

AFRICAN CITIES READER II

Mobilities and Fixtures



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

Email: africancitiesreader@chimurenga.co.za

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Preface

The aim of this second instalment of the *African Cities Reader* is to provide a space to illuminate emergent urbanisms of Africa in its continental and diasporic richness. The leitmotif of the contemporary globalising era is mobility, which references the incessant circulation of goods, services, ideas, technologies, imaginaries and money.

African cities are uniquely marked by disjunctive flows and circuits, but in ways that amplify both the intensity of mobility, and its shadow, fixity. The violent reverberations of colonialism in the processes of city living and building ensure that most urban dwellers are entangled in relationships of movement – as protagonists in migratory journeys or as economic or social funders of the journeys of others.

The concomitant costs and logistics are ubiquitous and demanding and they simultaneously generate conflict and co-operation, complicity and duplicity, cohesion and instability, all of which enhance a profound sense of entanglement and the desire for escape. The cultural worlds that are born of these processes remain largely invisible in the academic literature on African cities, although they live at the core of contemporary social and economic life. And this is to say nothing about the tedious movements, circulations and negotiations that are required to get by, or high, or down, or connected within any city. Moreover, when the possibility and necessity of movement is so extremely circumscribed by all manner of barriers, obstacles, fixtures, detours, dead-ends and disappointments, how can we fundamentally recast the trope – mobility – of the contemporary moment?

The ensemble of work between these covers serves up a different perspective on the dialectic of mobility. It offers a multitude of entry and jump-off points that encourage us to think differently about the relational scales, speeds and times that co-exist in the reproduction of urban space. Some of the work veers into theoretical discourse; other pieces offer artistic accounts of the phenomenological implications of forced migrations met with violence and barbed wire; others present poetic insights into the minutia of repair work associated with intensified mobility, with an ironic acknowledgement that so much mobility is interrupted by infrastructural failures and mechanical disrepair.

What is abundantly clear across these pages is that many urban worlds await to be explored and accounted for by paying closer attention to the details of social practices, political manoeuvres, economic ambitions and symbolic registers. The paradox of greater mobility and intensified barriers in African cities has an impact on all classes and social groups, and moreover, play out in the imaginaries of individual actors who ‘live’ our cities or try to escape them. We encourage you to enjoy this multi-directional exploration and hope it will take your own thinking and practice to a place deeply felt. As with the first *African Cities Reader*, we are struck by the constitutive emergence of pluralism, cosmopolitanism and diversity across Africa.

We thank the Rockefeller Foundation for its open-minded support of this project. Enjoy the ride.

Ntone Edjabe and Edgar Pieterse
Editors

Anti-Teleology: Re-Mapping the Imag(in)ed City

DOMINIQUE MALAQUAIS

Against Teleology

For some years now, scholars in a range of fields have been arguing that canonical approaches to urban space fall short when faced with cities like Kinshasa.¹ Despite claims to universal applicability, such approaches tend to be thoroughly Eurocentric. Rooted in the Modernist project,² they favour teleological narratives of progress in which the self-professed centre, the Euro-American metropolis, serves as the model and benchmark. At their core is a reliance on dichotomies – centre vs periphery, formal vs informal, success vs failure – that cannot effectively account for diversity: for ways of experiencing, structuring and imagining city life beyond the confines of a world narrated by Lewis Mumford and his followers.³ Such either/or readings of urban space have a pernicious effect that extends far beyond the realm of philosophical difference. At the hands of the IMF, the World Bank and related institutions, or deployed by state-sponsored local and regional planning bodies, they shape policy and as a result impact millions of lives, more often than not in distinctly negative ways.⁴

Examples of this abound. Simplistic visions of Johannesburg as a metropolis divided between haves and have-nots, the latter perceived as likely to impede the city's growth, attended many a step in the build-up to the 2010 World Cup. Evidence of this is rife in the form of massive over-investment in infrastructure – stadiums and hotels most notably. The latter will not only fail to bring in long-term revenue, but also, because of their restricted access, will exacerbate tensions, widening divides infinitely more complex than those envisaged by rich versus poor, underclass versus the rest dichotomies that shaped the artificial growth spurt prompted by the World Cup. The branding campaign aimed at reinventing Johannesburg as the centre of a fictional world united by soccer – one planet, under *futbol*, with liberty and justice for all – has proven as flawed as the linear logic of countervailing forces on which it was premised, and just as unlikely to yield positive results.⁵

At the risk of drawing overly easy comparisons between what are evidently very different cities, one might point to parallel developments in Cairo and Nairobi, to give but two examples. In both cases, the last decade and a half has brought a noxious mix of branding techniques aimed at attracting a small cadre of foreigners (investors, tourists increasingly difficult to come by in a post-911 world) and Los Angeles-inspired expansions on the center/periphery model once imposed on urban space by colonial authorities. The result has been investments in infrastructure that largely benefit small pockets of well-to-do city dwellers. Patterned on unimaginative Modernist templates, such developments are increasingly packaged as post-modern, post-colonial and, to differing extents,

1 For their generosity in sharing ideas and images as I was writing these pages, I wish to thank several people: the artist Méga Mingiedi, whose work is at the core of this essay and with whom I have had the pleasure of many long conversations in DRC, South Africa and France over the past year and a half; François Duconseille and Jean-Christophe Lanquetin, who first introduced me to Mingiedi, invited me to take part in a Johannesburg residency with him in 2009, and whose photography of the artist's work during this residency appears herewith; Eléonore Hellio, whose analyses and reading suggestions have proven a key source of inspiration; Dicoco Boketshu Bokungu, to whom I am most grateful for his guidance as I seek to navigate the complexities of Kinois social and political space; Christian Hanussek, who first encouraged me to write about one of the works by Mingiedi discussed in this essay, 'Kin Délestage' (Fig. 1).

2 Edgar Pieterse, AbdouMaliq Simone et al, <http://africancentreforcities.net/programmes/academic-research>

3 Mumford (1895-1990) was indubitably a remarkable writer, and an encyclopedic one as well. His most famous book, *The Culture of Cities* (1938) is an essential text that shaped (and continues to shape) generations of urban historians. At its core, however, is a fundamental lacuna: its failure to engage in any meaningful way with non-European urban cultures – with the predictable exceptions of Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. This tends to be blamed on 'an absence of sources due to the epoch in which he was writing' (see, notably, Corinne Beutler's review of Mumford's opus in *Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations* (1996) Vol 21, No. 4, p. 919). This is a dubious argument, given the ample coeval data on China, India and – yes – Africa, and it is of little comfort today, as many writers persist in this failure to engage with what they take to be the urban 'Other' and, in tandem, re-assert the kinds of centre-periphery divides that structure most of Mumford's otherwise fascinating analyses.

4 Dominique Malaquais (2006) 'Douala/Johannesburg/ New York: Cityscapes, Imagined', in Garth Myers and Martin Murray (eds) *Cities in Contemporary Africa*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan; Edgar Pieterse (2008) *City Futures: Confronting the Crisis of Urban Development*, London, Zed Books; AbdouMaliq Simone (2004), *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities*, Durham, Duke University Press.

5 For a fine – and a prescient – analysis of the extraordinary failure of the imagination that shaped the lead-up to and the execution of the 2010 World Cup, see Achille Mbembe's (2006) well-known text on the subject, '2010 World Cup: Where is the moral argument?', http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:mhnHYiIXXM8J:www.africultures.com/index.asp?fmenu%3Drevue_affiche_article%26no%3D5757%26lang%3D_en+achille+mbembe+world+cup&cd=2&hl=fr&ct=clnk&gl=fr

post-racial (alternatively post-ethnic) initiatives. Tired approaches to urban space, tried and true in their ability to fail the majority in favour of the minority, are being trotted out in brand-new garb designed by advertisement agencies for display on CNN International and BBC, in assorted investment brochures and in onboard airline magazines distributed free of charge to business travelers.⁶

This is not the stuff of bureaucracies and ad agencies alone. Lagos is instructive in this regard. Despite what are undoubtedly good intentions, precisely the same kinds of dichotomies structure the response of one of architecture's most successful figures, superstar planner/designer Rem Koolhaas, to West Africa's megalopolis of record. *His Lagos Wide and Close*⁷ has become a must-cite for commentators on 'the African city' (this a highly problematic category, for it suggests the existence of both a unity – basic similarities between such disparate entities as Marrakech, Dakar and Antananarivo – and an analytical framework capable of theorising such unity, neither of which in fact exists). Premised, at times in spite of itself, on overly simplified distinctions between centres and peripheries, foregrounds and backgrounds, formal and informal (or 'shadow') economies, Koolhaas' reading of Lagos claims to tell a radically new story and does precisely the opposite.

Haunted by the ghost of Lewis Mumford and the intimate links that his *Culture of Cities*⁸ bears to the colonial enterprise,⁹ the Dutch architect's take has hit home in ways at once mind boggling and wholly predictable. What appeared in its early days as an exercise in highlighting alternative, grassroots (inhabitant-driven) ways of shaping city space has been funneled into a full-blown branding project. The eponymous 'go-slow' – the (now) world-famous Lagos traffic jam, a very particular incarnation of Hell to which one might be forgiven for wishing to confine the CEOs of General Motors, Toyota, Shell and BP – has spawned a Prada store in downtown Manhattan, Koolhaas claiming the one as influence for the other,¹⁰ and a gargantuan bridge. The latter, the Fourth Mainland Bridge, to be designed by Koolhaas' firm, OMA, is advertised as the solution to Lagos' go-slows,¹¹ but of course will be nothing of the kind. It will make access to the wealthy parts of the city easier, that much is true, but will likely do little for the intractable snarls that bring movement to a standstill on the mainland, where the overwhelming majority of Lagos' inhabitants live.¹²

Babatunde Fashola, the governor of Lagos State and a superstar in his own right, clearly sees the construction of Koolhaas' bridge as a branding move and in this he is correct. In an age of fascination with failure and responses to it in bite-sized, easy-fix increments (not for nothing is reality TV a global growth industry), the story of urban implosion/explosion told by 'Lagos Wide and Close' has morphed into a selling point, attracting national and international political and financial goodwill to a neoliberal project that will see the city transformed in ways likely to serve its tiny bourgeoisie well and the rest of its inhabitants very little. The whole endeavour reads like a made-for-TV script: Big (white) Man – Koolhaas – diagnoses failure, drawing attention to lives marked simultaneously by pathos and resilience in an unjust yet burgeoning world; in response, other Big (black) Man – Fashola – is inspired to effect radical transformation; together, they change the very face of the city and, in the process, (urban) history. The back story is a tired Modernist teleology, fictive through and through: the periphery moving from worse to better by way of the centre.

Unsurprisingly, the same type of teleology characterises interventions by political leaders and entrepreneurs into the urban fabric of present-day DRC. Public-

6 For discussions of these and related issues as concerns Cairo and Nairobi, two recent publications offer a useful introduction: Diane Singerman and Paul Amar (eds) (2006) *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East*, Cairo and New York, The American University in Cairo Press; H  l  ne Chartron-Bigot and Deyssi Rodr  guez-Torres (2006) *Nairobi contemporain, les paradoxes d'une ville fragment  e*, Paris and Nairobi, Karthala and IFRA. For those who hoped that things might change in Cairo following the wave of protests that toppled Hosni Mubarak, recent crackdowns by the army in what had become the very symbol of urban uprising in the face of status quo rule – Tahrir Square – are reminders that the violence of capitalism and its disastrous impact on cities brook little contradiction.

7 *Lagos Wide and Close: An Interactive Journey into an Exploding City*, documentary film, directed by Rem Koolhaas with Bregtje van der Haak [DVD]. See also, http://www.oma.eu/index.php?searchword=lagos&option=com_search&Itemid=19

8 See note 3.

9 Dominique Malaquais (2004) 'Sexing Africa, Again: Watch it Tonight on HBO'. *Chimurenga* Vol. 5.

10 The intimate ties that the New York Prada store is meant to entertain with Lagos – the point being one less of formal influence than of mood, ethos, approaches to movement, mutability, multisensorial effects, experimentation and so on – are articulated, in various forms (text, image, transcriptions of [possible] conversations) in AMOMA / Rem Koolhaas / Simon Brown and Jon Link (2004), *Content (Perverted Architecture)*, Cologne, Taschen, pp. 290 291, 324 325, 326 331.

11 See http://www.oma.eu/index.php?option=com_projects&view=portal&id=1191&Itemid=10

12 Koolhaas' legendary irreverence and fascinating takes on shopping notwithstanding (or arguably because of these), it is worth noting that, in presentations of its plans for Lagos, OMA includes images of a Prada store on the lower deck of the Fourth Mainland Bridge. (There is talk also of Koolhaas designing a Guggenheim franchise for Lagos (*Content*, pp. 290-291), possibly to replace the Guggenheim Soho, in whose place the OMA Prada New York now stands). In OMA's design, the Prada store in Lagos appears alongside roadside food-vendors' stalls (<http://africappractice.blogspot.com/2010/06/lagos-megacity-or-crisis-city.html>) – an unlikely combination given the Lagos State governor's stand on 'informal' commerce, as demonstrated by the complete raising in January 2009 of Oshodi Market, one of the city's most important sites for unregulated trade, which Koolhaas himself had earlier identified as a locus of particular interest for his analysis of Lagos. See http://www.oma.eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=166&Itemid=25

private consortia linking the governments of Congolese president Joseph Kabila and his Chinese counterpart Hu Jintao with Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou-based capital are hard at work in Kinshasa's ex-colonial centre (Gombe and neighbouring Lingwala), now touted as a hub of formal (state-regulated) business, transforming shaded two-lane roads into treeless multi-corridor arteries. An Australian-Zambian investment group is advertising a gated city-within-the-city positioned astride the Congo River, La Cité du Fleuve, simultaneously minutes away from Gombe by speedboat and a world away from what, in scare tactics cribbed from the screenplay for *Escape from Manhattan*, are presented as the capital's cutthroat streets.¹³ Echoes of Lagos, here, are uncanny: the Koolhaas-Fashola Fourth Mainland Bridge project calls for precisely the same kind of 'safe' city-within-a-city, a 'new city centre on an artificial island' in the Lagos Lagoon, and, in a similar vein, a Chinese-Nigerian consortium is touting a high-tech, ultra-secure satellite city, also off the Lagos coast, the Lekki Free Trade Zone.¹⁴

Half a continent away, Lubumbashi is being rebranded as a foreign capital(ist)-friendly city by Moïse Katumbi, the governor of resource-rich Katanga state, with the active help of a French documentary filmmaker, Thierry Michel, author of a trilogy spanning the Mobutu, Kabila Sr. and Kabila Jr. regimes, the final installment of which is a virtual hagiography of Katumbi – a stunning reprise of the Modernist teleology that manages to equate the mining business with a concern for human rights.¹⁵ Here too, plans are underway for the construction of a gated luxury enclave, Luano City:

*[In] Africa – the last frontier – out of the ashes, a whole new city arises [the website for this other city-within-a-city intones]. The size of Dubai Land and half the size of Paris, [it is] [a]ll you need, [a]ll you want [a]nd all you can possibly imagine: a safe and secure centralized environment and an unsurpassed investment opportunity ... enclosed in a 474 ha mixed-use development.*¹⁶

Méga Mingiedi and the Art of Anti-Teleology

As previously noted, for some time scholars have been railing against such (neo) Modernist approaches to urban space. The results, in terms of real-world application, however, have been tenuous. The Fourth Mainland Bridge episode suggests as much: more than a few of us have spoken out against problems inherent in Koolhaas-inspired takes on Lagos (and cities more generally), to precisely no effect. Clearly, the message is not getting through. More powerful voices are needed: voices likely to make more sense, or more noise, if only because they are more direct. Activist multimedia exhibitions that engage with the theme of the city might offer a platform to this end ('Afropolis – City, Media, Art', which previewed in the summer of 2010 in Nairobi and opened in November 2010 in Cologne, is one example¹⁷). If they harbour a hope of succeeding in this regard, however, it is less by way of texts such as the present one – though hopefully words such as these may be of some use – than through objects they can highlight: photographs, videos, recordings, drawings and paintings, installations, ephemera made/gathered by creators whose experience of a city such as Kinshasa allows them to offer fresh narratives. A case in point among such creators is multi-media artist Méga Mingiedi, whose work does significant damage to normative Modernist practices of map-making.

How, precisely, to characterise Mingiedi's production is a conundrum. A discombobulating mix of graphic poetry, collage, architectural drawing and cartography – part sketch, part comic strip, and part lovingly detailed account of over-arching urban vistas and tiny street-corner details – it defies categories.

13 See <http://www.lacitedufleuve.com> and http://lepotentiel.com/afficher_article_archive.php?id_article=83508&id_edition=4729&yearID=2009&monthID=07&dayID=13

14 See note 11 and <http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?p=50815969>

15 *Katanga Business* (2009), Film, directed by Thierry Michel, <http://www.katanga-lefilm.com>

16 See <http://www.luanocity.com>

17 'Afropolis: City, Media, Art', curated by Larissa Förster, Christian Hanussek and Kerstin Pinther, is a multimedia exhibition that focuses on five cities in Africa: Cairo, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos and Nairobi. It opened at the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne on 5 November 2010. The curators articulate the show's goal and structure as follows: 'The curatorial approach highlights the interconnectedness of scientific and artistic concepts, not only exploring urban histories and recent developments, but also presenting 30 artistic viewpoints on issues of urbanity about and from these five cities. The result is a remarkable synergy of scientific and artistic research, documentary material and artistic reflection. The works shown in *Afropolis* include graphic arts, painting, photography, sculpture, installation, film and video art, as well as design, comics and weblogs.' See <http://www.afropolis.net> and <http://museenkoeln.de/rjm>. An extensively illustrated, German/English catalogue accompanies the exhibition, http://www.buchhandlung-walther-koenig.de/verlag/empfehlungen/aesthetische_theorie/isbn_3865608981.aspx

No maps of Kinshasa have come as close as his work does to accounting for the complexity of the city he calls home and few writings, even by the very best (De Boeck, Gondola, Simone), have managed to be as direct. Had novelist Sony Labou Tansi, Kinshasa's most brilliant storyteller, lived to see the 21st century, one imagines he would have been a fan.

The strength of Mingiedi's maps – let us call them that – lies in two characteristics of his work, both of which constitute a radical departure from canonical mapping techniques: its staunch refusal to consider urban space from a single perspective, resulting in cityscapes that look deceptively linear, yet on closer inspection turn out to be equally (il)legible from left to right and top to bottom; and their fundamental ambivalence, a push-pull of simultaneous desire and recoil that puts in intimate proximity two entities that Modernist discourse on the city insists are wholly incompatible: the 'jumble' of spaces born of 'informal' economies and the 'order' imposed by 'formal' planning.¹⁸ These two features – a multi-positional vantage point resistant to any single linear perspective and an unwillingness to come down on either side of what the work shows to be a wholly artificial dichotomy – puts Mingiedi's readings of city space at loggerheads with officially sanctioned approaches to the city, and with current urban renewal projects in Kinshasa and DRC more widely.

On the Art of Seeing from Multiple Perspectives

'Kin Délestage' (2010), one of Mingiedi's more accessible works, provides a useful starting point (Fig. 1).¹⁹ At first glance, this large piece appears to present a linear view of the city. Its horizontal format and the artist's use of both vanishing points (in checkerboard on the left) and arrow-like lines linking one side of the composition to the other suggest a fairly straightforward reading from left to right. This in turn seems to accord with the theme of the work. The focus of the piece is load-shedding practices that result in large portions of the city living for days without electric power, while the inhabitants of tiny wealthy enclaves enjoy the comforts of generator-powered air conditioning, internet access and lighting.²⁰ Read thus, from left to right (and, in parallel, top to bottom) 'Kin Délestage' appears to propose in visual form a boilerplate analysis of economic inequality, with resources and labour moving in one direction, from the jumble of an informal city that serves as the artist's vantage point (on the left), to the clinical order of a distant formal city to which he has little access (on the right).

Closer scrutiny suggests a different narrative. Indubitably, wealth and Modernist ideals of development – symbolised by a high-end timepiece, complete with thumb-like appendage poised on the stopwatch function – suffuse the city at right. Several of the features that identify the city as 'modern', however, are present also in the evidently less-well-off city on the left: skyscrapers and antennas most notably. The city on the left boasts more roads than its counterpart at right; infinitely more movement, a sine qua non of business, is possible there. Kinshasa's single most quoted visual icon of modernity, an immense cement and steel tower-cum-monument erected in the Mobutu era and key to political discourse under Kabila father and son, though it tends toward centre, is unequivocally located in the left-hand city.²¹ These various elements speak of significantly more balance between the two halves than seemed present at first glance – or, in any event, of a push-pull that casts doubt on the viewer's initial reading of 'Kin Délestage'.

This sense of doubt is accentuated by a kind of seepage that draws the attention as one begins to look more closely at the piece. An undertow – a manner of sucking force – seems to be at work and objects and materials sluice back and forth

18 As the foregoing suggests, I find notions of 'formality' and 'informality' to be of little use in thinking about spaces and economies, urban and otherwise. Readers familiar with the SPARCK project (Space for Pan-African Research, Creation and Knowledge/The Africa Centre), which I co-direct with my friend and colleague Kadiatou Diallo, will recognise this take, which underlies all of the projects supported by SPARCK. See <http://www.sparck.org>

19 'Kin Délestage' is exhibited in 'Afropolis: City, Media, Art' (see Note 17) and appears in the show's catalogue (text by Dominique Malaquais). I am grateful to Christian Hanussek for providing me with the high-resolution photograph of the piece that appears here.

20 Méga Mingiedi (2010) personal communication, April.

21 The edifice is the work of French architect Olivier-Clément Cacoub (1920-2008), builder of choice for many an African dictator. It was erected under Mobutu, but not quite completed. The finishing touches were added, with great fanfare, by Joseph Kabila.

between the two ends of the city. Buildings, or more properly their foundations and bottom stories, cannot seem to decide which side they are on. The roads on the left might be curvier and narrower than their runway-like counterparts on the right, suggesting an older pedigree (some, indeed, are recognisable as thoroughfares laid down in the late colonial and early Mobutu eras), but their tangle seems in places to be exerting an irresistible pull, slurping up like so many strands of spaghetti the linear perfection of the roads on the right. A peculiar sludge – a red/green/blue mix of water, bubbles, minerals and gems – is seen as if travelling back and forth between the two extremities of the cityscape, settling at neither end. A stream of spirits, in the form of cruciform designs patterned on the logo of Primus beer, Kinshasa’s drink of choice, tethers one side to the other. Squint slightly, as you might after one bottle too many, and the blue-and-white crosses start to look like blinking lights – whether garlands of miniature electric bulbs strung from lamp-posts at Christmas or emergency flashers on the roof of a police cruiser is (willfully) unclear – enveloping the two cities in a single, electropop loop.

No one perspective – left-to-right or right-to-left – makes more sense than the other. While Mingiedi’s location seems clear enough (the presence of two mouths on the left says as much: this is his point of departure, the locus from which he is speaking), the city is just as clearly in flux and this makes the artist’s position – formal and conceptual – significantly less clear than even he might like. Still closer scrutiny highlights a front-to-back and back-to-front push-and-pull that further complicates the possibility of linear readings. Spend too much time looking at ‘Kin Délestage’ and you start to feel a bit nauseous, as if your eye had somehow become attached to a bouncing soccer ball (an example of which turns up, uncannily, near top left).²²

Dangers and Pleasures of Ambivalence

The result of all this is a distinct sense of unmooring – a feeling akin to that described (in an entirely different context) by novelist Richard Russo as being ‘not quite plumb’.²³ Underlying this sensation, present but just out of sight, is a niggling doubt as to whether the artist himself knows where he stands – ethically, politically – in relation to the push-pull of the two cities. It seems fair to say that he is more

22 See also a football stadium, framed in an oval of purple viewing stands, at bottom left.

23 Richard Russo (2009) *That Old Cape Magic*, New York, Random House.

Fig. 1

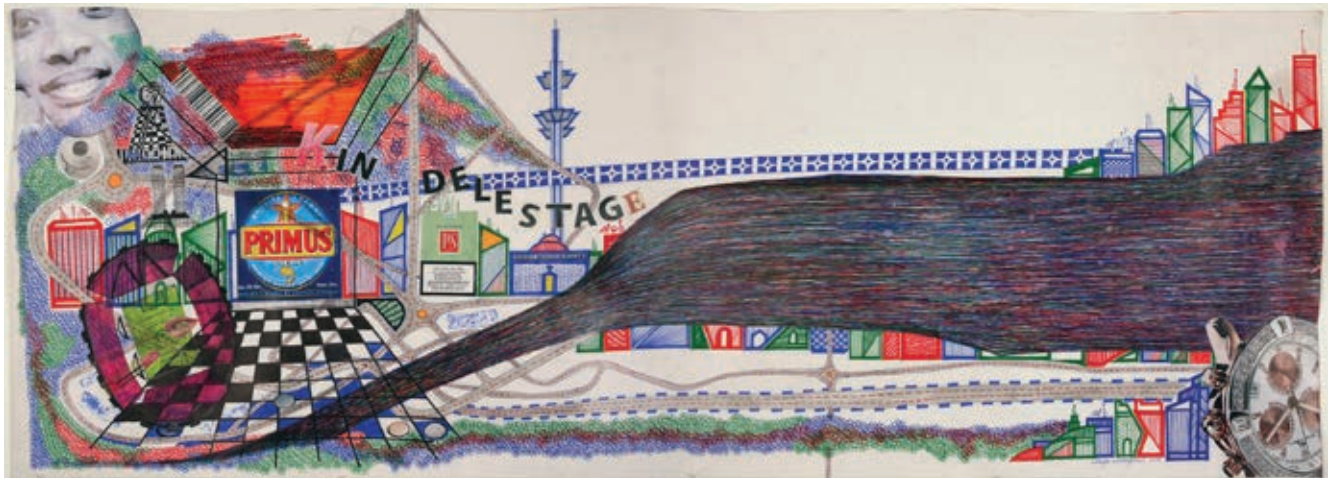




Fig. 2A

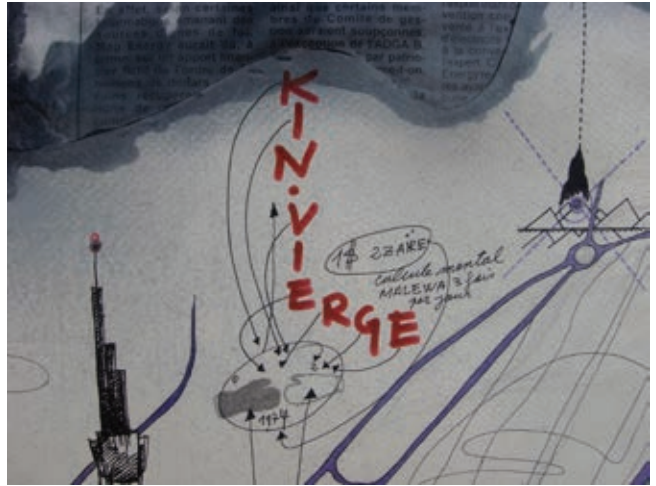


Fig. 2B

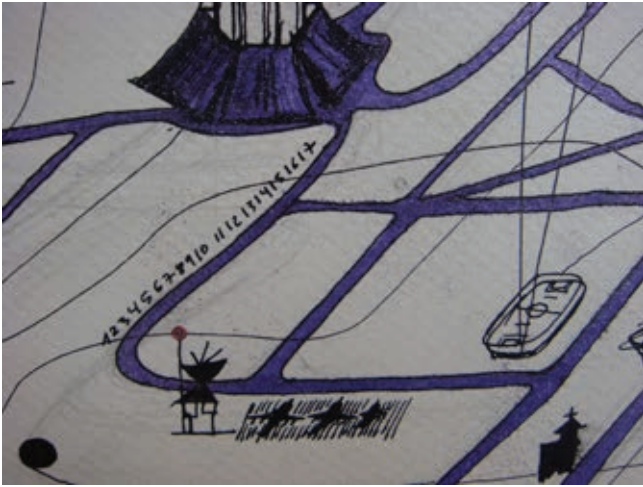


Fig. 2C



Fig. 3A

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FACTURE N°0032

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4	KABILA	10FC	10FC
5	LUMBAMBA	120FC	120FC
6.	KASAVUBU	1000	1000
7.	J. KABILA	500FC	500FC
	TOTAL	25000FC	

Les marchandises vendues ne sont ni reprises ni échangées

Fig. 3B

comfortable on the left; the sheer amount of detail that he builds into the picture there is telling, as is the fluid mix of humour, irony and dead-serious precision that characterises the left side of the composition. At the same time, one would be hard put to overlook the sense of distant perfection that marks the right-hand city. The careful order in which the buildings are arrayed – in a rhythmic dentate pattern at top and a gentle ascending curve at bottom – recalls rows of bottles in a well-stocked bar, a recession-proof establishment such as one might find in the lobby of an international hotel in Gombe. There is a certain wistfulness here that suggests a latent desire for something else: for an experience of the city distinct from the everyday haphazardness of the vibrant but intensely complicated districts Mingiedi calls home.

