"Nigga, if I don't come back my girlfriend will know what to do wit di rest of di money. If you make it, remind her dat my corpse cannot be buried in a foreign land."

"We're going to change money at the Blackies right? We go hand them the money, get \$11,000 and we all go home, right?" I ask tremulously.

It's the first time I see fear in his eyes. Chibike the brave, talkative, strong, proud ... is reduced to a slacker of few words. "Hillbrow is unpredictable. Kristmas period is also di period Nigerian huzzulers become hunted," he says slowly, his muted despair capsizing my hope.

He asks for a cup of water as if a stranger in his own room. Three short knocks on the door. That's how Nigerian drug peddlers herald their presence to fellow tradesmen. "Gimme di gun," he whispers.

Slowly the door opens. Two hulking Nigerians fill the room. One carries a pen and a piece of paper. "Don't point it at us," they chorus. Then they begin speaking in Ibo. The face of the one with the writing materials is frozen in a rictus of grief. I can hear a little bit of what they're saying. Someone killed the wailing one's brother in Durban. They've come to collect money from each Nigerian in the area, to repatriate the body.

Chibike reaches for his special black hat and peels out R1,000 and signs. I tell them I'm not loaded. They vamoose to the next room. As in rural Nigeria, drug peddlers in Johannesburg have meetings where members contribute to the wellbeing of others, especially in the event of a death.

Chibike says Nigerians buried in South Africa were too proud to seek help from their compatriots.

The door swings open again — this time without any knock. Thandi's carrying something in her handbag. She empties it. A sparkling semi-automatic pistol. Chibike tells me it's unlicensed. He's given me his licensed gun so I don't get into trouble should the cops become involved.

He shoves the semi-automatic into the breast pocket of his brown leather jacket. "Thandi, don't forget what I told you," he says to her and embraces her. She's sobbing.

Outside, some guys are plastering posters on the wall. The posters are of three Nigerians killed in separate incidents. Chibike says at this time of the year one rarely finds a building without posters such as these.

Witberg, along Olivia Road in Hillbrow, is just a few blocks away. Chibike insists we take a cab. He gives the driver R100 instead of the normal R20. "If I die, dat's how he'll remember me."

Although the Witberg apartments have been shut down, its previous occupants, Senegalese black market dealers, still skulk in its shadows. Suspecting a West African, the dealers approach passersby, and start negotiating rates. "One for 6.3. Everybody here knows I'm good for it. If you don't have 6.3, take my 5.7 for one. Don't let the banks eat you. You're West African and a foreigner here, don't be stupid. I'm your reliable banker ..."

By "one for 6.3 ...", they're telling clients they sell \$1 for R6.30 and they buy \$1 for R5.70. The moment they find out you're a South African, they either scamper into the darkness or offer astronomical rates to scare you off. And should you arouse their suspicion, you're begging for a bullet.

Clients come from all over greater Johannesburg. Others from other provinces who're flying to their home countries from Johannesburg International Airport, make use of the dealers. The dealers also have agents at the airport — some disguised as trolley-pushers. Their job is to persuade African foreigners to come to Hillbrow and exchange their foreign currency at better rates.

As usual, risk is not in short supply. Some foreigners never get to see Hillbrow. They lose their money at gunpoint before they reach the black market. Others exchange money successfully only to fall prey to scavenging thugs or patrolling cops.

Despite the clear and present dangers involved, it is easy to understand why many African immigrants are cajoled into dealing on the black market and not with legal financial bodies.

The black market offers better rates of exchange than banks and other financial institutions. But that's not all.

For Chibike and many other hustlers the problem is much bigger than opening bank accounts. They all fear their money will be confiscated.

"If you tell di bank you're selling fufu and stew along di pavement an' in tree monts' time you have R70 000 in your bank account, how will di bank react to dat? It's straight confiscation, my brodda."

Outside Witberg's dark corridors, Chibike makes a call, speaking in broken French. About 10 minutes later a black luxury sedan with tinted windows pulls over. The door swings open. Chibike gestures for me to sit in front.

"Nang ga def," I greet the pitch-black figure with thick gold chains wrapped around his neck.

"Denge Wolof?" he asks me back in a thick Senegalese accent. Mbaye is his name. I tell him I speak some Wolof (the common language of Senegal.) He heaves a sigh of relief and asks if I trust the Nigerian, because some Senegalese have recently been killed. I ask him why he does business with somebody he doesn't trust. He says risk is the name of the game.

"Naka ligi yebi?" — "How's business?" I ask. He replies that Allah is great. He tells me we're heading to Kempton Park, on the East Rand, to meet the Russian black market dealers. If the sum to be traded is more than \$5,000 they go to the wholesalers. He says normally he would go to the Pakistanis in Fordsburg, the Chinese in Bruma or the Italians in Norwood. But with the death of the two Senegalese, black market retailers are playing Russian roulette.

We drive to his apartment in Berea. He lives with his Indian girlfriend and the apartment is very oriental. The sofas are expensive. We sit and wait. Quarter-past-eight and Mbaye tells us we leave in 15 minutes. He keeps his money under a thick, red Persian carpet. We root about under the sofas and the carpet and stumble on wads of money.

He refuses to allow us to count the rands. He says he knows exactly how much there is. We stuff the money inside torn soccer balls and squeeze everything into an expensive leather bag. His girlfriend makes some strong Senegalese tea. He offers us two cups and tells us Allah will protect us. He takes off the African dress he is wearing and reveals charms and amulets around his waist and arms. He brags that no bullet can penetrate him.

Then he puts on boots, black jeans and a jacket. There are drawers underneath his bed. He pulls one open. Out come an AK47 and magazines. He loads the AK and throws two full magazines into the bag of money. He opens another drawer and removes a clarinet case. The third drawer reveals all sorts of medication. He puts syringes, morphine, bandages, plaster and a small iodine bottle inside the clarinet case.

"Dis is for GSW — gunshot wounds. If you get hit, make for de car before it's too late. My advice: let de bullet go tru your body. I don't want screaming if de bullet is stock in your body. It's easier to treat EW — exit wounds."

We hit the highway to Johannesburg International. "Can you drife at 180 and winding de lef window down?" asks Mbaye.

"You're crazy," I shout back. He pulls over on the highway and asks me to take the wheel. He says he wants to show me how to develop double concentration when I'm on the run.

"You have two seconds to look ahead of you and memorise de road and two seconds to reach for de window winder. By de time you reach de winder, de road's two seconds have past. You hold de winder and look ahead for two seconds again and back at de winder. If you can't do it, you can't drive and spray bullets at de same time."

I try it at 120 km/h, running all over the road to a cacophony of hooting motorists. He urges me to try again. By the time we hit the off-ramp to Pretoria I've mastered it. "Now 180. It's de same technique," he shouts over a Youssou N'Dour mix playing in the background.

I indicate left as if going to the airport and then head straight to a Kempton Park location where we park outside on the street in front of a white house with a red roof. It's dark inside. Our only source of light is from a street lamppost.

"Is dis it?" inquires Chibike. Mbaye nods and asks us to cock our guns. "If dey ask to si our stuff witout firs bringing deirs, know it's a set-up. Shoot your way out of here, or fall forever."

My heart starts pounding. The silence becomes spooky. The dealers economise in personnel as if wanting each one of us to be the hangman of the other two. “Dey’re watching us, trying to si if we wan to set dem up,” Mbaye whispers.

I’m thinking ‘ambush’. Looks like Chibike is thinking the same. “Wat’s up with ya guys?” he asks Mbaye, pulling out his gun. Mbaye gets out of the car, digs for a cigarette lighter, lights it and holds it up in the air. Immediately lights are seen inside the house. The gates of Hades flip open. No one need tell us that all who enter, lose hope of redemption.

Chibike is sweating. His eyes scrutinising like a medieval inquisitor; his finger on the trigger. “Nigga, can we trust dem? If you make it out of here, don’t forget what I told you at Parklane. My bodi cannot be buried in South Africa.”

“Welkom, three kings. My name is Dubronovich. Vwee spoke on ze phone. Jhust call me Dubro as in Diablo.” He’s a huge unkempt Russian with tattooed forearms. He lets us see his gun tucked in his tight-fitting jeans. “Zis is Katarina. She is strip-tease in our club in Bedfordview. And zis of course is Balakov. He is short, but very good fighter.”

We make our way into an elaborately furnished East European-style living room. Dubro reaches for a remote and blasts gangster rapper 50 Cent’s *Get Rich or Die Trying*. “Okay, let Katarina do drinks. I bring zer papers.”

He comes back with three blue travelling bags. “Kongratulation, you zust won jhackpot,” he says throwing the bags at us. The smell of blood and methylated spirits rises from the bags.

“Some of zer money is clean. Odder not. Is one for 5.5. You make point-five profit. Now, are Roshans not best? Vwhy you buy from dose Italians? Zay fucking rob you,” he says, crashing heavily onto a sofa.

Chibike empties his bag. “Seventy tousan. Clean.”

“Good. Zer is \$13,000 in zat bag and \$20,000 in odder two. You can keep change,” says Dubro tearing open the bags.

Mbaye insists on cleaning the bloodstained notes before leaving. Chibike wants us to leave ASAP. “I’m not going to count yor money. It better be right or vwee coming to Hillbrow,” continues Dubro.

Spending so much time in the underworld has skewed dealers’ visions of evil. Murder, kidnapping or petty brutality are not in their purview. Instead, they’ve developed heightened sensitivity to homely transgressions like cheating or failing to keep a promise.

The Russian dealers loan money to those who’ve been blacklisted, pawnshop and nightclub owners, moneylenders and car dealers with no collateral to secure bank loans. Clients pay back in dollars — usually after losing a lot of blood. The dollars are traded to black market retailers.

Dubro is a debt collector. He says they beat up a loan shark who borrowed money from them and his blood spilled on the notes. I watch Chibike and Mbaye dip cotton into some liquid and rub off the blood.

Moments later, without a rumour of a blush, Katarina asks if I’ve ever had a “Roshan” massage. I shake my head. She gestures me upstairs. The music upstairs is Sergei Rachmaninov’s *Adagio Sostenuto*, Concerto for Piano and Orchestra Number 2 in C minor, Opus 18.

A few minutes after she begins straddling me, rubbing her warm and soft breasts on my back, I notice two shadows inside the room. I push her around to get a clearer view. Two pistols are on my skull. Katarina soon adds hers.

“You are not black market dealer. Vwee see it in your eyes. Vwhy are you here?” It’s Balakov. Before I utter a word they cock their guns.

“Who are you? Tell us or vwee take you to basement.”

“Easy guys. The cameras say he entered here without a gun. He is a man of peace,” says an elderly Russian standing in the doorway. The guns are withdrawn. “If you’ve never spilled blood before, don’t flirt with the devil. We always observe people doing business with us. When you refused to touch blood money my men began feeling uneasy. If you’re in this business, blood becomes like water. Let him continue with the massage.”

I refuse, telling them I’ve had enough. I join Mbaye and Chibike downstairs and ask if we can go.

The Russians are laughing on their way down the stairs. I’m too shaken to handle the steering wheel. Mbaye speeds us off back to safe Hillbrow.

Back at the hotel, Chibike counts the dollars. \$13,000. Two thousand more than he’d expected. “Nigga, we’ve journied togedder. Here’s some bush for us.” I decline the trophy. “Give it to the brother of the Nigerian who got killed in Durban. It’s my contribution to send the corpse home.”

“What happened upstairs, Nigga, you never tol mi.”

“The Russians had a gun to my head.”

“Was dat your firs time? Did you feel dat headache?”

“Di street huzzulers have a name for dat,” he says. “We call it fire in the brains.”

The shame of being a man – is there any better reason to write?

Gilles Deleuze

I

I FIRST SMELLED DAGGA WHEN I WAS SEVEN OR EIGHT, walking to primary school with my brother through a small veld, a familiar shortcut for school children and workers. Our neighbourhood, New Orleans, was new and of the 1970s, a ‘community development project’ by apartheid planners. It was part of the development necessitated by the Group Areas Act, new accommodation for those kicked out of areas then recently declared white.

The language of apartheid town planning hid the displacement by pretending that it cared about the inhabitants, thus ‘community development’ (‘Gemeenskapsbou’). But the road map of New Orleans revealed its apartheid truth. No regular grid, but curves and crescents, cul-de-sacs which, while creating an idyllic image of community, also pointed to town planning as apartheid control. There were only three entrances/exits to the neighbourhood, and so it would be easy to close it off.

Each cul-de-sac had a footpath leading beyond the neighbourhood. Our road, Jacaranda Avenue, had a path onto a major junction in Paarl’s Dal Josaphat industrial area, with destinations for workers and train commuters. Workers from poorer areas east of New Orleans walked through the neighbourhood, down Jacaranda Avenue, and on to their various workplaces. The tramp and voices of these workers to and from work was familiar, and regular as a clock.

During the early 1980s, a new type of pedestrian joined: the poor who were addicted to cheap, sulphuric wine from a winery co-op in Drommedaris Road. This pedestrian type was identifiable by his or her *puza* face and, more markedly, by the round, black, plastic 5 l jerry can hauled on the shoulder when full: *swart varkie*.

In the mornings and afternoons, Jacaranda Avenue also carried school children – my brother, myself and friends included – to and from my alma mater, Noorder Paarl Secondary, which stood its ground alongside Athlone Training College in Berlin and Sanddrift Streets in the now white area, or to and from the bus stop in Jan van Riebeeck Road. At that time, there was no bridge over the Berg River along Oosbosch Street, but in summer, when the river was easily crossed, the route to school down Oosbosch Street was a fifteen-minute walk. And so we saved our bus fare for cigarettes by wading through the river.

In summer it was a simple matter: socks and shoes off, trousers rolled to the knees. Girls’ skirts tucked into underwear, as if they were getting ready to skip rope. But sometimes in autumn and spring, when the river ran fuller (but not at maximum), and desperate for cigarette money, we would still forego the bus and use the shortcut through the river. Boys only, in underpants, clothes and rucksacks in a bundle on the head, and water at one or two places reaching almost up to our chins. A rural scene, one to which, later, Cape Town friends always responded with disbelief, if not scepticism. Paarl is after all semi-urban, by nature of its own expansion. But it is also peri-urban, given its proximity to Cape Town.

As a child, I thought of Kraaifontein as the boundary between urban Cape Town and rural Paarl. A slight rise in the road, some industria on the left (Leyland was there), over a bridge over train tracks, and residential Kraaifontein started. From here on, there were few open expanses of land on the way to Cape Town and the sight of all the houses so close to the national road always excited me because now it signalled how close Cape Town lay. The sight of stretches of housing signalled the urban and the urban was Cape Town.

*

My mnemonic life – my coming to memory and, thus, to human life – starts after the rupture associated with the Group Areas Act. In other words, life in a group area was normal to me, not in schism, as it may have been if preceded by an established life in a prior place – as with my parents – on the western side of the Berg River. My family lived in the ‘servant’s quarters’ – a converted garage – on my uncle and aunt’s property on Charleston Hill, a previously white area then declared ‘coloured’ as apartheid shifted people around, turning South Africa into a giant sliding puzzle, like those found in the lucky dip packets of my childhood. I thus came to memory in an already ‘coloured’ neighbourhood and our subsequent move to New Orleans was a ‘normal’ move for my family and, for us, not directly, not immediately, associated with the Group Areas Act. Or rather, not for me as a child.

My parents must have suffered Group Areas indignities. Many times during aimless Sunday drives through the tree-lined parts of town – maybe driven there by my father’s own unspoken longing for home, a hidden ague – the names of streets that used to be their haunts in youth rolled off my parents’ tongues with just enough nostalgia to hide the hurt: Van der Lingen, Tempelier Straat, Malei Straat, as we rumbled through them in my father’s old Ford. But the move to New Orleans was also a new world adventure for them. My father had his name on a waiting list and it was a move towards independence for him: the ownership of property, no matter how modest, via the long and slow rent-for-ownership scheme.

New Orleans had been a guava farm and pieces of veld still had guava trees and old farm buildings. Our shortcut to primary school passed such a building, in which a large, very poor family had taken up residence. We called that area *die plaashuis* or *die dam*. There were two empty cement dams, one round, about thirty metres in diameter, and in which we often played, and a smaller rectangular one closer to the farmhouse. *Die dam* was a site for the most ordinary of childhood playing and mischief; most ordinary but – and therefore? – most enduring of childhood memories. The dam wall was easily scaled on the side of the main footpath, where a swell of ground brought you to within a step of the top of the wall. Inside, a set of steps led down to its dry, cracking cement floor. Cracking, but hard and smooth enough for games with tennis balls. Or *hokkie* – hopscotch. Or for sitting around in the shade of the wall, drinking a cool drink, or smoking a cigarette filched from a parent; and years later, for roller skating, but by then it was becoming frequently soiled by human faeces.

As a seven-year-old, I had a vague sense of what dagga might be. If I was not performing some chore efficiently, my father would ask: “*Is dji geroek?*” (“Are you stoned?”) So, I knew it caused some form of mental incapacity. And I knew, from both Islamic and broader social mores, that it was prohibited, taboo.

On our way to school one morning then, a pungent smell wafted past my brother and me, in the turbulent wake of a group of workers in blue overalls, rushing past us. It smelled strongly of raw peanuts. And it was nauseating.

“That’s dagga,” my brother said from the corner of his mouth, “They’re smoking dagga.” Two years older, he sounded affronted. I was quietly intrigued by the openness with which these workers were just walking along, smoking their dagga. They may have hidden the joint in cupped palms, but they did so casually, and they couldn’t mask the smell, that smell of raw peanuts that still causes me to gag when I smell marijuana being smoked or when I sniff at a bag of heads.

II

I FIRST TASTED RAW PEANUTS WHEN I WAS FOUR. My family was on a road trip that took us along the east coast up to Durban, from there to Johannesburg and then back through the Karoo to Paarl. In Durban we stayed for two weeks with family friends, a Hindu household that had bought new pots and stocked their fridge with Halaal meat (no beef). One branch of that family owned a smallholding in a lush, hilly area where they farmed ginger, but also grew peanuts.

My memories are necessarily fragmented, but augmented by photographs that my family, years later, would pore over with nostalgia; photographs which I now, with an even deeper cut of that ache for home, wish I had before me. One photograph stands out, a picture of a lanky, dark, moustachioed man, dressed in dark blue trousers muddy at the ankles, a hoe over his shoulders and staring deadpan and exhausted at the camera. The ground is dark and muddy; in the far background of the picture, a deep, indiscriminate, dark green jungle.

Paw-paw and mango, maybe banana, avocado, I imagine now, all part of a sub-tropical scenery otherworldly to us from the Boland, not itself unknown for its green landscapes, landscapes of mountain and fynbos, fern and protea, over which we roamed, my brother and I, with our father, often in winter, climbing rock faces, slipping over mossy ledges. That strange country of my father's heart – his own, yet not his own, or, differently, not his own but which he tried to make his own, through all the strange, twisted logic and heartbreak of this heartbreaking country. My father, in winter, somewhere along a steep side of Bainskloof outside Wellington; my father, who loved the natural world, tugging at an obstinate king protea which he would himself stubbornly plant in his garden in New Orleans, where it would wither and die, again and again; my father, who would say: "Protected. Conserved. For whom? This is God's earth, it belongs to me too." It is for him I arrive now at this paragraph, crying as I write this, for which I am not ashamed, for which I forgive myself, knowing that in myself crouches something of that mangled masculinity my brother and I inherited from him. Here we are, the heirs of apartheid.

Most of the adults, my parents included, were back from mucking about digging up ginger and groundnuts. I may have been crabby for my mother wandering off into the muddy fields. And perhaps this lies behind the strong memory and strong rejection when, sometime that day, I tasted a handful of raw peanuts: not quite soft, but not crunchy, at once bland, alien and offensive to my tongue which already knew and liked roasted peanuts. But raw peanuts do not smell like dagga. Yet, to this day, the smell of dagga reminds me of the smell of raw peanuts.

I digress.

As I grew up, dagga, it turned out, was everywhere. Hidden, but everywhere. In high school everyone knew who the *daggaroekers* (dagga smokers) were. Dagga slang and mannerisms trickled onto that perimeter of straight life inhabited by those who smoked cigarettes but who were otherwise straight – those like me. Us cigarette smokers might decide to "make a pipe", huddling in dense reeds at the back of the schoolyard, smoking cigarette tobacco in a bottle neck, pretending it was dagga. And dagga lingo might be used by us wannabe toughs: "*Hou in, dis wit!*" ("Keep it in, it's white [mandrax]!"). Or in an act of bravado in the school corridors, someone might shout across in greeting: "*Maak 'n pyp, ek sê!*" ("Make a pipe, I say!"). But it would still be a few years before I smoked dagga.

As a young, cigarette-smoking teenager, I was hanging out with teenagers three to four years older than myself. In the veld and bush of undeveloped plots, we could smoke in peace, and sometimes the others would 'make a pipe', a dagga pipe. Intrigued by the ritual and the slang – making the 'diamond' with the foil from a cigarette pack by folding it into a flat strip, rolling that strip into a tight disc and fitting it as filter in the mouth of the bottle-neck; distinguishing between good dagga and *majat* (dust, pips and twigs), cleaning this mess by crushing it onto a piece of paper held at an angle so that the pips roll free for easy discarding – intrigued by all this, I nevertheless didn't touch the stuff. My father would murder me if he found out. But there we were, middle-class and working-class kids, smoking dagga, consorting with dagga smokers.

III

IN 1980, M—, A CLASSMATE, INTRODUCED ME TO REGGAE during the long months that we were out on national school boycotts. Deep in winter, and bored with the ‘alternative education’ programme – listening to speeches, singing ‘freedom songs’ that were mostly old spirituals or hymns – or wary that police action might be imminent, we stayed home. M— would visit, carrying his olive army knapsack brimming with vinyl: Linton Kwesi Johnson’s *Forces of Victory*, Peter Tosh’s *Equal Rights*, Jimmy Cliff’s *Follow my Mind*, “Remake the world” from the latter featuring as a freedom song sung at ‘mass meetings’ at school:

*Too many people are suffering
Too many people are sad
Too little people got everything
While too many people got nothing
Remake the world
With love and happiness
Remake the world
Put your conscience to the test...*

Bob Marley in there also, of course. *Kaya*, *Natty Dread*, *Rastaman Vibration*, *Zimbabwe*, later *Uprising*.

Rapidly becoming politicised during that period, and knowing something about 1976 through stories from older cousins, family and friends, we found in reggae an expression of what we were learning about racial oppression and what we were experiencing and seeing around us in our own neighbourhoods. And reggae was also a spur to further learning: about colonialism and racial oppression elsewhere, about the Bible and also about politics and culture, politics and poetry. And slavery.

Slavery in South Africa had become disembodied from our individual histories, washed from our consciousness – unlike, say, in the USA, where even in the dubious archive of blaxploitation film, the history of New World slavery is never far from the surface, ready to burst into the open as a platform for defiance. Instead, slavery here was present only as a linguistic tic, reappearing in language as a mark of shame and disavowal: “*Wat, dink djy ek is jou slaaf?*” (“What, do you think I am your slave?”) Slavery was a distant, distant item in a general South African history and not something we felt as part of our identities, as part of our history *in* South Africa. But in reggae, New World slavery was ever-present, and a historical node from which its descendants gained strength and pride in a tradition of rebellion.

Reggae provided the final pieces in a jigsaw puzzle we, as teenagers, had not realised existed: apartheid was part of a broader *colonial* history of oppression. Or was the picture coming into view because of circumstance and the spirit of the times – knowledge-hungry teenagers with a growing awareness of apartheid and, by the logic of that particular historical force, happening to fall also into a tradition of protest which leads to further quests? And does one see it as cruel coincidence? Were the paths along particular branches of enquiry determined by the forces of apartheid? Not to grant apartheid sole or fundamental agency in how I came to political consciousness, but could it be that when white friends claim teenage innocence, this is what they mean, that circumstances for them led along other branches, one of them being away from knowledge of apartheid?

Where does individual agency separate off from history? If apartheid and its legacy as rhetorical device (‘blaming apartheid’) be put to bed, as many people wish it, it is by insisting on individual agency. That is, the individual, no longer constrained by apartheid, is his or her own agent and can transcend the legacy of apartheid. Does this mean that during their teenage years my white friends had been constrained by apartheid too, it determining, among other things, a particular focus of knowledge? Certainly. For me the most powerful argument against apartheid is that, in addition to producing material inequalities, it was also a psychological project that denatured normal human growth, for both victim and beneficiary.

The claim to innocence is an acknowledgement that, even for its beneficiaries, there is an apartheid legacy, that that structure brought its force to bear on the intimate lives of even its beneficiaries. Innocence is also a legacy of apartheid. How does one transcend a legacy of innocence? Can we transcend it?

*

We were in Grade 9 in 1980, attending Klein Nederburg Secondary, a prefabricated school with asbestos wall panels. The school was a fifteen-minute walk from our house in New Orleans, and situated, as its name indicates, in Klein Nederburg, a working-class area of council houses and cement-brick blocks of flats, the main group of which was Magnolia Flats, where M— lived. North of this neighbourhood, across the Hugo River, a small tributary of the Berg River, was Chicago, an even poorer neighbourhood. (By what irony did planners name these neighbourhoods after iconic US cities? There was also New York, and, later, Las Vegas).

Chicago was notorious for *smokkies* (shebeens; from ‘*smokkel*’, to smuggle) and *merts* (merchants, i.e. dagga merchants). It was a rough place and one I wouldn’t visit voluntarily. Outsiders were easily spotted and preyed upon. Even skirting it along the far pavement of dual carriageway Van der Stel Street on the way between Klein Nederburg and New Orleans, was a nerve-bitten endeavour (for me).

The boundaries between neighbourhoods were not rigid. Across the road on its western side, Klein Nederburg gave way to mostly middle-class Charleston Hill. On its southern side, it gave way to areas of middle-class housing stretching south to Klein Drakenstein Road and beyond, themselves interspersed with smaller houses and poorer households so that in one street a desperately poor family – bricklayer, single income, five schoolgoing children – would be living next to a household with two teachers’ incomes, teaching being then still a largely respected profession with a respectable income. Eastwards, towards Du Toit’s Kloof mountain, the area melded into *Die Rug* (possibly meaning ‘the ridge’) and Amstelhof’s council houses.

M— lived in Magnolia Flats, but would visit me in New Orleans. As my parents were both at work, and my brother and I had a rudimentary hi-fi squeezed into our small bedroom, we could smoke freely and turn the music up. Other friends might be there too, listening to reggae, assimilating and simulating Rastaspoken. M— and I eventually focused on reggae, shunning other forms of music as ‘bubble-gum’. Eventually, we saw ourselves as Rasta sufferers, *trodding* through Babylon. “*Hey*,” M— might say, “*dis four bells. Ek gaan nou eers trod.*” (“It’s four bells. I’m trodding/ leaving now.”)

It was not difficult becoming a sufferer. Photographs of Trenchtown used as album cover art could have been taken in Paarl. The dusty yards, the scrawny dogs, the feel of summer heat, the look on people’s faces, the signs of poverty, of the sufferer’s life, were strangely familiar. The same grey stoniness surrounded Magnolia Flats, fields of gravel strewn with glass and litter. In these photographs was something familiar, something universal, and a frame that we easily transplanted onto our own environment: the heat of a summer’s day radiating from blocks of flats and small houses, some with a shed or shack in the backyard, the web of footpaths, stony and dusty and shimmering, the sunned skin, shiny with sweat, of people encountered and passed along footpaths, all was part of the same system, our own Babylon.

Soon, we were hunting for the kind of militarist clothing Rastafarian musicians wore. Someone somewhere always had a cousin or brother who was or had been in the SADF (Coloured Corps), and I scored a green beret which I festooned with a chain (oppression, naturally) and Rasta colours (liberation). Not having the money for a ghetto blaster proper, M— and I took to trodding Paarl listening to reggae on a small portable tape player, hanging out sometimes at Huguenot train station, where there was a good fish-and-chips shop. But most days we didn’t have money for fish-and-chips, and consoled ourselves that our *sufferation* was all good and well, and made us better Rastafarians.

Our hair, however, would not turn into dreadlocks, even when a few years after I had lost my interest in Rastafarianism, M— was still trodding and his hair had grown matted. By my first year at university, I discovered that M— was working at Kohler Corrugated, the cardboard packaging factory down the road in Oosbosch Street, where my father was a mechanic, maintaining trucks, forklifts and conveyer belts. “*Daai jong met die verslonste hare? Nee, hy kom dikgeroek werk toe,*” my father once told me. (“That lout with the neglected hair? No, he comes to work highly stoned.”)

M— had been the truer Rastafarian and had started smoking ganja, hanging as he did with a growing band of real, committed Rastafarians close by Magnolia Flats. The strictures of my Islamic household kept me from doing the same. With some envy I listened to M—’s stories about the latest *gumba* held in Orleans Park, the drumming, the chanting, the smoking. For me, the pleasures of *skanking* to reggae while high on marijuana were still a few years off.

IV

I did start smoking dagga. The first time was at *die dam*, the farmhouse now abandoned. It was some time during my last three years of high school, with Bokkie, Hare (Hair) and MC. As our peers and friends were starting to drink, I was part of a smaller group of friends who eschewed alcohol. Naturally, my Islamic upbringing played a part, but Bokkie and Hare, not Muslim, also did not drink at that time. They even expressed a satisfaction that, hanging with me, they had not been curious or interested in alcohol. But dagga was approached differently. It was a mischief that a Muslim teenager could easily keep hidden. So when Bokkie and Hare presented the opportunity one day at *die dam*, I hesitated only for a moment. They reassured me that nothing much would happen. I took a few tokes.

Nothing happened. They told me that I was supposed to get the *laggies* (a fit of laughter), and later get hungry. Nothing, I said. Someone whispered to someone else; they giggled. Hare laughed non-stop, but MC dismissed his performance – he was putting it on. I was befuddled, bemused. They were behaving oddly. My mouth was parched. Demonstrating, Bokkie told me to smack my tongue repeatedly against my palate. What does it feel like? I shrugged: dry. He smacked his tongue against his palate a few times. Like putty, he said. A sweet-tooth and always prepared for eventualities, Bokkie drew some sweets from one of his pockets. We all cried out: “Sweets! You’ve got sweets!”

We walked to his house nearby. His parents were away and we had a house to ourselves, and a hi-fi. Funk. Mix-tapes, sometimes an *n*th-generation copy of the legendary DJ at Tiffany’s recent session. Tiffany’s, a new-generation dance club in Paarl, with strict door policies, expensive light and sound systems. And different from Mojo’s, the dingy club at Ivanhoe Park, a ‘shopping centre’ on *die Rug*.

I was still listening to reggae, that first time I smoked dagga, but now tolerated other music as well, like funk and disco; not disco as in ABBA, but a heavy, funk-infused music. So, in his lounge, Bokkie would turn up the T-Connection and he and MC might show off their steps. Perhaps they regaled me with stories reliving how the dance floor at Tiffany’s came alive when the DJ spun T-Connection’s “Girl Watching”. Perhaps Hare just sat there and laughed.

I didn’t go to dance clubs as my social life was proscribed by my religiously conservative father. I took some gaps; and some gaps I didn’t take. But I imagined Tiffany’s as a glittering space filled with sharply dressed boys and pretty girls. Mojo’s, on the other hand, I imagined as dark and humid, a sense based on one moment glimpsed through its door: a dark staircase, three sweaty teenagers bundling down it, out through the door, blinking at the bright sun and shaking their heads as if they were just waking from a dream. I understood that Mojo’s could also be rough, as I gathered from a cousin who had frequented it pre-Tiffany’s. Perhaps he had told a story about a brawl in the club, perhaps he was involved. Maybe someone was stabbed. “Steel blade drinking blood in darkness.” Whenever I hear LKJ’s line, I think of Mojo’s, a place I had never been, and imagine a West Indian blues dance in Britain.

After that first time at *die dam*, I would smoke dagga several times, but it didn’t become a habit. Not that I didn’t enjoy it. Circumstances and supply were always a problem. The second time I smoked it, with the same group of friends, I did experience fits of laughter. Bokkie, eyes narrowed, toothless smile widening, nudged Hare and pointed at me: “*Lampies is geroek*”. (“Lampies [my nickname] is stoned.”) Laughing fit. Euphoria. Hunger. What was there to eat in that kitchen? Peanut butter, jam, bread, tea. We gorged ourselves.

Emboldened by the fact that I had now smoked dagga twice and remained undiscovered, I was ready to smoke it whenever opportunity presented itself. Such opportunity presented itself at school one day, during second break, on a hot summer afternoon. Again, Bokkie and Hare were involved. This must have been Grade 11, before Hare became head prefect the following year. As always, it was an ugly bullet of a *zol* (a hand-rolled cigarette, not necessarily including dagga), inexpertly rolled with dry *majat* that was difficult to coax into the rizla (we were beginners). A few hurried tokes behind the boys’ toilets just as the siren signalled the end of break.

We were being foolish. There were still close ties among Paarl’s community, even as the Group Areas Act had scattered earlier neighbours across different new neighbourhoods. Teachers knew our parents from their own schooldays, or might belong to the same congregation, or might even be related. The school principal at Noorder Paarl Secondary, indeed, was my father’s cousin. And a year or two before, a big

scandal had erupted when a few boys from prominent families were caught smoking a dagga pipe in the reeds at the back of the school. They tried jettisoning the evidence, but teachers found the bottle neck. “*Die bottle nek nog warm en bitter van die dagga,*” Mr Julius, my biology teacher fulminated, spitting out the words with utter distaste. (“The bottle neck still hot and bitter from the dagga.”)

But we weren’t caught. Hare and I, in the same class, had history with Mr Simpson after the break. History class on a hot Boland afternoon, while stoned – a triple soporific, a state of torpor, of being *geroek*, unrivalled ever since.

*

The Greek roots of “nostalgia” are *nostos* (“return home”) and *algos* (“pain”) – not simply a soft-focus recollection of times or things past; it is an ache to return home. But how does one ache for a past that is also marred by the barb of apartheid? What am I looking for in that past? Are the words ‘home’ and ‘ache’ adequate at all? Accurate, at all? To recollect, to describe something that survives only in memory? That survives nevertheless? That has or had a fullness which no language, try as I might from many different angles, that no language can summon to my full satisfaction? To say, this is how it was, in all its fullness. That it was full beyond apartheid. That apartheid did not matter at all; and yet, that it was all that mattered. That apartheid was *at once* ever-present and never-present. That that schism between the ever- and never-present fractures the lens into myriad shards and the image breaks into the multi-faceted, as if seen through a kaleidoscope: an image that is *individual*, yet *patterned*. But, beyond the charm of the kaleidoscope, the image remains at a distance, intangible, a chimera of something that is no more, but still a chimera, a ‘monster with a lion’s head, a goat’s body, and a serpent’s tail’ (*Oxford Dictionary of English*).

Urbanism Beyond Architecture

African Cities as Infrastructure

Vyjayanthi Rao, in conversation with Filip de Boeck
& Abdou Maliq Simone



Marie-Françoise Plissart ©



IN KINSHASA: TALES OF THE INVISIBLE CITY, Filip de Boeck writes:

In spite of the fact that an analysis of the different physical sites through which the city exists and invents itself helps us to better understand the specific ways in which the materiality of the infrastructure generates particular sets of relations in the city, I would submit that in the end, in a city like Kinshasa, it is not, or not primarily, the material infrastructure or the built form that makes the city a city. The city, in a way, exists beyond its architecture . . . the infrastructure and architecture that function best in Kinshasa are almost totally invisible on a material level.¹

This understanding of the city, expressed so succinctly by de Boeck, is shared by all three of us. But as anthropologists speaking to architects, we are also concerned with exploring the relation between visibility and invisibility and with the ‘networks of concrete becoming,’² as Simone puts it, at once engaging and going beyond the artifice of material infrastructure and physical site. Built form may be, as de Boeck states, ‘produced randomly in human sites as *living space*.’³ As urban studies have taken a ‘southern turn,’⁴ with an increasing number of works in mainstream urban studies focusing on cities of the global south, this contrast between built form and living space is indeed critical. But equally central, it seems, are questions of global scale and the possible political and spatial descriptions of particular cities, especially these cities of the southern hemisphere, at the global scale.

For this conversation, we take as our point of departure the multiple uses deriving from the Latin root *capitalis* (chief, principal, in the sense of sovereign power), which is both the root of capital as well as of *capitellum*, meaning small head, or the top of the column in the architectural sense.⁵ By juxtaposing these multiple uses, we enter into a contradiction: we are speaking both about the sense of a vanguard and of fixing, of that which tops off and shows off the solidity of the architecture as well as that which circulates and controls the expression of sovereign power in the political sense insofar as it is able to circulate.

1. de Boeck, Filip *Kinshasa: Tales of the Invisible City* (Ghent-Amsterdam: Ludion, 2004), pp 233 - 235

2. Simone, AbdouMalik “The Visible and Invisible: Remaking Cities in Africa,” in *Under Siege: Four African Cities: Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos: Documentati_Platform4*, p. 24

3. de Boeck, *Kinshasa: Tales of the Invisible City* (Ghent-Amsterdam: Ludion, 2004), p. 233

4. Rao, Vyjayanthi “Slum as Theory” in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 30 (1), 2006.

5. Source: Webster Dictionary online.

We are especially concerned with where we can situate ‘networks of concrete becoming,’ both in terms of forms of accumulation and in terms of the possibilities for articulating political power in a continent that is increasingly subjected to global flows of finance capital, resource extraction and migration. We found that the best place to begin was with the transformations of the physical environment of African cities. While Simone unpacks the developments in and around Dakar and their political effects on other Senegalese cities, speculating on the causes of such massive investments in construction, de Boeck reflects on the intensification of *urbanity without architecture* throughout Congo, in part as a result of the diamond trade. The relationship between what de Boeck calls the ‘ejaculation’ of wealth and the accentuation of non-investment in the physical space of Kinshasa is contrasted, for example, with the imaginary ‘urban planning’ encouraged by the various churches that have gained enormous popular appeal in the Congo. Can a conventional understanding of architecture sustain the weight of this imaginary planning? Can one think of the city outside of material forms of representation and aspiration such as those of architecture? These questions also motivate de Boeck’s explorations of Kinshasa at the 2004 Venice Architecture Biennale and his more recent exhibition, *Kinshasa, The Imaginary City*, in Johannesburg (2006).

Non-investment in material terms might also be linked to a return of the colonial *comptoir* economy, the economy of the trading post and the generativity of certain kinds of urban performance. These performances center around the ‘hunter’s landscape,’ in which capital works only through its incessant expenditure and circulation rather than through a logic of accumulation and maximization of profit. It works, in other words, through the creation of social networks that make investments work for the urban hunter. In this landscape, colonial histories seem to endure inasmuch as the city continues to be seen as a site of exclusion by the vast majority of the people who developed Kinshasa outside its colonial boundaries. It is therefore a place where everything that comes from elsewhere – from outside the ludic spaces of social networks in formation – is thought of as being there to be ‘ripped off.’

Thus, the concentration of political power in the realm of the capital city is challenged by its circulation in and through diverse spaces and amid those networks that constitute the invisible architecture of connections of the contemporary African city. The physical aspect of the city, especially as the signal of a growing densification and convergence of trajectories, has, however, also become crucial. A history of Dakar, from its origins in the *comptoir* economy and its territorial incorporation into France that defined its relations with the other cities in the Senegalese metropolitan system, reveals these new trajectories. These trajectories are at once global in their reach—controlled by actors from the Senegalese Murid Diaspora as well as the Lebanese Diaspora—while also having effects at the level of the nation, expressed in the investments that new actors from the hinterland are making into the landscape of Dakar, gaining new visibility for their activities.

We explore here these dispersals of capital (financial and human) and their relation to these capital cities (Dakar, Kinshasa, Khartoum) and in the peculiar relations that cities like Lagos have to capital in both senses, economic and political. In other words, we try to open the question of the location of capital in this conversation. In so doing, we attend to other forms of invisibility as well. For what happens in the course of the circulation of capital across Africa is the generation of capital and of urbanity outside of known forms, outside of the structuring contexts of architecture and the planned insertion of material infrastructure. “These cities are often invisible to the outside world,” de Boeck says, because “they function in ways that we are not used to seeing and therefore go unnoticed.” Thus we face the question, “where should capital/the capital city be located?” by asking, “what is the scene/site of urban action?” We face the question, “what conduits of access are being developed in order to facilitate investment, expansion, accumulation or “ejaculation” of capital?” by asking, “what forms of social complexity are being explored in the development of these conduits?” What sort of etiquette is being developed by residents of these cities in the drive of their residents to becoming visible in order to enable social being? We turn to situations of boundary maintenance in Abidjan and in Khartoum, and we also turn to the emergent play of aspirations that reach for under-coded territories. Recent Malaysian investments in Senegalese social housing in the name of an ethical Islamic practice as well as Chinese investment in a transcontinental railway system represent gestures of a new kind of global play. In this conversation, we think these contradictions between the material and the non-material, the visible and the invisible, the push for material infrastructure in Africa and elsewhere today and the relationship that this push articulates between political power and capital, in the sense of the ‘topped off,’ aligned and accumulated stashes of wealth in its multiple forms.

Vijayanthi Rao

Capital/City

Imaginary Urban Plans

Vyjayanthi Rao: *What are the spatial expressions of capital in contemporary Africa? How do these expressions relate to expressions of political and subjective power?*

Abdou Maliq Simone: Currently, in Dakar, you have the rather recent and still opaque project of building a new capital, for the moment designated as ‘Dubai sur Atlantique,’ some sixty kilometers to the north. Partly this reflects the generalization of the reinvented logic of the entrepôt associated with Dubai; partly it emerges from the fact that there exists a kind of conurbation that leaves Dakar and then begins to link what were some major small cities like Thies and M’bour. In some ways you have this residue of a kind of colonial bifurcation. Fifty years ago, Dakar started to become too overcrowded, becoming too much of a threat to certain kinds of order and processes. Dense quarters were displaced to Pikine and Guediwaye, and that in some ways, culturally, became the real Dakar. Outside of colonial specifications, these areas reflected many of the tensions of urban spaces attempting to articulate temporal and spatial divergence. The same for Freetown, the same for Conakry, the same for Dakar and to a limited extent for Abidjan, you have coastal capitals where, geo-morphically, it’s quite limited in how they can grow. You have this kind of concentration in these very limited physical spaces. It becomes impossible to navigate. This kind of trajectory of expansion then makes it quite physically difficult to access the centers of power and centers of commerce. So, in terms of President Abdoulaye Wade saying we can no longer have the airport where we have it, we can no longer have ministries where we have them, we have to relocate, we have to bring them out to make them more accessible, to recenter, to reconstitute somehow the gravitational field of the capital means in one sense this old reiteration of new grand, grand works. Still, the former center, Plateau, continues to be a huge building site. You still see these immense kinds of constructions taking place there.

Filip deBoeck: It’s incredible. I just drove through it a couple of weeks ago. Whose money is driving this?

AMS: In some sense the appearance of continuous development signals a certain availability of this area to investment of all kind, and this plurality itself can constitute a platform for real occupation. Whatever is put up will in the end be used in some way. So residents in Dakar don’t usually have the sense that this is something that’s being inflated. Spaces are being bought. There’s a market. People are buying these things: office space, apartment space...

VR: *In other words, it’s somehow not virtual?*

AMS: I can’t say for sure, but there’s a kind of popular understanding that there are real buyers for these things, real occupancy.

FdeB: I think that is the difference with a place like Congo. Clearly in Senegal or in Dakar, you have a middle class or upper middle class of people, merchants with financial means who are doing their own trade and commerce and investing in their own city. In Congo, such a local middle class is absent, and there are, of course, historical reasons for that. For a long time the whole country was run by a small group, a power elite around Mobutu. There was no middle ground between the very poor and the very rich.

Mobutu’s downfall created a void in that respect. Those with money left. In Kinshasa, as a result, the housing market just collapsed. Those who remained in the city could afford to buy housing. Today, real estate is booming again as never before, but the boom is not caused primarily by Congolese. The capital flowing into the city comes through ex-pats and foreigners. The latter often Lebanese—people from outside, who start to redevelop the city but only to a certain and very minimal extent.

VR: *What about the diamond trade in the early 1990s and the kind of wealth it generated? Was it at all reflected in what was happening to the physical space of Kinshasa?*

FdeB: Well, on the one hand, it just accentuated the level of non-investment in physical space because all of that money would leave. Very little of it would be invested in infrastructure. On the other hand, it did have a huge impact in other ways because the informal diamond economy allowed for local actors to all of a sudden gain access to a lot of money. People, often youngsters, would go to Angola to dig diamonds, and often they would come back with \$1,000, \$10,000 or even \$100,000.

VR: *What would they do with this newly generated wealth?*

FdeB: Well, most of the time it was very quickly ejected and spent—kind of ejaculated, really, all over the place. Few were those who invested it in building, in houses, in plots of land. But some areas of certain neighbourhoods in Kinshasa did witness a modest construction boom thanks to that kind of money. But already, when you talk about the capital of Kinshasa, the question immediately is, *the* capital for whom? or who defined what the capital is, and who has access to it? In Dakar, it was merely a discussion of *where should it be*. In Congo, the colonial city really emerged as a non-place. It was defined as a ‘centre extra-coutumier,’ that is, the city placed itself right from the start outside of all locally existing cultural, social, and political frameworks. In the postcolonial period, Kinshasa became a major political centre. But in recent years, even that role has slightly changed. In the late 1990s we saw how regional players (Rwanda, among others) tried hard to make the capital move eastward, away from a Francophone sphere of influence. In the end that hasn’t worked, if only because of the sheer size and weight of Kinshasa as a cultural centre. And it has, of course, also remained an important political centre, but contrary to an earlier period, it is perhaps no longer exclusively the only political centre. There are other centres of power as well. With the Kabila dynasty, Lubumbashi, for example, has once again become more important.

And, second, the capital, already when the city was founded or when it grew out of really a *comptoir* economy, it was a trading post originally and then transformed into a huge labour camp. The city that the Belgian colonial administration developed was a deeply segregated one, certainly in terms of race but also in terms of gender, for example. Basically, it was a depot of cheap labour force. Access to the city was strictly controlled. The city itself was dual: there was ‘la Ville,’ the exclusively white, colonial heart of the city, and then there was “la Cité,” the vast, indigenous peripheral city, inhabited by Congolese. The city in itself has always maintained a state of exclusion, even today. For example, where the colonial borders of the city end today, the real city starts, much like Pikine. But in Kinshasa, you have a colonial city with a very small heart, which stopped growing in 1960, when Kinshasa’s population did not exceed 400,000. Afterward, 4 million to 6 million people have been added onto that, but in areas that have not been urbanized along formal lines.

Today, one of the access points into the old colonial Ville is marked by a statue, which Father Kabila erected in memory of Lumumba, Congo’s first prime minister after independence. The statue itself is of a Lumumba who stands with one hand raised. And there are all kinds of popular interpretations of that statue. First of all, in Congo, there is no real culture of statuary in public places, so its sudden appearance generated all kinds of comments. Painted in gold, the huge and heavy statue reminds one of the former Soviet Union’s aesthetics. The first remarks people made were, “This is going to be heavy to move and steal when another wave of looting sweeps through the city.” And second, “why is he standing there with his hand like this?” He’s basically saying, “Stop, you can’t get into the city.” To all of the multitudes who live in the peripheral city that has become the real city, the statue says, “You’re not allowed to come in.” It’s basically perceived as the government denying access to all these people who want to get into the city but who are not allowed to, who can’t afford to, who can’t make use of it, who are blocked and excluded.

The areas and neighbourhoods that extend beyond the statue are referred to as ‘La Chine populaire,’ or the Peoples Republic of China, because they are so populous. They are called “*Bana terre rouge*,” or the children of the red earth, in reference to the dusty and un-asphalted roads in those areas. The people living there have never had a real sense of the colonial city as their own. Very often, I think, they don’t feel as if the city belongs to them. It’s not their city.

Father Kabila, I believe, understood that very well and tried to decentralize the urban space, much like Wade. As an alternative to the Central Market in the colonial centre, Kabila ordered another market to be built in the city’s newer periphery. But even then that market picks up only very slowly because people do not really consider it their own: it is a top-down government initiative. It has been there now for almost ten years, and the feeling about that market is not good. People start working and functioning around the market, but the market itself as a constructed space by the government has never really been fully adopted.

So that other city, that peripheral city that is the real city, has developed according to its own notion of what capital might mean, or what forms of accumulation might mean. In order to exist socially in a city like Kinshasa, expenditure, circulation, and conspicuous consumption are far more important than accumulation or maximalization of profit. Accumulation requires a directionality, a teleology, a specific temporality which is not the temporality of the city today. The city, on the contrary, is a space of the sudden, the unforeseen, the unexpected and fleeting moment. In order to survive in it, one has to know how to capture that moment. It is this praxis of capture and seizure that determines life and survival in the city, which itself is often compared to the space of the forest. As such, the city does not function according to a standard capitalist logic as we know it. The city, essentially, is a hunter’s landscape. In order to survive in this

forest-city, one has to be a good hunter, that is, know how to seize an opportunity and know how to make that known. The new figures of success within the city, whether it be preachers, politicians, or musicians, are, in a very real sense, the city's best hunters: those who know how to capture wealth, inject it again in social networks, and gain social weight through it.

That also means that the urbanscape is not so much shaped by the dynamics of modernity but rather that it is constantly infused with all kinds of other notions and moralities that often have longstanding, rural roots.

The practices of seizure and immediate expenditure make for the fact that there is no build-up of any surplus; the notion of accumulation is absent. Everything you have or everything that is sold in the market is everything that can be contained by one's belly, everything that can be eaten and digested immediately in the moment. There is no use in buying ten cans of something because you don't know whether on the tenth day you will still be there to drink it. So you buy what you need in the moment. You don't buy a whole bar of soap, but you buy just a third of it, enough to wash yourself with this one time. You don't buy a whole pack of cigarettes; you buy just one or even half of one cigarette. And so all the heaps of foodstuffs that you see at the market are measured by the quantity of the belly, the quantity of the stomach. Capital in that sense starts to mean something else; it becomes something else, away from standard notions of accumulation.

VR: *If notions of accumulation are displaced from the logic of capital in the urban practices of the Kinosis, is there a different sense or understanding of investment as well?*

FdeB: Well, there is a lot of investment in social relations and in one's self-realization through these relations, but far less investment in material infrastructure. Not in buildings, not in a city that is still perceived as something that is not fully ours after all those decades. And since it is not fully ours, it means there isn't a sense of responsibility about it: the material infrastructure and everything that comes from above and from outside is there to be ripped off, to be captured and taken advantage of, whether legally or illegally. The term now is *kisanola*, or 'combing your hair.' 'Combing' in the sense people now give to it means stealing, looting, ripping off. If I, as a white person, walk through the street, people will make the *kisanola* sign, by which they indicate 'You are there to be ripped off,' basically because I don't belong there and can therefore be taken advantage of without any moral objections or feelings of guilt or wrongdoing. Similarly, a money changer in the street might advertise 'double *kisanola*,' meaning, 'Here you will be ripped off twice.' It indicates that the money changer you are dealing with knows what he is doing, that he is shrewd and streetwise. Paradoxically, the fact that he is not to be trusted is a sign you can trust that guy. Another image people use is that of an injection. In order to socially exist and survive in this urban environment, one has to know how to stick a needle into someone and suck the victim's blood. So that's the way in which capital moves in the city, that's what it is about. It's not about accumulating, it's not about maximizing. It is not about having but about being, not about possessing but about consuming, about singularizing oneself by immediately putting capital in constant circulation.

VR: *If these actions do not have a standard capitalist notion of investment, which is typically directed toward future profitability and to something that might materialize at some other point in time, then what kinds of future are being imagined by the Kinosis?*

FdeB: Such a sense is emerging today but in the religious sphere, where money has come to mean something very specific. Within Pentecostalism and other 'prosperity churches,' you see how the switch toward a capitalist notion of money and of accumulation is made. There you also witness the introduction of new notions of individualization. These churches turn away from older collective identities based on kinship or ethnic belonging. Within that new religious public sphere these former group identities are disfavoured. On the contrary, one becomes an authentic Christian as an individual and through one's own work and effort. And that's the constant message of these churches. Here one witnesses the introduction of a new subject formation, the introduction also, of a new work ethos and of new notions of accumulation. In these churches accumulation is no longer something that is socially negative. It is, on the contrary, something that is favoured, even though the fruits of that labour and accumulation are often not harvested instantly in this life. When people give money and goods to the church and to their preacher, they do so because they believe that God will multiply these gifts and return it to them. During Masses and prayer meetings the believers often listen to testimonies by people who died and were resuscitated through the force of prayer. Often they report back to the church community about what they witnessed in Paradise: "Everything that we give to the church, everything that we give to the preacher, is being invested for you in heaven," they would say. "And with the money you give they are already building your house and your villa in paradise. When you

die, your house will be there, a house that you were never able to afford here on earth.” So ‘giving’ in this religious context has become an investment in real estate, even though that real estate is located in heaven. In this sense, the churches do contribute to a new form of urban planning, but it is an imaginary urban planning in the hereafter.

In those churches, within these new forms of Christian fundamentalism, you clearly see how the switch is made from the notion of the gift toward a notion of capital, with all of the fallout that it produces too—because it means that stress is put on individual success and not on group solidarity. And it means that the notion of the group, of what ‘family’ is, for example, is being redefined at the moment away from the reality of the extended family toward the new and more restrictive notion of the nuclear family. In the process, people whom one would have defined as kin before are now being labelled as outsiders, strangers, or even witches. These are radically new geographies of inclusion and exclusion that emerge within the urban locale and redefine the boundaries between inside and outside, kin and stranger, endogamous and exogamous.

A city like Kinshasa has really become the fault line where these two different logics—the logic of gift- and kin-based reciprocity and the logic of money—meet, so far without really merging, and that produces huge upheavals.

VR: In the book, you talked about the idea of the jungle, and how it’s becoming part of the landscape of the city. The growth of the city seems to be premised upon the encompassing of this forest through new forms of action such as those in the religious sphere.

FdeB: Well, as I said, it’s again about the hunter. In the forest, in order to survive, you have to know how to hunt. In the city, in order to survive, you have to know how to hunt. Well, that means, what does the hunter do when he goes hunting? He comes back with meat and then distributes it according to specific roles and rules that indicate what one should give to one’s maternal uncle, first wife, the owner of the gun, the owner of the land where you shot the animal on, and so on and so forth. And that’s how he makes that capital gain, in this case, work for him. He gains in social prestige by investing in social capital.

In order to survive in the city, you have to do the same thing. You have to constantly make sure that you create and invest in certain networks, which are no longer the network of the household, maybe, or of your ethnic group or your village, but different kinds of associations, different kinds of groups of cooperation—maybe a gang, maybe all kinds of groups. But you constantly have to invest, you constantly have to be present, constantly have to exchange, constantly be “in touch” with others. In order to survive in the city you have to know how to do that.

When people speak of the city as forest, they refer to a specific kind of forest. It’s a forest in which you can become modern, where you can attain and access a certain modernity, even if it’s only in imaginary or oneiric form. I gave the example of the church, but the bar is another concrete example of a space where you can do that, and the church and the bar overlap to a certain extent. They are basically the same ludic spaces.

VR: I was also interested when you talked about the hollowing out of political power in Kinshasa—the colonial Kinshasa, not the other Kinshasa that has developed later on—and the concentration of that power in other cities, like Lubumbashi. What is the relationship between these various concentrations and expressions of power? What is the kind of impact they have on the landscape of the capital city?

AMS: Looking at some of the overlaps and divergences of Dakar may be somewhat interesting. Because one has to keep in mind that Dakar and other Senegalese towns were actual—

FdeB: Those were *comptoirs*.

AMS: They were *comptoirs* and also part of France at one point. Dakar was literally integrated into French territory and done so in a way to mark the strong divide between the city, the urban and the hinterland. The hinterland was the province of the *Marabout*, a kind of religious power that had to be contained, that had to be marked. I don’t know a lot about that history, but it is a clear history with ramifications to this day. In some ways, outside of Kinshasa is a hinterland that is teeming with certain possibilities. It teems with both an excess of life and death. Whereas outside of Dakar is increasingly a hinterland that is over. It’s wasted.

But what’s interesting, too, is the fact that you have Touba. It was a religious city and was at one time exempt from taxation and had no kind of local municipal structures. The buying and selling all was concentrated as a kind of terrain of the Murid social structure and also exempt from certain kinds of applications of customs law.

Touba really grew a lot through trade, so it was a kind of entrepôt masked as sacred city. Then, when people began to realize that it was a sort of booming commercial centre on the basis of illegal trade, there was the attempt to domesticate it in some way. The domestication, the complex negotiations to bring its urban economy, which was not just an economy of Touba, but a transnational economy— that somehow symbolically and administratively was administered from Touba. The complicated negotiations to try to bring it into the ambit of the state meant that certain deals had to be worked out. And an important deal was that Plateau, the commercial, administrative, colonial centre of Dakar, became—through many different policies, many different deals—increasingly available to the Murids. So, the Murids began to take over. They began to take over certain Lebanese commercial interests, particularly that kind of intermediary between wholesaling and retailing. What was interesting is that the Dakar’s urban economy in some ways became an extension of Touba. But you have then a kind of indigenous entrepreneurship that really is within an urban economy and is really strong, unlike in many other places.

FdeB: That’s really different from Congo. I mean, in terms of indigenous entrepreneurship, what has worked well in the past decades are those parts of the country that knew how to evade Kinshasa. A very good example are the Nande cultivators and traders of coffee in a secondary city such as Butembo, in eastern Congo, who through their own networks managed to really inscribe themselves in transnational commercial movements which link them to Dubai and Asia. Very wealthy, a whole new form of urbanization, a kind of very provincial urbanism, all of it because they are not under the control of the capital city and know how to evade the state. Otherwise, it would never have happened. The real urban growth and the notion itself of urbanity often develops, I would say, outside of Kinshasa, as long as it’s not controlled by the capital.

The same is true of the diamond trade. Even though materially they do not represent much, little diamond towns that spring up along the border with Angola, for example, or the gold mining towns in the East – those are the places where the idea of capitalism and urbanity is most fully generated. But again, materially, these cities and towns do not correspond to the form of what we think of as a city. And yet they are much more urban in a way in their dynamics than what goes on in the ‘real’ city.

AMS: In Senegal, in some ways, the predominant mode of urban accumulation can be attributed to what goes on outside of Senegal. There’s nothing within the nation of Senegal itself that could account for the kind of—

FdeB: No, but within Senegal, there are local autochthonous groups that have the capacity and strength to impose themselves and become key players and control that game. In Congo, you often don’t have these, in that sense. Whether small trade and commerce or industrial activities in the fields of mining or wood-logging today, these activities often were and still are not in Congolese hands but are controlled by the Lebanese for example or the Chinese, for that matter. Even in the early years of Kinshasa’s existence, the trade was not in Congolese hands but was often controlled by what were called the ‘Coastmen’: people coming from Freetown or Dakar or later the Greeks and the Portuguese and now the Lebanese and the Pakistanis and so on.

When it comes to the broader geopolitical game, I mean, why is Uganda there? Why is Rwanda there? It seems to be Congo’s fate to always be exploited by and profited from outsiders. Congolese, even the Congolese government, tries to get its hands on some of the crumbs that fall off the table, but it never fully controls the game, it seems to me. Whereas these Murid are in control of what they’re doing, to some extent.

AMS: And increasingly so.

FdeB: And increasingly so, yes, increasingly taking over the state.

AMS: So that sort of division, of keeping the state separate from capital, Dakar separate from Touba—

VR: *In practical terms, it seems to be blurring. This relation between the capital city as the expression of political power and as the space for capital as economic field of operation —*

AMS: It’s not there. For example, during the periods of intense religious ceremony in Touba, you can walk down the main street of Dakar and have almost no traffic. Otherwise, streets in Dakar, where I used to live not far from Plateau, which used to be a 10-minute taxi ride, today takes an hour and a half.

FdeB: Absolutely. Or even longer now, because of the road works.

AMS: But also because there are limited feeder roads, because of the increased densification. In some ways, what accounts for that kind of densification? All right, many of the Lebanese have gone away, have been displaced. So they go, but many of the Lebanese also continue to have important kinds of economic circuits. As they're displaced from certain kinds of economic activities but because of the ways that many of those Lebanese networks were implicated within the socialist party, they simply take another form of accumulation, which is through extending their real estate. So, you have these big Lebanese investments in building.

Now, the Murid are also capable of doing that. I mean, it's not that the particular form of economic activity is anything different from a kind of corporate structure. They do that as well. But there is something important about the market. There is something important about the logic of the way in which the market operates, as an intensely mutable form. There's something very material about the way that this market operates: small traders who are more than small traders, of shifting alliances that are made visible, of a form of visibility where people can watch, observe, see what's going on, who's dealing with whom. But that has to be serviced, so you have big trucks coming in and traffic.

It becomes a densification by virtue of multiplying these trajectories in a way that's partly symbolic, partly a kind of nerve centre. The antecedents want to reproduce themselves spatially, yet veer off and transform into a sort of Murid version of corporate headquarters—big buildings, because they're investing in that as well—and also the way in which Dakar is increasingly implicated in other economies elsewhere. For example, the political crises of Abidjan during the past several years has meant key corporations, multilaterals, move from Abidjan to Dakar.

But what's also interesting is the attempt to host the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Dakar, something that was supposed to have already taken place. It has been postponed now three times. Wade always says the reason for this delay is because Dakar needs adequate infrastructure in order to sufficiently host the meeting. For him, that means the construction of eight new five-star hotels on the Corniche.

In some ways the infrastructure of hosting this meeting already exists. It already exists in tourist areas outside the city. But in some ways, that's too much a kind of budget tourism, bordering on some sleazy activities that can't really be the site to host an Islamic meeting. Maybe any other meeting could take place there. But because this is the Organization of Islamic Conference and as the basis of accumulation of the Murids, Senegal has always in some sense been marginal to the rest of the Islamic world, there is some perceived need to use this gathering as a way of normalizing Senegal's relationships with the Muslim world.

Not that Senegal itself hasn't always been seen as part of the Muslim world. But increasingly, as the Murids assume more political and economic power and then become available as an expression of a certain kind of national cohesion, signalling the distinctiveness of Senegal as a nation but also its integration into a larger theatre of operations. "We're Muslims, we're clearly Muslims, we take Islam seriously." Singularity is very much wrapped up historically into a sense of national identity, a sense of national cohesion.

In some ways, the hosting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference signals almost the normalization of Senegal's position within the Islamic world, so it has to be done right. But to be done right means that you have to make this big intervention into the built environment. The money is coming from Dubai, from Kuwait. These hotels basically belong to them, and what is their interest? What is the interest of the Emirates in the Gulf? The financially ambiguous role of Dubai World and its real estate arm, Limitless, in the proposed construction of the new capital simply accentuates the impression that the country is being brought into a particular field of orbit that is being elaborated through major urban and financial engineering projects managed by Gulf companies across the Maghreb.

Somehow there's something about locating what will be Gulf-owned pieces of real estate on the Corniche, facing the Atlantic in the westernmost Islamic country. A six-hour flight from New York—there's something about that.

FdeB: Are you saying this, or is this the way this has been perceived?

AMS: On the street in Dakar, there's this kind of talk, you know?

FdeB: Like we're in the middle of—

AMS: All I'm saying is that when you look at the relationship between capital and the capital city, the kind of project of centralizing, the kind of expression of the capital, of the national cohesion—

VR: *The way I'm hearing it is that there's some relationship between being aligned to these other sorts of flows—from Dubai or elsewhere—on the one hand, and to the regeneration of the city, of the nation on the*

other hand, which cannot any longer be expressed without this alignment? Without this movement toward bringing those elements into the space of the city—in a very concrete expression. The buildings almost become that medium as it were, where—

AMS: Yes, but combined with a very old story too. Wade is a very old guy. He's in his early 80s. He's just begun his last term in office at what may be a high political price for the country. He knows that time is running out, and he's waited to be in power for a long, long time, and somehow the notion of the *grands travaux*, the big works—

FdeB: Very French. Like a French President.

AMS: To make the mark, to leave the trace, with also very old ideas about making Senegal really a modern nation—that's reflected in this. It's an old story.

Invisible Infrastructure

VR: *Turning to a related but different question, I want you both to elaborate why the notion of invisibility seems so analytically central to thinking about the contemporary African city?*

FdeB: The question seems to be the things that Maliq was talking about: urban networks and how people move through the city, make use of the city, and create the city and generate the city while doing so. How can you capture that? How can you start to understand, capture, contain, and represent urban life? How do you represent an urban reality like that? You cannot. All the means that we have at our disposal to do so, whether it's writing or whether it's photography, seem to be in a way not sufficient.

VR: *So the question is also about epistemology having to do with the urban as object. It seems that writing about invisibility is a productive way of describing what's happening in African cities. And part of the interest is also to understand whether those forms of description are particular only to Africa or if they can travel to other urban conditions.*

FdeB: Well, invisibility can mean many things. There is invisibility on many levels, of course. There is the fact that these cities are invisible to the outside world because people don't know much about African cities. There is the fact that these cities function in ways we're not used to, and that we therefore do not see, that go unnoticed. There is the fact that forms of urban planning and so on continue in very much literally invisible ways, like the urbanization that I was talking about - urbanizing in Paradise rather than the real life. Invisibility might mean a number of things.

AMS: I agree. As part of this New School grant, there has been this project in Douala for the past eighteen months. One piece of that was to have a working group of young, middle-class kids in a middle-class area of Douala, Bonamoussadi. They meet once every two weeks for eighteen months. This notion of invisibility was something that was on their minds as well. It was a word that was used, it was a concern that they had, it was a very particular kind of concern because these are middle-class kids. They come from families that are civil servants or lawyers or teachers, professors, business people, and live in a quarter of Douala that has maybe 300,000 people. It's not small; it's a significant chunk of the city.

When they talked about the changes that they have seen taking place over the past couple of years, the discussion started on the level of something very visible. That is, the changes in the built environment and the way in which there was this popularity of a certain kind of tile that was being put on the houses. Old houses were being torn down, and on the façades of these new ones that were being built was a particular kind of tile—white tile. They started to talk about the way in which this was a kind of uneasy thing, an unsettling thing, for them because it had these connotations of the cemetery, the mortuary, of death—the kind of the white that you would put on graves.

They would talk about the façade as some kind of death. In many of the new constructions, people would spend so much money putting the tile on the façade that they didn't have enough money left over to furnish the house inside. You'd have these beautiful, nice façades but inside something that—

FdeB: Emptiness.

AMS: Emptiness. So, again, sort of intensifying this kind of connotation of death. They would see their neighbours, but the concern was, “Okay, this is the built environment, it’s a nice house, but who is inside?” This thing about being visible in the built environment was also a kind of concern about with whom do we live? The sense about living with people you don’t quite know.

And then, of course, the notion of the living dead—those who are able to operate in the city without being interrupted, whose operations cannot be made visible, rendered visible. We don’t know how someone’s gotten their money. All of a sudden they have a lot of money, or all of a sudden someone loses a lot of money. Or all of a sudden, people move from a house without anyone knowing.

In some ways, their concern was “Okay, we’re all sort of middle class in this boat. We all have sort of narratives about how we got here. My mother, my father, they went to university . . .” But they would talk about going to shop at a new mall, a new supermarket. They would talk about the anxiety of with whom would you be shopping, because you never know who it is that these people are. So the concern was always to make that which is invisible visible—to interrupt it, to trip it up, to find ways of trying to slow down possible neighbours who could operate with such speed through the city that they wouldn’t be visible. How do you make them visible? How do you trip them up? How do you set up roadblocks?

They then went on to talk about what people they knew were actually doing to try to trip them up. The stories get quite complicated and quite political and involve other territories and people in the city that they would never deal with. The notion sometimes of visibility and invisibility is a concern that people themselves raise. It’s a kind of language that they themselves bring, so it’s not an analytical thing necessarily imposed. It can be that, but...

FdeB: It’s a natural thing that comes out of the reality that people inhabit. In Kinshasa, the same. The relationship between visibility and invisibility is a very weird one, in a way, because on the one hand, in order to exist socially in the city it is all about being as visible as possible. It’s about appearance. That’s why you have that whole popular urban culture of *sape* and elegance, about the clothes you wear. It’s about knowing how to put yourself on stage, and it’s the only way to acquire social weight and impose yourself in public space. All of a sudden there is this person emerging, this preacher, politician, musician, or businessman, very theatrical and very physically present, although you never see how he got there. The modes in which visibility was achieved remained rather invisible.

Performing Urbanity

VR: *So are there particular forms of etiquette associated with becoming visible?*

AMS: I am thinking about the work I did in Lagos, which was some time ago. It was in a particular neighbourhood in Lagos, which was very peculiar to Lagos, very particular to Lagos. There, the questions of visibility and invisibility were largely about witnessing. How do you turn yourself into a receiver of the kinds of information that might be useful to you in order to know how to insert yourself into some kind of emerging deal or scenario? Because all that this neighbourhood had was its deals: the deals that didn’t take place inside but always outside. There was always this kind of incessant process of visiting each other, showing up, visiting, making oneself visible, to go to a store where other people are showing up. But then as other people are showing up, how do you not insist upon your agenda? How don’t you dominate this space, this scene, but how do you become visible and almost disappear in the face of others who are also there, in some sense, for the same agenda?

Because this was largely a Hausa neighbourhood within a Yoruba city—or a Muslim place, West African Muslim place—it wasn’t that there weren’t visible associations and visible rules and visible representatives of the emir and his business interests. Somehow, in order to make the thing work, people had to put together new crews with new kinds of skills, with different kinds of experiences and trades than in the past, because you’re trying to take on something new. You’re trying to configure new kinds of deals now, you’re trying to go to new cities, you’re trying to buy new commodities, you’re trying to relate to other kinds of syndicates.

So, I want to put together a new crew, but how do I do that? But also, how do I *not* enter? It’s complicated because this is a spatial arena that knew it had to survive in some way because Babandiga and the military wanted to seize it because it’s an interlocked, an interstitial zone between Lagos island and Victoria. It was ceded by the British to the Hausa as a kind of space of operation, so there are very visible solidarities that had to be maintained. You can’t include everyone, but you can’t be seen excluding people

in particular. How do you create the sense that your new crews are in some sense self-selected, that you're not the one who's excluding?

So it is just a complicated kind of elaboration of a social etiquette in a way, a kind of business practice that had to keep channels of information open, had to not keep secrets, but had to have an informational economy where you minimized competition. It was all done through these quotidian practices of having sites that apparently didn't sell much of anything but were places of reception. There's a way of managing an economy of visibility and invisibility, where the two had to be brought together in some kind of functional calibration and recalibrated all of the time.

Within the larger scope of Lagos, given the fact that there are usually eight people to a room, always in very dense quarters, how can you keep something to yourself? How can you keep something away? Is there, in any sense, privacy? Privacy doesn't really exist spatially. It has to be a calibration of not seeing what you see, and also seeing what you don't see, because you have to be able to see.

Even in the everyday cognition of this kind of density, visibility and invisibility are day-to-day matters.

FdeB: But you also need to be invisible or to know how to disappear and reappear at a good time.

AMS: Timeliness.

FdeB: Time is very important.

AMS: The calculations of acting in a timely matter...

FdeB: That's why everybody also seems to be waiting all of the time, I think.

AMS: Given the sort of big-man or big-woman syndrome, particularly in a place like Lagos, you need a protector, you need a patron, you need someone you can have recourse to, you can appeal to, who can arbitrate, who can make a decision so that you don't have to: "Okay, I know the one that I appeal to, that I regard, that I owe, that I depend on . . ."

This person has a lot of other people around. What happens if we all show up at the same time? How do we know how not to all show up at the same time?

VR: *How do we know not to crowd the space?*

AMS: To crowd, yes.

AMS: In this one area I lived in when I was living in Khartoum, people from Darfur were living with people from the South in a complicated relationship with lots of tension but lots of complementarities. As the area was growing, so were demands for space and services. But it was always interesting because the households from Darfur were saying, "Implement Sharia. We want Sharia, we want to live in terms of Islamic law. We want this to apply to ourselves."

And so these people working in the area—local NGOs, activists—were always concerned that in some way this would create a legalistic divide with people from the South, who would not fall under Sharia law. The people from Darfur were saying, "No, you don't have to apply it. But we want to live under it. Please make it applicable for us; we want it." There was always the concern that this would polarize relationships more and really intensify conflict.

But because people from Darfur would then say, "No, this is not the point. We want Sharia for us. We want to mark the difference with our neighbours even more, because it will allow us to deal with them in a much easier way." When I then do all these other things, it's not that I'm doing it as part of my zone of operation, but I'm becoming part of their zone of operation. So I'm then exempt; I don't have to implicate myself. I can retain my sense of being a good Muslim, because that's my operation in their zone.

In some ways, the desire for the legalistic divide wasn't a desire to cut off contact but, quite on the contrary, to maintain a sense of a certain kind of integrity.

VR: *It seems that there is an interesting contradiction here with laws in the municipal, urban planning sense, and these other understandings of law, which don't quite territorialize in the same way, which are universal at some level. In other words, not quite cutting off or zoning behaviour and restricting it to a particular sphere of operation; instead, which allow universalization, based on that which is mobile, which*

can be carried around, through the person, through their ability to act and be governed by a set of invisible structures, rather than visible barriers of the ways in which cities are normally understood: barriers of neighbourhoods or barriers of access or transportation, infrastructure of various kinds, and so on.

FdeB: But at the same time [these barriers] do exist.

AMS: This is the claim that's made by my friend Ousman Dembele, who is an urban geographer in Abidjan. If you're in Kumasi [a quarter of Abidjan is largely populated by Ivorians from the North of the country] and the kids are stuck in Kumasi for the most part because surrounding them if you go to Marcory, it's dangerous territory. You could be killed, you could be beaten up. These territories of operation depend on where you're from, your religion, your region, and your political affiliation. The territorialization is really strong.

But what Dembele describes is that in some ways it's impossible for this kind of strict territorialization to be maintained. Somehow there's a sense of boundaries, and the boundaries are dividing lines but also works-in-progress. They become spaces of revision, trying to come up with new terms of connection. But, of course, this is somewhat invisible work. He claims that at these boundaries, there's a lot of boundary maintenance work taking place. The maintenance is not to keep the division in place necessarily, but to work out what are the terms through which there is interchange. It's impossible for people to stay put necessarily.

We know that there's a lot about urban life that increasingly enables the capacity to stay within segregated spaces but, we know, also risks atrophy overall. It risks the kind of urbanizing trajectories that an urban system needs in order to be able to function. We also know that these kinds of spaces of segregation are dysfunctional in some ways. In some way, the boundary becomes a kind of place where it's transgressed, not just about transgression, but about trying to come up with something that you don't necessarily commit yourself to, which is continuously revised, worked out—a language, a terrain of transaction itself.

Dembele claims that the relationship between contiguous areas with very different histories of inhabitation, where everyone is an enemy to each other, when you look at it as a kind of system, that system can't function just simply by being. There are these points of intersection at boundaries, but you can't make them too visible because you know that people might be looking, you could be killed. There's something else that does take place.

From Colonial to Global

The Capacity for Networking

VR: *If we were to return to our original point of departure and think about the problem of the visible again, we have to also confront these various global trajectories of investment in Africa that are increasingly visible now.*

AMS: The Chinese will probably end up putting in one billion dollars to Lagos, and much of that will go to the cultivation of a kind of Chinese entrepôt. I'm not sure if this is still the case, but at one point this was to be the site of Chinese personnel, of services, businesses and residents—of those that are responsible for managing West Africa.

It is almost like a large, gated community, but it is also more than just a kind of residential facility. So what happens? Always the thing is that unlike colonial relationships of the past, where the ability to operate was predicated on all of these other, ancillary activities like civilizing missions and destructive—

VR: *The display of excessive power...*

AMS: Yes, but this is: "We'll leave you alone if you leave us alone." It's a kind of capacitation of a kind of parallel play, of a quid pro quo. You allow us to bring our engineering teams, our staff, our personnel; you allow us to evacuate particular kinds of resources, again using our infrastructure, then we will pay you for the right to have done that. Part of that payment is, once again, investment in infrastructure. This is a kind of connection that will have really massive implications.

VR: *Yes, that's something that I want to bear more about, especially in the light our discussion about the operation of very low-end Chinese merchants or retailers in places like Douala and smaller towns in*

Africa—the ways in which they integrate themselves into local networks, markets, and economic flows, and so on. How do you think this massive infrastructural investment and capacitation that arises from that is different from the operation of these merchants? Or maybe it's not different. What is it going to do to the shape of the city or the future of the city?

For example, I'm thinking of the way that Khartoum is being transformed, not from the West but from India, from China, and not in the traditional forms of trade, which are historic. You have had Indian merchants in Africa for centuries, coming in through the Indian Ocean trade, and similarly the Chinese as well. But this is something new. This is Capital, with a big 'C,' coming in from the East. That's not so much built of these human networks, but built of something more inhuman, a creation of an inhuman platform. It probably has great ethical implications for the way that architecture, especially, inserts itself into the city.

AMS: Yes. The Malaysians, for example, wanted to make this deal with Wade where they would build 30,000 units of social housing, but they had to be built within one year, and it had to be done under particular kinds of conditions. And in some ways, it was. It was a Malaysian company that specializes in quick housing construction for lower-end consumption, from which they think they can profit. It has antecedents in a particular kind of Malaysian aspiration, which is that Malaysia can embody a kind of progressive, Islamic capitalism that is able to take certain kinds of risks but yet has an interaction with other fields of possibility.

It's still a playing field. In Cabo Verde, Irish investors want to build 15,000 units of retirement housing for European investment. In some ways, there is this sense that there is no place that can't be inhabited, there is no place that can't be potentially occupied, there is no place that is in some ways off-limits. Because you still have these kinds of undercoded territories, they also can become playgrounds for ideas and aspirations and of a variety of different external actors.

The Chinese juggernaut is the most dominant, the most visible kind of actor in this, but there are others.

VR: It's perhaps appropriate to end here with this gesture toward these singular projects that have great potential for generating urbanism beyond the city in ways that are perhaps different from those projects for renovating the capital city that we began with. Thanks very much to both of you for your time and energy.

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Ibadan, Soutin and the Puzzle of Bower's Tower*

(for Taiwo 'Tarifomah' Fatoki, in memoriam)

Akin Adesokan

I

DECEMBER IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA IS A THIRSTY, incandescent month, halfway through the dry season. The evening air is burnished to tinder-edged sharpness by the harmattan, cool, sandy wind blowing southward with imperceptible haste, eager to catch fire before it reaches the coast where humidity lies in wait like a spider to quell the happy-fly noise of the haughty breeze. These are the times of arson and brushfires, and you can sense it in the gaiety of public conduct, the upbeat display of enthusiasm that propels itself toward the disastrous with a little lack of care. It is not for nothing that the dying months of the year are called the 'ember-months'. Mix this atmosphere with soccer, 'good' nationalism (as opposed to the bad varieties in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda), home advantage, and faith too deep to need work as supplement, and you have the unforgettable encounter between the IICC Shooting Stars FC of Ibadan and Zamalek FC of Egypt, in the second leg of the finals of the 1984 African Champions Club Cup, played at the National Stadium in Lagos on Saturday, December 8. Everyone and everything in Nigeria, and especially in Ibadan, home base of Soutin, as the team was admirably called, depended on this match. For weeks, especially for the last two weeks since the home team had lost the away-match in Cairo by two slim goals, national interest had begun to rise in the media – passionate, effusive and complacent, driven by the dead certainty that the current Soutin line-up was the best in the team's long history. The excitement spilled into the streets, or rather spilled from the streets – it amounted to the same thing. Journalists were hard to tell apart from veterans of the supporters' club. The air was dry all the time, and as we counted down to that fateful Saturday, radio and television jingles, posters, newspaper cartoons, loudspeaker-bedecked supporters' vans prowling the streets, recorded-music stores partisan but businesslike, added to the sense of anticipation.

The most memorable, for me, was this jingle in Yoruba, a cross between wish, incantation and malediction, a gnomic *Ase* on the airwaves, periodically played by the culture-conscious official broadcast organ, Radio O-Y-O, based in Ibadan like the football team:

Egibiti o ri'ran osan o
Balubalu nt'afin o!
(May the Egyptians be blind this day
Blurry-blurry does the albino glimpse)

It was rumoured that the high-spirited supporters' club, headed by Mr Ganiyu Elekuru (a.k.a. Baba Eleran, because he was a professional butcher), had even paid witchdoctors for charms and fetishes. Probably an idle rumour, but Mr Elekuru would go to any length to demonstrate his support for the team, which was so total and frightening it attained the condition of fanaticism. Two years before, during a match in Tanzania, it had taken the personal intervention of the Nigerian High Commissioner in Dar es Salaam to rescue Elekuru from a mob which suspected him of being a witchdoctor and would have lynched the daylight out of him. Writing these reflections today, in the shadow of reports of ritual killings of albinos in Tanzania, one has an uncanny sense of the futile attractions of the occult, of beliefs which do not have to be true before they acquire immense material force, indeed acquire such force because they do not have to

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be true. The jingle would survive the event, as the poetry of a battle-cry outlives a war, but that eventuality belonged in the future. On the evidence of this unsurpassable enthusiasm in Ibadan, Soutin had won the match and carried the elusive Sékou Touré Cup. The game being a national event, however, it would not be played in Ibadan. On to the National Stadium in Surulere, Lagos; we'd reserve the partying afterwards for the legendary City of Seven Hills.

'A War Encampment'

Founded in the mid-1820s as the base of bandits, soldiers, warlords and refugees fleeing the old cities in the aftermath of the fall of Oyo, the savannah empire which attained its peak in the eighteenth century, present-day Ibadan, capital of Oyo State, observed no architects even in its peripheral vision. Geographers and city planners have had many field days proclaiming the city's singular identity, the breathless manner in which it developed with few of the features of the traditional Yoruba city. In the classical model of this urbanism, the main road of the town leads directly to the market, which is adjacent to the palace of the king and where, on occasion, residential quarters (compounds) converge with the farms and the smaller towns for business and social interaction. Ibadan has these features, but only as an afterthought – as the consequence of the trial-and-error process through which the war encampment became a town. The most famous figure at the time of the town's second founding (the earlier Ibadan was first settled in the fifteenth century, according to history) was Oluyole, the Basorun or prime minister, who used the diminished power of the king of Oyo and the unfeasible old capital as a pretext to develop his own political base to the south. This soldier's pioneering ways and quirks have earned the city its main alias; Ibadan is also known as 'Oluyole's homestead'. He was one of those incredible figures from the age of upheaval, the mean time when only the mean survived: Kurunmi of Ijaye, Generalissimo of the Yoruba confederate army; Ogedengbe of Ilesa; Somoye of Abeokuta; Aduloju of Ekiti; Kosoko of Lagos; Latoosa of Ibadan; and female notables like Efunroye Tinubu of Lagos and Efunsetan Aniwura of Ibadan. They were coevals of Samory Touré, Tippu Tip and Lobengula, in much the same way that Mohammed Farah Aideed, Charles Taylor and Laurent Nkunda could be today. If the Yoruba generals didn't attain the global fame of their western and southern African peers, it was both because of the nature of the colonialism in Nigeria, and because the Yoruba wars were a resounding implosion: the warring brothers were spent from decades of attrition, and the British generals, aided by African missionaries, stepped in as providential mediators.

In the new military capital the civilian head would emerge with time to complement the soldierly echelons, but while the Basorun remained the embodiment of power, the market that developed, Ojaa'ba (Basorun's Market), quickly assumed the character of the traditional market. Until the 1980s, there was no central king's palace. The fortunes of the commercial structure mirroring those of the body politic, Ibadan's rise as the base of military commanders in an age when soldiers thrived best became identified with the ethics of a republic. The civilian head became less irrelevant, first as the Bale when the establishment of the colonial Protectorate of Southern Nigeria clipped the wings of the 19th-century warlords, then as the Olubadan when the Richards Constitution (1946) chipped away some of the pomp of the Indirect Rule

system under which the new Oyo empire had regained suzerainty. The ceremonial base of this civilian head shifted with the appointment of a new person, for the new Olubadan emerged not in the hereditary fashion of most Yoruba towns, but through a process of rising through the ranks in which a vacancy at the top created opportunity at the bottom. Thus, every male citizen of Ibadan (understood as belonging to any of the families of military commanders and their civilian allies who had settled the town) can aspire to the highest traditional office in the city, the kingly position of the Olubadan – if he wants it enough to work for it!

Nearly three decades ago, the writer Paul Wheatley described the distinctive Yoruba living quarters, the *agboole* (or compound, but literally, ‘a gathering of homes’) as ‘large permanent, compact aggregations’ of landholding corporate groups descended along agnatic lines whereby the male members of a group live with their families. These compounds constituted the regular homes and held much of the population of a given city around the precinct of the palace. He was thinking about the generic urban setting, and he allowed that relatively recent settlements like Ibadan and Abeokuta, while retaining the main features of this genre, differed in some significant ways. The traditional urban form developed over a long period of time, probably from the 15th century through the major upheavals of the early 19th century. There was a religious rationale for this spatial organisation, because the king was the spiritual head of the town and maintained control of the cult groups and their associated rituals and festivals. In the post-1820 format, a military elite displaced the religious powers significantly, especially in Ibadan, where the *agboole* retained the physical attributes of the tradition: the long rectangular structure fronted with a courtyard, behind which the living quarters are organised into compartments each belonging to a nucleated unit in the agnatic family. Due to the manner in which the city unfolded, the compounds were homesteads of war commanders who governed through a hierarchical system in which military prowess and personal ambition were the primary yardstick for advancement. This republican ethic is elastic, and its elasticity is a source of great indignation among many indigenes who count themselves as meriting special consideration on the basis of birth, as the scholar Ruth Watson found out while researching her book, *Civil Disorder is the Disease of Ibadan*. Yet this is what distinguishes Ibadan from any other Nigerian city – its corporate image as a traditional city-village with unimpeachable cosmopolitan credentials. The Yoruba compound, according to the architect David Aradeon, is a spatial distillation of the practice of tolerance, and Ibadan offers a fascinating example of this hypothesis. A distinct kind of nationalism, city-based and negotiable, is deep-seated in Ibadan. The rise and fame of the Shooting Stars FC between the 1970s and the 1990s reflect a successful, if sometimes irksome, management of this nationalism, and this is what differentiates it from the blood-spilling variety.

II

THE EGYPTIANS WERE NO STRANGERS TO SOUTIN. Both teams had met at the semi-finals of the 1976 African Cup-Winners' Championship, and the Ibadan side had won, going on to defeat Cameroon's Tonnerre Kalara (of Yaoundé) in the finals, an encounter that has now become legend. (Fanatical supporters of Tonnerre Kalara attacked the Nigerian players with *werepe*, the powdery crusts of poison-bean which create painful, hours-long itches on contact with bare skin, and the team played throughout the inconvenience.) But there was no other meet in the next eight years. To get to the finals, Soutin had sailed past SEIB Diourbel of Senegal, overpowered their old Cameroonian antagonists, sunk the Maghrebi Fes of Morocco, and dispatched the little-known Semassi Sekode FC of Togo in the semis. Unlike their Nigerian opponents, Zamalek had never won a continental cup, although two Egyptian sides had won this particular championship three times before – Al-Ismaili in 1969 and 1970, and Al-Ahli in 1982.

The first leg of the finals was scheduled for Friday, November 23. It was a rainy day in Cairo. There was a small group of Nigerians in the stadium, and two of Nigeria's famous sports commentators, Sebastian Offurum and Ernest Okonkwo, who had accompanied Soutin to Egypt, ran commentaries in drenched clothes. The match was broadcast on the radio in Ibadan, early in the afternoon. I huddled over a radio with a group of friends soon after the end of classes, with rapt interest and confidence in our side's prowess. (I had begun to lean toward the more cosmopolitan Leventis United, Soutin's arch-rival managed by John Mastoroudes, the Greek director of the department stores after which it was named. I went to school in Ibadan but spent more time reading the 'Africa and the World' columns of newspapers, and paid equal attention to the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the election of Ronald Reagan and the International Trade Fair in Lagos. However, while among friends I retained some enthusiasm for the hometeam, and this pleased my Cousin T enormously. At any rate, Soutin were representing the whole country, and it made sense to leave personal preferences aside.)

Rain was not the only obstacle. For one, the Nigerian side was deficient on one particular point that day. Their star player, 'Mathematical' Segun Odegbami, arguably the best Nigerian footballer of all time, had suffered an injury during the semi-finals, and watched the match from the sidelines. Rashidi Yekini, later to be famous as the scorer of Nigeria's first goal at the 1994 World Cup in the US, filled in for him, and in spite of his best efforts, didn't net any goals. In a dramatic moment, twenty minutes into the game, the commentators' voices rose several octaves as the tall striker found himself deep inside Zamalek's box, but his wide shot quelled that enthusiasm. The other obstacle was the crowd, which awoke with the renewed vigour of the home team during the second half. A slight defensive error by the left fullback, and a pass sailed down to the goal area, where an Egyptian striker was waiting with a header. From this curtain-raiser on, the decibel level of the noise in the stadium would not wane; it merely reinforced Zamalek's aggression, which paid off with a bonus second goal – an undeserved penalty-kick awarded by the Gabonese referee in the 70th minute. Newspaper accounts of the match recorded that Soutin played well, with a superior command of the midfield and the left wing.

One afternoon in Albany, New York, I sat in a mid-scale restaurant near the Greyhound bus station and nodded to a casual conversation which had developed from a question I'd posed to jump-start some small-talk. It was a few days before the 2000 US general elections, and I had been intrigued by a Gore/Lieberman badge donned by an attendant. Then an African-American guy who fancied himself as possessing political opinion said with a gentle wave of the hand, 'Hillary [Clinton] will get the black votes.' No one had asked him, but he felt that as a sponge for mass-circulating views on an issue of great currency, he could weigh in on his own. The general public attitude in Nigeria toward the chances of Soutin before and after the first-leg match in Cairo was something of this nature. Not only did everyone have an opinion, he or she felt able to express it with a casualness which signified supreme confidence. In Ibadan in particular, it was not unusual to hear that all the city's team needed was a draw in Cairo. Then they would return to Ibadan, and drown Zamalek in goals. Even after the loss, with two goals down, optimism endured with a few adjustments: all Soutin needed were two quick goals in the first half, and a resolve to play defence in the second, sending the match to a shoot-out. It would be a replay of the encounter of 1976, when Soutin had cancelled their goal deficit in the dying minutes, eventually triumphing during the penalty shoot-out. In this frame of mind did the Ibadan-based team return to Nigeria in late November to prepare for the final of finals.

‘Like broken china in the sun’

The map of Ibadan is difficult to visualise. You will have a hard time imagining it as a fearsome cat, the form in which Ireland appears to the anti-hero of Flann O’Brien’s *The Poor Mouth*, or of Florida as a pistol in the thriller of the 2000 recount. This is in part because the precise reaches of the city, excluding its outlying districts collectively tagged ‘Ibadan region’ by city planners, are hard to determine. It is also in part because even as we write the city is still growing, the outlying districts continue to be turned into citified residential areas in the relentless sprawl of urbanisation. On a map, however, the metropolitan core of the city, what used to constitute the Ibadan Municipal Government area with headquarters at the Mapo Hall across from Ojaa’ba, looks like a soft-rot peach gently pulped at the top end. It is the region demarcated by urban planning experts to define the areas which once constituted the original clusters of *agboole*. These are the sections where industrial activities are nil, and commercial and residential purposes are integrated in such a way that their separation is impossible, even in theory. They might have been called the *musseques* and the *bidonvilles* if we lived in the 19th century; and though we didn’t, their location at the city’s core rather than at its periphery, integrated with the bases of political, religious and economic powers, and their preindustrial rationality, too, might suggest a new way of using the old grammar of relations of wealth and prestige. For we know, from Cheik Anta Diop’s account in *Precolonial Black Africa*, that the exercise of caste privileges was inconceivable without the relational hierarchies of the preindustrial West African city, and considering the conservative alliances between kings and slaves, it was possible to have nobility without wealth. This style of urbanism, among other factors, precluded the formation of a revolutionary consciousness on the scale and character of the European city. Ibadan went without a master plan for a long time, until the dissolution of the Western Region in 1976 caused city planners to etch perspective into the fatty sprawl of the legendary godmother. With time, Ojaa’ba acquired the character of the classic Yoruba market, because at some point in the 1980s a permanent palace was constructed to retire the practice of the moveable palace. The result was a complex of traditional and westernised centres of governance mediated by the market. Modern residential arrangements in these parts of the city were closer in form to the *agboole* than to the rationalised built space of the so-called ‘elite quarters’, which formed the outer rings of a concentric circle.

The city is located approximately on longitude 3° 5’ east of the Greenwich Meridian and latitude 7° 23’ north of the Equator, at a distance of about 130 kilometres northeast of Lagos. In physical outlook, it is made up of ridges of laterite (rock-hills), the largest of which lie in the central part of the city, and with peaks at Mapo, Mokola, and Aremo. The remaining four of the seven hills celebrated in J.P. Bekederemo-Clark’s classic poem, the five-line ‘Ibadan’ (1965), whose *enjambéd* last two lines supply the title of this section, are Oke-Ado, Oke-Are, Oke-Bola, and Oke’Badan, the rock-hill near Eleyele on the western outskirts. This last is never acknowledged as part of the poetic seven because it is not within the city, but as the legendary refuge of the founders of the first Ibadan it is revered and honoured annually as the goddess of fertility, during the licentious Oke’Badan Festival. The seventh hill is at Ojaa’gbo, a mile north of Mapo Hall, where Bower’s Tower was erected in 1936 in honour of the city’s first British Resident Officer, and from its height atop the natural elevation of around 275 metres above sea level, one can see the entire city by moving in a circumference. Situated right next to the old Rediffusion House, the Tower is locally named ‘Layipo’ because of the winding staircase by which one gains ascent to the top for a bird’s-eye view of Ibadan, and the naming embodies the city’s puzzle of cultural insiderism (*à la* Paul Gilroy), its subtle retort to arch-rivals like Oyo, Ijebu, and Lagos.

For Ibadan, eternal enmity is the price of eminence. Oluyole the Basorun did empty Oyo of political gravitas in the several decades between the fall of Old Oyo (1825) and the end of the Kiriji War (1886). But with the appointment of Captain William Ross as its Resident Officer in 1911, Oyo became so serviceable in the execution of the Indirect Rule system (the deployment of native institutions as the basis of colonial governance fashioned by Lord Fredrick Lugard) that Ibadan lost its pre-eminence as a political-military centre. Thereafter, it took the combination of the good offices of Henry Ward-Price (or evil, if you were an Oyo partisan) in the late 1930s, and the Richards Constitution of 1946 to enable Ibadan to engage in muscle-flexing with its ever-resentful uncle to the north. Nonetheless, Ibadan’s rivalry with Oyo was a sibling tiff, compared to what transpired between it and Ijebu. As one of the allies in the confederate army which founded the second Ibadan and decisively vanquished the Fulani jihadist aggression in 1840, Ijebu became integrated into indigenous Ibadan, sub-ethnic Ijebu settling in the southern part of the city, the Isale-Ijebu area. Renowned for their astuteness as entrepreneurs, a class of prejudice when you take a closer look at it, the Ijebu were not much loved in Ibadan. Worse still, they could point to another base of nativity,

their twin-towns of Ijebu-Ode and Ijebu-Igbo (in present-day Ogun State), and this opened their claims of being indigenes in Ibadan to question. To Ibadan natives, the Ijebu were at best native strangers, at worst interlopers.

The rivalry with Lagos was more recent and without the kind of nationalist passion which characterised Ibadan-Ijebu enmity. Lagos – cosmopolitan, showy, shallow, culturally bastardised, elegant and ruthless – was a more fitting claimant to cultural sophistication than Ibadan in late-colonial Nigeria, when modernisation equalled opportunities for professional and social advancement. Ijebu was also geographically closer to Lagos, and positioned itself as a natural ally of the country's cultural and commercial capital, what with the inseparability of commerce and bureaucracy in the scheme of colonial ideology. For all its wildcat stance toward Oyo, Ibadan remains the bridgehead of Oyo-Yoruba (or 'Yoruba proper', as the Oyo historian Samuel Johnson would have it), the cultural template on which modern Yoruba was fashioned in terms of language, culture, and religion. It is the custodian of the 'deep structures' of Yoruba, closer to traditional values than the border-trading Ijebu and the coastal Lagosians, yet not as intermediate as the mid-level towns like Osogbo, Abeokuta, Ogbomoso, Ilesa, and so forth. The truth, of course, is that as in most matters relating to difference, all Yoruba sub-ethnic groups are variously branded according to what others determine as their distinctive social characteristics. The prejudices which define Ibadan for its cultural and geographical neighbours are shaped by these relationships, for which three factors are decisive in annealing into cultural certitudes.

The first is the ubiquity of facial scarifications, lineage-based marks of varying patterns etched on a person's cheeks at infancy, usually during circumcision. This West African practice began long ago, but probably became popular in the era of the slave trade, when it was necessary to identify those who could not be sold into slavery, at least in theory. That, at any rate, was Ousmane Sembène's point in the short story 'Voltaïque' (or 'Tribal Scars'). There are at least twelve types among the Yoruba, from the simple *pélé* (three vertical marks) to the elaborate *kéké* covering the width of the face up to the temples and usually reserved for the families of professional circumcisers. Again, given the heterogeneity of Ibadan's ethnic makeup from the 19th century, different lineages became indigenised with their marks, leading to what one may call the mass production of lineage-marks as a distinctive feature of a 'proper' Ibadan person. Like most features associated with social prestige, an absence of these marks used to signify a lack of authenticity. By contrast, the practice was not common in places like Lagos and Ijebu, and so it became a sign of too much authenticity – in contexts where an unscarred face was the norm.

Another factor in the normalisation of cultural bias is the problem with the stressed 'S'. The Yoruba alphabet of twenty-five letters has two consonant sounds for the letter 'S', differentiated in the pronunciation of 'shaw' and 'saw'. In everyday usage, however, the difference disappears when the speaker is of Ibadan stock. Thus it is not unusual to pronounce 'Adesokan' with the neutral 'S' or smuggle the stressed form into a word like 'soil', hence the expression 'shons of the shoil' which puts a derisive spin on claims of authenticity. In fact, the problem is not particular to Ibadan; outside of the southern and coastal settlements, the conflation of stressed and neutral 'S' is standard practice. The phonological differentiation is probably the result of the complex negotiations that produced modern Yoruba orthography, but again, Ibadan's position as an amalgam of cultural groups and the butt of intra-ethnic rivalries makes it the target of such prejudices. There is a rich trove of jokes whose punch-lines turn on this speech habit. One in particular is the elaborate Q-and-A-format joke:

Omo-Ibadan, kimi sow?
Sow suob...
(Denizen of Ibadan, what's the show [i.e. what's happening]?)
Show is sure...)

When you add these two factors to the third, the process of benign stigmatisation is complete. Most censuses of Ibadan at the time these conceptions crystallised recorded that more than two-thirds of the city's indigenous population were Muslims. In the context of Western education modelled on Christian mission schools and instruction in Western classics, this was not an idle fact. Christianity arrived in the mid-19th century, but Islam was much older and more adaptable to many of the people's cultural practices. By the 1950s, when Ibadan's position as the administrative headquarters of the Western region brought about increased development in the industrial, commercial and social spheres, the population of indigenous Ibadan children attending primary school was 20%, compared to 70% in rival regions like Ekiti and Ijebu. Thus,

they tended to be less entrenched in the professions. To put it crudely, as a former governor of Oyo State did to his eternal regret, Ibadan indigenes didn't go to school and couldn't sway the scales in the modern scheme of things. Of all Ibadan's rivals, the Ijebu were the most routinely singled out because they constituted a sizeable part of the population – unlike the distant Lagosians and the Oyo cousins. Not surprisingly, most of the satirical and abusive songs during the Oke'Badan carnival targeted the Ijebu, and also the police. Finding political focus in the figures of an Ijebu like Chief Obafemi Awolowo (1909–1987) and the legendary Ibadan politician Alhaji Adegoke Adelabu (1915–1955) in the early 1950s, the mutual suspicion threatened to explode into a 'war'. Not only was Awolowo a Methodist and a successful lawyer, he also didn't have facial marks like Adelabu, a Muslim whose aspiration toward a British law degree never materialised.

Above all, his aversion to earthy populism was not the reason he didn't say 'Up Soutin!', in case you're wondering what happened to the 'h' in 'Shooting'.

III

THE IICC IN THE FULL NAME OF SHOOTING STARS FC stands for the Industrial Investment and Credit Corporation, a government-run limited liability company. The team used to be known as WNDC Sports Club (for Western Nigerian Development Corporation), with the alias ‘Oluyole Warriors’. It was actually founded by the expatriate partners of the corporation in the 1950s, but when a flamboyant football enthusiast named Lekan Salami became a director of the WNDC in the 1960s, his interest in the Ibadan District Amateur Football Association found a natural outlet in promoting the football team. With the political realism of national unity necessitated by the harrowing civil war (1967–1970), the 1970s marked the golden decade of football in Nigeria, and the Shooting Stars did battles with other city-identified teams. Raccach Rovers of Kano. Mighty Jets of Jos. Enugu Rangers. Bendel Insurance of Benin City. Stationery Stores of Lagos. These teams dominated the national league for over a decade. Whenever Soutin qualified for the finals of the Challenge Cup, Nigeria’s equivalent of the US Super Bowl, all footballing passions descended on either the Rangers or the Insurance. But the greatest rivals were the Stationery Stores, whom they rarely met at the finals. (Interestingly, Stores didn’t fare that well during the glorious years of the IICC. In the 1985 league fixtures, when Soutin’s chances of escaping relegation to the second division depended on the Stores beating the Flaming Flamingos of Benin, the decisive match ended in a draw. At a newsstand in my Lagos neighbourhood the following morning, I listened with mild resentment as the supporters of Stores, also known as Lagos Flamingos, exchanged cavalier repartee over a game that was simply a case of two flamingos playing... anyway, I was no longer an ardent Soutin fan. The Ibadan team dropped to Division Two for the first time that week, and remained there for a couple of years.)

An answer to the perpetual Soutin-Stores rivalry came in the early 1980s, when Leventis United was established. Another team based in Ibadan?! Didn’t Mr Mastoroudes get the memo about one-team domination, or was he looking for trouble? Taboo! Didn’t they tell him what happened to the Water Corporation, which, like a young wife menaced by a fierce rival, embarked on serial marriages, settling first in Oyo, then in Osogbo, and finally in Ilesa where it found peace in oblivion? By my third year in high school, my support for Soutin was waning. The Leventis line-up was youthful and Pan-African – half of the regulars were Ghanaians or southeastern Nigerians – in a way Soutin never cared to be. They didn’t rely on sheer brawn to win a match but had a style of cumulative passes organised around the control of the midfield which many would come to associate with Brazilian football. Whereas Soutin’s generational rivals were the Rangers, the Stores, and the Insurance, Leventis ruled the league with young teams like the Abiola Babes of Abeokuta, BCC Lions of Gboko, Femo Scorpions of Eruwa, Sharks of Port Harcourt, and the Iwuanyanwu Nationale of Owerri. But my interlocutor was Cousin T, whose fanaticism would embarrass even Mr Elekuru, although I doubted that he attended any of the matches. He had only one response to any defence of Leventis:

“Koraa don’t have a say in Ibadan!”

(Middle-easterners, from Syrians, Lebanese to Greeks, even Indians, were lumped under that generic term, *Koraa*, derived from the fact that the Lebanese used to trade in corals in Nigeria. Like the Ijebu, they were resented in Ibadan, but they didn’t dabble in local politics.)

In the 1980s, before and after the historic clash with Zamalek of Egypt, Leventis United either lost a match against Soutin or faced reprisals from the fans. Soutin’s home games were played at the Liberty Stadium, and there was an implicit understanding (sanctioned by the Nigerian Football Association) that the other stadium in Ibadan, at Adamasingba, belonged to Leventis. But the best the new team could hope for, even in this home territory, was a draw. *They had to allow their match to be forced into a draw.* In case the rivalry seemed bitter and coarse, let us note that Chief Lekan Salami, *de facto* owner of Soutin after whom the stadium at Adamasingba was later named, was a very stylish man who dressed in flowing *agbada* or a safari suit for football matches, with a further distinction – he brought a talking-drum along! It was a practice he’d begun in the 1970s, when the great rivalries had racial or ethnic undertones. For example, in a match with the Raccach Rovers, a team based in Kano, the northern Nigerian city, Chief Salami said the following through his drumming:

*Sabarumo soo loo gbon ni?
Waa sare!
Gambari soo loo gbon ni?*

Waa sare!
(Sabarumo, are you so audacious?
You'll soon flee!
Gambari, are you so audacious?
You'll soon flee!)

Sabarumo is a Yoruba expression for Arabs – never mind that the Rovers were a Nigerian team – and the same tune applied when Sudanese, Tunisian or Egyptian teams were visiting. In Ibadan anyone living north of Oyo was a Gambari, though in fact the name belongs to the royal family in Ilorin. The drum was a complex instrument in this context, a dexterous rousing-tool-of-exclusion, since special training was required to decode its tunes. It reinforced a sense of identity among the supporters. When the drummer changed the tune to '*Ibadan lo mo, o o mo Layipo*' (You may know Ibadan, but Layipo is beyond your grasp), encouraging the audience to singalong, every Soutin supporter knew what having a home meant. The local name for Bower's Tower connotes discursive circuitousness and dissimulation: Ibadan the city may be transparent, but there's more to reality than appearances, and it is the lot of the outsider to be denied access to insider info. Addressing an insult to a stranger who was not expected to understand it – what a confident way to affirm your place in the familiar world! When Soutin returned from Cairo in late November 1984, diehard fans like Mr Elekuru and Cousin T had put the disastrous loss behind them – it was more uplifting to aim for the second leg. Cousin T always said, in exonerating his darling team's poor performance: 'It is not every time that Odegbami wears top form [plays well].' But the star player was missing in action in Egypt. This asymmetry between received wisdom and facts on the ground should have sent enough signals to the fans. After all, a bit of superstition wasn't unknown in matters of sports.

'Shons of the Shoil': The Troika Plus One

Basorun Oluyole – Here is how the Reverend Samuel Johnson described Basorun Oluyole in his magisterial *History of the Yorubas*:

As a ruler he was arbitrary and oppressive and that was the cause of several civil wars at Ibadan. As a commander he was almost always successful although he had many narrow escapes. As an excuse for him, his was an age of anarchy and lawlessness, and a ruler who showed himself weak would soon be compelled to give place to another. He could endure no rival and was exceedingly ambitious, hence the two inexcusable flaws in his life history, the perfidy to his faithful friend Eleepo, and the disloyalty to the Alaafin, his uncle and sovereign.

He cannot be properly spoken of as a bloodthirsty tyrant because although sometimes inexorable, yet he was frequently merciful and forbearing. We may note for instance his treatment of those caught in the insurrection against him. In this respect he contrasted most favorably with his contemporary Kurunmi of Ijaye...

Oluyole was fond of husbandry; he had extensive plantations of okra, beans, vegetables, corn and yams, a separate farm for each, and whenever he had to take any to the market, no farmer was allowed to sell that particular article that day as he had sufficient to supply all the traders in the town and could undersell any farmer...

Adegoke Adelabu – By the time of this controversial politician a hundred years after Oluyole, literacy was already an achievement in Ibadan, and many ambitious people could pen their own subjectivities. Self-acclaimed stormy-petrel of Ibadan politics, Adelabu had a predilection for jingoism, not unusual for public figures of his time and social inclination. He authored an iconoclastic 'handbook of freedom for Nigerian nationalists' titled *African in Ebullition*. 'Lion of the West' was a stalwart of the nationalist party, the National Council of Nigerian Citizens, NCNC, of which Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe was inspiration and leader.

Here is Adelabu describing his own book in 1951:

This book derives many illustrations from astronomy, physics, chemistry, geography, engineering, agronomy and mathematics. It employs copiously the language of art, civics, biology, sociology, music, literature and history. It is liberally spiced with Greek drama, Roman law, English idioms, American slangs, French logic, Indian mysticism and African folklore. It is an Ode to Liberty, a Guide to Nationalists, a Handbook of Freedom, a Grammar of Politics, a Revolutionary Manifesto, our Book of Revelation, an Encyclopaedia Nigeriana, the Voice of the People, a Challenge to Imperialism, an Indictment of Colonialism, an Abrogation of Gradualism, an Invitation to Youths, a Call to Arms, the Sacrament of Patriotism, a Psychoanalysis of the Nation, a Dissection of our Soul, an Answer to our Detractors, a Reaffirmation of Faith, a Plea for Unity, an Appeal for Understanding, a Rededication to the Struggle, a Bill of Rights, a Declaration of Independence...

Much of the book goes like that, and it is only a little over a hundred pages in length. Those who attended his political rallies in the 1950s claimed he spoke in similar vein. His rivalry with Awolowo, founder and leader of the Action Group, deepened the historical rivalry between Ibadan and Ijebu in the city, and days of violence in which Ijebu persons and property were singled out for attack followed his tragic death in a car accident in March 1958.

Lamidi Adedibu – A thuggish chief who could have become the Olubadan had he not died in June 2008, and who played an ignominious role in Nigerian politics during the second coming of General Olusegun Obasanjo as Nigeria's president (1999–2007), Adedibu combined the worst aspects of his two predecessors, with a further touch of perfidy. Between 2003 and 2008 all politics in Oyo State revolved around him; on his say-so the parliament impeached the governor who refused to turn the state coffers over to the so-called 'strongman of Ibadan politics'.

His memoir, a dictated narrative with the typically implacable title, *What I Saw: On the Politics and Governance of Ibadanland and the Issue of June 12, 1993*, was an exercise in self-mystification. June 12 is the metonym for the presidential elections of 1993, adjudged the fairest and freest in Nigeria's history, but annulled by the military president, General Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993). It was typical of Adedibu's political myopia (he described himself *ad nauseam* as a 'realist') that he would establish a parallel between the politics of Ibadan and the historic elections of 1993. In *Adedibully*, a devastatingly witty profile published months before Adedibu died, the Nigerian poet Tade Ipadeola disclosed that the politician had taken that name early in his career as a declaration that he meant to best Adelabu's renown. Prior to June 12, however, he had been put in gaol for flouting the national ban on politicking. Here is an excerpt from his uncanny account:

After interrogation, the security agents asked us to come back the second day. However, the day appointed by the police that we should report to them was the burial day of Chief Lekan Salami who had died a day before. Because I had to attend the burial ceremony of this illustrious son of Ibadan, I decided not to keep the appointment...

It was the only mention of the flamboyant drummer/supporter in the whole book. Two pages later, a full-page picture shows Chief Salami receiving a trophy from a match official. We are told that he does this on behalf of the WNDC. This mixture of sports, localised tragedies and national politics may appear unsystematic, but as a witness to the annual Oke'Badan carnival once observed, there was a method to the madness: the Islamic burial of a local champion provided an auspicious occasion to traduce the law. Chief Lekan Salami died in a car accident in March 1988. He was sixty at the time – a double tragedy: he died young, and African football lost a great supporter.

Plus One – Like most prejudices, those directed at Ibadan are constituted by blind spots. The Olubadan Isaac Akinyele (1955–1964) published a masterful Yoruba-language history of the city in 1911, when Johnson's masterpiece was still a misplaced manuscript. It has been translated into English by his niece, Kemi Morgan; Akinyele's own biography was in turn written, also in Yoruba, by Chief J.A. Ayorinde, who used to delight television viewers with his elegant quotations from Shakespeare. As an Episcopalian Ibadan indigene who

belonged to the Action Group and embraced the city's martial heritage with a Christian touch, Olubadan Akinyele was the crucial factor in the equation between Awolowo and Adelabu.. A city-village like no other, Ibadan is variously called 'Harlem of Africa', 'the London of Negroland' (a tinge of racial prejudice there), and the 'largest indigenous city in sub-Saharan Africa'. Attaining its modern prestige in the 1950s, the city has suffered a series of decapitations as new states emerged to chip away some of its pomp as regional capital: in 1963, when the Midwest region was carved out; in 1967 with the creation of Lagos State; in 1976 with the creation of three new states; and with the creation of Osun State in 1991. These serial and partial transfers of human and material resources have naturally affected the city's standing among its peers: Lagos, Kano and Port Harcourt now appear more important than Ibadan from the point of view of economic development. It is a state of affairs which reinforces the view of Ibadan as a large village, and turns fixations with facial marks and suchlike into markers of real 'identity'. Things are this way, the skewed reasoning goes, because, after all, the 'proper Ibadan' cannot hold their own in the fast-moving scheme of things.

But Ibadan is...

In the mid-1990s, at the peak of the state of emergency superintended by brutal soldiers and marked by an extreme form of destitution which turned self-respecting but hungry citizens into beggars by decoy, a visitor walking through the motor-park would encounter a woman wiry with want or age panning for coins. She conducted herself with a disarming blend of grace, intimacy and importunity, and one had to lack manners to behold that quietly charming demeanour, and refuse to give. Then a certain parvenu arrived, in the manner of parvenus, almost out of nowhere, styling himself 'The-Wealthy-One-Who-Uses-His-Money-To-Dispense-Kindness'. On Fridays, after the Muslim Jumaat service, the hungry folk thronged his sprawling house along Iwo Road and got treated, so the legend goes, to a meal of *amala-gbegiri-kundi*, a combo as 'national' to Ibadan as *thiembu-dien* is to Dakar. It followed that Adedibu too would be identified with this genre of kindness, and that his reactionary and anti-democratic *amala politics* attracted rather than repelled the Ibadan folk in a long season of hunger and warped perspective. That partly explained the grovelling of virtually all politicians before this 'strongman', and the largely intellectual character of the opposition to his terror.

Besides Adedibu and the parvenu merchant of second-hand automobiles, there was yet another Ibadan indigene, a staunch supporter of General Sani Abacha in those days. He unabashedly used his emergency newspaper as a propaganda tool of that regime of repression, and so was highly resented by those who, though hungry, banked their integrity. Then, in November 1999, with the military back in the barracks, during the graduation ceremonies at the University of Ibadan, restless students ambushed this influential man's car, resolving to tear him into pieces for his bad politics. Security agents got wind of the plot and smuggled him out through the back roads, or bundled him into the trunk of his car, but it is significant that this happened at all, and that the setting was a university campus, the bastion of opposition to Adedibu's alimentary populism.

So, Ibadan ain't, either.

Its map may be tricky to the eye, but the aura, its brimming-over abundance of an aura, is far from ineffable or timeless. Ojaa'ba with its airy smell of *lafun*, the cassava flour, of *iru*, fermented locust seeds used as condiment, and of dried meat, called *kundi*; Gege with the whiff of butchered-animal entrails in its air; Bodija redolent of ground peppers, hen-coops and thawing mackerels; horny *danfo* drivers letting go of their libidinal frustrations on their horns, like 'Trane on tenor sax, from Mokola past Oniyanrin and Yeosa through Orita-Merin; the impertinent bus conductors more at home in the wiles of Gbagi-Ogunpa-Dugbe than wherever they called home; the once-famous Cocoa House at Dugbe, so high your cap fell off with the effort of glimpsing its peak. And the names, names so resonant with incantatory grace it would be common to call rose by an alias: Mapo, Beere, Yemetu-Igosun, Yemetu-Alaadorin, Yemetu-Adeoyo, Yemetu-Alawada, Alli-Iwo, Total Garden, Orita-Mefa, Agodi, Ikolaba, Idi-Ape, Monatan, Iwo-Road, Gate, Oje, Alafara-Oje, Alafara-Olubadan, Orita-Aperin, Adekile, Odo-Oye, Alakia, Agugu, Koloko, Ogberetio-ya, Odo-Ona-Elewe, Challenge, Ring-Road, Onireke, Iyaganku, Ireferin, Itutaba, Beyerunka, Ori-Eeru, Foko, Agbeni, Alekuso, Gbenla, Oke-Seni, Oke-Ofa-Atipe, Oke-Ofa-Babaasale, Oke-Padre, Ayeye, Idi-Ikan, Inalende, Ode-Oolo, Labo, Elekuro, Eleta, Ile-Titun, Idi-Isin, Oke-Oluokun, Molete, Oranmiyan, Imalefalafia, Oke-Ado, Kudeti...

The city has both an *oriki*, as befits any Yoruba entity worth its existence, and an anthem that speaks to its status as a modern city with national aspirations. Haunt of masters of the eloquent Verb, homestead of Oluyole, where the thief gets the better of the owner, the stranger prospers more than the

native, and the bandit-ruler, forswearing strife, makes captives of an entire town, for no one exists without some blemish, and civil strife is Ibadan's eternal affliction. An affliction with its soothing moments, during the masquerade parades in June, when Alapala battles Paje in the street, their hardy followers tearing mutual skins with razor-sharp whips, Alapansanpa prowls the entire city in ungovernable fury until he arrives at the Olubadan's palace, ringleaders of Abidi-Elege and Alemojagba air their sponsoring families' *realpolitik* in public, and the most revered of them all, Oloolu, lord of Ode-Aje, revels in inscrutable self-regard, until an irreverent mullah dares to pull off the veil. It is still Nigeria's publishing capital, and the first television station and the first university in West Africa were established there. It boasts a number of important research institutes whose current fortunes may or may not reflect those of the country, like the world-famous centre for tropical agriculture. It is called 'Harlem of Africa' because between 1951 and 1966, some of the leading lights of contemporary arts and letters such as Ulli Beier, Es'kia Mphahlele, Wole Soyinka, Geoffrey Axworthy, Chinua Achebe, Dennis Williams, Gerd Meuer, Tchicaya U'Tamsi, Jacob Lawrence, Mabel Segun and Robert July coincided in Ibadan, drawn thither by the university and the Mbari Club in the vicinity of today's Lekan Salami Stadium. It is home to Nigeria's only surviving colonial-era newspaper, *Nigerian Tribune*, founded by Awolowo, and the IICC Shooting Stars FC, to whose story it is now time to return.

IV

SOUTIN LEFT IBADAN FOR THE SECOND-LEG match in Lagos ten days early, on a Thursday. December in southwestern Nigeria is a thirsty, incandescent month, and you could feel the excitement of the impending football match in the texture of the evening air, burnished to tinder-edged sharpness by the harmattan. While the players worked out at their training-camp inside the Trade Fair Complex west of Lagos, Ibadan remained agog with exhilaration. Jingles, hortatory public announcements, parades flavoured with evangelical drama, ruled the airwaves. Committee meetings aimed at ensuring success went apace with plans for post-victory parties. The military governor of Oyo State (the country's civilian government having been booted out of power the previous December) probably instructed the director of sports, the coach and individual players to bring the Sékou Touré Cup to Ibadan or else...! (This, by the way, was the year of the Guinean strongman's demise.) I distinctly remember a cartoon on the back page of *Daily Sketch*, another Ibadan daily, in which a meteor (or a star) crashed down on the head of a Zamalek player. The caption read: 'Hey! Something is Shooting me Down!'

All appeared set. Odegbami, Soutin's star player, had spent the last several weeks recuperating, and he looked fit enough to play. The coach, Adegboye Onigbinde, who later coached the Nigerian national team during the 2002 World Cup, hoped to bag a convincing win as a belated 40th-birthday present for his wife. The supporters' club moved home to Lagos. Fans from different parts of the country came too, and the stadium began to fill up as early as 10:00 a.m. Pool aficionados knew that only the English league fixtures were worth banking on, but they placed bets on the match in Lagos all the same – old habits died hard. Everything and everyone was ready.

In ninety minutes, it would be over, and Soutin would shut down Western Avenue, the road leading to the stadium, with a victory dance.

In reality, the team was not ready.

Odegbami was not quite fit, but that match would be unthinkable without him. So he strode onto the pitch and played.

Felix Owolabi, the team's irrepressible left-winger, could not play for technical reasons. He had bagged three yellow cards, and only on Wednesday, when a letter arrived from the headquarters of the African Football Confederation (CAF), did he realise this.

Much of the playing was concentrated on the right flank, largely because Owolabi's shoe was too big for the replacement's foot.

Buoyed by home support and convinced of technical superiority, Soutin went for broke and played like bravehearts.

Toward the end of the first half, a play-within-the-play unfolded. Zamalek's goal-keeper, Abdel Maamour, started relying on delay tactics by holding on to the ball for longer than necessary. Whereupon Odegbami attacked and retrieved the ball from him for a successful shot at goal.

The Malawian referee had his hands pointed toward the centre, but he changed his mind after a protest by Egyptian players.

Then the unthinkable happened: Ogbein Fawole, an otherwise reliable defender, headed the ball back to the goalkeeper to deflect the aggression of a Zamalek attacker. The keeper was out-of-position. An own goal had occurred. The stadium went dead. It was 76 minutes into the game.

Moments later, another Zamalek player handled the ball inside the 18-yard box. Hope sprang eternal. But the striker couldn't find the net. Another penalty offered itself soon after that, but the result was the same.

Finally the 90 minutes were over. Fans trooped out of the stadium, mournful and dejected. Days of passionate postgame analysis would follow, none too useful. We read in the papers and heard on the

television that Soutin had not prepared well for the game. The coach was wrong to trust tactics of brawn and overwhelming raw power. One analyst speculated that the pitch at the National Stadium was rough, unlike the grassy turf at the Liberty Stadium in Ibadan. Another wrote that 'the Stars were not tactically and strategically equipped to make the difference. They lacked the ammunition to shoot down their opponents.' The *Daily Sketch* cartoonist clearly saw matters differently, having seen them earlier.

Fans went home. The Soutin players were abandoned at the stadium that night. The following morning. The following night. Three days and counting.

The worst was yet to come – or had arrived prior to that sentence of abandonment. On Sunday morning, December 9, the military governor ordered the dissolution of the team. Insult upon injury. It is doubtful that ICC Shooting Stars ever recovered from that action.

Postscripts

In the late 1980s, Soutin changed its name to the Shooting Stars Sports Club (or 3SC), with the general objective of functioning as a sports holding company catering to football, track-and-field sports, and so on. By 1991, the 3SC stabilised somewhat, and managed to emerge as Nigeria's representatives at the CAF Cup the following year. The opponents were the Nakivubo Villa of Uganda. The finals were played at the stadium named after Chief Salami, and the Nigerian team won. Many people had moved on. The 1984 captain, Taiwo Ogunjobi, had retired, as had Odegbami (who never played another game after the disaster of December 9). Leventis United reigned and fell, disbanded by its owners in 1988. The current manager of the team is another Ibadan indigene, Mutiu Adepoju (Headmaster), who headed home Nigeria's first goal against Spain in France '98. Mr Elekuru died in 2006, at the age of 78. Cousin T is also no more; he died in 1989.

Ojaa'ba thrives, but a more inscrutable market has risen at Bodija, near the University of Ibadan. Military governors/administrators follow in quick succession, mirroring the rapidity of the baton passing from General Babangida to General Abacha. A certain Colonel Ike Nwosu comes to call the shots in Oyo State. He brings out an edict that prohibits the use of malleable measures for retailing grains and other dry goods, because it is believed that retailers cheat that way. To enforce the new rule, he orders the mass production of plastic containers, imprinted with Nigeria's coat of arms as proof of authenticity. The market, the zone of occult instability where the people spin their spidery webs in Frantz Fanon's enigmatic postulation, is both rational and warm. 'Ike' is the Yoruba word for plastic, lacking the fragility of a plate, so the military strongman seems to have hit on an elastic idea of buttonholing the folk consciousness to the import of his innovations. But the denizens of the market, the same folks who partake of free meals of *amala-gbegiri-kundi* on Friday afternoons, have a different idea. When left for minutes in hot water, the official plastic measurement shrinks in size.

The soldier ruled Ibadan, but could he grasp Layipo?

Closer Than This

extracts from an open source book for urban planners

Karen Press

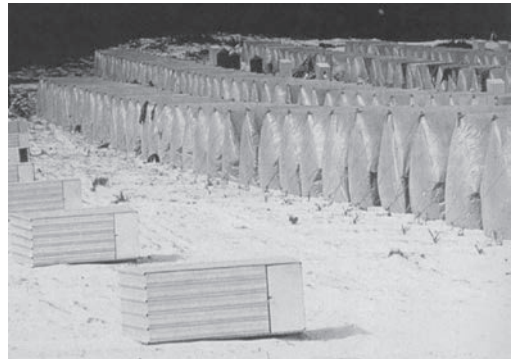


AND ON THE EIGHTH DAY

someone said –
we'll have a city here
(town, township, settlement, whatever)
pointing at a blank spot in his eye,
his finger dripping decrees onto whatever lay beneath it,

and you were standing just to one side of where the decrees fell,
maybe you were reading a novel or counting birds,
or thinking of how to fit utopia through the eye of a storm,
but the decrees ran towards you following the incline of the land,
they pooled at your feet, your face was reflected in them –

what did you do?