The question of what precisely that something else might be, adds several layers of complexity to the piece and to Mingiedi's work more generally. At the core of the matter is the figure of Mobutu Sese Seko: not so much the man himself, at whose name the artist grimaces, as what certain aspects of his three-decade reign represent. As is common in cities wrecked by war or recovering from political upheaval, there is in Kinshasa a widespread nostalgia for something past and no longer attainable – a hazy, dreamlike recollection of what the city once stood for in the eyes of others abroad. East Berlin is one such city, Moscow, in its poorer districts, is another. In Mingiedi's city, comparisons are made at every turn between 'Kin la poubelle' (Kin as trashcan) – the capital in its current form – and 'Kin la belle' – a city, so the (much romanticised) story goes, that not so long ago was one of the continent's urban jewels. The principal characteristic of that city, part fact and part fiction, was its identity as a Modernist entity. Although its origins as such lie in the colonial period – in Congo as elsewhere (Eritrea, Algeria, Mozambique) colonial regimes treated cities under their rule as platforms to experiment with space and form in ways impossible back home, resulting at times in pockets of high Modernist extravaganza – 'Kin la moderne' is recalled today primarily as a project of the early Mobutu era. The recollection is not wholly inaccurate: in the later 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, Mobutu expended gargantuan sums on constructing an image of his capital as an ultra-modern metropolis – a case in point being the massive restructuring of downtown Kinshasa that he launched in preparation for the Ali/Foreman 'Rumble in the Jungle', held there in 1974.²⁴

Elements of that other Kinshasa are present in the overwhelming majority of Mingiedi's works. Icons of the period appear over and over again: the tower-cum-monument mentioned earlier (Fig. 2A); various stadiums that Mobutu refurbished (for the Rumble, notably) and built from scratch to serve as stages for his (in)famous displays of political and military might; military bases and airports (Fig. 2B and 2C); Mont Ngaliéma, in the western part of the city, atop which stood Mobutu's fabled and feared Marble Palace; the TRICO II nuclear reactor, sub-Saharan Africa's first, also positioned atop an outcropping overlooking Kin (Mont Amba).²⁵ Many of these sites are now closed or crumbling, having fallen prey to looting (the Marble Palace), catastrophic erosion (TRICO II), financial implosion (military bases) and other debacles. In Mingiedi's drawings, however, they appear as new. Referenced in images of these sites, in collaged scraps of (now useless) Zaire bills adorned with his effigy (Fig. 3A), in invoices made out to him as if he were still alive (Fig. 3B) and in hand-written calculations that point to a time in the 1970s when the Zaire was a currency to reckon with (Fig. 2B), Mobutu haunts Mingiedi's maps of Kinshasa. Seen and unseen, he is present everywhere.

24 It goes without saying that other parts of the city, with a few notable exceptions, underwent no such transformations. *La modernité* was for the rich and, most importantly, for a politically and economically motivated show. See Dominique Malaquais (2009) 'Rumbin', *Chimurenga* Vol. 11.

25 This list of sites referenced in Mingiedi's work stems from a discussion with the artist in October 2009. While the reactor was not built by Mobutu (it was the brainchild of a peculiarly nuclear-obsessed Belgian cleric, one Monsignor Luc Gillon, who set it up on the campus of the University of Kinshasa in 1959), it was a source of great pride for the dictator and, in 1970, was upgraded by Gillon at Mobutu's behest. It has remained active since then, if in a disastrous state of decay (Michaela Wrong (2000) *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurz: Living on the Brink of Disaster in Congo*, London, Harper Collins).

26 Michaela Wrong (2000) *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurz: Living on the Brink of Disaster in Congo*, London, Harper Collins.

27 See http://www.conservapedia.com/Joseph_Mobutu

28 Footage of an inconclusive rocket launch can be seen in the first film in Thierry Michel's trilogy (referenced above), *Mobutu Roi du Zaïre* (1999). The same footage appears in low resolution on YouTube: <http://www.casttv.com/video/haddp71/le-programme-spatial-de-mobutu-une-vido-de-nzwamba-fuse-mobutu-zare-rc-espace2-video>

29 As previously stated (Note 21), the massive tower (150 metres) was almost, but not entirely, completed by Mobutu. The finishing touch was brought by Joseph Kabila. It is a statue of Patrice Lumumba, initially planned for but ultimately set aside by Mobutu, and which (much to the chagrin of Lumumba's widow Pauline) now stands in front of the tower. In a brilliantly cynical move, Mobutu raised Lumumba, whose demise he had actively aided and abetted, to the status of national hero/martyr and built the tower in question in his honour; but he decided against topping or flanking it with an effigy of the man. In an equally cynical and politically astute move, Kabila Jr. took over where Mobutu had left off, appropriating the memory of Lumumba, much as his father had before him, to add weight to his much-questioned legitimacy as ruler of present-day Congo.

30 I am grateful for this insight to Cédric Vincent, with whom I have had numerous exchanges on the nature of Africa-based Afrofuturist production in literature, the arts and architecture.

31 Such influence stems in part from the fact that, unlike many postcolonial leaders, Mobutu actively supported the arts. Granted, his support went to those, specifically, who served his reign. Still, modeling himself on the continent's few other exceptions in this vein (Guinea's Sékou Touré, Senegal's Senghor), he created an academy of fine arts that continues to attract many students today, Mingiedi included, who attended Kin's Académie des Beaux Arts for several years.

As noted, other influences can be adduced, alongside Mobutu's sci-fi bent, for the interest in things futuristic encountered among Kin's artists. Among these, one might mention the violence of a colonial and a postcolonial system so sadistic that imaginaries of a far-off future have proven for many an only and last redoubt, as well as wave after wave of religious and millennial prophetism, which have washed over the country since its earliest encounters with Europe. The latter, in a striking mix of genuine spiritual sensibility and biting irony, is reflected in numerous Mingiedi works.

32 See André Magnin et al (2001) 'Bodys Isek Kingelez', Hamburg and Ostfildern-Ruit, Kunstverein im Hamburg/Hatje Cantz Verlag.

33 See Filip de Boeck and Koen van Synghele (eds) (2008) *The World According to Bylex*, Brussels, KVS and Africalia. The book (an exhibition catalogue) is accompanied by a 69-minute video documenting the artist's practice, entitled *Percer les mystères de l'invisible (Piercing the Mysteries of the Invisible)*.

Between this spectral presence and the push-pull of left- and right-hand city in the drawing with which we began, there is an intimate tie. The city on the right is arguably Mobutu's dream, untouched by the disaster that the megalomania of this very same dream let loose on Kinshasa. Seen in this light, the precise, clinically-rendered city on the right emerges as a wholly ambivalent space – ambivalent, that is, for the artist, who like many young men of his generation is both too young to have experienced 'Kin la (supposed) belle' of the early 1970s and too old to have escaped the hell that befell the city in the final years of Mobutu's reign. Desire and detestation, (grudging) pride and appalled recognition are present in equal measure here, giving the lie to those who would offer simple before-and-after readings of the city or its inhabitants' experience of it.

Slippage, Collapse and the Mind-Mapped City

Mobutu's spectral presence extends beyond Mingiedi's cityscapes. As most any Kin's will tell you, it haunts the city as a whole and much of DRC to boot. The man might be dead, but his spirit is fast afoot, prompting odd slippages in which present, past and occasionally future seem to collide.

The matter of the future is particularly striking. Mobutu had a fascination for things sci-fi. The funds he sank into TRICO II are a case in point: the reactor was not meant to produce much-needed electricity locally, and indeed it never did, but instead to conduct cutting-edge scientific research on a global scale (which it also failed to do).²⁶ In a similar vein, Mobutu was determined that Zaire should be the first African nation to put a man on the moon and so, at exorbitant cost (some 10 billion dollars as rumour would have it)²⁷ he launched the continent's first space programme.²⁸ This predilection for things futuristic finds tangible form in the shape of the city. The massive tower/monument that looms over Kin – a monument to Patrice Lumumba, of all things²⁹ – is a veritable paean to Afrofuturist architecture, which shifts here from the realm of Afro-British speculation à la Kodwo Eshun to a full-fledged incarnation of Sun Ra's most ambitious designs (Fig. 4).³⁰

Though, no doubt, many other influences can (and should) be adduced, this sci-fi fascination of Mobutu's has left its mark not only on the city itself, but also on ways in which artists engage with and seek to transform it.³¹ Indeed, few cities anywhere can boast as rich a body of Afrofuturist production in the arts as can Kinshasa. Examples of this are legion: Bodys Isek Kingelez, of course, whose futuristic city maquettes have become all the rage since they were first shown in the 1989 exhibition 'Magiciens de la Terre';³² less well known though significantly more varied and sophisticated, the models, machines and installations created by Pume Bylex for a putative urban future;³³ Bienvenu Nanga's life-sized and winged robots;³⁴ Bebson de la Rue's iridescent devices for mind travel (part spaceship, part bunker and hobo's cabin) (Fig. 5), by far the most interesting because imbued with a genuine Afrofuturist ethos;³⁵ and Mowoso's radical re-readings of urban space through Skype and video performances that collapse cities into and onto one another, resulting in mind-bending urban hybrids (Fig. 6).³⁶

Such collapses, though in a different guise, mark Mingiedi's work. Drawn or painted and at times rendered as full-scale models, they take the form of hybrid vehicles born of peculiar couplings: a dugout canoe and the nose cone of a 747 (Figs. 7A and 7B); a TGV bullet train filled with French politicians and a Kinshasa *combi* (a collective taxi/minivan, typically outfitted with wood benches and hugely



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

34 See *Le palais d'artiste de Bienvenu Nanga – Ingrédients et mode d'emploi* (2007), documentary film, directed by Edwina Hoël, ASP Production / Centre Culturel Français de Kinshasa.

35 I mean by this an engagement premised less on form (interest in a futurist 'look' that has become something of a fashion in Kin's world of art for sale to European collectors of Afro-kitsch and -cool) than on a poetic and politically charged interest in the tactical possibilities of alternative realities and time-space continuums.

36 See <http://sparck.org/about-mowoso>; <http://sparck.org/about-gou>; <http://sparck.org/work-in-progress>. See also Dominique Malaquais (2011) '(De) Facing Rage', in V. Smith, S. Stemmler and C. Hamschmidt, (eds) *RAGE*, Berlin, Revolver Publishing.

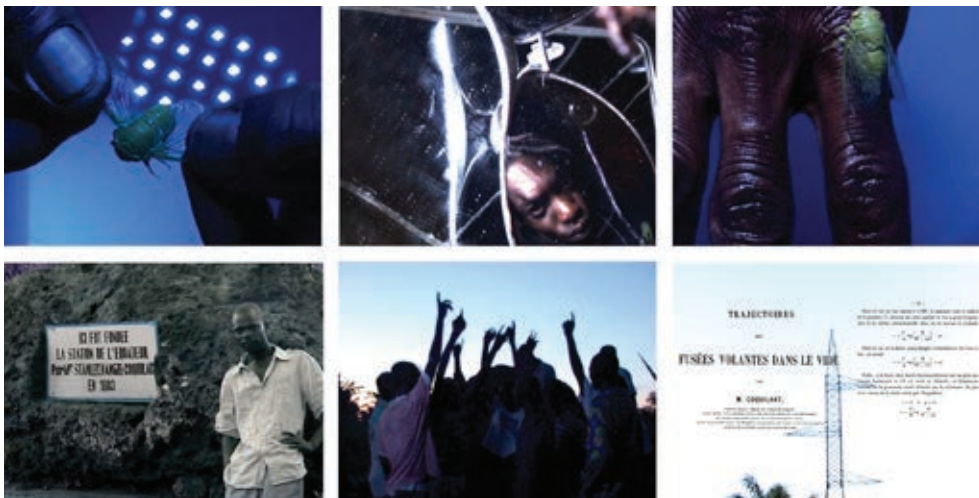


Fig. 6

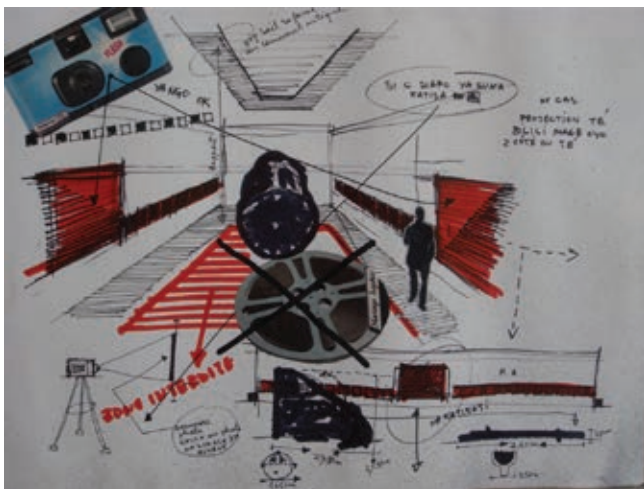


Fig. 7A

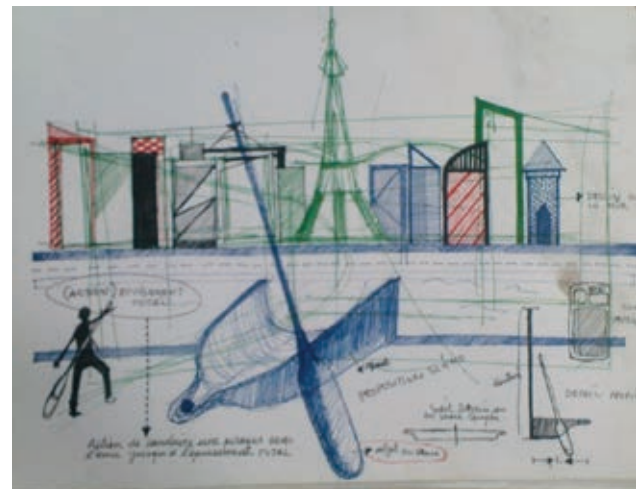


Fig. 7B

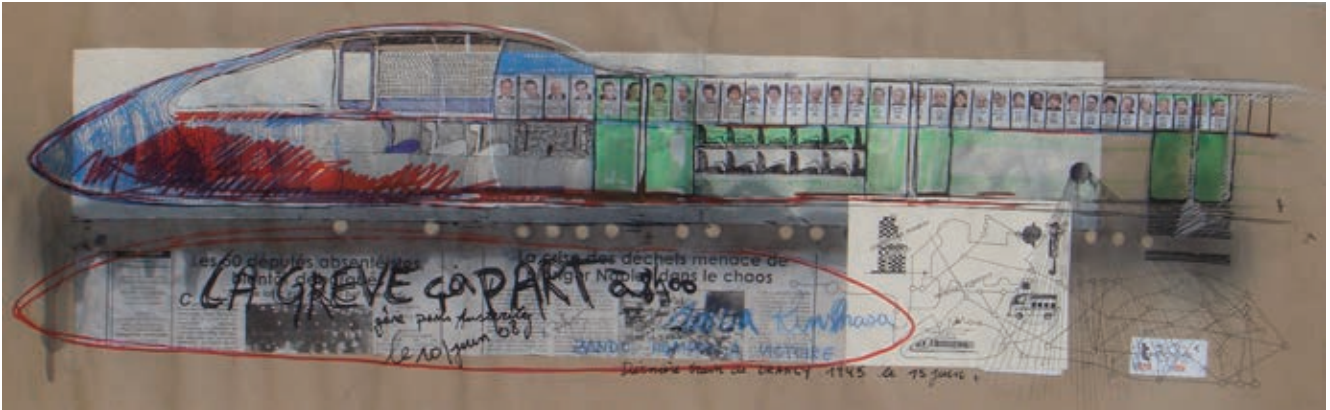


Fig. 8A



Fig. 8B

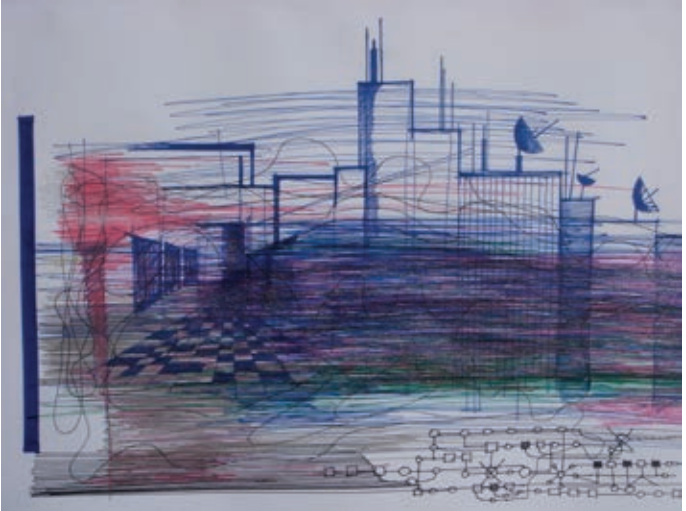


Fig. 9



Fig. 10A

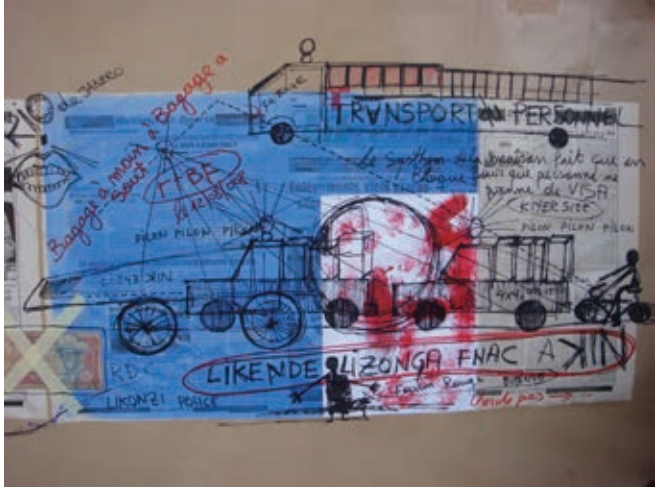


Fig. 10B

overcrowded), positioned side by side or smashed into one another, products of an unlikely rear-end collision (Figs. 8A and 8B).³⁷ In these implausible contraptions, once again linearity exits the picture: there is no way to tell in which direction the wheels are likely to turn. A bizarre wheelbarrow-cum-caterpillar earthmover designed by the artist in 2008 to transport artworks imported by a Parisian museum for an exhibit at the Beaux Arts academy in Kin looks just as likely to slide laterally (or up) as it is to proceed left or right on a horizontal plane (Fig. 9). Thoroughfares traversing his maps similarly run/morph into one another, forming maze-like intertwinings alternately reminiscent of lassos, fun house loop-d-loops and the circuitry of high-tech motherboards writ large, all of it leading everywhere and nowhere at once (Figs. 10A and 10B).

None of this, it should be noted, is happenstance. Mingiedi has not stumbled, à la *art brut*, on approaches to mapping that coincidentally echo those of such art world and theory luminaries as Teddy Cruz, Bernard Khoury or Eyal Weizman. Were he a European artist, this would scarcely need to be pointed out; in the realm of contemporary African(ist) art history, however, it must sadly be underscored, lest an artist who has dedicated significant time to formal study be categorised, like so many before him, as some manner of genius autodidact. While, to my knowledge, he has read neither Cruz nor Weizman and is not acquainted with Khoury, after years of formal training at the Beaux Arts Academy in Kinshasa, Mingiedi has spent a great deal of time, first as a student at Strasbourg's Ecole Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs (ESAD), then as a collaborator on numerous design and installation projects across Africa and Europe, in the company of artists, scenographers and curators whom Cruz and co. and their forebears have mightily influenced.

The ESAD is home to a cadre of professor-practitioners who have long engaged in sophisticated mind-mapping experiments. Among these are several people with whom Mingiedi has worked closely, by whom he has been influenced and whose practice he has in turn impacted. Among them are Eléonore Hellio, whose *art sans oeuvre* weds inspiration from mind-mapping guru Tony Buzan,³⁸ Dreamtime cartographies of the Noongar, Gagudju and related peoples of Australia, double-bind theory in its relation to complex systems and cybernetics, and Palo Alto School research on systemic clusters;³⁹ Pierre Mercier, whose work explores coercive systems (*dispositifs*) as articulated by Michel Foucault and, in his wake, Giorgio Agamben; Jean-Christophe Lanquetin and François Duconseille, whose engagement with urban space and performance brings into play the writings of Hannah Arendt, Michel de Certeau, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Paul Gilroy, Achille Mbembe, Jacques Rancière, Georges Perec, AbdouMaliq Simone and others, all of whom emphatically reject both singular perspectives and linear approaches to the production of knowledge.

Public Space is the Place

For this Strasbourg-based crew and its closest collaborators, notably Béninois designer Frank Houndégla and French theatre director Jean-Paul Delore, public space is the space of record: the single most important point of entry for reflection on and engagement with the city. The same is true of Mingiedi, for whom it has been a central concern since his earliest days as a creator, and it is the primary locus of interest for those with whom he works most intimately in Kinshasa. These include designers Cédric Nzolo and Iviart Izamba, with whom he has founded a collective, K50, whose focus is the art of shaping public space through processes of ephemeral remapping.⁴⁰

37 For photography of a stunning mural of precisely such a collision, created by Mingiedi on the façade of his house in Kinshasa, see the edition of the French contemporary arts journal *Livraison* (2011) No. 14, edited by François Duconseille, Frank Houndégla, Jean-Christophe Lanquetin and Dominique Malaquais.

38 Tony Buzan (1996), *The Mind Map Book*, London and New York, Penguin Books.

39 John Weakland and Paul Watzlawick (eds) (1981) *Sur l'interaction, Palo Alto 1965-1974, une nouvelle approche thérapeutique*, Paris, Seuil.

40 For an introduction to Nzolo's work on public space, see 'Let There Be Light' (2010), an intervention co-curated by Dominique Malaquais and Cédric Nzolo, in *Transition* 103.

This shared, cross-continental interest in public space has fed a synergy between ESAD and the Académie des Beaux Arts in Kinshasa: a seven-year partnership between the two schools, in the context of which several Kinshasa students – notably Mingiedi and Nzolo – came to study in Strasbourg, ESAD students took part in workshops, exhibits and performances hosted by ABA, and faculty traveled back and forth between the two schools. This in turn has spawned a number of projects, in a wide range of locations and media, centering on radical interventions on and into urban public space.

One such project, ‘Urban Scenographies’, initiated in the late 1990s by Lanquetin and Duconseille⁴¹ and active ever since in cities across Africa and, more recently, Europe, brought Mingiedi to Johannesburg for a month-long multiple artist/writer/critic residency at the Drill Hall in Doornfontein in April 2009.⁴² There, he developed his most sophisticated and challenging work to date – a remarkable exercise in three-dimensional urban cognitive cartography entitled ‘Lelo Awa’ (‘Here Today’).

The brief for creators involved in the ‘Urban Scenographies’ residency was to develop projects inspired by and meant to reshape – for a minute, an hour, a day – public space in a five-block radius extending from the Drill Hall.⁴³ All participants lived within this radius for a month – Mingiedi in the Hall itself – and, at month’s end, deployed their takes on space in a public three-day happening/festival/multipolar event. The World Cup was looming on the horizon and there was much talk in Doornfontein during this period about the impact that the new inner-city tram line being planned at the time would have on the taxi business – this an issue of some grievance given the presence, across from the Hall, of the infamous Noord Street taxi rank.

Given this general state of affairs and his long-standing fascination with urban routes and mobility, Mingiedi had much to think about. Add to this an interest on his part in football as a political phenomenon (this too a product of growing up in the shadow of Mobutu, who used the national football team, named in honour of his reign as self-proclaimed Leopard King, to highly effective political ends) and within hours of his arrival in Johannesburg Mingiedi was bursting with ideas. Shortly, he set about devising a moving installation that involved rolling a gigantic ball through the crowded streets of Doornfontein. The neighbourhood, home and transit point for thousands of car-less folk mired every day in endless traffic jams – people whose origins and economic condition, it was clear by this point, would not make them particularly welcome at the Rainbow Nation’s World Cup celebrations – was about to be steamrolled by a Kin-and-*fut*-inspired, space-invading take on the violence of movement and access curtailed (Fig. 11).

There were, however, two problems, which quickly became key concerns for the artist. First was the difficulty, given limited means, to produce a mega-ball large enough to satisfy the project’s intentions (the diameter was to be no less than 2.5 metres), yet robust enough to withstand the less-than-smooth pavement of central Jozi. The second was the neighbourhood itself. Although certain participants in the residency were fascinated by the veritable Babel of languages, practices, ways of thinking and doing of Doornfontein’s multi-national environment, Mingiedi was mostly appalled. The miserable living conditions, fear of deportation and police violence, gang activity and broken dreams he encountered among so many ‘local’ foreign Africans with whom he crossed paths on his forays through the area left him despondent. In the eyes of some, this might have been an exotic laboratory

41 See <http://www.eternalnetwork.org/scenographiesurbaines/index.php>. See also Dominique Malaquais (2008), ‘Douala en habit de festival’ *Africultures* 73.

42 See <http://www.eternalnetwork.org/scenographiesurbaines/index.php?cat=joburgresidency>

43 In no instance was such reshaping to leave a permanent mark. Indeed, one of the most interesting – and refreshing – aspects of the ‘Urban Scenographies’ project as a whole, in all of the cities where it comes into play, is its active refusal to ‘fix’ the urban environment. In some rare cases, it should however be noted, interventions do end up having a longer-lasting impact, a case in point being a bridge that Mingiedi created using a discarded 18-wheeler truck axle on the occasion of ‘Urban Scenographies Kinshasa’, which took place in 2007. The bridge changed the lives of hundreds of inhabitants in a neighborhood bisected by an until-then impassable river-turned-sewer, and is still in use today.

for sociological observation. For Mingiedi, it was just more of what he had seen elsewhere – in the hell that Kin had become by the late 1990s, following the state’s collapse and the attendant trail of destitute men, women and children streaming from everywhere into a city that wanted nothing to do with them; and in the ugly world of constant ID checks, holding cells and baton-wielding military police that greets African immigrants in many a European city. Most depressing, for him, were the homeless Zimbabweans adrift in Doornfontein and nearby Hillbrow. This was emphatically not what he had had in mind when he stepped off the plane at OR Tambo International Airport.