Early Khayelitsha
(Source: Mayibuye Centre, University of the Western Cape)

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

test: would Vladimir and Estragon be willing to wait here?

test: would a ball kicked along the road roll backwards?

test: would a bunch of flowers stay alive all the way home?

test: would Charles Baudelaire walk these pavements?

test: how long would a goldfish survive?

test: would Frida Kahlo find enough colours?

test: would the carrots grow straight?

test: would Nawal el Saadawi be able to relax?

test: would a cellist be heard?

test: would Elvis be happy here? would Fela?

SONGS OF THE DATA BIRD

dawn song

30% under thirty
2% over 60
the wheels of the bus go round and round

999 male pensioners
2 740 female pensioners
round and round, round and round

41 male foster parents
1 188 female foster parents
the wheels of the bus go round and round

400 dads in need of child support
37 000 moms in need of child support
all day long

dusk song

1 543 residential burglaries
4 000 weddings
342 smash-and-grabs
8 cases of public violence
35 078 baptisms
the queue moves at a rate of
3 metres every 15 minutes

346 drug-related crimes
(excuse me?)
167 graduation ceremonies
1 160 common robberies
25 fashion shows
77 indecent assaults
3 010 kitchen teas
518 stokvel frauds
1 165 thefts not mentioned elsewhere
the queue moves at a rate of
3 metres every 15 minutes

midnight song

344 murders
954 car crashes
the queue moves at a rate of
3 metres every 15 minutes

304 attempted murders
2 647 assaults with intent
20 439 birthday parties
the queue moves at a rate of
3 metres every 15 minutes

398 000 weekend street parties
556 rapes
(excuse me?)
109 ill-treatments of children
(excuse me?)
54 875 unreported child rapes
and a partridge in a pear tree
the queue moves at a rate of
3 metres every 15 minutes

CONNECTED

in my room I hear the boy upstairs whose mother died
lifting weights and dropping them onto the floor above my
head,
the mongrel puppy snuffling at the skirting board next door,
back and forth, back and forth, hungry for them to come
home
the lime green white-eyes strung along the plane tree
branches
dangling over my balcony, chattering to the pearl-pink sky

*
no closer than this

*
your shoulder falls against me in the taxi
and I can't think of it as innocent
but in your eyes I see that this is all you have to offer
though your hands are hardened like a farmer's shoes

poor man, I think, poor man
what would you do with a small animal if it nudged your
calf?
what would you do if I leaned against you
and said, tell me a story?

*
no closer than this

the little girls know not to touch anyone
their mothers fold their arms as I walk past, turning aside

young men shove their hands through the taxi window
to offer me keyrings and sunglasses

'for home for away' they call, laughing,
they shout at me as we drive on

*
no closer than this

THE THINGS THAT SURVIVE ARE THE THINGS THAT SURVIVE

put a frame around it and it stops jiggling,
takes on proportions and resonances

take the frame away and it weathers into dirt

the frame is just a rectangle of wood or metal, mass-produced

the jiggling was going to stop anyway, for a while

when it starts up again it's heavier-footed

until the air gets hold of it, then it's grave dirt
dug up and drying out, the portion displaced by the beloved body

with nowhere to settle

roaming in the air, surviving
or not

the city turns the land
from an animal into a machine

STATS SA SAYS

Stats SA says there are 10 771 disabled people in Khayelitsha.
Were. In 2001, or possibly 1996.

Of which a quarter can't see well, a quarter can't move well, three hundredths can't hear well, a tenth can't think well, thirteen hundredths can't feel well, one twentieth can't speak well, and nearly one tenth struggle with many of the things humans are supposed to be able to do.

And according to Stats SA there are, were, 328 997 people living in Khayelitsha.
More or less.

Which would mean that for every disabled person there are:
30.54 people to take care of them
7.98 households in which they might live
9.03 children who might look at them with wide eyes
0.68 pensioners who might spend time talking to them

wait a minute: 7 371 pensioners in the whole of Khayelitsha?
I don't think so.

Anyway.
Here on a folding chair in the sun outside a house looking onto the street
a woman sits who may be one of the quarter, the thirteen hundredths,
the twentieth,

the nearly one tenth, or the 30.54 who watch over someone not fully able to live here on the busy streets of a town no one can count properly.
She leans her head back against the wall so that the brick heat can massage her crown and smiles.

For what it's worth she lives here, you can count her in.
A child walking past looks up from her cell phone, her bright eyes register that the woman is not her mother or aunt,
her dark eyes busy far behind the bright eyes register without speaking that she will be this woman one day,
they programme in the folding chair in the sun against the wall overlooking the street.
What to expect, what to save up for.

No point counting. The sums perpetuate themselves hand-to-hand.
The one who can't move now has her 30.54 people remembering her hour after hour
as they step around her, over her, walk the other way, drop blankets at the door.

The one who can't speak has 9.03 children's laughter to scar him with sound.
The troubled thoughts of the one for whom 7.98 households stand ready will flow like a river through them,
and all their troubled thoughts will flow with him out into the streets
where children on their cell phones avoid the eyes of the pigeons,
kicking them with their little feet, storing up data for long-term recall.

WORDS THAT MUST BE INCLUDED

periwinkle
Cathar
pirogue
honeycomb
amphora
linotype
parrot
lantern
foundry
ellipse
mulch
footlights
water lily
robin's egg blue
crystal
metronome
windmill
seesaw
bubble
grave
parachute

UNPLACE

What to do with four million people wandering around all day with nothing to do?
This is not a statistic it's a mass of plankton with no algae to eat,
a herd of lion cubs growing bigger by the hour,
a sea of hunger and boredom washing up against the walls of every building.

City of aimless adults
pacing the same grooves into the same pavements hour after hour.
Would a free museum on every corner help?
A library, a cinema, a sports café?
A gym with swimming pool?
A hobby centre with free tools and materials?

City of girls and boys full of bounding energy and curiosity
pacing up and down the sandy roads where no one invites them in to play.
Would a military training programme help?
A 24-hour dance venue on every block?
Free sandwiches and apples for anyone willing to stay off drugs?

It seems the city is not designed for people to just be present in, Zen-like, still.
A useless location for foraging, for exercising the body,
for meditating on nature and god. No bible came from a city, no moral teachings.
Send them back into the deserts and forests, the ones with no jobs,
let them start their own cities, there's always room for a new civilisation to start up
against a bare mountain, bare-handed and free of refuse collectors, traffic police, housing authorities.

THE URBAN PLANNER RUMINATES

AFTER THE FIRST WHISKEY

all the arguments have already been used up
everyone knows why it won't work
to give everyone a small kind house
or to ban shopping centres
or to let the roads be marked out by children playing adventure games

it's naïve and also boring to ban cars and swimming pools
from cities and their suburbs, to ban suburbs,
to insist that everyone has to plant ten trees per year as a tax payment
to encourage dogs to settle where once were tanning parlours

sometimes just
any place that shuts
any room, dry enough
walking distance from food and water

sometimes just
any place where you don't have to bargain, vote, explain
make friends in order to stop moving on,
greet ten people in order to sit looking at a bush

(no one celebrates bushes in memories of a place, isn't it odd,
always a tree or a hill or some climbing twisting thing,
never a simple bush sitting steadily on its own feet
not even flowering for attention)

if everyone got a room and a good bathroom
no questions asked
would that take the pressure off the capitalist system
to trade in homes?

if every square metre came with fibre optic connections
and a good bathroom, would we all just sit quietly for a bit
thinking, chattering in that wonderfully silent electronic language
that makes us invisible to the neighbours?

and then outside, cobbles for sentimental reasons, flowerbeds,
paths leading to little shops, children hopscotching to keep the psychologists happy,
cats sunning themselves and dogs padding along being alert,
men sitting at tables in the sun, women learning to do the same,
would that satisfy the urban theorists?

same old same old

everyone wants to live in pretty Minerve
the way it was before the market went global,
before all that blood flowed that makes the summer geraniums glow
so firmly on their blond steps up to the little doors,
the good old thick doors with their cast iron hinges and the lintels worn by hands,
real human hands now long dead, little children and women and sturdy men
who ran through the streets screaming and then bled into the earth,
bright Minerve with its vineyards and chateaux
is a place that shows how a place should be, a public private place,
a human place between hills and a gorge good for defence, though too little in the end
to last when people came, real people on horseback with vats of oil and swords
made in another town somewhere along the same road
with its church at a slightly different angle to its market square

AFTER THE THIRD WHISKEY

what came first, the 'trinkets and baubles'
or the appetite for them?
if no one wanted them there'd be no shopping
and therefore no capitalism

cats like trinkets and baubles
at least for thirty seconds

so do elephants, probably (for whom an SUV counts as a small trinket),
and moths, who like them big and blazing hot

must be an evolutionary thing
trinket as food source perhaps or
bauble as shelter from the storm
or sweets for my honey, sugar for my gene pool's mum –

not a sign of anthro-spiritual genius but a DNA moment
prodding the creature into action – maybe that's what all the junk DNA is for,
to spur the hunt for junk –

if stomachs get hungry, so do brains and fingertips
yearning for shiny fluffy silky glittering doses of sensory input

even Mr and Mrs Feudal Serf in their mud-spattered clogs and coarse hessian coats
must have lifted their heads in longing when a crown rode by
(else why was it worn, the headache-inducing spine-crushing crown
with its load of trinkets and baubles?)

capitalism wouldn't have got started if the first peasant had walked past
the first silver buckle displayed in the first shop window thinking,
what would anyone want with a thing like that?

and here we are, building gherkins and sailing ships out of stone and glass
to amuse ourselves because there's nothing to watch on television,
the wonderful city is too easy to explain, its CAD-infused skin has no perfume,
what can we do next with our hands and eyes to keep us out of trouble?

ESSAY TOPICS FOR URBAN PLANNING STUDENTS

- What kinds of dwelling do you build for people who have a tendency to rape or be raped?
- What public leisure facilities should you design for people who are likely to be murdered?
- What are the civic participation processes most suitable for hijackers and drunks?
- What governance structures will best serve the interests of people addicted to consumer goods?
- What should be the layout of commercial zones in a city where most people are unemployed?
- How many paintings should each child be able to see on the way home from school?

TYPOLGY

City 1 won't let you sit down

City 2 says wear heavy shoes

City 3 sends you across your own direction

City 4 says whatever, just hurry up

City 5 stands you against a wall

City 6 follows your lead

Three Women

Allan Kolski Horwitz

She Is Alone

ZAZAH IS LYING DOWN. The bed stands in an otherwise empty room – there is only a stool and a very small table on which she has placed a kettle, two cups, a pot, a plate and some cutlery. A suitcase with her clothes lies open in a corner. She shares the flat with two other families but is fortunate enough to have a small room to herself. In any case they start work early in the morning and drop their children at a crèche so for most of the day she is the only one in the flat.

She knows some people in this new country; they are distant relatives from where she grew up. But she feels very isolated and alone this morning, and lies, legs sprawled, as if she is drunk, but she is not drunk, just sweating, for the city is hot, not as hot and humid as her old city, but still steamy with sun and rain.

At first it was exciting, and daunting, this very big city compared to her home, this city with a famous name: a place where they said money can be made, where new things can be learned, where you can change your life. And there are many hundreds of thousands from all over the continent who have come here. They fill this suburb; everywhere in the streets one sees their robes and hears their languages, and sees their shop signs.

She has been here six months. Her relatives tried to help, but they could not find her work. It was only two weeks ago that she found a job in a small shop selling vegetables. The owner, though not from her hometown, is from the same region and speaks the same dialect. He pays her almost nothing, but he is polite, and in the evenings after he checks the day's takings and locks up, he gives her a ride back to the flat.

Sprawled on the bed, she is curled into herself. A cheap magazine lies on the floor. Her face is grey with worry. She does not know if it is worth still having hope. Clouds are gathering over her bed. She turns over. She wants to cry but she knows that crying will not help. She has cried too many times already this morning. Why has he fired her? It was not true that she had taken money from the till. It was not her fault that the shop was not making a profit.

*

Dawn does not wake Monique. She has been to a club. She only took soft drinks. No beer could tempt her. She saw what happened to women who touched beer.

Men danced with her. They pulled her onto the dance floor. Her jiving hips then sucked them in, made them gasp and grab at her. But she did not allow them to touch – not even her waist or her hands. And when one of them offered her money, she shouted 'no' and pushed him away. Other women watched her jealously. But the man she had hoped to see did not arrive. This was the second time he had not turned up. Was he with one of her friends? Another woman from the old town?

When the moon was already dipping, she walked back to the flat. A drunk man crossed the road. She walked faster. And when he came up to her, and lunged at her breasts, she took off her shoes and ran away. Now she sleeps. And when she wakes it is long past noon.

What is happening to her in this new country? Is life here better than at home doing the housework for her parents? She turns over. Maybe she should have gone off with one of the men, the one with the black jacket, the smooth head.

I am under your spell O African woman whom I love

This note lies in her bag; it was given to her by a grey-haired man. He had lingered at her table. Then he had sat down and taken her hand, taken her attention from other suitors. The old man had become an embarrassment. But when he had offered to take her to dinner, she had agreed. And after dinner, when he had dropped her back at the flat, she had sat stubbornly in the car, refused to hold his hand, waiting for 'airtime' money. The next time she had kissed him and he had given her 'grocery' money. But the following night when he had wanted to caress her, she had run out. And afterwards, though he had begged her to accept him 'flesh to flesh', he was not violent, so she had continued to see him and only scolded him if his payments became smaller.

The real problem was the drug. The drug had been given to her by the brother of one of her school friends. He had said it was good for the stomach and made you feel relaxed. And yes, the little white pill had made her feel loose, so loose that she had slept with him and two other men that night. The hot beat of his sound system had made her forget all her problems. There was no doubt: despite the jagged edges of the next morning, the headache and the dry tongue, it had been good, the drug – very good. And she was ready for him the next night. And the next.

But later that week, without understanding why, when they had gone to a flat in an area she did not know well, she had refused to sleep with more than one man, and the bringer of the drug was angry. "I invite my friends because I want them to also enjoy. Who are you to refuse?" His friends had tried to restrain him but he had beaten her, and she had cried – from the blows and because she had not wanted to believe he was so stupid, this man she quite liked.

It is three months since that night. She is sad. His rejection is petty. She still desires him. The drug makes her feel she can go on till dawn because her body is supercharged liquid, ebbing and flowing with the tides of her skin and blood. But though she bought it from someone else afterwards, and it was as good as before, it is expensive and she cannot afford it.

Now she lies on her bed, sweating, head throbbing. The only compensation is that the older man will be arriving soon. How long will it take till he comes?

*

The church is not far from the flat. Once Lungi joined she remembered always seeing it but not stopping to really look at it; this church that was an old house with a big sign that read CHURCH OF LOVE. She had laughed at the name. Laughed aloud because it was such a good idea: that a church be devoted to love. It had made her think bitterly of the man who had first rubbed her breasts and made her press them against him. He was a preacher who had a flock of goats and two houses but his teeth were rotten and his dead wife had been a witch. Only her sister has guessed at her secret: she does not want to go back home because she would be forced to marry that man.

Another computer course, that was what she needed – not a husband. The work she wanted to do, in an office making more money than her family had ever dreamed of, demanded such knowledge. Her father had borrowed from relatives and a loan shark to send her to this city. Now she is on her bed in the room she shares with her sister; her older sister who has just arrived in this city and already knows what to do. (Her sister is at work; she is always on time for work and is studying at night for a higher diploma.)

Yes, she lies on her bed crying because she has failed her computer exam and is scared of what her father will say. And her sister has already told her she must go back home and marry. No, she wants to stay in this city. She is sure she will find work soon. She is sure because she does not want to go home. She wants to stay in this city and learn new things that will make her life more rewarding. She wants certain things that home cannot give her. She is not going to sacrifice herself for her parents.

She sits up on her bed. She has made up her mind: she will rewrite the test; she will pass. She will find a man here. They will walk down the aisle of the CHURCH OF LOVE. She will only go back home when all this has come true. She opens the curtains and the sun streams in.

She shivers with knowledge. This city will give her what she needs. But the choices that need to be made are hers alone. Hers alone. She knows this as she waits for her cell phone to ring. It must ring. Someone must ring. Someone must ring and wake up her life.

Survival of the Stars

On the edge of the valley
a muezzin calls to the setting sun
dozing sunday
slow streams of cars

the muezzin sings languid sad songs
urges his god to anoint us
– us to anoint him

the muezzin implores all believers and unbelievers
in the desert and dusty villages
those sprawled by fountains of imperial majesty
on sultanic divans near scented riverbanks
and those bearing scimitars and veils
along busy throngs and market stalls

the muezzin calls piety and respect
into the world of work and profit-taking
as a man and his dogs walk the kopje
pushing forward in the fading light
breathing no panting with the joy of space
of sky and sound carried along the valley and its slopes

*

the man and his dogs
reach the squat khaki marker
erected by a pious empire
in memory of fallen lackeys
colonial servants of war
brought across the ocean
to fight and die
for another's glory
another's wealth

called by the empire upon which the sun never set
called to render service
then once disease or artillery or horses' hooves
trampled the life out of them
this empire commissioned their memorial pile
recorded their sacrifice
their duty filled per and beyond
expectation

from across the ocean they came
with horses and tents and beds
to serve the white folk:
their masters:
administrators defenders expanders

now the man and his dogs circle the memorial:

TO THE MEMORY OF BRITISH OFFICERS
NATIVE
NCO'S AND MEN
VETERINARY ASSISTANTS
NALBANDS
AND
FOLLOWERS OF THE INDIAN ARMY
WHO DIED IN SOUTH AFRICA
1899–1902

Musalman
Christian
Zorbustrian
Hindu
Sikh

coloured servants and soldiers come to the call of the bugle
come to south africa to serve the white devil:
golden veins running along his arms

(no doubt rhodes dragged the stones for the marker
himself
along the ridges and the rande
of the farm that became the observatory

under which the white veins ran into billions

*

man and his dogs
smoke column in the east above the last mine dumps
golden hills of jozi sunset
skyscraper colouration ebbs majestic
reflects
wraps up observatory ridge with its peaceful towers
silver globes' exploration of the stars
silent rock gardens with aloe stalks
foreign and native plants greening the ridge flanks
deep space hum in which the blip of guns
or dogs or muezzins
fades

is irrelevant
is impossible to trace

*

all falls into the time stream

all falls off the slopes

of this kopje
this high holy place
for zionist preachers and their congregants
white robes white doeks staffs plastic bottles
of Holy Water

they bring chickens to behead
sheep heads
they bring their woes and their hallelujahs
ancient voices calling the ancestors
to intervene and bring rain and money and love

*

zionists light candles in crevices
leave them smoking in rock alcoves
pray for wind to lift flames and purge the hillside
purge devils from the body of the earth
from the stinking body of the sinner

from the drinker the whore the conman the merchant of disease and death
the wanton the wild the one who takes from children
cons beggars into parting with their blind eyes
– wanton mistress who cons street corners

so fire blackens the slopes
savages green shoots of spring
swats the shrubs and stunted trees

and on that scorched earth
the man and his dogs find paper crosses
inscribed with the names
of the dead

dead by diarrhoea
dead by coughing
dead by sweating

names and dates

names and dates
of the dead

anointed with semen
bathed in vaginal fluid
a plague rewarded their highpoints
with a climb
to heaven but first taste
hell
the virus said
first taste hell
have hell rammed up and come out of your arse
clog your teeth
scale your skin
grey you
grey you

first taste hell

*

the zionists come to the hillside to save
the thin ones
and the thinner ones
 the guts aching stream of water
the heavy-breathing ones
 the ones with mottled peeling skin

the ones almost too weak to climb the kopje
they bring their water to wash off the semen
 the vaginal juice
they bring plastic coke bottles filled
with potent flowing fluid

they spread their arms to the sky
 they call out

and the congregants face down
swim in the voice of the chosen one
– the one who will take their pain and raise it high
for the Maker to make light
 to carry off and bear away

*

the man and his dogs pass the zionists
and he requests they preserve the beauty of the slopes
 the winding paths
and the zionists their white crisp robes red with the sand of the kopje
smile
 and the man smiles in return
and he vows to bring bags to carry off the bottles
 and the chicken heads and the sheep heads
 and the robes left dangling on the branches
 the stumps of burnt bushes

he vows with them to keep
the holy presence
but he knows he speaks
of another holiness
 theirs is too close to their flesh
 to the other world of the already dead

he knows they do not see *his* holy mountain
they do not feel
his elation as the sun sets
they do not feel *his* jubilation
as the horizon lifts and the cityscape
unfolds and the dogs race madly up and down the slopes sniffing and barking and being free

*

the man walks on the ridge every sunday
he greets the zionists and the vagabonds
who come to wash
and he observes the plastic and the ripped cloths multiply
the fires come quicker and quicker
to burn and blacken

and he prays for the kopje
prays for the holy space
prays for the zionists and the thin people
the frightened people the suffering people

he prays and the blessed light
survives as dusk shelters his eyes

the beauty of the kopje must always survive

always survive!

in order for those who need its beauty to
survive

for beauty enables
the holy to survive

beauty enables . . .

so survive!

*

the man and his dogs
walk the kopje as sunset shines and rusts the sky
and the valley below
echoes with the muezzin

they walk at ease
uplifted by the high place
walk into the steady evening
but their hearts are light

lighter than any history

they walk knowing that nothing counts beyond
this hour:

soft poetry of the kopje
sad but not mournful
footsteps on the path
paws pattering the dust

joburg at rest

2am Transit In Addis

Ten hours to kill

in the gleaming tiled transit lounge
like a hotdog
shiny roll spiked with overhanging girders

I want to kill these dead hours

peel Time
nibble Newsweek
to find
half-naked women tortured in fast cars
government press conferences applauding sleek lies
school grounds ruled by steroid bullies

hours to kill

staring at Italian photos
antique scenes of Ethiopia

how I want to kill these dead hours
but not even the waitress who tells me
it's 8 birrs to the dollar
can keep me awake
not even her wistful smile
when I produce empty pockets
not even the ex-minister's memoir
about the Derg's prisoners
or the one exposing imperialist Aid as a racket
or the prayer rooms that give off
an odour of blasphemous pleasure
can keep my eyes open
can keep me from drooping

I want to burn these hours

trapped without birrs without dollars

outside in the dark
fabled city of selassie
toothless lion of Judah
sleeps soundly as dubai and frankfurt
beckon memory and travel

kill these dead hours!

echoing footsteps
new arrivals
rouse me
gaggle of green dresses clinging to thighs

I sway now not from tiredness

stewardesses sweep out the tunnel
this is the land of the long-distance runner
so lithe they must be
high heels clicking new world anthems

dashiki'd musicians play lips like drums
and the hall soars
as shambling bear catches my eye –
bushy-bearded loping poet
from ghana encountered in chad
on his way to delhi
another talkfest
another fixture on the international
trail

I am awake

we greet murmur
then he's gone through the gates
flight via beijing
and I am left to marvel
booming laugh and strong teeth
west african excess
its rhythmic loquacity
but even our ganja-dancing
philosophizing interests
cannot justify
these ten hours outside addis

fabled city of shaggy lions and armed thugs
organized african disunity
running through its alleys
not dead
not quite alive
dawn lightens the overhead girders
the speculated city
a jumble of buildings
in a landscape of stretching plains
jagged mountains
twisting riverbeds

ten hours

captive in the bubble
of transit
surrounded by earthscape fit to be the
high church of a sovereign continent

The Devil's Comma

The Holy Bible as Postcolonial Technology for Reconfiguring the National Narrative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

James Yuma

We may suppose that 'mythical behavior' will disappear as a result of the former colonies' acquiring political independence.
Mircea Eliade(1963)

After more than fifteen years of absence from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), my homeland, I started going back there on a regular basis in 2003, and even living in the capital city of Kinshasa for half of the year since then. This experience was not so much a narrative of non-return as a cultural turbulence of re-entry. For instance, during the Congolese presidential electoral campaign in July 2006, watching television one night, I was mystified to see and hear a pastor who was being interviewed exclaim, "This is a special country and a special people: God had prophesied on this land and its people! Politicians better watch out" ('Interview avec un Pasteur'). Asking people around me what he meant by that admonition, they advised with condescension that I read Isaiah 18. And I, for one, was among those who used to claim, 'No one reads anymore in the Congo.' I meant by this aphorism that the practice and performance of literature as experienced in the West has all but disappeared in the country.¹ But I was discovering that night that I needed to amend the aphorism as follows: 'The one book being read and misread in the Congo is *The Holy Bible*.'²

Consider this other instance: On another one of my stays in Kinshasa, a cousin of mine, who had just converted to an evangelical sect, suddenly turned vegetarian. As I was jokingly warning him against the danger of such a radical dietary change in a city where daily protein intake was far from granted and the very act of getting food amounted to foraging, he told me to look up Genesis 6:19–21. I did look up this passage with him: Noah is being briefed by God who has 'determined to make an end of all flesh' (Genesis 6:13) prior to his boarding of the ark. Noah is told to bring into the ark 'every living thing of all flesh...two of every sort,' all the biodiversity on earth, but God adds in the last verse of this passage (21): 'Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them [living things].'

According to my cousin, this verse clearly shows that God meant us to be vegetarian, for, why would He tell us to take all the 'food that is eaten' in addition to 'every living thing of all flesh'? My cousin's close reading also points to the nature of *The Holy Bible* as an amulet in the DRC: every single passage in the Good Book, even a comma, or for that matter the actual physical printed book one carries to Sunday service, is worth its weight in gold. And this attention to minute detail even bleeds into the way people now read secular documents like the new Constitution enacted in February 2006, following the referendum that took

1. Literature in the literal Western sense of the word as a daily individual and cultural practice does not exist in the DRC. This function of literature is instead performed by modern Congolese music—with an extensive corpus of lyrics, a self-referential domain, pop and religious genres, a language (Lingala), and a cohesive narrational texture of national experience. Congolese written literature as a practice emerged and briefly enjoyed its heyday under the rule of Mobutu, and had synergetic relations with the Afrocentrist biopolitical practices of that regime. This parentage was such that this emergent literature was 'cannibalised' by the regime and, unlike the French nineteenth-century nomothetic literature, failed to carve out a territory of its own where it could function as an alternative space of independence and supremacy. (On nineteenth-century French Literature as a nomothetic field, see Bourdieu 1995).

2. All biblical quotations in the text are taken from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version* published by Thomas Nelson & Sons in 1946 and 1952.

place in December 2005 (République Démocratique du Congo 2006). In the run-up to that referendum, some politicians of the opposition, especially the maverick pastors Théodore Ngoy and Gabriël Mokia, known to the local media as the most prolific ‘injurologues’ or ‘injurologists’³ in the country, who were campaigning against the new Constitution, claimed that a comma in the first sentence of the first paragraph of its Article 40 was a clear opening to gay marriage—an abomination, according to them. That paragraph states:

*Tout individu a le droit de se marier avec la personne de son choix, de sexe opposé, et de fonder une famille (République Démocratique du Congo 2006).*⁴

[One has the right to marry the person of one’s choice, of the opposite gender, and to set up family].

Now, these opponents of the Constitution contended, why would the legislators put a comma between ‘choix’ [choice] and ‘de sexe opposé’ [of the opposite gender] if they did not intend to have gays wedge into official marriage through that gaping opening while leaving the subsequent fragments unscathed? Or, as Reverend Ngoy put it in one of his televised interventions, that comma is the devil’s own highway into the soul of the Congo.⁵ Such is the state of close, partial reading today in the DRC—a paradoxical state of reading, as it were, a reading which is at the same time paraliptic, cryptic and elliptical, as this essay evinces, for while these contradictors of the new Constitution insisted on this devil’s comma, in their daily reading and hermeneutics of the Bible they often take serious liberties with the text. A state of reading one could term ‘pathological’—a pathology that borrows its symptomatic signature, as will be shown below, from the country’s home-grown religion: Kimbanguism. This pathology is also seen in the flourish of rumours not only in the streets but also in what would pass as legitimate mainstream media.

Though this reading pathology and the undergirding rumour-mongering at first struck me as novel, its origins can be traced back decades earlier to the heyday of Mobutu’s era when the party-state monopolised—or attempted to monopolise—all communication technologies, including the media, which were indeed all state-owned. As is the case with propaganda, the information circulating through these technologies was falsely exaggerated on behalf of the regime and to the detriment of the opposition. This state of affairs led people to deploy alternative technologies of communication, chief among them being what was called ‘Radio Trottoir’ [Sidewalk Radio]: that is, information by word of mouth. Soon, even the ‘Radio Trottoir’ had its own anchors, called ‘Parlementaires Debout’ [Parliamentarians Standing], who, at street corners, would analyse, comment on and interpret political, social and cultural developments in the country. Most of the

3. A Congolese neologism to describe politicians and TV pundits specialized in heaping injuries and other verbal abuses upon each other.

4. All English translations are mine, except where otherwise indicated.

5. ‘Dialogue et Débat’. Canal Congo TV CCTV, Kinshasa, 10 November 2005

members of this guild, who ironically are also today called ‘theorists’, were then unemployed. It is worth noting that some of them have now found employment that turned them into genuine politicians, journalists and TV pundits in the emerging democratic practice in the country. And it is all the more striking to observe that the current political and media discourses have the hallmarks of the ‘Parlementaires Debout’: insults, little or no cross-checking of sources, and the abuse of the conditional mood—in short, a recipe for rumours and violence which in fact have marred the democratic process in the Congo.

This empowerment of the people through an informal technology of expression occurred in tandem with another empowering drive: the spread of revivalist churches, in which almost anyone with some basic notion of the Bible could set up a church and have what the critics of this trend in the Congo call a lucrative or entrepreneurial ministry. This was in part encouraged by the powers that be under the banner of Mobutu’s biopolitical practice of Afrocentrist policy called ‘Authenticité’ [Authenticity] that came to be vehemently contested by the domestic Catholic Church, which frowned upon the 1972 regime’s decree banning suits and ties as well as Christian names, thus forcing citizens overnight to scurry to find new African ‘Authentic’ names.

It was also in the shelter of these evangelical churches that most people found solace and meaning during the five-year regional war with Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda dubbed the ‘First African World War’. No wonder then that, more than Mobutu’s virulent nationalism, it was these evangelicals that effectively used the Bible as a technology in ‘the production of citizenship’ (Hansen & Stepputat 2005: 26), especially at a time when the collapse of the state meant that the latter could not protect its own citizens. This process is illustrative of the shift, introduced by Thomas Bloom Hansen and Finn Stepputat in the concept of sovereignty in the postcolony, from the traditional Western notion of ‘unequivocal linking of sovereignty to the state’ to one that construes the ‘sovereignty of the state [as] an aspiration that seeks to create itself in the face of internally fragmented, unevenly distributed and unpredictable configurations of political authority that exercise more or less legitimate violence in a territory’ ((Hansen & Stepputat 2005: 3). In the Congo, this process of fragmentation was heightened by war and the rise of warlords, which also dialectically bolstered civil society and individuals willing to carve out parcels of sovereignty from the virtually non-existent state. Among the latter were a growing number of non-government organisations (NGOs) and Christian revivalist groups that took matters into their own hands for the protection of the people. This ‘devolution’ of the state’s attributes ‘to a multiplicity of units’ (Mbembe, 158) was also often accompanied by violence meted out against children branded as ‘sorcerers’ by a fringe of evangelicals who would then carry out, sometimes with the consent of families, very cruel rituals of ‘exorcism’ on those unfortunate children.

Congolese Christian revivalism was first accompanied by the genre of confession writing,⁶ then afterwards by oral testimonials at church gatherings. Though this phenomenon could be construed as the constitution of the Congolese individual postcolonial self through the genre of religious confession, the turn to oral testimonials could also denote a reversion to the ‘natural’ discursive mode of oral literature prevalent in Congolese traditional cultural practice. This reversion could also be a symptom of the destruction of the public library system inherited from Belgian colonial rule after independence, the high costs of books, the disintegration of the school system through years of neglect that started under Mobutu, and the sorely devastating war. Today, reading as routine entertainment has almost vanished, while television viewing (in urban areas) and gregarious habits have either emerged or soared, with streets becoming the ‘sociological location’ par excellence.

To turn back to *The Holy Bible*, as stated above, this book has thoroughly reconfigured the foundational myth and the *Bildung* narrative of the DRC. This essay recounts : 1) how Chapter 18 of the Book of Isaiah is being read as the new foundation of the nation’s ‘narration’; 2) how Kimbanguist theology defines the Congolese mythographic production; 3) how the nation’s *Bildung* provided by an alleged prophecy by the Congolese prophet Simon Kimbangu was appropriated during the presidential electoral campaign by the camp of the incumbent Joseph Kabila; and 4) how a counter-prophecy on the historical unfolding of the country’s history was offered by the transitional vice-president and presidential contender Jean-Pierre Bemba’s side: a prophecy based on Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the ‘Golden Image’ in Chapter 2 of the Book of Daniel. As this essay draws heavily on personal observation, it is at the locus of transdisciplinarity—literature, cultural studies and ethnography— with a particular stress on the latter, especially as it ‘is a mode of knowing that privileges experience—often going into realms of the social that are not easily discernible within the more formal protocols used by many other disciplines’ (Das & Poole 2004: 3). For, ‘[a]s such, ethnography offers a unique perspective on the sorts of practices that seem to undo the state at its territorial and conceptual margins’ (Das & Poole 2004: 3).

6. See Nkashama (1995). Nkashama sees these confessions as organised ploys by Mobutu’s associates to avoid prosecution and public wrath, though the genre quickly spread to laypeople in the streets.

But two remarks need to be made before getting to the gist of the essay's argument.

1) In the DRC, there are two strands of reading strategy applied to the Bible: a strong, literal reading and a mild, allegorical reading. The former consists in the actual reading of current events into the Bible or vice versa; its technique and methodology are found in Kimbanguist theology. It is made up either of re-readings that purport to be prophetic visions, taken verbatim from the Bible in the mode of a *roman à clef*, or of prophecies envisioned by local prophets, as is the case with the country's alleged *Bildung* offered by Kimbangu. The latter is the old allegorical reading, where the passages of the Scriptures would generally provide moral lessons for the flocks. An instance of mild reading is that made by Reverend Daniel Mulunda whose NGO, PAREC (Programme Oeucuménique de Paix, Transformation des conflits et Réconciliation [Ecumenical Programme for Peace, Conflict Transformation and Reconciliation]), which exchanges light weapons for ploughs and other agricultural tools as well as melting those weapons to make farming tools, has as its motto Isaiah 2:4:

*[A]nd they shall beat their swords
into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning
hooks[.]*

2) In these current prophecies and counter-prophecies, the vision has dramatically shifted from the Cargo-cult perspective on the eve of independence in 1960, in which independence was held up as a millennialist marker of the moment when people would have direct access to the bounties of paradise; a phenomenon encapsulated by Mircea Eliade in a telling anecdote of what went on in the Congo in 1960 at independence:

*In some villages the inhabitants tore the roofs off their huts to give passage to the gold coins that their ancestors were to rain down. Everything was allowed to go to rack and ruin except the roads to the cemetery, by which the ancestors would make their way to the village. Even the orgiastic excesses had a meaning, for, according to the myth, from the dawn of the New Age all women would belong to all men.
(Eliade 1963: 3)*

Today's vision is utterly different in that the ancestors have completely vanished from the plot. It is Jesus who has turned into the central character. Since Jesus-God is life itself, the cemetery is no longer the topos; but the streets and the land have turned into topoi. A cunning strategy is furthermore deployed to bar from the 'living land' the Others, the invaders: Rwandans, Ugandans, Burundians and their perceived backers, the international community. (But in turn, as we are about to see, the same strategy is also used to demonise domestic political enemies. It needs to be stressed, as the essay evinces below, that, contrary to the Congo where it is a new construct, the sense of 'nation-ness' in Rwanda and Burundi predates the colonial period.) The Eliadean 'orgiastic' streak has given way to prudishness and puritanical attitudes. And to outright verbal or physical violence meted out against those perceived to be on the wrong side of God, i.e. one's own political enemy—for, in this 'dispensationalist' approach, God is foremost a Lord of Hosts, a title which captures the very material violent essence of this God in a country already torn by war. In other words, if you can't fight your enemies with weapons, curse them with words from the Bible. More importantly, today's myth is based on what I term 'actionable theology', a reading of the Scriptures yielding immediate practical results and action in the here-and-now. One does not hold any longer that sudden bliss will come *ex nihilo* from heaven and make the passive world holistic for good in an instant. It is instead the daily vigilant practice of the word of the Lord against Satan, the sorcerers, and the enemy of his people that will make one's country a viable and sustainable environment where the faithful can see God 'radically breaking into our world' (Bock 2006). The plot of the new Congolese mythology has therefore undergone a radical break from the Eliadean mould and is thus characteristically magical-realist, based, not unlike the mythical world of the Afrikaner Calvinists of apartheid South Africa, upon a 'mythologising of history and a politically charged biblical hermeneutics' (Carr). In the postcolonial state, mythology, far from disappearing 'as a result of the former colonies' acquiring political independence', as Eliade wrongly anticipated (1963: 3), has in fact been redeployed and turned into a sophisticated hermeneutic myth-generating machine.

Isaiah 18

'A Nation Whose Land the Rivers Divide'

THE TITLE OF THIS SECTION ILLUSTRATES the strategy of the Congolese in reading their story in the Bible: a partial reading consisting of chopping off huge blocks of the text, toning down those parts of the text that seem to contradict their plot, appropriating and cleaning out the original narrative, all of this often accompanied by a runaway paralipitic hermeneutics. Consider the title above: to come up with this title as applying to the nation-state of the DRC, one had to cross out some critical elements that would have otherwise contradicted one's claim. In order to demonstrate this, let's consider the prophet's text, while first pointing out right away that this book is currently one of the most hotly debated by theologians (McCann).

At the beginning of Chapter 18, the prophet is relaying God's message intimating to a nation 'which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia' (18:1) to:

*Go, you swift messengers,
to a nation, tall and smooth,
to a people feared near and far,
a nation mighty and conquering
whose land the rivers divide. (18:1)*

There are elephants in the midst of this excerpt that are willfully occulted by the Congolese prism through which this verse is being read. Indeed, in order to realise the magnitude of these omissions, one has to consider the common myths, prejudices, and history in Africa's Great Lakes region, as well as eyewitness accounts of explorers recorded in their travelogues. In precolonial times, in that region, only the old kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi (or Urundi, as it was called until its independence in 1962) had organised armies able to ward off raids by Arab slave traders at their borders. These two kingdoms were ruled by the Tutsi minority who, on average, were taller than their fellow Hutus, though centuries-old intermarriages have today almost dissipated this trait but not quite wiped it out from the psyche of the peoples in the region. In 1876, in one of his reports to the *New York Herald*, Henry Morton Stanley, the famous British-American explorer and an associate of King Leopold of Belgium, while at the border of the Rwanda-Urundi territory, was informed that these 'long-legged natives' were uncooperative and that 'at five different times Arabs had endeavoured to open intercourse with them, but each time had been repulsed, and some had been murdered by the treacherous people' (Stanley 1970: 271, 273). In yet another of his reports, Stanley expresses his frustration and bemoans the loss to geographical knowledge caused by these kingdoms' impenetrability, saying that he would have gone back to wrest this knowledge by force had he not named a lake, Gulf Beatrice, 'after a daughter of Queen Victoria':

Here, within two degrees of longitude, where seven [European] countries meet, representatives of seven [European] nations are unable to give a clear and connected account of this most interesting region. The cause of this ignorance arises from the peculiar character of the northern Warundi and Wa-Ruanda, who are a jealous, treacherous, and vindictive race. If an explorer could cross the country of Urundi, and enter Mkinnyaga, he meets with a different race, with whom it could not be difficult to establish amicable relations; but unless he had balloons at his disposal I am unable to see how he could reach Mkinnyaga from the east or the south. Were the Warundi or the Wa-Ruanda anything in disposition like the tribes or nations we have met between here and Zanzibar, how easy a task it were to push one's way direct to the utmost reach of the Nile! We have tribes who exacted tribute, and we have paid it and passed on our way, and have met tribes who compelled us to fight our way through them; but here are two nations (not tribes) of one peculiar distinct breed, who are neither to be subject to the power of sweet suasion with gifts of sugar-candy, knick-knacks and gaudy cloths, or to be forced from the position they

have assumed with a few dozen Sniders. Heaven knows the original progenitors of these fierce nations. I had half a mind once to make an alliance with the bandit Mirambo, ...and, with the addition of a thousand Brown Besses, ...drag the secrets of the Nile by force to the light of day. But the name of the amiable Princess of Wales could not be taken then to cover such a stain as this would have been on the source of the Nile. (Stanley 1970: 313)⁷

And very recently, the Rwandan army has demonstrated an ability to carry out blitzkriegs into the neighbouring country of the DRC, even providing the late Congolese president Laurent-Désiré Kabila's rebel ragtag army with the backbone that would ultimately lead to the toppling of the Mobutu regime in May 1997. More importantly, when his former Rwandan allies turned out to be cumbersome, and Kabila decided to have them withdraw from the Congo, Rwandans conquered in matters of weeks vast swathes of the Congo and installed their own local puppets in the eastern DRC. Now, if anything, a literal reading of the passage from the book of Isaiah above would grant the attributes 'people feared near and far' and 'a nation mighty and conquering' to Rwanda, and not to the Congo, whose army has not fought any heroic battle since 1960. In fact, in order to twist verse 1 to have it apply to the Congo, the only characteristic retained was 'a nation whose land the rivers divide.'

A major leap has thereby been made from the book of Isaiah to the current Congolese national narrative. This 'crisis narrative' was mainly fleshed out during the 'First African World War' which, according to a United Nations Security Council report, was one of the most vicious colonising and plunderous enterprises of modern times:

The illegal exploitation of resources by Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda took different forms, including confiscation, extraction, forced monopoly and price-fixing. Of these, the first two reached proportions that made the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo a very lucrative business. (United Nations Security Council Report 6)

According to the same report, this 'mass-scale looting,' carried out 'by foreigners aided by [some] Congolese', saw 'wave[s] of 'new businessmen' only speaking English [in a Francophone country], Kinyarwanda and Kiswahili,' and took place on such a scale that:

[b]etween September 1998 and August 1999, occupied zones of the Democratic Republic of the Congo were drained of existing stockpiles, including minerals, agricultural and forest products and livestock. Regardless of the looter, the pattern was the same: Burundian, Rwandan, Ugandan and/or RCD soldiers,⁸ commanded by an officer, visited farms, storage facilities, factories and banks, and demanded that the managers open the coffers and doors. The soldiers were then ordered to remove the relevant products and load them into vehicles. The [UN Security Council] Panel received numerous accounts and claims of unlawful removal of products by Rwandan or Ugandan armies and their local RCD allies. (United Nations: 3, 7, 8)

These acts of plunder were often accompanied by what human rights groups and the UN term today 'sexual terrorism', consisting of mass rapes of women and girls as young as a few months old.⁹ Faced with such searing egregiousness, the silent indifference of the international community, and the utter inability of the nation-state to defend its borders and its citizens, the Congolese had no one to turn to but the proliferating religious sects dotting their neighbourhoods, where they rerouted and reinvested their mental energies and where they found readymade narratives to account for their sufferings.

7. The 'obscure hydrological debate' over the sources of the Nile still rages on today, attracting its lot of adventurers with its accompanying human toll. See Duane.

8. RCD or 'Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie' [Congolese Rally for Democracy] was then a rebel outfit dominated by Congolese of Rwandan descent, that has since transformed into a political party after the 2002 Sun City [South Africa] Congolese Global and Inclusive Agreement, whose charter determined the form of transitional rule in DRC starting in 2003.

9. See for example, IRIN.org; Mbembe sees in the 'conjunction of the gun and the phallus' in these gang rapes of women in war-torn regions of Africa the absolute othering of women—death: [E]njoyment through the gun and through the phallus are conjoined, the one ending in a corporeality that is inert and emptied of all life, death; and the other by a discharge as violent as it is brief, the orgasmic satisfaction by means of which the power of enjoyment is converted into a power of radically objectifying the Other, whose body one bores into, digs into, excavates, and empties in the very act of rape. (Mbembe:165)

In any event, the reading mode of the Congolese is thus established, with its paradoxical accessory strategy of leaps, omissions, and ‘forging’ of correspondences. Yet, the reading we just had of verse 1 would in itself be partial if we were not to include the reading of the last verse of Chapter 18. After briefly quoting God in verse 4, the prophet interrupts God and embarks on a somewhat cryptic, threatening and lengthy indirect speech recounting what God has told him before concluding, with a Messianic promise to the chosen nation, in a palimpsesti iteration of the lines already used in verse 8:

*At that time gifts will be brought
to the Lord of hosts
from a people tall and smooth,
a nation mighty and conquering,
whose land the rivers divide,
to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the Lord of hosts.*

Despite the iterations that once again would not let anyone miss the characteristics in this text which clearly point in the direction of the Rwandans, that is, if we were to read the text as my fellow Congolese do, the blinders are firmly in place. What is more, in the messianic time of reckoning, Congo would then not only have the status of one of the most favoured nations among those gathering with Israel at Mount Zion but would be on a par with Israel itself—a view that firmly places Congolese biblical interpretation among the ‘traditionalist’ evangelicalism that sees the actual nation-state of Israel having ‘a central role in the [messianic] future’ (Bock 2006).

But this peculiar interpretation and rereading of the Bible has little to do with academic exercises in exegesis. It evinces instead a new redeployment of ‘autochthony’¹⁰ with this biblical hermeneutic gone haywire as an encapsulant of what Mbembe would call a ‘project of identity-creation’ (Mbembe: 166) and Comaroff and Comaroff a ‘popular consciousness-under-construction’ (Comaroff & Comaroff: 139). Such conditions could only have been exacerbated in the face of the ‘fragmentation and the diffusion’ of the state in the postcolony where people now have recourse to ‘a plurality of repertoires of action and a parallel entanglement of conflicting codes of legitimation’ (Mbembe: 153) with a host of ‘informal sovereigns’ (Hansen & Stepputat 2005: 179). In the particular case of the Congo, one such code of legitimation is the irredentist religious revivalism. The Pastor has turned into a ‘sovereign’ over family, community and even state matters. And a whole range of vocabulary has been deployed to describe the powers of these new informal sovereigns, in the increasing order of respectability, respectively, of the Pastor, the Evangelist, the Apostle and the Prophet. In the face of this proliferation of religious sovereignty, the biggest loser seems to have been the domestic Roman Catholic Church, which has now revamped its propagation tools through the creation of smaller ‘charismatic’ neighbourhood proximity groups in a lame attempt to counter the massive loss of its congregants to the new revivalist movement.

The irredentism of Congolese revivalists, which mirrors the racination ideologies peddled by populist politicians, was triggered, as we have seen, by the five-year occupation of the eastern parts of the country by foreign armies and their local allies who operated like ‘doppelganger anticitizens’ (Comaroff & Comaroff: 140). Given that the occupied zones were being administered by these foreign powers as de facto annexed territories, with little that the Congolese central government could do on behalf of its citizens, alternative modes of resistance and belonging were developed to draw a symbolically secure circle around autochthons. With the end of the occupation, the irredentism has been reinvested against domestic others, who are deemed ‘non-autochthonous’. Chief among the latter are Congolese ethnically associated with Rwandans and, specifically in the capital city of Kinshasa fired up by populist rhetoric, the incumbent Joseph Kabila, who has the misfortune of having grown up abroad (in Tanzania) while his father, a rebel leader, was Mobutu’s number one enemy of the state. Anecdotally, when Joseph Kabila had to replace his assassinated father in 2001, the opposition to the succession was based on the fact that the Congo, not being a hereditary

10. I subscribe to Comaroff and Comaroff’s definition of autochthony as ‘a form of attachment that ties people to place, that natures the nation, that authorises entitlement’ (Comaroff & Comaroff: 147).

monarchy, the president's son had no right to succeed his father. This line of attack found ammunition in the all-pervasive book of Isaiah (3:4):

*And I will make boys their princes,
and babes shall rule over them.*

The youth of leaders that this curse of God alludes to reflects Joseph Kabila's age; he was just 29 when he acceded to power in 2001. Then, when, after a few years, he turned out to be popular in his own right, especially across the eastern provinces once occupied by foreign armies and which are the most populous in the country, the rationale transmogrified into the questioning of his filiation with the assassinated president, with some politicians even demanding that he establish this filiation through DNA analysis.

The locus of Isaiah in the Congolese psyche is intersected by that of Prophet Simon Kimbangu, a catechist turned religious leader in the early 1920s, who died in internal exile under Belgian rule in 1951. Unlike Isaiah, Kimbangu did not write prophecies but left a 'word-of-mouth' corpus that his family and his followers have used to set up one of the most successful churches in Central Africa, spanning multiple countries, complete with mega-churches, radio and television stations in Congo-Kinshasa and Congo-Brazzaville, as well as schools and a university. And still unlike Isaiah, Kimbangu is today a messiah in his own right, God's 'Special Envoy' as the Kimbanguists call him in the full name of their church, the ECSK ('Église du Christ au Congo par l'Envoyé Spécial de Dieu Simon Kimbangu' [the Church of Christ in Congo by God's Special Envoy Simon Kimbangu]). Moreover, the prophet's birthplace at Nkamba, in the southwestern province of Bas-Congo, is now the 'New Jerusalem', according to another peculiar interpretation of a biblical prophet, Ezekiel, as shown below. Kimbangu—or what his followers purport to be one of his prophecies—provides the first most comprehensive *Bildung* of the nation-state of the Congo. But before turning to that development of the country according to the vision of Kimbangu, a closer look at the concept of the Kimbanguists' 'New Jerusalem' is warranted, as it shows the methodological approach of the current Congolese biblical literalism.

Nkamba, Southwestern DRC The New Jerusalem

THE BIRTH PLACE OF KIMBANGU (1887–1951), Nkamba, today a thriving holy city, started to be turned into the New Jerusalem by his followers on March 3, 1960, upon the return of the remains of the prophet from Jadotville (today Kolwezi) where he had died in internal exile. Besides the claim that in 1935, the temple his followers had built in that city was suddenly spatially moving to avoid destruction by colonial authorities, the city owes its present-day status of New Jerusalem to a reading of Ezekiel 47. This reading by Kimbanguist theologians is so critical in understanding the current Congolese production of mythography that an examination of their extreme close reading of this chapter of the book of Ezekiel is warranted and compels quotation at length:

As for the interpretation of the remainder of the biblical text (Ezek. 47: 8–11), we considered the Congo River as the image of the Dead Sea, evoked in the Bible. Thus, where the brook, turned into a torrent, flows into the Congo River, there are villages of fishermen whose livelihood depends on agriculture, fishing and hunting (Ezek. 47:9). These fishermen use nets one can see drying in the sun, on the bank of the Congo River. Others do angling (Ezek. 47:10). Hunters could find game in the surrounding forests and savannas. On any given day, one can buy diverse species of fresh, grilled or smoked fish. We have ourselves often bought grilled and smoked fish there. Thus, this location yields a good livelihood to the inhabitants of the surrounding villages. A remarkably particular and touristic joy also exists there: a motor-propelled ferry allows permanent daily crossings of people and goods at this location of the Congo River. It is therefore a meeting point of people from various horizons. Cars are often lined up, awaiting such an entertaining crossing of the Congo River, at least three kilometres wide at this precise location.

At this location, one can also observe swamps and lagoons invaded by mounds of white sand (similar to salt reserves), coming out of the littoral of the brook and of the river, running towards each other (Ezek. 47: 11).

On each bank of the brook, off Nkamba New Jerusalem, different kinds of fruit trees grow whose leaves are always green and never wither. These trees, watered by the stream coming from the holy source (south of the altar), incessantly produce fruits, all year round. Their fruits are used as nourishment and their leaves as remedies (Ezek. 47: 12).

The similarity found between Ezekiel's biblical vision and the reality at Nkamba New Jerusalem will astound any investigator or any good observer. This vision of Ezekiel, written a long time ago in the Bible, describes in fact a very concrete reality that presently exists at Nkamba New Jerusalem, in the heart of Africa. Get your knapsack ready and go discover more, on the ground at Nkamba New Jerusalem!

The Kimbanguist theologians gives us the hermeneutical device of the Congolese misreading: 1) wishful reasoning (or rather, speculation) on a tenuous link between the text and actual events or sites; 2) yielding plausible interpretation; 3) based on anything deemed uncannily similar—a word association run amok. What is more, as this interpretation has to be materially perfected to conform to the biblical landscape design, and as the holy land of Nkamba was proclaimed a ‘permanent building site’, a likewise permanent hefty tithe called ‘nsinsani’ (literally, ‘competition’ in the Kongo language) was set up whereby every Sunday women’s and men’s groups compete through donations to the church. Thus, if other-worldliness could so easily permeate the here-and-now and vice versa, prophetic visions could as effortlessly reach far into the future and unravel destinies of present nations-states, as illustrated in the vision of Kimbangu of the *Bildung* of the DRC.

Prophecy

Simon Kimbangu's alleged *Bildung* of the Congo

WITH NO WRITTEN DOCUMENT left by Kimbangu to go on, as stated above, one has to rely on word-of-mouth. The one recent written account of this prophecy was found on the official website of the Congolese president, in its January 2006 editorial, penned by the presidential editorialist Marcel Nzazi Mabidi and entitled 'Joseph Kabila's Exceptional Destiny' (then recycled after the incumbent's victory, in December 2006, as 'Joseph Kabila Has Won His Challenge'), which was clearly pandering to the Kimbanguist church, with deep roots in the Kongo ethnic group of the southwestern province, where incidentally the incumbent performed poorly during both rounds of the presidential election in 2006 despite the following panegyric:

[Congo will one day be independent. For 40 years the country will be put to fire and sword and will experience daunting difficulties and sufferings of every kind. Then good fortune will come. The country will first be led by a sheep [Joseph Kasavubu, Congo's first president]. That man will be a native of the province where I was born.

The country will then be led by a wild beast [Mobutu] who will come to cast aside the sheep. During the rule of the wild beast marked by terror, the country will be ransacked. Money will be lacking in the country. Even banks will be empty.

Then a man will come, a meteor, a native of the province where I will die [Laurent-Désiré Kabila]. His rule will be very short. His main role will be to chase the wild beast from power.

Then someone will come, a young sage [Joseph Kabila]. It's he who will save this country and bring to the people true independence.]

One would rightly think that this kind of prophetic lore could only be used by politicians to coax unsuspecting and credulous masses to vote for them, especially as the *Bildung* of the country suddenly stops at the moment of rule of the incumbent, without opening up to the future, as if the development of the country's story ends with the administration currently in power; an impasse that the counter-prophecy of the incumbent's opposition also somehow emulates to a certain extent, before conflating the whole nation with Israel of messianic times, just as in the Isaian foundational myth.

But one should bear in mind that Congolese theology is foremost 'actionable' in the here-and-now, with immediacy thus being at its core—in this case, the near future being the farthest removed horizon. Furthermore, the Bible is often taken as a potent anti-sorcery amulet and Christianity as a competing worldview to sorcery, not only in the DRC but in other African countries as well. One indication of this can be found in the success of the Nigerian Christian films in the DRC and in the plots of locally produced television drama and comedy. The plots of these movies and television series are often about Christians being protected by their faith against sorcerers. Another indication is the ghastly number of children thrown into the streets after being accused of sorcery. This phenomenon has been so pervasive that the new Constitution, in its Article 41, has a specific provision deeming unlawful and criminal any accusation of sorcery leveled at a child:

The abandonment and ill-treatment of children, including paedophilia, sexual abuses as well as the accusation of sorcery are prohibited and punishable by law.
(République Démocratique du Congo 2006)

And the supposed perpetrators of sorcery continue to be routinely burned alive, while rebel groups have been accused of cannibalism of pygmies as game meat or for the purpose of making their fighters impervious to bullets (Griswold 2004).¹¹ All this establishes the fact that evangelism is all-encompassing, as is the belief in sorcery in the Congolese cultural landscape. It may thus turn out that politicians themselves may strongly believe in the myths they feed to the people.

In the face of such powerful prophecy allegedly proffered by Kimbangu in favor of its opponent, the transitional vice-president Jean-Pierre Bemba's camp came up with its own counter-prophecy, based on the Book of Daniel, with the same loose word association as exhibited by Kimbanguist hermeneutics.

11. See also for example Radio Okapi 2006, Independent Online 2003 and UN News Centre 2003.

Counter-Prophecy Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Golden Image

On August 17, 2006, seven months after the editorial of Marcel Nzazi Mabidi was posted on the official website of the DRC president, the opposition to the incumbent produced its own counter-*Bildung* of the country on its television network Canal Congo TV CCTV ('Prophétie sur les élections'). Though the opposition narrative did not have the prestige and the seal of Kimbangu on its own counter-prophecy, it utilised the same methodology as the one the Kimbanguists used in conflating the city of Nkamba with the New Jerusalem, which evinces the fact that Congolese reading takes its cue from its home-grown religion. The textual point of departure this time was Daniel 2:31–45.

'Show me the dream and its interpretation' (6) were the threatening words Nebuchadnezzar had uttered to the 'magicians,' 'enchanters,' and 'sorcerers' of Babylon who were put to the test of finding out not only the king's disturbing dream but its interpretation as well. The biblical narrative goes on to say that 'the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night' by God (19), thus saving those 'wise men' from destruction by unveiling Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation as the *Bildung* of the kingdom: the famous messianic 'Dream of the Golden Image'. Duplicating Daniel's process, the Congolese television prophet likewise had a nightly vision in which God allowed him to crack open the unfolding mystery of Congo's future. But his vision was instead simply a palimpsestic re-interpretation of the same vision of Daniel.

According to the Congolese prophet, Nebuchadnezzar's dream as pertaining to the Congolese situation was to be interpreted as a narrative in six instalments:

- 1) *The 'head of [the] image' in 'fine gold' represented the Belgian colonial regime, as gold is associated with a monarch's crown.*
- 2) *The 'breast and arms of silver' represented the administration of Congo's first president Joseph Kasavubu.*
- 3) *The Mobutu regime was the image's 'belly and thighs of bronze'.*
- 4) *Laurent-Désiré Kabila's regime was the image's 'legs of iron'.*
- 5) *The transitional government led by the incumbent was the image's 'feet partly of iron and partly of clay'.*
- 6) *The regime that was about to unfold in the wake of the presidential elections would be Jean-Pierre Bemba's upcoming regime of 'stone' ('Pierre' being 'stone' in French)—which, according to verse 34, was set to shatter the image's legs to pieces: 'As you [Nebuchadnezzar] looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it smote the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces[.]'*
But the Congolese prophet does not stop there. Contradicting himself, he then equates the stone, which he had previously conflated with the person of Bemba, with the Congo: 'the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth' (verse 35). But this contradiction somehow turns out to be an improvement over the other prophecy that abruptly stopped with Joseph Kabila's takeover. Here, at the very least, the country continues to live on, and inflates into a mighty power, thus rejoining the Isaian destiny of the Congo in messianic times.

Congolese street and television preachers have a built-in disclaimer in their prophetic dithyrambs. The television prophet who made these predictions about a month prior to the runoff elections couched his disclaimer in the following terms: if you choose the incumbent despite these dire warnings, everything he does will be doomed to fail as he is already doomed by the Good Book.

Incidentally, that month of August 2006 was very creative for CCTV. In the evening of August 20, 2006, just a few hours before the opposing sides in the presidential elections resorted to a two-day armed confrontation in the capital city, CCTV broadcast a political talk-show in which one of the pundits was explaining why it was so dangerous to vote for the incumbent, who had all but sold out to Western interests that were busy rigging the elections on his behalf. Western powers were hellbent on seizing the Congo, according to this pundit, because of the depletion of the ozone layer. With the ozone depletion caused by the greenhouse effect (whose culprit is the West), the ice caps on both poles was melting, and a huge volume of water was slowly and inexorably adding to the ocean. Countries with long coastlines were doomed to be

flooded. But as ‘God Almighty had blessed us with only a 27-km coastline, we will be spared the impending doom because of our elevated and sprawling hinterland. The whites thought this doom could only happen in 15 years, but as it turns out, this would come sooner than expected.’ That’s why ‘these people’ are busy stealing ‘our paradise by installing stooges at the helm of the state’ (‘Débat politique’).

The prophetic books of the Old Testament, especially Isaiah, have been re-appropriated as technological devices in reinventing ‘we-ness’ and autochthony in the DRC. This reappropriation was mediated by grassroots pastors during the long years of war, a situation predicated on Mobutu’s Afrocentrist biopolitics and the seeming indifference of the international community during a time of untold sufferings. The surge of the sovereignty of pastors, evangelists and prophets in the postcolony is illustrative of the ‘devolution’ of state powers to ‘informal sovereigns’ (Hansen & Stepputat 2005: 179), as evinced by contributions to Hansen and Stepputat’s seminal volume, especially when the state, as in the Congo, has been blatantly incapable of protecting and defending its citizens.

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Terror and the City

Ashraf Jamal

IN A SHORT FICTION, 'Empty', I record the dying moments of a sex worker dumped on the outskirts of a nameless South African city. She is the victim of a gang rape. The details of the rape – the modes of penetration, the manner in which she is made helpless – are remorselessly recounted. Every surface and cavity of her body becomes the site of a violation that is physical and psychical. Dead – a thing made for death – the woman is reminded repeatedly of her nothingness. It is a truth she cannot negate, that ravages her all the more. We read:

The pain within is deafening, all encompassing. It has no single source. Blood everywhere. In the eye, the mouth, in the emptiness between her legs. Empty. ... Don't fill a woman but empty her. Tear the flesh, rape the voice. Leave nothing. Make nothing of nothing.

It is the word they spoke repeatedly. Nothing. Indefinite. Without substance. A hole. The hands that shoved her legs apart, shut her mouth, tapped the bottle against her ear so she could hear the hollowness, seemed to belong to one man. Did it make it easier to believe so? She thinks not. She only knows the hands were one and the same – they may have belonged to different men but they were one and the same – fingers and palms calloused, nails sharp as blades. Only the voice was soft; soft and hateful. You want money. I give you money. Wallet gaping, a stained and clotted tongue. She watched the hand withdraw a thick sheaf of ten rand notes, green and white as mould.

Money. Isn't that what she's made for? A thing made for money. Ten rand notes shoved in a bottle shoved up her – the medium is the message – up her cunt. It's the only word she can find. Not one she'd use, but like fucked it's a word that comes easily now. It's a word that lives inside her; unsentimental, efficient, sharp as glass. A message in a broken bottle. Up her. Inside her. Dividing her. Not her. But who is she? Whore. Jintoe. Poes. She's heard the words a thousand times, spat like nails from the mouth of any grunting man. Words of hate to match their sex like knives. She, the target. Did she think it would come to this? She doesn't think so. It's not that she's stupid. She's not. It's not that she doesn't know that what's happened to her has happened to others. It's not that. She knows the risk that comes when you stand on a street corner and bargain with hate. She just didn't bargain for this. This feeling that she's feeling now, because – yes – she is starting to feel. She's moving beyond the evidence. She's feeling because she thinks she's dying – because she is. She is dying. Her cry is deafening. Mute. She is not sad. She's not even afraid. She is not blind to her fate. She is not even confused or desperate. Knowledge fills her in a way that air will not. If she cannot move her head, it is because her throat is cut. If she cannot shift her back, it is because the spine has snapped. Her heart is a broken bridge. Her hands, gathered at the nape of her spine, are bound with razor wire. If her knee falls and her calf slackens, it is because she is resigned. Gravity claims her. Still there is pain. At least there is pain. She feels. She thinks. She cannot tell sensation apart from mind. (Jamal 2002: 9–11)

This story is one instance of an emergent artistic compulsion to record an escalating depravity and to find within depravity the means to sustain the will to live. Samuel Beckett's formulation – I can't go on/I must go on – conveys the tenuousness of this besieged will. Between hopelessness and hope falls the shadow. It is this shadow, this blurred moment, that this essay seeks to address. For Homi Bhabha it is a moment that conveys the unthinkable – understood here as terror – that is 'not quite experience, not yet concept; part dream, part analysis; neither signifier nor signified' (Bhabha 1994: 181). If the city is the chosen space in which to grasp terror as the unthinkable it is because therein its oppressive and phantasmal presence is most acutely felt. Moreover it is the city's simulacral relation to the real, its slippages *between* categories, its conflation of intensities, its inability to contain the flows of people and things, its porous and transgressive boundaries, that make it a compelling and vertiginous axis across which to assess the complexity of Bhabha's formulation. Driving through the city Jean Francois Lyotard notes that the markers that lead one to the centre eventually disappear. In the instant of their disappearance Lyotard reminds us that there is no centre, that, rather, there are multiple centres and that each competes against and erases the provenance of the other, for a city as a rhizomatic and ceaselessly bifurcating organism cannot be centralised. An urban sprawl that *performs* its unending estrangement of itself, the city reinforces all the more its rhizomatic nature. Every attempt on the part of its occupants to rigidify and consecrate its variable nodes is subject to erasure, for a city secretes its anonymity in the instant that it claims the familiar.

If art and criticism are to address this slippage they cannot hold fast to tidy polarised fixities. Rather, art and criticism must access a language that embraces a constitutive ambivalence, for the truth of a city, always evasive, always fraught, ceaselessly evades and challenges cognition and sensory intelligence. In South Africa the fraught nature of the city is compounded all the more by the terror that stalks it. Terror, as understood here, is not merely the sum of empirical acts of violence but a pervasive and variegated *psychic seam*. It is this seam that must be tapped if we are to understand why the city works yet does not work. For, to my mind, there is no disputing that the South African city is a psychically agonistic and besieged terrain. Neither knowable nor wholly unknowable, the South African city exists in the shadowy interstices of its vaunted intentionality. Like the house in Ivan Vladislavic's *The Folly* (Vladislavic 1993), the South African city occupies a liminal point between wakefulness and dream. Therein the very desire for a sense of place recoils before its lack of substance. That *The Folly* emerges on the South African literary scene in 1993, when South Africa stands on the verge of its first democratic election, is telling. For Vladislavic that transitional point becomes the marker for a fraught ambivalence. In the place of certainty we find a gnawingly intrusive lack: the house will not be realised. The very phantasmal venture – the creation of a house that does and does not exist – defines an imaginary in the abortive instant of its conception. Hallucinatory projection rather than mimetic representation, the house in *The Folly* marks a key psychic and epistemic shift from the real to the hyper-real. At the very point of its putative consolidation we find the increased estrangement (and derangement) of the South African imaginary. Central to this derangement, I suggest, is terror, for it is terror that founds the restlessness of the South African city. This restlessness is no mere existential nausea; rather, it marks the ceaseless and micrological devastation of hope in the instant of its enactment. Thereby the verticality of mobility is thwarted by the horizontality of threat. Indeed the very axes of the vertical and horizontal are annihilated by the immanent and circumferential nature of violence.

Here Frederic Jameson's reading of Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, in 'The cultural logic of late capital' (Jameson), finds its apt resonance in the South African city. Jameson transposes Herr's reading of the Vietnam War to the urban American context. His transposition focuses, in particular, on the irreferential relation of the Bonaventura complex to its surroundings and the spatial disorientation produced within it. For Herr, the state of war in the Vietnam jungle demands an impossibly permanent vigilance. Because perspective is obliterated – one cannot distinguish threat from the thick vegetation that screens it – awareness becomes all the more intensified and paranoid. Caught within a threat whose invasive orbit has no distinguishable source, the soldier is compelled to keep moving in the knowledge that settlement means certain death. This state of perpetual movement possesses no guarantee of protection, though it may momentarily prove protective. For Jameson an equivalent threat is produced in the decentralised and defamiliarised city. The psychic consequence of this spatial and social defamiliarisation is that it cathects and neutralises agency. It is this fracturing of individual agency which, in the embattled context of the South African city, all the more intensifies the incommensurability of the lived condition therein. For Jameson the city is 'above all a space in which people are unable to map either their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves.' (Jameson) It is this failure, then, which results in the deterritorialisation of movement in space and time. Unlike Jameson I can find no satisfactory recuperative mechanism that could make this deterritorialisation endurable other than in and for itself. If Jameson hankers for an instrumental agency and believes in an urban *totality*, my own epistemic and psychic inclination finds greater sustenance in Bhabha's non-totalisable conceptualisation of a cryptically camouflaged moment that eschews totality. It is this more immanent view that emerges as the most precisely imprecise way in which to read and write the lived condition of the South African city.

If the benighted South African subject possesses no continuity, no coherent narrative, it is because the very notion of continuity is impossible. Caught between fatalism, optimism and, more insidiously, relativism, the agency of the South African subject is compromised at every turn. If the South African imaginary is defined by an acute sense of estrangement it is because the terror at its root has not been satisfactorily addressed. The so-called miracle said to define the South African transition marks the precise degree to which the ills that traverse and mar this transition have not been answered. Perhaps this is so because these ills are unanswerable. Or perhaps it is because the belief in transfiguration has proved so consuming. However, as Nietzsche observed, optimism can be more dangerous than pessimism. In South Africa, in particular within its cities, this has certainly proven to be the case. With its burgeoning systems of deterrence – its paramilitary swat teams, its darkly visored and sleekly powered vehicles, its gun culture – the South African city is a place-as-space that is running on empty. The only locus of plenitude, of fullness, is terror, for 'risk is full/every living thing in siege' (AR Ammons).

The challenge then is to find ways to epistemically and psychically endure and reconfigure terror. Homi Bhabha gestures towards this need when, in his Foreword to *Black Skins, White Masks*, he writes of 'Fanon's search for a conceptual form appropriate to the social antagonism of the colonial relation' (Young: 146). This search for new forms of cognitive and sensory survival is an ongoing one. The antagonism of the colonial relation is, in the South African postcolonial present, a matter that remains inescapable. What then is the conceptual form that needs to be harnessed? Needless to say it is a form that is neither singular nor all-encompassing. Rather, the form required is one that necessarily understands its contingent and fraught context. Moreover it is a form that must admit its constitutive formlessness and vulnerability, for terror can never be wholly appeased and synoptically totalised. If in Joseph Conrad's Congo – as in Michael Herr's Vietnam – the horror is indecipherable, it is not because it must not be named but because the very act of naming is a repeated act of risk. One names at one's peril. To not know the perilous nature of this act of naming – of giving form to a radically ambivalent horror – is, precisely, to betray the attempt. The act itself – the act of naming, of giving form to the inchoate and formless – must, therefore, be conceived under erasure. Conceptually, then, the form or act of naming is rendered visible in the instant that it is qualified. This qualification, in its highest moments, is not a self-reflexive gesture or escape clause, but the figuration of an immanence that consumes both the work and the artist. In the excerpt from the story 'Empty' you will note that every proposition redoubles upon itself. At no point do I allow the moment to finally be claimed by gravity. Consciousness cannot eschew the pain that is its source. Similarly art, or artistry, cannot be deployed at the expense of the moment it seeks to address. Which is why in 'Empty' Marshall MacCluhan's formulation – *the medium is the message* – emerges not only as a grim conceit but, rather, as an implacable and unassuageable truth that all the more compounds the emptiness which the raped victim experiences.

Marcel Duchamp conveys the necessity for erasure in the instant of perception and creation when he asks: 'How does one make a work of Art that is not Art?' If this question is prescient it is not merely because

it negates the canonical in art but because it anticipates the heightened and increasingly aggravated sense of art's impertinence and inconsequentiality. The question Duchamp asks is, to what end has art been put? To whom does it speak, and of what? Duchamp's answer – at odds with the commonplace assumption of the artist as an aesthete – is that art has failed to address the brute and antagonistic nature of life. As an idea, as a mode of expression, art does not satisfactorily capture the shadow world that arrests and confounds its very necessity. Similarly, Michel Foucault conveys art's conditional disavowal of itself, in the instant of its reification, when he reminds us that:

it is necessary to strain one's ears, bending down toward the muttering of the world, trying to perceive the many images that have never turned into poetry, so many phantasms that have never reached the colours of wakefulness. (Bailey: 3)

Here the key phrase that echoes Duchamp's formulation is *the many images that have never turned into poetry*. Does this not suggest that for art to be what it must be, it must begin to grasp that which it is not, and, in so doing, locate the means to speak itself? Is this not also the source of Bhabha's apprehension that for Fanon to grasp the antagonistic colonial relation he had to find a new conceptual form that would be intrinsically other to itself, the better to reconfigure the very conditions that made the perception possible in the first place?

After Theodor Adorno one could define this perception as a radically negative insight in which the act of objectification is *suspended*. 'No authentic work of art and no true philosophy ... has ever exhausted itself in itself alone, in its being-in-itself,' Adorno declared. Rather that which matters necessarily stands 'in relation to the actual life-process of society' (Adorno: 23). For Adorno this life-process reached its barbarous nadir after Auschwitz. It was that point, a point of unthinkable horror, that resulted in a mode of thinking that would become ceaselessly unconvinced in its own conviction. Remarkably, Adorno would never fall prey to a solipsistic apprehension of the tragic. Rather the society that is his grim inheritance is 'no less a source of terror than a promise of happiness.' In the famous concluding aphorism to *Minima Moralia* Adorno signals the redemptive force at the heart of terror:

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed in the world of redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. (Adorno 1974: 247, my emphasis)

This redemptive will to life, we must remember, is conceived in a time of acute trauma and confusion. That we exist as pale survivors of this trauma, or as survivors of a related trauma, should perhaps direct us to an equivalent conclusion. However in this regard I am not certain. Certainly the conclusion of my story, 'Empty', appears to lean in a similar direction:

She thinks she sees the sky empty. She is wrong. Where there was blackness the ground reaches up brown against the expanding blue. She senses this rather than sees it, the one eye blinded, the other swollen, pressing the world into a sliver. A bird settles in front of her, its beak taps the crushed and twisted can. She hears a human cry. A pair of thick ankles and squat feet with nails painted red appear before her, sheathed in pink slip-ons with the flimsiest of heels. In the blinding sliver of light, her face flush against the warming tar, she sees little else. She could never have imagined a stranger consoling vision – such feet in such shoes! She is smiling – difficult to picture – but she is smiling. Pictures are hard to see, especially internal ones. She listens to the woman's broken voice on the cell phone. Three distinct sets of hands and arms appear, one creased with age, another lithe, the third a veld fire of red hair. The fourth pair of hands, invisible to her, holds the head and neck in place. Slowly, ever so gently, she is being lifted. She trembles in their trembling hands. Tears from above sting her face, her cut breasts. Pain returns, audible and comforting as a sigh. (Jamal 2002: 12)

I think that here, like Adorno, I wanted to avenge the damage that had taken its toll in the writing of this dark story. Here the second grouping of hands that hold the victim's body is beneficent. In the set of oddly alluring feet, in the wracked voice of another, resides the longing that the victim's death, if not her life, can, at least, be witnessed. But is this not too much to ask when so many atrocities are perpetrated without witness and without redress? Is this final act not a false balm? And is this not where the story, like the mind of the writer, fails? To what extent, in other words, is it permissible to project a saving closure? What, indeed, is this messianic light that Adorno claims *will* appear one day? Is this the light that art, *against* truth, is compelled to project? And, if so, is it not precisely this light that Duchamp and Foucault challenge? The light of art, the light of poetry; a light that obfuscates more than it illuminates. Is art not then our desperate bid to deny our very indigence, our bid, in the face of terror, to bear witness, and to be witnessed in turn, in the instant of our ceaselessly immanent annihilation?

This last question is neither rhetorical nor one that can be satisfactorily resolved. Rather it is a question that I consider key to an understanding of the ambivalent relation between ethics and aesthetics. Baruch Spinoza's formulation – that ethics marks the blurred, contingent, and graduated distinction between good and bad, rather than the tidy counterpoint of Good and Evil – allows for the minimal and partial appraisal of terror that this paper promotes. In an age of barbarism – Adorno's as well as our own – there remains the possibility of an ethical turn; a turn which, for Simon Critchley, allows for a 'preparation for action, however minimal' (Critchley 1997: 20). It is this preparation, then, a preparation perceived as permanent though by no means transcendently resolvable, that I understand to be the job of cultural inscription. If barbarism-as-terror is inescapable this does not mean that its provenance as *the* condition of our time is immutable. Rather it is terror's psychic and epistemic dominance that must be reconfigured or othered in the instant of its apprehension. Therein, for Adorno, lies the 'responsibility' of critical and cultural inquiry. Adorno asserts:

Even the blossoming tree lies the moment its bloom is seen without the shadow of terror; even the innocent 'How lovely! becomes an excuse for an existence outrageously unlovely, and there is no longer beauty or consolation except in the gaze falling on horror, withstanding it, and in an unalleviated consciousness of negativity holding fast to the possibility of what is better. (Adorno 1974: 25)

My nagging contention – a contention that challenges my own yearning as much as it does that of Adorno – is, to what extent is one's own sense of responsibility permissible? What is it within us that would want the possibility of what is better? If nothing exists that is not shadowed by terror, then what is the good of a consciousness that kneels at the altar of hope? Would a post-apocalyptic acceptance of terror not be more fitting? Would the role of art and criticism not be better served by an acceptance of its *irresponsibility*? For what good is longing when it cannot redress an aberrant present? If these questions leave one, as they do myself, with the bitter taste of gall, it is because I believe that they are unanswerable. Yet they persist, drawing me nearer to the terror that sculpts their ambivalence. That Adorno too is drawn to the terror that mocks all hope should alert us to terror's intractability, yet, at that crucial moment Adorno is also compelled to turn away. Why, when the solution he proffers is not a solution at all but a pale riposte? Is his redemptive turn not a kind of derangement; a madness to counter madness? And is that not precisely where the mind's artistry – its resistance to truth, its will to survive at all cost – fails? If terror must be negatively apprehended and thereby othered, the prevailing quest is, how? I, however, would ask, why?

Consider the formulation by Duchamp: A GUEST + A HOST = A GHOST. Conceived in California in 1943 – at the same time and in the same locale that Adorno was writing his 'disconnected and non-binding' record of a damaged life (Adorno 1974: 18) – this formulation draws our attention to the *ascesis* that distinguishes life in a post-apocalyptic time. With the erasure of certainty, or with the heightened ambivalence of relatedness – between guest and host, colonist and subaltern, citizen and migrant, body and virus – that which emerges not only threatens the dialectical composure of the aforementioned relation, but undoes the immutability of its putative conditionality. The ghosting that occurs not only traverses the prior set of relations but renders strange their balance and equanimity. If Duchamp's formulation remains as pertinent as ever, if not more so, it is because it alerts us to the exacerbated and aggrieved nature of the present moment. Inscribed on a small sheet of shattered glass, the equation alerts us to the impossibility of transparency – be it the transparency of the colonial relation or that of the postcolonial relation. That which is all the more apparent today is the need to cancel all categorical relations, and to develop what Homi Bhabha calls a 'third space', a space that 'eludes the politics of polarity' and enables us to 'emerge as

the others of ourselves' (Bhabha 1994: 39). This emergent otherness is not the inverse of selfhood. Rather, in the manner of Duchamp's equation, it is an emergence that opens up the possibility of another way that, by foregrounding the tension that threatens the fixity of oppositional logic, allows for a reconfiguration of every privative construction.

In South Africa, the geographic and imaginary location of this essay, conceptual innovations such as those of Duchamp and Bhabha have proven to be critical. When Loren Kruger, speaking of the historical shift in South Africa in the 1990s, defines it as the 'post-*anti*-apartheid period' – a period in which 'the moral conviction and commitment of anti-apartheid [has] waned' and 'radical social transformation' is displaced by a 'postcolonial uneven development' (Kruger 2002: 35) – she is speaking of a similar shift to that proposed by Duchamp and Bhabha. The formulation – post-*anti*-apartheid – is suggestively stilted. While it conveys an epistemic and psychic turning point it does not memorialise that turning point. Rather, what matters is Kruger's pointedly disturbing insight: that the very radicality of transformation has been *diverted*. This diversion is summed up in the late-modern paradox: post-*anti*. Now it is precisely this diversion that has resulted in South Africa's sepulchral and ghostly cultural imaginary; an imaginary that, while it hosts the possibility of Bhabha's reconfiguration, has short-circuited its radicality. For what we have in South Africa today is a curious sustenance of the polarised fixities of the past in the very moment of their epistemic and psychic exhaustion. For, yes, there is in South Africa the existence of newfound possibilities and re-routings of prior inequities; however, at the same time there is a growing and unnerving sense that these new possibilities and re-routings are simulacral: affects that stem from the *idea* of freedom rather than from freedom's actuality.

In this regard my story 'Empty' alludes not only to the terror that preys upon freedom but also to the constitutive *emptiness* of change in South Africa. This claim is not made casually. Rather, it is a claim that seeks to foreground a hollowness that inhabits change in the country. Jane Taylor arrives at a similar conclusion when, in her notes to the theatrical production *Confessions of Zeno*, for which she wrote the libretto, she speaks of performing before a vacuum. It is this sense of a vacuum, of an empty space that cannot be filled and converted into a *place*, that brings me to the sepulchral ghostliness of the South African imaginary, and, by extension, the sepulchral ghostliness of its cities. For it is the city that affirms the life – or deadliness – of a culture's imaginary. A woman dying on the outskirts of a city is not an anomaly. Neither, of course, is her death the apotheosis of the lived condition therein. However it remains an instance of an incontrovertible desolation and damage. Women are abused, raped and murdered in every conceivable location, be it in the workplace, the home, a darkened alley, a floodlit city centre, or on the shoulder of a highway. Terror therefore has no designated place. Indeed it is the very absence of received designation that cancels the polarity of safety and danger. In South Africa no place is safe. If this is so it is because the very idea of a place, of a haven or topos for the familiar, is at the same time a space that is threatened at every turn by the unfamiliar. One does not have to stand at a street corner to bargain with hate; hate is everywhere.

Nicole Turner's story, 'J88', selected by JM Coetzee as the recipient of the 2001 *SL Magazine* short fiction award, conveys the unease at the heart of the contemporary South African city (Turner 2001). Set in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, it records the peripatetic journey of a murderess in search of a murderer. That the act at the close of the story is unfulfilled does not dispel the story's perverse longing. 'I want to be killed violently,' Turner writes. 'I want to be brutally and randomly murdered. There's more than enough of that to be had in this city; it's just a matter of finding it, of putting myself in the path of it and allowing it to happen.' What does happen, however, is a random apprehension of the spaces the murderess walks through; spaces that blur the distinction between the living and the dying. The 'Hillbrow hospital is largely deserted. Besides the community clinic, a small and rudimentary reception for casualties and the oncology section, the rest of the hospital has been mothballed.' Nearby is 'a broken ambulance resting on bricks, out of the hospital gates.' The diminished functionality of the hospital, along with its dead spaces, accustoms the reader to inflation and scarcity. The system works, yet does not work. 'With the attention to detail of someone about to die,' the murderess observes the outpatients:

A gaunt woman coughing up pieces of her lungs, a frightened teenager with dead eyes and others who look perfectly healthy except for the smell that gives them away as bodies made of half-dead flesh. Their smallest parts, the bubbling, fragile compartments that are the miracle of the body's construction have become suicide bombers. The terrorist cells have invaded and the whole must be destroyed.

These perceptions of a plague are not the sole or consuming markers of Turner's story. Domestic abuse, xenophobia, poverty, segue one into the other, creating an urban texture that challenges the ease of the murderess's navigation between life and death. Moreover it is the very teeming interpenetration of putatively discrete worlds that gives the lie to the murderess's fatal longing. 'The ones who kill for no reason, for bags and wallets and car keys' are contrasted with the 'commuters, grocery shoppers and children discarding their school uniforms as they walk home.' All about there is noise. 'Minibus taxis plying the inner city streets hoot incessantly and bootleg music stalls are sending kwasa kwasa, gospel, kwaito and Marshall Mathers into the mix.' What becomes increasingly evident, however, is that Turner refuses to distinguish the city's vitalism from its threat. Entering the 'bustle of Pretoria street' the murderess sees 'nothing that is vaguely dangerous. There are knots of people enjoying the last of the sun, a skinny white man with thin red hair walking two poodles, boxers sweating as they run to their gym, a religious procession of angelic women in white, a glut of young men who smile instead of trying to kill me.' But then, pell-mell, the murderess recalls her mother, a cancer victim, who 'hated coming [to the Hillbrow hospital] for her treatment because she would be forced to see the place as it is now: the streets choked with hawkers, the buildings decrepit and festooned with laundry ... the bookshops and the hair salons of her golden years replaced by offal-selling butchers and cut-price stores stocking cheap "Fong Kong" knock-offs made in China.'

That Turner's narrative refuses the fatal intention of its narrator reveals an aesthetic and ethical refusal of a terror that binds the story. The concluding words – 'everything is blurred' – reach, rather, to Spinoza's calibration of good and bad. For Turner Good is not the inverse of Evil, Terror the inverse of Happiness. Rather, through the conflation and blurring of these polarised fixities the story gestures towards a reconfiguration of fear. Turner's city, in particular the domain of Hillbrow, emerges as the unresolved locus for a drama that allows for the malignant, the benign and the serpentine indifference that lurks between. It is this conflation that informs the abraded manner in which South African artists have come to tell their stories. If the terror that lies at the root of so many of our narratives appears inescapable this does not presuppose that the terror is triumphant. Rather, what Turner's narrative draws our attention to is the battle that is being waged within and against the inescapability of horror. Her story signals not the negation of horror but the necessity to inflect its influence *indifferently*. The urgent need for this critical inflection becomes the more apparent when we consider the following rumination by Achille Mbembe:

It is a characteristic of actual corpses, dead things, that they all seem frozen in pastness. Doubts emerge as to whether those apparently animate beings who seem to be alive are really alive, or whether they are only the figurative corpses of what had once been alive and are now but shattered mirrors at the frontier of madness and abjection. (Mbembe 2002)

Here we find a compelling response to the ghostliness of cities. Amidst the glare and hubbub, against the futurity of the city, stand 'the bodies made of half-dead flesh'. Here both the living and the dying emerge as eerily simulacral. In relation to Mbembe's perception Duchamp's equation – A GUEST + A HOST = A GHOST – becomes all the more suggestive. It is the living and the dying, caught in a mutual act of cannibalism, that produce the ghostliness of cities. Snagged between pastness and futurity, the city tolls its paradox. By adjusting the lens one can read day for night, for darkness can emerge as a glare and light as a stain.

Irrespective of the inflection, however, terror remains. In hindsight, terror, when reflected upon or prattled through, can cloak itself as a thing blackly comic. In South Africa there is certainly a surfeit of horror that is comically-and-hysterically retold. There is also a deadliness or dispassion that may consume the telling. Here Stefan Helgesson's description of J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* as 'an ascetic narrative ... that accedes impoverishment and makes of writing a sheer dry intensity' is a case in point (Helgesson 2003). Alternately Helgesson notes in the writing of Ivan Vladislavic a use of language akin to Duchamp's use of found objects. This use, which imputes an art that is *not* art, allows for a mode of inscription that suspends itself in the instant that it acknowledges the inescapability of its social and cultural implication. For Vladislavic this redoubling of art upon itself – a redoubling that amounts to a cancellation – results from a 'fall through language'. This fall, like the painter's construction of a 'negative space', is one that emerges from an unalleviated consciousness. For the artist Kendell Geers, an equivalent negativity obtains. In Geers's work, '48 hours', South African urban life emerges as a catalogue of violent incidents collected over two years and treated to look 'like an enlarged listings, news in brief or small ads section of a newspaper' (Bradley: 212). Reproduced in *My Tongue* in *Your Cheek*, the work reveals both the obsessiveness of its

focus and the randomness of its context – a London street. Eschewing the walls of the Stephen Friedman Gallery, Geers chooses instead to paper its windows, thereby narrowing and rendering depthless the interface of street and the gallery's interior. The images of the exhibit, shot from the street, are strikingly suggestive: a black policeman weighted with an informatics console, white men in grey suits eating on the move, a casually dressed white man burdened with purchases and a haunted look emerging from the gallery. In each of these images Geers's work serves as a backdrop. Not one of the figures pays a glance. The horror that is the work's content becomes ephemera, the papered windows the conventional screen for a secret alteration within the gallery. Yet there is no secret and no alteration. It is the gallery's façade that contains its truth; a truth which, by virtue of its passing context, is rendered all the more negligible. Here I think that Geers's work affirms South African terror as simulacra: as a papered truth that, despite its variable repetition and magnification, is perceived as incidental and ultimately forgettable. It is there, then, in the instant that the work is remaindered – as waste paper, as supplementary and forgotten events – that Geers attempts his corrective. It is the work's very supplementarity – *as that which adds to but doesn't add up* – which affirms all the more the incommensurability of the horror it summarises. If, as TS Eliot remarked, humankind cannot bear too much reality, it is because it seeks to evacuate pain the better to embrace the simulacra of futurity. So, yes, in the context of the London exhibit the terror that informs Geers's work may appear to go by unnoticed. However, it is the very anonymity of the work that affirms all the more the singularity and desolation of the lost and destroyed lives it records. That London, too, is a city under siege should remind us that no one is exempt. In the context of the South African city, however, one will never find the nonchalant ease evident in the swaggering young men in suits. Some in the South African city may consider terror as virtual, but more often than not this complacency will be cruelly interrupted. Others, still, may spoof the terror. Here the emergent Y generation that gathers under the simulacral banner of Loxion Kulcha (location culture) is a case in point. However, no inflection of South African life can be exempted from terror. The very plea to South African teenagers to 'LOVE LIFE' is a call to FEAR DEATH. And when three generations of a white family – a grandmother, mother and baby daughter – are hijacked in broad daylight and shot, execution style, no one who reads or watches South Africa's looped carnage is unaware of the fact.

However, this essay is not a catalogue of the terror unleashed in the city. My concern is not with whether terror is explicable or whether it can be contained – a longing as belated as it is impossible; rather, what concerns me is terror's efficacy as *the* condition through which to write the South African cultural imaginary. If today South African artists are working *through* terror this is because it is an urgency or élan of mind and spirit that allows them to free themselves from the categorical and moral imperatives that, heretofore, have shaped the South African narrative. Like the city with its intrinsic formlessness, its indifferent abutments of mothballed and thriving services, its vacant lots and bustling streets, its gleaming and bruised surfaces, its collapsed spaces in-between, the artistic narratives that are emerging are styling a paradoxical and blurred record of South African life. It is this blurring of boundaries which, increasingly, has come to mark the way in which the South African city, and the disjointed and non-binding narratives pertaining to it, operate. As Michel de Certeau (1984) reminds us, the town planner's Platonic conception of the city is markedly distinct from the way in which the city is remade by its occupants, who effectively inscribe the particularity of their myriad, distinct and eccentric urgencies within and upon it. Given the difference at the heart of the human, a difference compounded all the more in post-apartheid South Africa, De Certeau's view remains relevant. His description of a body 'clasped by the streets that turn and return it according to an anonymous law ... possessed by the rumble of so many differences' (1984: 92) is compellingly conveyed in Turner's story. However as Sarah Nuttall notes in her qualification of Certeau's view (Nuttall 2003), South African cities are also 'the places of the most effective surveillance in which people – as in apartheid's spatial geography – are confined, segregated, monitored and rendered violently invisible to others not in their "group".' Here all the more Turner's murderess, with her thanaturgical attention to the *violently invisible*, affirms Nuttall's qualification.

It is this violent invisibility, which roots terror at the heart of the anonymous, that Turner's story brings to the fore. In the South African apartheid narrative this violent invisibility – as the *swart gevaar* – has always been central. Elsa Joubert's story, 'Back Yard' (Joubert 1986), reprises this psychic seam. At the start we read: 'I live on the periphery of an existence which I don't understand.' These words capture the ignorance, isolation, and fear that marked white South African experience in the early 1970s. In those dark years communication across the colour bar was guarded and tentative. 'There are superficial points of contact,' Joubert notes, 'a few words to the petrol-pump attendant, good morning to the man who delivers the milk. And there is the Black woman who works in my house' (1986: 219). The systematic separation of people according to colour, the vigilant maintenance of a fraught divide, was a familiar mode

of operation. What distinguishes Joubert's story is the subtle and corrosive manner in which knowledge and impotence converge in an awakening consciousness. From the beleaguered vantage point of her home Joubert's narrator looks upon her back yard, a silent witness to the ghostly movements of those connected to the 'Black woman' – a cipher for a relay of maids, for the itinerant and ominous nature of black labour. This ghosting that is black experience in white South Africa harbours a nascent threat:

There's a network running through town, invisible lines joining one back yard to another, joining suburbs, and joining the suburbs to the Black locations. Like a spider web – invisible until the light catches it, or dust collects on it, or smoke coats it with soot – these lines of communication only become visible in a time of crisis. (1986: 225).

That the story predates the Soweto uprising may attest to its prescience. However, the crisis of which Joubert writes is not reducible to spectacular events. Rather, crisis as it is understood here marks the illumination of the violently invisible. In this regard Joubert's story marks the *continuance* of unease and terror. That the uneasiness that this invisibility provoked for a ruling white minority is not quite the uneasiness of which Nuttall speaks does not dispel its continuance. Rather, it affirms continuance as the variegation and intensification of a constitutive *seam of threat*. For Nuttall, who acknowledges the continuance and difference of violence, the contemporary city is producing intensified 'point[s] of entanglement' (Nuttall 2003). The term Nuttall attaches to these points of 'difficulty' is creolisation or creolite. Violence, Nuttall argues, is critical to a paradigmatic understanding of the workings of creolisation. This violence emerges in 'mutual mimicries, border crossings, mutabilities'. A rhizomatic trope for mobility, spatiality and circulation, its 'particular inflection ... is its violence.' As a cartographic method for reading the emergent South African city creolisation presupposes 'that intimacy does not necessarily exclude violation.' 'On the contrary it may often be another name for tyranny.' Here Nuttall's critical reading, like Turner's story, forcefully reminds us of the terror that inhabits the 'porousness' of boundaries, which is why entanglements become precisely the points of a further aggravated difficulty. Nuttall's conceptualisation of the city as the refracted locus of 'violence and transformation-as-entanglement' may appear as a moderated and conscientiously contextual interpretation of an incipient terror; however, at no point does she rule out my more anarchic reading. Where our interpretations differ more crucially, however, is with regard to the evolution and/or devolution of the city. For Nuttall it remains possible to inhabit the beleaguered streets of Johannesburg: 'to fall kicking and screaming into the future.' At no point, however, does Nuttall's claim disregard 'the materialities of conflict, violence, social hierarchy and inequality.' However there remains a way, she argues, of 'tracking and ... breaching [the city's] historical construction.' It is this transgressive breach that allows for 'a way of conceptualising the now. A way of conceptualising walking, and walking differently.'

My persistent and nagging question, however, is whether it is truly possible to conceptualise a way of living in the South African city that, in the final instance, could cancel terror. While I don't think that Nuttall believes this to be possible – the very phrase, 'kicking and screaming into the future', suggests this – Nuttall nevertheless affirms, after Michel-Rolph Trouillot, a radically resistant possibility. Liz Gunner similarly conceives the South African city as 'a place of reclamation, or restoring and in some cases restorying' (Gunner 2003). Gunner writes of a 'blind poetry', a 'perverse agency', that allows for a 'redemption [that] comes through self-revelation.' My dilemma, however, concerns the extent to which Gunner and Nuttall's projects are truly possible; whether *revelation*, be it that of the besieged self or malevolent other, is realisable. Surely here Gunner's recourse to a Christian myth in which self-revelation emerges, after Mbembe, as 'the resurrection of the dead', as the 'capacity for symbolisation' through a 'dream-like violence', is both a hopelessly pre-emptive and horribly belated gesture of recovery? (Gunner: 639). If, however, there is a merit in Gunner's reading of the city, then it lies in the value she accords to the silent and non-substantive; to that which will remain unwritten, that which emerges in the unclothed and untenanted sphere of ephemeral speech. The question remains, however: can the South African city be redeemed? Can the lives lived therein be freed from an agonistic captivity within fear and nothingness? Surely the very inflection of Gunner's view, which embarks with 'the tangible sense of a lost era ... [with] lost voices and forgotten streets, alive in all its gaiety, lyricism and brutality, and yet, absent', suggests a pathos and nostalgia for a vanquished vitalism. Certainly the erasure of the freehold of Sophiatown, the exemplification for Gunner of this vitalism, and its recreation as the bleak poor-white suburb of Triomf, is suggestive of the impossibility of the reclamation of that which is lost. And yet the persistent longing returns, as the reclamation of a gone world (Gunner), as an insistence upon the transfigured 'now' (Nuttall). Caught like Adorno in the thrall of an 'unalleviated consciousness,' both Gunner and Nuttall hold fast to the possibility of what is better.

Nuttall defers to Trouillot who in an essay entitled 'Culture on the Edges; Caribbean Creolisation in Historical Context' writes:

Creolisation is a miracle begging for analysis. Because it first occurred against all odds, between the jaws of brute and absolute power, no explanation seems to do justice to the very wonder that it happened at all.

It is in this compellingly affirmative and seductive spirit that Nuttall embarks on her rethinking of the South African city. My own view, or rather a view that *dispossesses* me, is not so much a reaction to this critical affirmation as it is a non-parallel engagement which, while it inhabits an equivalent difficulty, postulates a more darkly affirming prognosis. Unenamoured by the secular historical record – be it one of oppression or resistance – impelled rather by the shadow world between – a world Frantz Fanon terms the 'zone of occult instability' (Fanon) – my view proposes that we give greater credence to the fathomless, the anarchic and non-substantive. In doing so I do not ask that we yield to the malevolence that keeps the city in its thrall, but that we think *through* that malevolence. Within and against the pathological malevolence and productive though non-instrumental instability that shapes the city we can – *in spite of reason and hope* – arrive at a perception akin to Edmund Burke's sublime of terror (Burke). Therein lies my darkly affirming prognosis. At no point, however, do I wish to dress this prognosis as a romance with horror. Rather, caught in the jaws of my own raw and tenebrous fear, my own sense of victimhood, I have, against hope or any sense of futurity, chosen to speak of terror in its manifold mystery as *the* trope for the way the city is experienced. It is terror that defines the way we read space, the way we move through a South African city. Here Gunner's recent victimisation in an attempted hijack – she was stabbed with a screwdriver, hit on the head with a rock – should alert us to the asymmetrical relationship between a romance with longing-and-loss and brute actuality. That Gunner's psychotherapist should ask her to imagine as intimately as possible 'the scent and smell and closeness' of her attacker should affirm all the more the necessity to *inhabit* the space of terror. It is not merely projection or recollection that is required here, but a remorseless and sensuous grasp of terror's substantive *and* non-substantive configuration.

If my reading of the violent intimacy of the city appears excessive, even paranoid, this is because, like Nietzsche, I think it necessary to exaggerate when dealing with emergencies. Turner's story, 'J88' – named after a form letter for a medical emergency – similarly conveys a remorseless yet sensuous engagement with terror. For Turner it is mental and emotional unsettlement that produces the peripatetic deviations in the narrative's unfolding. The murderess at the bruised core of the story is not the urban *flâneur* who drifts and stumbles upon insight but the fraught and psychically raw conduit through which the city's unnerving irresolution is enacted. Here the story's thematic allusion to Martin Amis's urban dystopia, *London Fields*, is fitting. Turner's purpose is not merely to assert how dangerous the city is, but through ceaseless qualification to affirm danger as both an empirical reality and a phantasmal projection. It is not surprising that oncology – the study of tumours – emerges as central to the narrative. An affliction that is explicable and inexplicable – emerging without reason and pretext like Kafka's carnivorous horses and Nietzsche's beasts of prey – the tumorous marks the parasitic that preys upon and extinguishes its host. Crucially, however, the tumorous is not solely the invasive outsider, but also that resident within the putatively healthy body. By refusing to separate health from sickness, the host from the guest, Turner affirms the constitutive ambivalence of life in the city. This ambivalence is never apprehended in a detached or composed manner, for it is precisely composure that is impertinent.

If, furthermore, I have asked that we consider terror a psychically expressive seam of narrative construction it is because one can, thereby, begin to locate new modes of writing the city. Here writing is understood in the broadest sense as a method of cultural inscription. If Turner writes the city she also records the way it is written. The murderess is defined at the start as an 'Umlungu', a 'whitey'. This is not only a racial descriptor but also a marker for a present-absence: the murderess secretes an annihilating will to absent herself. Unlike the 'brown girl ... the small oily curls of her hair ... torn into disarray by a crusted gash', the body of the murderess is 'unbruised'. And yet between the two a shattered mirroring occurs. When the brown girl screams to her Ghanaian pimp-lover, 'I'm not a dishrag, I come from a good home,' it is a plea that is also the jilted murderess's. Thus the isolation and desolation at the core of the story are never merely solipsistic. For Turner it is the body that becomes the marker of the ravages of the inner city. The brown girl's skin is 'layered with old bruises and dark stains, the occasional blur of skin from cigarette burns – like a carpet in a crack house.' Here the blurring of discrete surfaces forcefully implicates the human and material in a single fraught narrative. Later the murderess notes 'the tar underneath [her] feet and the brick walls

on either side ... black with grease and marked by the grey and white tide marks of urine and discarded dishwater.' And then: 'someone has written on the wall in boxy letters that lack authority: 'PLEASE This is NOT A TOILET.' In another, more girly and curled hand, a postscript: "Respect".' Here, as in the brown girl's plea, there is pathos and hopelessness. Neither injunction is heeded. The brown girl's plea is met with the sleekly menacing silence of her Ghanaian pimp-lover; the call to respect is tainted all the more. Thus the stain – or the repeated act of staining – comes to mark a violation without end.

As in Foucault's rewriting of Magritte's famous phrase (Foucault), the line 'PLEASE This is NOT A TOILET', along with the plaintive call for respect, marks its inverse. Notably Turner does not wish to merely affirm this inverted logic but to draw our attention to the fallibility of signs – to their incipient erasure and deformation. Moreover it is the mortality of the city, the mortality of the lives lived therein, that is the story's focus. At no point does the murderess judge. Indeed it is Turner's absence of judgement – her refusal of the ease of exemption and moral authority, of any crass symbolisation – that comes to mark an emergent – Spinozian – ethics. For Turner the city is not a place from which one flees, and neither is it solely the oncological locus of a fear; rather it is a place wherein the paroxysmic contradiction of flight and fear is harnessed in a darkly affirming way. Neither wholly trapped nor liberated, the occupants of her city both endure and thrive within an immanent, aporetic and unresolved urban condition. If Turner's city is one that is on the move, this movement is critically horizontal, non-linear and rhizomatic. The city neither evolves nor devolves, but is held in a suspension that is *never* constant. Thereby it is the *inconstancy* of the city that becomes all the more apparent. The city: a place where promises are reneged on, where the right to claimancy is an illusion, where walking is an act of falling. Here Vladislavic's configuration of writing as a 'negative space', 'a falling through language' (Vladislavic), finds its cognate in the vertiginous violence inflicted on the inner-city dweller; a violence akin to a fathomless freefall.

It is therefore the constitutive ambivalence of the city – as the virulently exacerbated place of Orwell's DOUBLETHINK – that has produced the most potent new South African writing. This new writing, as starkly divergent yet linked as that of Ivan Vladislavic and Lesego Rampolokeng, is, I have suggested, critically shaped by terror. By proposing that this new writing is in effect the *styling* of terror, I am not suggesting that terror is thereby moderated and contained but that it is disjunctively and aphoristically invoked the better to speak its truth. If blood – and its surrogate, race – has proven to be the marker of the apartheid narrative, then it is terror – irreducible to racial conflict and difference – that is the marker of the post-apartheid narrative. This of course is not to dispel the fact that race – as a calling card, as a psychically intractable fact of contemporary South African life – is still operative. It is simply that today the co-ordinates that define the projects of allegiance and resistance are collusively *entangled* and by no means singularly informed by race. As Achille Mbembe notes: Just as 'Africanity [is not] coterminous with blackness', similarly:

... the category of whiteness no longer has the same meanings as it did under colonialism or apartheid. Although the 'white condition' has not reached a point of absolute fluidity that would detach it once and for all from any citation of power, privilege, and oppression, it is clear that the experience of Africans of European origin has taken on ever more diverse aspects throughout the continent. The forms in which this experience is imagined – not only by whites themselves, but also by others – are no longer the same. This diversity now makes the identity of Africans of European origin a contingent and situated identity. (Mbembe 2002)

Here Turner's fiction once again emerges as a case in point. However, as in Turner's fiction, Mbembe argues that this shift has not dispelled the continuance and exacerbation of violence. Indeed it is violence that lies at the heart of new psychic, cultural, and urban formations. As Mbembe notes: 'There is no identity without territoriality – the vivid consciousness of *place* and mastery of it, whether by birth, by conquest, or by settlement' (2002). But as Turner's story makes bracingly clear, it is precisely territoriality that is under siege; so much so that the only strategy left is that which Mbembe calls 'the strategy ... to assert a wounded identity' (2002).

Now it is precisely this strategy that is the harbinger of both innovation and threat: *innovation* insofar as it qualifies the putative purity of membership and origin and the intactness of territory and locality; *threat* in that it bespeaks a victimhood that consumes the powerful *and* the powerless. It is here, moreover, in the blurring of oppressor and oppressed, in the relativity of a psychic wound – a wound that

is terror's lesion – that we arrive at the vertiginous 'zone of indistinction' that defines contemporary African urban life. This zone, Mbembe writes, 'is a space set outside human jurisdiction, where the frontiers between the rule of law and chaos disappear, decisions about life and death become entirely arbitrary, and everything becomes possible' (2002). Implicit in Mbembe's formulation we once again find the uneasy alliance of innovation and threat. It is precisely this uneasy alliance that is at the root of Duchamp's equation A GUEST + A HOST = A GHOST. Despite the reactionary affirmation of the imperatives of citizenry, membership, origin, at the expense of those who occupy the putative margin, what has become increasingly apparent is that the fixities of territory and identity are the product of an unassuageable wound. Hence Mbembe's zone of indistinction, a zone that also distinguishes the geography of Turner's story. 'Progressively,' writes Mbembe, 'the spread of terror fragments inhabited spaces, blows apart temporal frames of reference, and diminishes the possibilities available to individuals to fulfil themselves as continuous subjects' (2002). Then, echoing Turner's story, Mbembe notes:

The horror of bodily injury is everywhere to be seen. Trauma has become something quasi-permanent. Memory is physically embedded in bodies marked with the signs of their own destruction, moving through a general landscape of fragmentation and economic decay. In many places, life has taken the form of a continuous journey. One leaves one space, establishing oneself in another, only to be dislodged thence by terror, confronted by unpredictable circumstances, and forced to settle once again where one can. (2002)

Mbembe's formulation is not restricted to urban South African life. However, there is no disputing the acuity of its relevance to the South African city. It is therein, in the city, that one finds the acceleration of what Mbembe calls the brute disavowal of *a debt owed to life*. It is this selfsame disavowal that Turner and I address in our stories. In both stories we find what Mbembe calls 'a marked disconnection between people and things'. Both stories are marked by what Mbembe calls 'the limit of the principle of utility – and thus ... the idea of ... preservation – of human lives' (2002) That Turner and I attempt to right this error in no way dispels its prior agency. In Mbembe's words, both stories are 'sculpted by cruelty'. If this is so it is, as Mbembe further asserts, because terror or 'the state of war' has become 'part of the new African practices of the self' (2002). This war – a shattered state of madness and abjection – forms the fathomless seam of a South African history that is born from sacrifice. In this regard the controversial outcome of the rape in JM Coetzee's *Disgrace* emerges as a case in point. It is sacrifice that shapes the novel's seemingly remorseless and inconsolable unfolding. The question that persists is what to make of the fathomless seam of psychic terror and sacrifice that the novel wills. How is one to *write* sacrifice in an ethically and aesthetically enabling way? Indeed, is this question in fact answerable? Certainly Coetzee, in *Disgrace*, seems to suggest that this is not possible; that in actuality it is a question that is impermissible. It is this gloomy conclusion that accounts for the uneasiness that the novel provokes. The very randomness of the novel's violence suggests an anarchy that is terrifyingly constant. There is no reprieve, no ending to the novel, and therefore no succour for the plaintive and beseeching reader. Snagged in a sacrificial act as blind as it is fated, the novel condemns us to an ambivalence that no consciousness can dispel. To grasp the sacrifice in the novel as both a fatal act and an act of fate is to begin to understand its chillingly fraught mortality. The regenerative promise the novel offers is necessarily austere. What seems evident, to me at least, is that Coetzee does not see South Africa's psychic strife and horror as immutable. Rather Coetzee, in the enigmatic and compelling words of Mbembe, suggests that:

through sacrifice, the African subject transforms his or her own subjectivity and produces something new – something that does not belong to the domain of a lost identity that must at all costs be found again, but rather something radically different, something open to change and whose theory and vocabulary remain to be invented. (Mbembe 2002)

It is at this precise and unnameable point that Mbembe calls for new practices of the self. These new practices cannot be embraced without 'a construction of the self understood in terms of both victimhood and mutilation' (2002). Mbembe's insistence upon victimhood is telling, for it is thereby that he is able to challenge the glib and narcissistic claims of universalism and cosmopolitanism. While these tropes prevail, Mbembe resists their provenance the better to affirm the singularity of a wound that no empowered generalisation can subsume. Which is why, in the African context, he chooses to focus on 'chronic scarcity' and on 'pillage and violent seizure' (2002). The seeming negativity of this focus is derived from Mbembe's

ethical will to address a consuming pathology in a manner that will not explain it away but which would account for the *inevitability* of its existence. If, through this pathology, that which is abandoned is the debt owed to life, this is so because it is people who are first and foremost the victims of need.

Where shortage and scarcity prevail, the appropriation of desired goods may take place through pillage and violent seizure. If not, it can only be realised through shadow interventions in the phantasmatic realm. Fantasies are thus focused on purely imaginary objects. The powers of imagination are stimulated, intensified by the very unavailability of the objects of desire. The practices of plundering, the various forms of mercenary activity, and the differing registers of falsification are based on an economy that mobilises passions such as greed, envy, jealousy, and the thirst for conquest. Here, the course of life is assimilated to a game of chance, a lottery, in which the existential temporal horizon is colonised by the immediate present and by prosaic short-term calculations. In the popular practices of capturing the flows of global exchange, rituals of extraversion are developed – rituals that consist in miming the major signifiers of global consumerism. (2002)

Mbembe's perception may appear familiar. However, if it remains striking it is because of the particularity of his perception to the African condition — a condition that is most pronounced in cities — in which poverty abuts wealth, hunger and scarcity abut the desiring machine of consumerism. If the economy of the city is perceived as virtual it is because the discrepancy that subsists within it is not felt at a sober distance but violently and intimately. The South African National Lottery's by-line — *license to dream* — reinforces the attempt to ascribe legitimacy to a desire that is known, from the position of power, to be pressingly and dangerously illegitimate. Those who have little or nothing are massively disproportionate to those who may claim to have everything. This discrepancy, experienced as a psychic wound, cannot be easily overcome. Which is why the conceit of citizenry or membership is necessarily cancelled by scarcity and by a desire that, while it may mimic possession, is all the more aggravated by lack. If Mbembe would short-circuit the economy of desire it is because he believes that it can never absolve the incommensurability of the lived condition in Africa. If this is so it is because 'African identity does not exist as a substance' (2002). This remarkable and devastating conclusion, preceded by a lengthy examination of the historical evacuation of the African's psychic and bodily integrity, should draw us all the more to a saving logic of the non-substantive. However it is precisely here that Mbembe counters a logic of the substantive *and* a saving logic of the non-substantive:

By now, the all-too-familiar and clichéd rhetoric of nonsubstantiality, instability, and indetermination is just one more inadequate way to come to grips with African imaginations of the self and the world. It is no longer enough to assert that only an African self endowed with a capacity for narrative synthesis — that is, a capacity to generate as many stories as possible in as many voices as possible — can sustain the discrepancy and interlacing multiplicity of norms and rules characteristic of our epoch.

Perhaps one step out of this quandary would be to reconceptualise the very notion of time in its relation to memory and subjectivity. Because the time in which we live is fundamentally fractured, the very project of an essentialist or sacrificial recovery of the self is, by definition, doomed. Only the disparate, and often intersecting, practices through which Africans stylise their conduct and life can account for the thickness of which the African present is made. (2002)

Given Mbembe's anatomy of Africinity, what then is the possible route through which to think the present moment? More specifically, for the purposes of this essay, how are we to interpret Mbembe's reading in relation to the South African city? As I have suggested, a way through which bypasses a pre-emptive and false resurrection — be it that of the self or the city — is one that embraces a constitutive terror. It is terror that challenges all claims to the substantive at the precise moment that it despairingly invokes the non-substantive. By insisting upon the prevailing despair that has gripped the South African imaginary — a despair that is flanked today by an unparalleled hope — I would not want to consecrate that despair in and for itself. Rather within and *between* despair and hope I would suggest that another way of living becomes possible. This other way is only possible once one accepts that the styling of self is coterminous with the styling of terror. For it is the epistemic and psychic reconfiguration of terror that will best enable us to embrace the barbarism of the present moment. This embrace — at once intimate and violent — allows for both

an implacable acceptance of a brute fate that emerges without pretext and reason as it allows for a limited conversion and transformation. This view lays no claim upon the future and neither does it measure itself against a preordained past. Rather, it is a view that accepts the unresolved nature of the present moment as one that must be negatively questioned and apprehended. Only thereby will we free ourselves from the captivity of despair and hope. Unlike Adorno, I am less concerned with how this moment may be assessed in some redemptive future than with how it is endured in the present. To ask for more would, I think, be to ask for that which cannot be given. Which is why Mbembe's ruminations are inconclusive and why Turner's story concludes with the words 'everything is blurred'. We live today in the gradations of a blur. Any stand in relation to the shadow of terror must be non-positive and non-positional. If this is so it is not only because intellectual history has forced this aporia into being but also because life has willed it so. In this regard the South African city emerges as the productive marker for a further aggravated unsettlement.

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Blood Money*

A Douala Chronicle

Dominique Malaquais

Je veux ma voix brutale, je ne la veux pas belle, je ne la veux pas de toutes les dimensions.

Je la veux de part en part déchirée. Je ne veux pas qu'elle s'amuse car enfin, je parle de l'homme et de son refus, de la quotidienne pourriture de l'homme, de son épouvantable démission.

Frantz Fanon – *Pour une révolution africaine*

READER, IF YOU DO NOT HAVE A STRONG STOMACH, may I suggest you put these pages down? Pictures follow – in image, in word – that are excruciating. Torture and death are the subject.

Some might argue that telling such tales as I do here is unnecessary, seeks merely to shock. I plead guilty. It is my intention to shock. Die Hard, Harder, Hardest: at the hands of Hollywood and CNN, we are told, we have become immune to sights and sounds of gore. Here, then, is the smell of such: let us think concretely, tangibly.

Still, who are 'we', who have the luxury of seeking sense? Scholars, for one – fuckademics, says a friend of mine. Distance, we hold, a certain dispassionate gaze, is necessary to our craft. In the age of post-colonial -isms, we know this: that we are outsiders, voyeurs, always, looking in from a safe and sanitising beyond. With great interest, irony at times and a good deal of elegant footwork, for some two decades now, we have been looking at ourselves, analysing our analysis. The results, on occasion – Clifford, Appadurai, Minh-ha – have been stunning. Many have followed in these hallowed steps, as I shall here. From afar, an eagle's eye cast on the distance of my own gaze, I will seek to chart the impact of violent death on space, on movement, on constructions of the self in a city half a world away.

And yet... This paper will be given, first – spoken – in a land, a city awash in the blood of its colonial past and its neo-colonial present. This place, this time are not incidental. They shape what I write. Soon, my words will be no more than ink on paper. For now, from Johannesburg, I would have them be more: a plea for passion, a refusal of distance.

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The academy is in need of analysis that is politically – and, yes, ethically – engaged. Late twentieth-century trends, taken too often too far, have blunted our words, our ability to see. Some of these trends have been undeniably positive (the realisation that some manner of self-critique is essential, sheer embarrassment at the wealth and power that underpin the Euro-American academic enterprise); others, cloaked though they be in the garb of cultural relativism, have proven profoundly reactionary. Too many give us leave to remain wholly, and far too safely, on the outside.

Much of the horror chronicled in these pages is the product of collusion between an African kleptocracy, its (neo-) colonial sponsors and ‘first world’ business interests. A citizen of two nations deeply implicated in the contemporary débâcle of Africa (France and the United States), an academic trained in the USA in the heyday of post-deconstructionism, neither a political scientist nor a sociologist (an art historian, for pity’s sake!), at times I find great comfort in the haven of an outsider’s gaze; distance, the fiction of objectivity tempt. Still... To conduct research, as I do, in one of Africa’s most complicated cities, to observe and write yet do so without denouncing FULL LUNG the world order that produces living conditions and violence such as exist here: this, in my eyes, would be unacceptable.

True, we must recognise that little of what we say has real-world impact. Still, it behoves us to try, to seek, within reason, to commit words that *matter*. In a post-9/11 world, where orthodoxy, more than ever before, rules the day, this, I believe, is fundamental.

I. Into the Belly of the Beast

ON FEBRUARY 20 2000, THE GOVERNMENT OF CAMEROON instituted the *Commandement Opérationnel* (Operational Command or CO), a paramilitary body bringing together local and national police and the armed forces. Its main focus, geographically, was the city of Douala, the country's economic capital, home to some 3.5 million people. Its official purpose was to put an end to a wave of banditry: thefts, break-ins, car-jackings and murders.

At first, the CO was well received. For the most part, the rich were gratified. The poor too, initially, were pleased. In the city's many slums, men and women both had taken to lynching bandits. The police could not be depended on to keep the streets safe, they held. *Gendarmes* refused to patrol, preferring to spend their time collecting bakshish. On those rare occasions when officers did arrest a mugger or thief, the culprit was back on the street within hours, the price of his freedom a bribe well tempered. Under the circumstances, any sense that the state might be interested in providing its citizens with a modicum of protection was welcome.

Very soon, however, things started going wrong. People were being arrested *en masse*. Entire neighbourhoods were being cordoned off and their young taken in to CO command posts. There, two things were happening: those arrested were being ransomed – made to buy their freedom – and many were being tortured, beaten with night sticks on the soles of the feet, hung from the wrists for hours on end, fallen upon by machete-wielding soldiers and policemen.

Then things got worse. Many of the arrested were not coming home. They were being taken out of over-crowded cells at odd hours of the night and executed.

On June 16 2000, Christian Tumi, the Archbishop of Douala, called foul: in six months, he declared, over 500 people had fallen victim to extra-judicial killings by the CO. Six months later, ACAT, a local NGO, put the number at 1 000 dead.

What follows is an attempted reading of ways in which the CO was experienced – lived, internalised – by members of the Douala community and an inquiry into the origins of the bloodbath it visited on the city.

Ring Around the Rosic

In the early days of the CO, bodies tortured and killed were positioned in highly strategic places by the army and police: at major intersections, in front of important buildings in the colonial core of the city. As the deaths grew in number, a different approach was adopted. Bodies began to be systematically disposed of. They were dumped into trenches at various points around the city. You can try to hide such things, but an alert population tends to take notice. Some of the mass graves were discovered; others were the subject of hushed speculation. People began talking about the burial sites as a circle of graves, ringing Douala.

Early sites were fairly close to the city centre. Ones discovered thereafter were further afield. As time passed, more and more emerged, creating, in a very real sense, a cordon of death.

The archbishop's denunciation spoke explicitly of these sites, giving their locations and calling them, quite accurately, 'human slaughter-houses'. The prelate's charges were made, originally, in a letter to the president. When it became clear that little would come of this private approach, the letter's text was leaked to the opposition press. It appeared in *Le Messenger*, the country's most-read newspaper. The city's emerging geography of death had been a widespread rumour; it was now common knowledge.

This knowledge found expression in a series of renamings. Streets, plazas, dumps were given new names. Among these was a site located in the peripheral neighbourhood of PK 57. Here, a trench was

uncovered, in which dozens of bodies had been piled. Once known as Mangoule, it was renamed *Montagne de Sang* ('Mountain of Blood'). In the neighbourhood of Bépanda, in April 2001, nine young men were arrested, allegedly for stealing a canister of cooking fuel, and murdered. Their remains were never found. This site, now infamous, was re-named *Carrefour des Neuf Disparus* ('Crossroads of the Nine Disappeared').

Within the cordon of bodies denounced by Tumi, in time a second, inner ring of death emerged. Once in the hands of the CO, there were several places a person could be sent for 'processing'. All were in the central part of town – in what had been the heart of colonial Douala. Two were located in Bonanjo, the city's administrative centre. A third stood in the nearby area of Mboppi and a fourth, by the very colonial name of Camp Bertaut, in close proximity as well. A fifth was at the Douala port's naval base, a stone's throw away. Two further ones – Base Elf (an allusion to France's all-powerful petroleum company, handmaiden to many an African dictator) and Nkapah – were located a bit further afield.

Naming Death, Reshaping the City

For several of these CO strongholds, new names appeared as well. The naval base, a notorious killing field, was given the moniker *Couloir de la Mort* ('Death Alley'). Camp Bertaut was renamed Kosovo, part of a broader renaming campaign in which reference was systematically made to war zones outside Cameroon, globalising the vocabulary of death. In a similar vein, victims of the CO were referred to as Chechen soldiers. Cameroon's president, Paul Biya, was given the nickname Milosevitch. Persons marching to protest CO actions identified themselves as Intifada fighters. Rumours emerged linking a notorious murder thought to have prompted the CO's birth with Lebanese and Asian gangs.

This renaming process was one of many forms of indiscipline that became crucial, on a street level, in resisting the CO. Related responses included an increased awareness of unseen (or lesser known) parts of the city. Men and women running from CO troops acquired a sophisticated knowledge of side streets and back alleys. This was the case in particular in Bépanda, which, in April 2001, became the site of weekly marches demanding information about the nine young men who had disappeared following the fuel canister incident. The marches brought to a neighbourhood that had had a relatively calm street life an approach to local geography that was characteristic of much more difficult parts of the city. In Makéa, arguably Douala's toughest quarter, the ability to navigate at great speed impossibly narrow alleyways called *mapan* – this to escape the police – is a basic survival skill. With the advent of the CO, the *mapan* approach to movement became a staple of Bépanda life.

A fundamental problem for the police and army, in this context, was a new tool the marchers had at their disposal: the cellular telephone. Cell phones made their way into Douala pop culture in 2000. Before then, in the late 1990s, they were few and far between – little more than props for the city's tiny elite – and, absent proper service coverage, essentially useless. By the spring of 2000, things had changed. Several mobile telephone companies, among them France Télécom/Mobilis and the South African giant MTN, had entered the Douala market, making cell phones common where, previously, access to telephones of any kind had been a rare luxury. In a country little discussed in the world press yet renowned, in Central Africa, for the propensity of its government to drown anti-government protests in blood, this had a powerful effect. Information about what forces were where could be passed on from one group of protesters to another and – an important factor – the private press could be summoned.

Other tools still were put to use to reshape the urban geography of protest. CO forces and anti-CO marchers alike made active use of traffic jams, reorienting the flow of cars and motorbikes on the city's chaotic streets, cutting off major thoroughfares and generally causing havoc. Newspaper accounts of the Bépanda Nine affair abound in descriptions of this battle of the traffic jams. Significantly, both sides, in these settings, used terms associated with notions of circling and closure – most notably *boucler*, 'to create a ring and close or lock in', 'to imprison'.

The Dismembered City

As the numbers of dead suggest, the CO was far more successful than its opponents in its use of *bouclage*. Through its enclosing of neighbourhoods, of people, of bodies, it managed, quite literally, to dismember the city. Douala was cut off from surrounding areas; for days on end, people and goods seeking to enter from the West and Northwest Provinces – the country's breadbasket, but also its most politically volatile regions – were denied access to the city. Neighbourhoods were cut off from one another, roads made impassable by heavily armed convoys. Families were cut off from loved ones. Bodies were violently cut, broken, discarded.

Reflecting this vision of a city dismembered, new expressions emerged. Among these were graphic wordplays centred on the term *artère* – 'artery', meaning 'main road' or 'thoroughfare' and 'blood vessel', 'channel of life' – puns suggesting a reading of the city as a disjointed, disarticulated body.