Mulling all of this over, Mingiedi took to his room. When he emerged a few days later, he had a plan: he would not leave his room *at all*. If public space in Doornfontein had become for so many a space of broken private lives, then he would contrive to explode private space, turning it into a radical reincarnation of public interaction. The project was properly bizarre and simply brilliant. First, he put a multilingual sign up on his door identifying the room’s occupant – in

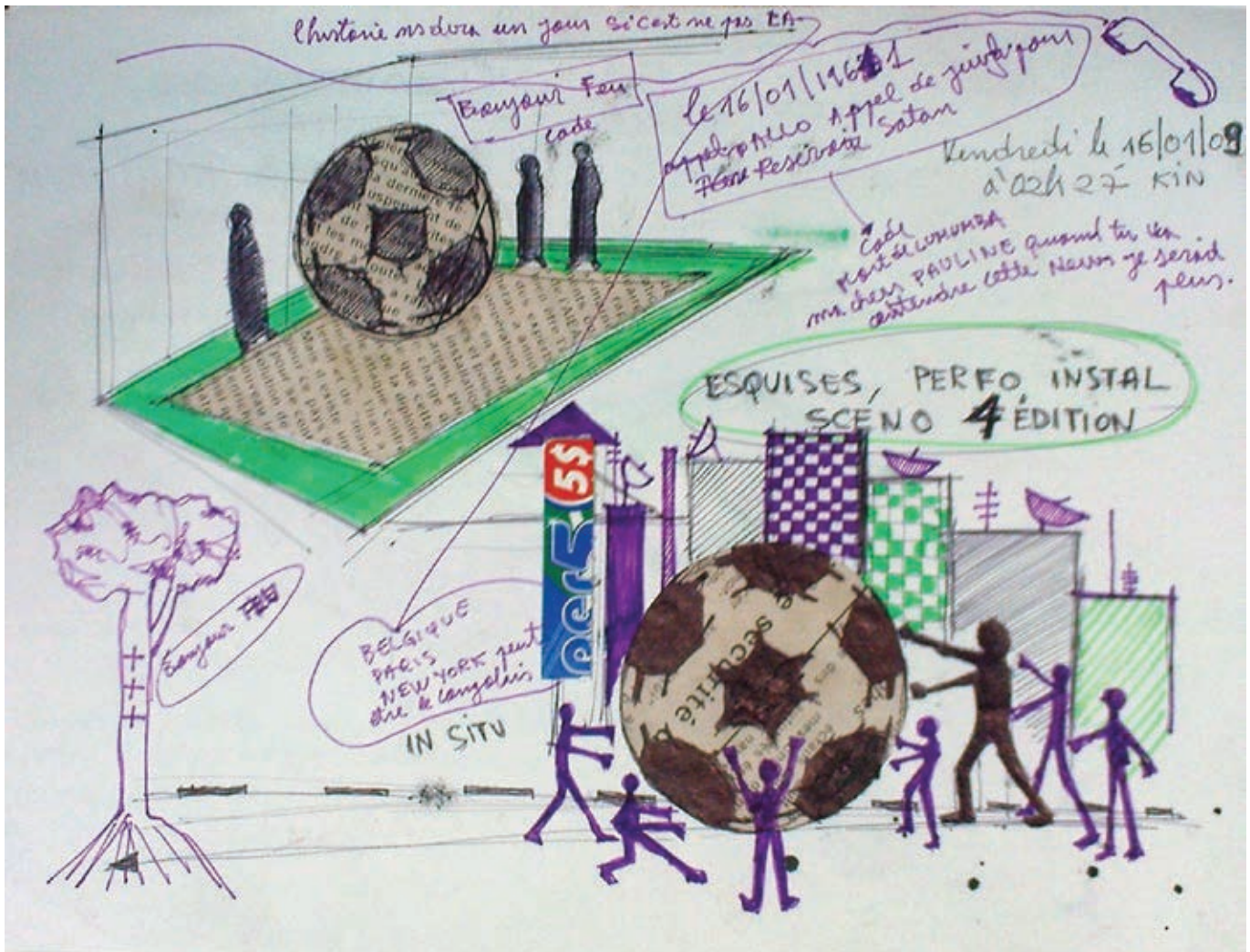


Fig. 11

Lingala, French and assorted broken versions of South Africa's eleven official tongues – as a Zimbabwean in Johannesburg (Fig. 12). The white on black design of the sign looked more like a wanted poster than anything else and, that, of course, was the goal. Then he got to work, inviting those who cared to do so to come in and see what he was up to.

Shortly, however, getting in got complicated. Mingiedi, it turned out, was building that massive ball *inside* the room and the object was no small contraption. It reached from floor to ceiling and left little space along the sides – just enough (a kind of narrow viewing gallery) to see a mural extending over the four walls: a drawn, painted and collaged cartography radically collapsing Joburg into Kinshasa, so that there was absolutely no way to tell where one city began and the other ended. In the first days (or, rather, nights – the wee hours being the best to encounter Mingiedi at his most inspired), it was easy enough to enter the space, as he was in the process of constructing the ball's armature, this out of plastic tubing used to house electric cables. If need be, to get from one spot along the mural to another, you could step gingerly through the coils of tubing. When the whole armature was up, however, this was no longer an option (Fig. 13A and Fig. 13B).



Fig. 12



Fig. 13A



Fig. 13B



Then movement in and out became even more complicated, as the artist embarked on creating a cardboard shell for the ball (Fig. 14). If you were thin enough to squeeze by, you inevitably found that the mural had changed since the last time you'd come through, growing to incorporate an increasing number of references to the work being done by other members of the residency. Mingiedi might not have been leaving his room other than for an occasional walk down the hall to shower or relieve himself (he had devised a sleeping-cum-food-bag arrangement that hung in a coil from the ceiling and was rolled out in one of the viewing aisles when sleep or sustenance was required)⁴⁴, but he kept very much abreast of activities in and around the Drill Hall and, as headlines cribbed from daily newspapers and incorporated into the mural showed, he was making sure to stay on top of goings-on in Johannesburg and the world more generally. This latter process got even more interesting when headlines, entire articles and grainy color photographs began appearing on the ball itself.

Mingiedi, it turned out, had undertaken to cover the entire sphere in newsprint. Most regular onlookers had expected this process to take at least several days and were looking forward to reading the world, as it were, for by this point the ball

44 See Fig. 13A and Fig. 14.



Fig. 14

45 Eyal Weizman (2007) *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*, London and New York, Verso.

46 Mingiedi did not know if any of this would work and at first expressed repeated concern about it.

47 In advance of the 2010 World Cup, the government embarked on a 'beautification campaign' meant to make South African cities more attractive to foreign visitors. In Johannesburg, the campaign proved particularly ruthless. It was accompanied by a wave of violent evictions in which poor immigrant families were beaten and ousted from whatever homes they had managed to make for themselves, their meager furnishings trampled and burned by gangs of rent-a-thugs known as 'Red Ants' for their fire-engine red overalls and helmets. The Ants' employers were the provincial department of public transport and related state outfits. Braam Hanekom, the chairman of Passop, a refugee rights organisation, offers a pithy definition of their job: 'They are essentially a militia that ruthlessly and forcefully displaces people from their shelters under government instructions. They are notorious for their brutal and violent approach towards the poor' (Dan McDougall (2010) 'Red Ants Clear Slums South Africa-Style', *The Sunday Times* (UK), 10 April).

During their stay in Doornfontein, the 'Urban Scenographies' participants witnessed several Red Ant evictions, the area immediately surrounding the Drill Hall being high on the 'clean-up' list of the local authorities. The majority of those who lost their homes were Zimbabweans living in abandoned buildings of the inner city. Descriptions of the early-morning rousts by the riot-gear-equipped Ants, complete with accounts and photographs of bleary-eyed and often bloody evictees staring at defenestrated mattresses, pots, pans and children's toys, were chilling. A sense of helpless horror pervaded the Hall.

For a sense of what the inner-city Joburg Red Ant evictions entailed physically, see:

<http://www.mediaupdate.co.za/default.aspx?IDStory=25297>
http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_A6KsRAiehsM/StXujQrUj3I/AAAAAAAAA5o/GeGwBiEt4Ek/s400/web07.jpg
<http://media.photobucket.com/image/red%20ants%20evictions%20johannesburg/drevil5000/STclean746.jpg>
<http://media.photobucket.com/image/red%20ants%20evictions%20johannesburg/drevil5000/STclean746.jpg>

48 I am grateful to Elisabeth Malaquais for her suggestion that I consider Mingiedi's installation in relation to Ionesco's *Amédée*.

49 On Apartheid Johannesburg's (and more broadly urban Apartheid South Africa's) quest to become 'Modern(ist)', see among others: Clive Chipkin (1993) *Johannesburg Style: Architecture and Society 1880s-1960s*, Cape Town, David Phillip; Gilbert Herbert (1975), *Martiusen and the International Style: The Modern Movement in South African Architecture*, Cape Town and Rotterdam, A.A. Balkema; Jonathan Hyslop (2008) 'Ghandi, Mandela, and the African Modern', in Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe (eds) *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, pp. 119-136; several essays in Hilton Judin and Ivan Vladislavic (eds) (1998) *Blank Architecture, Apartheid and After*, Rotterdam and Cape Town, NAI Publishers and David Phillip; Clive Chipkin, *The Great Apartheid Building Boom: The Transformation of Johannesburg in the 1960s*; Derek Japha, *The Social Programme of the South African Modern Movement*; Tony Morphet, *Personal Traits: The Work of Eaton and Biermann in Durban*; Melinda Silverman, *Ons Bou Vir die Bank: Nationalism, Architecture and Volkskas Bank*.

at the centre of the increasingly complicated cityscape inscribed on the walls had started to look like a planet rotating at the core of an urban implosion. But no: in a single, frenzied night, Mingiedi managed to coat every inch of the ball, resulting in a sight so peculiar it looked properly psychedelic (Fig. 15A and Fig. 15B). A row of empty beer and cheap whiskey bottles running the entire length of the floorboards, evidence of a per diem liquidly spent, glimmering in light streaming in through the room's one window, served to anchor the eye, offering a form of scansion for gazes that could scarcely find a point on which to settle in the buzz of implied movement filling every inch of the space.

By the time the news-covered ball was finished, the only way in and out of the space was through the window. This might have discouraged many – walking by the door to Mingiedi's room, you could see that no access was possible (Fig. 16) – but at this point the ball-room had become such a source of curiosity that people were lining up on the fire escape for a look and possible visit. Private space had quite literally become public, in a haunting echo of the Gaza bed- and living-rooms described by Weizman: personal, indoor spaces transformed into public thoroughfares by the wrecking ball panopticon-on-the-move of the Israeli war machine.⁴⁵ Here, however, a reversal had been operated. The ball was on the inside, claimed as his very own panopticon by the Congo-Zimbabwean at the heart of it all, along with not one but two cities (Joburg and Kin melting into one another) and a host of others adding guest appearances to the mix (a building plucked from the Manhattan skyline, an odd, pickle-shaped structure straight out of Dubai). The ball had no intention of wrecking anything, but it did make a dead-serious point: in a late capitalist public sphere that, on grounds of origins, complexion, accent or absence of means, denies many the right to decent private space (or, indeed, to any private space at all), there are the means – anger, imagination, sheer determination – to create bedlam from the inside out. What had begun as a wholly speculative experiment⁴⁶ had turned into a full-fledged model for radically rethinking the urban borderlines between public and private space. Gaza, referenced also in the mural by way of comparisons with the ultra-violent 'Red Ant' evictions taking place throughout Doornfontein at the time,⁴⁷ was present in the heart of inner-city Johannesburg and, at Mingiedi's hands, most definitely intent on talking – and taking – back.

A constant question from onlookers, first among them those who thought the whole thing should be somehow preserved and collected – 'how are you going to get the ball out of there?' – unwittingly added to the message inherent in the installation. In one of the most implausible and, uncannily, one of the most logical mixes one could imagine, the spirits of French playwright Eugene Ionesco and Cameroonian filmmaker Jean-Pierre Bekolo had managed to meet up at the Drill Hall – the former by way of his play *Amédée ou comment s'en débarrasser* (1954) and the latter via his film *Les saignantes*, two Ubuesque tales in which efforts to get rid of an unwieldy object make the lives of assorted city dwellers increasingly complicated and absurd. In both cases, the object is a corpse. In Ionesco's play it is a body that will not stop swelling, taking up more and more space, and in Bekolo's film it is a deceased John who, despite attempts to cut his remains into disposable pieces by the prostitutes on whose watch he has died, keeps on reappearing in the most inappropriate public places.⁴⁸ In both instances, the increasingly present corpse is the proverbial pink elephant: the THING taking over, whose presence no one will fully acknowledge. In the confines of Mingiedi's room turned public viewing chamber, the THING was not literally (or even symbolically) a corpse, but it did lend itself to a reading as a deceased entity:

the Modernist city. In the urban heart of a neighbourhood that had once been Apartheid South Africa's proudest claim to Modernist identity – so much so that it billed itself as 'Little Manhattan'⁴⁹ – the artist had created the ultimate rebuke to Modernist teleologies of unilinear, forward movement: a moving object that staunchly refused to move, inside a space that just as staunchly refused to be what its architecture dictated that it be, a closed and private space. It chose instead to become a public arena in which visitors were confronted not with one city, or even two, but with an Afrofuturist layering of urban cartographies in which all cities were suddenly one and one city was all others.



Fig. 15A



Fig. 15B



Fig. 16

Airport Theatre, African Villain

MARTIN KIMANI

Airport security officials in America are taking extraordinary interest in passengers' crotches. The authorities assure us that the latest nefarious tactic of the fanatical acolytes of bearded men in the borderlands between Afghanistan and Pakistan is to hide explosives in the crotch area and to blow themselves and their fellow passengers out of the sky. No stone is being left unturned to prevent such atrocities. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA), with a very American faith in the power of technology, has deployed a new machine called an Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) unit. Its X-rays pierce the shell of your clothes, exposing your naked body to the security personnel operating the unit, and thus presumably preventing you from smuggling anything harmful on board. You might, of course, have the explosives or drugs inside you but that little problem is not the topic of this essay and will have to wait for an American machine that looks all the way into your large intestine.

It was months after learning of the existence of this machine that I came to suspect that it could only have been designed by a man who, like me, read lots of superhero comics in the 1970s and 1980s. If you did, then you might recall that most of them had advertisements for USD1 X-ray glasses, toward the back pages: 'See through fingers, see through skin, see yolk of egg, see lead in pencil ... yours to see always, when you wear Slimline X-ray Specs.'

The genius who invented the AIT unit is putting its predecessor – designed to expose metallic objects of a certain size – out of commission. This new machine and its flesh-baring capabilities is the darling of the new best practice for American security officials, whose foremost intention is to let us to know that they will do anything to keep their skies safe.

A combination of factors has helped bring this new technology to the fore. The first being Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the young Nigerian, who boarded a flight to Detroit on Christmas Day in 2009 and unsuccessfully tried to detonate explosives hidden in his underwear. Barely a month earlier, there had been reports of the arrest of an unidentified Somali man in possession of powdered chemicals, liquid and a syringe as he was attempting to board a plane in Mogadishu for a flight to Dubai, via the northern city of Hargeisa and Djibouti. You might also recall Richard Reid, the attempted shoe-bomber and of course the box-cutter hijackers of 11 September 2001. It is doubtful that the AIT unit would have done a better job than the older machines at stopping most of these attackers.

What is not in doubt is that planes are irresistible magnets for men with a cause and that security officials who want to keep their jobs must be seen to be trying to thwart such murderous plots. Hijacking a plane, blowing it up or flying it into a skyscraper, guarantees instant publicity in the competitive world of insurgency-against-Western-power. Abdulmutallab made headlines

at precisely the moment that this new body-baring technology was being marketed for wider use and the Obama administration was looking to stimulate a shattered domestic economy. The result was the purchase of many of the new scanners with funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Unfortunately for the US President's underlings, this touch of Obamaesque technocratic ambition is being looked at askance by Americans, who are well aware of their right to privacy and thus are less than comfortable with the idea of their love handles and man breasts being ogled by TSA employees. Their fears are not unfounded. Last year, an airport screener was arrested for assaulting a co-worker who, having seen a shot of him on the AIT unit, asked him, 'What size are you?' His line of defense was that the inquiry as to his penile proportions amounted to 'psychological torture'.

With any African who has ever applied for a visa to a Western country, the poor man's suffering would immediately strike a chord. Indeed, Africans who travel to Europe and North America have long been subjected to invasions of privacy and dignity that are harsher than anything the AIT unit and its giggling operators can dish out. The AIT unit might appear as little more than a form of theatre to the currently offended Western punditocracy – a lame attempt by the government to assure the public that it is safe, and not a real countermeasure to the determined terrorist. But that this form of theatre extends beyond airport security for the average African is barely acknowledged.

The best way to understand this system is to follow an African through it as he labours under seemingly automatic suspicion of being a criminal element; of carrying drugs up his anus; of malintent to fleece the social welfare system; and/or of contributing to the further soiling of a pure Western culture with his odd religions and smelly foods. For the African, the security theatre has no façade, whether it is practiced in an embassy or on the streets of any Western city. He is the first to suffer the indignities that are inherent in the oppressive and suppressive practices of the West.

If you are an African who wants to leave his country for another, you start by asking yourself whether or not you need to apply for a visa. In case the journey is to a neighboring country or to China for instance, this is a relatively easy procedure. But such is not the case if the intended journey is to the West. The visa requirements to any part of Europe or North America are laid out in exacting legalese. Reading this list, you receive the first intimation that getting to the West is a going to be a battle between your will to go and a rich and powerful government's determination to keep you out. Success is conditional on palavering with a variety of *mzungu* bureaucrats before travelling to their country – in other words negotiating a geography of power that demands constant shifts and emphasis in communicating your identity.

Western visa application forms commonly demand a written invitation from an individual or institution, proof of sufficient funds to make the trip and sustain yourself financially during your stay and proof that you have the incentive to return home after the visit. The great difficulty of fulfilling these requirements confirms just how correct your cousin's letters from Paris are about pots of gold and easy French girls waiting for you on the Champs-Élysées. After all, why would anyone work so hard to keep something that was not exceedingly pleasant from you?

Many people give up at an early stage, but there are hardier types who, after weighing the costs, decide that the only visa they need is a bus ticket across the Sahara and cash to pay a smuggler for the dangerous leaky boat trip across the Mediterranean. Other innovative souls monitor global headlines on the present state of rape, dismemberment, discrimination and murder in their country. After careful calculation, on the advice of the cousin in Paris who is au fait with which stories of atrocities are currently resonating with the refugee processing office, a story is concocted and a long trek made to a neighboring country's United Nations refugee office to demand asylum.

The better-off embark on a mission to subvert their countries' laws and regulations. They bribe bank officials for fake income statements showing balances with many zeros; costly certificates boasting of brilliant academic achievements are pried from school and ministry of education officials; and immigration officials get *backsheesh* for a speedily processed passport with the appropriate date of birth. These documents are kept in a large brown envelope that slowly, torturously becomes thicker in direct proportion to your shrinking wallet.

Long before you get to the West, you have become, strictly speaking, a criminal. Perversely, this is the very reason Western countries give for making the visa application so difficult. Underlying all the forms and procedures is a single question: Why are *you*, out of the teeming, desperate millions who want nothing but to live abroad, *the one who deserves* the opportunity to travel to that glittering city on a hill?

Your visit to the embassy commonly begins at the break of dawn. A queue of men and women, like you holding brown envelopes and dressed in their Sunday best, stands outside the high walls. Cameras swivel to gaze at you. The guards at the gate are neater and more efficient than you have ever seen men in uniform. You teeter between heady excitement and stomach-churning nervousness and worry about the debts you have incurred to get the chance to stand there in the cold.

The thoroughness of the security check depends on the country you are trying to get to. The American embassy appears terribly threatened for such a powerful country. Its walls and gates are ready to withstand a three-year siege by the hordes from hell. The Swiss on the other hand, who live under the profitable illusion that they have no enemies, are as inviting as a bank branch. Leaving behind the local security guards, you enter the West for the first time. It is steely quiet, with lawns so manicured that they must have used sophisticated lasers to cut the grass. And clean, so very clean. You might not know it then, but that is the moment that the West begins to fuck with your mind.

A young white person interviews you – possibly the first white person you have ever had a conversation with. She already looks irritated by your pleading eyes and sweaty face. You slide the contents of the brown envelope under the glass and shift from foot to foot. Like a man marrying a powerful politician's daughter, you have a hollow, lightheaded feeling. You try to remember answers to the questions you have been told to prepare for. And when she asks those very questions, it is as if this is the first time you have ever heard them. They fly out of her mouth like angry bees: 'Why do you want to go to Paris?; How will you afford it?; When will you come back?; Why should I believe you?; Do you have relatives in Paris?; Are

they working?; What is your real name?; This degree you say you have, what is the subject about?' She does this a hundred times a day so you feel she might be looking into your future in *her* Paris, a place you are determined to never leave until you have the money you did all this lying for.

True story. I was applying for my first visa at the American embassy one afternoon in the late 1980s, when a famous Kenyan musician and television host walked into the waiting room – his hair in a curly kit, dressed all in white, and replete with, I kid you not, a white Michael Jackson glove. But walking is not the right way to describe his gait. He was doing the 'bop' we used to see black Americans doing on television. A cool expression and a high step with the feet thrown forward, shoulders still and held slightly back, one hand in the pocket and the other one dangling casually. The whole room sat up straighter, visa question strategies forgotten for the moment. The rest of us, squares all, were in ties and blazers or below-the-knee ribbony dresses. This new arrival was the coolest thing that Kenya had produced that decade, and I for one had no doubt that here was a man who was ensured 100 per cent success in his application for a visa.

His name was called over the loudspeaker and he 'bopped' over to the application window. I couldn't hear everything he said, but there was no mistaking the *ngwee-ngwee* American accent he was throwing skillfully at the woman behind the glass, repeating over and over that he had a concert to throw somewhere in America. Her questions were equally difficult to make out but their impact was clear. His cool pose soon crumbled and our star's accent began to sound a bit rural. Eventually he ran out of angles and turned to walk quickly out of the room, bop forgotten.

Back to *the* story. You get your visa and are headed to the airport, at last, to America. You really are leaving. The boarding gates have exotic names like Bangkok, Frankfurt, Paris and Addis Ababa. The shops bear goods you have never seen before and the prices can only be an April Fools' Day joke. You are X-rayed one final time before walking toward the entrance of the plane. This journey down the padded passageway becomes a banal detail once you've flown a few times. But the first time you walk that gangway, it is mindblowing – never have you walked through a steel tube to anywhere. Just a few metres and you have already walked across continents. The cabin attendant, white (especially if the airline is European or American) with equally gleaming teeth, takes your boarding pass and with a practiced nudge to the shoulder pushes you down the correct aisle. Experienced passengers are already seated, opening their newspapers and taking off their shoes. You, on the other hand, have never read numbers with such ferocious attention as you do now, looking for your seat.

By the time the announcements are finished warning you not to smoke, to keep your seat upright, your table folded, your luggage out of the aisle, to switch off your mobile phone and to fasten your seat-belt, you are in a highly disciplined state. The safety instructions warn you that you are about to die. The one about putting on your oxygen mask before your child's might be accurate as far as emergency procedures go, but it feels deeply alien to any survival code you have ever considered. But you listen carefully. Wanting to know precisely where the parachutes are, how to deploy the inflatable emergency chute and how to bend forward, head cupped between your arms to brace for impact.

These drills are in reality about only two things: reassurance and control. Reassurance because the idea that you will survive in a tube of steel falling out of the sky by putting your forearms against your ears is laughable; equally, that you will be able to breathe in oxygen when the masks fall from the ceiling, the siren goes off and you are alternating between screaming and hyperventilating with terror. Nowadays, they have abandoned the parachute pretense, but that

certainly was good for a laugh. As for the emergency chute, I cannot imagine the people seated near the emergency exits waiting to help some fat stranger from the back rows bail out before they escape with flames licking at their heels.

Here is the simple fact: plane accidents are rare but if they happen, you are a goner. But this is the last thing that airlines want you to dwell on. The other aim of these onboard instructions is control. The pilots and cabin crew want you to do precisely what you are told. Their many restrictions are there to ensure that, for the course of the flight, you are a hypnotised, needy creature who knows only to open your mouth to shovel in food and drink. It is highly likely that the world's worst dictators learnt their techniques as young men flying in economy class. This process of control begins at the embassy and continues at the airport, during your flight and indeed follows you through much of your immigrant existence.

So finally you land. In Paris' Charles De Gaulle airport, the police meet flights from Africa at the door. The cabin attendant might be smiling goodbye at you but the black-clad policeman has never in his life smiled at an African disembarking from an airplane. At Dulles airport in Washington DC, they sometimes ask passengers from Accra or Addis Ababa to get out of the plane and line up facing the wall of the passageway to the terminal. Then they walk a big German Shepherd dog along the row and it sniffs at you, so close that sometimes its nose touches the back of your thighs or your buttocks. You are neither told what they are looking for, nor are you asked whether you are willing to be searched. It is terrifying, especially for people who have grown up in countries in which dogs are kept as guards against criminals and are trained to attack. It is particularly unpleasant if you have been kind enough to carry in your hand luggage the smoked fish that your cousins begged for. The dog pauses above your bag long enough for you to suspect yourself of smuggling in cocaine by the kilo.

You follow the rest of the passengers to the immigration desks that are the final hurdle in your long journey. Here is where the complaints of Americans about the AIT unit are made to look like child's play. You stand in a long snaking line with other non-Americans, clutching your passport and entry forms. All the white people in the queue who are travelling to visit Disneyland or to cut deals on Wall Street look relaxed and bored. The Africans are visibly tense and keep glancing at their papers. There are men with guns walking around, fingers close to the trigger and benches holding Africans who have been detained for failing to deliver a correct response to an immigration officer's questions. These vary from relatively simple queries about where you are headed, to others that strike you as a bad joke.

* * *

I was once asked by one such official what my real name was. I stuttered in surprise and this of course resulted in me being sent to the bench in record time. I was soon directed to a waiting room, not unlike the old visa application room at the American embassy in Nairobi. I was called into an office and a policeman – at least that is what I assumed he was – again asked for my real name. I repeated it. He asked why I was lying and whether I knew how harsh the consequences were. I had faced mean cops in Nairobi before and knew that there are only two ways out of such a situation: to beg for forgiveness, whether you are in the right or not, or to throw down a bribe. Not knowing the American language to get to the latter, I chose instead to grovel. Using a wheedling, submissive tone, I explained I was who I said I was, and that I was very sorry if I was in any way inconveniencing him.

The tactic drove the initially mildly irritated man to become a volcanic beast, intent on jailing me and beating the lies out of me. He only let me go after shouting the same question at me again and again, until I think his shift ended and he let me go to avoid the hassle of working overtime to complete the paperwork. An acquaintance of mine was not as fortunate. She flew

from Accra to New York's JFK airport and was ushered into a similar room. A small group of immigration officials demanded she strip naked with one of them searching her orifices while the others looked on and made jokes about her appearance.

* * *

This airport show is not divorced from the world. The men who want to hijack and blow up planes also seek to be centre stage to perpetrate a horror that will transmit terror into far-away living rooms. Young Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab wanted in on this production, unlike the vast majority of Africans who endure strip searches and dog's noses and suspicious glances as they make their way daily through airports around the world. Western security agencies know perfectly well that the countermeasures they have at airports and on planes are mostly for show.

But if the goal of our young Nigerian terrorist and his comrades was to intrude on perception, then the AIT unit is similarly meant to control the terms on which we perceive the state and our relationship to it. Where Abdulmutallab wanted to rupture the atmosphere of control by committing mass murder, the AIT unit official seeks to regulate the potentially unruly elements that might unseat him and his masters. With the advent of the AIT, Westerners in increasing numbers will find themselves subject to the indignities of airport theatrics – sniffed, stripped, exposed, laughed at and limited.

A01



A04



A03



A05



The Car Doctors of Maamobi

MANU HERBSTEIN

Meet the car doctors of Maamobi.

Maamobi (A01) and the adjacent Accra suburb of Nima are slums: the standard of construction is poor, sanitation is poor and water supply is at best intermittent. Yet these areas serve a useful purpose, offering migrants from Ghana's rural areas and elsewhere in West Africa relatively low rent accommodation (typically 'chamber and hall') not far from places of work.

In 1976, JK Mensah, a master panel beater, rented a plot of land at the top end of the Nima highway and put up a signboard reading JK Mensah Auto Engineering Works. The population of Accra was then about 750,000. Mensah invited several car maintenance specialists to join him. Each of these masters employed apprentices. Mensah married one of his, Sister Esi, who in the course of time became a Master Panel Beater in her own right. The Mensahs subsequently emigrated to Germany, where they still live. The landlord later reclaimed the front strip of the plot and constructed a row of stores, which he let to dealers in electrical goods, cement and yoghurt (A03). A narrow passage provides the only access to the yard behind (A04). JK Mensah's sign is no more, but the successors of the original masters continue to operate in the tiny, congested, ungated yard behind the stores (A02 p.32, seen from the unfinished three-storey building to the west (A03 and A05).