Closely linked to these were accusations of sorcery. Much was being made on the street of missing bodies and body parts. This, of course, is hardly surprising: bodies *were* missing. But there is more. Like many cities in the throes of economic and social strife, Douala, of late, has been deluged with talk of witchcraft. Central to this are allegations of trafficking in human bones and body parts. Typically, such allegations rear their head in relation to new forms of wealth – money made too fast, too soon. With the advent of the CO, things took an unprecedented turn: members of the armed forces became the focus of organ theft accusations. Hearts, male genitalia, entire heads, it was said, were being removed from the corpses of CO victims by their killers, for sale to foreign brokers. What remained of the dead was disposed of in vats of acid.

True or false, the accusations of organ pilfering found fertile ground in a city traumatised by the CO. The matter of heads severed had become such a gripping one for many Doualans that, by early 2001, it was making its way into the work of the city's most avant-garde artists. Most striking was the work of sculptor and installation artist Malam, much of whose production in 2000–2001 centred on visions of dismembered and tortured bodies.

Decisions made by the CO in response to families' demands for the repatriation of bodies made the atmosphere more charged still, adding to the sense of occult doings afoot in the city. Where complaints were raised or marches organised to demand the return of bodies, the CO forbade funerals. This proved disastrous. Douala became a city awash in errant souls.

Adding to the tension still more was a determination on the part of the CO and government to foster a sense of uncertainty. Rumour; the broadcasting of deliberately false, misleading or contradictory information; daily additions to the roster of forces involved in the CO – this to such an extent that it became impossible to keep track of all the acronyms... For months on end, the citizens of Douala were deluged with useless, yet at the same time essential data about the CO, which made it impossible to make sense of what was happening.

When, finally, things started calming down in June 2001, even the most basic facts were unclear. One was told the CO was no longer extant. The decree creating it, however, had not, and has not, been abrogated, suggesting it might come back into being at any time. Claims that deployments of soldiers and policemen in riot gear are a thing of the past are palpably untrue. Venture out at night and you will inevitably come across platoons of men in uniform. Look closely and you will find that a new entity has been created to see to the city's 'security'. Look closer, and you will find that this new entity is built on precisely the same foundations as the CO: it does the same thing, in the same way – a bit more discreetly, perhaps, but no more. Its name? *Opération Etau*.

Etau signifies 'stranglehold', 'noose'. The ring of violence, of death, strung about the city is still very much present. The geography of fear brought into being by the CO remains in place, branded onto the map of Douala.

II. The King's New Clothes

PRETORIA, 1994. Cameroonian journalist Pius Njawe is in South Africa to interview members of Nelson Mandela's fledgling cabinet. First stop, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The minister, it turns out, has a problem. He has just received a fax from one of the poshest hotels in Sandton. A guest is announced, the hotel's manager writes, whose rank poses questions of diplomatic protocol: the king of Cameroon. Who, the minister wants to know, might this monarch be? There is no such thing as 'the king of Cameroon', Njawe explains. Puzzlement all around.

Njawe decides to investigate. At the 'monarch's' hotel, he is directed to the presidential suite. A stunning woman greets him, covered in gold. Entering the suite, he sinks into four inches of plush rose carpet. Ahead is a cavernous room furnished in gold and pink. Young men in dark suits lie about. One wrestles with a remote control, attempting to open at a distance a set of floor-to-ceiling drapes. Success: the drapes part, revealing a mezzanine. On it, a man stands, covered also in gold.

The man on the mezzanine is not a king. He is, however, *le king*, one of Cameroon's most notorious gangsters. Donatien Koagne is his name.

Forty-five minutes of questioning lead nowhere; Njawe leaves knowing no more than he did coming in about what Koagne is doing in South Africa. Further research proves more fruitful. The journalist learns that his fellow-Cameroonian has established close ties with members of the Mandela team. The great man himself may have been taken in: one of the gangster's proudest possessions is a series of photographs of himself posing side by side with Mandela. Worse, Koagne, it seems, was a guest of honour at Madiba's inauguration ...

Mandela was not the only head of state taken in by Koagne. *Le king* kept snapshots of himself with many a man of power, among them Mobutu Sese Seko and Denis Sassou Nguesso. There is no evidence that his relations with Mandela, whatever they were, became at any point unpleasant. Not so his ties to Mobutu and Sassou. And with good reason: Koagne did both men, and others too, gloriously wrong. He took Mobutu for 15 million dollars. Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso lost 40 million to him. Sassou, Etienne Eyadéma of Togo, several high officials of Gabon, Tanzania and Kenya, a member of the Spanish government and an ex-operative of the Israeli Mossad were bamboozled as well.

Koagne has been linked to a wide range of illicit practices – drug-dealing, money laundering and trade in controlled substances (blood diamonds, uranium), among others. The means he used to defraud Mobutu and his colleagues, however, were something else altogether: a sham money-multiplication scheme involving a top-secret potion allegedly concocted by the United States Department of Treasury for use in the manufacture of dollar bills.

Eventually, Donatien was caught. He fell prey to the Yemeni police, following yet another con in which he took a high-ranking member of the local police for two million dollars.

Feymania

Any Cameroonian will tell you: Donatien was a *feyman*, a top-of-the-line con artist.

Of all *feymen*, Donatien is the most famous. Still, he is far from alone. There are many, some of whom may even have surpassed him in wealth. Though each has his *mo* – cons, disguises, means of approach very much his own – all share certain fundamental characteristics.

A *feyman's* gaze is, by definition, trained on the outside. Business, as Donatien's itinerary suggests, is done abroad. When it is not, the cons it calls for systematically reference the outside. The *feyman* identifies himself as a foreigner or claims close links with foreign partners. Commonly, cons prey on a mark's yearning for contacts with outsiders, voyages, a life elsewhere. In this net, countless folk have been ensnared: young men and women seeking jobs or an education abroad, who turn over large sums of money only to find themselves defrauded or, in the case of women, held hostage as prostitutes in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands.

While Europe does figure in the plans and cons of *feymen*, the elsewhere that are of most interest to them and their marks are American or, more generally, Anglophone ones. This is particularly evident in two contexts: links *feymen* establish or claim to entertain with English-speaking countries in North America and in Africa (South Africa and Nigeria most prominently) and their trademark look. The first of these highlights an essential aspect of *feymania*. Donatien's success was not a fluke; nor was it the product, merely, of cons well devised. He and others brought to their work a sophisticated understanding of shifting markets, political events and transformations in the social order born of the cold war's end and the fall of apartheid. The former ushered in a whole new era in the illicit world of diamond smuggling and trade in controlled substances. As, post-1989, strategic interests made way for purely economic ones in countries like Angola and Congo, Togo, Burkina and Liberia, a vacuum developed, a space for new players to invest. *Feymen* did particularly well in this setting.

With Nelson Mandela's release, South Africa opened up. Among the first to see its potential as a place where novel forms of business might be undertaken were Cameroon's *feymen*. The new country was in search of capital. At the same time, it was beginning to experience the backlash of disastrous economic policies implemented by the apartheid regime in the 1970s and '80s and, thereafter, to 'rectify' these, at the behest of the World Bank and the IMF. Coupled with deteriorating economic conditions throughout the sub-continent, resulting in widespread poverty and massive immigration in the south, this state of affairs prompted a crime wave such as the country had never experienced. By the early '90s, trafficking in all manner of goods (drugs, weapons, stolen vehicles to name but a few) was rife. Porous borders and police who were trained to kill, not protect, ill-equipped for their new duties and often corrupt, rendered such trafficking easier still, as did the catastrophic conditions created in neighbouring countries by apartheid's decades-long campaign of regional destabilisation. The Rainbow Nation was a place where a businessman well versed in the ways of fraud and deceit could do very nicely ...

Of interest too, for those so inclined, was the new South Africa's thirst for links to the rest of Africa, to peoples, cultures, ideas it had been systematically denied for half a century. With this in mind, Donatien and others made extensive use of allusions to 'tradition', evocative references to an African past – of royalty, of power and grandeur – with which they claimed an intimate association. To further such visions of himself, *le king* appeared in floor-length brocaded vestments and intricately embroidered caps. Others did the same, apparently with considerable success.

When in Cameroon, Donatien and his crew sported a different look altogether. Here, the style of choice was meant to suggest links with urban American culture. This proved of great use in a country looking increasingly toward the USA. France, and more broadly Europe, were the reference points of a nomenclature held in little regard by the majority of Cameroonians. America, for most, was the place to be. Of this basic fact *feymania* made ample use.

In the second half of the 1990s, in Douala's hottest nightspots, in fancy hotels and Air France's first class cabin, over and over you came upon men – most of them *feymen* – dressed for all the world as if they were straight outta Compton: Nike gear from head to toe, thick gold chains, the latest model SUV. 'New Jack' (aka 'gangsta') style was all the rage. *Feymania*'s adoption of the New Jack look corresponds with the arrival on Douala television screens of MCM, Francophone Africa's answer to MTV, home, in its early days, to videos by 2 Live Crew, Public Enemy and Snoop Dogg. MCM had been available in Cameroon as early as 1990, but only, at that stage, to a tiny minority of the very rich, whose houses were equipped with satellite dishes. In 1994 it became commonly accessible; within weeks it had become a staple of urban pop culture. At this time too, hiphop-themed movies began appearing in Douala: *Trespass*, *Menace II Society*, *Slam* ...

In these films, 'ghetto glamour' was the look: out with the Nike and SUVs, in with Gucci and Fendi, Mercedes and BMW. By 1998, if you were a *feyman*, it was the way to go:

Head shaved clean, Armani sunglasses black as night, jacket by Hugo Boss, pen by Mont Blanc, wheels by Mercedes. Scents to swoon: Shalimar, Coriolan. And jewellery: lots of jewellery...

So one Douala newspaper described the style.

In such looks, *feymen* had a powerful marketing tool, particularly well adapted to the clientele of young, mostly disenfranchised folk they sought to attract. This was not mere ostentation: it was the stuff of strategy, of sophisticated business. Still, we are not talking, here, of business alone. Underlying this all was a rejection, loud as they come, of ideals deemed normative by Cameroonian society.

All *feymen* come from New Bell: so the rumour goes. Like many rumours, this one is a little over the top. Still, there's something to it. New Bell, a sprawling cluster of neighbourhoods southeast of the city's colonial core, is Douala's poorest and most congested section. Its name is a reference to the Bell dynasty, one of several Duala clans whose rulers, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, controlled trade networks linking Cameroon's ivory- and palm-rich interior with the coast, long a port of call for European merchant ships. In 1912, the German colonial authority displaced the Bells, moving thousands of men, women and children inland to a mosquito-infested, flood-prone area to take over their seaside lands. From these difficult beginnings came a neighbourhood typified by social tension.

As New Bell grew, tensions increased. Among the neighbourhood's first inhabitants were not only Bells, or more generally Duala, but also folk hailing from the interior. Foremost among them were people whose home lay in the western highlands, in what is known today as the Bamileke region. In the decades following the creation of New Bell, hundreds of thousands of Bamileke emigrated to the city, leaving behind a hopelessly overcrowded homeland. Today, well over 75 per cent of Douala's inhabitants are of Bamileke origin. In New Bell the percentages are higher still. Coupled with a policy of exacerbating ethnic divisions – a highly effective form of divide-and-conquer introduced by the French and pursued by Cameroon's independence-era rulers – this state of affairs has resulted in a pervasive climate of tension and controversy.

Locally and nationally, there is talk of *la question bamiléké*, a deeply divisive ethnicist discourse at whose heart stand government-sponsored accusations of Bamileke economic hegemony. New Bell has come to play a central role in this discourse. As early as 1960, editorials were appearing in the state-run press calling for mass removals of Bamileke from Douala and, more specifically, from New Bell. Such harangues persist today, accompanied, at times, by hair-raising violence. In this environment, several generations of inner-city youth have grown up deeply alienated.

The matter of alienation is central to any discussion of *feymanism* or the Commandement Opérationnel. *Feymanism* can in no sense be termed a Bamileke phenomenon. It is, in fact, distinctly pan-ethnic. Still, the fact remains that the first generation of *feymen*, represented most famously by Donatien himself, counted among them numerous young men of Bamileke origin, a majority of whom had grown up in New Bell. This speaks not, as government spokespersons argue, to Bamileke propensities for economic crime, but to the disastrous impact on poor urban youth of ever-worsening economic conditions in the 1980s and '90s – conditions that most affected the largely Bamileke population of New Bell and nearby slums.

To understand the sense of alienation that pervades New Bell, one needs to consider the origins of Bamileke urban migration. Though many Bamileke families have been living in Douala for generations, few think of the city as their home. For an overwhelming majority, the plan is to make enough money in the city so as, one day, to establish oneself *au village* – 'back home'. For men, this means something quite specific: the acquisition, in the highlands, of a compound (land, a house and dependencies) and a notable's status.

It has never been easy to become a titled homeowner in Bamileke country. Today, but for the very few, it is well-nigh impossible. Land shortages and rules put in place by a local elite determined to maintain its ascendancy make it so. This results in massive emigration.

In 1915 already, young men were moving to the city, hoping one day to come home. By the 1950s, the situation had become critical. Thousands were leaving daily for Douala, where they were received with hostility and lived in abysmal conditions. If things were disastrous for the poor, for a small oligarchy of chiefs and high-ranking notables they had never been better. Under French rule, huge fortunes had been accumulated by members of the gentry willing to work hand-in-hand with colonial authorities. The divide between rich and poor was now a chasm.

In 1957, the highlands exploded. A massive uprising, among the most revolutionary in sub-Saharan Africa, shook the region to the core. The revolt was intended to create a new social order. Drowned in blood by French and Cameroonian troops, it failed. The hopes of hundreds of thousands were crushed.

In the wake of the revolt, things only got worse. More and more people were forced to leave for the city. Economic downturn, starting in the mid-1980s, made things worse still. Devaluation of the currency in 1994, in which the CFA lost 50 per cent of its worth, caused havoc. In places like New Bell, life became near-impossible to live. The sense of anger, of despair was palpable. This sense was heightened by the abject failure of a movement many young people had believed in deeply and in whose service hundreds, many from New Bell, had lost their lives: the quest for democratic pluralism. In 1991–92, supporters of the movement brought virtually all formal economic activity in Douala to a halt in a massive general strike known as *Villes Mortes* ('Dead Cities'). Though, ultimately, the government capitulated and opened up the electoral process to opposition parties, in the end little changed. Well versed in the arts of bribery and nepotism, the Biya clique managed to buy off those of its critics it did not find expedient to arrest or send into exile. The opposition was de-fanged. Those who had fought in its name were left to their own devices: poor as ever and, now, without any hope at all.

It is from this context, of rural exile, demoralisation and ever-worsening poverty, that *feyman* emerged. For Donatien, his colleagues and those who sought to follow in their footsteps, the get-rich-quick schemes for which *feyman* is infamous offered more than a way out: they were a form of revenge. French-style schooling, hard work, obeisance to the rules of chieftaincy and nation: these, young men had been told for generations, were the keys to success. Untrue half a century earlier, by the mid-1990s such admonitions were laughable. Success was the stuff of ill-gotten wealth and political patronage, lies, bribery, fraud. The means and methods used by *feymen* to acquire their fortune were those of the ruling elite – tools unavailable, until then, to the common man, re-worked to fit his needs and the context at hand.

Feyman created significant difficulties for the Biya oligarchy. Its comen took great pleasure in making life trying for officials and allies of the government. Stories abound: a cabinet member bilked of millions in a phoney real-estate deal (he was attempting to buy an apartment in Paris with embezzled funds); an ex-minister of justice – a Bell no less – whose house was thrown into shadow by the mansion of a *feyman* whom he had tried to indict ... On the streets of New Bell, such tales were told over and over, with relish. The *feyman* took on a mythic quality: he was the poor man's avenger; a Robin Hood for Cameroon's downtrodden. Men like Donatien, in turn, cultivated this identity. Periodically he and his entourage would roar into New Bell in a convoy of Mercedes and take over a kerbside restaurant, buying food and drink for passersby and distributing CFA bills.

The crowning moment of Donatien's career came in 1994. The national soccer team, the Indomitable Lions, had qualified for the World Cup, to be held that year in the USA. The government, however, having defaulted on loan payments, was in the midst of negotiations with the World Bank. Training, outfitting, flying and lodging the Lions would cost a small fortune – not something the Bank would look kindly on. The fate of President Biya, however, was (and remains) intimately tied to that of the Lions': failure to send the team would have caused riots. Donatien saw his chance: on national television, he presented the government with a cheque for the amount of ten million CFA. He was now a fully-fledged popular hero: not only had he saved the team's and the country's honour, he had done so in a gesture many saw as humiliating for Biya himself. Donatien had grown up dirt poor; now he was bailing out the government: the ultimate revenge.

But, of course, things were not so simple. The relationship Donatien and his cohorts established with the ruling elite was a symbiotic one: the *feymen* needed the government as much as it needed them. To wit Koagne's close ties with one of Cameroon's most dreaded men, Jean Fochivé (1931–1997). For decades, Fochivé headed the country's secret services. Long Paris' man in Yaoundé, he was responsible for the murder of many political opponents, a number of whom he tortured to death himself. Donatien and Fochivé knew each other well and – even the country's staunchest conservatives admit this – worked closely together, the former providing funds and information, the latter protection.

Such ties are dangerous. By 1996, Fochivé's activities had become too much even for Yaoundé to hide. His Paris cronies were on their way out (to be replaced by more discreet, if no less deadly players); in negotiations with the World Bank, much lip service was being paid to human rights. Not a bit discreet, Fochivé, had to go. He was fired. With his departure, Donatien lost a precious ally. His days were numbered, as were those of the first generation of *feymen*.

By 1999, things were changing in Cameroon. The economy was finally showing signs of redressing itself and the World Bank was planning a massive pipeline linking Chad to the Cameroon coast. Long a fiefdom of French companies, the country was opening its doors to US business interests. South African and Nigerian capital was trickling in. There was quick money to be made, particularly if you weren't a stickler for transparency. This was an environment made for *feymen*; with its focus on the USA and anglophone Africa, it seemed the fulfilment of a prophecy their business tactics had foreshadowed.

But there were others, now, who wanted to get in on the game. Drawing liberally on *feyman* style and approaches, members of the country's tiny Biya bourgeoisie entered the fray. Foreigners too, not a few of them Americans, began doing less than limpid business in Douala. Speculation ruled the day, facilitated by government officials' notorious lack of interest in regulating foreign businesses, so long as adequate compensation was in the offing. Though some, Cameroonian and not, lost their shirts, a number of colossal fortunes were made. Mansions belonging to this emergent group started popping up, complete with heavily armed guards. So reminiscent were they of houses built by Donatien and his clique that a term was coined: *le style feyman*. Façades covered entirely in white tiles, demanding constant attention by an army of minions, neo-classical porticos and wrought-iron gates were its hallmarks. A neighbourhood known as Denver (after the soap opera 'Dynasty'), once a *feyman*'s paradise, became the quarter of choice for the newly rich. The first Lexus appeared on the streets of Douala. The city – and the country at large – were undergoing a massive *feymanisation*. What had been a subculture was fast becoming integral to the lifestyle of a fledgling *nouvelle bourgeoisie*. In the words of one observer, 'Cameroon [was] becoming a country of *feymen*.'

For the first time ever, the country's economy was not under the exclusive control of the French-sponsored elite. This had political repercussions. In dining rooms and board rooms, discreetly but surely, talk began of a post-Biya era. Lawyers, financiers, CEOs, long staunch supporters of his regime, were beginning to speak of change, hinting that others, perhaps, should take over, better versed in the ways of the business world and prepared to look beyond old alliances. A mere four years earlier, no one – least of all in the established bourgeoisie – would have dared suggest such things.

Taking Back the City

This presented the Biya regime with a serious threat – possibly the most serious challenge to its hegemony since its inception in 1982. In response to this state of affairs, the government took a number of measures. One was a series of highly publicised indictments directed at prominent *nouveau riche* businessmen. Another was the CO.

By 2000, there were entirely too many weapons in Douala, many of them in hands other than those of the police and army. To protect itself – against thieves and, more importantly, business relationships turned sour – the *nouvelle bourgeoisie* had adopted an approach favoured by men like Donatien: private guards. In time, this became the norm for all who could afford it. For help with break-ins, you did not call the police; you turned to security companies first introduced following *Villes Mortes* (Africa Security, Wackenhut). If for South Africans this is hardly surprising, in Cameroon it constituted a significant departure from previous practice, symptomatic of a growing loss of faith in the government's ability to provide even the most basic services.

It is one thing for the populace to hold such views, another entirely when it is the opinion of the wealthy. The fact that many of those resorting to the services of private security companies were not staunch Biya supporters made things more complicated still. In essence the city was being patrolled by mercenaries – several of the companies are subsidiaries of larger guns-for-hire concerns – and these mercenaries were being paid by people whose support for the government was, at best, mitigated. From the standpoint of an authoritarian regime that most of the country's poor and, now, whole sectors of the bourgeoisie wanted replaced, the situation was untenable.

Much of the blood shed by the CO was that of poor folk – to this I return shortly. But the CO was not concerned only about the disenfranchised. Its highly visible presence and violent exactions – particularly in the early months, when corpses were positioned in places the rich, not the poor, frequent – were a warning to members of the bourgeoisie, new and old, considering alternatives to a Biya regime. That corpses appeared in the heart of Douala's financial centre is telling in this regard.

The ‘order’ and interests the government sought to ensure were ones put in place during the colonial era. This too was evident in the CO’s work. Any number of locations would have been possible for its detention centres. The decision to centralise everything in the French heart of the city and its immediate environs was not innocent: it sent a very specific message. The message was all the more potent as Cameroon is one of the few African nations colonised by France in which the government in power descends in direct line from the country’s pre-independence regime. Only two presidents have ruled: Biya and, before him, Ahmadou Ahidjo, a man handpicked by Paris, whom Biya (his vice-president) replaced in a passing of the reins orchestrated by the Quai d’Orsay.

The CO’s massive show of force was meant also for another, related ‘public’: local leaders (neighbourhood co-ordinators, community representatives and the like). In Cameroon as elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, entirely too much attention is focused on ethnicity as a cause of conflict, to the detriment of other catalysts – class and generation divides, most notably. This has been the case in analyses of the CO. Much has been made of the fact that a majority of those detained and killed were Bamileke. While this is so, it would be inaccurate to speak of the CO as an anti-Bamileke vehicle. A more relevant factor, here, is age. An overwhelming number of the CO’s victims were young folk. This is important in two regards. First is what it says about real (as opposed to statistical) economic indicators; second, it brings to the fore generational conflicts that have resulted in unexpected alliances.

By the mid-1990s, Donatien & co. had become role models for destitute youth in quest of hope. In this, they had replaced the political activists of the early ’90s. The children of New Bell had believed in democracy and seen their hopes dashed. With the gradual demise of Donatien-style *feyman* in the later ’90s, they lost yet another reason to dream. This proved problematic for the forces of ‘law and order.’ In the context of *Villes Mortes*, New Bell youth had been a source of considerable disorder, certainly, but a relatively predictable one as well. The same was true during the Donatien years. Now, they had nothing. This, combined with the fact that the country’s much-touted economic recovery had had virtually no impact on the poorest sectors of society, made them dangerous: unpredictable and very, very angry.

The CO’s violence was unmistakably an attempt to bring under control this potentially explosive force. That so many were arrested, tortured and killed, however, cannot be explained in these terms alone. Such terror would not have been possible without the tacit acquiescence of a group that should have risen up to defend the children of New Bell, but did not: their elders. A characteristic of the Bamileke expatriate community in Douala is its high degree of organisation. In every neighbourhood where Bamileke live, New Bell included, there are chapter houses, one for each major chieftaincy. At the head of these chapters are elders whose responsibility it is to see to their community’s wellbeing. From such men (and occasionally women), one would have expected vociferous protests, accusations of ethnic profiling. None such occurred. Their silence speaks volumes. Following the disappearance of the Bépanda Nine, older folk did rally. It should be noted, however, that Bépanda, while many of its inhabitants are Bamileke, is not a slum; far fewer desperately poor young men live there than in New Bell. During *Villes Mortes*, young and old, in New Bell as in many other neighbourhoods, had joined forces. In the face of the CO, the children of New Bell – many more of whom than nine lost their lives – were largely left to fend for themselves.

The neglect was intentional. Over and over, elders say the same thing: the CO may have been targeting Bamileke youth, but this was mostly defensible; the younger generation, they hold, is precisely what the police and army accuse them of being: riff raff. They are lazy, pay their leaders no heed, abandon the traditions of their homeland. As the contrast between *Villes Mortes* and the CO period suggests, this is a novel development. A distinct generational rift has appeared, pitting older men who feel they have played by the rules of the social order against younger ones who show little interest in doing so. Others before these youth had turned their backs on the highlands, refusing to go home and build or acquire a title. Among them, however, were several – virtually all *feymen* – who had done quite well for themselves. Their wealth and clout made up (in part at least) for their rejection of communal norms. For the young of New Bell under the CO, there were no such mitigating factors.

This rift between generations of Bamileke facilitated the CO’s task. For those in power it was advantageous as well: properly handled, it could be used to drive a wedge into the Bamileke community’s legendary solidarity. This both the Ahidjo and the Biya regimes had long sought to do, mostly to little avail. Their goal, in this respect, was twofold: to break Bamileke monopolies in a number of economic sectors and to counter the Bamileke community’s active and often highly successful engagement in opposition politics – an engagement going back to the late colonial period, during which the French-sponsored elite’s most

formidable political enemies hailed from the western highlands. The CO emerged as a powerful weapon in this setting, drawing out and inflaming tensions inherent in the Bamileke social fabric, yet until then kept largely under wraps.

In seeking to understand the stunning violence of the CO, there is still another factor to consider. Many a president in francophone Africa was handpicked by Paris to lead his country into 'independence'. Ahmadou Ahidjo's, however, was a unique situation: he was actively *opposed* to independence. Others, who had fought for the country's freedom, were violently silenced by the French and, in their wake, by Ahidjo. To maintain himself and his entourage in power, the French-appointed president had to resort to draconian methods: his was one of the most repressive regimes of the early post-colonial period. Biya too, if less habitually than his predecessor, made use of such means. In shoring up their power, the two presidents relied heavily on the army and police. As a result, both institutions have a high profile and considerable sway. If Cameroon has suffered no (successful) military coups, it is because both regimes have known how to placate their men in uniform. Never, not even at the height of the government's fiscal crisis, have they gone without pay.

Discreetly yet forcefully, on a regular basis, the army and police remind those in power that, without them, chaos would ensue. Shortly before Paul Biya created the CO, there had been rumblings to this effect – talk of disaffection among the army brass, rumours of a possible coup. While this may have been a coincidence (such talk is not rare), it does seem clear that the army and police were given considerably more leeway in setting afoot and managing the CO than was in fact necessary. Many observers of the Cameroonian scene viewed this as payback. It was also a hedge. Well aware of his debt to the military and of the threat it could constitute if dissatisfied, facing massive discontent among the populace and, increasingly, a vote of no-confidence from the bourgeoisie, Biya turned for help to the armed forces, ensuring their support by giving a *coterie* of high-ranking officers what amounted to *carte blanche*. That such was the case is underscored by the treatment the CO's leader was afforded when, finally, his paramilitary units were disbanded: he was assigned another post ... in the Bamileke highlands. A few of his subordinates – scapegoats, essentially – were arrested. In the highest spheres of power, however, it is acknowledged that they will probably never be tried. As for the myriad acts of illegal detention, torture and murder committed under the CO, these have yet to prompt even the beginnings of a serious investigation.

The Road from Here

The CO was a multi-layered phenomenon. Both cause and effect, it was brought on by and, in turn, prompted a whole range of transformations in the social order. As a result of fundamental economic and political shifts – some global, others continent-wide, others still specific to the country and, within this, to particular regions – long-held certainties are increasingly thrown into doubt. Who you are within the social order; how you move through its spaces and what, precisely, these spaces are; who your allies are; where, with and to whom you belong; goals and means of attaining these; ethnic and political affiliations: categories and identities that had seemed fixed, or in any event solidly anchored, are proving wholly contingent.

This state of affairs is the product of a history particular to Cameroon. It is not, however, a specifically Cameroonian phenomenon. Nor is it purely an African matter. The briefest perusal of newspapers, music, poetry anywhere in the world today makes this clear. Still, in many ways, Africa is at the forefront of such developments. Change – the unmooring, de- and re-constructing of identities – is happening faster, in cities south of the Sahara, than anywhere else on the planet. The challenge, for those who would write about contemporary culture South or North, is to do so in ways themselves open to flux, bearing in mind that most of the categories, identities and modes of self-representation that shape our analyses are themselves rendered contingent by the radical changes under way in cities like Douala.

Three Poems

Gabeba Baderoon

My Tongue Softens on the Other Name

In my mother's back yard washing snaps
above chillies and wild rosemary.
Kapokbos, cottonwool bush, my tongue softens
on the rosemary's other name.
Brinjal, red peppers and paw-paw grow
in the narrow channel between
the kitchen and the wall that divides
our house from the Severo's. At the edge
of the grass by the bedrooms, a *witolyf* reaches
ecstatically for the power lines.

In a corner in the lee of the house,
nothing grows.
Sound falls here.
Early in the day shadows wash
over old tiles stacked
against the cement wall.
In the cold and silence
my brother is making a garden.

He clears gravel from the soil
and lays it against the back wall.
Bright spokes of pincushion proteas puncture a rockery.
For hours he scrapes into a large stone a hollow to catch
water from a tap that has dripped all my life.
Around it, *botterblom* slowly reddens the grey sand.
A fence made of reed filters
the wind between the wall and the house.
Ice-daisies dip their tufted heads
toward its shadows.

At night, on an upturned paint tin, he sits
in the presence of growing things.
Light wells over the rim of the stone basin
and collects itself into the moon.
Everything is finding its place.

Contemporary Architecture

It rained.
I left my shoes outside
because there's no mat
to permit a polite rasping of mud.

There are places
where you take your shoes off
at the door.

I watch the cat calibrate the
distance between the man I love
and me, find the exact midway point
between us. In choosing
where to lie, she practises
a kind of architecture.

A neighbourhood practises architecture
with sound, the sound of children,
for instance,
or a mosque.

There are no sounds of mosques where I live.

But if I drive for 42 minutes to
the place I used to live
I will hear three mosques
whose calls triangulate me,
pinpoint my relation to God
and home.

Though you cannot tell from
the homeless grief of young men's mothers,
the architecture of mosques aims to create
a space for love.

When they look at Gatesville mosque –
a sight from the news, but
to those who pray there,
familiar as a cheekbone –
most people will not see
it is excessively lovely.

To the outside eye,
the blue-domed mosque marks
a strange presence.
To the hungry, inside eye,
its beauty grants a place in the world.

One can read in bricks and light
a numinous philosophy of proportion
and repetition. A pattern based
on the size of a single dot
in relation to the height of the first letter
of the Arabic alphabet can blossom
into infinity.

A mosque in Konya, Turkey
built in the 13th century,
is known for its roof –
a necklace of tiles suspended
by breath. In its centre is a hole
that threads its patterns into the intricate sky.

Where is the centre,
and where the end point
of its space?

One day
while the prophet was praying
a cat settled on the warm bed
of his robe, and started to give birth.
He did not move
until she was done.

A Prospect of Beauty and Unjustness

I walk down Heerengracht,
where pigeons dip their necks
like question marks into the fountain.
Then left at Long, while the sun slips

Toward the sea and the moon takes its place
above Signal Hill.
Above me, starlings clatter
like typewriters.

Higher still, turning right at Wale,
seagulls tilt like white kites
against the wind.

I step on the old silences of the city.

Here is the place on the hill where artists came
for peace and the view of the harbour.
Below, the city reveals itself.
We still walk the neat streets of their paintings.

Under the angled mountain, its blue light,
the starlings are cold but, looking at them,
I see the loveliness
of their chaotic and coordinated hunger.

What can explain
this exact and unjust beauty?

The flock clusters at sunset for warmth and seed.
Poetry cannot be afraid of this.

Sketching the streets, the artists stood
on the burial ground of the city's slaves.
In the paintings is something
of the private grief of their bodies.

In precise patterns the starlings follow one another
and redouble on their own flight-tracks,
slipstream of warmth,
blood-trace of the self.

Nothing to begin with,
and nothing again.

Around me, the air is thick with history.
Two hundred years ago,
slaves could no longer be sold.

Nothing, and nothing again.

I look again at the painted city, falling
silent at sunset, even the birds stilled.
In the last flash of the sun, the city gleams
white and hard as bone.

The Book of Chameleons*

José Eduardo Agualusa

The Small World

JOSÉ BUCHMANN LAID THE PHOTOGRAPHS OUT on the big living room table, large A4 copies, black and white on matt paper. Almost all of them showed the same man: an old man, tall, slender, with a mass of white hair that tumbled down to his chest in thick plaits then disappeared into the heavy strands of his beard. As he appeared in the photographs - dressed in a dark shirt, in tatters, on which you could still make out a sickle and hammer on his chest, and with his head held high, his eyes ablaze with fury - he'd remind you of some olden-day prince now fallen into disgrace.

“I've followed him everywhere these past few weeks, morning to night. Want to see? Let me show you the city from the perspective of a wretched dog.”

- a) The old man, seen from behind, walking along disembowelled streets.
- b) Ruined buildings, their walk pockmarked with bullet-holes, thin bones exposed. A poster on one of the walls, announcing a concert by Julio Iglesias.
- c) Boys playing football, tall buildings all around them. They're terribly thin, almost translucent. They're immersed, suspended in the dust like dancers on a stage. The old man is sitting on a rock, watching them. He's smiling.
- d) The old man is sleeping in the shade of the husk of a military tank that's eaten away by rust.
- e) The old man is standing up against a statue of the President, urinating.
- f) The old man, swallowed up by the ground.
- g) The old man emerges from the sewer like an ungovernable God, the unkempt hair glowing in the soft morning light.

“I've sold this story to an American magazine. I'm off to New York tomorrow. I'll be there a week or two. Longer, perhaps. And you know what I'm planning to do there?”

Félix Ventura wasn't expecting the answer. He shook his head.

“But that's crazy! You do realise how ridiculous that is, don't you?”

José Buchmann laughed. A serene laugh. Maybe he was just joking:

“A long time ago, when I was in Berlin, I was surprised to receive a telephone call from an old friend of mine, an old schoolmate from my beloved Chibia. He told me that two days earlier he'd left Lubango, he'd travelled by motorcycle to Luanda, and from Luanda flown to Lisbon, and then from Lisbon he'd set off for Germany - he was fleeing from the war. He had a cousin who was meant to be

* First published by Arcadia Books, 2006

meeting him, but there was no one there, and so he decided to try and find his cousins house - he left the airport, and got lost. He was anxious. He didn't speak a word of English - still less of German - and he'd never been in a big city before. I tried to calm him down. *Where are you calling from?* I asked. *From a phone box*, he replied. *I found your number in my address book and decided to call.* I agreed: *You did the right thing. Stay where you are. Just tell me what you can see around you, tell me anything you can see that looks unusual, that attracts your attention, so I can get a sense of where you are. Anything strange?* I asked. *Well, on the other side of the road there's a machine with a light that goes on and off, and changes colour, green, red, green, and in it there's a picture of a little man walking.*"

He told the whole story imitating his friend's voice, the broad accent, the anxiety of the unfortunate man on the other end of the line. He laughed again - uproariously this time - till he had tears in his eyes. He asked Félix for a glass of water. As he drank he began to calm down:

"Yes, old man, I know New York is a very big city. But if I was able to find a traffic light in Berlin, and a phone box opposite it, with an *acorrentado* - a man in chains... that's what they call people from Chibia, did you know that?... If I was able to find a phone box in Berlin with an *acorrentado* inside it, waiting for me, I should in New York be able to find a decorator called Eva Miller - my mother! God, my mother! Within the fortnight I'm sure I'll find her."

My dear friend,

I do hope this letter finds you in excellent health. I realise that what I'm writing you isn't really a letter, but an email. No one writes letters any more these days. But to tell you the truth, I do miss those days when people communicated by exchanging letters - real letters, on good paper, to which you might add a drop of perfume, or attach dried flowers, coloured feathers, a lock of hair. I feel a flicker of nostalgia for those days, when the postman used to bring our letters to the house, and we were glad, surprised to see what we'd received, what we opened and read, and at the care we took when we replied, choosing each word, weighing it up, assessing its light, feeling its fragrance, because we knew that every word would later be weighed up, studied, smelled, tasted, and that some might even escape the maelstrom of time, to be re-read many years later. I can't stand the rude informality of emails. I always feel horror, physical horror, metaphysical and moral horror, when I see that 'Hi!' - how can we possibly take seriously anyone who addresses us like that? Those European travellers who spent the nineteenth century travelling across the backwoods of Africa always used to refer jokingly to the elaborate greetings exchanged by the native guides when - during the course of a long journey - they happened to cross paths with a friend or relative in some favourably shady spot.

The white man would wait impatiently, until after several long minutes of laughter, interjections and clapping had passed, he finally interrupted the guide:

‘So what did the men say? Have they seen Livingstone or not?’

‘Oh, no, they haven’t said anything about that, boss,’ the guide explained. “They were just saying hello.’

I expect just that time-span from a letter. Let us pretend that this is a letter, and that the postman has just handed it to you. Perhaps it would smell of the fear that nowadays people sweat and breathe in this vast, rotting apple. The sky here is dark, and low. I keep making wishes that clouds like these might float over to Luanda, a perpetual mist which would suit your sensitive skin; and wishes too that your business carries on, full steam ahead. I’m sure it must do, as we all so need a good past, especially those people who misgovern us in our sad country, as they govern it.

I always think of the lovely Ângela Lúcia (I do think she is beautiful) as I beat my way rather disheartened through the anxious chaos of these streets. Perhaps she’s right, perhaps the important thing is to bear witness not to the darkness (as I’ve always done) but to the light. If you’re with our friend do tell her that she did manage at least to sow the seeds of doubt in me, and that in the past few days I’ve lifted my eyes up to the sky more often than ever before in my life. By lifting our gaze we don’t see the mud, we don’t see the little creatures scabbling in it. So what do you think, Félix — is it more important to bear witness to beauty, or to denounce horror?

Maybe my careless philosophising is beginning to annoy you. If you’ve read this far I imagine you’re beginning to understand what it was like being one of those European travellers I referred to earlier:

‘So what does this guy want? Did he find Livingstone or didn’t he?’

No, I didn’t. By consulting the telephone directories I was able to find six Millers called ‘Eva’, but none had been in Angola. I then decided to put an ad in Portuguese in five popular newspapers. Not one response. But then I did find my way onto the trail...I don’t know if you’re familiar with the Small World Theory, also known as Six Degrees of Separation. In 1967 the American sociologist Stanley Milgram of Harvard University set up an odd challenge for three hundred residents of Kansas and Nebraska. His hope was that these people - using only information obtained from friends and acquaintances by letter (this being in the days when people still exchanged letters) - would be able to make contact with two people in Boston, for whom they knew only their name and profession. Sixty people agreed to take part in the challenge. Three succeeded. When he came to analyse the results, Milgram realised that there were on average just six contacts between the originator and the target. If his theory was correct, I’m now just two people away from my mother. Everywhere I go I bring with me a cutting from the U.S. edition of Vogue, the one you gave me, which reproduced an Eva Miller watercolour. The report

was signed by a journalist by the name of Maria Duncan. She left the magazine years ago, but the Editor still remembered her. After a lot of hunting around I was able to track down a telephone number for her in Miami, where Maria lived when she still worked for Vogue. My call was answered by a nephew of hers, who told me his aunt no longer lived there. After the death of her husband she'd gone back to the city of her birth, New York. She gave me the address. And would you believe the irony? - it's a block from the hotel where I was staying. I went to see her yesterday. Maria Duncan is an elderly lady with scrawny gestures, purple hair, and a strong, certain voice that seems to have been stolen from a much younger woman. I suspect that loneliness weighs heavily on her - it's an ill that befalls old people, and so common in big cities. She welcomed me with some interest, and when she learned of the reason for my visit became even more excited. A son looking for his mother- bound to touch any feminine heart. 'Eva Miller?'- no, the name didn't mean anything to her. I showed her the cutting from Vogue and she went off to fetch a box of old photographs, magazines and cassettes, and the two of us spent hours rummaging through it all, like two children in their grandparents' attic. It paid off. We found a photo of her with my mother. And more importantly, we found a letter that Eva had written to her to thank her for sending the copy of the magazine. The envelope bore an address in Cape Town. I imagine Eva had been based in Cape Town before settling in New York. But I fear that in order to find her here - or wherever she now is - I'll have to retrace her whole tortured path. I fly to Johannesburg tomorrow, on my way back to Luanda; it's just a step or two from Johannesburg to Cape Town. It may be a most important step for me. Wish me luck, and receive an affectionate greeting from your true friend,

José Buchmann

The Scorpion

OUT OF HABIT, AND OUT OF GENETIC PREDISPOSITION (because bright light bothers me), I sleep during the day, all day. Sometimes, however, something will wake me up – a noise, a ray of sunlight – and I'm forced to make my way across the discomfort of the daytime, running along walls till I find a deeper crack, a deeper damper crack where I can, once again, rest. I don't know what it was that woke me this morning. I think I was dreaming about something severe (I can never remember faces, only feelings). Perhaps I was dreaming about my father. The moment I awoke I saw the scorpion. He was just a few centimetres away. Motionless. Closed in a shell of hatred like a mediaeval warrior in his armour. And then he fell upon me. I jumped back, climbed the wall, in a flash, until I was up at the ceiling. I could hear quite clearly the dry tap of the sting against the floor – I can hear it still.

I remember something my father said once when we were celebrating – with only pretend joy, I like to think – the death of someone we disliked:

“He was evil, and he didn't know it. He didn't know what evil was. That is to say he was *pure* evil.”

That's what I felt at precisely the moment that I opened my eyes and the scorpion was there.

The Minister

AFTER THE EPISODE WITH THE SCORPION I wasn't able to get back to sleep. This meant that I was able to witness the arrival of the Minister. A short, fat man, ill at ease in his body. To watch him you'd think he'd been shortened only moments earlier and hadn't yet become accustomed to his new height... He was wearing a dark suit, with white stripes, which didn't really fit and which troubled him. He lowered himself with a sigh of relief into the wicker chair, with his fingers wiped the thick sweat on his face, and before Félix had the chance to offer him a drink he shouted to Old Esperança:

“A beer, woman! Nice and cold!”

My friend raised an eyebrow, but restrained himself. Old Esperança brought the beer. Outside, the sun was melting the tarmac.

“So you don't have air conditioning in this place then?!”

This he said with horror. He drank up the beer in large gulps, greedily, and asked for another. Félix told him to make himself at home - wouldn't he like to take off his jacket, perhaps? The Minister accepted. In his shirtsleeves he looked even fatter, even shorter, as though God had carelessly sat down on his head.

“Do you have anything against air conditioning?” he joked. “Does it offend your principles?...”

This sudden camaraderie irritated my friend even more. He coughed, a bark of a cough, then went off to fetch the file he'd prepared. He opened it on the little mahogany table - slowly, theatrically - in a ritual I'd observed so many times. It always worked. The Minister, anxious, held his breath as my friend revealed his genealogy to him:

“This is your paternal grandfather, Alexandre Torres dos Santos Correia de Sá e Benevides, a direct descendent of Salvador Correia de Sá e Benevides, the famous carioca who in 1648 liberated Luanda from the Dutch...”

“Salvador Correia?! The fellow they named the high school after?”

“That's the one.”

“I thought he was Portuguese! Or a politician from the capital, or some colonial; otherwise why did they change the name of the school to Mutu Ya Kevela?”

“I suppose it was because they wanted an Angolan hero - in those days we needed our own heroes like we needed bread to feed us. Though, if you'd rather I can fix up another grandfather for you. I could arrange documents to show that you're descended from Mutu ya Kevela himself, or N'Gola Quiluanje, or even Queen Ginga herself. Would you rather that?”

“No, no, I'll keep the Brazilian. Was the fellow rich?”

“Extremely. He was cousin to Estácio de Sá, founder of Rio de Janeiro, who – poor man – met a sad end, when the Tamoio Indians caught him with a poisoned arrow full in the face. But anyway, what you will want to know is that during the years he spent here, running this city of ours, Salvador Correia met an Angolan woman – Estefania – the daughter of one of the most prosperous slave-traders of the day, Felipe Pereira Torres dos Santos, and fell in love with her. And from that love – an illicit love I hasten to add, as the governor was a married man - from that love three sons were born. I’ve got the family tree here, look – it’s a work of art.”

The Minister was astonished:

“Fantastic!”

And indignant:

“Damn! Whose stupid idea was it to change the name of the high school?! A man who expelled the Dutch colonists, an internationalist fighter of our brother-country, an Afro-antecedent, who gave us one of the most important families in this country - that is to say, mine. No, old man, it won’t do. Justice must be restored. I want the high school to go back to being called Salvador Correia, and I’ll fight for it with all my strength. I’ll have a statue of my grandfather cast to put outside the entrance. A really big statue, in bronze, on a block of white marble. (Yes, marble - don’t you think?) Salvador Correia, on horseback, treading with contempt on the Dutch colonisers... The sword’s important. I’ll buy a real sword - he did use a sword, didn’t he? Yes, a real sword, bigger than the one Afonso Henriques has got. And you can write something for the gravestone. Something along the lines of *Salvador Correia, Liberator of Angola with the gratitude of the nation and the Marimba Union Bakeries* - something like that, or something else, whatever, but something respectful - yes, hell, respectful! Have a think about it and get back to me. Oh and look, I’ve brought you some sweets, *ovos moles* from Aveiro - do you like *ovos moles*? These are the best *ovos moles* in Aveiro, though in fact they’re “Made in Cacucaco”, the best *ovos moles* in all Africa, in the whole world - even better than the real thing. Made by my master-pâtissier, who’s from Ilhavo - do you know Ilhavo? You ought to. You people spend two days in Lisbon and think you know Portugal. But try them, try them, then tell me if I’m right or not. So I’m descended from Salvador Correia – *caramba!* - and I never knew it till now. Excellent. My wife will be ever so pleased.”

Sape Project: 2006 – 2009

Jean-Christophe Lanquetin
Translation: Dominique Malaquais

I HAVE BEEN WORKING IN KINSHASA, DRC SINCE 2001. Early on there, I encountered *sape*. There are many ways to describe *sape*. Few, however, can effectively capture its intense complexity and none can claim to “explain” it. It is far too rich and shifting a phenomenon for that. Broadly, then – and of necessity *too* broadly – a definition: what I speak of here is a set of practices involving young men and women that revolves around intersections between street fashion, haute couture, performance and “dressing up”. *Sape* is the art of dressing to kill.

Initially, *sape* had me stumped: why was it, I asked myself, that people who have exceedingly little choose to forego food in order to acquire and appear in public in costly designer clothes? Wherefore this fascination – this obsession, it seemed to me – with elegance? To what ends the competitions I witnessed between crews of *sapeurs* (the name that adepts of the practice give themselves)? How does this all work, for *sape* is more than clothes worn and displayed; it is also clothes exchanged, bought, sold, smuggled and (sometimes) copied: a vast economy, monetary of course, but also implicitly political, social, symbolic and emotionally deeply fraught. In an attempt to gain a foothold in the face of all these questions I began looking, asking, documenting.

In 2006, PROGR, a contemporary art centre in Bern, Switzerland, asked me to develop an exhibition. Out of conversations back and forth was born the idea of a scenography (scenography is my ambit; I am not a photographer): a series of photo shoots that would be face-to-face encounters. *Sapeurs* would pose, taking on with their gaze the lens of my camera, talking (back) to an audience yet to be – people who, in time, would see the photos developed and blown up. The plan was for the photos to be shown in Mikili. Mikili is a place. The name comes from the Lingala word *mokili*, meaning ‘the world’. In Kinshasa, it refers to Europe, to – so they say in the DRC – the ‘clean countries’, those one hopes to travel to because life there seems as if it might be better than ‘back home’.

The photo shoots were a stunning mix of moments: dance moves; poses inspired by fashion magazines; mirror-mirror-on-the-wall games (imitation, parody, flashes of humour, of irony) played (out) with *mundele* (white folks); grotesques... At the heart of it all, ebbing and flowing, were fragments of a body language, highly fluid and varied, shared across vast swathes of Kinshasa. That and a great deal of sadness, too: in the gaze, again, in gazes that, at given moments, chose emphatically not to engage.

The images born of this process are the product of a double exchange. They speak *to* and they speak *from* the context in which they came to life: the street that is the locus of each shoot and the people on the street who witness(ed) the shoot. For *sape* is a spectacle in Kinshasa and so each photo session turned into a party attended by many guests. In the photos themselves, the bodies of the *sapeurs*, their clothes, presented by the wearers so that labels can be clearly read (Yves St Laurent, Gucci, Versace, Yamamoto), upstage the city, hiding (or, in any event, rendering less immediately visible) this city which many *sapeurs* claim is ‘dirty’ (“You want to know why we *sape*?” I was told over and over again, “to stay clean (*pour rester propre*)” – this city that so many *sapeurs* say they want to leave.

The photos, once shot, were developed, blown up close to life-size (persons shown in the shots stand at a little over 1.65 m) and shown in and around the streets where they were taken.

Since 2006, on every one of my trips to the DRC, I organise and film *sape* meets. Most are with men, but women feature as well. Without the assistance of trusted Kinois friends, these sessions would not be possible. From the very beginning, these friends too have been documenting the *sape* phenomenon and producing a body of photographic images about it. In the first photo exhibit of the *sape* project held outside the DRC – in Bern – their photos and mine appeared alongside one another. At the centre of it all – fundamental to the entirety of this project – are the guidance, gaze and generosity of Dicoco Boketshu, a musician, video and performance artist based in Kin, and Djanga Weni, also a musician (both men are members of Trionyx, a band founded by Kinois composer, performer and educator Bebson de la Rue). Also key to the undertaking are artists Androa Mindre, Freddy Mutombo and Kens Mukendi.

Sharing – conviviality – is an integral part of the project. When in Kin, as a group, Dicoco, Djanga, Androa, Freddy, Kens and I spend hours over beer and chunks of grilled meat discussing issues, styles, approaches. These comings together are essential: they make it possible for me to avoid – or, at any rate, help me keep at bay – an outsider’s gaze; they allow me to get into and to grapple with the complex skein of things. These moments when we link up are intense, rich in joy and camaraderie.

Each shoot poses a set of fundamental questions. Exchange is one. Means (of which I have few) must be found to do one, essential thing: develop the photos relatively quickly to show them to those whom they depict and, where possible, leave prints with them. I say that this is essential for a simple but sad reason: foreigners are constantly coming to Kin, photographing and going home, leaving nothing behind. What images Kinois do see of themselves, their city and the lives they live there – typically in the press and on TV – make little sense to them. They are largely negative images, images that sensationalise what the photographers represent as unadulterated misery, images that say little or nothing of actual lives lived. In reaction to this ever-so-common practice, some of the Kinois friends with whom I work have developed rich practices aimed at self-representation – at showing Kin through Kinois eyes. Thus Kens Mukendi’s photographs, which document *sape* competitions, and a series of images by Dicoco Boketshu which go beyond documentation into full-fledged *mise-en-scène*: the staging of elegant, imaginary scenes that give tangible form to fictions – to dreams – of Mikili.

I try to ensure that each *sapeur* with whom I work receives a small salary as well as a print of a photograph in which he appears. Oftentimes, after the fact, one finds the image in his home, framed or taped to a wall. We shoot video as well and organise showings in the city: on the street; in places where the photos were shot; at *sapeurs’* houses; once, even, in a police barracks. Each presentation turns into a party, rich in narcissistic pride. Places I thought I would never be able to enter open up to me; thanks to this ongoing process I am able to go deeper into this otherwise guarded city.

In Bern, the photos were shown in a gallery (nothing on the streets, I was told: “the images are too tough...”). Clearly, a white cube is not where they belong, however; in a traditional ‘Northern’ exhibition space, the object – the image – overshadows the process, the relationships and the exchanges that are at its heart. These are works that need to be shown in public spaces. They call for the street. And so my friends and I decided to show them, maxi-sized, on the streets of Kinshasa, during an event entitled Urban Scenographies (an ongoing, multi-city series of artists’ residencies held across the world as the result of collaborations

between ScU2, a collective I run with my friend and colleague François Duconseille, and artists' collectives based in Douala, Cameroon (Cercle Kapsiki) Alexandria, Egypt (Gudran), Kinshasa (Eza Possibles) and, since then (and most recently) Johannesburg, with the Joubert Park Project (JPP) (<http://www.eternalnetwork.org/scenographiesurbaines>).

When work first began on the project, the notion had been to tape the images onto façades, billboards and such in Paris, Brussels and Tokyo (*sapeurs* commonly refer to themselves as 'Japanese citizens' because they hold in particularly high esteem haute couture by the likes of Yohji Yamamoto and Issey Miyake). The idea was to create a face-to-face exchange, so that the photos, via their presence, might interrogate these 'high-end' urban spaces where the clothes that *sapeurs* sport are originally sold. I do not know if this particular iteration of the project will come to pass; time will tell. One thing is certain, though: this type of approach, if implemented, will have to be confrontational – a provocation of sorts. For it seems fairly clear that these images – of Kinosis *sapeurs* in effect highjacking the high-luxe of places that think so well of themselves – are not images that these places are particularly keen to showcase. In France, the reactions I have met are often problematic: people like what they see because they think that what they are looking at are grunge fashion shots, cool because they're funky and/or trashy ... not a 'take' I find interesting or have too much patience with. Then again, I suppose, I must take into account the fact that different people will see the photos in different ways depending on where they encounter them.

I was still grappling with the French responses when I received an invitation to show the photographs in Johannesburg, in the context of a residency sponsored by the JPP and IFAS (the French Institute in South Africa). I agreed and a project developed in partnership with artists Athi Patra Ruga and Dorothee Kreutzfeldt. We decided to tape up life-sized blow-ups of the images in and around the Drill Hall in the CBD, in Yeoville, where many folks hailing from the DRC live, and in Rosebank, at the hippest mall in town, The Zone. The plan was to have a distinctively performative event.

Things got rolling fast. Photographer Lolo Veleko introduced me to the Smarteez, a group of young artists-cum-fashionistas whom she works with in Soweto. Together, we taped images on buildings, billboards, fences and other outdoor spaces. Some stayed up for weeks, others were torn down in a matter of hours. Just about everybody in the CBD and in Yeoville got it: here, there didn't seem to be a disconnect a 'what the hell is this?' factor. *Sape* made sense. Conversations got started, exchanges, questions...

In Rosebank, the situation was a little more complicated. It proved impossible to tape up the images anywhere in The Zone. The whole place is under 24-hour surveillance – security men and CCTV. Also – and clearly this is intentional: part of the place's look – there are no flat, free or blank spaces onto which the images could be affixed. So, with Athi Patra Ruga, we organised a march: the Smarteez and friends bore the images aloft, like placards. Wherever we sensed a crack in the disciplinarian structure of the location, we gave it a shot: propped up an image against a wall, set it up in a shop window. It was an easy, casual march

– more of a stroll, really – but it got us into trouble nonetheless. We were shown out by security. We made our way into the parking area surrounding the mall. This worked nicely, but was not quite the disappearing act that security had had in mind for us... To get into The Zone, you must first park, so the images were the first thing people coming in saw and, icing on the cake for our move, the overwhelming majority of the car park guards at The Zone are Congolese.

As we walked among the cars, joshing with the Congolese guards, it felt as if the *sapeurs* in the images were among us, moving with us. At the same time, the fact that they were there in image and not in the flesh underscored the fact that they could not – that they cannot – move, that it was physically impossible for them to be with us *lelo awa*, as Kinshasa artist Méga Mingiendi might put it : ‘here, now, today’. This place, where the fashion they sport is so ‘in’, is ‘out’ for the *sapeurs* whose presence and absence both haunted our performance. This – this presence/absence and this haunting – everyone saw and called out right away when, back in Kin, I showed footage of the Rosebank march. It was part and parcel of the moment in both cities.

At the end of the Joburg residency, we organised a “fashion event” in the street in front of the Drill Hall. We called the event “100th Year W[e]jar” – a wordplay on “100 Years War”, the name of a *sapeur* crew in Kinshasa (“Guerre de 100 Ans”). (There are many different crews, a number of which use allusions to war in their names; a case in point is “Guerre Sans Fin” – “Never-Ending War”.) The event was meant to juxtapose *fashionista* moves and practices in Jozi to Kin moves and practices as seen in video and photo images of *sapeurs* shot in the DRC. What we were interested in foregrounding were the politics of *sape* : the body politics of it. What we were after was an understanding (or a glimpse) of ways in which individual identities are constructed and expressed through performative uses of the body as moving flesh, clothed entity and concept(s) embodied. In the process, intersections – meetings of form, ideas, words, movements – emerged that brought to the fore a notion that is coming to play an increasingly powerful role worldwide: **MY BODY IS MY COUNTRY.**

Interested? Stay tuned...

<http://www.eternalnetwork.org/jcl/index.php?cat=sapeprojet>



Fashion competition in Bandalungwa / Kinshasa / Aug 2003



(Photographs, Ken's Mukendi)





1



2



3



4

left:
« Sankhara » / Camp Lufumbula – Lingwala / Kinshasa / Aug 2006

right:
1. Exhibition at PROGR / Bern / Nov 2006
2. Exhibition in Camp Lufumbula / Kinshasa / Jan 2007
3. Exhibition at the Drill Hall / Johannesburg / Apr 2008
4. Screening at the Camp Lufumbula / Kinshasa / Jan 2007

(Photographs, Jean-Christophe Lanquetin)



left:
1,2,3&4. pictures from Jimi Loko's musicians / Railway / Lingwala / Kinshasa / Dec 2006

right:
Exhibition at Jimi Loko's space / Railway / Lingwala / Kinshasa / Jan 2007

(Photographs, Jean-Christophe Lanquetin)







1



3



2



4

left:
Jimi Loko's musician / Railway / Lingwala / Kinshasa / Dec 2006

right:
1. Exhibition at Jimi Loko's space / Railway / Lingwala / Kinshasa / Jan 2007
2. Street exhibition in the fashion district / Johannesburg / Apr 2008
3&4. Street exhibition in Yeoville / Johannesburg / Apr 2008

(Photographs, JcLanquetin except 4, Lolo Veleko)





1



2



4



3

left:
Gantine's theater team member / Lingwala / Kinshasa / Aug 2007

right:
1&2. March in Rosebank / Johannesburg / Apr 2008
3&4. Street exhibition at the Drill Hall / Johannesburg / Apr 2008

(Photographs, Jean-Christophe Lanquetin)





1



2



4



3

left:
Tresor Omeyaka "Python", "Non ending war" collective member (guerre sans fin) / Bandalungwa / Kinshasa / Aug 2007

right:
1&2. Idem / Johannesburg / Apr 2008
3. Street exhibition at the Drill Hall / Johannesburg / Apr 2008
4. Street exhibition in the fashion district / Johannesburg / Apr 2008

(Photographs, Jean-Christophe Lanquetin)





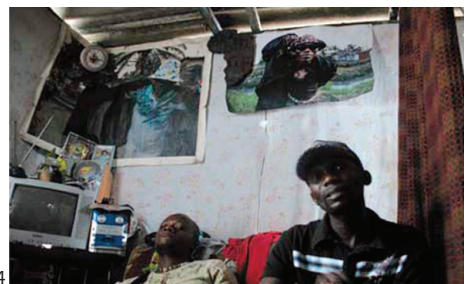
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3



4

left:
"Vieux Daouda" / Mont des arts / Kinshasa / Dec 2006

right:
1,2&3. March in Rosebank / Johannesburg / Apr 2008
4. At Daouda's house / Kinshasa / Dec 2008

(Photographs, Jean-Christophe Lanquetin)





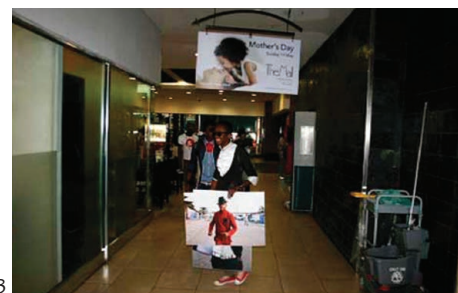
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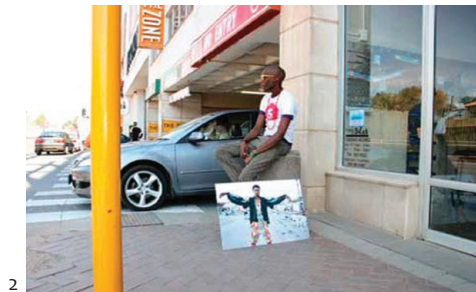
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left:
Itchay Bessongo , “100th year war” collective member (guerre de 100 ans) / Bandalungwa / Kinshasa / Feb 2008

right:
1,2,3&4. March in Rosebank / Johannesburg / Apr 2008

(Photographs, Jean-Christophe Lanquetin)





2



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left:
Alain Mouela, "100th year war" collective president / Bandalungwa / Kinshasa / Feb 08

right:
1,2,3&4. March in Rosebank / Johannesburg / Apr 2008

(Photographs, Jean-Christophe Lanquetin)



(Photographs, Dicoco Bokhetsu)

Fiction about "sape" by Dicoco Bokhetsu / Lingwala / Kinshasa /
aug 2007



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(Photographs, Jean-Christophe Lanquetin)

100th YEAR W(E)AR / Fashion event:
1. The Smarteez, 2. Strangelove, 3. The dead eighties, 4. 4mat & friends / Johannesburg / 30 apr 2008

Shout Out

... *The sapeurs in the pictures:*

Dicoco Boketshu, Djanga Weni, Sankhara, Petit Yannick, Vieux Dauda, Bebeto, Gervais Mavinga, Tresor Omeyaka (Python), Olivier Lunama (Boston, L'Homme à Rayon, Johnny Efoloko, Bijou Diama (Vrai Djo), Trésor Tombi (Yohji), Guelord Kanza (Japon), Arnaud Madienga (Double Impact), Chris Setchi, Franck Ngoy, Nzumbi (Youssou N'Dour), Eric Bokeke (Kenzo), Christian Tangui (Le Bourgeois), Christian Wanani (Firenze), Blaise Tayaya (Peter Kokopy), Sacré Lubamba (Yodji), Gantine et Ses Actrices, Dédé Forme (Toutankhamon), Kebere Mbondos, Foumadj, Itchay Bessongo, Patou Koucha (Grand Père), Alain Mouela (Van Deutsch), Les musiciens de Johnny Loko...

No Grave Cannot Hold My Body Down¹

Rituals of Death and Burial in Postcolonial Jamaica

Annie Paul

For Ma Bell did have a cache of money which she hoarded for a purpose. Every extra cent she could squeeze from her frugal living she kept in this special fund. She kept this money for one reason only. When Ma Bell died, she wanted the most beautiful coffin that the undertaker could provide—the real undertaker from town and not Brother Bertie who sent off everyone around in plain cedar coffins. The coffin was something that Ma Bell had to provide for herself, she did not believe that anyone in her family would go to that sort of expense when she was not around to see. Ma Bell had arrived at the decision about the coffin late in life when she saw that none of her other secret longings would ever be fulfilled. Ma Bell used to say to the Lord: “Poor people just come into world so and is just so they must leave? Well I ent leaving that way and I don’t care if you don’t like it.”

She wanted to leave this world and enter the next cocooned in the luxury she never had in life and she sometimes grew impatient at the slowness with which the fund had accumulated for she was anxious to lie in the splendour of white satin surrounded by polished wood and silver fittings, in a coffin so heavy it would take twelve men to lift it. Ma B hoped that the undertaker would make her face beautiful at last so that everyone for miles around would come to ooh and aah as they walked past the open coffin where she lay in state. That is why she became fearful at the boy’s mention of money for she would rather die than part with it.

Olive Senior, “Country of the One Eye God”, *Summer Lightning and other stories* (Trinidad and Jamaica: Longman Caribbean Limited, 1986).

FUNERALS AND WAKES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN RITUALS in Jamaica, as in many other societies in the African diaspora.² Writing in 1953 Fernando Henriques observed that: “In the West Indies burial must take place by law within twenty-four hours of death owing to the rapid decomposition of the body in the heat.” As soon as a death occurred relatives far and wide would be notified and their attendance was considered almost mandatory for “the funeral serves a dual purpose; it enables kin who have not met for years to renew bonds of friendship, and it serves to emphasize the loss by death to this group in the society.”³

In the fifty years that have intervened between then and now much has changed. In twenty-first century Jamaica the rise of the mortuary industry enables bodies to be kept for weeks rather than hours, allowing the wide network of kith and kin of the departed to assemble from all over the world, not merely from the island. Funerals are routinely held two to three weeks after the death, making it possible for elaborate preparations to be made while waiting for family and friends to assemble. The coffin or casket in particular acquires the expressiveness of a status symbol signifying the importance both of the deceased and the bereaved family or community. Often disproportionate amounts of money are invested by poor communities in custom-made designer caskets.⁴ In postcolonial Jamaica then, painted and decorated caskets of various kinds seem to be the latest art objects to have surfaced, registering with fetishistic fervour the ever escalating death rate in the country.

¹ First published in *Small Axe* 23, 2007

² The title of the chapter refers to one of the hymns sung at the funeral of popular dancehall icon Gerald “Bogle” Levy in February 2005.

³ Fernando Henriques, *Family and Colour in Jamaica* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953), 139

⁴ Ghana also has a tradition of fantasy coffins that has attracted considerable attention. Unlike the Jamaican custom however, in Ghana, coffins are sculptural, carved to resemble actual objects of significance to the departed client. Thus, a seamstress might have a sewing-machine or needle-shaped coffin, a fisherman might choose to go out in a fish-shaped coffin, and so on. There are also cell phone-shaped coffins, and airplane-shaped ones marked Ghana Airways for people who have never traveled by air before.

The trendsetters in this regard have been the funerals of “dons” or “community leaders.” The don’s funeral is certainly not something new. Winston “Burry Boy” Blake, buried on 15 March 1975, had one of the largest funerals ever with an estimated twenty five thousand people turning out, including then Prime Minister Michael Manley. Chaos is said to have reigned all around. Blake was the leader of the Garrison Gang, which had helped to secure political victory for Manley in the constituency of Central Kingston.

The funeral of Willie “Haggart” Moore in 2001, another don affiliated with the ruling PNP who was gunned down by unknown assailants close to his home in Arnett Gardens, was a similar show of subaltern strength, in what amounted to a quasi-state funeral.

At the funeral, the country was treated to a show of dancehall fashion and a display of material wealth manifested by a motorcade of stretch limousines, BMWs, Lexuses, Ford F-150 pick-up trucks, SUVs and other luxury motor vehicles that followed the Mercedes Benz hearse carrying Moore’s casket.

“Yu live in style, so yu haffi go out in style,” one woman was overheard saying as she watched the procession of mourners who had turned out to pay their last respects to Moore, a reputed “don” for Arnett Gardens, a People’s National Party stronghold in South St Andrew where he commanded significant authority.

Officially, Moore was described as a businessman who ran a trucking enterprise and an entertainment complex at the very spot where he was killed on April 18. But he appeared to many to have had resources beyond the capacity of those businesses.⁵

The following report appeared in the newspaper immediately after the Haggart funeral describing the spectacle in greater detail.

Jamaica’s National Arena was converted into a colourful shrine of orange and white balloons yesterday as an estimated 5,000 people, headed by Finance Minister Dr. Omar Davies and a contingent of People’s National Party (PNP) senior executives, led mourners in paying tribute to slain community leader, William Augustus Moore, alias “Willie Haggart.”

For about 3 1/2 hours, the entire stretch of road from the intersection of Arthur Wint Drive and Statue Road, down to the gates of the National Arena, was blocked by thousands, some from the United Kingdom, United States and Canada who had come to say farewell to their community god-father “Willie.”

The 20-gauge steel casket, complete with wing bars and decorated with a replica of Leonardo da Vinci’s “The Last Supper,” was boxed in by four iron rails, near the platform from which Roman Catholic priest the Rt. Rev. Kenneth Mock Yen conducted the service.

5. Vernon Davidson, ‘Willie Haggart to be exhumed,’ Sunday Observer, 3 February 2002. Legend has it that Moore acquired the name “Haggart” because as a child he used to beg his butcher father for the hog’s heart. Hog-heart or Haggart thus became his nickname.



Willie Haggart Moore's funeral at National Arena, May 8, 2001.

Later, under wailing sirens, the funeral cortege was escorted from the National Arena by about four police outriders, into his home town to the 'Black Roses Corner' on Lincoln Crescent and Rousseau Road.

Shortly after the body was interred and as the mourners made their way out of the Calvary cemetery, near his hometown in Arnett Gardens, South St. Andrew, several volleys of shots were fired by gunslingers to salute their hero.⁶

In the days that followed Haggart's funeral the public sphere raged with debate about the national outrage the funeral represented with the garish costumes of the mourners, the conspicuous consumption, the extremely un-European rituals that marked the ceremony, and crowning the outrage to the body politic, the attendance at the funeral by prominent politicians from both parties. Jamaican funerals, especially those of the underclasses, are replete with ritual and ceremony.

If there is a small child in the household it is thrown three times over the coffin containing the body. But this is only done if the deceased was the father of the child. It is to prevent the father returning as a spirit to play with the child. Every ritual connected with the spirits is performed three times. One informant stated that this was because of the Christian Trinity.

An integral part of Jamaican funerals is the wake. In communities plagued by violence there might be several wakes a week. At these wakes family members and friends congregate to "eat fried fish and hard-dough bread, drink coffee, chocolate tea and alcoholic beverages, to smoke marijuana or pipe tobacco and to sing," according to Imani Tafari-Ama whose research focused on the troubled community of Southside near Kingston Harbour. The wake is an institution of both rural and urban life, 'demonstrating strong African retentions, the wake not only encodes meanings of spiritual resistance but also provides a psychosocial coping mechanism for people who experience the death of loved ones. . . . This tradition—the wake—might have died out as a cultural practice if it was not for the pervasiveness of violent deaths.'⁸ She continues:

People die so frequently in Southside as Uncle Reff [the shepherd of the wake] told me, that the ceremonies have been made into an almost professional preoccupation for at least forty people in his group and many more people in the community at large. The wake reflects the main agenda that is observed for nine nights when someone dies.⁹

One of the biggest funerals in Southside was that of Franklyn 'Chubby Dread' Allen from Southside who was killed in New Kingston on Friday, 7 October 2005. The area leader or don of Southside, Chubby Dread preferred to be called an 'elder.' As a child Chubby Dread used to dive for coins thrown by cruise ship tourists in Kingston Harbour, such was the poverty of his background.

Funerals of dons and famous popular figures such as the dancer Bogle are occasions for supporters to parade their clothes. At the funeral of another PNP-affiliated don, Donovan 'Bulbie' Bennett, leader of the Spanish Town-based Clansman gang, who was killed by police on 30 October 2005, newspaper reports gave a lot of space to describing the glitzy costumes of his followers:

From sequins to costly, tailored suits, Bennett's supporters displayed an abundance of what in street jargon is termed "Fashion over style."

6 Glenroy Sinclair, 'Emotional Farewell for 'Haggart', *Gleaner*, 9 May 2001, 1A.

7 Henriques, *Family and Colour*, 140.

8 Imani Tafari-Ama, *Blood, Bullets and Bodies: Sexual Politics Below the Poverty Line* (Kingston: Multi-media Communications, 2006), 178–79.

9 *Ibid.*, 180.

Some women wore heels with pants; others were clad in short skirts with matching jackets. One woman, who gave her name only as Sherine, said her outfit “cost over 10 grand” (\$10,000). She said that if it were anyone else that had died, she would not have bothered to buy anything new. “But a di big man, so mi haffi show up big time,” she said.

Marlon Nieta, a resident of Spanish Town, said that he paid close to \$20,000 for his outfit—a black and gold Versace suit complete with matching shoes. “Dis a di bling,” he said. “Mi nuh tink twice fi buy dis, ‘cause di fadda deserve it, you see mi.”

Another man, who gave his name only as ‘Barber,’ said that his two-piece suit and shoes cost him close to \$18,000, and that he was proud to have been a part of the funeral “to put the don inna heaven.” His comment elicited laughter from his friends.

One man, who wanted to be referred to as ‘Glitchie,’ was dressed in a dapper, two-piece black suit and had the words ‘One Don’ carved in his hair. He did it specially for the funeral, he said.¹⁰

Bulbie, who was reputedly worth \$100 million, had two caskets—a glass one for the “tour” around Spanish Town (his supporters rioted for two days after his killing by police) and the other for the actual burial.

The casket that will be used for the “tour” will also be used later in the evening for the viewing of the body, and is fully decorated with photos of “Bulbie,” with an orange background. The casket is made of glass and wooden strips. “He will be driven in a glass house chariot, for all to see,” said Tommy Thompson, CEO of Brite Lite Funeral Service. The burial casket, which is made mostly of glass, has handles imported from Texas, United States and was made of 18 karat gold, said Thompson.¹¹

In early 2006, Bulbie’s main rival, Andrew ‘Bunman’ Hope, leader of the burgeoning ‘One Order’ gang (affiliated to the opposition Jamaica Labour Party), was also killed by police. Newspaper reports stated that:

A lavish funeral service is being prepared for slain One Order leader, Andrew ‘Bunman’ Hope . . . by funeral services company, Brite Lite. . . Like most of these renowned ‘area leaders,’ Bunman will be given a send off ‘fit for a king,’ with a glass coffin, glass chariots and a concrete and glass sepulchre.

Hope’s coffin is also lined with 100 per cent white silk, green neon fluorescent lights and 18 karat gold-plated handles. Although the chief executive officer of Brite Lite, Tommy Thompson, was unwilling to reveal the cost of the coffin, sources at the funeral home told THE STAR that it cost about \$500,000 to build.

“The theme of course will be green . . . the church will also be transformed into a garden, with natural flowers, ribbons, cloth designs, and balloons. We can’t reveal any costs, but it will be a spectacular affair,” said Thompson.



Bulbie’s rival, Andrew ‘Bunman’ Hope’s funeral casket.

¹⁰ Paul Clarke, ‘Mourners display expensive outfits ‘to show respect’,’ *Jamaica Observer*, 28 November 2005.

¹¹ ‘Police on alert for Bulbie’s burial,’ *Jamaica Observer*, 25 November 2005.



Funeral casket of national football player, Peter Cargill, killed in a road accident. Paying his last respects is former Jamaica Football Federation President Captain Horace Burrell. The casket is painted in the colours of the Jamaican flag reflecting the intense patriotism associated with the Reggae Boyz, Jamaica's national football team.

"Afta Bunman all get back gun whe police lose, dem still a tell bear lie bout wi don . . . wi love Bunman because him love we. Wi nah get no money but we wi do anything fi him," said a resident of Ellersie Pen, who assisted in the reform of the grave site.

The sepulchre will be made of concrete, marble, and glass blocks. Behind the blocks there will be green lighting.

"We don't do funerals of mourning, we do funerals of celebration, so this will be a colourful event celebrating the life of Bunman . . . Limousine service for relatives, flashy cars . . . the works," said Thompson.¹²

Interestingly, party colours predominate at these events, orange for dons affiliated to the ruling party and green for those associated with the opposition.

The Brite-Lite funeral home is the funeral parlour of choice for slain celebrities of the underworld as well as popular dancehall figures. Another popular funeral parlour is Taylor's Funeral Home located in downtown Kingston. The owners of these parlours are themselves prominent individuals with aspirations towards stardom, judging by interviews they have given to the media. While making good money servicing the funerals of underworld dons and stars they make a point of subsidizing the last rites of poor individuals whose families could not otherwise afford anything other than a pauper's funeral.

Tommy Thompson, chief executive officer of the Brite-Lite Funeral services, has devoted his life to righting the wrongs of death, and writing off debts, in his quest to ensure that even the poorest citizens of this land get a decent funeral.

In his latest philanthropic gesture, he has underwritten the cost of burying 13-year-old Shawna Palmer. The teenager was killed by gunmen while trying to save two children who came under attack during a birthday party in Greenwich Town, Kingston. The funeral reportedly cost more than \$800,000. . . . "I hope this gesture will send a clear message to society. . . . This funeral . . . is not just about this little girl. It's a statement to careless bus drivers, to men who kill babies, to civil society, the business leaders, and the government that we will not allow our babies to be killed anymore. The life of every child is precious," said Mr. Thompson who provided a custom-made \$150,000 casket adorned with white baby angels, programmes and prayer cards in full colour, floral arrangements, limousines, a Lexus SUV, Benzes and company-employed ushers.

What would drive any man to incur such expenses on behalf of persons he doesn't even know? The answer may lie in his past. At 16, Mr. Thompson's father died. The funeral, he remembered, was a "shabby affair, which brings tears to my eyes even now".

"It was so bad . . . the smell . . . I couldn't even stay beside the casket, and how he was brought to the church . . . good God. It was terrible," recalled the 42-year-old who is a big fan of HBO's 'Six Feet Under,' shaking his head slowly.¹³

A recent entrant to the highly profitable funeral industry Mr. Thompson, who describes himself as a grief therapist, is credited with revolutionizing the business 'with

¹² Fabian Ledgister, 'million \$ funeral,' Jamaica Star, 24 February 2006.

¹³ Claude Mills, 'Righting deaths, writing off debts,' Gleaner, 23 November 2002.

designer funerals, creative, offbeat concepts and a personalized hands-on approach that endears him to the bereaved families.’ He continued in the *Gleaner* interview:

“I attend every funeral my company takes on. I become a part of the extended family, I grieve with them. I attend the nine-nights, I drink what they drink, I eat what they eat, I go anywhere just to be with them,” he said.

“Talking with the families brings back bad memories for me, and sometimes I get teary-eyed but I like to grieve with the little man, I like to bring some light into his life, especially at this dark time. So I end up doing funerals without making a profit many times,” he said.

“No riff-raff funerals for my company, even if I have to write off a debt if a funeral costs \$70,000. I don’t worry about it though, I am always blessed with the big ones which I use to subsidise the others,” he added.¹⁴

Renford Taylor, the other popular undertaker, was extensively covered in *Riddim* magazine, in an article that documented such facts as Taylor’s fascination with American mobster John Gotti, whom he claimed as a role model.

This September makes twenty years since Renford Taylor has operated a downtown Kingston funeral home. The calendar for 2003 shows a man that promises to take his clients out in style. For Taylor this was the most secure business he could ever have started. . . . “It is a business that will always keep me in business.” He gives me the same straight faced look he has on the funeral home calendar for 2003. Considering the high death toll in Kingston’s garrison communities where gang warfare and susu (informing) keep the stakes high in the game Bounty Killer calls the ‘Blood Sport,’ he might well be right. Taylor is as much a reflection of his community as the community is a reflection of him. Not unlike the don who serves the living, “dem build and keep the community.” the undertaker serves the dead. . . .

The wall is papered full of newspaper clippings of murders, daily quotes, photos of friends and family, photos of himself in the Star (a popular daily tabloid) where he’s featured twice as one of Kingston’s best dressed. Rene points to one of the pictures and says proudly: “Is we bury him.” I quickly readjust my focus to read: Willy Haggart Moore, early thirties, a self styled don, leader of the Black Roses crew was shot down execution style in broad daylight, West Kingston Arnette Gardens on April 19th 2001, the gunmen remained standing over the lifeless body pumping several bullets into it, a friend of Mr. Moore says: “up to last night everyting was nice and straight . . . a pure movie star vibes an sportin’ did a gwan . . .”

*Movie star vibes send the clients off to meet their maker and the undertaker becomes the angel who is able to fulfil a ghetto dream, which in life might have been deferred again and again.*¹⁵

The rituals of death and burial in Jamaica vary a great deal between social groups. Middle and upper class funerals are considerably more restrained affairs



A section of the gathering at the thanksgiving service for his Eminence Abuna Yeshehaq Mandefro, Archbishop of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the Western Hemisphere and South Africa. The service was at the National Arena in Kingston.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “Unda Di Unda Taker,” *Riddim*, Issue 1, 2005.



Miss Lou's body being transported by policemen.

reflecting the preoccupation with propriety and 'good' taste of these groups. 'Movie star vibes' have little purchase in these communities where 'standard English' is the only acceptable language and a virtual 'cult of respectability' prevails.¹⁶ The question of language hovered unspoken over the official funeral service of Louise Bennett Coverley, Jamaica's beloved folk poet and dramatist, who died in 2006 in Toronto, Canada. Fervently embraced by the country as a national heroine, 'Miss Lou,' as she was universally known, remained a symbol emitting conflicting and contradictory signals even in death.

A popular figure consigned to the rear of national history books at the time of independence, because her poetry was expressed in Jamaican or Creole rather than English, Miss Lou was firmly enthroned centre stage by the time she died. Yet this paragon of Jamaican culture chose to live far from home, in cold and wintry Toronto. When she died her body was flown home by the Jamaican government and given a state funeral; this was viewed by some as problematic and debate ensued in the public sphere on the reasons that compelled Miss Lou to leave Jamaica.

Another contradiction lay in the fact that the official funeral service was conducted entirely in standard English (with a few hymns and the occasional cameo recitation of a poem in patois) although the reason most often cited for valorizing Miss Lou was that she had conferred 'legitimacy' and dignity on patois by her untiring championing of the language in the face of intense hostility from the middle and upper classes.¹⁷ At the wake and nine nights preceding the funeral, however, patois was freely used.

The official funeral service would have been entirely designed and mediated by middle and upper class culture brokers whose taste would have been at sharp variance with that of the poorer classes. This manifested itself in discord expressed in the street about the funeral programme or booklet circulated to those attending the funeral, which was perceived to be too sober and lacking in bling for a personage of Miss Lou's stature. Miss Lou is a good example of a popular or 'roots' figure with street credibility who has been virtually appropriated and reincarnated by the middle classes and ruling elites into a national heroine in their own image.

This, however, is in stark opposition to the image Miss Lou started out with as a figure in popular theatre in Jamaica. As I have argued elsewhere, Miss Lou's was a Creole register capable of being co-opted into the story independent Jamaica likes to tell about itself. In fact Miss Lou has been elevated into such an institution that she is beyond criticism of any sort and has become an almost oppressive 'role model,' an ideal mould into which every aspiring schoolgirl poet must pour herself. That is to say her brand of Creole has been elevated to the status of standard English; or better, she has been successfully translated into the highly respectable language of the nationalist-modern. Miss Lou is not only now legitimate, she has become normative.¹⁸

A contrast can be observed with the funeral of dancer Gerald 'Bogle' Levy in February 2005.¹⁹ Bogle, a prolific inventor of 'dances' and the latest in a tradition of 'Legs' or male dancers in vernacular Jamaican culture, was brutally shot multiple times while making his way to Passa Passa after leaving a dance called Weddy Weddy,²⁰ where he had been involved in a dispute with supporters of dancehall star Beenie Man. Interestingly Bogle, also known as 'Mr. Wacky,' was named after national hero Paul Bogle because as a baby he was said to resemble him. As the most commonly available image of the original Bogle was the statue sculpted by Edna Manley and erected outside the courthouse in Morant Bay, it must have been the face of the sculpted Bogle that young Gerald Levy was considered to resemble. Of course Edna Manley modeled her Bogle on a native of Morant Bay who bore no relationship to the real Paul Bogle. Nevertheless such was the conflation between the national hero and the dancer in the eyes of some that a history teacher in Port-of-Spain who asked her class to identify Paul Bogle in a test, received the answer from one student that he was a famous dancer from Jamaica.

¹⁶ For a useful discussion of the cult of respectability see Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865–1920* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2004).

¹⁷ One explanation offered for the service being held exclusively in English was that the Coke Methodist Church in Kingston where the ceremony was held was not open to the idea of a Creole service.

¹⁸ See Annie Paul, 'Sound Systems Against the Unsound System of Babylon: Nude Tourists vs. Rude/Lewd Lyrics,' in *Creolite and Creolization: Documenta1, Platform 3* (Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2003).

¹⁹ Although the two deaths were unconnected Bogle was also from Arnett Gardens and a member of the Black Roses Crew headed by Willy Haggart.

²⁰ This weekly dance at the headquarters of Stone Love on Burlington Avenue was itself named after one of Bogle's most popular hits "It's a Weddy time again."

Bogle's funeral (described in the media as 'an elaborate, bling bling, jiggy affair'; his coffin incongruously adorned with Sesame Street figures Big Bird and the Cookie Monster on the lid) represents another landmark in Jamaican cultural and sepulchral history. Celebrated at the Kencot Seventh Day Adventist Church, Adventist officials were scandalized by the per-formative expressions of mourning dancers and dancehall figures at the service. At one point the officiating priests disconnected the microphones to curtail what they thought an inappropriate and noisy performance by Bogle's own troupe of dancers. The programmes were in such demand and seemingly in short supply that Bogle's mother was nearly overrun by eager funeral participants when she arrived with an armful.



These women felt that the funeral program was not elaborate enough for Ms. Lou. They thought it lacked colour and creativity.

Things . . . started getting out of control again when L. A. Lewis, who refers to himself as 'Five-Star General,' took to the podium. He shouted out "See the key deh!" to which the audience responded "Lock dem up now!" The comical entertainer, who was overwhelmed with grief, lamented how he witnessed his friend Bogle being killed and that he was still traumatized by the incident.

Delly Ranks and Voice Mail (with whom Bogle recorded the number one hit single 'Weddy Time Again') were next. They attempted to do the song in tribute, but were overcome by emotion until dancers Ice, Boisy, Kieva and Mad Michelle joined them on stage to do 'Jiggy Time Again' with the entire audience getting jiggy.

Already out of control, the sermon was replaced with the singing of several lively popular gospel songs, during which Bogle's body, in House of Tranquility's designer casket, was taken out to the glass carriage.

As the huge funeral procession, which was like a carnival and caused a major traffic jam, passed through various communities on its way to Dovecot, curious onlookers gathered along the way shouting "A lie!"²¹

Similarly virtual chaos had reigned at the wake preceding the funeral:

On the Friday and Saturday before the funeral at Matthews Lane, Tivoli Gardens, Tony Spaulding Complex and Black Roses corner, where the viewing of the body took place was total pandemonium. The most popular phrases expressed by those viewing his body were: "A lie!," "Wey dem did deh!," "Wey di key deh!," "Oh so badly Mr. Wacky!," "Him pretty eeh!," "Him get better looking," "Mr. Cornwall [House of Tranquility's CEO] really mek him look smooth!," "Bwoy, di big man glass casket tuff," not to mention the vengeful comments from those who swore to avenge his murder.

Bogle's mother, Dorothy Smith a.k.a. Miss Mae, holding on to the glass casket, wept bitterly when it arrived from a one-hour viewing at Matthews Lane to Black Roses corner on Friday, February 4. She was, however, soon smiling when she looked at the pleasant demeanour of her son's face. She then chanted, "Mi son pretty sab! Look how him a smile and look like him a sleep. Wey dem did deh?" to backup shouting from the gathering who asked, "Who dem deh?!" . . .

21 Claudette Brown, "A Final Farewell to Bogle—bringing together rival factions," XNews Jamaica, 10 February 2005.



For Bogle's funeral a special glass enclosed chariot was used to transport the body.

When Bogle's body in Brite Lite's glass casket finally arrived at the Tony Spaulding Complex, it was pandemonium as persons from Jones Town, Craig Town, Top Jungle, Texas, Mexico, Havana, Angola and other adjacent communities scrambled to get a look.

Several persons, including members of the Black Roses crew, wept openly as the reality of his death hit them hard. Meanwhile, on nearby Lincoln Crescent (Black Roses), the Lover's Choice sound system, which played at the wake, rinsed versions of the tune said to have led to Bogle's demise, 'All Dem Deh.'

As the night progressed, several persons (among them international press) from as far as Japan, USA, Canada, England and the Caribbean descended on the area for the wake that would take them late into Sunday morning.²²

Funerals such as Bogle's, the lavish caskets for dons, and the extravagant ritual and conspicuous consumption attending such events could suggest a relatively recent obsession with materiality, even in the celebration of the transition to a spiritual state. Some, however, have noted that these are not new practices or customs at all:

I have been exposed to evidence which showed me that the elaborate and expensive caskets of dons, area leaders etc, did not originate solely with crime and politics in the 1960s or 70s. You have to read the works of anthropologists which indicate that the house slave, who was the sweetheart of the white bukki massa and was very powerful, stole the gold and silver from the Great House and gave the items to those who were building the coffin of the slaves. There is proof that the adornment of the coffins pre-1838 were more ostentatious than those of the English bukki massa who died. It is also true that the funeral processions of the black slave was fantastic and colourful. This pre-/post-emancipation culture has now become an integral part of the popular political dancehall funeral culture of the dons, etc, of 21st century Jamaica. It is impossible for the Church to dismiss this reality.²³

In her 1938 book *Tell My Horse* Zora Neale Hurston described a funeral she attended in rural Jamaica of a man who died in a hospital far from home and who was 'as poor in death as he had been in life. He had walked barefooted all his days so now there would be no hearse, no car, no cart—not even a donkey to move this wretched clay.'²⁴ It didn't matter—the people of the district made a 'rude stretcher' out of two bamboo poles and a sheet and a group of men set out to bring him home:

According to custom, several people from the district went along with the body-bearers to sing along the road with the body. The rest of the district were to meet them halfway. It is a rigid rule that the whole district must participate in case of death. All kinds of bad feelings are suspended for the time being so that they sing together with the dead.

. . . The corpse might have been an African monarch on safari the way he came borne in his hammock . . . bare feet trod the road in soundless rhythm and the dead man rode like a Pharaoh— his rags and his wretchedness gilded in glory.²⁵

²² Ibid.

²³ Reverend Ernie Gordon, 'Popular Culture and funerals of Dons,' *Weekend Observer*, 22 June 2001, 7.

²⁴ Zora Neale Hurston, 'Night Song After Death,' *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*. Reprint (1938; New York: Perennial Library edition, Harper and Row, 1990) 40.

²⁵ Ibid, 40–41.

The rituals of death and burial described in this paper are by no means a comprehensive account or analysis of funerals and funeral fashions in contemporary Jamaica. There is much that is merely hinted at such as the resplendence of rites associated with Rastafarian funerals which differ from both the ostentatious ‘bashment’ celebrations described here and the refined rituals of the middle class funerals. Rather this paper is an attempt to gather visual and textual data on the subject with a view to asking what such practices might signify, if anything, and to speculate on whether these are further instances of ‘the uses of the body in the cultural-politics of colonial and postcolonial Jamaica’ (albeit the dead body not the living one).²⁶ It also raises questions about the desire for majesty and splendour on the part of ordinary Jamaicans, the overweening desire ‘to die well’ and be buried with pomp.’ Are these manifestations simply signs of the ‘obscurity of power in the postcolony’ as suggested by Achille Mbembe?²⁷ Or are such rituals, as Obika Gray might claim, the practices of freedom signaling the ‘social power of the poor’ and the presence of a ‘rebellious counter-society’ in post-colonial Jamaica?²⁸

What remains beyond doubt is the ongoing and spiraling state of violence that grips this particular postcolonial society. The epigraph that Michael Thelwell quoted at the beginning of his 1980 novel, *The Harder They Come*, remains an elegy of exceptional currency in twenty first-century Jamaica and is worth resurrecting here:

Behold my people: How violence does enfold them like a mantle. It sitteth upon their shoulders even as a garment.
Book of Lamentations, Jah Version.²⁹

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Mavis Belasse, manager of the Information Systems Department at The Gleaner Company, and her excellent staff, for their assistance in sourcing photographs for this article.



Mortimer Planno's coffin

²⁶ David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

²⁷ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California; London, England: University of California Press, 2001).

²⁸ Obika Gray, *Demeaned but Empowered: The Social Power of the Urban Poor in Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004).

²⁹ Michael Thelwell, *The Harder They Come* (New York: Grove Press, 1980).

Johannesburg

Vocabularies of the Visceral and Expressions of Multiple Practices

Jyoti Mistry

HOW DO WE WRITE OF AN AFRICAN PRACTICE, particularly an art practice, that is neither essentialist of an entire continent, nor drawing only from the obvious historical places of a colonial past, and that is, finally, more reflective of the confluences of socio-political and cultural factors informed by access to global trends? More specifically, I mean to suggest that there is a profound tension between what is written and addressed from outside the continent, and the strategies that define those expressions, and how those practices might come to be defined from within. Moreover, the academic discipline-specific needs of the social sciences and even of art critical writing have created a set of paradigmatic principles through which to view practices on the continent (consider, for example, Okwui Enwezor, Simon Njami and Olu Oguibe).

Using the works of three artists and with reference to specific texts, this study aims to show the multifaceted layers with which a pan-African practice might be produced. This serves as an interventionist approach to the already canonised theories on African art-versus-craft practices. Particularly in the case of the writings on the city of Johannesburg, there has been a tendency to provide theoretical positions from either a strongly historical, an urban development or a social sciences position.

In what has recently been considered an influential publication, *Johannesburg, The Elusive Metropolis*, a special edition of the journal *Public Culture* produced by Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, the authors write: 'The city's [Johannesburg] fabric has been described as a structure in need of radical transformation and only rarely as an expression of an aesthetic vision' (Mbembe & Nuttall 2004: 353). In this analysis I hope to explore the possibilities of an aesthetic vision created from multiple experiences of the city of Johannesburg. Moreover, in addressing the artistic practices of spoken-word artist Kgafela oa Magogodi and filmmakers Akin Omotoso and Nduka Mntambo, I hope to suggest that a pan-African art practice is a modernist project which at once recognises the burden of a colonial historical past and, more significantly, creates multiple entry points for the production of meaning. These entry points offer a counter to assumed notions of what African cities might or might not be (imagined or lived), and gestures towards an art practice and representational form that deals with kaleidoscopic reference points. These reference

points are about a search for the meanings of an African experience from within rather than as viewed from outside, or the more conventional concern to offer explicit meanings for an outside audience. The basis of this study, therefore, is an examination of what constitutes these multiple entry points, and how the vast gamut of global literature, cultural and social studies, and indeed evolving African experiences, come to impact on the meanings produced in contemporary African art practices and aesthetics. In developing this study I sought not only to draw on close readings of the films and poetry produced by the three practitioners involved, but chose to engage in a series of conversations with them. Their responses inform or offset my analytical framework and serve as their space to express their influences and experiences of Johannesburg and the making of their work.

The essence of metropolitan culture is change – a state of perpetual animation.
(Koolhaas 1994)

All three works considered here – *If this be a City* (Mntambo 2008), *Jesus and the Giant* (Omotoso 2008) and *Itchy City* (oa Magogodi 2006) – express a visceral connection to the city. Each of the works captures a sensory experience, an embodied relation to the space of the city that is dynamic.

The spatial dynamics of Johannesburg after apartheid have resulted in an unstable urban landscape where abandonment and neglect have left once-valued and stable parts of the built environment in decline and ruin, where unbridled growth and horizontal expansion have undermined the Herculean efforts at city planning and regulation, and where the steady expansion of sequestered sites of fantastic luxury has been matched by the proliferation of places of degradation and despair. (Murray 2008: 4)

Nduka Mntambo: *Walking in Rosebank, one is confronted with a monumental gaping hole, the construction of the Gautrain. Looking at it from a makeshift pedestrian bridge, I experienced a visceral, almost brutal sensation. The image of a hole for me speaks to the necessary brutality that has to happen in order for cities to stand. The wanton emotional and verbal abuse one has to endure from the city mini-bus taxi drivers and the abject poverty juxtaposed with the meretricious wealth of the African City of the 21st century speaks very strongly to the construction of my precious [golden] ennui.*

In his experimental short film *If this be a City*, Nduka Mntambo captures an intense triangulation between the history of Johannesburg, its aspirational quality – represented through labour and migration – and an urban cosmopolitanism expressed through a single character’s memories and experiences of attempting to fulfil desire and seek love. The film starts with a man alone in a room, in a high-rise apartment building. He is restless, unable to quiet his mind (so it seems), and even though we later learn that the space itself is quiet, sounds from the city invade his cocoon. Not only is he plagued by these sounds, his memories are constantly mediated through the voice of his *doppelgänger* – a man who is capable of articulating what he himself seems unable to find language for expressing. In his room, in his silence he embodies the city’s alienation, and memories of satisfactory coitus turn into vast spaces of loneliness.

Jyoti Mistry: *You describe your film as an expression of a ‘golden ennui’ – how might this be different from urban ennui in any other city where urban alienation, failed dreams and aspirations are so central to the psychological experience of cities?*

Nduka Mntambo: *The response is at first glance literal. The golden as experienced in my film speaks directly to the object of gold – the reason for the city’s existence which is devoid of any true functionality or substance beyond its glittering surface. Like the object, the very fact that we can have a character drowning in ennui seems to me excessive in the context of our city. The project of imaging this experience of urban alienation, failed dreams and aspiration set in the lofty room overlooking the city evokes an experience quite alien to my experience of the city, which at best can be defined as golden.*

What distinguishes this film are the ways in which it moves between the individual experiences of the city, the burden of history and the markers of capital and consumption. Mntambo seems to draw on what Achille Mbembe refers to as the *Aesthetics of Superfluity* – drawing from Marxist notions of commodity, its relation to (black) migrant culture, and the gold rush that spurred the development of Johannesburg as a city. ‘Through the movement of bodies, superfluity came to be based on not only the prominence of money, credit and speculation but also on the obfuscation of any use value black labour might have had. Such obfuscation was itself a mode of rationality closely related to the circulation of capital. The circulation of capital is predicated not just on class relations but on human investment in certain forms of racial delirium’ (Mbembe 2004: 380).

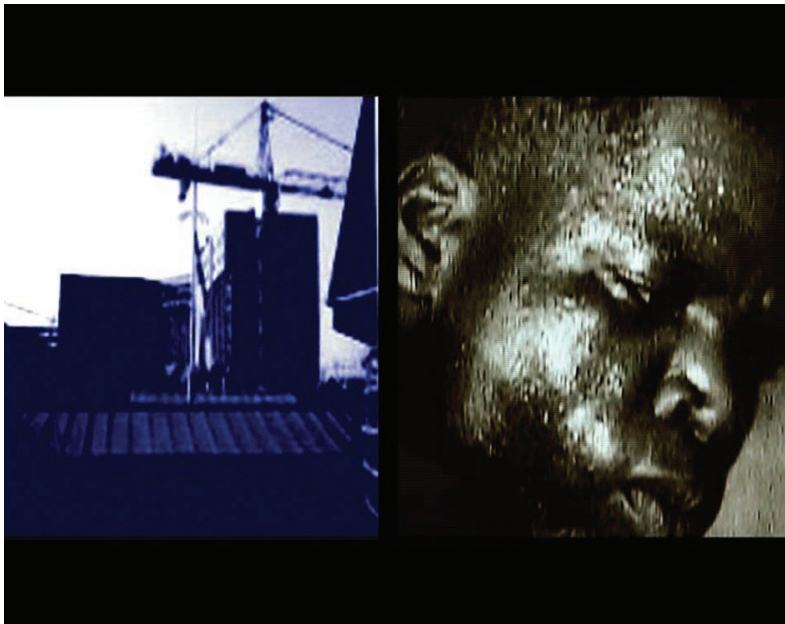
Mntambo captures this superfluity by rhythmically inter-cutting on a split screen archival images of migrant workers being transported on trucks, a savage butchering of an ox, and cranes against the sky with buildings under construction. In a poignant audio-mix he captures the state of delirium, using the sound of speeding trains and whistles.

But the delirium is not simply about the history of labour (human investment and the circulation of capital). It is also about the way in which this black subject in a post-colonial, post-apartheid state can certainly find expression for desire that is outside of a racialised paradigm (and also possible through economic exchange). The lonely man has lovers of different races, and race seems to have nothing to do with his desire; desire here is non-racialised, produced from availability and access – miscegenation is no longer (institutionally) regulated.

Nduka Mntambo: *The lonely man has the luxury of contemplating sexual encounters devoid of human fluids and contact. Is he the kind of a character who drives to Claim Street or Oxford Street at night in search of ‘conversations’ with the ladies of the night? I think coupling speaks very strongly to the conceptual self-flagellation in my reading of the city. There is nothing uniquely or inherently sexual or violent about my African city, yet this representational preoccupation seems to be very pervasive in the discourse about Jo’burg. Hopefully my text begins to contest these preoccupations and presents them as such.*



The man and his doppelgänger



Jo'burg under construction and miner

Kgafela oa Magogodi often uses the city as a vehicle or a metaphor through which to offer social and political commentary. *Itchy City* deals explicitly with the tensions between the promise and allure of the 'golden' city and its grim and often bleak reality. Magogodi's circulation of capital is observed through the two stark experiences of the haves and the have-nots.

*every tom dick and pipi with cash gets their kuku in the city of golden wishes
beggars ride horses of small change*

uncle lease small change asseblief

*itchy city lights kill the night not even god is bored riding the back of a hijack
(from *Itchy City*)*

Magogodi's strength as a practitioner is his ability to capture through live performance the sensory immediacy of the city. Analogous to the experience of live jazz performance, his stage play *I like what I like* (inspired by Steve Biko) sets a tone for artists to embody the freedom of expression and the right to non-partisan representational politics. Politically charged and socially hard-hitting, his performance is a *bricolage* of inter-textual references that draw from the political history of the city, activist discourses, popular street expressions and the stratified geographies of Johannesburg.

*babyjakes come in small packages they pack dynamites in their trumpet blows
break down the walls of jericho's temples biblical brimstone and fire in the city
of cold blood flows cheaply like pavement tomatoes the streets are red rivers dead
bodies and gold platted teeth five star smile in the face of a corpse'*

*(from *Itchy City*)*

In my collaboration with Magogodi, the idea was to find a way in which the stage play could be realized as a film. The challenge was not simply to capture the immediacy of what a live performance offers but to seek an expressive visual language for representing the city. An expression not confined to a single representation, but one which captured the multi-faceted nature of the city's geographies, while alluding to its historical anchor. Furthermore, a film could not simply be a visual representation of the poetic referents. An interpretative treatment of the poetry was necessary on my part to augment the layers of dynamic commentary on history, urban regeneration and urban decay that had befallen Johannesburg that are present in the poetry itself.

Jyoti Mistry: *How do the images and commentary created through your poetry differ from the historical images of Johannesburg and how do you view this in relation to the gentrification initiative of the city?*

Kgafela oa Magogodi: *Those who want the city gentrified want to remove what they see as 'filthy' or 'threatening' elements. These days security personnel put strong surveillance over anyone with dreadlocks. The focus seems to be on combing out unwanted ganja-smoking Rastas (they are said to smoke ganja at the slightest spiritual provocation; and the lingering smoke of their holy herb disturbs other people's peace). They gentrify for the gentry of our times. A culture of the gentry is upon us. Gentry poetry. Gentry theatre. Gentry curators. Maybe this explains the things that take place on their stages ... They love noble savages. Generally, blackness is adored if it is brought forward by the jiving native. It is safe (for them). If a native can jive, the fame of the auction-block stages awaits them. Celebrated black culture is, mostly: jive talk, jive walk, jive ass. It is strictly-come-jiving-time. It is Jika-majika time. No straight walk. No straight talk. People tend to jika-jika when serious dialogue must be held. Gamakhulu Dimiso types are not really welcome. And I am not saying that people must stop jiving. There are those who believe that jiving is our culture, and who am I to differ? You probably remember the Radio Metro advert: 'what makes you black?' they asked. And the answer was a huge ghetto-blaster and loud music. You can call it ghetto-fabulous blackness. Yet, I think that there's more to blackness than jiving. National television stations are best at promoting the jive aspects.*



Red, Gold and Green in Johannesburg



Magogodi mediated in the city of Johannesburg

The promotion of jive culture is rife. Around the world, they discourage, even frame or defame, black people who refuse to jive for the gentry ... Maybe history will raise questions about gentrification in the field of the arts. The curators of cultures will have to answer.

By using action paintings created by Musawenkosi Xokelelo during various performances, the film version relies strongly on the *bricolage* idea as a visual trope. Thus, through an integrated play between Magodogi's spoken utterances, his performance itself, the mediated images produced by Xokelelo's paintings, and the visual landscape built through the film layers, the representation of the city takes the form of not just a single experience but what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as heteroglossia: the derivations of meaning of texts based on contextual frameworks. Not just as the written (spoken) text but in the context of the live performance and in the context of the film, each mediated form inscribes a new subjective experience of the city.

Michel de Certeau, in the chapter 'Walking in the City' in his study *The Practice of Everyday Life* (De Certeau 1984), describes the importance of navigating the city on foot to fully understand its spatiality on an individual level. Organised by planners to produce one set of functionalities, it produces a myriad other possibilities for the individual who works through their own, self-determined movement through space.

*in small street you soak up the sounds of hustlers and hawkers selling secret
socks starters packs and ama-empty empty cassette two for five rand ama-empty
cassette*

(from *Itchy City*)

For Magogodi navigating the city, with its inhabitants from all parts of Africa, is what speaks simultaneously to the vitality and the violence of contemporary Johannesburg. While the city offers itself up to be explored and navigated, it is also deeply stratified and these circuits of inclusion and exclusion lead to violent ructions.

Kgafela oa Magogodi: *Johannesburg is historically 'the city of the white man.' We hope it has changed. Pass laws are now applied to Africans from the rest of the continent. The darker you are the more 'illegal' you look. Who bothers foreigners who look 'legal'? Is it a Pan-African city in which the whiter or lighter you are, the more 'legal' you look.*

The idea of a Pan-African City is tricky. What does it mean? Is it because there are so many African people impacting on the city's temperament? Do these Africans beat drums? What is a Pan-European City like? Is it like Cape Town? Is Durban Pan-Indian? Back to Johannesburg; there is the Oriental Plaza in Fordsburg for Indian businesses. There's Chinatown around Bruma Lake. Is it about ownership? Africans own which part of the city? Africans are either struggling to pay the rent or they trade from street pavements. Is this what we mean by Pan-African spaces? ... Africans always looking out for police ... Police always raiding 'illegal' African vendors... I really need to be advised about the meaning of a Pan-African City. This is probably the question I was grappling with in Itchy City:

*sobukwe's flock grow cabbages and sweet potatoes on street pavements to feed
clothe and school the children school the children teach them to walk on fire who
says the fire is fictitious it's a furious figment of the city's madness we point fingers
at Nigerians but who is shooting poison in the arms of wingless angels heaven help
us.*

There is a poignant tension in *Itchy City* that captures on the one hand the textures of the city as they can only be experienced from walking it and absorbing its signs and language, while on the other hand, those that design and plan the urban regeneration view it from a distance. In the second instance the city is reproduced in a panoptic fashion as described by Michel Foucault through surveillance, observation and regulation (Foucault 1984).



Bull slaughtered and miners commuting



Hillbrow Tower colored over by new experiences and histories

at least us climb to the top of pyramid schemes before police tear down these dreams

Will we escape these ulcers of fires inside us ulcers of fires eating up the bowels of our poor yet television fables say that 'we are one' but we are the ones who know the itching soul of the city

(from *Itchy City*)

The installation of closed-circuit television in downtown Johannesburg further attests to the regulation and policing of society that is strongly critiqued in Magogodi's poetry.

Similarly, in *If this be a City* Mntambo's lonely man spends time observing the city from a distance. He seems almost incapable of entering it, choosing instead a pair of binoculars from which to watch it. At one point, it seems as if he is waiting for someone to arrive; he glances down over the balcony, anticipating or perhaps contemplating jumping off the building.

Nduka Mntambo: *This distance is very central to my enquiry about the representation of Jo'burg in contemporary scholarship. Will it not make more sense to have the central character walking the streets of Jo'burg, interacting with the myriad of people of his city instead of his preoccupations of degraded memories and fantasies? Our central character, towered in his panopticon, studies possibilities and regrets and is comfortably wrapped in his ennui. It is the negation of the day-to-day experiential value of the city that my film seeks to highlight as a poverty of our scholarship.*

Issues of gender and sexuality are perhaps some of the most hotly debated concerns for artists representing the African urban experience – primarily to counter some of the stereotypes of African masculinities, and secondly to challenge more rural assumptions made about women's positions in society; the city is seen as a place that offers the possibility of redefining expressions of gender and sexuality.

Kgafela oa Magogodi: *Sexuality is an important aspect of identity and it must be addressed alongside phenomena such as race and class. It is also important to converse about diseases that plague the nation, whether they are physical ailments or emotional traumas.*

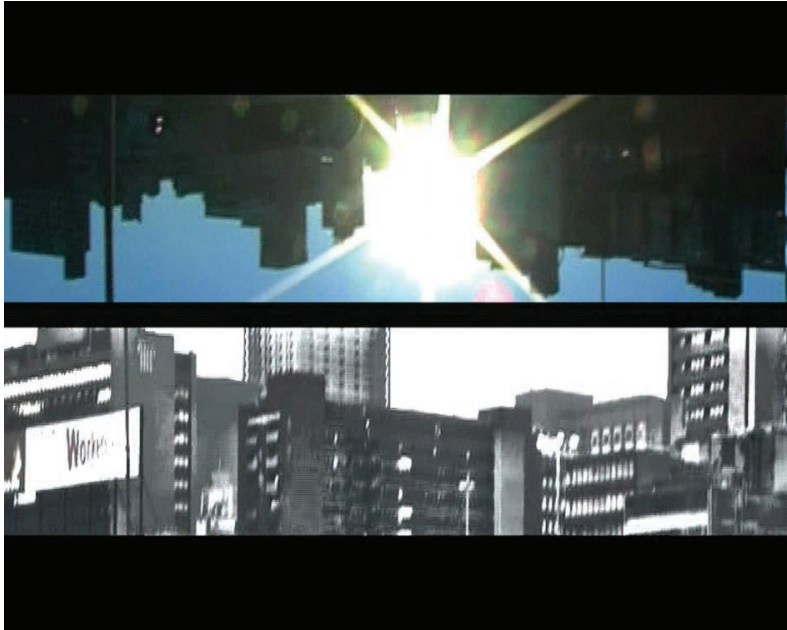
Akin Omotoso: *Gender politics in the country are problematic and events like the woman that was assaulted at the taxi rank for wearing a mini skirt are continual reminders of the ugly side of this city.*

Jesus and the Giant, Akin Omotoso's short film, brings a wholly different presence to the city of Johannesburg. While the women in *If this be a City* are desired, and the centre of memories of love and longing, this short film produced through a series of still images attests to the violence in the city that is inscribed by a gendered politics. Mary (a black woman) seeks retribution from Jesus (a black woman) for the brutal and systemic beatings she experiences from her husband The Giant (a black man). In another context I have addressed the issues of racialising historical characters in this film (Mistry 2008). But for the purposes of this analysis I am concerned with the way in which the film strongly locates gendered violence in an urban context.

Akin Omotoso: *Johannesburg is a violent city and I wanted to also create the idea that violence surrounds us daily so hence the slaughter of the cows at the taxi rank. The fact that Mary runs naked in the street bleeding and no one helps her and Jesus walks with a baseball bat and no one stops her, reflects the naturalising of this violence. This aspect of the city needed to be reflected in the film.*

The opening of the film captures Jesus in quiet meditation, observing in her inner eye the violence of the city. The brutality is set up immediately through the use of close-up shots of cattle heads being skinned and chopped.

Jyoti Mistry: *In a highly energetic and charged sequence Jesus runs through the streets. What aspects of the city did you want to show in this sequence and how did you decide what was important to reveal about the specificities of Johannesburg?*



Jo'burg from different views



Mary is bruised from the beatings

Akin Omotoso: *Jesus was undecided as to whether to take revenge or not so she roams the city thinking about what she is going to do. I decided that she should do her main trek down Rockey Street and because of the style of shooting we were able to just shoot her walking casually. The choice of that street worked because it was alive and vibrant in ways that we couldn't have imagined. She also runs through the pigeons. The pigeons are a recurring motif in the film and I have always found that whenever I drove past that part of town I knew I wanted to shoot a character running through the pigeons. It represented Jesus coming out to the freedom of the city but also that she still has a task to do.*

Later in the film, when Jesus avenges Mary, the sequence intercuts between heads being chopped, Jesus beating The Giant with a baseball bat, and close-ups of Mary writhing in pain from her bruises. When Jesus accomplishes the retribution, she looks over the city, in a single panoramic view shot on 35 mm film to juxtapose with the fast, rhythmic edit of the stills images that preceded it – social balance is restored. Jesus is the master of the city as she watches over it from her lofty vantage point.

But it is not that simple. Omotoso complicates the message by showing that Jesus as a woman is neither tolerant of violence against women nor will she allow a city to rest without assuming responsibility for the violent treatment of women.

As she looks over the city Jesus says, 'I have come with a sword, think not that I come in peace.'

To reveal the unconscious of a city, we need to track the visible marks of the passage of time and the various lines of flight that symbolise the culture of a place. (Mbembe 2004: 404)

In order to fully grasp the layers of a city, it is vital that art practice be used as an equally important marker to reveal the multiple meanings and experiences of the city. While history, architecture and urban geographies offer a material mark for the passage of time, it is the visceral that captures the conscious and unconscious experiences of the city. It is by walking, navigating, observing and surveying the city that artists produce new meanings about it that may offer contradictions or complementary positions to more scholarly positions on the city. These three practitioners, through their distinct and disparate practices, create new and evolving vocabularies in order to capture a visceral experience of their Johannesburg that offers entry points to a culture of place.

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Hacking the Carcass



Jesus confronts the Giant

Quel Est L'Endroit Idéal?

Christian Hannussek and Salifou Lindou

DOUALA MAY NOT BE THE IDEAL AFRICAN CITY for religious redemption or happy-clappy born-again-Christian speaking in tongues, but if your idea of salvation after the hardships of daily life is a refreshing beer, then this is the place to be. Les Brasseries du Cameroun is the country's largest industry and dedicated to guaranteeing a steady flow of liquid amber to the vast proliferation of bars, restaurants, nightclubs and other unidentified nightspots – some still in Maquis-style hiding – that have mushroomed all over the city.

But how do you make your night? What is it that attracts you to one place and not another? Our survey has no claims to reflecting anything but personal preferences – but that still won't deter us from analysing our criteria of choice, from interior design and architecture to how the venues are anchored in the life of the city in today's urban space. Admittedly, we aren't drawn to expensive furniture and upmarket decoration in that hallmark ambience irresistible to wannabe snobs. In our quest for real style, we have to leave our options open. Even after a great time at one venue on one evening we still have to confront that fundamental question the morning after: But what is the ideal place?

The city's longstanding bar-strip is a 200-metre stretch of beer-fuelled raucousness in the Bali quarter; if you want simultaneous music from several competing sound systems above the yelling of the crowd but still enjoy your drink and retain control of your basic motor functions, "Nuit Blanche" is the place of our choice and the perfect spot to observe the action.

Its white walls and furniture reflect the current penchant for snowy hues. The divinely unpretentious Monoblock A chairs are the most comfortable bar seating in all Douala and the atmosphere swings between garishly lit and sultry and well, garishly sultry and lit.

The beer on offer is brewed in accordance with the German purity law of 1516. It's a nice venue, immaculately clean and very spruce – a place where even the German purity law could feel at home.

Here, we meet local artists Hervé Yamguen and Hervé Youmbi and over a beer or two we get all the latest gossip about the Douala art scene.

"C'est bon mais c'est trop fort." ("It's good but it's too hot") says Dou Kaya, putting even more pepper sauce on his grilled fish. Dou – multi-talented Egyptologist and musician – lives in an impressive mansion, a signature building of German colonial architecture right across the street from 'L'Escale de Bonantoin'. This restaurant/bar heads our list for its excellent seafood and the sophisticated atmosphere of the mixed but distinguished Deido quarter crowd. The high-concept design of intersecting patios and terraces with soothing purple and green spots blurs the boundaries between indoors and outdoors, design and function, seeing and being seen. We can comfortably watch the constant flow of passersby or a selection of international video productions on multiple screens that include stunning surprises, even for the new media connoisseur.







The interior has plenty of wow: a shell of a building with exposed raw concrete beams and walls in a teasingly unfinished state skilfully set off against a corrugated steel ceiling.

The toilets are also deliberately designed to perplex alcohol-addled minds: the doors are hinged in the opposite direction to the way they look and there's no light switch... the door snaps shut behind you and ta-da! Total darkness and no sense of orientation. What a lark.

The pleasure-themed 'Alt Délices du Wouri' guarantees the ultimate in relaxation. The well equipped shelves behind the bars provide the input for heavenly dreams and the sheer enjoyment of the good vibes of the company around.

In the early evening, this is the preferred meeting point for amorous couples and later – after they have left for the more serious part of the date – the artists and intellectuals take over.

We were honoured to share the night with painter Koko Komegne, the good spirit and heart of the Douala art scene. He always finds the right words to express the most profound thoughts with lightness and humour. But why do we discover the highest level of aesthetic consciousness here?

It must be the bar's understated, minimalist design and soft flow of fluorescent light that gives this venue its unique atmosphere – which is just pinch-me-I'm-dreaming magical.

Lagos Underground

Jeremy Weate



copyleft Jeremy Weate 2007

CREATING THIS MAP FELT LIKE A NECESSARY ACT – my subconscious had been driving me mad to produce it. Back in July 2007, Lagos State had a new governor, Fashola, and there were rumours that he meant business. Lagos had been neglected and unloved for decades, with its modern infrastructure of bridges and flyovers becoming increasingly dilapidated and even dangerous. It was time for fresh ideas.

Using the iconic London Underground tube map as a basis for a Lagos mass transit system was never meant to be taken as a serious proposition. It was, rather, a device to stimulate the imagination to think again about what could be done with the city. Ultimately, Lagos is more like Venice than London – it's a city surrounded by water. Any transit system for Lagos that doesn't make major use of the creeks and lagoons would be a wasted opportunity.

As with the London version, I have taken quite a few geographic/artistic licences for the purposes of design clarity and readability. My thinking is *ppp*: companies with deep pockets could sponsor the design & building of some of the stations to reduce the strain on the public purse, and in return pick the name of their choice (see Zenith, Silverbird, IBTC). On the other hand, some of the station names strongly signal a poetic sense of place, as with Palace (for the Oba's Palace on Lagos Island), and 1004, standing for the eponymous flats. Again, for ease of use, I have left out the Five Cowrie Creek that separates Lagos Island from Victoria Island below it – those familiar with the morphology of Lagos can project it onto the map in their imagination.

For example, the highbrow set could take the Falomo line (Piccadilly renamed) from their Bourdillon mansions to catch a classical music concert at Muson – at last not having to worry about parking and 'settling' *awon* boys; one could shop for a picnic at The Palms, then drink and eat it all on the new-look Bar Beach; or one could stock up on no-one-need-know *juju* fetish-wear at Oyingbo market before heading for the Silverbird cinema (connecting to the Circle line at Kuramo Waters).

What the map does, I think, is make you realise what a great city Lagos could be if it was just a little easier to get around. It is also a celebration of place – all the nooks and crannies of the city, each with its own flavour.

Of Tamarind & Cosmopolitanism

Nuruiddin Farah

IN THE VICINITY OF THE COURTS IN SOMALIA, it is common for one to see clutches of men loitering with intent. Some of the men who hang around at the entrance to the courts are there to help you write your letters because you happen to be illiterate; some to find you a lawyer at short notice; but the majority is there to bear false witness. Decently dressed in a manner that attracts no attention, the men wait as patiently as vultures perched on the highest point of a roof in the neighbourhood of an abattoir. Actors, manqués, they entertain themselves with humorous anecdotes about many a vulnerable client, now satisfied, whom they served on the payment of a fee. These professional men are so alert they stir into action at the sight of a gullible man or a woman with a problem. And they offer their services for a price and in cash. That they can tell the pregnable state of the person as soon as he or she comes into view is an advantage that serves them well. When you come to think of it, it is all part of an act: the judges know the men who bear false witness, as do the jurors and the public too. We allude to ‘Carais Ciise’, in the region of Somalia where I come from, when we wish to imply that So-and-so is bearing false testimony, or tells lies knowingly, and benefits from doing so.

I can think of many such witnesses, among them a number of well-known writers. Not committed to telling the truth and lacking deep knowledge of the areas about which they write, these givers of ‘false testimony’ are easily discerned, especially by locals. But not so for many of their readers, least of all those who are unfamiliar with the faraway areas about which these false witnesses write. I won’t mention the names of these writers, because it would not be good etiquette to do so.

What I would like to do, instead, is to give another kind of testimony in times when the notion of truth suffers unimaginable abuse at the hands of an entire community or a group of professionals and when truth is compromised. I am referring here to the commentaries and other forms of reporting by journalists, writers or political analysts, who offer us misguided testimony when it comes to Somalia, when they should know better.

My argument is that much of the commentary on the Somali civil war is based on a false premise in the form of a cliché, an easy peg on which to hang a misguided theory. We are told again and again that the Somali civil war is the consequence of an age-old clan conflict that has only lately gone awry. The clan is viewed by many of the commentators as the single most important issue, pitting one family or groups of families related to each other through blood against others who are not related to them by blood. This view is also erroneously held by a large number of Somalis, who ought to know better, but who don’t, for reasons to do, I think, with a sense of intellectual tardiness.

Of the landmarks of Mogadiscio I remember the Tamarind Market most. As is often the case, misnomers abound in a city with an ancient oral history and with a memory far more complex than the lives of the peoples currently residing in it. Try as you might to trace things to their origins, you will find that nobody has the slightest idea why the market, which isn’t a market in the sense that we understand when we speak of an African market, was called Tamarind Market. Driven by your obsessive search for the explanation forever eluding you, you come across other misnomers along the way. In fact it may even surprise you to hear that the term Tamarind itself is a misnomer, comprised as it is of two Arabic words: timir and Hind, meaning ‘dates’ and ‘India’. Now what features do dates and tamarind have in common? But before you answer the question, if you will pardon my digression, let me ask another question, at the risk of being indiscreet. Do you in actual fact know what tamarind is? Have you seen it, eaten it and tasted

it? Or do you know of it only vaguely, in the way a child growing up in the tropics ‘knows’ of snow in the sense of having seen it on TV, or having read about it in a folktale? In other words, have you asked yourself why the Arabs, who ‘knew’ dates and grew them in abundance, gave the name ‘dates of India’ to the thing we now know as ‘tamarind’? Perhaps we are engaged in a prosaic comparison between two unlike items, one known to those bestowing the name, and the other unknown, and we should just leave it at that? Equally, we could assume that the sticky mélange that the Arabs named ‘dates of India’ is what the Indians knew as tamarind. Unfortunately that doesn’t seem to be the case!

Anyhow I remember the enthusiasm of the seventies in which all Somalis were in joyous celebration. In those long-gone years, we were enthusiastic about a number of things. We were highly enthusiastic about the political independence that was only a decade old then. We were enthusiastic, too, about our particular cultural and linguistic legacies and the enviable fact that ours was the only country on the continent of Africa with a sizeable population whose people spoke one language, Somali. Many of us would also mention another important point of which we were very proud. We knew that the city we lived in, Mogadiscio, was not only one of the prettiest and most colourful cities in the world, but also that it was decidedly the oldest in sub-Saharan Africa and older than many of Europe’s most treasured medieval cities.

One of Mogadiscio’s best-kept secrets was the shopping complex locally known as Tamarind Market. This was always abuzz with activities, its narrow alleys filled with shoppers. You could see entire families pouring into its alleys and plazas soon after siesta time, some shopping for clothes, others wishing to acquire what they could find in the way of gold or silver necklaces, many made to order. Stories abounded in which you were told that some of the shoppers came from as far as the Arabian Gulf to strike bargains, well aware that they would pay a lot more for the same items in their home countries in the Emirates or Saudi Arabia. In those days, no bride would get married without a collection of custom-made gold and silver items bought from one of the artisans there. And, for your tailoring needs, you went behind the market, where you would be fitted for your shirts, dresses, trousers, caps, jackets or a pair of leather boots, all to be had at bargain prices.

The history of Mogadiscio, how it came into being and what became of it after it went up in flames following the civil war, are to my mind all tied up with the history and destiny of the small cosmopolitan community who ran the Tamarind Market. The presence of this small community dates back to the tenth century, at which time Mogadiscio existed as a city state and boasted a negligible level of administration run for the benefit of the bourgeois elite, many of whom came from elsewhere: Iran, India and Arabia. As more and more foreigners migrated to it from other countries over the years, the city assumed an unmistakably cosmopolitan orientation. It was an open city with no walls, to which anyone could come, provided he or she lived in harmony and at peace with those already there. It was as small as many other cities in other parts of the world then, probably no bigger than four square kilometres. And it was prosperous, thanks to its residents, many of them artisans hailing originally from the Middle East or the Indian subcontinent.