There are eleven masters, three auto mechanics, an auto electrician, a panel beater and gas welder, a blacksmith and electric arc welder, an upholsterer, a sprayer, and brake band and car air conditioning specialists. Their ramshackle offices and stores line one side of the yard, offering the only shelter when it rains. The ground is unpaved, its surface irregular. They have a washroom but have to use a public toilet down the street. Each of the eleven co-tenants pays rent of about USD35 per month. When business is good, there isn't enough space in the yard for all the cars. Late arrivals wait their turn in the street outside. The landlord forbids this, but in between rent collection days he is an infrequent visitor.

Once a year the tax collectors of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly and the Internal Revenue Service visit the yard and, having given a week's notice, demand payment of tax totalling USD70-100. The masters used to pay their taxes individually but they have recently negotiated a single collective payment. The masters also pay membership dues to the Garage Owners Association.

The stories of the masters and their apprentices convey something of Accra's big-city magnetism; of ambitions realised and frustrated; of interacting ethnicities, languages and religious affiliations; and of families that stretch beyond the borders of Ghana and Africa.

The most senior of the masters, **Samuel ('Coach') Yeboah (B01)**, car refrigeration master, was born in 1942 at Amanase, near Suhum, 60km from Accra. His mother tongue is Akwapim Twi, but he speaks English as if it were his first language. He also speaks a little Ga.

Coach's father, the first Christian in his family, headed a succession of Presbyterian primary schools, most them not far from Suhum. His mother was a seamstress. He has one sister, in Kumasi, as well as a half sister.

After leaving Middle School in the early 1960s, Coach worked for the Ministry of Agriculture, cutting down cocoa trees infected with capsid and replacing them with a quick-yielding resistant variety. Today he owns cocoa farms covering eight hectares and these are managed by members of his extended family.

In 1962 he was one of the pioneer students of the Agricultural Training College, which the State Farms Corporation established at Adidome in the Volta Region. There he received broad training in the use, maintenance and repair of agricultural machinery and specialised as an auto electrician.

In 1965 he moved to Accra where he drove a taxi, without a license, for six months. Then RT Briscoe, the Mercedes Benz and Volkswagen agents, employed him as an auto electrician grade 2. He took advantage of their training schemes to acquire a broad range of skills, including battery assembly, diesel pump repair and car refrigeration.

Later, he registered a company, New Ideas Engineering Agency Ltd., with the intention of importing spare parts. When the Ministry of Trade red tape confounded his efforts, he started his career as an independent master in car refrigeration.

Coach has been married for 41 years. He preaches every Sunday at The Touch of Faith Ministry, a Pentecostal church at Adenta, a suburb of Accra.

The Yeboahs have five children. Two sons are in Atlanta, Georgia, one a medical student (whose daughter is at boarding school in Ghana) and the other an architect, studying for a second degree. A third son, studying medicine in Freiburg, Germany, is married to a German woman. The youngest son, 28 years old, works as an arc welder in Accra. Their only daughter, a nurse, is married and has two sons and a daughter.



A02

Coach is presently building a five-bedroom house. As soon as this is finished and his single apprentice completes his training, he plans to retire and devote himself to his cocoa farms.

Klutsey Lagoh (B02), car upholstery master, was born in 1950 at Fenyi near the Ghana-Togo border. He was one of the first masters to join JK Mensah, in 1978. He speaks Ewe, English and Twi and understands Ga and Hausa.

Klutsey's parents worshipped African gods. Though his father had no formal education, he was a man of many skills: a farmer (growing cassava and maize), a palm wine tapper, a wood carver and a blacksmith. Klutsey was the last born of 14 children. When his father declined to send him to school he bought a piece of cloth and had a tailor sew him a uniform. This persuaded his mother to have him registered and his father then agreed to pay the fees.

Klutsey was a bright student and a favourite of all but one of his teachers. In 1972 he moved to Accra, joining a senior brother who trained him as an upholsterer. After trying his hand at panel beating and working for R.T. Briscoe for a year, he bought a sewing machine and set up on his own.

Klutsey has ten children, ranging in age from nine to 38. Two of them attended the Fenyi-Dzodze Secondary School, but their final results were a disappointment to their father.

One of these sons, **Justice**, 23, (B02a) was born in Newtown, Accra. His home language is Ewe but by the time he entered primary school he was already speaking some English. He reads and writes both Ewe and Ga.

Klutsey has trained Justice as an upholsterer. Justice's favourite school subject was Visual Arts and he continues to paint. He has a portfolio of pictures but hasn't sold any to date. His ambition is to help his father expand his business and to develop his artistic skills.



B01



B02a



B02



Bo8



Bo3



Bo5



Bo7



Bo4

Fuseini Abubakar (B08), Master Auto Electrician, was born in 1959 in Yendi, about 500km north of Accra. His father, a farmer (millet and yams), had four wives. Fuseini's mother had six children, some who live in Accra, the others in Yendi and nearby Zabzugu and Tatale. Fuseini spoke Dagbani as a child. He attended Balagu Primary School, an English-medium government school and completed Middle Form IV in 1980. His education was curtailed because of problems with the payment of school fees. He came to Accra and served an apprenticeship with a master who stills works in Nima.

Fuseini currently has 11 apprentices. He says that the apprentices he has trained are too many to count. Many of them are today in Spain, Italy and Germany. He charges apprentices a commitment fee of USD550 plus two crates of minerals. The family of a graduating apprentice is expected to pay for refreshments at the graduation ceremony.

Fuseini has one wife but plans to take another. His wife is a Fanti from Cape Coast, a Christian who converted to Islam when she married him. There were already some Muslims in her family so the conversion presented no problems. They speak Hausa, which she learned after moving to Accra. They have six children ranging in age from seven to 28. The eldest is a student at a teacher training college.

Alfred Kofi Sokpe (B03), master auto mechanic, was born in 1956 in Accra. His parents hail from Aklaku in Togo. His father was a house painter.

Kofi was one of eight children, of whom seven survived to adulthood. They all now live in Pokoasi, 20km from Accra.

Kofi attended the Kings Royal Mission School in Nima and the Kotobaabi K2 where he reached Middle Form II before problems with the payment of school fees curtailed his formal education.

After completing his apprenticeship he worked for some time as a driver mechanic. He joined JK Mensah in 1986 and since then has trained six apprentices. His wife, who, like Kofi, is Ewe, sells foodstuffs. They have four children. The eldest, aged 15, is in JSS 2.

Kofi speaks Ewe, English, Ga, Hausa and Twi.

Eric Kobina Sapeh, master panel beater and auto gas welder (seen in B04 with his apprentice Godsway Kpasrah and on the right in B07), was born in 1964 in Ho, the capital of Ghana's Volta Region, 150km from Accra.

His father was an accountant in the Department of Agriculture, latterly based in Accra, and his mother sold cloth. He still has family in Ho. His mother tongue is Ewe. He reads the Bible in that language and, when visiting Ho, attends church services in Ewe. Kobina also speaks Ga, Twi and English. In Accra he attends the Ebenezer Church of Yahweh Seven Days, where the services are conducted in Twi.

Kobina started school at the age of six in Peki, some 50km from Ho, while living with his grandmother. He was 28 before he completed Middle Form IV. He says that the youngest of his fellow students were then about 20 or 21 years of age.

When his father refused to continue paying his school fees, he moved to Accra to stay with his mother's brother. After a three-month course at a technical school, he signed on as an apprentice. Five years later he joined JK Mensah as an assistant to his wife, Sister Esi. Since the Mensahs' emigration to Germany he has acted as their agent in Accra.

Kobina has two apprentices, Raymond Agyei from Jasikan and Godsway Kpasrah (B04) from Peki, both of them introduced to him by one of his brothers.

His wife hails from Lolobi Kumasi, near Hohoe, also in the Volta Region. They have two daughters, a nine-year old in Primary 5, whose ambition is to be a nurse and a seven-year old in Primary 3, who plans to be an accountant.

Kobina says the masters in the yard all work well together, without friction.

He has never had a bank account but has in the past belonged to a Susu savings club, which charges a fee of one day's contribution per month – effectively 3.33 per cent per month. If he could borrow at a more reasonable rate of interest, he says he might buy accident cars and rebuild them for sale.

Saddam 'Fahilu' Adam, master of brake linings (seen in B05 with his apprentice Faisal Atta Hassan in the background), was born in 1979 at Chamba near Bimbilla in the Northern Region of Ghana, about 500km north of Accra. His parents were farmers, who grew yams and cereals.

He was educated in a government school in Togo. Apart from his home language, Chamba, he speaks French, Kotokoli, Hausa, Fanti and some English. He says he had reached class 4 or 5 before he could speak French. In 1994, after the death of his father, he left school and moved to Accra to join family. He was apprenticed the following year. An observant Muslim, he is married with two infant children. He says he doesn't plan to have more. Fahilu dreams of travelling to the United States.

His sole apprentice, **Faisal Atta Hassan**, born in 1988, also traces his origins to Chamba but was born at Anum Apapam, near Suhum, 60km from Accra. His parents now live in 'Agege' (Lagos, Nigeria) with four of their children. One of Faisal's siblings lives in Accra.

He completed JSS (Junior Secondary School) at an Islamic school for boys and girls. The only technical skill he acquired at JSS was construction drawing.

After leaving school he spent two years at home, living with his grandmother, before moving to Accra and taking up this apprenticeship. He expects to qualify at the end of the year and to set up in business on his own.

He last visited Chamba two years ago.

Felix Kobina Aganyo (B06), master auto mechanic, was born in Accra in 1973. His late father's home town was Agbozume, near Aflao on the Togo border. His mother tongue is Ewe.

His father was a Christian but nevertheless had two wives.

Felix has six sisters and four brothers, of whom he is the eldest. His youngest brother is 22 and works as a photographer. His other brothers also do technical jobs. His sisters are married and mainly engaged in petty trade. Felix's mother and his sisters still live in the house that his late father built in Accra.

Felix started to learn English through songs and poetry when he was sent to a kindergarten in nearby Kotobaabi at the age of three. Though he speaks Ewe fluently, he cannot read or write the language well. After primary and junior secondary school he attended the National Vocational Training Institute, where he graduated with an auto mechanic's certificate in 1994. He then served a three-year apprenticeship at the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, before joining his father at JK Mensah, where Aganyo senior was a master auto mechanic.

Felix is married and has one child, a girl of three months. His wife is Ewe and works as a trader. They live in a rented chamber and hall nearby. He has ambitions for his child's education but recognises that these days a secondary school certificate or university degree is no guarantee of a job. Although his father managed to pay his school fees and those of all his siblings, times are harder now. He does not plan to have more than two children.

Felix has two apprentices. Relations with his fellow masters are good, in spite of their diverse ethnic identities.

Ibrahim Morfen, master auto sprayer (left in B07, holding forth to master auto mechanic Mashoud Mohammed ('Master Awudu') and master panel beater Eric Kobina Sapeh) was born in Kotobaabi, in 1962.

Ibrahim's father was born in Koforidua, 70km from Accra, his mother in Togo. His father's family home was at Aniho, in Togo and Ibrahim still has family there. He started school at Bamboi, on the Black Volta, 450km from Accra, where his father was working as a carpenter in the Public Works Department.

D03



Bo6



D02



His mother tongue is Ewe. After primary schooling in English up to class 6, he was sent to Togo and had to learn French. He also speaks Asante Twi, Ga and Hausa. He learned Hausa in Nima where it is a lingua franca.

Ibrahim's grandfather, who was working as a driver in Wenchi, 50km from Bamboi, took him on as his mate and taught him to drive. Then, in 1979, Ibrahim moved to Accra and served a four-year apprenticeship with a master sprayer in Kokomlemlle. He paid his master the customary fees and received chop money in return. Though he has had no formal technical training, he has himself trained six apprentices, all of whom had previously attended technical school.

Ibrahim was once a Roman Catholic, as was his first wife. Their only daughter, now 25, married and attending teacher training college.

Living in Nima, all their neighbours were Muslims. After a dream, Ibrahim decided to convert to Islam. His wife's family objected and this led to the break-up of his marriage. He was then 28.

His second wife was born in Ghana, but her family hails from Djougou in northern Benin. Her home language is Dendi. They have three children, a daughter of 8 who was at the Madarassa at the time of our interview, a son Moosa, 5 (D02) and daughter Aisha, 2 (D03). At home they speak Hausa. Because Ibrahim was already an adult when he became a Muslim, he cannot read the Koran in Arabic.

His ambition for his children can be summed up in a single word: education.

Ibrahim would like to build a spraying shed, which he estimates will cost him about USD3500. He doesn't like to be in debt and is reluctant to take a bank loan. He recently guaranteed a moneylender's loan to his wife. Returning from a trading trip to Benin, with just two monthly instalments outstanding on her debt all her goods were stolen from her. Ten days after the following due date, the money lender arrived and seized Ibrahim's property.

He was not aware of the existence of organisations offering micro finance in Accra.

Mashoud Mohammed ('Master Awudu') (B07, centre) was born in Nima, Accra in 1961.

His father was a Kotokoli man from Pawa in the northern Volta Region, close to the Togo border, about 400km from Accra. The ancestors of the Kotokoli migrated from Burkina Faso in the 17th century, settling in lands that stretch from Ghana, through Togo to Benin. They could hardly have known that centuries later European foreign ministers, gathered in Berlin, would draw on their maps of Africa the inviolable boundaries which today define our nation states and divide the 400,000 Kotokoli among three of them.

In the 18th century the Kotokoli adopted Islam. In 1820 they built their first mosque. Today almost all of them are Muslims; but they still manage, even in an urban environment, to preserve some of their ancestral customs. And they still treasure their language, Tem.

Awudu's late father had four wives and twelve children of whom only seven survived to adulthood. Awudu's first wife had two daughters, one of whom succumbed to malaria in infancy. His other daughter, Alima Saidya, is now 13 and in her first year of Junior Secondary School. When her mother died, Awudu remarried. His second wife, Maria Alhassan, is a Dagomba who was born and raised in the Asante capital, Kumasi.

As a child, Awudu learned to read and write Arabic and recite long passages from the Koran by heart. A late starter in the state education sector, he stuck it out until he was 22, reaching Middle Form I, when increasing family responsibilities forced him to leave school and to begin to scratch a living as a self-employed casual porter at Accra's International Airport. At school he learned English but he also speaks Tem, Ewe, Hausa, Twi and some Ga.

After two years he had saved enough to pay an auto mechanic the commitment fee for an informal apprenticeship and later to buy his own set of tools. When he had completed his three years' training and a further year working for his master, he set up on his own. I was one of his early customers. He has superb practical skills, often diagnosing a fault merely by listening to the sound of the engine. My guess is that he might struggle with a written examination, but so what?

In his time Awudu has trained some 20 apprentices, most of whom are now running their own independent businesses, in Accra and elsewhere. Their commitment fees, today about USD200, provide him with some working capital. He gives his junior trainees 'chop money' (a food and soap allowance) of the equivalent of USD1-2 a day; seniors get more. Some of them live with their parents and walk to work; others sleep in the yard, serving as security guards.

Rather than operate a bank account, Awudu puts his spare cash into an informal Susu savings club. He has never applied for a bank loan, but has saved enough to build his own modest home at Amasamang, 15km from Accra.

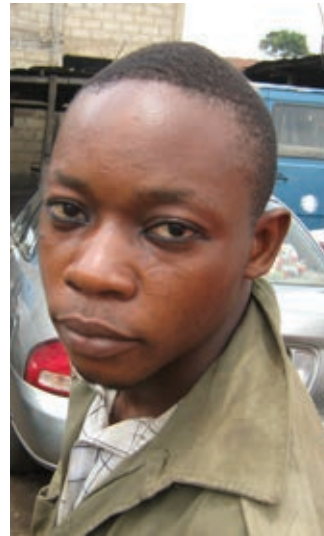
He prays regularly and goes to the Nima Mosque every Friday. His prime ambition is to perform the Haj.

Awudu has eight apprentices, more than any of his fellow masters. Seven of them appear in C01. **Mohammed Amidu**, on the left, is the senior apprentice.

Abdul Rachid (C02 and 2nd left in C01) was born in 1990 in Accra. His family is Kotokoli. At the age of five his parents took him to Kano, Nigeria, where they worked as food sellers. When his parents died in 2004, he returned to Accra to join his grandmother. Having attended a Koranic school, he can read Arabic. He speaks Hausa, but his command of other Ghanaian languages and English is poor. He has completed about six months of his three-year apprenticeship.



C01



C02

Mubarak Amadu (3rd left, C01) was born in 1989 in Bawku in the Upper East Region, about 750km north of Accra, close to the border of Burkina Faso. He finished JSS 2 and speaks Mossi, Hausa, Twi and English. In Accra, Mubarak lives with his grandparents and sisters. Asked what brought him to the capital, he says that there is no peace in Bawku, only chieftaincy disputes and revenge killing.

Ibrahim Nuhu Kano (4th left, front, C01), senior apprentice and due to graduate next year, was born in 1983 at Akyim Akroso, about 80km from Accra, where his parents still live. His father hails originally from Nigeria, coming to Ghana in 1954 from Sokoto.

Ibrahim's mother tongue is Hausa, but he also knows Twi, English, Ga, Kotokoli, Fanti and Arabic. He finished Junior Secondary School with good grades but was unable to proceed to Senior Secondary because his parents couldn't afford to pay the fees. At JSS the only technical skills he learned were pottery and farming.

In Ghana he has travelled widely. He dreams of going overseas, perhaps to Japan, to improve his skills as a mechanic.

Fuad Ismail (5th left, behind, C01) was born in Kumasi in 1992. His father is a driver and his mother sells yams. His home language is Hausa, but as a child he soon learned Asante and English. He attended the Nasrudeen Primary School and JSS, which cater for both boys and girls. He was accused of misbehaving and playing truant and was consequently sent to stay with his married sister in Maamobi. His ambition is to become a good mechanic and travel to the United States.

Bunyami Osman (6th left, front, C01) was born in 1991 in the Mossi Zongo in Kumasi, where his father deals in cellphones and his mother sells vegetables in the market. He attended the Ahmadiyya JSS and reached Form 3. He speaks Hausa, Asante and English and reads Arabic.

Kunyima Abubakar Jamal (right, back, C01). Like Mubarak, Kunyima hails from Bawku, where he was born in 1988 and where his father was a businessman dealing in building materials and his mother a hairdresser. His home language is Mossi and he also speaks Twi and English. He has lived in Accra since 2006. His mother also lives in Accra; his two brothers and two sisters are still in Bawku. At school he completed JSS. He is interested in practising art.

Osman Saeed (C03), just 15 years old, was born in 1995 at the Tesano Police Depot in Accra, where his father was a policeman. He is Awudu's most recent and youngest apprentice. He completed Primary class 4 at the Institute of Islamic Studies. When both his parents died, he was informally adopted by a lady called Hajia Asiah. Unfortunately, due to late payment of his fees, he was removed from the school roll. He hopes to resume his schooling.

Osman knows the Nima Children's Library but says he has to register before he can borrow books. He has some books at home. He found a German-language illustrated History of Germany, somewhat the worse for wear, in the boot of a car sent to Awudu for repair. He has been 'reading' it, studying one picture at a time, but finding it difficult to make head or tale of them.

I have tried, in this photo essay, to convey something of the texture of life and work in JK Mensah's yard. Rather than attempt a conclusion, I should like to suggest some of its limitations.

Family is an important element in the life of all these men; family stretching back from grandparents and forward, in some cases, to grandchildren. I have been able to capture no more than a hint of the changes that have taken place through the generations. The photographs of Ibrahim Morfen with his youngest children, Moosa and Aisha (D01-D03), suggest a missing dimension.

I have also failed to capture the changes that have occurred in the businesses of the individual masters since they were established. Photo F01, taken on 9 November 1996, hangs on the wall of Klutsey Lagoh's office. Klutsey sits at the centre, wearing sunglasses, flanked by his two senior apprentices. Five apprentices stand behind them. (The man on the right has since died 'from hernia'.) Klutsey's sons, Justice and Sylvester sit in front. Today Klutsey has no apprentices.



C03



D01

The masters and their apprentices interact with the world beyond JK Mensah's yard in manifold ways. Food vendors, such as Faija (E01), wander in. Near the entrance to the yard Hajara (E02) minds her mother's stall. There are customers requesting diagnosis of their vehicles' ills and quotations for repair. Defective parts are removed and taken for matching to Kokompe, the congested streets where the 1000 members of GASSDA, the Greater Accra Second-hand Spare Parts Dealers Association, offer used parts 'from home', Japan or Germany or wherever the ailing vehicle was manufactured.

There were 1.13 million vehicles on the road in Ghana at the end of 2009. I have not been able to discover how many there were in 1976, when JK Mensah set up shop, but my guess is that there might have been less than 200,000. In 34 years, Accra's human population has grown 3-fold to more than two million. In the same period the vehicle population might have grown to five or six times that number. How are the micro-economic business decisions of the masters affected by these numbers, statistics of which they might have no more than a rough qualitative awareness?

All the masters use mobile phones to keep in touch with customers, suppliers, apprentices and family. However, not one of them has a personal computer and, as far as I have been able to discover, none of them keeps written accounts. Would doing so help them increase their turnover and profits?

The stories I have collected have all been stories of men. Apart from the enigmatic character of Sister Esi, JK Mensah's wife, I came across no female masters or apprentices. What might that tell us about Ghanaian society today?

All the masters and apprentices are multilingual. I conducted the informal interviews recorded here in English. I wonder whether the stories I was told would have been different had the respondents spoken in their mother tongues and, if so, how?

I did not attempt to explore in-depth the multiple identities of these men: identities relating to gender, ethnicity, language, religion, and nationality. I asked one of the masters: 'Do you consider yourself a worker?' He had to give the matter some thought before replying in the affirmative. Although analytical terms derived from a different historical experience might be of limited value in attempting to understand the realities of this society, the underlying human stories remain.

I drive a 1987 Nissan Bluebird. For most of its life its engine has been maintained by my friends Awudu and Fuseini; Kobina has given a new lease of life to rusting bodywork, Klutsey has replaced worn upholstery and, once or twice, Ibrahim has given the Bluebird a fresh coat of autospray. I am grateful to them for having allowed me to photograph them and their place of work, for sharing their stories with me and for persuading their fellow masters and their apprentices to do likewise.



F01



E01



E02

PILGRIMAGES

In 2010 the Chinua Achebe Center for African Writers and Artists at Bard College in New York City and *Chimurenga* Magazine joined forces to initiate the Pilgrimages project. This highly ambitious publishing venture sent 14 African writers to 13 African cities (and one city in Brazil) for two weeks to explore the complexities of disparate urban landscapes. From this experience the writers will create 14 non-fiction books about their trips, capturing each city against the backdrop of Africa's first World Cup.

The books are intended to prompt a shift in the focus of African reportage and will comprise the Pilgrimages series, to be published simultaneously in Lagos, Nairobi and Cape Town during the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. The collection will be the most significant single addition to the continent's archive of literary knowledge since the Heinemann African Writer's Series was introduced in the 1960s.

The writers taking part in the Pilgrimages project are: **Chris Abani** (Johannesburg, South Africa); **Doreen Baingana** (Hargeisa, Somaliland); **Uzodinma Iweala** (Timbuktu, Mali); **Funmi Iyanda** (Durban, South Africa); **Billy Kahora** (Luanda, Angola); **Kojo Laing** (Cape Town, South Africa); **Victor LaValle** (Kampala, Uganda); **Alain Mabanckou** (Lagos, Nigeria); **Nimco Mahamud Hassan** (Khartoum, Sudan); **Akenji Ndumu** (Abidjan, Ivory Coast); **Yvonne Owuor** (Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo); **Nicole Turner** (Nairobi, Kenya); **Abdourahman A. Waberi** (Salvador, Brazil); and **Binyavanga Wainaina** (Touba, Senegal).

The following pages provide a glimpse into three divergent journeys to Kampala, Hargeisa, and Kinshasa respectively. These narrative essays both examine and re-imagine change and stagnation in the African city.

PILGRIMAGE TO KAMPALA

Jambo

VICTOR LAVALLE

The logo for Water Tight Services/Pinnacle Security is a giant scorpion over a light blue image of the globe. The company offices are in the wealthy neighbourhood of Bugolobi in Kampala. Because Bugolobi actually sits right alongside a hardcore slum, the homes here are surrounded by high walls and the driveways are blocked by metal fencing. There is always a guard or gatekeeper at these types of homes, no automatic garage door openers. If that guy doesn't come and open the gate, then you are not getting in.

When we drive up to the front gate of Pinnacle Security a young man in a vaguely martial uniform stops our car. The car isn't allowed inside. We have to get out and walk through a small doorway in the fence to enter the grounds. The man in the uniform walks us to the doorway and watches us closely as we step through. He doesn't check our bags for weapons and doesn't seem to be carrying one himself.

Pinnacle Security operates out of a one-storey home, which has about five rooms. It is likely the most modest property for blocks. There are two small lawns inside the compound, separated by a little driveway, where two four-wheel drive trucks are parked. The Pinnacle logo is painted on both trucks. Young men and women are sitting on the lawns here and there, under the shade of the few trees; most of them are filling out paperwork. Three men look down at one sheet of paper and come up with answers by committee. They look up at us quickly – my wife, our guide and me – but lose interest and return to their work. They are filling out job applications.

Inside the home we find a waiting room. There, another half a dozen men sit in chairs familiar to any clinic or dentist's office. The guys look at us and quickly figure out that we are not important. A receptionist sits behind a desk, rifling through paperwork. We introduce ourselves and she makes a call to one of the back offices. A moment later, Gilbert Kwarija comes out to greet us.

'Mr Kwarija,' one of the men waiting says, in a pleading whisper. Gilbert raises his hand to call for patience and the man goes quiet. He frowns, but loses the look quickly and sits back in his chair, gazing ahead patiently.

Gilbert walks us back to his small office. There is a desk with a chair behind it, and three waiting room chairs for us. Two metal filing cabinets, looking decades old, stand against the walls. An open laptop is on Gilbert's desk. It's only thing in the room that looks like it was built in the 21st century.

Gilbert Kwarija is a contractor. The men in the waiting room, along with the men and women outside on the lawns, are prospective employees, hoping they will be lucky enough to be sent by Gilbert to work in Iraq.

Gilbert is handsome and crisply dressed, his hair styled in a tight, professional afro. As we take our seats he leans back in his office chair and crosses his solid arms. His diction is as crisp as his clothes. His eyes are half shut and he smiles faintly, as if he is wary of answering my questions but too confident of his own powers to hide from them. When he speaks, even in greeting us, his voice is oddly soft, just loud enough that you have to lean forward to really hear him. He expects that you would do so.

Gilbert is 30 years old and is the training and business development manager for Water Tight Services/Pinnacle Security. The company is contracted, primarily by the US government, to provide Ugandan nationals to work in support positions on American bases in Iraq. The Ugandans do not do service work, such as food prep or driving buses, because those are handled by other foreign nationals. Instead, Gilbert's company might contract for chemical or electrical engineers, doctors, plumbers or heavy machinery operators. They also supply Ugandans for personal security details, and general security on the American bases.

Some of Gilbert's employees might find themselves in armed conflict situations. No matter what the job, they must know how to use a gun. This is part of the training they receive before being flown out of Uganda. Those who are hired for any kind of security work get further training in firearms and combat proficiency. During our conversation Gilbert sometimes refers to his 'employees', but more often he calls them 'the product'.

These days Iraq is an infamous place to work, so why are Ugandans clamouring to sign up and serve? The answer is simple: money. Gilbert says the US and Britain began contracting with the company in 2005, during the Bush administration. Ugandans were some of the first foreign nationals approached to fulfil these private service contracts. At the time an employee could earn between USD1200 and USD1500 a month. Contracts lasted one or two years. This meant a man or woman, suffering rampant unemployment in Uganda, could work in Iraq for 24 months and return with 25 million, or even 50 million Ugandan shillings – enough money to invest in a home or a new business; enough to entirely change the lives of themselves and their families. These rates have dropped over time, Gilbert says, down to about USD400 to USD500 per month, on average, for Ugandans he contracts. Nevertheless, it is still a good salary compared to they can make at home

'It's business,' Gilbert says. 'It's war business, but it's business.'