Parallel to the open city, within the radius of a few kilometres in any direction, there resided a pastoralist community made up entirely of Somalis who for all intents and purposes were peripheral to the city’s residents and their cosmopolitan way of life. Traffic was principally one-way, with few and then later more pastoralists taking up residence in the city so as to benefit from the educational infrastructures there. Otherwise, the urban and the rural communities existed apart from one another, except when either was

selling something to the other. But they regarded each other with mutual suspicion. The pastoralist Somalis, who are by nature urbophobic, saw the city as alien and parasitic, and because it occupied an ambiguous space in their hearts and minds, they gradually accumulated hostility towards the city until they became intent on destroying it.

The sacking of the city in 1991, when the Tamarind Market fell victim to the most savage looting, was not the first time that a conglomerate of pastoralists acting under the command of city-based firebrands set on dispossessing the city of its 'foreign' elements, laid waste to it. The same sort of thing occurred more than four hundred years ago, between 1530 and 1580, according to oral historians. The manner in which the sixteenth-century city was laid to waste had uncanny similarities to the 1991 sacking: in both cases, contingents of disenfranchised herdsmen, led by city-based men and armed with ancient injustices newly recast as valid grievances, visited havoc on the city.

In retrospect I would say the recent sacking had a lot to do with the Italian colonial presence, which brought about massive changes in the city's demography. After all, it was Italy that recruited many Somalis into its army to fight in its colonial war of expansion into Ethiopia. That many of those co-opted into serving in the police and armed forces were from regions of Somalia other than the communities adjacent to the city would in a perverse way upset its demographic balance. Following the Great War, further influxes of migrants swelled the rank of those already there, and those whom I would describe as 'semi-pastoralists', because they had one foot in the rural area and the other in the urban, accounting for the largest number of arrivals. By the time flag independence came, more pastoralists were poised to move towards the towns and then to the one and only city in the country, Mogadiscio. And the pull towards the city and away from the seasonal droughts and crop failures meant that there would be tremendous demographic upheavals, giving Somalia one of the highest urban migration rates in Africa. In the late seventies, after another war between Somalia and Ethiopia over the Ogaden, a massive number of refugees, in addition to a huge internal migration from the regions with depressed economies, helped to make the urban growth reach alarming figures. Somalia by then had become a state with one city, ruled by a single tyrant, Siyad Barre. It came to pass that in the late eighties the city moved toward its own extinction, because it no longer had any of the amenities one normally associates with cities. In spite of this, everyone gravitated towards it: to find jobs, to be where the action was, where the industries were, where the only university was, and where you could consult an eye-doctor or a heart specialist. Power was concentrated in the figure of the tyrant: and he was there, too.

Local orature has it that in 1989, just before the armed militias invaded the city, close aides to the 'Mayor of Mogadiscio', as the tyrant was known then, suggested to him that he quit the city. His arrogant dismissal of the suggestion now seems prescient, for he is rumoured to have responded that if anyone tried to run him out of his city, then he would make sure that he took the whole country along with him to the land of ruin.

There are very few things that we know with absolute certainty when it comes to Mogadiscio. A city with several names, some ancient and of local derivation, some hundreds of years old and of foreign origin. The city claims a multiplicity of memories and sources, some of which are derived from outside Africa, others native to the continent. However, no one is sure when the name Mogadiscio was first used, or by whom. Does the name consist of two Somali words Maqal and disho, meaning, in Somali, 'the place where

sheep are slaughtered', and indicating that it was once an abattoir? Or is the etymology non-indigenous, derived from Arabic, at one time the lingua franca of the city-state? In other words, is it the composite word Maqcadul Shah, meaning 'the headquarters of the Shah'? Does its local name Xamar define a city built on 'red sand'? Or does the red colour implicit in the word Xamar refer to a people of reddish hue?

Myself, I find it fascinating that there are arguments and counter-arguments and claims and counter-claims about the history of the city to the extent that we cannot shrug any of them off, nor accept any at face value. However, if there is one thing of which we are absolutely certain, it is that the relationship between the urbophiles and the pastoralists was a vexed one, regardless of whether we think of the sixteenth century or the 1991 sacking. In both sackings, what took the cosmopolitan communities several hundred years to build was destroyed in a very short time by the invading hordes of pastoralists and borderline city-dwellers, both groups being hostile to the cultural mélange of the city.

The 1991 sacking was more destructive, because by then Mogadiscio had become the factotum-state of a nation, and all the country's available resources were poured into it. But it was similar in important ways to the city's sixteenth-century precursor, because it too was a city-state set apart from the austere cultural landscape of the country surrounding it, a cosmopolitan city with a negligible level of administration. So far as most Somalis were concerned, the power inherent in the city was invested in people who were alien to them, 'foreigners' of a kind and elitists at that. Perhaps what the warlords and their irregular armies managed to destroy in Somalia was not the infrastructure of the city, of which there was very little, or the foundation of the state, of which there was hardly any worth saving. Rather, they destroyed the spirit of a place like Tamarind Market, murdering the people who ran it, chasing out those who frequented it, in short demolishing the idea of cosmopolitanism.

In my most recent visit to Mogadiscio, I was at a loss for words when I saw what had become of the Tamarind Market, a place of carnage. For me, there was a cause to mourn: the murder of the cosmopolitan spirit of the Market. In its place, another market to serve the needs of a city now largely emptied of cosmopolitans has been created: the Bakhaaraha Market. At this newly established 'Market of Silos', for that is how its name translates, market forces prevail, and 'the clan' reigns supreme. It is the height of a nation's tragedy when those who pillaged and therefore destroyed a city's way of life are allowed to turn murder into profit. Militarised capitalism is on the ascendancy, and the idea of cosmopolitanism is dead and buried.

The destruction of the Tamarind Market augurs badly if, like me, you've invested in the metaphoric truth implicit in the notion of Tamarind, an evergreen tree of the pea family, native to tropical Africa. The seeds of the edible fruit are embedded in the pulp of the tamarind, which is of soft brown or reddish black consistency, and used in foods as much as in medicines. Not so the Bakhaaraha Market. To me, a silo suggests an entity that takes pride in its separateness, intolerant, parasitic and unproductive.

Of Goats and Great Hope ...

Fiona Moolla

HARGEISA IS A CITY WHERE THE STREETS HAVE NO NAMES and the houses have no numbers. But no one here is lost. Of course this precludes a postal system; but snail mail seems particularly passé. Hargeisians are at the cutting edge of the information age and are highly connected both locally and globally. In bizarre pastiche, apparently 'pre-modern' nomadic pastoralism meets 'post-modern' cyber-connectivity. Most Hargeisians carry a mobile phone or have access to one. The tallest building in Hargeisa is the seven or eight storeys of the mobile phone network provider. And tall glass buildings, like obelisks before them, seem to be some kind of phallic index of power and progress. Make what you will of the happy coincidence of cyber-connectivity and multi-storey development. The number of internet cafés by far exceeds the number of traffic lights – there seems to be only one malfunctioning set. But hang on to your handbag if you get googled by a goat. Hundreds of goats appear to have the freedom of the city; along with stray dogs, skunks and baboons which venture in for scraps from a countryside which, for a number of reasons, faces gradual desertification. (Unlike other urban spaces, the border between country and city in Hargeisa is porous.) The goats, incidentally, are pets kept not for slaughter, but for the pleasure of children who also drink their milk. So goat milk in a sense is on tap, while water for most people is not. Water in Hargeisa is a precious commodity. Well water is supplied from metal drums drawn by mules. Piped water is something of a luxury enjoyed by the elite and the well represented NGO community.

Banking Hargeisa-style is an absolute cinch. Apart from the state bank, the only operator in town is the money remittance company, Dahabshiil. (The other company was put out of business in the early, excessively zealous days of the paradoxically named War on Terror.) Here you can enjoy a limited range of banking services at a fraction of the cost of the service charges of 'proper' banks. Apart from livestock, the Somaliland economy relies on remittances of Somalilanders in the diaspora, for whom the call of kinship (at the moment) remains strong. The money remittance company has branches in eighty countries in the world and operates based, believe it or not, on trust in the largely non-literate nomadic regions of Somaliland. If you're inclined to do your banking outdoors, buy foreign exchange from the currency hawkers on the street – pronto! – with no filing through x-ray security doors, no tellers behind shatterproof windows and best of all, no queues! (Not that they need any of this in Dahabshiil either.) They use wheelbarrows here for cash in transit. There are no heists. At worst the wheelbarrow, loaded to twice its height with banknotes, can overbalance in a pothole. Potholes occur with an alarming frequency and an even more alarming magnitude. Old women also hawk thousands of dollars' worth of gold jewellery in the street with only plastic sheets to guard against the rain. Hargeisa experiences some petty crime, and the rate of violent crime is extremely low. The security checkpoints at the main routes into the city are a safeguard mainly against the political banditry of the south which threatens to spill into Somaliland. The Somaliland judicial system mirrors the political system, which is a dynamic (and sometimes uneasy) equilibrium of state, Islamic and traditional law.

If, in other African cities, the 4x4 is frequently the only accessory which offsets with adequately garish consumerist verve bling-bling jewellery and his-and-hers pointy shoes, in Hargeisa the 4x4 is an absolute necessity. Most city streets constitute rugged terrain and where the roads are 'tarred', often they are the product of community initiatives and community funding. The city is intersected at two points by a river. There used to be two bridges which spanned the river at these points; now there is only one. The other bridge was bombed by the dictator, Siyad Barre, in the late 1980s. To reach Hargeisa University one needs to cross the riverbed, which becomes something of a survivor challenge after rains which have been coming less and less frequently.

They say that the city never sleeps. If cities are man-made spaces which fundamentally flummox diurnal rhythms, rendering day-time and night-time indistinguishable, Hargeisa by contrast is very different. By about lunchtime, most of Hargeisa grinds to a business but not social halt. By the early afternoon, most Hargeisan men seek the sociality of the little green leaf called *qaat*. *Qaat* is flown into the city daily and constitutes a significant percentage of trade with Somaliland's big neighbour, Ethiopia. *Qaat*-chewing suppresses the appetite, slows down the body and focuses the mind. *Qaat* has since time immemorial been used by Somalis, but what has changed are the social rituals and economic context of its use. It is reported that ninety per cent of Hargeisan men chew *qaat*, with the habit growing in the shadows among increasing numbers of young women. *Qaat* is sold openly in the streets at little stalls. There are tea shops and dedicated *qaat*-chewing dens where men assemble in conviviality and conversation. If this sounds like a latter-day version of the coffee shops of Habermas's eighteenth-century public sphere, perhaps it is, but at a disturbing social cost. The prevalence of *qaat*-chewing means that the working day in Hargeisa essentially ends at lunchtime, with chewing and talking going on late into the night and the hangover lasting until late the next morning. A large part of breadwinner income also goes into supporting the habit, creating family discord and domestic abuse. Significant health risks also attend continuous *qaat* use. To return again to the ubiquitous city goats; stalks and tough *qaat* leaves are frequently fed to the goats to increase milk production. The milk is fed to the children ... say no more.

The 'public sphere' centred on the tea shops is extended by the relatively lively print media and somewhat constrained electronic media. Three daily Somali-language newspapers are published in Hargeisa, and one weekly English-language paper called the *Somaliland Times* – a remarkable achievement for a society that is predominantly oral, with a script and orthography for Somali standardised fewer than four decades ago. Interestingly, all four Hargeisa papers, which are distributed throughout the country, have the same editor who appears signally unafraid of courting controversy. The electronic media exists through state subsidy, perhaps explaining a noticeable failure of imagination. In the post-World War II era, Hargeisa was a renowned Somali cultural centre, with a thriving theatre. The bombing of the Hargeisa theatre in 1988, together with the ravages of the civil war, brought theatre culture to an abrupt close. Theatre has not been revived, but will hopefully be resuscitated in a few years' time on completion of the theatre building on its original site, a project undertaken by the Somaliland Ministry of Culture and Tourism in conjunction with a philanthropist in the Somaliland diaspora. The theatre structure at present is about waist-high. (Incidentally, apart from self-help, the philanthropy of Somalilanders who have managed to make it accounts for most successful Hargeisa projects.) The Hargeisa of about five decades ago was also the Camelot of oral poetry. In fact, the most important 'modern' genre of Somali oral poetry, the *beello*, developed in Hargeisa. Most Hargeisans lament the decline in orature which, they claim, had its golden age about twenty years ago in the resistance to the authoritarianism of the Barre regime. Clearly, the art-politics dichotomy is not a consequence of the way in which poetry figures in this society. There is also in Hargeisa a handful of poets and novelists who quite mind-bogglingly write in English in a society mainly Somali-speaking and oral. English, for these writers, appears more suited to represent what is styled 'modern' experience and is an escape from the sometimes rigid strictures of traditional art and political criticism. In other words, these young artists can say what they like in a language their elders don't understand. These self-reliant young writers create their own opportunities where none exist. Not only do they self-publish, but they also organise social gatherings (much like big and festive weddings) to read their work. And on the topic of weddings, weddings among the Hargeisa elite are much the same interface of 'tradition' and 'modernity' as

elsewhere in Africa, with bride and groom constrained in sweaty satin and razor-sharp suits, looking like they'd much rather be on a trek across the desert in *jilaal*, or the dry season. As almost everywhere else, the most widespread entertainment (apart from *qaat*-chewing, that is) is satellite television – and, yes, even in Hargeisa the regime of Hollywood is challenged only by the coup staged by Bollywood.

Hargeisa is a relatively young city, having been founded only in the late 1800s by a Sufi sheikh. It had to be rebuilt in the 1990s, quite literally out of the ashes of its 1988 bombing by Siyad Barre, based in Mogadiscio in the south. The city's inhabitants have felt the fallout of the Ogaden war in 1977, which witnessed so many refugees fleeing into Somaliland that Somalilanders themselves were obliged to seek refuge elsewhere. Many of the refugees of the Ogaden war remain housed in Hargeisan school and municipal buildings. Hargeisa has endured the economic and political domination of the south, culminating eventually in brutal persecution. Most Hargeisans tell of life in a refugee camp, or of a family member killed or incarcerated. All Hargeisans know about the 'Hargeisa Group', a group of twenty-eight professionals whose initiatives to improve schools and hospitals were deemed seditious by Siyad Barre. They were tortured and held in solitary confinement for a period of almost seven years, during which one of their number tapped out in a kind of Morse code for his troubled neighbour in the adjacent cell all of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, his copy of which had not been removed by the guards. They have known resistance, insurgency and civil war.

Hargeisa is a city which has been reconstructed by Hargeisans upon mass graves of their kin. It is the capital city of a country which is a testament to a peace negotiated wholly through autochthonous Somali conflict-resolution techniques. Since self-declared independence in 1991, it has with varying degrees of success sought to integrate traditional principles of egalitarianism and pastoral democracy into the inevitability of a modern state formation. Class differentials have been inescapable. It is not internationally recognised, so has not enjoyed any of the benefits of bilateral aid and has not been able to develop the economic foundations of the modern state it seems it must become in order to survive.

What one sees on the streets of Hargeisa may not be much, but it is the product of the initiative, will and co-operation of Hargeisans, the people themselves. But Hargeisa, for various reasons, has reached an economic impasse. The position of Somalilanders in the international community is dependent upon the African Union, which has been put in the position of gatekeeper. Ironically, the policy of the African Union is to respect colonial boundaries to which Somaliland does conform. Hargeisans are holding their breath for change. But, as the self-reliant people of this city like to say ... God willing.

Koltan Kills Kids*

Tsuba Ka 23

MORRIS & MORRIS ASSOCIATES

Singular Solutions for the Discerning Business Executive

3 Shady Pine Dell - Suite 3548
Dulles, VA 20199
Tel. 540 555 6749
Fax. 540 555 6751

December 15, 2008

R. Bridger Rollins, CEO
Sweetwater Creek Ventures, Inc.
1577 Westheimer
Houston, TX 77002

Dear Bridge:

Following our conversation of November 23, I met with our team in Dallas. Karen Schools, Director of our Challenging Terrains Division and Skip Alpenhous, Ph.D., J. E. Hoover Chair in Communication Strategies, Murdoch University, were present as well.

The meeting began with an updated assessment of Sweetwater's Valuable Assets-DRC subsidiary. Principal issues of concern were identified and preliminary strategy proposals elaborated. The following is intended to provide you with an overview of the situation: what we have learned, what information we are seeking and how, and what we recommend as the best course of action for Sweetwater at this time.

Sweetwater's most urgent concern, at this point, everyone agrees, is the 'Koltan Kills Kids' – aka 'KKK' – campaign launched by the Braka Dju Collective. The campaign has had a significant negative impact on Sweetwater's public profile. Damage control is not considered sufficient. An aggressively proactive approach is urgent to counter an accelerating fall in Sweetwater share prices.

As you know, Braka Dju's campaign centers on a series of images whose purpose is to alert consumers to one fact: that the rush for coltan (columbite-tantalite), essential to the production of virtually all computers and cellular telephones and a significant number of devices vital to the arms industry, is fueling the war in Eastern Congo and its spread to adjacent countries (Rwanda, Uganda and so on). Large numbers of people are dying and entire communities (in the hundreds of thousands) are being uprooted. Although Africa tends to get little attention on the evening news, this story seems to be gathering steam and the UN is talking genocide. This obviously presents a significant PR challenge for Sweetwater, as it is one of the most visible coltan mining ventures in the region.

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Braka Dju's 'KKK' images have had a devastating effect. Two in particular are a problem: they have caught on like wildfire and, at this point, seem to be known pretty much everywhere. I attach reproductions for your files. Braka Dju has plastered poster and sticker-sized versions of the two images in cities across the globe. Graffiti versions have been developed as well. The trend has attracted other organizations, notably in Canada and Australia (which, as you know, are strategic coltan extraction sites as well) and now the images are appearing on T-shirts, bandanas and assorted 'protest' gear from New York to Beijing. Most major cities are infected and clearly the phenomenon is spreading: this past hour, the tracking team we've put in place has reported sightings in a women's WC outside Yerevan, Armenia, in a bar near Las Tunas, Cuba, and on a halibut trawler in the bay of Kattegat, off the Danish Mainland.

The more graphic of the two Braka Dju images shows a gorilla at a computer with a briefcase full of broken cell phones, a dollar sign and a coltan symbol (specifically, the electron shell diagram for Tantalum, the 73rd element in the periodic table of elements), which doubles, here, as a target. The image has taken on a life of its own. Hong Kong and San Francisco tattoo parlors are offering several versions – the gorilla alone, the gorilla with the coltan symbol or the whole spread.



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Along the way, the monkey has apparently acquired a name: Tsuba Ka. We have run the name by Gordon Fallous, head of African Linguistics at Bradenton State, and the news is not good. According to his report, filed yesterday:

The name functions on several metaphorical levels. Two, in particular, are worth noting. The first is clearly a reference to Congo: in Lingala, one of DRC's lingua francas, tsuba ka means 'to penetrate with an object'. Here, then, you have an allusion to mining, as well as, in all likelihood, a scatological statement – to put it bluntly, something along the lines of 'up your ass'.

A second meaning finds its roots in popular culture. I owe this insight to my colleague Patricia Schnausertrensch, a primatologist who is the mother of two young boys. 'Tsuba Ka,' she tells me, is almost certainly a willful deformation of 'Chewbacca,' the name given to the widely beloved simian creature played by actor Peter Mayhew in several of the *Star Wars* movies (episodes 3, 4, 5 and 6, in which Chewbacca appears, notably, as the first mate of protagonist Han Solo's spaceship, the Millennium Falcon). The name choice, Patricia suggests, is explicitly meant to tug at the heartstrings of ecologists, who are concerned with the disappearance of the Virunga volcano region's (DRC, Rwanda, Uganda) eponymous mountain gorilla (*gorilla berengei berengei*), whose dwindling population (fewer than 320 at last count) may not survive another year of warfare.

As, of course, you are aware, a great deal of attention has been paid to the plight of the mountain gorilla, as witness an article published yesterday by the *Los Angeles Times*, in which the DRC conflict is described as a 'gorilla war'. The fact that mountain gorillas are not only endangered, but also vegetarian, our Media Watch Division tells us, has won them a great deal of sympathy. (Parallel research backs this up: on the NRA's 'tree-hugger index' – an informal but highly accurate source – the Virunga gorilla rates several point higher than the endangered Namibian Cheetah, which is considered equally in need of support, but less attractive because a carnivore.)

By linking its anti-coltan campaign to the gorilla situation, Braka Dju has, by all accounts, significantly increased its visibility. As the Chewbacca tie-in shows, the Collective has also tapped in quite effectively to pop culture. With *Star Wars* as an access point, it has been able to reach two generations – parents who were in their teens when the first *Star Wars* movie came out, as well as their children, who are familiar with more recent episodes of the saga. This broad demographic significantly complicates the task of countering the Braka Dju action, as does an additional factor.

The Tsuba Ka/Chewbacca character has made inroads into a tranche of the population that peace activists and assorted human and animal rights groups have historically had a great deal of difficulty engaging: 20-something disaffected Caucasian males. According to Joy Silversmith of CAC (the Conservative Action Campaign, Denver, CO), who has been working with us on this matter, timing – *when* the monkey in the Braka Dju campaign first got its name – is key. Apparently, this occurred within hours of Sweetwater's first Braka Dju-related press conference. You remember the débâcle, of course (this was the occasion on which you were pelted with rotten bananas – in hindsight, a harbinger of things to come – after pointing out the importance

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of coltan in the development of early diagnosis tools for testicular cancer). By the next day, an animated version of the Braka Dju gorilla had shown up on the web and within the week the sites where he appeared (primarily as a break-in hacked into legitimate business platforms, including, of course, the Sweetwater home site) were screening one-minute episodes of a series entitled 'Fight the Power: Vote Tsuba Ka'.

The first episode was called 'Gotcha by da Balls' and was a takeoff of two widely recognized storylines from the now famous and highly offensive South Park animated series launched by Comedy Central: (1) the 'Chin Ballitis' stream, in which the character Butters agrees to have prosthetic testicles attached to his chin by two *Star Wars* special effects mavens so that he and his friends can appear on the equally offensive Maury Povich tabloid TV talk show; (2) the 'Chewbacca Defense' stream, a satire of the OJ Simpson murder trial, in which an animated version of attorney-to-the-stars Johnny Cochran reprises the type of red-herring defense ("If the glove doesn't fit, you must acquit") that, most people believe, resulted in Simpson's acquittal.

As far as Sweetwater is concerned, the allusions to South Park are a direct hit. The Chin Ballitis stream is clearly a reference to your press conference statement and, with all due respect, a reference also to the loose skin of your neck (our LA-based Physiognomy Division, which provides relooking advice for businesspeople, recommends that you have this 'turkey wattle' [the term used by plastic surgeons] removed before your next encounter with the press; several of our top people have gone this way and report significant improvement in several areas of their daily life). The Chewbacca Defense stream is equally a reference to the press conference, the inference being that Sweetwater is deploying wholly invented arguments to deflect attention from a crime it has committed: aiding and abetting the death and displacement of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians.

My assistant Violetta has compiled the following data, which will clarify the situation for you:

According to the *Urban Dictionary*, the term 'Chewbacca Defense' is 'a totally bullshit argument'. Specifically, it is 'a term for any legal ... or propaganda strategy that seeks to overwhelm its audience with nonsensical arguments, as a way of confusing the audience and drowning out legitimate opposing arguments.'

Still according to the *Dictionary*, 'the term Chewbacca Defense was first used in the South Park episode 'Chef Aid', which premiered on October 7, 1998 as the fourteenth episode of the second season. In the episode, Chef [a recurrent character on the show] discovers that Alanis Morissette's hit song 'Stinky Britches' is the same as a song he wrote years ago, before abandoning his musical aspirations. Chef contacts [Morissette's] record company [Capitalist Records], seeking to have his name credited as the composer of 'Stinky Britches'. Chef's claim is substantiated by a twenty-year-old recording of Chef performing the song. The record company refuses, and furthermore hires Johnnie Cochran, who files a lawsuit against Chef for harassment.

In court, Cochran resorts to his 'famous' Chewbacca Defense, which he 'used during the Simpson trial,' according to another South Park character. Cochran begins by noting that although Chewbacca is from [the homeworld] Kashyyyk, he lives on [planet] Endor, and then

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proceeds to the heart of the defense: “Why would a Wookiee, an eight-foot tall Wookiee, want to live on Endor, with a bunch of two-foot tall Ewoks? [Wookie and Ewok are species names.] That does NOT MAKE SENSE! But more important, you have to ask yourself: What does this have to do with this case? Nothing. Ladies and gentlemen, it has nothing to do with this case! It does NOT MAKE SENSE! Look at me. I’m a lawyer defending a major record company, and I’m talking about Chewbacca! Does that make sense? ... Ladies and gentlemen of the [jury], it does NOT MAKE SENSE! If Chewbacca lives on Endor, you must acquit!”

Cochran’s use of this defense is so successful that the jury finds Chef guilty of ‘harassing a major record label’ and sets his punishment as either a two million dollar fine to be paid within twenty-four hours or, failing that, four years in prison.

Ultimately a ‘Chef Aid’ benefit concert is organized to raise money for Chef to hire Johnnie Cochran for his own lawsuit against the record company. The concert (a parody of Live Aid¹) features his old showbiz friends — Elton John, Meat Loaf, Ozzy Osbourne (who kills [the character] Kenny by biting his head off), and others ... At the concert Johnnie Cochran experiences a change of heart ... and offers to represent Chef for free. He again successfully uses the Chewbacca defense, this time to defeat the record company and make them acknowledge Chef’s authorship of their song. In the second use of the Chewbacca Defense, he ends by suddenly producing a stuffed monkey and shouting “Here, look at the monkey. Look at the silly monkey!”, causing a juror’s head to explode.

According to both our Internet and legal analysts, Braka Dju has hit a home run here. At this point, ‘Chewbacca Defense’ has become a by-word on websites dealing with legal and, increasingly, political issues (see the Slashdot site – <http://slashdot.org> – and its various subculture offshoots; in fact, it seems there may be an under-underground link here: below the Tsuba Ka gorilla in the Braka Dju image is a series of slashes and dots, morse code for ‘KKK’ [Koltan Kills Kids]).

Thus, Koltan Kills Kids has managed to infiltrate multiple demographics simultaneously: the usual suspects (peacenicks, tree-huggers, vegetarians and the like); baby boomers *and* their children (a stunningly successful cross-generational appeal that seems to have given rise to a line of all-organic Tsuba Ka stuffed monkey toys just in time for the holidays); an otherwise unreachable white male audience (couch potatoes); net freaks, computer nerds, assorted bloggers and pundits; and, worst of all, lawyers.

A final demographic of which you must be made aware has our analysts extremely concerned. Their concern stems from the fact that the process involved seems to be completely unrelated to Braka Dju. Others, as yet unidentified (one group or several, linked or not – this is still thoroughly unclear) have attached themselves to the campaign against Sweetwater, taking it

1 Karen and Skip had originally recommended a Live Aid-like plan to counter some of the bad publicity Sweetwater is facing (something along the lines of Gorilla Aid), but it seems Braka Dju had seen this coming and, with the Tsuba Ka campaign, has forced us to nix the plan. As polls in seven industrialized countries indicate that gorillas rank higher than human beings in the public’s awareness of the DRC conflict, we are in the process of developing alternative, monkey-centered PR proposals for your review. At the same time, we cannot afford to ignore the ‘children’ aspect of the Braka Dju campaign, which, after all, is named ‘Koltan Kills Kids.’ Possibly a school or two could be built, as well as a few dispensaries, as an initial form of counter-action.

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in directions that we do not think Braka Dju had itself envisaged. In other words, this thing has taken on a life of its own. It is spawning networks whose nodes may or may not have any formal link to one another. As we know from the war on terrorism, this is the toughest nut of them all to crack.

These networks do seem to have one, common starting point: a campaign poster created by Braka Dju (we are still hunting down the artist(s), but at this point have little hope of succeeding).



This is the second of the two images I attach here. It shows, from left to right:

- (1) A planet over which a snake is slithering² – most likely earth, on which Sweetwater may be the snake – shortly to be hit (and likely destroyed) by a coltan meteorite that has apparently given birth to headless beings (art historian Rosalind Krugge interprets these as a cross between Edvard Munch's 'The Scream', the bright yellow Homer Simpson version of same, and some kind of bacterium, suggesting a terrible disease or mutation);
- (2) A small African child on whose forehead a bar code has been pasted (according to Krugge, 'an image of commodification');
- (3) CIA surveillance footage of an anti-coltan march in Paris (the sign brandished by the protestor at center, which equates coltan with blood, refers to 'multinational' companies in general but, sources inside the Paris movement tell us, this is a coded allusion to Sweetwater);
- (4) The money shot: a Photoshop image showing a gagged and one-armed dreadlocked African,

² Research on snake anatomy (Violetta found a useful South African web site – www.icon.co.za/~mvdmerwe – on the subject) pointed us in the direction of answers about the snake in the poster. Apparently, the snake is Congolese. It was photographed in 1959, in Congo, by a Belgian helicopter pilot, one Col. Remy van Lierde. According to a second web site, on which the original picture can be viewed (<http://www.geocities.com/CapeCanaveral/Launchpad/6873/crypto.html>), 'the snake [Van Lierde] saw measured approximately 40 to 50 feet in length [and was] dark brown/green with a white belly. It had triangle-shaped jaws and a head about 3 ft x 2 ft. Experts have analyzed [photos Van Lierde took of the reptile] and have verified them as authentic. They also have verified the size of the creature by matching ground features to the snake. As the helicopter flew in lower the snake rose up 10 feet and looked as if it would strike at the helicopter if [it] flew any closer.'

visibly in pain, holding what appears to be a corpse – his own body – wrapped in a Congolese flag, and wearing an Obama victory shirt (clearly, Krugge tells us, a claim of worldwide support for the Braka Dju campaign – the only good news, here, is that the Obama people swear they have nothing to do with this and that they have had no contact with Braka Dju).

Completely outside Braka Dju's ambit, the poster has engendered a worldwide phenomenon that has caused havoc in the computer and telecommunications industries. The phenomenon in question is a computer game that can only be described as perverse. It belongs to a category that virtual reality specialists refer to as 'ubiquitous games' (or, more generally, ubicomp [for 'ubiquitous computing']) – defined by our in-house IT crew as 'games that are characterized by a porous interface between metaspace and cyberspace'. In the more interesting ubicomp games, much of the action takes place in the real world (as opposed to on a computer screen): while leading their everyday lives, players participate in a parallel gaming universe in which places, objects and people they encounter have a hidden, or double meaning.

Here again, Violetta has done useful research for us. Jane McGonigal (Resident Game Designer at the Institute for the Future), she tells us, has written a good article on the subject, in which the following is explained:

Ubiquitous gaming asks players to take up two core mechanics: first, searching for and experimenting with the hidden affordances of everyday objects and places; and second, exhaustively seeking to activate everything in their immediate environment. This activation is, in fact, mutual. Game structures activate the world by transforming everyday objects and places into interactive platforms and also activate players by making them more responsive to potential calls for interaction. This is because the act of exposing previously unperceived affordances creates a more meaningful relationship between the actor and the object or the space in the world.³

The ubicomp game engendered by the Braka Dju poster is called 'Third World War.' It features a hydra-like female protagonist called Daku Rani who can take on as many forms as players involved. Daku Rani can be good or evil, depending on the player's inclinations. She moves through space collecting firepower, battle plans and tactical advantages, and rallying people to her cause, in a conflict that, as the game's name suggests, involves the whole world. While the entire planet is concerned, in the game's storyboard set-up, the starting place of the war is Eastern Congo. Specifically, it is Sweetwater-DRC's Goma offices. As in early games such as 'Barcode Battler' (a low tech game developed as early as 1991) and 'Botfighters' (2001), 'everyday objects can be (mis)used (or put to alternative ends) to gather tools for effective (play) destruction.'⁴

In 'Third World War,' the ultimate goal (depending, again, on the player's inclination) is either to blow up Planet Earth or to save it from destruction. Here, the creators of the game have clearly taken their cue from the left-most image in the Braka Dju poster. A secondary goal (yet again a matter of player inclination) involves either murdering or saving a protagonist known as Le Lion, who possesses a cache of esoteric knowledge that must be accessed to move upward into the more complex echelons of the game (which few people, if any, have been known to reach so far). Among the items in the cache is Sweetwater-DRC's business plan for 2009–2013. Rumour has it that we are talking, here, about the actual business plan and that, when changes were

³ Jane McGonigal, *Space Time Play – Computer Games, Architecture and Urbanism : The Next Level*, F. von Borries, S.P. Walz and M. Böttger eds., Basel, Boston, Berlin : Birkhäuser, 2007 (p. 236).

⁴ Madeleine Notrbright, *When Death Is Worth It: A Gamer's Manual*, Washington, DC: Arcadia, 2007 (p. 123).

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made to the plan following the collapse of Lehman Brothers earlier this year, the data in the cache were changed as well. In other words, Sweetwater security may have been breached or you may have a mole at headquarters. For 'Third World War' gamers, the gagged, two-headed figure on the right of the Braka Dju poster would appear to represent Le Lion – to be killed on top (facing North) or liberated at the bottom (facing South).

As in the early games mentioned above, and as in more sophisticated present-day games, tools to fight in 'Third World War' can be acquired in metaspaces – the real world. In 'Barcode Battler', the trick was to use barcodes obtained from the packaging of ordinary goods to accrue points. Aficionados of the game knew which barcodes were more effective than others; as this had nothing to do with the actual cost of barcoded goods (Campbell's tomato soup barcodes were more point-rich than Lindt chocolate barcodes, for example), the game ended up attracting a crowd known for its vocal attacks on capitalist value systems. The 'Third World War' people have revived the old 'Barcode Battler' move: barcodes from items you can buy in any corner store contain tools for engaging in the war; this return to an old-school gaming device (Battler was the inspiration for the Pokemon craze) was probably inspired by the top middle image in the Braka Dju poster.

Much more effective, however, as sources for weapons, plans and tactical advantages to do battle in 'Third World War' are everyday objects that are said to 'contain blood.' At the top of the list are items whose manufacture calls for coltan. To access the 'blood points' contained in such items, the coltan within them must be removed and destroyed. This, of course, is highly problematic, as the two most common, coltan-dependent everyday objects with which people across the world come in contact are cell phones and computers. The fact that most cars today contain computers of some kind or other further complicates things.

Ubicomp games are meant to be, can be and are played anywhere and everywhere in the world. Unlike related but different types of games, according to McGonigal, they 'engage players by the hundreds or thousands at minimum, more typically by the tens of thousands and, in the most successful games [which appears to be the case with 'Third World War'], by the hundreds of thousands at a time.'⁵ Given how easy it is to access cell phones, computers and cars almost everywhere, including the most remote parts of countries like the DRC, this is alarming to say the very least. In the early days, the damage was fairly contained. At this point, however, we are fast approaching a potentially catastrophic tipping point. So many people in so many places are playing 'Third World War' that, in the past month and a half, we have witnessed destruction on a massive scale.

At first, manufacturers of objects containing coltan were delighted: the assumption was that the need to replace stolen and destroyed phones, vehicles and lap- and desktops would result in orders that would counterbalance sales losses due to the global economic slump. It was also assumed in some quarters that the price of coltan would shoot up as a result. Initially, these predictions proved accurate. But as the damage has become more and more widespread (by way of example: in the French village of Ludon-Médoc [*circa* 3 500 inhabitants], 2 023 cell phones, 798 computers and 1203 cars were destroyed by gamers in the fall trimester of 2006 alone), insurance companies have ceased reimbursing consumers whose coltan-containing valuables have been vandalized. As a result, not only have sales not picked up; consumers have also started to look into alternatives, with an increasing number of people biking to work and visiting neighbors and family rather than calling, skyping or emailing them. Paper and pen sales are up. Most alarming, cell, computer and car manufacturers are starting to invest in

⁵ *Space Time Play*, pp. 236–237

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alternative materials and technologies research, with an eye toward moving away from coltan use altogether.

Analysts disagree as to the long-term effects of what is shaping up to be a major crisis. Paul Tuparl d'Uncon (The Mining Institute, La Joya, CA) argues that the movement will peter out. Hugh Montague out at Langley disagrees; as he sees it, there is much worse to come. He predicts 'blood tool' attacks on increasingly large targets – a move, notably, from SUVs to small aircraft and eventually, as 'Third World War' gains adepts among commercial ground and flight crews and military personnel, onward to civilian and military carriers. According to a confidential memo leaked to our Palm Springs office by an unnamed Pentagon official, increased security is being recommended for Cape Canaveral. The French seem to be gearing up for a similar arrangement at their Ariane launch pad in Guyana.

The darkest scenario comes to us from Isaak Judah (U.K. Le Guin Professor of Futurology at the Institute of Higher Consciousness, Kiev, Russia). Judah has been tracking 'Third World War' gamer strategies and compiling statistics on the game's spread for two years now. He heads up a team of fifteen, including mathematicians, sociologists, epidemiologists, a viral marketing specialist and, of course, an IT crew. His take is that the movement is growing so fast and that so many people are becoming caught up in it that 'it has effectively migrated from the virtual world wholly into the everyday space of human interaction.' As he sees it, the likeliest outcome is a situation in which so many coltan-based manufactured goods are destroyed that: (A) as noted by others (see above) major manufacturers in a range of fields will focus on developing alternatives to coltan and (B) as a result, the coltan market will collapse entirely. This, however, he states, will only be the tip of the iceberg. Having come to this point, the developers and gamers of 'Third World War' – and, likely, collectives like Braka Dju – emboldened by the success of their actions, will (C) turn their attention to other 'blood point' materials (other rare and highly strategic metals as well as better known targets such as oil, diamonds, uranium and the like), (D) potentially causing the collapse of entire commodity markets and (E) ultimately, destabilizing capitalism itself. He believes that it is unlikely the movement can be stopped.

On the basis of the foregoing, and following extensive consultation with a crisis cell put in place at our request by the World Bank, we recommend that Sweetwater promptly sell all of its DRC coltan holdings and invest the proceeds in clean air technologies. Appalling as it is, barring large-scale military action (for which our friends at Blackriver, Inc. are prepared to offer you a turnkey package, but which we are not convinced has a reasonable chance of success) it does appear that investment in these technologies is the only reasonable option at this time.

I will get back to you early next week with detailed proposals for the smooth execution of this proposed exit strategy. In the meantime, we strongly recommend that you avoid any interaction with the press and that you enforce a Sweetwater-wide gag order in all matters relating to Braka Dju's 'Koltan Kills Kids' campaign.

Please don't hesitate to call me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Robert N. Mukozy

Angels in Winter

Teju Cole

I

OUR FIRST SIGHT OF LAND CAME FROM Lazio's farms, a green different from American green, less neon-bright, more troubled with brown. Later, on the express train into town, the impression was strengthened by the scattering of pines, palms and cypresses along the tracks. I became aware for the first time of how plant life is part of the story of being in a foreign place. As the eye adjusts to different buildings and different uses of technology, as the ear begins to find its way into the local dialect, the flora, too, present a challenge to the senses. Here, the biome projected a certain obstinacy: these plants had struggled against both human culture and hot weather for a long time. It wasn't hot the day we arrived. It was cool, the fog interleaved with rain, spoiling visibility.

A woman from Verona, her ticket on her lap, sat across from us. She wore a business suit and sunglasses, and had the slight impatience of early morning work-related travel. On the other side of the aisle was a middle-aged couple, the man in a blue tracksuit (which at the belly strained to contain him). Facing them, a sharply dressed young man in dark-blue suit, powder-blue shirt, and skinny black tie, spoke loudly into the telephone—"Pronto! Sì, sì. Sì, sì, sì! Andiamo, ciao, ciao!"—a clipped bare-bones negotiation. There was a performative busyness in his torrent of sì's; *negotium*, the negation of pleasure.

Italy is a third-world country. It has the ostentatious contrasts of a third-world country, and the brittle pride. The greenery of Fiumicino quickly gave way to abandoned buildings with rusted roofs. We rumbled by a necropolis of wrecked cars in a wide yard, beyond which were muddy roads. On the culverts and walls, graffiti artists were indefatigable, covering every available surface for miles. Their tags were, to my surprise, beautiful: I began to see how they answered to the ancient ruins. The ruins themselves were as elaborate as stretches of aqueduct, or as simple as sections of walls. Their size as well as their integration into the landscape was the first real sign of the ubiquity of the past in Rome. In many places this past was elaborated (as I would soon discover), but in others it was entirely uncurated, the material relics simply remaining there, a testament to thousands of years of effort, an echo of the wealth and greatness of the people who lived here.

The filthy suburban tenements were festooned with washing, and increasingly smaller patches of open land provided mean sustenance for small flocks of tough-looking sheep. By the time we arrived at Termini, the rain had begun again, heavily. We knew which bus we wanted, but there were no bus maps (everyone else seemed to know where to go). Finding the right embarkation point consisted of walking from one section of the parking lot to another, and we were drenched by the time we did find it. But time quickened, and we were soon inside Rome proper, in the Esquiline (one of the original seven hills), inside what felt like a gigantic Cinecittà set.

I was immediately intoxicated by the visual impression of the place: the large, well laid-out squares, the dilapidated but elegant buildings, the Vespas, the mid-century modern feel of much of the signage, the ragged edges on everything (for some reason all this made me think of Julian Schnabel). It was alluring, even

in winter, perhaps especially in winter, with the colours bold (orange, red, yellow) but desaturated. As we passed through Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, I noted above all two features: the gargantuan scale of the built environment, and the profusion of ornament.

Both scale and ornament are related to history. ‘The classics,’ I well know, are not homogeneous. But what distinguishes Roman art from Greek art? My impression was that the Greeks were idealists, invested in the perfection of form, fixated on eternity. Isn’t the way people die in the Iliad, sorrowfully but not without a certain dignity, part of the attraction? I thought of your love for the Greeks, Beth, which is related to this dignity. The Romans, who later adopted their forms with a startling exactness—much of what we know of Greek art is from Roman copies—were more grounded: political advantage, obsequy, national honour. In a word, propaganda. And so, the buildings got larger and more ornate, lurid even, ostensibly to honour the gods or the predecessor rulers (many of whom were deified), but in reality as guarantees of personal glory. The Greeks truly loved philosophy for its own sake, but the Romans loved it for what it could be used for, namely political power. This at least was the way I understood it.

Roman propaganda, the manipulation of images for political ends, hadn’t begun with Augustus (Julius Caesar’s successor, and the first of the emperors), but he’d certainly brought it to a keen level. He’d enlisted architects and sculptors for the project of transforming him from violent claimant to the leadership (a position for which he was neither more nor less qualified than his main rival Mark Antony) to *Pater Patriae*. The message, which got through, was that he was not merely fatherly but also avuncular. He was powerful, well loved, generous, and his leadership was inevitable.

Augustus’ successful marshalling of art to the shaping of his self-image was the template for just about every emperor who came afterward. The skill and subtlety of Roman art, from the first-century emperors to Constantine in the fourth, was for the most part dedicated to dynastic and propagandistic goals. Was there after all, I asked myself, so great a leap between imperial Rome and the buffoonery of Mussolini? The misuse of piety was no new thing.

And so, on that first day, heading out in the late afternoon to the Capitoline Hill—the ancient site of an important temple to Jupiter, now a set of museums set around a Michelangelo-designed piazza—I was braced for a mental separation between art and its public functions. I came up Michelangelo’s broad, ramped staircase, past the monumental sculptures of Castor and Pollux, into the glistening egg-shaped piazza. The rain had ceased. Not many people were around. I had my arsenal of doubts at the ready.



II

BUT I WANT TO SET PARENTHESES around this essay, Beth. It's no good pretending that, in going to Rome, one went to some exotic corner of the earth. Rome was as central a centre of the world as there has been in this world. And now that there are many centres, it remains one of the important ones. So, I want to acknowledge that not only do millions of other visitors do what I just did—visit Rome as tourists or pilgrims—but that this has been going on for a great long while. Those visitors have included many of the world's best writers and, in addition, many of the world's great writers have themselves been Romans. I am unlikely to write anything new or penetrating about Rome. In writing about Rome, I am writing about art and history and politics, and how those things relate particularly to me, a solitary observer with a necessarily narrow purchase on the place. Rome is simply the pretext, and the font of specifics, for these discontinuous thoughts.

And while I'm at it, I also want to question the very possibility of writing anything about a people, in this particular case Romans. Is it possible, I wonder, to write a sentence that begins, 'Romans are...,' and have such a sentence be interesting and truthful at the same time? We are properly sceptical of generalisations, after a lifetime of 'blacks are...,' 'women are...,' 'Indians are...,' 'Pakistanis are...'

But an important part of the Roman enterprise, historically speaking, was the effort to characterise Rome and what it meant to be a Roman. This went beyond local pride, and also beyond imperial ambition. It was a certain relationship to fellow citizens and to the state, a relationship buttressed by war and by oratory. Principles were important, they were fought over if necessary, and any and all hypocrisies had to be practised under the aegis of the principles. The motto SPQR (Senatus Populusque Romanus: a reminder that a given enterprise or monument was there at the pleasure of the senate and people of Rome) simply manifested the principles at stake.

Rome followed the example of Athens in this (think of Pericles' funeral oration, which had more sly jingoism than an Obama campaign speech), and would herself later serve as exemplum for the American experiment. Before American exceptionalism, there was Roman exceptionalism, to a much more severe degree. Our Capitol is named for the Capitoline Hill. Close parentheses.

Thus primed with my scepticism, a scepticism compounded with an anti-colonial instinct, I entered the museums on the Capitoline Hill. Well: so much for preparation. I was floored. My theories simply had no chance against what I experienced—the finest collection of classical statuary I had ever seen. The strength of the collection was not limited to the famous pieces—the Capitoline Venus, the Dying Gaul, the Colossus of Constantine—wonderful though they were. There were countless other sculptures, including several such as a standing Hermes that would have been the proud centrepiece of a lesser collection. The patron of



boundaries wore his winged hat and winged sandals, held a caduceus in his hand—what a wonder to meet Hermes where Hermes meant so much. But what struck me most were the rooms full of marble portrait busts.

Ancient Roman marble portraiture rose to a very high degree of competence. It was an art that had been less thoroughly pursued by the Greeks, invested as they were in ideal forms. The fascination of Roman portraiture for me was twofold. First, I was struck by how subject to fashions it was, how, within the space of thirty or forty years, there were perceptible shifts in the sculptural style. The pendulum swung between ‘veristic’ and ‘idealising’ techniques. A female portrait from the second, for instance, is rather easy to identify: the sculptors depicted the corkscrew hairstyle of the time in careful detail, and made extensive use of the drill (to poke holes in the marble, and give the hair an illusion of depth). Drills were used too, in portraits of men during this period: after Hadrian’s decision to wear a beard, they were all the rage. By the time of Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus (both bearded), portraiture had reached new levels of psychological acuity. To the realistic depiction of age and wrinkles, which was itself a conscious throwback to the portraiture of the Roman republic, there were now added indications of the subject’s frame of mind. Melancholy, levity, exhaustion, fleeting states set in stone.

Among representations of the gods and emperors and senators were busts of ordinary citizens. What these portraits said to me was that ordinary Romans participated intimately in this economy of imagery. I was right to have been aware of the propagandistic aspect of image-making, but not to the extent of forgetting how widespread and common images themselves were, and how generally sophisticated the ability to read them. One estimate puts the number of sculptures in Rome in the second century at two million. History tends to favour rulers and warriors, but the history that peered at me from the white marble faces on the Capitoline was closer to ground level: bakers, soldiers, courtesans, writers. It was a history of involvement and implication in the Roman project.

Whatever Rome was, or whatever it had been, it was so out of the enthusiasm of the people of Rome for Roman modes of being. The sculptures were one part of that. They were a way of expressing a desire to be honoured and to be remembered. That the results were so visually arresting was no coincidence. The visual propaganda of the emperors would not have been so forceful had the populace not been already attuned to imagery.

So, ‘Romans are...’ what? Romans are people who are part of Rome, and would rather be part of Rome. To be Roman was to participate in Rome. That was my inkling on the first day. But, of course, that inkling was not to last the week without revision.



III

“WE ARE WORKING HARD. In fact we’re just hustling. It’s not easy at all,” Moses said. He’d made little room for small talk or pleasantries. A certain bitterness was evident in his voice. Moses was a friend of Paula’s, and she’d introduced him to me because he was a Nigerian, an Ibo. Before he came to the house, she’d told me that he was a building contractor. “He is in partnership with an Italian. You know why? If you have an employee, there are rules, you must pay a certain amount, of taxes, of benefits, of certain minimum salary. But if you are ‘partners’, then there is no responsibility. And so this man cheats him by making him a partner; Italians cheat foreign employees this way. They painted this house, but I don’t know who pocketed the money.”

Moses’ sober mien and sharp comments confirmed this picture. “Our problem is that when we go home, when we are there for few days, we spend one thousand euros. And everyone thinks that life must be luxurious for us overseas. They think we live in palaces here. It is not so, but they don’t know that. They get on the next flight and come. They meet a bad situation in Rome.” I asked him about the Nigerian community in Rome. “There are many of us,” he said, “not as many as Turin—you know, that’s where our women are, mostly, doing, you know—but our people are always how they are. You know our people. No Nigerian helps you unless you help them first, unless you pay them money. Nothing is free. There is no help. I’ve been in this country now nine years, and everything is still a struggle. Especially for those of us who don’t have much education.”

Moses spoke fluent Italian, and he wore a well cut brown suit, a blush-coloured tie, oxblood brogues. His moustache was meticulously trimmed to a slightly comical half-inch thick strip on either side of his philtrum. There was no particular warmth in his interaction with me, confessional though it was. His presentation was smart, his manner courtly, a contractor dressed like a dandy; but the tone was all exhaustion. A miserable cry of exhaustion. ‘Our women’ to describe the Nigerian prostitutes in Turin was, I thought, part of his resigned attitude. No activist he, just a brother trying to survive.

Paula was Italian, and separated from her husband. She ran the B&B with the help of a business partner. The husband, Carlo, helped when she needed it. We’d met him on the first day—an evasive, thin-faced man—and hadn’t seen him since. Their split was recent. Paula herself was warm, an ‘accidental Italian’ as she saw it, much more interested in Latin America, in salsa and tango, and in learning English.

One evening, at the kitchen table of her beautiful home, she said, “Have you read Saviano? Everyone here read this book. It’s so sad, no? I feel such deep shame for my country.” Roberto Saviano’s exposé of the mafia, *Gomorra*, had been a bestseller, and had recently been made into a film. But a number of threats to his life meant that he was now under around-the-clock police protection. It was a big story. For anyone



who knew the ruthlessness and reach of the Naples organisation known as the Camorra, the threats were credible, and chilling. Their tentacles, it seemed, reached into high levels of law enforcement and government. “I don’t care about Berlusconi. Everyone hates him,” Paula said, “but I care about the future of Italy. It means nothing to me, for myself, but I think always of my daughter. She is growing up here, she will maybe make her life here. We have a justice system so slow that it is like having no justice system. Mafia bosses are released on technicalities, but petty criminals get stiff sentences. Can you believe, in Naples, when the police come to arrest a killer, the women get in the street and make a big scene, shouting, crying? The Camorra is like a cult; it controls them totally. I have such shame for this country. And our politicians, of course, they can do nothing. Berlusconi, he is the worst, just the worst. You say his name and people spit.”

Perry Anderson, in a recent essay in the *London Review of Books*, wrote about the ‘invertebrate left’ in Italy. From the engaged and partially successful interventions of Gramsci and Morandi, there had now emerged...nothing. Italian politics was a mass of confusions, and within this confusion, rightist parties clung on to power.

Paula said, “We are excited for America. We love Obama. But we don’t believe we can change things here. It’s not possible, so we don’t try. It’s a great shame for us, though people don’t talk much about it.” Later, on television I watch Berlusconi speak rapidly and smugly, his hands gesturing at speed. The impunity that he and the Camorristi share is met with shrugs. He’s made of money; he can outbid anyone.

Father Rafael said, “Italians are too interested in enjoying life to do anything about politics. Wine, fashion, that’s what they care about. So people like Berlusconi face no opposition.” Father Rafael was a Jesuit I had met through another priest in New York last summer. He now lived in Rome. He was easygoing, in his mid-forties, not at all ascetic. We’d first met over drinks and football matches. I was drawn to him then for his matter-of-fact style. “Most priests dislike this pope,” he’d said to me, “he’s old, his ideas are old. The sooner he dies off, the better. This is something we priests talk about openly. We loved John Paul, because he did a lot to move the church forward in the right ways. Now Benedict, among his other mistakes, has given a free pass to those who want to drop the vernacular and return to a Latin mass. What’s the point?” Like many priests of his generation, he’s not from Europe or America, not white. He’s from Angola, though for many years he worked in Burundi, and considers it his home now. We met in a *trattoria* not far from the Colosseum. I ordered the pizza with prosciutto and *funghi* (mushrooms); he ordered the same, but without the ham; it was Lent.

“You won’t have too much problem with racism here,” he said, “especially if you speak the language. Italians love that, when someone from outside masters their language.” He was doing advanced studies in



Biblical Scholarship at the Society of Jesus. Italian, being only a half-step away from Portuguese, had been easy for him to learn. “And you have to remember, there are racists everywhere.”

But, I wanted to know, wasn't the situation of the Roma, the gypsies, especially bad? “That's true,” he said, “people here have little patience with them. There is a belief that they are generally criminals and, well, they are. They raise their children up to be thieves.” I had raised an eyebrow, so he softened his stance. “Out of every two crimes reported in the newspaper, one is committed by Roma. Is that the reality? Who knows? But that is what is reported. So, Romans don't view them as human beings, really. There is a big effort in the *commune* to push them out once and for all. There have been rapes and murders recently that they are blamed for. And that is why you haven't seen many of them: they're afraid! I think there's a real possibility of Roma men being lynched in this city now. The feeling about them is that hostile.”

On the metro lines, there was a small set of videos that recycled endlessly on TV screens. One, a jaunty little cartoon, warned you against pickpockets. Another was a television blooper-reel, most memorably featuring a fat man in a hurdle race who stumbled at every hurdle but kept going. And then there was the slickly produced spot that implored those who had been victims of racism to call the number provided. The ‘anti-*razzismo*’ push was a serious public project. But privately? In many restaurants and museums I was stared at, aggressively, repeatedly. In public interactions, I was treated either to the famous Mediterranean warmth (usually by the young) or to an almost shocking disdain. I had at least four incidents of speaking to people (in Italian) and being met with resolute silence, some transactions taking place entirely in that silence.

There were in any case many people of colour in the city: Africans, Bangladeshis, Latin Americans. Around them was the inescapable air of marginalisation—the clergy seemed to be visitors, and the workers (newsagents, street florists, sellers of knock-off luxury goods) appeared to have a scarcely more secure hold. They were here only because Romans, for now, tolerated their presence. The *commune* was Roman, nativist. Not black, not brown, not Albanian, and definitely not Roma.

After Berlusconi's frothing performance, the RAI picture cut to a newscast. The newscaster was a middle-aged African man, much darker than I was, distinguished-looking, greying at the temples. He delivered the day's headlines in rapid Italian, but in the cloying, ingratiating style common to newscasters everywhere.



IV

I HATE ANGELS. But even to put it that way gives them too much credence. It would be more accurate to say I don't believe in angels but I hate the idea of angels, finding them silly, seeing none of the beauty, grace or comfort that people seem to project onto them. When I was more active in church life, I found angels actively embarrassing, as though comic book or fantasy novel characters had somehow lodged themselves in the centre of the world's most serious narrative. Fairy tales had no role in theology.

No feature of angels annoyed me more than their wings: impractical, unlikely wings, from a biological point of view entirely false. I always thought of the points of attachment and articulation, and reasoned that for a man to fly with wings on his back, he would need enormous back muscles. Angels, in most depictions through the ages, looked like men with white toy wings tacked on. They were an infantile fantasy, made to bear a spiritual burden that they were, to my eyes at least, remarkably ill-suited for. Angels were just about as relevant to my life as the pre-processed sentiment of Hallmark cards or top-forty love songs: in other words, irrelevant.

Towards the end of my week in Rome, standing in the long gallery of the Museo Pio Clementino in the Vatican, I saw another fine statue of Hermes. Nearby were two herms, sacred stone objects (a head set on an unelaborated plinth) that were placed by the Greeks at roadsides, crossings, and thresholds. I did not look at the herms for long, but—as is fitting to their function—they flashed through me memorably. Recently, my spiritual development has found ever greater room for porous boundaries, shadow regions, ambiguities, and, lately, for the idea of embodied intermediaries. This is why I have become more interested in how these intermediaries have been narrated: Hermes, Mercury, Esu and, in the case of the Christian religions, angels. But no, to say 'interested' is insufficient. Better to call it 'invested'—an investment in what, it now occurs to me, I might call a parenthesis, a parenthetical mode of life.

Hermes governs travel. In the Pio Clementino, I thought of Seamus Heaney's poem *Postscript*—one of my favourites—which recounts a journey in Ireland, a drive down the Flaggy Shore in County Clare. Heaney writes, 'You are neither here nor there, a hurry through which known and strange things pass.'

I visited Rome in the waning of winter. I was susceptible to angels, feeling myself neither here nor there. My original idea was about fixed forms, about propaganda and my opposition to it. But what I found, through the senses, was a deep degree of implication. The senses were key: in addition to the



classical statuary, my most intense artistic experiences of Rome were the troubled architect Borromini and the troubled painter Caravaggio. Both freed my senses, caught my heart off guard, blew it open. Borromini's buildings—the small church of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane in particular—seemed to be taking wing right before one's eyes. Caravaggio's paintings, meanwhile, were full of musicians, peasants, saints, and angels. His *St John the Baptist* (at the Borghese Gallery), the young prophet with an inscrutable expression on his face, his body nestled next to a wild ram's, was a sensuous catalogue of subtle conflicts, as smoky and disturbing as anything by Leonardo da Vinci.

People, too, stood in as angels. Paula, the owner of the B&B, who declared that she did not believe in doing anything if she could not do it with *amore*, was one such. Another was Annie, a new friend, whose wisdom and intelligence steeped me in worlds entirely mine and entirely unknown to me. In stories of her friends and acquaintances, I caught glimpses of creativity and flexibility (hers, as well as theirs). Through her, I understood De Sica better, and Rossellini, and Visconti. I especially enjoyed her story about driving Fellini around—of his insatiable curiosity about everything around him. And through her, I met Judit, a Hungarian photographer who, in the long low Roman light of a Sunday evening, showed me a quarter-century of her work, pictures taken in Budapest and Rome. Our photographs—I shot a great deal in my brief time in the city—had uncanny areas of resonance. We were drawn to the same moments: reflections, ruins, motion, wings. I wondered if perhaps immigrants and visitors had certain insights into the heart of a place, insights denied the natives. My life and Judit's had been so different, she growing up in communist Hungary, wrestling over a lifetime of creativity with the legacy of great Hungarian photographers: Kertész, Munkácsi, Capa, Brassai—then moving to Italy, and raising a son in what still felt, to her, like a foreign country. I was grateful for the connection, of which Annie had been the intermediary. And for the connection with Annie, too, which had been brokered by her sister, Natalie. These avatars of Hermes who guided me from where I had been to where I was to be. And you also, Beth, through whom these words and images now enter the world in a new way.

At the Spanish Steps, where even in winter tourists swarm, there were lithe African men doing a brisk trade in Prada and Gucci bags. The men were young, personable as was required for sales, but at other moments suffused with melancholy. The bags were arranged on white cloths, not at all far from the luxury shops which sold the same goods for ten or twenty times more. It was late afternoon. Beautiful yellow light enfolded the city, and from the top of the steps, the dome of St Peter's was visible, as was the Janiculum Hill,



on the other side of the Tiber. In that light, the city had an eternal aspect, an illumination seemed to come from the earth and glow up into the sky, not the other way around. Did I sense in myself, just then, a shift? A participation, however momentary, in what Rome was?

There was a sudden commotion: with a great whoosh the African brothers raced up the steps, their white cloths now caught at the corners and converted into bulging sacks on their backs. One after the other, then in pairs, they fled upwards, fleet of foot, past where I stood. Tourists shrank out of their way. I spun around and pressed the shutter. Far below, cars carrying *carabinieri*, the military police, arrived, but by then (all this was the action of less than half a minute) the brothers had gone.

Later, I looked at the image on my camera: the last of the angels vanishing up the long flight of steps, *a hurry through which known and strange things pass*, their white wings flashing in the setting sun.

Rhythms of a Road, Voices of an Ethnographer

Vanessa Ulia Dantas e Sá



DRIVING ALONG ONE ROAD OF A CITY. *Limiting the space of understanding, deepening the possibility of understanding. I chose my hometown, Maputo, capital of Mozambique. I chose 25 de Setembro and Marginal, the two avenues, part of a road that runs northwards delineating Maputo's bay, where its ever-changing urban planning manifests the social and economic decisions of the present government; where humans move in bounded yet seemingly free urban spaces, constructing difference and uniformity through conflictual and yet harmonious dynamics. I was to observe the beauty of the urban flow... in one long road. And you were to come with me.*¹

Avenida 25 de Setembro

Drive towards the south end of 25 de Setembro, make a u-turn, stop the car, breath in, prepare the camera, switch off the air-conditioning and open the window. The south end is characterised by an industrial area. Turn your eyes left to observe the small industrial buildings, manifesting strong plastic forms, dated from the 40s and 50s, such as the oil and beer factories; now turn them right and see the contrasting Railway-owned land, where old trains and maintenance tools are buried in high grass, followed by stone double-storey houses originally constructed for railway employees. Look left at the sports club Ferroviário, an old white and green building, surrounded by blossoming acacias.

Can a city be understood through one long road? Could I, through 25 de Setembro Avenue and its continuation, Marginal Avenue, deepen my understanding of Maputo? I got in the car with the intention of driving this road, northwards, noticing and observing its various and different rhythms, the interactions between individuals, the services offered, the networks established, the landscape, the infrastructures, the environment, the cultural practices. Yet, this was not a new site. I had been there before, but never had I driven the road slowly and methodically with a research intention in mind, which did change my observational projections, my analytical standpoint as well as the direction of the photography.

“We already know this speech. The war, colonialism, imperialism, apartheid, everything and everyone are to blame. Except ourselves. It is true that, to a certain extent, others are to blame for our suffering. However, part of the responsibility has always resided at home. We are being victims of a long process of avoiding responsibility. The act of avoiding responsibility is one of the most fundamental stigmas that burden us, Africans from north to south. Some say that this is a part of the inheritance from slavery, the time in which we did not own ourselves.”