Gilbert himself worked in Iraq for two years for Uganda's Department of Defense. He was a sergeant, but he never engaged in combat. Instead he worked as an administrator at the Victory Base Complex, the largest American military base in Baghdad. The worst part of being there, according to Gilbert, was the weather. 'The summer is horrible. I never experienced anything like that. The winter is just as bad.'

He returned to Uganda with a desire to join the private contracting business, seeing the rich opportunities in hiring Ugandans out to trouble spots around the world. In fact, Iraq is far from the end of his interest. The work there isn't going to last all that long. As the Americans pull out of the region, the Ugandans are losing contracts. The Iraqi government has no incentive to hire foreign nationals to support their military because there are enough Iraqis in need of work. So Gilbert has other goals. He is itching for Pinnacle Security to get work in Somalia.

Unlike Iraq, he believes Somalia is an immediate threat to Uganda's safety, whether because of small arms sales - arms that eventually reach and damage Ugandan citizens – or the local terrorists who find safe haven in the country. Somalia is a territory that promises no end of trouble, which spells opportunity for a contractor like Gilbert. When we broach the subject of Somalia, Gilbert leans

forward in his chair with the look of a man indulging in a pleasant fantasy: 'If I got a contract this morning, at 6.30 this evening [the employees] would be at Mogadishu Airport.'

On 11 July, 2010, the night of the World Cup Finals between the Netherlands and Spain, a number of bombs were detonated in Kampala – specifically in two clubs, where locals and tourists had gathered to watch the final match. Seventy-six people were killed. Suspicion was immediately cast on the al-Shabab, a militant Islamic group operating in Somalia. Al-Shabab had reportedly threatened Uganda in the past. In Mogadishu, an al-Shabab commander, Sheik Yusuf Sheik Issa, was quoted by the Associated Press as saying he was happy with these attacks: 'Uganda is one of our enemies. Whatever makes them cry, makes us happy.'

I had spoken to Gilbert, about two weeks before the bombings took place and then his desire to work in Somalia had seemed, to this outsider, like a mercenary move based on greed rather than good sense. But in light of the attacks Gilbert's thinking might have been prescient. The Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni, has vowed that the nation will now go on the offensive against its enemies in Somalia. Pinnacle Security might be getting those contracts much sooner than even Gilbert imagined.

Ronald Sserwanga was a contracted employee in Iraq. He didn't work for Pinnacle, but for a rival contractor in Uganda, called Dreshak. The general parameters of the work were the same however. Ronald wasn't sent to Baghdad, but to Talil, in northern Iraq, near the border with Syria. He worked at Ali Base, a 43km² American military installation. He signed up for a one-year contract but resigned after nine months. He had been back in Kampala for only three weeks when I met him, the day after I interviewed Gilbert.

Ronald is short, but densely built. Even in a loose rugby shirt and jeans his strength is obvious. He wears a pair of dog tags on a silver chain around his neck. They ring faintly whenever he shifts in his chair. At 25 years of age he has a smooth, young face, but his expression is dispassionate. When I ask him questions he looks me in the eye directly and never turns away. He rarely blinks.

So why did he quit his contract early? His answer is quick. 'Conditions.' When pressed he says it was the heat. Like Gilbert, he found it unbearable. Kampala is a temperate place, sunny but rarely humid. Ronald shakes his head again at the memory of the summer heat in Iraq.

What was his job in Iraq? 'Security specialist.' In other words, he and three other men drove along the fence line of Ali Base in a gun truck, guarding against anyone who might try to scale, snip or blow up the perimeter fencing. One man stayed on the gun while the other three traded off checking for breaches. They worked the night shift. For his entire time in Iraq Ronald worked in the dark. Before leaving Uganda, he received three months of military training, to prepare him for the dangerous nature of the work.

'Sometimes you have fear,' Ronald says. 'But then it becomes a job and you have no fear.'

Did anyone ever get through the fence? 'Twice,' he says, almost casually. Both times the Iraqis broke through to steal supplies, not to launch a direct attack.

I ask Ronald why he signed up for this work. 'I took the job because I had no job,' he says. He has a wife and a child to support. He figured this contract would allow him to save enough to start a bar. He made between \$400 and \$500 per month, he wouldn't say precisely, but it was in the same range Gilbert had mentioned as the current going rate for Ugandans. Ronald has

already started a business with his savings. It is a restaurant – a small fast food joint. ‘I wanted to own a bar,’ he sighs. ‘My wife is a Christian, so no bar.’

So he couldn’t find work in Kampala, he has a family and dreams of being an entrepreneur. And yet here he is, back home, having left the contract three months early. I have a hard time believing that a man like Ronald, who seems both committed and competent, has given up three months pay just to avoid the heat.

Finally he says, ‘I found the Americans...’ He sits quietly, looking at me. ‘Some are friendly, but the friendly are few.’ This is when Ronald introduces me to the term ‘Jambo’ as it is used on the Ali Base. In Kiswahili Jambo is a greeting, like ‘hello’, but on the base Ronald says the American soldiers use it as a blanket term for the Ugandans. As in, ‘those are the Jambos’, ‘Check out the Jambos’ or ‘Here come the Jambos’.

At this point Ronald’s expression doesn’t change, but his posture does. He is hunched forward, his elbows are on his knees. The American soldiers had orders to say hello to everyone on the base, which they always did. But after the greeting they’d refer to the Ugandans as Jambos, or they’d refuse to share seats with them on the buses that shuttle people around the base.

I ask him if the black American soldiers treat them any better than the white soldiers. ‘Only a few,’ he says. ‘Others say, “your grandparents sold my grandparents”’. So, they accused a man from East Africa of having been involved in the West African slave trade? Ronald shrugs. He probably wasn’t in a position to give geography – or basic history – lessons to those black soldiers.

Ronald says that sometimes the Ugandans would strike up relationships with the American servicewomen who came to the base. In those instances, he says, the American servicemen would tell the women that the ‘Jambos have disease, AIDS’.

‘They say that we smell a lot’, he adds.

This was one of the reasons American soldiers apparently refused to share seats on the buses with Ugandans. As bad as it sounds, I have had the same feelings in Kampala. There are rough body odors to be found. Not everywhere, certainly not among everyone, but some folks in Uganda can be damn whiffy. Whenever this thought crosses my mind, while at Owino market – a crowded bazaar – or even when I am dealing with staff at our hotel, I remind myself of conversations I had with Indian friends when I was growing up in Queens, New York. They spoke about coming to the United States and being struck by the overwhelming *dairy* smell emanating from the pores of most Americans. They’d found that pretty gross, too. And I couldn’t blame them. Different diets, different attitudes toward deodorant (not to mention *access* to deodorant or even regular running water) make for different body bouquets. But I actually blame Ronald’s contractor for this miscue. Employees are given months of training, why not an hour on the difference in hygiene?

When Ronald brings up the point about the American soldiers’ attitudes toward Ugandans, he seems more shocked than insulted. I have friends who, when travelling to the Middle East or to parts of Africa, are told they should never shake with the left hand. This is the equivalent of spitting in someone’s eye. So why not look out for Ronald and the other Ugandans in much the same way? This is not meant to excuse the behaviour of American soldiers, but fair is fair.

Another problem with this generally negative relationship between the Americans and Ugandans is that it filters down to some of the other nationalities on the base. Ronald says that some of the Filipinos, who drive the buses that transport people around the base, join in the disrespect aimed at the Ugandans. Ronald mentions one driver in particular, who drives a bus ‘going Southside’ at

Ali Base. Apparently everyone knows the man because he posts a note in big letters on the back of his seat. It reads: 'Jambo don't sit behind me.'

I ask Ronald if the Ugandans ever get into arguments, or even fights, with the American soldiers. He recalls one incident in which a Ugandan got into a screaming match with an American officer. The Ugandan was fired and then a representative from the employer, Dreshak, came to speak with the remaining employees. Ronald says the representative threatened employees: 'If you fight with Americans I'll be waiting for you in Entebbe and arrest you for three months.' Ronald is at pains, however, to make point before we end our conversation: 'We are human beings, we are all the same. We are friendly and we love to be friends with [the Americans]. For us, we have no problem with the Americans.'

I tell him about Gilbert. Ronald knows of Water Tight Services/Pinnacle Security. They are rivals with Dreshak. There are also other contractors in Kampala. And this business is also thriving elsewhere on the continent. 'It's like a competition,' Ronald says.

As he prepares to leave, Ronald mentions his own trip back to Uganda. He flew from Talil to Baghdad, from Baghdad to Entebbe Airport and then travelled home to his family. Before he flew out of Baghdad, he met some new recruits, men from Sierra Leone hired to do the same job he was turning his back on. They would be earning USD200 a month.

PILGRIMAGE TO HARGEISA

Hargeisa Snapshots

DOREEN BAINGANA

The best coffee in town is at Sinow's. He's a tall elegant grey-haired man who wears all white, every day, topped by a brown *kufia*. Sinow makes the coffee himself, behind a huge red contraption that looks like it belongs to a museum. After I am served, he comes over and asks, 'E buono?' I had told him I speak Italian, which I don't really, but we stagger along until he has to ask my guide, in Somali, what on earth I am saying. Once Sinow takes your order, he won't ever forget it. I keep changing mine though, from *caffè latte* to *espresso* to *macchiato* and back again. Still, always, he comes over to ask, do I like it?

On election day, I ask Sinow if he has voted. He whispers in my ear that he is from Mogadishu. He smiles, half-shy, half-sly. But everyone knows this. He had a coffee shop there for years, first working for Italians, then on his own. He escaped the war and came up north to Hargeisa. His family, wife and kids, are still there. He sends all his money back to them.

Somalia, the festering wound. Somaliland, a wound healing, though the scars are huge: rubble from bombed-down buildings; rusting tankers along the highway sinking into sand; veterans on crutches; everyone's story that begins, *when I came back to Hargeisa* ... And, of course, the city's central monument: one of the fighter jets that bombed Hargeisa to dust in the 1988–91 civil war against the south. It is raised high as if to be worshipped, balancing atop an ugly pedestal roughly painted with a battle scene showing bloody bodies with heads and limbs chopped off. No wonder everyone tells me again and again: 'All we want is peace.'

We take our coffee in the car when all we need is a quick refuelling of energy. When there's more time, we sit outside the café on plastic chairs on the sandy pavement, shaded by two trees, close to the road that is bustling with people and lumbering 4x4s (I'm told Hargeisa has the highest number of four-wheel drives per capita in the world. My guess is it rates just as high for its number of goats), donkeys dragging carts, lorries and buses painted in carnival colours, and always, everywhere, the flowing, swaying black or every other possible colour and pattern, of the women's clothing. I haven't seen women sitting outside the café, though a woman owns it.

One afternoon I have coffee with Abdihakim Mohamed Dirir, a painter who sells his work in a store opposite the café. He paints pastoral scenes of majestic camels and chubby sheep and goats against golden-yellow desert backgrounds, or traditional milk gourds, thumb pianos and hair combs arranged into group portraits. He says these paintings sell well, especially when diaspora Somalis are back for the summer. He says of course he paints anything else he wants, and is inspired by what he sees on the internet, but he won't display those in the shop.

As we talk on in the still mid-afternoon heat, a couple of baboons, with heart-shaped cheeky faces, long grey hair, and flared pink bottoms, join us. One of them is given an almost empty bottle of Sprite, which it drinks from like a child. The wind rises, whips our faces with sand.

Next to the art shop is a stall selling *khat*, the leafy intoxicant sold all over Hargeisa. On election day, I ask the stall owner, 'How is business?' She says, 'Same as usual'. She is wide with success and self-satisfaction, glowing in a white and blue flowered hijab. A boy of about 10 sits next to her drinking tea out of a tin cup. He stares at me, curious, open-faced.

'What about Fridays, is it business as usual?', I ask.
'*Khat* chewers don't take holidays', she says. 'They don't even fall sick'. She adds, laughing, 'They grow fat'.

I laugh with her. She reaches between her widespread feet and throws back a brown sack to reveal *khat* stems tied in large bunches that she says go for USD30 (which everywhere are used just as often as Somali shillings).

I am in awe of her self-assured matter-of-factness; I no longer want to ask her, but what about all the men who do nothing but chew? What about all that money not used for school fees or saved? What about the ethical issues? Shouldn't her customers 'Just Say No'? Was it just the same as selling coffee, only more lucrative? She would have a sassy comeback, for sure.

Ryszard Kapucinski once wrote that political rallies in Africa are celebrations. We all know such sweeping statements should be swept into the dustbin, and we are more familiar with political bloodbaths than celebrations, but in late June 2010, in Hargeisa, a celebration it was. In the last week leading up to the vote, when each party was given a day for its final campaign, the roads were full of cheering crowds by seven in the morning. I joined the crowd supporting the main opposition party, Kulmiye, as it chanted and danced its way to Liberty Park. Everyone was wearing green and yellow headscarves or bands or waving green and yellow cuts of cloth way above their heads. In the park, groups of women formed circles and danced, stamping feet, raising dust and drawing sweat as one woman beat a goatskin-covered drum vehemently.

The scene was repeated the next day, except the colour that covered the city now was the dark avocado green of the other opposition party, UCID, pronounced more like a gurgle than a word. Hundreds of cars raced by with men and women hanging from the windows, sitting on the boots of the cars, clambering on the tops, crowded in lorries, shouting, singing, delirious with excitement. The scene was repeated yet again, at an even higher pitch, a few nights later when the winner, Kulmiye, was announced.

Why the fuss? This was my reaction as an observer bred to be cynical about politics. Why expend, expel such passion? Yes, a party is good fun, of course. And a good excuse to publicly dance and sing, in a country that boasts not a single disco. Public theatre, public catharsis, and so on.

Somalilanders have fought hard and paid much to reject a joint destiny with Somalia; and were continuing to do so with this dance and this vote. They were in the streets and campaign halls and in long lines at voting centres all over country, knowing full well that the al-Shabaab terrorist group had called the elections 'the work of the devil'. Anything awfully bloody could happen. But they celebrated the sheer audacity of holding a national election, a peaceful and organised one at that, whether the world recognised Somaliland or not. They danced in the streets, knowing how precious this was, because down south, their fellow Somalis in Mogadishu were dying in the streets. As my guide on election day said, all that their political leaders asked of them was their vote, while in Somalia people were asked for their lives.

The bullet or the ballot? This wasn't a hypothetical question, not for Somalis. So how could they not, as Somalilanders, celebrate the choice they were making? Whatever the election outcome, it was already a victory. It was time to party.

PILGRIMAGE TO KINSHASA

Kin la Belle:

In the Clear Light of Song and Silence

YVONNE OWUOR

Mbote!

Mbote!

In the course of being summoned by the ghosts of World Cups present, past and future to venture into Kinshasa, under the miasma of sentiment that is a fallout from the 50 years of independence celebration from Belgium, I run into a language that was born out of music and spoken in microtones, so that the entire gamut of human emotion is given a voice and words to speak.

I feel the language in my heart, my hands, my stomach. I feel the lyrics of a soldier man scolding water vendors gesticulating with one hand, music and dance, the Congo cliché live. The water vendors flee. I feel the words they hurl back, words that curve and fall short of the soldier who is sauntering away. I turn. Two men in front of me stoop, lower their heads and move close so their foreheads touch.

What a poignant way for men to meet.

Mbote!

Mbote!

A stranger who would be a pilgrim eavesdrops on the cadences, the rhythm and pace of this one place. To the limitlessness of music, of a language and a universe inside the language made of music for music. This is an old place. On first encounter the truth that howls out is this: the immensity, the immensity. And this is not just in reference to its size.

The thing about Lingala is the inner knowing that pops up on first encounter – that this too comes from a deep, deep song, comes from the time when words had not broken off from music and perhaps the same time when humankind had not been infected by pain. It rouses new and old feelings with names yet unknown, certainly. Its chords vibrate and find resonance with something within, and I know, if I were of this place, in order to channel the sensations I too would need to sing or dance or cry.

And a voice rings out. A stranger turns. Because in the melody of the tongue a stranger has discovered chords that have been made for her.

A tall, thin man beckons.

She glances around before she walks over.

He has music to sell.

Music from the East.

Where she is from?

‘How do you know where I am from?’, she asks in bad French.

It is in the look, the way of standing in the world. It is the way of listening to the sounds you hear. He leans over to add. 'Here, where you are, it is not always safe to be from the East. To look as you do can bring problems.'

'Why?'

'The Memories.'

'What memories?'

'For example, not far from here there was a fire. It was in Masina. There is a shrine to patriotism where there had been a fire. The fire was fuelled by human fat, the remains of the invaders from the East. Like you.'

'A correction. I am from the further East.'

'Kigali?'

'Further.'

'Where?'

'Nairobi.'

'Really?'

'Kenya.'

'If you say so'

'I do.'

'Say something in Kiswahili then.'

She stutters. 'How do I learn Lingala in two weeks?'

He giggles. 'Ha! If you can tell me you can see the world in music I will tell you that you will learn Lingala soon.'

Did he say *see* the world in music?

'Yes. See the world as music. The world is inside music.'

'How do you see music?'

Before he laughs he says, 'Eyes have ears of their own. Try to use them from time to time. An eye can see what it is asked to see. So ask your eyes, I want to see music ... they will show you ... then you will learn Lingala quickly.'

Viewpoints.

I think the music man is speaking of viewpoints. A holographic place and from where anyone stands the view is/might be different, the perspective changes, so does the story and the song. *Eyes, I want to see music.*

I am being cautious, terrified of the convenient habit of the single story, which writer Chimamanda Adichie decries so eloquently. That horrible sickness of a sustained single point of view, which never changes, cannot be allowed to change, repeated often enough so it becomes reality. That is not the shame. What is awful is the smallness of the now compromised world that emerges, those stillborn worlds that cannot be born. Worlds are shy things, like baby souls and they need to feel they will be seen and loved just as they are. And when voices clamour and decree that this is what they are and shall always be, these worlds shrink, retreat and cover their faces, afraid of what humankind can do to all the dreams and existences they contain.

A music man's pause. 'Why are you here from Nairobi?'

'To feel Kinshasa, and maybe after, to write the sensations.'

'Do you know what you'll write?'

'No.'

'Then maybe Kinshasa will tell you something.'

Another pause.

‘What can I sell you then?’
‘What do you have?’
‘Music?’
‘Joseph Kabasale?’
‘Why him?’
‘Independence Cha Cha’
‘Ah! Nostalgia music. Let me play it so others can hear it. And when we play it let us watch what they will do. And then you can buy it afterwards.’

Independence Cha-cha to zuwiye...

Kinshasa cacophonies on the crossroads that is Victoire, and in the blend of so many sounds and the songs in a language, the old song still wields its magic. And we watch hurrying footsteps falter, linger for two, three seconds where Kabasale celebrates. A few pick up the tune beneath their breathing, mouths purse as they take the melody to others, three women – sisters maybe, they are so alike – turn simultaneously to stare, first at the sign above the shop and then at a tall, thin bald headed music man, and a stranger leaning on the door jamb next to him watching them. Kabasalleh summons us all to beginnings, and in the song we can start again. We erase East-West-North-South and those unrepentant fires in Commune Patriotique de Masina are laid to rest for three minutes and six seconds.

Kabasale’s melody ends. My Kinshasa seers, my colleagues and companions for this pilgrimage, approach, similar worry lines on their foreheads. Five men of myriad worlds, aligned to Kinshasa in one way or another. It is with and through them that I shall glimpse this place. It is they who have agreed to share my struggle to give word to all our experiencing. These are their names (for now): Claus, Junior, Roger, Kiripi and Patrice, who will leave us after a few days, but only after he has laid down pathways and summoned other wilderness guardians.

I attempt mild defiance at their look, and then give up and simply apologise:

This was not a deliberate escape attempt. I merely followed the song in a language. This is where it led me to.

‘Listen,’ says the Music man.
Again.
Independence Cha-cha to zuwiye...

In the black car that will become the metaphorical chariot that leads to yet another destination. In my dreams the car will appear, driverless and conscious. And still even in dreams, I will leap in. *Show me.*

I am now being reminded that Lingala, like *bitterness* in coffee, is but one of four essences that make up the fullness of Kinshasa. There are four national languages here. The other three are Kituba, Tshiluba and Kiswahili.

Lingala, I am told has a pain-filled past. It carries many wounds. It was the official language of the hated and mostly diabolic *Force Publique*, the hand cutting the colonial army that served the whims of the greatest *genocidaire* of the modern world, Leopald II. Lingala, I am admonished, is suffused with the waters of Congo’s sufferings.

Would that explain the texture of the blue note, the microtone in the language?

The fifth essence, French, though cherished, applied and used everywhere, is regarded as a bit of a paedophilic uncle who must be endured because he is family and is also useful. It is the official language, the safe 'other' that, officially, is not really inside the national pot but can be jumped into when the national pot gets to boiling point.

Viewpoints.

After dinner I shall ask about the fires of Masina.

A pause.

'Ah! To quote Marseillaise: "*Qu'un sang impur/abreuve nos sillons!*" the patriotic murdering is a human habit that gets amplified when it happens here, glorified when it happens elsewhere.'

'East Goma is far away from Kinshasa only in geography but not in memory.'

Here. Another echoes...

Shame can be

Prayed away

Danced away

Drank away

Subjected to amnesia.

You too can be a part of our silence.

I decline.

'You don't have a choice. Now you have heard, and the noise has entered into you. You can be apart from the noise, but the silence, you are in it; you are made of it. The choice was made for you when you noticed.'

'How can you live with the silence then?'

A belly laugh.

'Apnea. Cut off the breathing. Something like that. Cut off the oxygen. It can take time, and sometimes people die of silence. Silence can suffocate to death.'

Listen.

I lean forward.

'Once, there was a man. His name was Godfroid Munongo. One day at a conference, in the middle of his speech, he announced: "It is too much. Tomorrow I will tell you how we killed Lumumba." And the world waited for the great revelation the next day. But when dawn came, the world found out that during the night, Godfroid had died of cardiac arrest. He died right here in Kinshasa.'

Godfroid was chief of the Bayeke, grandson of Msiri, patriarch of Lumbumbashi, which was the capital of Katanga, chieftain of a state within a state. Katanga is the locale of the sulphuric acid pit where, those in the know say, Patrice Emory Lumumba's remains were dissolved.

'Silence has a visual aspect, too. Apart from the pit there is no evidence of the space being different from any other space, except for the silence.'

Fifty years later, the persistence of the idea that is Patrice Emory Lumumba is evident. Ghosts remain restless when their lives and loves are unrequited. And of their own accord, passing minstrels – has that term been rehabilitated – strike the chords of the *Independence Cha-Cha*. They sing it to us.

We shift in our seats. Silent. And glance at each other. It seems that only I am surprised that the ghosts have so daringly joined us and now have something to contribute to these musings.

And this time I listen to the words.

The opposite of Kinshasa is Cité du Fleuve. One of my Kinshasa seers, the artist-arts manager Patrice Mukurukeza explains, tongue firmly in cheek. ‘We shall rebuild Kinshasa by moving to the river. We shall have a planned and organised city. Kinshasa will finally escape from Kinshasa.’

Cité du Fleuve/MbokayaEbale will be extricated from the *mélange*, the *bruit*, the gnarled *cosmoi* that have become Kinshasa today. MbokayaEbale will be ordered, clean, formed in lines, painted and face the river, and unlike Kinshasa there will be river viewing equity. That can only be a good thing.

I imagine as only a stranger, not even that, a mere pilgrim might.

Obstacles

ANNA KOSTREVA

You know those days when it's so hard to get out of bed? For many teenagers around the world, that's the biggest obstacle to their everyday movement. But in Johannesburg, things are more complex.

A group of South African teenagers at the Afrika Cultural Centre were asked to consider the obstacles they face as they move around Johannesburg. They were asked to write about the subject and to make an image, positioning the place or goal they were trying to get to in the background and an obstacle as an object in the foreground.

These young people are aged 12 to 24. They live in the central business district of the city and in surrounding townships. Some of the descriptions might seem simple, but on further reflection are astonishing. The young people are actors in the city, and they recognise that they are being held back. To propose something as an obstacle requires a consciousness that things could be different. The landscape, distances, infrastructure and crowds of people are pointed to specifically. However, the subject of obstructed movement in the city is expanded to symbolic movement and is even inverted to movements out of the city. These revisions of the question reveal that what weigh most heavily on the minds of these young people are the challenges they confront to move forward in their lives.



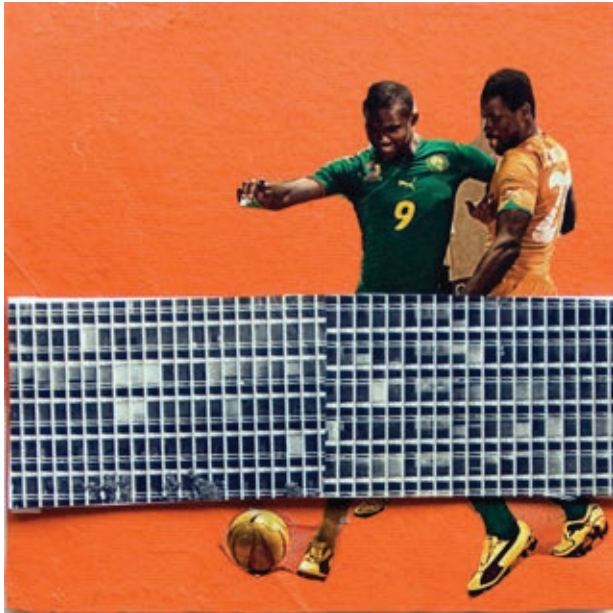
Background

***My background represents the end result of what I'm working towards and the city with the light represents success, the beach represents the peace, happiness and fulfillment that comes with it.*

Obstacles

**The first one of the woman represents who I am as an African young woman, my culture and I would like to believe the crazy hair represents the insane side of me which I like to call my creative Insanity. The houses represent my current environment as its not the best one. The building is a school, I have to excel academically in order to achieve my dreams. All of these I think I can work through with the utmost diligence.*

Camilla Tshelane



I am trying to get in to a soccer field but there is an obstacle that is preventing me from getting there which is a fence but we can go around it in order to get inside the field all of this is situated in orange farm which is what I experience most of the time when my and my friend try to go and play in the soccer field.

Sifiso



I want to go Cape Town and the obstacles that I face up to, that make difficult for me to get there are mountains, transport and my brain, coz i get this negative thoughts that i can't make because where Im from I live the different lifestyle that they are living.

Nsimande Sanelisiwe



Well basically I Experienced traffic coming to newtown, People were busy with construction, coming here we had to turn back around just to get the other route to come here, which I ended coming late.

Tshepiso Promise Ramosela



In order for me to get home I have to jump this big rock's, for me to get were I live, Because they is know way fro me to pass, so it is a must for me to Jump.

Rocky Ndlovu



*My obstical Is that i want to go
somewere but i cant get to town with
out getting disterbed So The was a
dy when the was a conival I had to
get my way I moved on the oter side
go move over the people Like over
on the side.*

Karabo Mabena



*My destination train station
The obtacle is the gate between the
city and the station Now i'm saying
that cause it delays Sowetians you
have to pay to get trough.*

Luzuko Sondzaba



Im poor and I want a bright future and what stops me to bright future is that Im not working due to my Previous and existing education. Im not qualified to better living. so I need to work firs in order for me to be success.

Thabo Moshdeu



The city is my obstacle to nature.

Angela Sithole



My background clearly states a group of people of the city, some of them hang around all day and while most of them make they way to work to make a living. My obstical as you see is exactly what some of us that sit around all do, make us weak & weaker.

Waterlilly T Rosa Siyengo



I wanna be in a quite place where I can do other thing quite but the place must be glowing shiny and Golden also but the obstacle that I am soeing is that I just dont understand myself sometime I become some one am not am sometime I just feel like not ltting the past go this happens usually when I am alone.

Banele Motha



Many years ago I was not being treated good on the street. When I was learning At Park Town boy High school. They were boys that they were group, when I am passing by the road they usually take my money and lunch box. every day they take my things, but I discovered that they are always taking my things and I tried to go right around, but it is fear away to get there.

Mthokozisi Dube



There's a place where I wanna go at a beach in DURBAN; But there are somthings that block my way through MONEY MATTER'S is one of the reasons that blocks my way because I am earning a less salary and I cant afford to visit the beach our economy is poor and as a results I cant afford to take a Trip Vacations.

WILDLIFE - Nature - These are the thing's that stands in my way because if They weren't there maybe there would be a way for me to visit the beach. Mountains and wild animals I can't cross them anyway.

Phineas Mopogo



Exhortations

Tracks

WORDS BY MADEYOULOOK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SANTU MOFOKENG

The train – *igado, isithimela* – a means of transport that has become a stand-in for the distances between peoples, the construction of segregation and a mode of economic repression. Somewhere between station and tracks, departure point and destination are the memories and futures of ordinary lives. Spanning the paradoxical gap between Johannesburg city and its neighbour Soweto, run two railway routes made purely for transporting mass labour – a necessity to apartheid planning and ensuring cheap access and continued apartness. Today, the same routes exist, still unable to reach many of the further corners of Soweto, still maintaining a system of labour for the majority and mass capital accumulation for the minority.

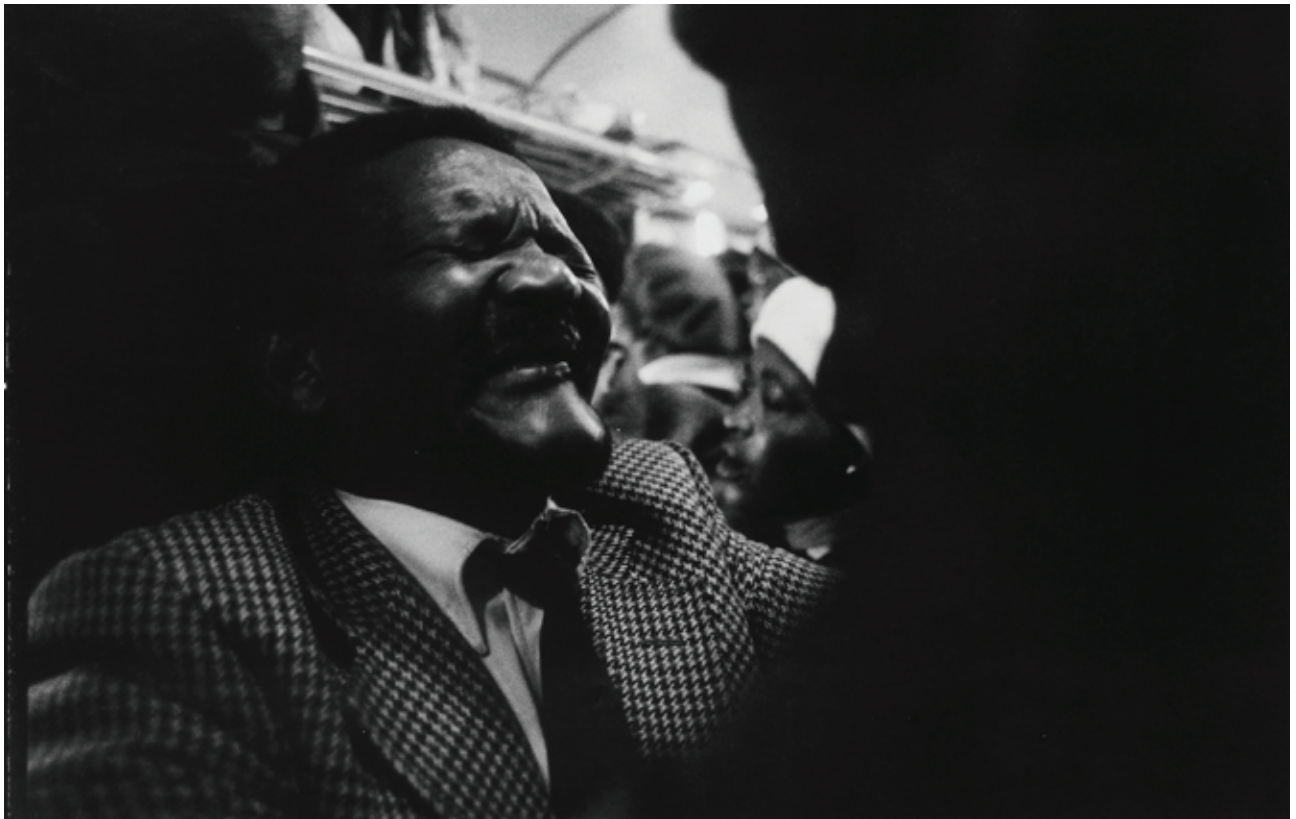
But some things have changed and the ways in which the public are able to engage, challenge and occupy their spaces have taken on new forms. Cognisant of this, we met with the photographer Santu Mofokeng to establish the point of crossroads, where things are in motion and where things remain still. To do so, we considered two works of art that explored the practice of train preaching on Metro Rail's Soweto route – artworks separated by 24 years, medium, intention and democracy.

Santu Mofokeng's *Train Church* was embarked upon in 1986. A personal project, taken on in response to the overload of violent and blandly political imagery coming out of South African documentary photography. Mofokeng's project was strongly situated in his own daily experiences and a need to reflect them.

MADEYOULOOK began *Sermon on the Train* in 2009, a project that looked to push notions of public ownership, interaction and academia into a new direction by facilitating university lectures on the train to Soweto. This project was not based on ordinary life but rather on curiosity – at human interaction and access to knowledge.

And in '86 I was young at the time so you can imagine Mondays you come with babalas. You arrive on Monday, you just went to sleep at two in the morning, you have been jolling, you hoping when you arrive in the train you can get some sleep [...] Two stations down the church begins and people start clapping hands and the bells and sing hymns and then you find yourself in church. – interview with Santu Mofokeng, July 2010

Mofokeng's *Train Church* depicts the ordinary occurrence of train preaching on his route to work everyday. The photographs are black and white, largely taken in close-up, intimate and unapologetic. They capture worship, preaching and prayer, faith and passion – all in a days travel. By depicting the everyday, the ordinary and the real Mofokeng sought to do something quite against the status quo – to depict



Overcome / Spiritual Ecstasy

black people not as victims, as sufferers or as revolutionaries, but rather as the faithful and the coping. These were personas of the black South African not captured much since the heyday of *Drum*. Today, looking at the photographs, they are clearly fraught with strategies of survival. A reality of the train world wide.

The project I decided to do as my own personal project, looking at life, township life, which means if I am photographing in a shebeen its because I am there, if I am photographing football it's because I am there. These are the kinds of things I do. By inclination. Not because I can't. I don't like the kind of work where you show up people, you say Afrikaners are like this, people are like that. I am not persuaded.

Train church was a kind of revenge, these people who were depriving me of sleep. It's photogenic, and most of the pictures were made in winter, it's very dark in the morning, gets dark very early. At the time, I did train church on the path I was doing and in time you realise that commuting is not something that's naturally... it did not come about organically. People were moved from the city so they commute. – SM, 2010

The coming of the railroad is a world-wide phenomenon, directly related to the coming of mechanisation, of new levels of production, of a different kind of labour consumption – essentially with the coming of the modern. All over the world, and particularly in England, the United States, Kenya, India and South Africa, a common history of a network of gashes in the landscape and the blood that oozed from the workers who made them, correlates with the coming of the steam locomotive and its robbing the earth of coal, diamonds, gold, man, woman and child. The South African migrant labour system, the Bantustans, the townships were dependent on the railway and its ability to separate and then connect people when necessary.



Commotion

Still a marker between neighbourhoods, races and classes worldwide, the train speaks of rigid fixities of historical lack for some and excess for others, while embodying in its existence the very nature of movement.

And now suddenly the tenure is for millenarianism, that is to say that life after, in heaven, whatever the Boers are doing to us they will get their come-uppance. 1000 years, whatever, it's in the Bible somewhere. Kids are becoming priests, because if you are touched or you can see or whatever, these kind of churches, charismatic, big churches, people turn towards looking at ancestors, they turn to the Bible, they turn to look at whatever, because politics: basically were beaten. – SM, 2010

Today the train is the cheapest mode of transport in Johannesburg and its surrounds, and it is synonymous with the working class and the poor. Not so long ago the trains were too dangerous for anyone who had a choice, the violence peaking a number of years ago during a protracted strike by security guards. Guards who chose to risk their lives to go to work were often thrown from the trains – an echo of the pre-1994 violence attributed to the conflict between the Inkatha Freedom Party and the African National Congress.

Trains in Johannesburg today, however, are heavily populated with young and old. Children whose massive backpacks reach their knees hop on and off to school and back without the slightest insecurity. Small-scale entrepreneurs walk from coach to coach with overloaded shopping baskets of absolutely everything you need – nail clippers, zambuk, chappies, superglue, buttons, jiggies, 'ice', fruits and vegetables. Every now and again there might be a performance, drums, dancing, *ibeshu* and all – an astounding display of agility and balance because trains don't ride smooth.



The Book

And then of course there is church. Depending on whom you are, or how bad a day you are having, the train church is either a blessing or a curse. You don't always know there is one on the coach you get on and two young men might leap onto your coach, Bibles in hands, a station or two after you get on. Sometimes the train is too full for you to move to somewhere quieter. There might be singing, other people in the train might take part, preaching might take the form of an elongated relay of pacing and 'amen, hallelujahs' till you get to your destination. Whatever way, church goes on. The loud clacking on tracks and screeching breaks just heightens the fervour, the long day that's almost past only strengthens the resolve and deepens the melody. If the train is full enough, you can clap without worrying about losing your balance.

Because I don't have this courage to confront violence or violent situations, even a car accident, I can't bring myself to photograph that. I decided, when people were saying they will take photographs of, do a project on farm labour or pensioners or whatever, to show African society as victims. I was never into victimology – I decided to do a project that is kind of a fictional biography or metaphorical biography, about looking at my life without necessarily ... to try and show what life is like in the township, for me. I go to shebeens, I play football, not necessarily as a kind of lack but to show it for what it is. Not to say we don't have swimming pools, not to say we don't have, not in the negative, just by looking at life as it is found in the township. – SM, 2010

The train, its penchant for stirring nostalgia, has not lost its torn soul. It remains a vehicle for moving mass labour. Train churches are set deeply within this reality – part way to pass the time, part negotiator of community, part call of salvation. It is this nature of ordinariness that Mofokeng sought to capture and that we were inspired by.



Supplication

Sermon on the Train, a lecture series on the Metro Rail, took as its point of departure the ordinariness of train preaching, of sharing enlightenment, of communal understanding and its position slap bang in the centre of isolation. The lectures were given by academics, about academic subjects, to a mixture of usual commuters and an added ‘not so usual’ public. These lectures were intended to ‘take knowledge to the people’, not because ‘the people needed it’ but because those who produced it did – as a way of calling to account the isolation of academia and encouraging the exploration of possibilities for new ways of making and sharing knowledge. *Sermon on the Train* took on the fraught clash of connectedness and separation that is embodied in the train, engaged it, did not change it, did not make it better but ensured it was taken notice of.

Talking with Mofokeng about the spaces in which our works might find a cross-road first exasperated the separation. *Train Church* was photographed just as we were born and is deeply situated in historical narrative; *Sermon on the Train* takes on the current and the colloquial, somewhat naively. *Train Church*, and Mofokeng in particular, exemplifies classic use of a classic medium, while *Sermon on the Train* denies conventional forms of art making and definitions of artists. *Train Church* explores the realities of the lives of its subjects, made initially as document, while *Sermon on the Train* brings together two extreme opposites, motivated by abstract concept and ‘art’.

Yet Mofokeng’s description of his work, how and why he makes it, brought about some starkly clear motivations for why we do what we do and the power of the ordinary, the strength of normal people and the need to recognise this. Our discussion brought to the fore a number of parallels: the challenge to the status quo, the appreciation of ‘what’s there, everyday’ and the need to take on the cleavages and vast social distances that exist, still.

‘Here I Am Nobody’:

Rethinking Urban Governance, Sovereignty and Power

CAROLINE KIHATO

It is a cold July afternoon and I am spending time with Florence, a Congolese woman, at her stall in the Yeoville market. The Johannesburg winter sun is streaming through the market, and its welcome rays are falling on the *kitenge* material that she sells. Florence is recounting how she managed to escape a police raid on the market the day before. The ‘Metro’, [metropolitan police] as they are commonly known, conduct raids in the market in search of illegal foreigners and others who contravene municipal by-laws.

‘They come and surround the market so that you cannot escape’, she says. ‘But we have a warning system, those sellers who face the street see them and warn us inside the market.’ ‘*Sbo!* I almost didn’t escape yesterday,’ she laughs. ‘I didn’t hear the [warning] whistle, but God is great, I was helped by a friend and escaped before they caught me!’

As Florence tells her story, which is similar to many I have heard, I ask her how she copes, seemingly always on the run. Manner-of-factly she says, ‘Here I am nobody. I hide from the police, I hide from the South African government, I hide from my government at home. Sometimes I even hide from my own country men ... you see this is how I survive’.

Florence represents an enduring problem for urban governance. Her ‘hiding’ obscures the state’s objective to control patterns of social behaviour and to make urban space transparent. Indeed, the everyday practices of migrant women reshape our understanding of urban governance, how we see the official and unofficial, formal and informal, visible and invisible city. In their murky world, what appears to be informal business supports and is supported by formal economic activities. Women’s lives collapse the dichotomy of the official and unofficial city, in ways that overturn conventional understandings of the nature of the state and state power in the city.

Governance and the African city

The idea of urban governance in African cities is often influenced by the definition itself: ‘the relationship between civil society and the state, between rulers and the ruled, the government and the governed’ (McCarney 1996: 4). Set against growing urban poverty, inequality, crumbling infrastructure and mounting social and political crises, proponents suggest that the key to resolving urban problems is to recognise that a city consists of a variety of urban actors, each with a stake and role in the city’s development (Stren and White 1989; Halfani 1996; McCarney 1996; Swilling 1997). Governance suggests that the solution to the crises is to develop relationships that are underscored by democratic, accountable, reciprocal norms and values. Resolving the urban crisis therefore is not so much a managerial or technical exercise, but a *relational* one.

Viewing governance as *relational* might imply, at least in theory, that the locus of authority and power does not lie in a single urban actor or institution, but in the actual practice of urban governance. It is the state that sets the nature and character of civil society participation and decision-making and determines when, where and how civil society engages with it.

This is true for South Africa.

After the establishment of a legitimate local government in 1995, the focus turned to restructuring the city in ways that erased the racial and economic inequalities. The establishment of local government as a 'sphere' with constitutional authority and functions, set up urban governments with the power to restructure urban spatial form and to work 'with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic, and material needs and improve the quality of their lives' (Ministry of Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development 1998: 17).

Critical to the transformation of local government is greater participation and democratic decision making at local level. Although in theory this remains true, the reality in South Africa suggests that the practice has been reduced to a 'technocratic' managerial exercise in fulfilling certain legislative requirements around integrated development plans and land development objectives (Heller 2003: 170). Inner city regeneration in Johannesburg, some charge, tends to be driven by powerful business and commercial interests, with the city paying 'lip service' to the participation of ordinary urban dwellers (Beall et al 2002: 128). And although the way in which governance is conceived makes critical contributions toward developing a strong foundation for the management of urban space, it presents only a partial understanding of the dynamics that privilege urban relationships between the state and civil society. In doing so, it fails to see how 'urban Africans are reworking their local identities, building families and weaving autonomous communities of solidarity, made fragile by neo-liberal states' (Fassil 2007: 155).

Legal limbo and administrative invisibility

A problem in determining how many foreign migrants there are in a country is the fact that many, particularly those who are undocumented, are invisible to the state. Once undocumented migrants enter the country, the state has no way of tracking them unless they are detained by the police. The migrant women I encounter are cases in point – 'hiding', in a precarious state of limbo, with limited choices to participate fully in South African society because of their legal status. Most of the women are asylum seekers, with Section 22 permits that *de jure* allow them to work and study while their refugee status is determined. Although status determination is

meant to take six months, in reality it can take years of waiting to get an interview to determine whether an application is successful or not (IRIN 2008; CORMSA 2008). In the meantime, few service providers, such as banks and state hospitals, or landlords for that matter, recognise the Section 22 permits as valid forms of identity.

These institutional ‘barriers to entry’ mean that migrant women can live suspended, sometimes for years. The consequences of being in legal limbo crystallise daily when women seek such basics as employment, health care and housing in the city. For Rose, a woman from Rwanda, the barriers impact her ability to find work and a place to live:

For me [getting work] is difficult because I’m still having this asylum seeker permit so I can’t get a little job. I just sell my bananas. So I was trying to ask to the Home Affairs if they can give me a permit for more than one month, [but] ... until now they just give me one month ... [and] every month I have to go now to renew my permit. This ... permit can’t allow you to get a job; can’t allow you to open an account ... can’t allow you to even to rent your own house ... Even the flat which we are living is on another person’s name ...’

Julliet from Cameroon echoes Rose’s frustration about not having access to a job, despite completing her degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her experience of trying to access ante-natal care in a provincial hospital is also indicative of the alienation experienced by migrant women:

When I was pregnant, the first time I went for ante-natal [care], all the South Africans were let in. Then if you are a foreigner, if you are a refugee ... they have to check to see if your paper is valid. Then if you are not a refugee they give you some conditions. You find it very difficult to register ... and even after you registered, they don’t treat you the same way they treat the South Africans. So those are the kind of things that make me to feel that it is not home here ... that make you feel like an outsider.

A report by the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CORMSA) shows that these women’s experiences are not unique, but are shared by many migrants in Johannesburg. On accommodation, the report states: ‘The vast majority of non-nationals seek housing through the private sector ... In many instances, landlords refuse to rent to non-nationals regardless of their legal status. Others take advantage of non-nationals’ vulnerability and charge them higher rental rates than South Africans (CORMSA 2008: 8).

Exclusions from services, such as health, banking and job opportunities, and the differences in the way in which nationals and non-nationals are treated by service providers and state officials creates a threshold that keeps women as permanent ‘outsiders’, unable to breakthrough the discriminatory thresholds. These attitudes toward non-South Africans also make social integration difficult.

Shifting sovereignties – fragmenting state power

For refugees or migrants, national borders are of great significance. They are at once symbols of hopes and fears, obstacles and opportunities. Borders are the embodiment of a nation’s sovereignty, yet are also the point at which state power can be undermined. They are both a nation’s strength and its potential weakness. Borders are meant to keep ‘illegals’ and those without the requisite documents out, while allowing in those who conform to the law and its requirements. But as some women’s accounts of crossing borders illustrate, it is not necessarily the statutes that govern who comes into the country and who does not.

In practice, borders are porous for those people able to negotiate their way through. Their very existence creates an opportunity for the development of a sub-economy, whose actors include migrants, state actors, drivers and smugglers. These alternative economies create spaces that resist official border restrictions and develop new 'rules of the game' that at once subvert sovereign codes and laws and at the same time, reinforce the significance of the physical border. Although these factors contribute to a failure in governance, they are nevertheless indicative of the ways in which the state *is present* and, wittingly or unwittingly, *active* in producing parallel centres of authority and power.

Consider Estelle who left Lubumbashi at 19 to come to Johannesburg in September 2000:

I travelled with a cousin who was going to Lusaka from Lubumbashi ... I was alone when I left Lusaka to go to Namibia. The cost of the travel was high, compared to the amount of money that I had. I spent three days in Windhoek ... waiting for the money that my sister from Johannesburg would send to me. In Windhoek, I met a Congolese businessman who advised me to hide my passport before getting into South Africa and declare myself asylum seeker at the border, as I did not have enough money. According to him, South African immigration officers do not allow foreigners who lack money to get into their country.

I was scared because of what that businessman told me. When I got to the South African borders, I hid my passport and told the immigration officers that I lost it. Unfortunately, things did not work as I was thinking because nobody trusted me until I decided to show it to them, after telling them that I found it in my stuff. I managed to talk to him [the border guard] to let me go in with R200. It was almost everything I had. I did not have money for the bus and had to convince the driver that my sister would pay him when I got to Johannesburg. Normally they do not agree ... but he kept my bags until my sister paid.

Harriet was 23 in 2002 when she left Kampala to come to Johannesburg to live with her sister:

I was planning to obtain a South African visa before coming to South Africa ... Unfortunately, the ... embassy refused to give it to me. So, I decided to come without visa as did many other people. I came by road, and the journey was very long (six days) ... From Uganda to Tanzania, everything was fine because I did not need visa to cross these countries. But from Zambia to South Africa, I spent a lot of money in order to bribe the immigration officers. Before getting into South Africa, I paid R300.

A Zimbabwean woman's determination to enter South Africa led her and a family member to take advantage of a particular gender stereotype when presenting at a border post:

Yes, it was not easy to come to South Africa at that time... I was helped by one of my sisters-in-laws ... She was coming to South Africa for a visit. When we arrived at the South African border she presented me as her sister and told the immigration officers that I was a dumb and I never spoke to people. I was just quiet and looked at people like a mad woman because if I did not react like that my sister-in-law and I could be arrested.

For these women, crossing borders required courage and the ability to manoeuvre and manipulate difficult situations. The experience for Janet, a Rwandan refugee who had an infant child at the time, was no less stressful:

We heard through Burundi people that you could make a living by looking after cars in Durban. We decided to go there ... We went to Tanzania through bushes, when we crossed the border the child was a few months old. From Tanzania we went to Zambia, then we crossed to Zimbabwe. We tried to get to South Africa through Zimbabwe but ... our money was running out, and they wouldn't let us cross without papers. We found people who told us ... to go through Swaziland. But to do that we had to cross through Mozambique. I remember carrying my child the way they carry their children in that country ... We just walked through the border as if we were going shopping, my heart was nowhere! In Mozambique we were warned that crossing to South Africa through the bush was too dangerous. There are electric fences and wild animals. So we went through Swaziland [and] paid a border 'agent' to come to South Africa.

Women's experiences of border crossing challenge the idea of the state as a homogenous actor with coherent rules that are universally applied across space. Using networks consisting of a whole host of actors foreign nationals enter South African territory without the passports or entry visas. Other studies show that not only money is exchanged, but also sexual transactions between the migrants occur in order to facilitate passage into the country (Human Rights Watch 2008). In these ways they subvert sovereign codes and laws. No longer is the juridical power of the state supreme. Rather, power is vested in the relationships between migrants wanting to get into the country and the actors that facilitate their entry. Thus, new systems of legitimacy that are not state-authorised are generated and as Michel Foucault notes: 'Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of undergoing and exercising this power' (Foucault 1980: 98).

Yet power is not so diffuse that it lacks a location or centre. Although illegal border practices undermine the control and enforcement of border regulations, which are a significant area of state jurisdiction, they do not weaken the symbolic and empirical significance of the border. The networks and sub-economies unwittingly reinforce the presence of the *physical* border. Migrant women's manipulations and evasions allow them to traverse border spaces in ways that circumvent the state's juridical power. But, to do so, the border as a frontier demarcating South Africa's political territory has to be recognised by social practices. What women's experiences reveal is the coexistence of multiple spheres of authority, which are applied differentially depending on the context.

Boundaries of power in the city: booms, busts and everything in between

Raids, such as the one Florence recounted to me in the Yeoville market, are not uncommon in inner city Johannesburg (Bullard, 2003; Pelser 2003; Thale 2003) and they are the topic of much public debate. Raids are seen as part of a broader Inner City Urban Renewal Strategy, which according to a city official involves, among other things, 'intensive urban management including the provision of high quality services; strict enforcement of by-laws; managing taxis and informal trading in the city ... addressing "sinkholes" and encouraging "ripple pond" investments. Sinkholes are properties that are slumped, abandoned, overcrowded, or poorly maintained' (Makda 2004:180-1). Human rights and other civil society activists claim, on the contrary, that these raids are unjust mechanisms of racial profiling, used to arrest asylum seekers and refugees on suspicion of being illegal aliens (Ramajahan 2003).

Inner city raids are revealing both in the names that officials adopt for them (for example, Operation Identify Yourself, which took place in Hillbrow in 2003) and in their actions. They are attempts to make visible urban space and to establish state authority in an area in which ordinary by-law enforcement appears to have failed. Through staging highly visible displays of state power, often executed in military style, local state authorities hope to re-establish their rules of engagement. By imposing this official cartography on inner city 'sinkholes', the city

government of Johannesburg seeks to displace the unofficial, invisible and illicit city, with a visible, official and legal one.

Interventions such as Operation Identify Yourself and urban regeneration initiatives, are often founded upon an enduring faith in the state's ability to shape urban space. Like many cities, Johannesburg's lifecycle has seen periods of boom and bust. Its decline in the 1990s culminated in the flight of big capital, such as the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, De Beers and Gold Fields, and the closure of service-oriented businesses such as the Carlton Hotel. More recently, strategies have shifted to creating new opportunities for business and middle class investment in inner city property. Where the latter is concerned, the CBD is bustling with activity and millions of rands have been spent on converting historic buildings into boutique hotels, condominiums and bars aimed at the 'hip, cool and sexy' (Fraser 2010). The development of new art, knowledge and lifestyle precincts, such as Arts on Main, has transformed dilapidated buildings into revitalised spaces. Where Johannesburg's past model was big and bold, its current upswing is driven by smaller developments marketing exclusive, intelligent, green and urbane lifestyles.

Yet, amid the glitter of the new capital investments and the enforcement of order, the 'sinkholes' remain and continue to perplex city planners. Their enduring faith in statutes, law enforcement and financial incentives to transform the densely populated inner city neighbourhoods, seems misplaced and even military-style interventions prove inadequate in addressing challenges in the urban core – blinded as they are to everyday practices of exchange, the multiple regimes of authority, and the moral codes and social norms that shape urban living. Criminals and 'illegals' might disappear after a raid, but they soon resurface elsewhere in the city or they return when police withdraw from the area. Thus, the state's crime prevention strategies unwittingly encourage practices that undermine its own ability to 'see' or make legible its territory.

Avoiding detection by the police is key to remaining 'invisible'. Mary, a Congolese woman, employs a similar strategy to Florence in the Yeoville area:

I do not like going down that street, Joe Slovo ... because under the bridge there are always police there. If I have to go to Bertrams, I rather take another route through Yeoville. It is very long, but it's better than meeting the police.

Indeed, encounters with police are something to be avoided because of the fear of harassment, corruption and threats of arrest and deportation. Lucy, from Zimbabwe, is all too familiar with being on the receiving end of such practices:

Many times when we are going home from the restaurant in the evening in a taxi, we find a lot of police roadblocks. We all know these police are just there to target Zimbabweans because they know we have just finished working and we have money from tips. I would really like to take a photograph of a policeman taking money from us, but I don't know what they will do if they catch me.

Women's navigation through urban space is shaped by 'fear and risk' (Short 2006). Their tactics for avoiding police display not only their resistance to state power, but also their vulnerability to it. Paradoxically, police interventions, intended to 'see' urban populations, unwittingly create urban 'black holes'. Florence, Mary and Lucy are not criminals, but they are at the mercy of state authorities who all too often target foreigners to extort bribes. It could even be argued that the presence of foreigners produces a parallel economy that undermines the juridical power of the state. An Eritrean student living in Johannesburg rationalises it this way: 'As foreign students we are not required to pay taxes to the government. But when we walk down these streets, we pay' (Landau and Monson 2008: 330-1).

Street trading – life on the streets

Emma and Ruth, from Kenya, make a living selling jewellery, socks, gloves and other miscellaneous items on the corner of Claim and Plein streets in inner city Johannesburg. This location is considered illegal by the municipality because it has not been designated an official trading area. It is therefore prone to police raids and so the street traders are often forced to pay a fee to a ‘spokesperson’ who negotiates with the police. In this case, the appointed spokesperson is a South African woman. Everyone pays her R50 a month, but how much of that goes into the pockets of the policemen is unclear. There are instances in which the spokesperson is unable to fend off the authorities and traders have to rely on each other. If they are caught in the dragnet of a municipal raid, the consequences can be harsh, as Ruth explains:

The business is not bad. It's quite ok. But the Metro, they don't allow it and most of the time they come and take the stuff ... Normally they give you a ticket for about a R1000. And you can't pay it. So that is a way to take your stuff. I think it's better to get other stuff than to go back ... That fine, it's just too much.