The first traffic lights indicate the border between the industrial and the commercial areas, the latter having lively formal and informal trade. Cross Guerra Popular Avenue carefully, attempting not to crash, ignoring the red green and yellow lights which interchangeably, almost randomly, come and go. Look to your right and see the Central Market. Feel its age through the façade. Park the car. Be careful not to leave anything inside it. Put on the steering-wheel lock. Wrap your camera around your chest, lock the car, negotiate who will be looking after it, and cross the street walking towards the market.

¹ The following text is composed of three narratives: the voice of the ethnographer guiding the reader through a journey along this road, the voice of the ethnographer remembering and analysing what she saw during the journey, and extracts chosen by the ethnographer from a speech Mia Couto presented in 2005, entitled 'The Seven Dirty Shoes' (www.comunistas.info/mia.htm on the 2nd October 2006, translated by the ethnographer). I would like to thank Khalid Shamis for agreeing to take the photographs under my direction, as well Mia Couto for agreeing to have this text published.



A city is made of rhythms; flowing goods, people and services constantly moving and being moved in complex networks of exchange and power. The existence of these networks determines individuals' lives, as much as they determine the existence of the networks. In a dialectical relationship of power, networks are born, developed and killed, in constant flows, or in other words, in rhythms. This life and death is also relational to the physical environment, which includes the built and natural environments.

The understanding of a city's rhythms and networks will, hopefully, allow me to take a glimpse at the complexity that permeates each urban space, made of superimposed economic, political, cultural and social layers, like the Central Market.

“The boss, many times distant and invisible, was responsible for our destiny. Or for the absence of a destiny. Today, not even symbolically, do we kill the old boss. One of the ways of calling the other, which emerged in the last 10 years, was the word ‘boss’. It was as though it never really died, as though it was looking for a historical opportunity to throw itself in our daily life. Can we blame someone for this reappearance? No. Nevertheless, we are creating a society, which produces inequalities and which reproduces power relationships that we believed to be buried.”

Observe the mobile vendors, selling samoosas and pies, perfumes and DVDs, dolls and oranges; observe people going in and out of their cars, scared of being robbed, the street children asking you to let them carry your shopping, the imported cars parked along the street. Go in. Feel the smell. Observe the colours. Touch the fruit. Touch the colours. Walk around, looking at the people, black vendors, black buyers, white vendors and buyers, Indians, mulattos, canecos, light blacks, dark whites, until there are no colours, but just vendors and buyers. Choose between grapes, peaches, raw honey, caged birds, pecan nuts, arts and crafts, oranges. Observe the sound and enjoy.



Going inside this market brings me a sense of nostalgia, like going inside an old favourite book which I often come back to reread, to rediscover. I visit the market every time I go to Maputo on holiday, where I buy bags for friends, cashew nuts for family members living overseas, tamarind for my curries, grapes for my fingers and mouth. Being there makes me think of a city inside a city. It almost feels self-sustained.

“The popular saying says, ‘the goat eats where it is tied’. We all know the sad use of this aphorism and how it justifies the action of people that take advantage of situations and of places. It is already sad that we equalise ourselves with a goat. But, it is also symptomatic that, in this convenient popular saying, we never identify ourselves with producing animals, such as the ant. Let’s imagine that the saying changes, becoming the following: ‘the goat produces where it is tight’. I can bet that if this were the case no one would want to be the goat.”

Leave the market through the main entrance, where you came in earlier. Check if your car is still there, but do not walk towards it. Cross the avenue to its opposite side. Walk through a small street, the Mesquita Street, perpendicular to 25 de Setembro opposite the market, which leads you to the central Mosque of Maputo. Observe the intricacy of the old façade of this mosque, with its arabesque forms and designs; then look behind you, observing the women begging in front of this monumental building. They are old or handicapped, or both and have baby children.

I am curious about mosques. I go in. It is a men-only mosque. I walk around appreciating its architecture, profoundly touched by the exclusion of women from this place of worship. I imagine them at home on their prayer mats, forgetting how the bathaan sounds, away from the public life of Islam. Is this Islam? Or is this the Indian culture in Maputo? I exit the mosque and sit next to the other women, the ones who wait outside. ‘Everything you do now is for money,’ Gracinda tells me. ‘Look around you. Everyone is



after money. This is just another way of getting there. This is my job.' Gracinda is not Muslim, although her head is meticulously covered; on Sunday morning she works outside the church. They wait for men to come out from prayers, expecting them to show repentance/generosity in the form of money.

“We talk about soil erosion, deforestation, but the erosion of our cultures is way more worrying.”

Walk back to your car. Argue about who looked after it, get in, find some coins, pay the car guard, place your camera on your lap, unlock the steering-wheel lock, lock yourself inside the car, start the engine, watch out for cars, and carry on driving north.

Maputo's urban planning dates to the end of the 19th century. It was designed on the basis of military notions and intentions. When observed from above one sees the roads' linear forms, creating a mosaic of squares and rectangles, in an infinite number of 90° angles. The city design aimed at organising a future development, a future set of networks and rhythms according to the objectives of that period, when Lorenço Marques was the capital of Mozambique, one of Portugal's overseas provinces.

“I am from a time in which what we were was measured according to what we did. Today what we are is measured according to the show we make of ourselves; by the way we place ourselves in the shop window. Many of the institutions that should produce ideas today are producing pieces of paper, filling in shelves with reports condemned to become a dead archive. Rather than finding solutions, problems are found. Instead of actions, new studies are suggested.”



I was born in Maputo. I wonder how Lorenço Marques was. The roads are the same, although the names have changed since independence. Now we live amongst the memory of all the African revolutionaries; my mother lives in Eduardo Mondlane, I took Julius Nyerere and Robert Mugabe on my way to high school, my best friend lives off Kenneth Kaunda and Mao Tse Tung is known to have the best tar in the city – no potholes, no relaying necessary. My grandmother still remembers the old names, the old clubs, the old people; she remembers independence with sour pain. My parents fought for independence. I try not to take it for granted. The ownership of an urban space is ever changing, and predictably, so are the forms of ownership. While my grandparents and parents walked downtown, I was driven and now drive; while they shopped in the Central Market for most groceries, I go there as a visitor, appreciating its Mozambiqueness.

You are in downtown Maputo, a baixa de Maputo. There are shops and services on both sides of the street; small shops, franchises, coffee shops, printing shops, there are many shops. There are Vodacom and Mcel shops on either side, competing for Mozambicans' eyes and pockets.

Seven years ago there were no cell phones in Maputo. We used landlines. Now, I am told that an extraordinary, maybe unbelievable, proportion of the active population of this capital owns a cell phone. Cell phones have been proven, in various urban and rural studies, to facilitate situations of poverty, tightening the relationship between rural and urban family members, easing cash and information flows. With the rate of growth of this market, Vodacom, in 2004, attempted to break into it; until then it had been solely controlled by the Mozambican Mcel. The competition between these two companies is public. I should even say that it is intrusive. There are yellow (Mcel) and blue (Vodacom) adverts throughout the whole city, on posters, in the papers, on the radio and on TV. Maputo is their playground, the people of Maputo their object of desire. They represent the free market, the lack of protection for national companies. 'It's good, 'cause it gives Mcel a reason to be better', my economist friends argue. I wonder where the money that Vodacom makes in Mozambique goes?



“I look at our urban society and ask myself: do we really want to be different? Because I see that, these rituals of passage reproduce themselves as a loyal photocopy of what I always knew in the colonial society. We are dancing the waltz, with long dresses, in a prom night that is a copy of those in my time. We are copying the graduation ceremonies from European models from medieval England.”

Now look slightly up, above the shops, observing the façades, a mixture of missing windows and lights, and newly renovated and well-kept buildings. The Bank of Mozambique is on your right, grand, modernist, evocative, with a long mural on its façade. Contemplate decisions being made, money being produced, documents being signed. Contemplate the changes that have been undergone inside this financial house in the last thirty years, from socialist to communist to capitalist modes of production and distribution, money flows changing, quantities of money increasing, the power of the state decreasing.

“The hurry to show that one is not poor is, in itself, the proof of poverty. Our poverty should not be hidden. Those who should be ashamed are not the poor but those who create poverty.”

This avenue is made up of historical layers, in which the inheritance of political and economic decisions is visible. It has been the stage of drastically different times. These historical layers make up the present – new networks determined by foreign policy and international trends. Mozambicans are also sure to inherit financial debt, and a country modified to correspond to the conditions imposed by the IMF and World Bank, in order to receive yet another loan, of which we, Mozambicans, know very little. We now have tarred roads and more health centres, and we have a huge rate of unemployment and corruption. I think of the ethics of the new government, and whether these are publicly discussed. If I was to read these ethics in this avenue, in two words I would say, capital-power! Do I lose hope? No. Maybe sometimes.



“I spoke of the burden we have to get rid of in order to dive fully into modernity. But modernity is not a door solely made by others. We are also carpenters of that construction and it only interests us going into a modernity of which we are also constructors.”

At the street junctions, there are vendors, selling phone credit, fruit in tchovaxitadumas, hangers, pieces of material, and there are professional beggars, handicapped individuals with assistants. There are also mobile services like nail polishing, and cell phone calls. Turn right, into Samora Machel Avenue, at the junction with Continental and Scala.

Continental and Scala are old coffee shops. They are remembered by my elders, my parents' generation, my grandparents' generation. My mother and father used to watch movies at the Scala movie theatre, since then closed and reopened; now showing action thrillers from the nineties, like Rambo. Like the movie theatre, the coffee shop Scala also closed and reopened a number of times, while Continental has been solid in its pastél de nata production.

Outside Continental, there are tables with tourists, middle class workers having their working shoes polished, families drinking cool drinks and eating cakes. While seated, one has the privilege of breathing the life of this wide avenue. Quietly, one can watch the frantic traffic, the car guards and washers fighting for vehicles and meticulously washing them in ten minutes, people passing, in all their colours, their smells, their sounds.

Stop the car soon after the turn, decide who will be guarding it and whether you want it washed. Grab a pastél de nata at Continental and walk right towards the Saturday crafts market.



The crafts market takes place every Saturday. Due to the reconstruction of the square where it used to take place, since last year, it has moved three times. With it move artists and sellers, finding new corners and sidewalks to lay out their art. Tourists like this market; there is a sense of 'authenticity', of 'localness'. They can talk to artists whose art they might buy. If the artist is not present, they negotiate with the uncle, or nephew or brother, or son. There are only a few women selling in this market; as with street vendors, this business is very male in Mozambique. Most great artists of this country are male, like Chichorro, Naguib and Malangatana, painters, and Chissano, the late sculptor. Reinata, from Nampula province, an illiterate woman, is one of the few strong female presences in this male-dominated scene. Is Maputo a patriarchal society? Do I contribute to or do I challenge this conservative rhythm?

You are in the middle of a street, in downtown Maputo; you are in the crafts market. National and international art and crafts converge in this space, unclearly exposing commercial and kinship networks, at various scales. Look at the carved wooden windows – from the Congo, the colourful wooden sculptures representing historical events of Mozambique, like the floods or the court case of Carlos Cardoso, the batiks hanging in lines between trees, gently waving to the rhythm of the wind; look at the tourists, engaging with the artists and sellers, negotiating, smiling in excitement, frustrated at the insistence, decisive about buying or not buying; notice the life, and how by just being there you are part of it – a potential buyer.

Most Saturdays that I am in Maputo, I visit this market. My house in Johannesburg is where I collect the bits I am able to buy there. I like coming back from a trip to Maputo and finding a place in my house for the new pieces I have brought; it is like making my own Mozambique inside my house, outside my country, as a migrant. Sculptures and other pieces go through so much transformation, from raw material to the end result, worked with creativity, manifesting a view, a way of understanding and expressing emotions and ideas. The artist finishes them; they are passed from hand to hand, and like this avenue, they acquire new meanings over time, in constant reconstructions and redefinitions, according to who owns them and what purpose they serve.



Back in your car, place your goodies in the boot, pay the car guard, start the car, u-turn and turn right back into 25 de Setembro. Drive past the small shops; on your left observe the old colonial Post Office, on your right Emose's headquarters – a Mozambican insurance company – followed by Hotel Tivoli, recently renovated in purple tones. As the following traffic lights approach, look up on your left side – look higher up. 33. The 33-storey building, the highest in southern Africa.

I remember the first time I went to 33 – trinta e três, as it is. My school friend lived on the 27th floor in the left block. There are three blocks – left, centre and right. At the time the lift in her building was not working, so we had to use the one in the right block to the 33rd floor, walk up the stairs to the top of the building and from there walk across to the left block. Once we got there I was paralysed, not by fear, but by amazement, by curiosity and acknowledgement of my size. The view from the top. God's eye. Subsequently I often wondered if the government of Mozambique all lived on the 16th or 17th floor, disengaged from the reality below, way too high to understand the micro-dynamics, but not high enough to see the whole picture, to have a comprehensive view and knowledge of the macro-networks of this city. And then, if I thought about the whole country, I often got confused, upset. I returned to the top floor a few more times. The view from the top lost its wonder, I sought to be on the ground listening to conversations, looking at faces, diving into the urban fabric, not looking at it.

“More than a generation technically able, we need a generation able to question the technique. A youth able to rethink the country and the world. More than people ready to give answers, we need the ability to pose questions. Mozambique does not only need to walk. It needs to discover its own path in a foggy journey and a pathless world. Other people's compass does not fit; others' maps do not help. We need to invent our own north and south. We are interested in a past that is not burdened with misgivings; we are interested in a future that does not come already drawn like a financial sheet.”



Carry on driving. On your right there is the theatre Avenida, followed by the popular fair, opposite Macau restaurant. Notice the new traffic light, where road constructions are taking place. Take care not to bump into one of the workers. When the light turns green, drive through the sports park on your right, where a movie is being shot, and on your left, the new hotel VIP, Mcel headquarters, two petrol stations next to each other, office buildings, a Standard Bank branch, Chicken on the Run, Steers, KFC, a local coffee shop, a Vodacom shop. Look right to FACIM, the host of an annual national fair of commerce and services. Look left to observe the colours and forms of the post-modern building of Televisão de Moçambique. At the Robert Mugabe rotunda, carry on driving straight between two giant advertising posters for Vodacom, where you read '1 imagem vale mais que 1000 palavras', 1 image is worth more than 1000 words. You have exited 25 de Setembro Avenue.

"Slowly it becomes clear, that more technical individuals do not solve, on their own, the misery of their own nation. If a country does not have strategies turned into production of profound solutions, then all that investment will not produce the difference. If the capacities of a nation are turned towards the quick enrichment of a small elite then having more technical individuals is very irrelevant."

I went to school in FACIM. The Portuguese School of Maputo rented the space, given that the fair only occurs for one week a year. The fair consists of different buildings that belong to different companies. In my 10th grade I had classes in the Nescafe building. I was in FACIM from 1991 to 1999. I saw the forest opposite this, on the left side of the avenue, being cut down, for the sake of new office buildings, petrol stations, hotels... we used to run there during our sports class. I wonder about the policy on urban green belts in Maputo. I wonder about when, how and by whom, hydrological assessments are done. It is either a case of lack of environmental/urban planning policy, or a lack of implementation due to weak technical support or to massive corruption. Who decides about where to construct in this city?



Avenida da Marginal

Discover Maputo's bay where individuals fish peacefully, where the avenue's lamp posts carry Vocadom and Western Union's publicity. You are between the bay and the hill; drive slowly, following the gentle curves. Notice the breeze. After the petrol station on your right, stop the car at the fenced Clube Naval, where members enjoy the swimming pool, tennis and squash clubs. You have to pay to get in, or be a member. Ask to go in just to watch for one minute. Observe the boats coming in and out of the docks, people coming in and out with beautiful towels, bags and outfits, in big 4x4s; walk to the pool area noticing the middle-aged women in bikinis chatting away their Saturday morning and afternoon, the couples kissing underwater, young and old men fishing, people waiting or eating meals at the restaurant alongside. Drink from this contentment.

“We are living on a theatre stage: a vehicle is no longer a functional object. It is a passport to a status of importance, a source of vanity. The car become a reason for idolatry, something like a sanctuary, a truly promotional obsession.”

Class division. One avenue, another rhythm. Money decides whether you can gain access to Clube Naval, whether you can swim and tan, and do other things leisure-related. I 'grew up' in Naval – doing the leisure things with my parents, their friends and my friends. I still enjoy going there, sitting with my mother's friends, having intellectual talks, analysing Maputo's litter management system, the quality of tanning lotions, and deconstructing the latest literary products on the market. As I arrived after driving the whole street, I noticed it being fenced, othered from the rest of the avenue, excluding those who cannot gain access. It is a middle class club, for those who do not own pools and yet can choose the swimming pool over the polluted beach.



“It is urgent that our schools highlight humility and simplicity as positive values. Arrogance and exhibitionism are not, as it is pretended, emanations of the African culture in power. They are emanations of those who mistake the package for the content.”

Back in your car, carry on driving north. On your right, the bay seems to enlarge, while on your left houses seem to almost fall on your car. New houses, some of which are under construction, other inhabited and others paused, with unfinished structures and cement walls. Contemplate. The following buildings on your right house the shop and workshop of the handicapped association. They work in leather. Stop and visit them. They are open 365 days a year. Back on the road, observe more new houses on your left, on the hills that support Maputo’s higher neighbourhoods. When the two lanes converge, you have the Holiday Inn on your right followed by a precinct of shops and restaurants, all surrounded by art and craft vendors.

After this busy stretch you enter a new section of the avenue; you are at the beach. You can see people playing volleyball, others walking, marriage ceremonies taking place in the water, chocolates being bought and sold, coconuts being opened and drunk, tchovachitadumas being pushed, small fishing boats arriving and leaving, windsurfers dancing with the wind. After a while you see Clube Marítimo, opposite a petrol station. Turn off on the next road to your left; park immediately afterwards. It is important that you decide who is guarding your vehicle, and that you memorise his face. Leave the car empty and locked. Hold your camera tight, and make your way to the fish market of Maputo.

“Reality is that there is only one way to value ourselves: through work, through the product that we are able to make. It is important that we know how to accept this condition without complexes or shame: we are poor. Or, we have been made poor



by history. But we are also part of that history, we were also made poor by ourselves. The reasons for our current and future failures also live inside ourselves.”

Here you have many choices. You can buy your fish or seafood and have it cooked in one of the restaurants at the back of the market, you can buy them and cook them at home, not buy and just watch, or go straight to a restaurant and have their own fish or seafood cooked. If you choose to buy fish bring your own scale or use the government scale on the right inside; negotiate the price until it has dropped by 50%. If you choose to stay and eat here, walk through the market until you see all the restaurants and find one you like the looks of. Sit down and get ready to wait for at least one-and-a-half hours. Listen to the competing loud sounds of prices being negotiated and of the sound system in your restaurant; observe the colours. The whole market is in constant movement.

The fish arrives in the early afternoon. Women and men buy directly from the fishermen, who had gone to the sea very early in the morning, before sunrise. The fish and seafood are brought to the market, organised in perfect rows and piles. You can buy prawns, live crabs, crayfish, calamari, and all different kinds of fish, like pescada, carapau, vermelhão, garopa, serra and espada. The market remains open until around 9 pm, at which time the vendors start packing away their goods. The restaurants remain open until the late hours of the evening. The vendors are back with the same fish and seafood early in the morning, at around 7 am. At around 3 pm new fresh goods arrive.

On your way out, find the kid who guarded your car. The car guarding service is more expensive here, so be prepared to pay more. Go back to the avenue, turn left and carry on driving north. As you drive further you come across a residential neighbourhood, Bairro do Triunfo, with big houses and sand roads, opposite the beach. After a while, you can see Game on your left, while on your right there are people walking to and



from the beach. The traffic thickens, drivers slow down. Observe kids and adults resting on the beach, some playing soccer. Pay attention to maize growing on your left; think of urban agriculture. The following stretch of the road has small rustic bars, opposite vendors selling furniture, clothes and other Mozambican things. Drive through, carefully observing the uprooted trees on the right, the sand flowing from the beach towards the left edge of the road, opposite the big houses, in permanent and degrading erosion.

During the summer, individuals visit the beach. There are takeaway trailers, chickens being barbecued, there are hundreds of cars driving towards Costa do Sol. It's summertime, the schools are on holiday and the beach becomes full. At low tide, it becomes even more populated. Individuals from the low and middle classes walk on the sand watching for broken bottles and old cans; others fearlessly dive into the ocean's populated waters. The summer brings life to this avenue; from September to March, each Saturday and Sunday feels like a New Year's Eve. The seasonality of Maputo.

The road ends at Costa do Sol, a restaurant located in a colonial building, owned by Greeks. It's normally full. It faces the beach, and the island, where once a prison functioned, during the colonial period. Stop your car, choose whether you want to walk on the beach, buy a drink from one of the street vendors or have a coffee at Costa do Sol.

The tourists drive along the avenue northwards to Costa do Sol and its famous seafood, where seated in this immensely colonial building while waiting for prawns and grilled fish they can observe 'the others', the population that seasonally floods the beaches of Maputo. But are 'the others' also tourists in



their own city? What does this journey through the city and to the city, in taxis, buses and uncles' cars represent for them? What does the beach of Maputo represent in the imagination of those who frequent it?

“But the strength to overcome this historical condition also resides inside ourselves. We will know, as we have known, how to achieve certainties that we are producers of our destiny. We will have more and more pride in being who we are: Mozambican constructors of a time and of a place where we are born every day. That’s why it is worth it to accept taking not only the seven dirty shoes, but all the shoes that delay our collective march. Because the truth is one: it is more worth walking barefoot than falling with other people’s shoes.”

Once you are back in your car, u-turn and travel southwards, I can assure you you will find infinite new details, and infinite urban beauty.

After driving this long road I am content to stop and look at the sunset from inside the car. I feel I know Maputo better and I think of what my understanding of this city would be if I travelled each road of this capital incessantly, looking for its rhythms and networks. The journey gave depth to a lifelong conversation with this, my city.

Vocabularies of the Visceral and Expressions of Multiple Practices

Hobbs/Neustetter

Artists Statement and Description of Installation

DURING SITE RESEARCH FOR AN URBAN REGENERATION project on the border of Hillbrow, Stephen Hobbs and Marcus Neustetter were confronted by two francophone immigrants who warned them that entering Hillbrow with a camera was not safe. Drawing their inspiration from this encounter Stephen Hobbs and Marcus Neustetter (for their contribution to the Dak'Art Biennale 'Off' Programme) interviewed a group of Senegalese immigrants asking them to draw maps of Dakar, which Hobbs/Neustetter would use to navigate the city during their two week residence in May 2006. The culminating exhibition at the Ker Thioissane residency space in Dakar comprised a series of wall-map-paintings and photographic stills projections that reflected on the interactions and engagements resulting from navigating Dakar on foot and visiting colleagues and friends of the Senegalese immigrants.

Hobbs/Neustetter's preoccupation with barriers to communication - in this case observed through the racial and ethnic transformation of neighborhoods such as Berea, Joubert Park and Hillbrow has prompted their investigation to examine perceptions of foreignness in their own city, ownership in terms of space and territory and degrees of belonging.

Hobbs/ Neustetter's project has for themselves and for the Senegalese community served as a socially engaged process whereby engagement through interviews and drawings have been employed to produce a comparative analysis of the two cities and at the same time cross substantial psychological barriers inherent in contemporary South African society.

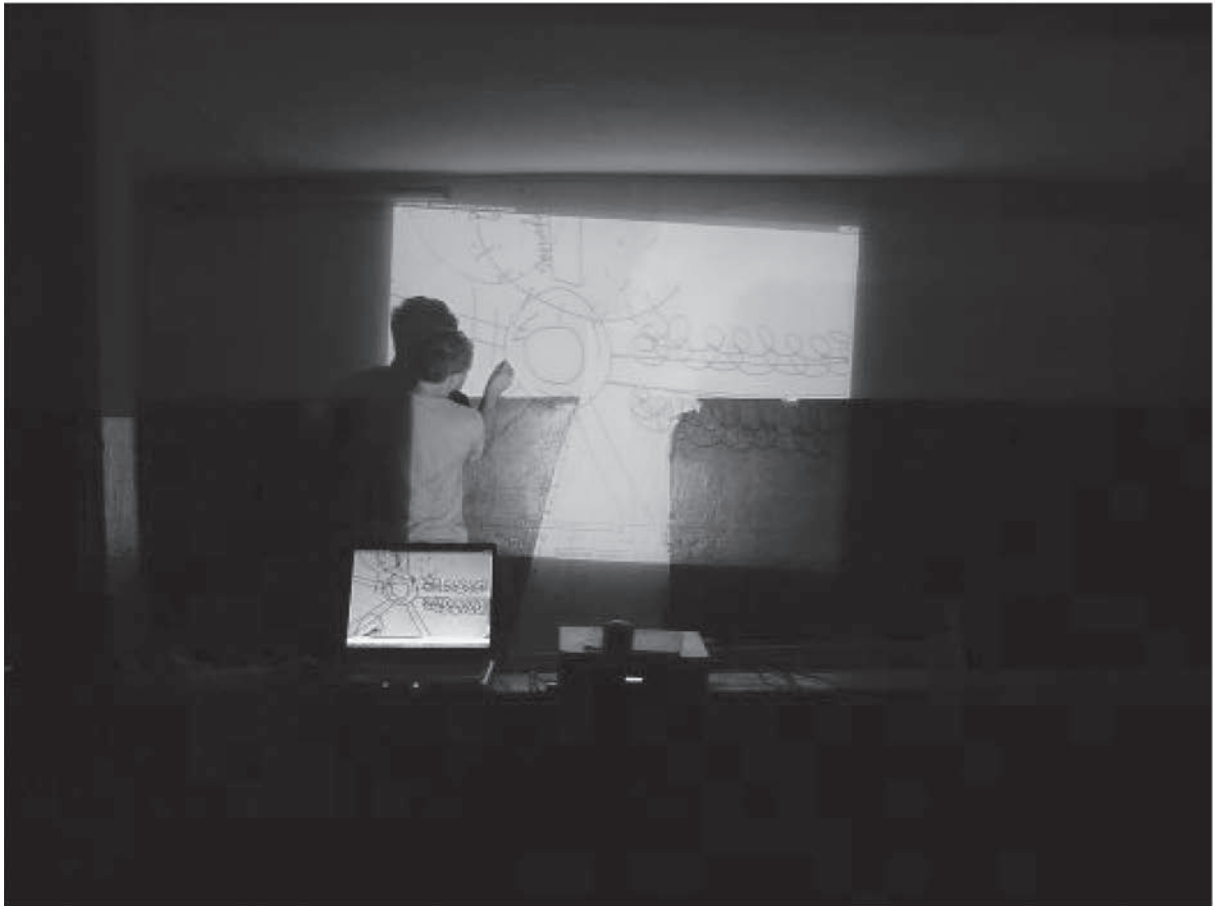
Since its return to Johannesburg, the project has been featured at the 'Sightings / Siteings of the African City' conference held at the Wits Institute of Social and Economic Research in June, a project page was commissioned for the September 2006 issue of Art South Africa. More recently an audio-visual presentation and action-reflection session on the comparative findings between Johannesburg and Dakar was held at Chez Ntemba, a Congolese night club in Hillbrow, for the Senegalese immigrants and the project was included in The Colour Line at the Jack Shainman Gallery, NY, Curated by Odili Donald Odita, (July 2007).

Installation for University of Johannesburg Art Gallery

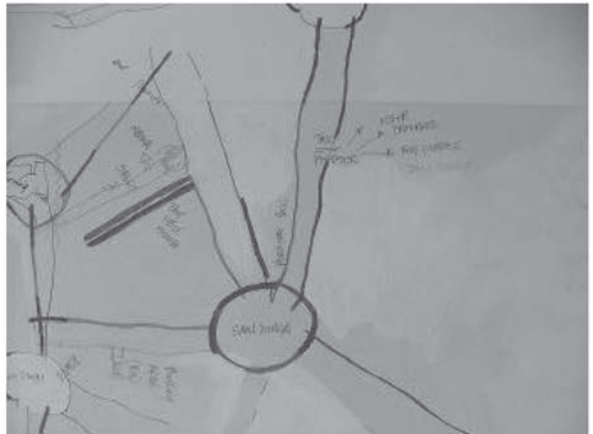
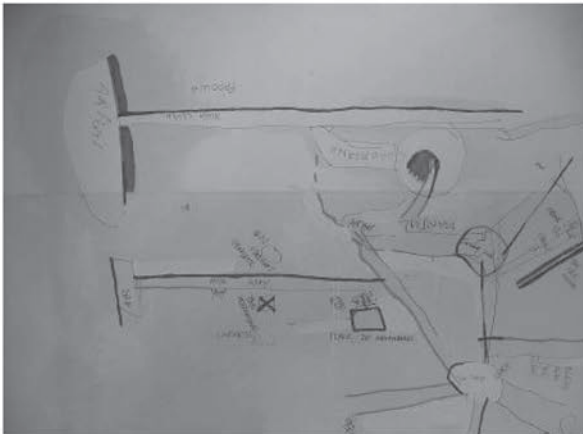
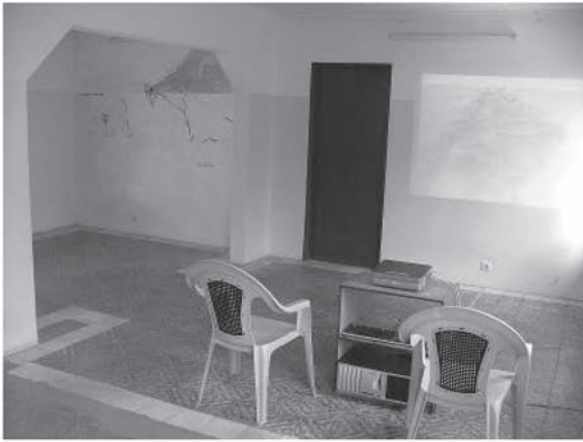
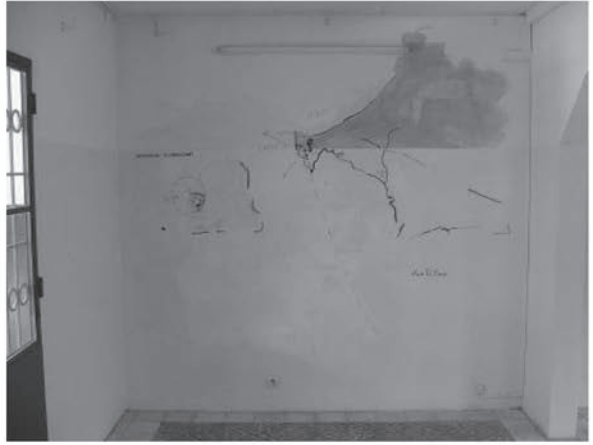
Given that the project (to date) has been influenced and formed by its various stages; the residence in Dakar, conference presentations, publication, social gatherings and presentations, a wide range of associated documentation (photography, video, interviews and drawings) has been gathered. The project aims to find its resolution in an installation that combines these elements in a more contemporary exhibition installation. While short video sequences will serve as contextual data to support the experiential aspects of the two cities, the main visual dialogue would be between the hand drawn maps, actual maps and the photography done at the time of discovering Dakar in relation to the drawings used to navigate the city.

Hence the viewer would be situated in material that juxtaposes a reading of Dakar and Johannesburg through personal experience of the spaces informed by the manner in which Senegalese immigrants have made Johannesburg home as well as their specific memory-recall of Dakar.





Work In Progress and Installation
at Kër Thioussane Media Lab, Dakar





Hobbs/Neustetter - UrbaNET - Hillbrow/Dakar/Hillbrow
University of Johannesburg, Kuns Sentrum July 2007







Detail of map showing proposed routes for walk from the gallery to Hillbrow





Documentation of walk from Art Gallery to Hillbrow and back to Art Gallery, Saturday 14 July.





Planning for Chaos

Urban Regeneration and the Struggle to Formalise Trolley-Pushing Activity in Downtown Johannesburg

Ismail Farouk



Joubert Park presents a particular context of the Johannesburg inner city in decline. Situated centrally in the downtown area, Joubert Park boasts two large taxi interchanges and a tightly locked street grid pattern, which has resulted in extremely high densities of mini-bus taxi traffic on the roads.



All the economic activity in the area is orientated towards the taxi industry. There are a large number of motor spares shops specialising in cheap taxi spares and a diverse range of informal motor-related services, offered predominantly by Mozambican motor mechanics. Specialised services ranging from window tinting to auto-electrical work are all carried out on the sidewalks in direct contravention of the city by-laws.



Lately, Zulu women have been cooking traditional Mozambican food on the street corners to cater for the large numbers of Mozambican mechanics working in the area. At every intersection men approach the taxi drivers selling cigarettes and sweets. Outside the taxi ranks, groups of Zimbabwean and Mozambican luggage porters (trolley pushers) wait for customers requiring luggage-carrying assistance.



The city is faced with the challenge of integrating the taxi industry and its associated economic activities into its wider development objectives. Its strategy thus far has been to develop new infrastructure – Central to Joburg's plan for easing much of the taxi traffic congestion has been the introduction of a new BRT (bus rapid transit) system. The pilot BRT project is located in Joubert Park, where local taxi associations have been complaining, as they fear the BRT will result in increased competition for customers and space.



The introduction of new infrastructure is in keeping with local government's agenda to support the process of transformation in the inner city. Whilst it is acknowledged that new infrastructure is required by the city, the process thus far has been geared towards generic plans, which support the gentrification of the city. There seems to be a single-minded focus on physical infrastructure upgrades and a lack of institutional support for local organisations. The city regeneration plans also disregard migrants and the informal sector, who are not considered part of the desired future in the re-imagining of the city.



Trolley Works is an innovative artist-led project exploring the potential for the arts to complete a community asset-mapping project in Joubert Park. The objective of the Trolley Works project is to develop a comprehensive profile of the informal trolley pushers and related economic activities in the greater Joubert Park area. By mapping the informal economic activities and the organically generated diversity, the project aims to bring about awareness of the potential role of migrant-controlled business in contributing towards the economic and cultural regeneration of the inner city of Johannesburg.



The Trolley Works project was initiated with the primary aim of providing trolley pushers with a legal trolley alternative to the stolen shopping carts currently being used on the streets. A major problem associated with trolley-pushing activity has been victimisation by the police. Every time a raid occurs, trolley pushers are fined R300 and their trolleys are confiscated. Lately, raids have been occurring with increasing frequency and trolley pushers are being detained in prison for a seemingly harmless economic activity.



In total four custom-built trolley types are being developed as part of an active experiment on Johannesburg's roads. In addition to designing these custom-built trolleys for the legalisation of the activity, the project also seeks to develop trolley pusher-led guided tours of the downtown area. The guided tours are seen as a practical strategy to sustain the project as well as a means to address the need to walk in the downtown area of Johannesburg. Walking in Johannesburg is strongly linked to class, race, crime, fear and paranoia. The proposed tours attempt to address these challenges, whilst getting people thinking and contributing to a conversation related to the politics of public space in the city.



Four trolley pushers from the Joubert Park area have been selected to work as tour guides and as field researchers. The research team is currently conducting interviews and surveys aimed at providing demographic information about the trolley pushers in the area. In addition, they are also carrying out daily mapping exercises concentrating on spatially locating the various informal economic activities in public space.



On the morning of 3 February 2009, our research team counted 104 trolley pushers in the Joubert Park area. Our study shows that 50% of the trolley pushers were of Zimbabwean origin, 40% of Mozambican origin, whilst South African trolley pushers made up only 10% of the total. Trolley pusher groups occupy almost every corner of Joubert Park. The groups prefer waiting at known taxi stops, where they are likely to find customers requiring luggage assistance. There are approximately 20 trolley pusher groups operating within a 10-block radius in Joubert Park. Group sizes vary from as few as 2 members to as many as 20 members per group. The groups are formed through informal social agreements where routes of operation are agreed upon. Theoretically, anybody can become a trolley pusher; however the activity is exclusively male-dominated.



Theft of supermarket trolleys is a highly organised business. The trolleys are supplied by gangs made up of Zimbabwean youth, who utilise hired trucks and vans to transport stolen trolleys from shopping centres to the downtown area where they are sold on the streets. The trolley pushers are not directly responsible for the theft of trolleys. However, everyone is aware of the pick-up points for stolen trolleys in the area. During quiet periods, stolen trolleys are sold for as little as R50, whilst they can sell for as much as R200 during busy periods. The response from supermarket chain stores has been to set up a special task force for recovering stolen trolleys off the streets. Weekly raids ensure that all the visible trolleys in the area are confiscated. Consequently, the trolley pushers have devised a system whereby trolleys are locked to immovable property on the sidewalk. During raids trolleys are also moved off the streets and are parked in the basement spaces of high-rise buildings.



Increasingly, trolley pushers find themselves without any housing, and some can be found sleeping on the sidewalks during the day. Most turn to substance abuse as a means to escape the realities of poverty. The trolley pushers of Joubert Park need access to basic services. They need counselling, access to health care, better nutrition, stable housing and a more secure means of income. There are no city-run programmes aimed at young adults in Joubert Park, while most non-profit service providers in the area are struggling with issues of sustainability and are generally stretched to capacity. Respite occasionally comes from faith-based organisations through weekly feeding schemes.



Standing outside Park Central Filling Station in Joubert Park, trolley pusher Hansa Monsaka complains bitterly about his inability to earn enough money. Besides paying the Metro Police fines every time he is caught with a stolen trolley, Monsaka needs to pay rental for his room. He is also expected to send his son to school in Johannesburg, as well as send money back home to Zimbabwe.



During the month of January, Monsaka struggled to earn as little as R50 per day as things were slow on the streets. Business in February seemed to be no better. The increasing number of trolley pushers on the streets is not helping the situation as competition is leading to conflict. The criminalisation of the activity seems to be making an impact on the numbers of trolley pushers operating on the street during the week. The police are known to come around on Friday morning raids which often result in weekend detention. Keen to continue their work on busy Friday mornings, the trolley pushers have resorted to carrying people's luggage on their shoulders as a strategy to avoid arrest.



A recent protest action against the criminalisation of trolley-pushing in Joubert Park demonstrated that the trolley pushers are united in their struggles against police harassment. During the protest, they addressed members of the police force and highlighted the fact that they were creating jobs and were not mere criminals.

Despite their common stance against the criminalisation of the activity, not all trolley pushers are in favour of a representative trolley association body. Trolley pushers working at established taxi stop areas are particularly reluctant to join a representative body as they are afraid that formalisation may result in a loss of 'turf'. Despite this, weekly meetings with the trolley pushers have been organised with the aim of interrogating a suitable institutional form for them.

The Trolleyworks.org project was initiated by Johannesburg-based artist Ismail Farouk as part of the Sylt Quelle Cultural Award for Southern Africa 2008. The cross-disciplinary award, launched by the Foundation Kunst:raum Sylt Quelle and the Goethe-Institut, invited proposals from writers, artists, choreographers, musicians, filmmakers and others in Southern Africa, focusing on practitioners that engage relevant social issues in their work. The first phase of the Trolleyworks project began in December 2008, and is proposed to run until May 2009.

D.I.Y.

Doing It Yourself. Doing It Myself. Doing It My Way.

Lesley Naa Norle Lokko





*'I must have been almost crazy
to start out alone like that on my bicycle
pedalling into the tropics
carrying a medicine for which no one had found the disease
and hoping I would make it on time.'*

Richard Sheldon, *The Tattooed Desert*

WHAT FOLLOWS IS A SHORT ACCOUNT of a year-long architectural project that took place on my return to Ghana after some twenty years spent abroad. In many ways, it should have been the project *par excellence* – I'm an architect, after all. My own home, designed and built exactly the way I wanted it, with materials carefully selected for their cultural and environmental significance, its form carefully culled from history and precedent, uniquely tailored to fit. No ordinary house – made of mud, modern, precisely engineered, carefully hand-crafted – a one-off prototype in contemporary African urbanism. A lesson, in other words. Armed with a PhD from London University and a decade's worth of teaching, writing and thinking about 'race' and its relationship to architecture, I knew exactly what I wanted to build. The title of my dissertation? *Out of Africa: Race, Space, Place*. I no longer recall the full or exact wording of the abstract but there's a desire in there to find 'an appropriate language of space, form and place that speaks to the African experience'. A Grand Design. Like Sheldon, I started out alone, pedalling (or flying) into the tropics, carrying the plans of a house which no one understood, hoping I would build it on time (and within budget). I could not have been more wrong. Here's what happened, and possibly why.

Some background first. Depending on whom you speak to, Accra is a mid-sized West African city of some three or four or five million people, ranked joint 107th (with Curitiba, Brazil) out of the top 475 Urban Conglomerations of the World. Figures vary partly because there hasn't been an accurate census for almost a decade. No matter. It's crowded, growing more so by the year and, for the most part, it's (seemingly) unplanned. My return a few years ago is fairly typical of Ghanaians of a certain age and background. Since the late 90s, traffic into and out of Ghana has grown exponentially in two quite distinct ways – coming back *into* the country after a significant amount of time spent abroad are middle-class, educated Ghanaians (like myself), returning with modest capital, big plans and rose-coloured spectacles. Almost simultaneously and in exactly inverse proportion, working-class Ghanaians without fancy degrees but with great ambition are leaving for Europe or the United States in order to forge a better life. Two contrary flows that say more about the political and economic changes of this mid-sized West African country than most of the IMF and World Bank-sponsored reports that I've ever read.





Accra is a spectacularly ugly city and I say this with loving conviction. There is beauty here, great beauty, but it lies in the detail, not the overall. Flashes of colour, foliage, the spectacular density of urban life; street signs, slogans, humour . . . all the usual clichés abound. There is very little public space (at least in the European sense of the word ‘public’) – no grand boulevards, no wide open spaces, few parks and even fewer promenades. Public space tends to be retail space – open-air markets, roadside stalls, even the sea front has been colonised by vendors. Not so different from Koolhaas’ assertion that ‘City = Mall’, but differently configured and designed, perhaps. In the past decade, the city has spread outwards in every direction save south (the sea’s in the way). Less suburban sprawl than urban stain, exceptionally poor planning and non-existent transportation regulations have turned this once rather sleepy, handsome city (in a sort of dubious ‘colonial-retro’ kind of way) into a malignant, miniature Lagos. On most days. It’s quicker, if not cooler, to walk. With that in mind, I chose a site that, whilst fairly expensive, was relatively close to the city centre – the airport, the shopping district (there’s really only one), my parents’ home, etc. At that time, the South African-financed, -designed and -built shopping mall (there’s only one) hadn’t yet been built – more on that anon. Mindful of the horror stories surrounding land title in Accra, I chose to buy in a development which made the process painless, and quick. Six weeks, from start to finish – something of a record. The developers could not have been nicer. I made a nice, clean white model; submitted nice, clean plans on large sheets of glossy white paper, carefully omitted the word ‘mud’ and quickly won them over with my nice, clean white Modernist box. Permission was duly granted and within weeks, we were ready to start.

My contractor (half Swiss, half Ghanaian) was both understanding and excited, at least in the beginning. When he found out I intended to use mud, not concrete blocks, less so. He excused himself from the masonry on the grounds that he’d never built anything out of mud – not even a sand-castle – and I had to look elsewhere. Help arrived in the form of a team of ‘mud-masons’ from the Volta Region, to the east of the capital. Contractor A (for clarity’s sake, I’ll call them Team Switzerland) dug the foundations, a scarily efficient operation involving trucks, pay-loaders, digging equipment and a few walkie-talkies. Team Volta arrived a few weeks later with a couple of trowels and an old mosquito-net door which they used to sieve the laterite soil (used in making the mud). It was surreal. I marched around on site with my models and my drawings (by now no longer white, of course) and then found out that few, if any, of the masons could read. No problem. They knew what they were doing, even if I didn’t. With absolutely no experience of building anything (not even a sand-castle), it was I who couldn’t make the connection between the structure slowly unfolding (or arising, rather) in front of my eyes and my drawings. I called in an architect friend (a ‘proper’ architect, not a teacher-architect) and begged her to help. She did and between the two of us, we managed to ascertain that all was as it should be. Then she went on leave.





In the weeks that followed, there were moments of terrifying incomprehension. To begin with, I'd decided upon cavity walls on the assumption that they would act in the tropics the way I'd heard they acted in the UK – as insulation against the heat. All well and good. Of course, I'd drawn the plans differently. Team Volta thought it a supreme waste of time and effort – and that was before we'd reached lintel level. Team Switzerland stood back, looking on smugly as I tried – in vain – to draw what I thought *ought* to happen when the lintels (made of concrete and therefore the responsibility of Team Switzerland) met the mud brick walls. Disastrous. We cast and re-cast . . . and re-cast again. Fortunately, before casting for the third time, Christina ('proper' architect) came back from holiday and peace was restored. The list of like incidents is somewhat repetitive – from the installation of the windows ('Madam, you want to use louvres? But they're so 'colo' – meaning, I think, colonial, old-fashioned) to the polished concrete floor ('Madam, what kind of a floor is that? Don't you like to have some tiles?') what *did* become apparent fairly rapidly was the complete absence of a universal language of design. Where I wanted things straight, linear, lined-up, the builders (plumbers, electricians, plasterers, everyone) forgot their spirit levels – or, indeed, had never used one – and things were screwed in place or simply hammered into the mud walls at a variety of mis-matched angles. Where I wanted *looseness* – in the landscaping, for example, trees were planted in perfectly neat little rows. The plants that I had spent a month carefully selecting for their variety of colour and texture were grouped according to some other aesthetic criteria (or perhaps not?) and planted accordingly. We dug up the garden several times over.

But in the end, bar a few mind-bogglingly horrific mistakes, it all came together. We polished the polished concrete floor by hand; resealed the bathroom tiles after the masons had stripped off the glaze with acid (acid?); we took out the windows, turned them upside down and put them back. We had a reason to get it done on time. The UK *Guardian* had sent out a photographer to take pictures of the completed house. Stress oozing from my pores, I sacked the foreman at the eleventh hour and cleaned the place myself. Beth Evans was the first person to sleep in it, not me. Beth loved the house; so did the *Guardian*. No one knew the cost of getting it finished on time. I suspect that's the way of most projects, whether they're in Ghana or not. (I wouldn't know since I immediately gave up architecture and I now write novels for a living.) What did I learn? Quite a lot, actually, and not what I expected to learn. I still know nothing about foundations and slabs and how walls meet lintels. I understand possibly less than I'd care to admit to about electricity and how to earth a socket, or a whole house, for that matter. But that sort of stuff pales into insignificance when I think about the bigger-picture issues that the project threw up.

When people talk (in West Africa at least) about the 'gap', they're not talking about the US clothing store or the gap between the train and the platform (as in 'mind the gap, please, sir!') at almost every London Underground station or the gap between one's teeth. Since the dominant paradigm in West Africa is development, what everyone's talking about is the conceptual or metaphysical gap between 'developed' and





‘developing’; between ‘First World’ and ‘Third’; between Europe and Africa, black and white – us and *them*, if you want to be blatant about such things (and most ex-pats here are.) Almost irrespective of who you are, daily life in Accra is very much taken up with the problems of negotiating the gap – instinctively, intuitively, deliberately, knowingly or otherwise. With the luxury of distance and a more or less comfortable home, it comes to me now that bridging that gap was/is the real truth of the project all along. To make a place/space/home that was ‘both/and’ not ‘either/or’. A cliché, perhaps, but true. Both African and European; traditional and modern; luxurious and sustainable (stretching it a little, perhaps, but you get my drift . . .); a home, in other words, that is both ‘here’ and ‘there’. That’s the peculiar beauty of architecture – it fixes ‘there’ in ways that other disciplines can’t. Hopes, dreams, desires, aspirations (and I’m not talking here about the material kind) get *built*. In mud, stone, brick, steel. Space is conceived, drawn, planned, formed. Boundaries erected; lines made in the sand. But this peculiar beauty hides something else. Unlike, say, language (which is the ‘other’ material in which I work), architecture cannot improvise. Anyone who’s spent any time in English-speaking West Africa will understand the power of pidgin – that créolised, bastardised language, perhaps not unlike Cape Afrikaans, which shifts, moves, subverts, invents . . . so fast you can’t catch it. New words, phrases and expressions slip in and out – hybrids are formed almost on a daily basis which *really* speak to the experience of trying to bridge the gap. Within hours of Obama’s victory, young men on the streets of Accra were seen fist-bumping one another with the expression, ‘Obama, how far?’ ‘How’re you, mate?’, in other words. ‘Obama’ is now a by-word for ‘mate’. It’s fast and furious and often very, very funny. But architecture exhibits no such readiness. I’m still trying to work out for myself whether this is a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ thing. If the paradigmatic emphasis in developing countries is on *closing* the gap, becoming less like ‘us’ and more like ‘them’ (which, if you *really* break it down, is pretty much what’s on offer) which are the disciplines likely to succeed, and which of those will not? Humour and irony are deployed on a daily basis in Ghana to deflect the pressures of modernity. Architecture seems designed (forgive the pun) to embrace them. Somewhere between these two models, one of fluidity and adaptation, the other of place and fixity, lies a path. Building my house – out of mud, one room only, with louvres – touched upon that path momentarily. My training quickly shooed me off.

I’m not sure *anyone* – Team Switzerland, Team Volta, the developers, family or friends, *Guardian* readers or curious passers-by – gets the references to Mies, to Neutra, to the Bauhaus, Derrida, Bhaba or Baudrillard. In fact, I can pretty much swear to it that they don’t. I self-deprecatingly sometimes refer to it as a ‘simple mud box’, as if its form has anything to do with the ease of conception or construction. There’s nothing simple about it – and this is no reflection on the project’s worth or success. It’s simply a statement about intention, perhaps even ambition. Five years after completion, I’m only slowly beginning to grasp what it is I’ve built. Yes, it is a mud box and no, it isn’t European. Is it African? No, not really. Well, maybe just a little bit. Yes, a bit. But *which* bit? That age-old unanswerable question rears its head. Where does Europe begin and Africa end? Maybe the house *is* both. Or neither. Maybe that’s the point?

Contributors

Chris Abani's prose includes *Song For Night* (Akashic, 2007), *The Virgin of Flames* (Penguin, 2007), *Becoming Abigail* (Akashic, 2006), *GraceLand* (FSG, 2004), and *Masters of the Board* (Delta, 1985). His poetry collections are *Hands Washing Water* (Copper Canyon, 2006), *Dog Woman* (Red Hen, 2004), *Daphne's Lot* (Red Hen, 2003), and *Kalakuta Republic* (Saqi, 2001). He is a Professor at the University of California, Riverside and the recipient of the PEN USA Freedom-to-Write Award, the Prince Claus Award, a Lannan Literary Fellowship, a California Book Award, a Hurston/Wright Legacy Award, a PEN Beyond the Margins Award, the PEN Hemingway Book Prize & a Guggenheim Award.

Akin Adesokan is Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at Indiana University, Bloomington. He received his Ph.D. in 2005 from Cornell University with a dissertation entitled "Worlds that Flourish: Postnational Aesthetics in West African Videofilms, African Cinema, and Black Diasporic Writings." He began his writing career as a journalist and critic. In 1996, he won the Association of Nigerian Authors' Prize for Fiction for his first novel, *Roots in the Sky*, which was published in 2004. In 1998 he received the PEN West Freedom-to-Write Award, honouring 'writers who have produced work in the face of extreme adversity and have defended freedom of expression and fought against censorship'. He also co-edits *Glendora Review: An African Quarterly on the Arts* and has published chapters in *African Drama and Performance* and *The People's Poet: Emerging Perspectives on Niyi Osundare*. His areas of research include 20th century African and African American/African Diaspora literatures and cultures; global postcoloniality; African cinema, and contemporary global cinemas; nonfictional prose; and cultural theory.

Jose Eduardo Agualusa: Angolan novelist and filmmaker. He is the author of eight novels, including *Creole*, and most recently, *The Man Who Sold the Past*. He is currently developing a novel and a film script entitled *My Father's Wives*. He lives in Rio de Janeiro, Luanda and Lisbon.

Gabeba Baderoon is a South African poet, and the author of three poetry collections, *The Dream in the Next Body* (2005), *The Museum of Ordinary Life* (2005) and *A Hundred Silences* (2006).

A Hundred Silences was a finalist for the 2007 Olive Schreiner Award and the 2007 University of Johannesburg Prize for Creative Writing. In 2005, Baderoon received the DaimlerChrysler Award for South African Poetry and held the Guest Writer Fellowship at the Nordic Africa Institute in Sweden. In 2008, she was a Fellow of the Civitella Ranieri Foundation in Italy and the inaugural Wits Humanities Writer in Residence at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa. www.gabeba.com

Valentine Cascarino is a Cameroonian journalist apparently based in Johannesburg – no-one really knows. His work's been published in the *Sunday Times*, *Mail & Guardian* and others. He also co-wrote the novel, *Finding Mr Madini* (1999).

Teju Cole is a writer and photographer currently based in New York. He has worked as a cartoonist, dishwasher, lecturer, gardener and haematology researcher. His writing has appeared in various journals in Nigeria, South Africa and the US. He's the author of *Every Day is for the Thief*, a novel.

Vanessa Ulia Dantas e Sá; born in Maputo in 1981. She completed an undergraduate degree in Social Anthropology and Environmental and Geographical Science and a post-graduation in Social and Environment Impact Assessment at the University of Cape Town. Her MA, at the University of Witwatersrand in Human Geography, looks at issues of citizenship, participation and world heritage in Mozambique Island. Currently, she is working with the business of words and language, having opened a translation agency in Cape Town, and continues to write about the texture of human landscapes in urban localities.

Nuruddin Farah is a Somali novelist currently living in Cape Town. He is the author of a dozen novels, several plays and essays, and has won a number of prestigious literary prizes.

Ismail Farouk holds a Bachelor's degree in Fine Art and a Master's degree in Geography from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. His work explores creative responses to racial, social, political and economic injustice. Using a variety of media and tactics, Farouk aims to empower and mobilize the urban poor in the struggle for social and spatial justice.

Salifou Lindou & Christian Hanussek:

Salifou Lindou is an artist working in painting, sculpture, installation and video. Born in Fouban, Cameroon in 1965 he currently lives in Douala. Besides canvass, he uses sheets of iron, sometimes burned, as a medium to provide visions of the urban machine. Some of his installations feature cars or motorbikes with grind off surfaces. He is part of the artists collective *Cercle Kapsiki*, founded in 1998 in Douala, which has organised artistic interventions in public space like *hors les murs* (Douala 1998) and *scénographies urbaines* (Strasbourg 2000, Douala 2002/2003 and Alexandria 2004).

Christian Hanussek is an artist, writer and curator currently based in Berlin. Born in 1953 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, he studied art and art-theory at Staedelschule, Frankfurt. and ateliers '63, Haarlem, The Netherlands. Since 1978 he exhibited his art, which often combines painting and film or video and created some permanent installations. In recent years he has published several texts on art from Africa and in 2005/6 directed his project 'meanwhile in Africa...' which included exhibitions, seminars and discussions.

The collective Lindou/Hanussek has worked together since 1997; exhibitions:
2007, *Alt. Délices du Wouri*, Foerderkoje (c/o Fuersr Pükler), Berlin
2008, *émotions partagées*, Ecopole, Dakar
2009, *émotions partagées*, doual'art, Douala
2009, *Effervescence*, K-factory, Douala
2009, *avant c'était avant*, kunstraum muenchen, Munich

The Trinity Session: Directed by Stephen Hobbs and Marcus Neustetter, the Trinity Session is a contemporary art production team that investigates the relationships between art and business, collaborative practice and network development. Hobbs' personal artistic interest is in the urban environment and public art interventions and Neustetter's in the electronic arts and growing virtual communities. The Trinity Session is strongly defined by its exchanges with Johannesburg, in relation to Africa and similar first world - third world contexts. This position determines their attitude to local and global debates, networks and partnerships with a view to the survival and sustainability of the visual arts industries.

Allan Kolski Horwitz lives in Johannesburg where he makes art, politics and hedonism function without creating mind/body overload. He's a founding member of the Botsotso Jesters, a poetry collective, and the editor of *Botsotso*, a literary journal.

Ashraf Jamal teaches Art History and Theory at Rhodes University. He is the author of *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa* (Unisa/Brill), the co-author of *Art in South Africa: The Future Present* (David Phillip/New Africa Books), and the co-editor of *Indian Ocean Studies: Social, Cultural, Political Perspectives* (Routledge). He is also an award winning fiction writer.

Rustum Kozain is a poet and freelance editor based in Cape Town. He won the 2007 Olive Schreiner Prize for his collection of poems *This Carting Life*. He blogs at www.groundwork.wordpress.com.

J C Lanquetin is a scenographer and artist based in Paris. He has been working and touring extensively for theatre (Philip Boulay, Guy Regis Junior...) and for contemporary dance (Opiyo Okach, Faustin Linyekula, Augusto Cuvilas...) in Europe and overseas. Since 2006 he has been developing a project about fashion, *la sape*, in Kinshasa, which has been staged in 2008 in Bern (PROGR, 2006), Kinshasa (2006), in the streets of Jo'burg and at the Drill Hall (invited by The Joubert Park Project and the French Institute in South Africa, 2008). He is also founding member (with Francois Duconseille) of the Urban Scenographies project. After Douala, Alexandria and Kinshasa this residency project took place in March 2009 in Jo'burg (co organised with The JPP). Lanquetin is head of department and teacher at the Strasbourg Decorative School of Art. www.eternalnetwork.org/jcl - www.eternalnetwork.org/scenographiesurbaines

Lesley Lokko trained as an architect, taught and practiced in the US, UK and South Africa for a decade and then chucked it all in to become a best-selling novelist. Her debut novel, *Sundowners*, was published in 2004 and was a *Guardian* Top 40 novel; her recent novel, *Bitter Chocolate*, was on the WH Smith bestseller charts for 3 months; and her latest novel, *Rich Girl, Poor Girl*, partly set in Zimbabwe, is out in June 2009. She designed her own home in Accra, Ghana, which you can see on her website (www.lesleylokko.com). She splits her time between Accra, London and Johannesburg.

Dominique Malaquais is a historian of contemporary African cultures. She sits on the editorial board of *Politique Africaine* and is Associate Editor of *Chimurenga*.

Jyoti Mistry is a filmmaker and Associate Professor at the University of the Witwatersrand's Department of Film and Television in Johannesburg; She's on the editorial board of *Wespennest*, a literary and cultural journal, and served on the executive committee of the National Film and Video Foundation in South Africa from 2003-2006.

Fiona Moolla is a lecturer at the University of the Western Cape and a PhD candidate at the University of Cape Town. Her thesis, which is close to completion, explores the novels of Somali writer, Nuruddin Farah.

Annie Paul is a writer and critic based at the University of the West Indies, Mona, where she is head of the Publications Section at the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies. She is Associate Editor of *Small Axe* and was one of the founding editors of the original *Caribbean Review of Books*. Paul has been published in international journals and magazines such as *Art Journal*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Wasafiri*, *Callaloo*, and *Bomb*. She has also contributed to Documenta11; the AICA 2000 International Congress & Symposium at the Tate Gallery of Modern Art, Bankside, London; Meridien Masterpieces, BBC World Service; Dialogos Iberoamericanos (Valencia, Spain) and to forums sponsored by inIVA (Institute of International Visual Art, London). Paul blogs at <http://anniepaulactivevoice.blogspot.com>

Achal Prabhala is a journalist and activist living in Bangalore. His writing has appeared in *Transition*, *Bidoun* and *Outlook India*, and most recently in *Johannesburg*, *The Elusive Metropolis*, a collection of essays about the city. He is also editor of *Civil Lines*, a literary journal out of Delhi, and contributing editor of *Chimurenga*.

Karen Press is a poet and editor based in Cape Town. She's co-founder of the Buchu Books collective, and contributing editor of *Chimurenga*.

Vyjayanthi Rao is Assistant Professor of Anthropology and International Affairs at the New School for Social Research. She currently has two book projects in development, to be titled, *Ruins and Recollections: the Heritage of Modernization in a South Asian Context* and *Infra-City: Catastrophic Urbanisms in Post-Industrial Mumbai*.

Tsuba Ka 23, a Pan-African collective of new media, word and note artists. To contact the crew, email tsubaka23@gmail.com and watch the Space for Pan-African Research, Creation and Knowledge (SPARCK)

Jeremy Weate is a philosopher and consultant based in Abuja, Nigeria. He's the author of the best-selling children's book *A Young Person's Guide to Philosophy*, which has been translated into 9 languages. He is also the Managing Director of Lagos' first online guide: Lagos Live. With his partner Bibi Bakare-Yusuf he runs a publishing company called Cassava Republic Press. He is working on two long term writing projects, on memory and invisibility. He blogs at <http://naijablog.blogspot.com>

James Yuma, born and raised in Kisangani (Democratic Republic of Congo), holds a Ph.D. in French Language and Literature as well as a Master's in Film Production from Boston University. He also holds a bachelor's degree in Psychology from the Université de Kisangani. He is currently a consultant and travels extensively to Kenya and Congo. His publications include: *Bagraines*, a collection of short-stories published in Paris by L'Harmattan, in 1995; *Discussion sur la méthode des témoignages*, published in Brussels in the Cahiers du CEDAF, nos. 5-6, 1986; and *Aube nouvelle à Mobo*, a script for the graphic novel drawn by the Congolese artist Barly Baruti. He is presently working with Barly Baruti on another three-volume graphic novel set in Stanleyville (Kisangani) in 1964. His interest is in cultural studies with Congo as his area of research.

Launch issue:
Pan-African Practices

Featuring words and images by:

Chris Abani; Akin Adesokan; José Eduardo Agualusa; Gabeba Baderoon; Valentine Cascarino; Teju Cole; Vanessa Ulia Dantas e Sá; Filip de Boek; Nuruddin Farah; Ismail Farouk; Christian Hanussek; Stephen Hobbs; Allan Kolski Horwitz; Ashraf Jamal; Rustum Kozain; J C Lanquetin; Salifou Lindou; Lesley Lokko; Dominique Malaquais; Jyoti Mistry; Fiona Moolla; Marcus Neustetter; Annie Paul; Achal Prabhala; Karen Press; Vyjayanthi Rao; Abdou Maliq Simone; Tsuba Ka 23; Jeremy Weate; James Yuma