Emma concurs with a personal experience of having her entire stock confiscated during police action:

Unfortunately that day I had everything there on the street ... I normally only put a few things on top ... This was the lady who was selling for me on that day when the police came; she's the lady that Ruth and I have employed. She's the one who was supposed to handle my stuff and run with it but she didn't; she's pregnant, she's very, very pregnant – eight months. I lost everything, everything on that day, despite saving for months to be able to buy new stock. Now I am back to square one.

To survive police raids, Ruth explains the importance of forming networks on the street:

My neighbour [on the street] is a Tanzanian guy called Rasta. He sells just next to me. This one, she is also selling somewhere next to me; she is from Mozambique. ... you have to keep together, with the person who is selling next door ... [This is] very very important because if you do not stand together your business will go down. People will not warn you when police are coming...

It is clear that the money Ruth and Emma pay for protection on Plein and Claim Streets does not guarantee them protection from the police. Yet, if they don't pay they risk losing their trading space. Everyday life on the street therefore means negotiating multiple relationships, each with its advantages and disadvantages but no less significant in their implications for survival.

Beyond the city of formal/informal, visible/invisible, legal/illegal binaries

Condemning unofficial practices as a result of the lack of effective enforcement or a weak local state fails to see the dynamic inter-relationship between official and unofficial spaces. To be sure, strengthening state enforcement agencies, rooting out corruption and improving systems of registering migrants, will go some way toward improving the state's control over the inner city. But this is not entirely up to the state. There are other social norms values and codes that determine acceptable and reprehensible behaviour and these compete alongside the official city.

What does this mean for strengthening relationships between the state and urban dwellers, particularly non-citizens? These sub-economies create instability and fear that negatively impact women's willingness to see the city as part of their future. Migrant women's legal status prevents their inclusion and full participation in Johannesburg. Experiences of xenophobic violence and other forms of exclusion, such as the lack of access to bank accounts and economic opportunities, result in the emergence of a transient and ephemeral existence in the city. Women's business activities are often structured to allow them to make a quick getaway, when under threat.

The concept of urban governance makes certain assumptions about what motivates urban dwellers, the certainty and fixity of urban identities, the nature of state power and the unified objectives of the state system. The experiences of migrant women complicate these assumptions, shifting how we conceive of urban governance, and the nature of state sovereignty and power in African cities.

By exploring the everyday lives of migrant women, such as Florence, Lucy, Ruth and others, we see not only how state power is reconfigured, but also how the categories that seem so clear in official parlance – legal, illegal, official, unofficial – are blurred. Their experiences of living ‘in between’, and often invisible to the state and the community, challenge assumptions about governance and invite us to rethink urban social categories and relationships. By looking from the ground up, yet another reality and perspective of the city emerges, one that draws our attention to the complexity of urban relationships.

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Anti-Iconic:

The photography of David Adjaye

SEAN O'TOOLE IN CONVERSATION WITH DAVID ADJAYE

A decade ago, David Adjaye, a London-based architect born in Dar Es Salaam to a Ghanaian diplomat family, began journeying to various African cities in search of first-hand knowledge about how the continent's diverse metropolitan spaces are constituted. The digital camera, rather than the sketchbook, became an indispensable aid to seeing the 53 cities he visited. In particular, the democratic rawness of the digital image appealed; 'I wanted the experience to have the kind of naivety of anybody landing in the city,' he says of the anti-iconic images made on his personally directed research trips. 'This is not David Adjaye finding you the best buildings and saying these are the gems.'

Sean O'Toole chatted with the architect at a Johannesburg showing of his photographs, hosted by dealer Monna Mokoena at his suburban-modernist Gallery Momo in September 2010. The conversation, which begins with the architect's decision to use photography to record his research, culminates in a digression on the ethical limitations of architecture and the utopian impulse.

My first question is, I suppose, process orientated. I'm interested in how architects learn, not formally, but experientially. I have two questions in this respect, the first a collegial one. Rem Koolhaas seems to understand architecture, I think, through writing. Robert Venturi and Paul Virillio photographed places and buildings. Le Corb used the pencil. Why photography?

I guess for me I would say specifically digital photography because it is not photography in the traditional sense. I was at no point interested in becoming a seminal photographer of content. I started to use digital photography at the end of the 1990s. In a way it started to supersede the way I used my sketchbook as a student, which was documentation, learning – the thinking eye. With the advent and shrinking of digital technology into a pocket-sized phenomenon, I realised that I could be much more fluid about the things that I was looking at, which I was recording in my mind experientially and reflecting on when I worked; I could actually document and reflect literally through digital photography. In the late 1990s I was taking a lot of photographs of what I do generally, and it was around this point that I decided to visit the countries I grew up in.

I didn't want to make emphatic shots; I wanted to document without affecting the viewer or the thing I was viewing as much as possible. I was trying to capture what my eye was feeling and seeing. I wanted to do what I call snapped - really fast photography – almost like an espionage agent. [Laughs] Snapping away like crazy. That for me became very interesting: it had a spontaneity about it, which captured the things that struck my eye as I travelled around cities and towns. That became the format. In my own work, I love the format, because digital photography allows you to be very disposable – I could take ten images of the same thing, five different zoom points, and then choose three that I thought were really nice. I love that freedom: I'll shoot it now and check it out later.

It is the experience of photography now, the finger flicking through the iPhone album.

Exactly. That became a way of documenting the continent, but also a way of me documenting the continent without the gravitas of me having to say, 'I am embarking on this epic journey to photograph Africa.' I was not interested in the 19th-century romantic version of: 'Here, this is what the continent looks like.' Rather, it was: 'Here is my snapshot diary. In fact, this is my snapshot diary of things that I like as an architect of the built environment.' And instead of it just being about the things I like, I thought, 'Let me systematically look at all the typologies that I experience.'

The history of the camera is about establishing relationships and typologies.

Correct, so it was a natural bedfellow. In a way, the way I think and work with architecture is experience and imagery. I am very influenced by experience and imagery. The camera is a natural vehicle for me to use as the device I negotiate with.

Did it entirely replace the sketchbook?

For this trip, completely. I found myself being redundant whenever I brought my pencil out. The moment was lost and my hand couldn't capture it enough. So it has actually flipped my whole experience of my sketchbook, because my sketchbook really is a vehicle for conveying what's coming out of my head, my outputs onto paper rather than my experiences in the world, which is a bit of shame.

In terms of that distinction between the visual and verbal, I'm interested if you ever made annotations while travelling?

I did. I have a diary of every city, and I would always make sure I wrote my journal before I left that city so that it was an immediate reflection of that city. The diary also took the form of me really trying to describe back to myself, experientially, what I felt the trip had shown me, and what the different groups or typologies told me about the place. It allowed me to create essays on each city, which I would look at and work out the groupings, about the way certain places have certain characteristics. My own writings reveal those connections without me being *a priori* in doing that.

Let's talk about African urbanity, which constitutes the nub of your project here.

Correct.

Let me repeat that phrase, 'African urbanity'. It chafes against the notions of Africa the un-peopled expanse, Africa the wild, Africa the slum, Africa the contingent state, Africa the irrational.

Correct. The project is really fuelled by those statements you've just made, and hearing those, not just in popular circles where I'd expect a certain ignorance from people who are not travelled, but in academic and political circles. I became absolutely frustrated. I was born in a metropolitan city; I was born in a cosmopolitan condition among different groups of Africans, Indians and Chinese – that is my beginnings, and it was in metropolitan skylines. I was like: 'I don't know what Africa you guys think you are dealing with', but the Africa I was born in had towers, was very metropolitan; we knew different cultures and religions – this is how I started my project. I am really perplexed by this dilemma of the dual images, one being projected from the West, and the one that actually exists. Of course, there is poverty and all these things, but at the same time there is this notion of the city and urbanity. I felt the only way I could systematically deal with this was to literally demonstrate it. I used to deal with it in talks, but it needed demonstration.

The first exhibition that started to make that change was at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design, where I just showed 13 cities strictly as architectural places. I didn't show any bucolic, picturesque image. In a way, my aggression in using the digital camera is against the picturesque, which tends to happen when you point at a landscape – you start to compose. I didn't want that, to fall into the trap of making beautiful urban pictures. I wanted to say, 'You know what, if you stick your camera out the window, this is what you're going to get. It is there, it is not made up for you to consume as though it is a certain fragment. It is everywhere.

So, in a way, the 13 cities that I showed at Harvard was great; it is one of the best schools in the world and none of these students know anything about Africa. It's absurd. They know everything about Vietnam, Japan, everything about everywhere but Africa. It was amazing to see the to-ing and fro-ing. Ouagadougou was the big find. 'There's a city called Ouagadougou?' Yes, and there's a country called Burkina Faso – it's probably one of the most literate countries in Africa. It was amazing to have dialogue and show that these countries have connections and links to the world; they are not isolated places. That was a good conversation and it made me realise this has to be more than just a show, followed by a disappearance. I wanted to systematically do this and make a book out of this. But it took 10 years. [Laughs] I really didn't plan the timing of it, but it is impossible to do this sort of stuff.

You repeatedly use the word typologies. Africa is a small word for a big continent. From your findings, what ties urban patterns in Africa? Conversely, what distinguishes Lagos from Cape Town, Kigali from Luanda, Maputo from Bamako, Johannesburg from Tangiers?

On reflection of the whole journey, I started to understand that if you look at the metropolitan centres and capitals as just individual phenomena – what I call population density and GDP – you miss how to understand the nuances between them. I realised the way to understand the differences was to understand the geography a little more precisely. We've become so ingrained with the notion of the political map that we have forgotten the geographical map of Africa, which is actually profound. It is one of the most dramatic geological layerings...

Those movements from brown to green...

Yes, it is extraordinary – it is almost like a bar graph. I think all the other continental plates collide so they have funny distortions. But this one is a bar graph of stripes of terrain. When you start to see the capital centres that are in these terrains, you start to see these incredible connections. You start to understand Tripoli in relation to Algiers; you start to understand Luanda in relationship to Cape Town and Durban. You start to see these salient qualities

appearing when you look at Central Africa that start to make sense. You realise that the geography is inflecting very much; sometimes it inflects so much on the architecture that it forces the architecture to create a response, which gets interpreted culturally in different places – but it is exactly the same response.

It is either an architecture of layering, of screening; or it is an architecture of eaves, different projecting eaves; or it is an architecture of cellular dimensions with miniature perforations; or it is an architecture of coastal bucolic respite; or it is mountain cellular systems, which create small micro-climates (I am talking about the mountain cities). I only started to see this after a reflection on the whole thing. If you want to understand a specific idea about an African city, you have to move away from understanding them in terms of their densities and their capita, in other words their modernity, and look at them in terms of their geography. Because, even though we might think geography is not there, because modernity puts a blanket over geography – it is such a thin layer – geography and geology is the salient quality.

Has that proposition been met or treated as provocative?

Some people have found it provocative; some people have found it problematic, but I truly believe that a didactic approach is one that is satisfying to me. [Laughs] I find myself fraught and caught in the quagmires if I deal with things politically or even economically. I find a more didactic approach to the physical evidence of place is a much more searing truth, which hurts sometimes, but actually allows you to wake up out of the fiction of modernity. Also, I think the disconnect that cities make from each other becomes flattened. ‘What are you talking about? You are a mountain city.’ Namibia is like Ethiopia, actually. And that is how you have to understand it.

One of the narratives of Johannesburg is of the combat city, a medieval fortress city. Another narrative of post-apartheid South Africa is the big reconnect, with Africa. I wonder, in your experience of coming here, what are Johannesburg’s salient features and how does Johannesburg connect with other cities you’ve travelled to on the continent?

Johannesburg is really interesting because it is a city that is a matrix, an insular matrix to begin with; it was about a network and making a commercial centre which was about its national boundary. But Johannesburg, more than Cape Town, has become the cosmopolitan city of South Africa – everybody comes here, business is conducted here. So, in a way, the matrix of Johannesburg is quite interesting. There is the very particular vernacular typology of the way in which people live, and you can see it from the informal right through to the formal, but it has this modernity which is the infrastructure of the downtown, which allows for a certain flexibility to work globally. It works globally through a recognition, so the typology is loose enough to make it easy to connect. But, at the same time, as you move out of what I call the part of the city that negotiates with the outside world – in terms of an international-style sense of modernity – it becomes very specific very quickly. Even if you recognise the modernity, it’s absolutely, precisely articulated in way that is not articulated anywhere else. So you know the code, but you don’t know the rules. [Laughs] I find it really interesting. It is a beautiful way of understanding how even the ubiquity of modernity has to play with a context. Johannesburg has enough in it that it invites you in and allows you to explore very easily.

Salif Keita has a song in which he draws these loose distinctions between cities. He compares Johannesburg and Dakar to New York. Would you see the connection?

Dakar and Johannesburg have very metropolitan natures, in a way that is very explicit and vibrant. Other cities have different groups and make ups, but in a way the groups are much more entrenched. I sense from Johannesburg and Dakar that they are very transient groups: they



Cairo, Egypt.JPG



Cairo, Egypt II.JPG



Djibouti Cuty, Djibouti.JPG



Nouakchott, Mauritania.JPG



Abidjan, C'ote D'Ivoire.JPG



Accra, Ghana.JPG



Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania.JPG



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.JPG



Antananarivo, Madagascar.JPG



Dakar, Senegal.JPG

come in for very short periods of time, and can easily live in the city, which is probably what he means by the New York phenomenon. New York is the city *par excellence* where anyone can come in for six months, two or 10 or 20 years, and feel really comfortable, like a New Yorker. I think Johannesburg probably has that quality, although I haven't lived here. I would imagine it has that quality. I know people from Africa come to Johannesburg and feel very comfortable, are able to operate very quickly, much quicker than in Cape Town or anywhere else.

Dakar is the same. It is really interesting because it is not really that big, but because of its coastal nature and the way Francophone cities are designed, it has this incredible generosity about it. You feel really convivial in that city, and I don't understand why. I keep going to it and I love it to death, the coast. But actually, it is not that big, but somehow it has this conviviality of being absolutely cosmopolitan, which underscores its nature. It gives it this grandness, which you could almost say it doesn't really deserve. [Laughs] Anyway, I love Senegal.

One last question on the subject of making your photos: Looking is a raw, unmediated activity – pure experience in a way; still, reading can direct your looking, make you see differently. Who were you reading while travelling and doing this project?

It is going to sound absolutely absurd, but I made this very conscious effort not to read about Africa whilst I was experiencing it. Whenever I came to a country for the first time, I would do it alone; I would never come with friends, and I would never try to make any connections with somebody there who would guide me. I did that once or twice, and I realised very quickly that my version of the city was their version of the city. Now, it is very hard to avoid that, because in the end they are all edits, but I wanted to somehow make the experience as ubiquitous as possible, as in I wanted the experience to have the kind of naivety of anybody landing in the city. It was important to me because it was about demonstrating that these are not privileged views or moments, these are not curated views through a certain intellectual trajectory; I am not interested in that, even though I am, but central to the idea of this work is you landing and just experiencing the city. This is not David Adjaye finding you the best buildings and saying these are the gems.

People were really scared for me at times. I said: 'Other people are going there, and I should not have to feel I have to mediate my journey because of a perception.' Somehow it always worked. You get into a little bit of trouble, but you find your way out of it; it all became part of the experience of my journal, actually. As I got halfway through, friends asked if they could come. I realised that they wanted to hijack my experience of travelling, but that would then have also collapsed my journey, because then I would start to curate their journey for them. So, in a way, the whole thing was trying to jettison as much as possible, including any kind of readings.

However, I was coming up to speed with how geographers think about landscape, so I became very interested in geography during these 10 years, in a way that I wasn't before. I wanted to understand how the language is built, how the conversations are made, and how different terminology comes out of the phenomenon. Geography is fascinating, I loved geography at school but I just dropped it, and then I realised it is absolutely amazing.

Your display strategy is one of collage and is very anti-iconic.

Exactly, it is a body of parts. I was criticised for making everything look the same. [Laughs] Well, is that a criticism? I just pointed a camera: those are the images. If your perception is that everything looks the same to your eyes, then you're reading something. We are talking about a continent, and how could I possibly, emphatically, make representations that somehow give a sense of the whole continent. When I did the show in London, people said it was overwhelming. Well yes, it is a continent. My job is not to fail – I wanted to fail at giving a singular image. If I

succeeded in giving a single image, I would have really screwed up. I would have made it bite-size. My job was not to make it easy for the viewer, my job is to allow you to understand the vast cavity of knowledge that you don't have in your system. In a way the show is that provocation.

In terms of entering the images as they are displayed, there is no A to Z then, you simply plunge in?

The way I have designed the exhibition for Gallery Momo is very specific: you walk in and are faced with the two polemics – the political and geographical map. That is the centre, and I really want people to reflect on that. And then what I've done is zone the show [53 box-framed collage portraits] into six areas: desert, savannah and so on. The geography metaphor drives the city conditions and their groupings. The reduction I make is that there are six geographies, and within these geographies there are these capitals. Now start to look at them, try to see, with your own eyes, what you can in these capitals. Each frame is a city, and I've taken about a dozen images, which go from the most formal civic structures to the most informal. I took as much as 500 images in each city, so these are a slice of key moments. Each country is in a frame with a typology of parts. I didn't want to wallpaper the whole space, which is what we did at the Design Museum in London, which was a kaleidoscopic collage of information where you had to come in close to see where the edits were.

You once said, in the context of New York, that the 'home is something that becomes an emotional incubator and resuscitator'. Given the recurrence of the slum image, which has become a sort of visual shorthand for Africa, is this statement true of the spaces you encountered in Africa?

Very much. For me the journey was an emotional journey, absolutely; it was a very large intake of breath. It was about filling all the kind of romantic cavities in my mind about the continent that I wanted to dispel. I wanted to dispel the romantic cavities away, to fill them with tangible moments that gave me clues to what those places might be in my own memories.

It is interesting that you used the word romance. I lived in Japan for two years, a country that is also belaboured by an exotic image. What was interesting living there was realising how complicit the Japanese are in manufacturing these images.

They produce that romance. The Japanese are the best agents! I lived in Japan as well, for just over a year, and I came away thinking, this is the most amazing country. If you photograph the built environment of Japan, it is actually a complete mishmash. There are these little, tiny moments, which suddenly become the image of the entire place, to the point that you can do an amnesia in your mind where you think that all the other stuff is irrelevant and those little moments represent everything. I thought it was kind of divine that they managed to make this incredible illusion of their place, that when you enter Japan the myth is more present in your mind than the reality of the country. I think that is a big lesson for Africa, actually. Africa needs to move more to understanding how it wants to project itself in the world, rather than just allowing it to happen.

You were born in Dar es Salaam, travelled extensively with your father who was a diplomat, and came to London when you were 13. Again, I want to quiz you about your experience of architecture. Did the southern side of the Thames River, with its distinctive and grim modernist architecture – I think particularly of Elephant & Castle and the North Peckham Estate, where the Nigerian schoolboy Damilola Taylor was murdered in November 2000 – did any of this ever filter into your looking?

You know, my career started in London specifically because of the disconnect between the reality of the place and the projection of London as a Victorian picturesque city. My argument always was that this picturesque is false, and that the lived experience of most people was not the Victorian landscape. There are beautiful moments, of course, Putney, Hampstead, but this is not

London for me. My argument in my work was that difference is what makes London unique, and its ability to absorb many types of modernities, and by default, many types of cultures. Because of its ability to make or manifest many modernities – I mean many typologies and many types of living – it is flexible enough to absorb a lot of people. That's what makes London unique. To deny that quality in the search for the regional vernacular (London or English architecture) is painful and fictional. It frustrated me, and in a way my work was against that position. It was about the reality of what the differences were.

Much like your Idea Store library project in the multi-racial London borough of Tower Hamlets. [The first library, a rectilinear glass structure with minimal barriers to entry, was opened in 2004 at Chrisp Street, East London.]

Half the profession hates me because they thought I'd committed the ultimate sacrilege: I'd given up the high mantel of architecture as this pedimented Victorian chamber, or the modernist inheritor of this chamber and adopted instead a much more loose glass building. 'What the hell was I doing? Populism with colour as a motif of a civic infrastructure?' Now they're doing this everywhere, even with office buildings. [Laughs] First they shoot me down, and then it becomes the fashionable thing. But that is what London is good at: it absorbs. But there is this disconnect, even today. I think if you ask English people what their city is, they will deny those areas you mentioned earlier. The best music and theatre comes from those disconnects, and I argue that the best architecture comes from those disconnects too. It is actually what makes London relevant, in a way that Rome can never be; Rome struggles because it is too uniform, in a way that Paris also struggles because it is too uniform.

You spoke earlier of travelling to an Africa that was in many ways misunderstood. If we rewind a decade, to when you were working in parts of London that are notionally misunderstood, do you think some of that experience, of going into Tower Hamlets, for example, was helpful? Completely. In my childhood, when I was teenager in London, we went to parties in Harlesden, Willesden and Brixton – that's what teenagers did. We toured in cars at night through all the council estates. That's where the best sound systems were. My real experience of the city was negotiating these fields. By the time it came to working on Tower Hamlets, it was so obvious to me. Other architects were talking about the difficulty of these people; they asked if I would do it in public consultation. I said absolutely. It is very simple: it is about aspiration and respect. Do it properly and watch them respond. I was actually enthralled by the ability to make something for that community. When they said that there were 15 languages spoken in Tower Hamlets, I said great. It is about negotiating a matrix that is loose enough to accommodate diversity. It is not about projecting an image onto a group about what you think they should be. I think a great metropolitan city nurtures and allows difference to occur.

Of course, in any metropolitan condition there is a process of assimilation, that's fine, but at the same time, I think a really strong metropolitan condition allows for a uniqueness to be born, which informs the host group about their identity (because it reflects against it). I think teenagers are really great at that. When the Afro-Caribbean community came to England, there was a kind of distancing, but two generations later The Clash is born. But that is Englishness: it absorbs and mutates and learns. The idea of allowing different cultural identities to have a presence is something that I think is critically important, not in any vague political sense – I'm not really that interested in multiculturalism as a word – but rather the way difference can nurture and accelerate notions of what the metropolitan is. Already now the notion of the metropolitan is so sophisticated. I don't know anybody that's on pulse with the complexity of the negotiation that's occurring between citizens and the way in which we relate to each other. And, for that matter, the way architecture is operating. We are still 50 years behind.

The whole Blair era tried to capture this sense of a new optimistic Britain and particularly co-opted architecture to create this fiction of the new. I think of the Dome, the Eye – all this new leisure architecture. What were you thinking during this period?

When I was a student modern architecture only existed in interiors in London. There was nothing that appeared externally, and when it happened it was like the coming of Christ. Young architects ran to the buildings: ‘Oh my god, you have a white wall with a corner window!’ [Laughs] We relished at the Holy Grail of these little fragments. What Blair was brilliant at, like any true visionary, was to understand that he could marshal architecture as an image of his political idea. And we [architects] are the most gullible pawns of this, which picks up on the issue of ethics and morality, because implicit in architecture is the idea of inventing the new identity of the state or the commissioner. We’re makers *par excellence*.

Isn't this why Albert Speer's name will forever be remembered?

Albert Speer is greater than Hitler, in a way, because he becomes a canon figure who makes physical that ideology, in a way that Mussolini’s architects didn’t. This is the kind of flaw of architecture, when you talk about morality, because architecture implicitly ... Like a painter is compelled to paint his feelings of the time or condition he is in, an architect is compelled to make form of the time he is in, irrespective of what it needs.

In 2007, you told New York Magazine: ‘My job is not to judge... Architects are good at building. They are not good at politics.’ What ethical or moral considerations confront an architect? Or rather, when do you have to judge?

The history of architecture is full of injustice, from the pyramids right through. It is about the destruction of vast resources, the abuse of people’s lives to make monuments to ideas. The history of the subject is fundamentally flawed, ethically. Now we come into an age where that sort of ability to ignore that position is no longer tenable because we live in a fragile world economically, socially and culturally. It is very hard for dictators to now do things in secret. It used to be possible, 50 years ago. The idea that the product in architecture is the only thing is becoming more and more difficult to justify; that beauty, which is what we seek, is becoming difficult to attain if it is by any means necessary.

So we start to construct certain kinds of moralities. One is the morality of resource, the green movement – it is a way to somehow find a meaning and measure for why we do what we do, because what we do is the most abusive thing on the planet. Carbon emissions aside, building architecture is the most destructive thing on the planet. Another morality occurs as we negotiate the notion of the many having power. That is a morality occurring in the world, which some people call democracy. The notion that you make for the few becomes problematic, more and more; it is ethically difficult to justify. It is also difficult to radicalise the architecture and make it relevant when it is serving the few.

Do you work for the government of Kazakhstan, Angola? It’s a huge debate. Rem Koolhaas is at the pinnacle of that debate: you go build the Chinese state’s propaganda machine [Central China Television Headquarters Building in Beijing] as the ultimate propaganda machine against everything that is in the morality, thereby throwing the whole conversation into turmoil. I think the resource morality we’re solving, we’re finding a way to deal with it, but the social morality not: we don’t have enough language and not enough political science to negotiate with. This isn’t about sanctions. Architecture is the most nuanced creature, where sometimes building creates new positions to occur. I would argue that CCTV in China radically shifts China’s own image of itself in terms of how it positions itself to the West. It is by default now linked, even if it thinks the building is its own monument.

The black and white view, which is the Cold War strategy, the American strategy of polarising ethics, I think becomes more complicated. I prefer a complicated engagement, if I am honest, rather than a black and white standoff between the good and bad guy. It is too simplistic and not solvable in the end.

So you would build in Luanda, to simplify?

I would work in Luanda, but I would work in Luanda specifically to create an architecture that contributes to a social change agenda. The language of architecture can explicitly talk about social agendas, which is what is brilliant about it. Somehow, that language is not fully understood in terms of the power it really has, what it says to a civilisation about what citizenship is. There is a lot of power that can be had in using architecture to shift political ideas that say that they are moving one way but are in fact moving another. The early fascist period in Italy is a classical example: Mussolini thought he was getting one thing but got another thing entirely, then realised and clamped down on it. I am always for using architecture as, what I call, a special forces strategy – get it in there, let smart architects build in the strangest places. If you are building architecture, not just making a building, you are actually messing with and recoding the notion of the social and the citizen, by default.

Even on the block scale?

Even on the block scale, even on a fragment: one artefact correctly articulated in a context can shift the dynamic. I've seen it happen, and I'm a firm believer. The dilemma is that when you let architecture become building and science in your mind, then you lose the whole plot. We can objectively say that we need housing for people, so we just build, creating a roof and wall – but actually, no.

It is true. When Monna Mokoena opened this gallery, it surprised many people because of the expectations of his race and age. The architecture threw all the set assumptions out the window. This is the power of architecture, when it works at its best. It has nothing to do with scale; it is about the opportunity and translation.

I'm going to end with a series of questions that take things down to the domestic scale. You've created homes for Damon Albarn, Jake Chapman, and Sue Webster and Tim Noble, among others. The artist as client: what are the pros and cons of this?

At the beginning, I was never really interested in houses. I was interested in artists, and the only projects I could get from artists were homes or doing shows. I was only interested in that because some of the most inspirational projects from the history of architecture were about cultural operators and architects, translating something that was different to the pervasive norm. I am very suspicious of the architect coming in and being the only agent that translates a cultural moment, and then hands it over to a client. I think that is a complete myth. The most revolutionary architecture came from incredible dual moments; and it always came from cultural thinkers. For me, I became very fascinated by artists because I felt artists, especially at that Blairite moment, became very empowered. They were front-page news suddenly. I found that really fascinating, because actually these are the guys talking about the cultural image

There is a fabulous reciprocity between art and architecture. I think of that wonderful Steve McQueen film where he re-enacts a Buster Keaton scene, of the house collapsing on a standing figure and surviving because he is positioned where the window is [Deadpan, 1997, 16mm black and white film.]

It is brilliant.

What do you think accounts for this reciprocal fascination?

I think we are both producers. We produce content in the world that has to be deconstructed and dealt with. I think we are emphatic poles of this game of production. Artists are just as fascinated by what we produce in the world, and make images that respond. There is a kind of voyeurism across the divide between us, which is interesting, because we give each other meaning. For me, artists and architects are funny twins who validate each other by their very existence. I take great nourishment from going into the thinking space of an artist. I found all the artists I work with take great nourishment from coming into the thinking space of an architect. I was shocked the first time I realised this.

You are a working architect with a practice that spans multiple continents; you have staff and overheads, all that stuff. What is the feedback loop between a research project such as this and what you do professionally?

I need an enquiry for my work, I think the minute I loose the enquiry I will stop doing architecture. This Africa project has been deeply instructive and reflective for me in the way it informs my new work, like the new Skolkovo Moscow School of Management. People said it was completely different and asked what was going on. It is not different, but it does draw on this other reflection that I am now making. There is a whole new body of work that has a whole different figure to the old work. The old work talks about being hidden and revealed, the idea of eminence, and disappearance and loss, it talks about all those issues, which is the London-European condition of the diaspora. This new project talks about a different notion of how you exist in the world, the idea of urbanity, the position of form. It is all to do with the way I have been looking in the past 10 years. Sometimes there are literal connections, which freak me out. I see certain things that I've been drawing which are actually things I've seen.

There is a glorious paradox, in a sense, where you have gone to what is nominally still the most 'degenerate' architectural space, and then draw on your findings and insert them into the new Versailles, which is what Moscow is.

I know, and in a way it is delicious. I am very interested in transformation. The creative process, for me, is about transformation, so somehow to completely ingest that which everyone thinks is completely off-the-table is profoundly delicious. To reconstitute a new modernity from that is, for me, just the best. That is my project, if you want to define what I do.

It is very optimistic. Should an architect be optimistic?

If an architect isn't optimistic then there is a fundamental problem. By our very nature, because we make things, we have to be the image of optimism. We have to be almost naively optimistic.

How does one distinguish optimism from utopianism?

There is not much difference. We are, I'm afraid, the gatekeepers of the notion. In everything we strive for, we strive for utopia. We create these things as drawings, and when they're drawings they're already utopic – the promise is held in the drawing. They fail whenever they become buildings, they fail, but the drive is always striving to make it, I wouldn't say perfect, but to make it perfect-like, to make it utopic. But, for me, architecture is the beautiful story of failed utopias, which I love very much. I love that architecture keeps trying.

Las Vegas:

The Last African City

CHRIS ABANI

Sunil took in the copper ingot of the Mandalay Bay rising into the dying sun. Next to it was the pyramid of the Luxor and reclining in front, the light catching the gold paint of its headdress, was the Sphinx. Further to his left, were the Bellagio and the tip of the Eiffel Tower rising above Paris Las Vegas. The Venetian, his favourite, was obscured.

He loved this precipitous moment just before the abruptness of night that seemed exclusive to deserts and plains. Here in Las Vegas it reminded him of the light on the Southern African veld. One moment bright and full, the next, gone. The veld was just like its name, a stubby felt of grass and trees and small hills that seemed to only break when the green rim of it touched the sky.

For one magical summer as a seven year old, he'd left Soweto behind on a summer trip to see his grandmother Marie who lived in KwaZulu. KwaZulu was a homeland, one of those odd geographies created arbitrarily by the apartheid state as all-black enclaves within South Africa. Not unlike Native American reservations, homelands were corrals, ways to contain and further impoverish native populations: entire settlements made up of shanties leaning unevenly into the wind, not unlike the townships in the republic, except perhaps worse.

Grandma Marie lived in the foothills, and as Dorothy and Sunil traveled higher into the old Zulu territory, the shanties disappeared. Up there, everything felt different – the pace moved only as fast as the swaying fields of corn, or the lumbering herds of Zebu that roamed everywhere, horns curved like arms raised in prayer. Each cow was marked so distinctively, in so many variations of red, white, black, brown, rust and dun, that from a distance they looked like flocks of birds littering the grass on the hillsides.

The frenetic mood of Soweto seemed like a bad taste spat from the mouth, and the air smelled fresh and sometimes heavy with rain. There was hardly a white person to be seen, and the blacks were less suspicious of each other. The only anger was the gossip – how Shemble Masunkungo had slept with Blessing Mphahlele's husband a week after she died. How Catechist Brown was never the same after Father John died, and though no one would admit it, they all knew they'd been lovers. How Doreen Bwongenga always miscarried because she'd had an abortion as a young woman in Cape Town, and how though she'd renounced the world and followed the Lord, she couldn't find any respite until she confessed to the murder of her unborn child. But as his mother Dorothy told Grandma Marie, there are no words for some things. Everything else was the smell of the toffees his grandmother pressed into his palms that melted in the heat of his clutched fingers; the drying grass and herd animals that filled the air with dust and delight, and butterflies – everywhere, butterflies. And at dusk, the soft purple pastel of sky blurring into the darkening grass and then before he could count to a hundred, night.

Sunil knew that his memory was faulty, that it was so tempered by nostalgia it could offer nothing concrete, but that knowledge did nothing to diminish his joy in the recollection. The sun

in his eye brought him back to the moment, to his body standing at the windows of his sixth-floor office in the nondescript building in the nondescript business park east off the strip that was home to the Desert Palms Institute.

Sunil was a history buff and he knew that the extravagant hotels he could see weren't new. They were in keeping with the tradition of this city. The Jewish-Irish-Sicilian mob syndicate opened grandiose hotels early. In 1952, the Sahara was designed to mimic the movie romanticism of North Africa. In 1955, the Dunes, which had waitresses dressed like DeMille extras in an *Arabian Nights* production, complete with a 30 feet tall turbaned black Sultan with crossed arms guarding the doors, appeared almost overnight. And in 1956, in the new Fremont, twelve-year-old Wayne Newton rose to fame singing *Danke Schoen*.

Vegas is really an African city, Sunil thought. What other imagination would build such a grandiose tomb to itself? And just like in every major city across Africa, from Cairo to his hometown of Johannesburg, the palatial exteriors of the city architecture barely screened the seething poverty, the homelessness, and the despair that spread in townships and shantytowns as far as the eye could see. But just as there, here in Vegas, the glamour beguiled and blinded all but those truly intent on seeing and in this way, the tinsel of it mocked the obsessive hope of those who flocked there.

In Johannesburg there had been the allure of gold and the untold monies to be made in the mines. Gold so plentiful there were hills of it. No one bothered to explain to the obsessed that the glittering hills were just a trick of the light – mounds of yellow sand dug up for the gold, the silicate glowing in the sun with false promise. No wonder I feel at home here, he thought, I am used to this companion to every city's luminescence – darkness.

He hadn't lived in Johannesburg since White Alice left, shortly after his mother was taken to Durban, and he had returned only once in the years since, just after apartheid officially came to an end. He'd been shocked to see that the once vibrant city center had turned into a ghost town. Indians and Whites had emptied out, fleeing either abroad, or to the suburbs. What had surprised Sunil though was that in the wake of that flight, the city hadn't been filled by South African blacks leaving the townships for more salubrious digs, but by Nigerian and Senegalese businessmen selling everything from the popular Nollywood movies to phone cards. The feeling of racial camaraderie hadn't been extended to these invading blacks that the more gentle South Africans thought were worse than Zulus, which was saying something.

Now he thought of Las Vegas as home. That's the thing about having always been a displaced person; home was not a physical space, but rather an internal landscape, a feeling that he could anchor to different places. Some took easier than others and although it was always hard work he was good at that.

He came to Vegas seven years ago to co-direct a new research project at The Desert Palms Institute, fresh from Cape Town where he had worked for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Desert Palms Institute, among its many government contracts and shady research projects with no oversight, was studying psychopathic behavior. This was the project Sunil had come here to work on. He had expected to enjoy the study, but what he had not expected was that he would fall in love with the city.

His attention returned to the coming night, and the darkness that held nothing but what was projected, like a wallet for his demons. Was night the same everywhere? In the Soweto of his childhood the darkness was broken between pockets of lights and cacophony and an absolute stillness that held only police cars cockroaching through. Here in Las Vegas, near the strip where it never really got dark, could anything be revealed in the bright neon? He often tried to read

the faces teeming there but quickly realised that everything was obscured even in revelation; the brightness its own kind of night.

Noticing that the coffee had run in a tiny rivulet down the side of the cup, Sunil frowned and reached for his handkerchief. Adorned with his initials, it was a throwback to his childhood, to the older men in Soweto who always seemed to have a clean handkerchief on them, no matter how threadbare and patched. He wiped the rivulet away, brows furrowed in concentration.

There was an exactness to Sunil that spilled out into the world and was reflected in his sense of order: the neat row of very sharp pencils in the carved ebony holder on his desk, upright and ranked by use like soldiers on a parade ground; the sharp diagonal line connecting the brushed aluminum box of multi-colored paperclips and the art-deco stapler; the small photo, not much bigger than a baseball card, held in a solid block of Perspex, angled so that it was visible to him and anyone sitting across from him.

The photo was of a man with a red turban and thick black beard and moustache. It was eroded on one side, the man's face disappearing under a mottled furry stain. Sunil still sometimes wondered if it were really a photo of his father or a generic photo of a guru that his mother bought in the market. He'd been too scared to ask and he regretted that. Sunil wished he'd met him, and on the back of the photo in childish script, he had scrawled his father's name: Sunil Singh Snr.

Wooden and glass frames lined the red walls, arranged in ascending order of size. His diplomas were on the wall behind the desk. Against another wall, colour photographs of Zebu were arranged like the speckled squares of a Rubik's cube. Flush with the far wall was the teak sideboard adorned with carved Ghanaian Adinkra symbols, on top of which sat the silver coffee machine and boxes for the Equal and wooden stirrers.

This obsession with order carried on to his home and often into his mannerisms, most notably the way he brushed imaginary lint from his clothes reflexively, or the way he crossed his legs when he sat, snapping the fabric of his trousers then smoothing the crease between two fingers.

The wall of cows, not so much their frames but the riotous colour and patterns of their hides, contradicted all his control. 'Like a tarot deck,' Asia said the first and only time she'd come to his office. They'd had sex on the sofa and walking around nude, she'd stopped by the wall, mentally shuffling the framed cows, trying to read the spread. He'd felt more naked than her in that moment, more revealed than when they had sex and though she came to his home often after that, he never asked her back here again.

He sighed and crossed to the sideboard to pour himself some more coffee, wondering if he should call her and see if she was free tonight. It was Halloween though and she was no doubt busier tonight than other nights. Everyone else was.





Oil City:

Petro-landscapes and Sustainable Futures

WORDS BY MICHAEL WATTS
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ED KASHI

'The secret of great wealth with no obvious source is some forgotten crime, forgotten because it was done neatly.'
Honore de Balzac

Houston is popularly known as 'the oil city'. It has siblings bearing the same name in the great oil-producing regions of the world: Baku, Kirkuk, Luanda, Fort McMurray, Midland-Odessa and Murmansk. Some cities carry the appellation because they are the hubs of corporate power in the universe of Big Oil (San Ramon, California and Irving, Texas come to mind). Others, like Dubai, are the products of vast oil wealth, spectacular excretions of a particular sort of financial and consumerist excess. As Mike Davis says, Dubai is the Miami of the Persian Gulf sutured to a 'monstrous caricature of the future' (Davis 2007: 53).

Virtually all American cities in their morphology and geographical dispersion – what John Urry (2004) has insightfully called the unbundling of home, leisure and work to produce a 'splintered' urbanism – are the products of hydrocarbon capitalism – of a culture of automobility predicated on the availability of cheap gasoline to fuel the particular form of the internal combustion engine otherwise know as the car. Much of what is modern in the modern city is the by-product of oil. The city as a way of life is, in this specific sense, petro-urbanism *a la lettre*.

I want to reflect upon a particular iteration of the oil city, and upon its future. Such are cities standing at the epicenter of the African oil and gas production, metropolises which house the fundamental oil infrastructure (refineries, gas plants, petrochemical plants, export terminals), serve as barracks for the armies of workers employed on the rigs and platforms, and accommodate the corporate enclaves of the likes of Shell, Agip and ExxonMobil. These cities stand as hubs within a vast regional (and ultimately global) network of oil 'hardware'. The global oil and gas infrastructure – the arteries and organs of the oil and gas global value-chain (this is the industry term of art) – is nothing short of gargantuan.





To say that the value of the industry now totals more than USD40 trillion says everything and nothing. Close to one million producing oil wells puncture the surface of the earth (77,000 were drilled in 2008, 4,000 offshore); 3,300 are subsea, puncturing the earth's crust on the continental shelf in some cases thousands of metres below the ocean's surface; and more than 2 million kilometres of pipelines blanket the globe in a massive trunk network. About 75,000km of lines transport oil and gas along the sea floor. Another 156,000km of pipelines will be completed between now and 2012. There are 6,000 fixed platforms, and 635 offshore drillings rigs (the international rig total for 2009 is more than 3,000 according to Baker Hughes). A total of 4,295 oil tankers (vessels greater than 1,000 long tons or more deadweight) move 2.42 billion tons of oil and oil products every year, a figure which represents more than one-third of global sea-borne trade. Worldwide more than 700 refineries process crude oil and more than 80 massive floating, production and storage vessels have been installed during the last five years. Overlaid on the oil and gas network is an astonishing patchwork quilt of territorial concessions – the oil blocks acquired under long-term lease by the international and national oil companies – spaces within which exploration and production is conducted. Spatial technologies and spatial representations are foundational to the oil industry and include seismic devices to map the contours of reservoirs, geographic information systems to monitor and metre the



flows of products within pipelines, and of course the map to determine subterranean property rights. Hard-rock geology is a science of the vertical, but when harnessed to the market place and profitability it is the map – detailing the spaces of oil – which becomes the instrument of surveillance, control and rule. The oil and gas industry is a cartographers' wet dream: a landscape of lines, axes, nodes, points, blocks and flows.

These industrial landscapes – let's call them petrolic surfaces – become, over time, relics and ruins, residual and abandoned landscapes as photographer Edward Burtynsky calls them:

You have an industrial process that has transformed a primal landscape, and then once forgotten, it begins to turn into something between the natural landscape and a man-imprinted landscape. They become the leftovers after the banquet, residual territories; not quite dead, as they regenerate, they begin to generate a new life, but it is a compromised life. (Burtynsky 2008: 42)

The transformative power of oil, that is to say the human ecology of hydrocarbon capitalism, dwarfs virtually every other sector (with perhaps the exception of the spectre of nuclear winter). The collateral damage associated with producing and moving vast quantities of oil – the nightmare of Exxon Valdes, the massive scarification of the Canadian tar sands – is hard to calculate. In any inventory of the most polluted spots on the face of the earth, the oilfield figures prominently. Virtually none of these costs (externalities as the economists quaintly put it) show up in the price we pay at the gas pump. When deployed as a target of war or insurgency, oil infrastructure becomes a weapon all of its own. The stunning aerial images of Kuwait's incendiary oilfields, detonated by Saddam's retreating forces, have become part of the iconography of war.

This oil hardware is fed, literally and figuratively, by a seemingly unstoppable rush to discover more of a resource that everyone agrees is finite. The appetite for oil is insatiable, and the lengths to which the industry will go to obtain more is, well, to the ends of the earth, or a mad gallop to the bottom of the ocean. Deepwater exploration is the new mantra (deepwater offshore production is expected to grow by 78 per cent between 2007 and 2011).

On 2 August 2007, a Russian submarine with two parliamentarians on board planted a titanium flag 3.2km under the North Pole. At stake were the lucrative new oil and gas fields – by some estimations 10 billion tons of oil equivalent – on the Arctic sea floor. In late 2006, a consortium of oil companies discovered oil at a staggering depth 240km into the Gulf of Mexico. The test well, Jack-2, delves through 2,100m of water and 6,000m of sea floor to tap oil in tertiary rock laid down 60 million years ago. The drill ships – and the production platforms – required to undertake such are massive floating structures, much larger than the largest aircraft carriers and much more expensive, costing well over half a billion dollars (and close to one million dollars a day to rent). In 2007, a the vast new Tupi field in Brazilian coastal waters was discovered in 200m of water below a massive layer of salt in hugely inhospitable geological conditions. One test well cost more than USD250 million. What is on offer is a great deepwater land grab at 700m below the surface. The technoscience of oil and gas is something of a train wreck: utterly terrifying and compelling at the same time.

We might say that oil cities are centres of political and economic calculation (I take the language from Bruno Latour), within a vast but *partially visible* network of flows and connectivity. If oil has its onshore and above-ground pipelines, rigs, platforms, flow stations, floating production and storage vessels (FPSOs) and export terminals, it also encompasses an invisible underworld of reservoirs, subsea pipelines, submersibles and risers.

These petro-networks, what I have called an oil complex, are extensive in their connectivity. As a space of flows and connectivity, the oil and gas universe is one of geo-strategic operation, saturated by considerations of power, calculation, security and threat (Campbell 2002: 950). This global oil network is reminiscent of Mark Lombardi's extraordinary atlas of the 'uses and abuses of power in the global political economy' (Lombardi 2003: 19). Like the drug- and money-laundering networks that so intrigued Lombardi in his attempts to map the black sites and blank spaces of the map of the global illicit economy, the world of Big Oil is, in spite of its formal market character, an industry shrouded in secrecy, a world in which even the most basic statistics can be meaningless. It is a zone of economic and political calculation that can only be understood as a form of what Karl Marx called primitive accumulation – in other words, violent dispossession and appropriation. Oil cities, and oil regions generally, are epicentres of extraordinary violence and conflict. For Werner Herzog they are landscapes of the apocalypse.

The hubs, spokes, flows and nodes that make up the oil-military-construction-drug-finance network (the defining qualities of the oil complex) led David Campbell to see the oil and gas system as capsular in form: 'capsules are enclaves and envelopes that function as nodes, hubs, and termini in the various networks and contain a multitude of spaces and scales' (Campbell 2005: 951). Oil rigs, floating storage vessels, flow stations, refineries, gas stations and cars, are all capsules within the global oil and gas network. In turn, oil cities might also be read as particular capsules, composed of other capsules, which emerge from and are given shape by a network in which the visible and the invisible, secrecy and duplicity, spaces of flow and immobility, and forces of power and security operate to produce a perfect storm of violence, inequality, militarism and corruption.

When located on this dark canvas, what makes African oil cities – Port Harcourt or Warri in Nigeria, Luanda or Cabinda in Angola – different? Oil states awash in petrodollars embark upon ambitious state-led modernisation programmes: gigantism, ambition and corruption are their hallmarks. Explosive rates of urbanisation – driven by the prospect of urban employment





amid a sea of rural poverty and typically by the collapse of agrarian employment – compound the problems of weak urban infrastructure and service provision. The slum world of the global south, so vividly captured by Davis in *Planet of the Slums*, assumes a new hypertrophied form. Millions are barracked in the most terrifying squalor with few job opportunities conferred by a notoriously labor-extensive industry. At the same time for the lucky few – those able to benefit from oil rents, political patronage and massive corruption – the city becomes a personal enclave (the heavily walled and fortified compound is its urban form) of unimaginable wealth and conspicuous consumption. Inequality of the starkest sort becomes the stamp of the oil city. Unprecedented rates of urban migration coupled with stupendous wealth among a class of oil oligarchs and state functionaries (whether military or civilian) makes for a peculiar dynamic to real estate markets. On the one hand property prices in oil cities (Luanda is a striking case in point) can be among the highest in the world. On the other, armies of the poor occupy illegally settled lands on the periphery of the city (or are displaced there by violent government-enforced slum clearance in the city centre to make way for the latest oil recruits). Many fall under the sway of slumlords and local government officials eager to exploit their ‘illegal’ status.

The oil city is where the hyper-modern meets the hyper-poor. Luanda’s sparkling corporate sea-front offices meet Luanda’s *musseques* [slums], in which 85 per cent of the population ekes out a miserable existence. The oil city appears as a peculiar sort of parcelised sovereignty: a capsule within the oil infrastructural grid. The corporate enclaves of Chevron and Shell resemble nothing more than militarised encampments. The upmarket residences (and elite government residential areas) are gated communities with fully privatised water, electricity and service provision. Those without the means build their own walled compounds with their generators, wells and guards. Capsules within capsules, enclaves within enclaves. In this sort of petrolic-cityscape it is not at all clear what urban citizenship might mean. The slum world is held together ideologically by the call of evangelical churches or radical Islam, and the world of oil elites by the siren call of the global economy and neoliberalism. Both fear the threat of crime, rebellion and the shadow world of political violence and corruption.

Oil cities are combustible, unstable and ultimately unsustainable in human and ecological terms. Oil is, of course, finite. It will be exhausted. In this sense oil cities must confront their future, and their fate, from the moment the first oil begins to flow. They have in this regard built-in obsolescence. This is both an opportunity and a burden.

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Beira Through the Looking Glass

and What the Journalists Found There

SEAN CHRISTIE

(with apologies to Donald Barthelme
and Lewis Carroll)

The photographer sighed

The translator sighed

Both the writer and the
photographer sighed

The mayor sighed

Eusabio blew out his cheeks, and
gamely smiled

A catastrophe most often recalled
with a sigh

The sun's light was weak on the enormous wreck of The Grande Hotel on the southern end of the Beira promenade. In fact it was fading, so the translator Saratiel, who had been praying all night with fellow Zimbabwean apostolics on the beach across the road from the Miramar, was told to go in search of Joao Goncalves, the hotel's ad-hoc mayor.

The search for a contrast to the lovely news that the European Union would soon be funding the rehabilitation of Beira's drains had ended, inevitably, in front of the Grande Hotel, which glared dark-eyed at the contaminated Bay (the menace in that look mitigated by the ficus trees sprouting from the fourth storey balconies like cauliflower ears).

It looked exactly like a Guy Tillim photograph.

Joao Goncalves materialised from unknown labours with chalky white arms and politely touched the teams' extended hands with his clean elbows. He was a short man with an almost quadrilateral pot-belly, who after learning the reason for this visit quickly delegated the responsibility of guiding the team through The Grande to a moustachioed Mestizo named Eusabio. Eusabio had been among the first FRELIMO soldiers billeted on the third floor of The Grande in the late 1970s, years after the original Portuguese owners had abandoned the structure. After being variously used as a party conference venue and army barracks, the art deco hotel had been overrun by squatters, driven from the countryside by the civil war which was soon raging between FRELIMO and right-wing insurgents RENAMO.

The photographer suppressed a desire to sigh

The photographer sighed

The translator shrugged his shoulders

The writer suppressed a desire to sigh.

The crone may be imagined sighing inside her lean-to

Standing on the vehicle ramp before the entrance hall, which was currently occupied by a small tuck-shop and two wooden mortars used for dehulling rice, the team considered how best to approach the matter at hand.

‘Corporeality,’ suggested the writer. ‘Tillim is chaste: concrete and broody. Haunted, abandoned rooms are his thing. We’ll go the other way. We want snotty noses, crowded halls, turds.’

‘What is turds?’ queried the thoughtful apostolic translator. The writer explained and he said: ‘oh-oh, faeces – yes, we will find them.’

The tour began in the entrance hall, where children who had aggregated on the helix of the staircase shouted, ‘Fuck you, Fuck you! *Vovo vou te tudar!*’

Saratiel, channelling Eusabio, explained that the hall became a classroom during the week, as suggested by the winsome chalk drawings of freestanding houses that covered the dirty floor. To keep the children from falling down the elevator shaft into the basement, the two square holes had been cleverly plugged with 30 feet of litter, upon which an alopecic rat was grazing. The photographer approached it with her camera but the rat fled before she could film it.

Against the stairs a candle was glowing behind the gauze curtain of an internal lean-to.

‘We allow an old woman to live there in return for fetching water for the residents from the well outside,’ said Eusabio.

The translator shook his head

Eusabio shook his head

Saratiel and Eusabio shook their heads simultaneously

The writer made a scrawl in his notebook which was itself like a sigh for the lost dignity of the colonial era

The smacked girl gasped and rolled her eyes

Eusabio emitted an exaggerated sigh

Writer and photographer gagged

Eusabio explained, too, that the population of the Grande is so large – 3,650 now – that the building has been declared an independent district of Beira and assigned a municipal councillor. Important matters such as the curiosity of journalists, filmmakers and artists, are adjudicated by a committee led by Goncalves, who was the natural choice, Eusabio explained, by virtue of the fact that he supports RENAMO and works for the municipality. However, after the newly constituted Mozambique Democratic Movement took the municipality in November, there is a chance that Goncalves will have to relinquish his command.

‘Probably we will have to find some mother fucker from the MDM to lead us,’ Eusabio muttered quietly.

The state of infrastructure in Beira and the logic of her politics are intimately related, explained Saratiel. FRELIMO liberated the country but let Beira’s infrastructure fall apart because the Sofala Province in which Beira is located was once a stronghold of RENAMO, the right-wing force backed by neighbouring white dictatorships.

‘In revenge everything important in the economy of Mozambique now gets moved to Maputo and Beira gets nothing,’ said Saratiel. ‘That’s why people have been voting RENAMO before and now MDM.’

The profiled heads of all three parties – peeling in places – followed Eusabio down a ramp into the dark basement as he explained that this area of The Grande was initially used as a dungeon for FRELIMO’s political opponents. The sound of piano keys could be heard tinkling out of the cavernous basement *boîte*, but this apparent reference to dance soirees of the colonial heyday turned out to be nothing more than the intro to Chris Brown’s *Superhuman*, which one hears played on battery powered radios everywhere in Beira at the moment.

Ignoring a couple who were irate at the intrusion of strangers into this space, Eusabio took to the circular dance floor with crooked arms and danced a solo *pasada* for our benefit, then smacked the daughter of the angry-eyed father on the arse and

worked her limp arms like levers while he swayed his hips.

‘People here are crazy,’ he said. ‘They are not normal people.’

‘Faeces,’ Saratiel yelled unexpectedly as the tour nears the kitchen, which must have had a glass roof once but was now something more of an atrium into which refuse had been thrown for 30 years, so that it rose around the walls to a height of 20 feet.

Writer and photographer breathed in deeply

‘These people hang their bottoms over the balconies and the faeces land here,’ explained Saratiel, who was at pains to point out that this was strictly a night-time practice, and one which was somewhat contrary to the unwritten codes of The Grande. For diurnal ablutions the councillor had secured a stretch of beach across the road, to the right of a storm flow outlet. Urinating and washing took place in reed enclosures dotted around the hotel, as the hotels’ toilets had long since been ripped out and sold, and the bathrooms themselves had been divided by cane walls to make little flatlets.

Writer and photographer nodded solemnly

‘In Mozambique we used to talk about concrete towns and cane towns,’ said Saratiel. ‘Concrete towns were for the Europeans, and cane towns were for the locals. Now after independence the two have come together – a cane town inside a concrete building.’

Writer and photographer exhaled in a way that indicted China generally

Inspired by this witty conflation the writer called for more rats: ‘Tell Eusabio to show us where they feed.’ The former soldier whistled and warned that the rodents of the Grande, like the fist-sized spiders and the human inhabitants, were not normal. ‘The cats won’t touch them. In the morning I will show you a cat and a rat eating side by side, no problem. But there are not so many now since the Chinese road makers started paying the children to catch them alive – 5 *meticais* for a rat.’

The translator shook his head

The translator groaned from the back of his throat

A young couple sitting a little distance from the main building motioned the photographer over. ‘Take a picture,’ the teenage boy said, and as the photographer was adjusting focus he pinched his girl’s nipple.

The translator sighed

Horrified sighs

The photographer failed to suppress a weary sigh

The writer failed to suppress an irritated sigh

Upon hearing this photographer and writer knew that they were perpetrating another mild plagiarism, and sighed

‘Take a picture, take a picture.’

‘These people will sleep with anyone,’ said Saratiel. ‘Marriage means nothing to them. Even married women will sleep with other men. When Samora Machel was still alive and leading Mozambique he told these people there was no God. So here they are, still living with no God. Watch out, here are some more faeces.’

The worst portions of The Grande, by common consent, were the flats on the bottom floor, the balconies of which were constantly being bombarded by litter, bathwater and nocturnal turds. But of course each floor in the wasted hulk had its challenges, chief of which for small children and heavy drinkers were the gaping elevator shafts and the absence of rails along the aerial walkways, which were once covered by plate glass. Eusabio reported that two children had taken falls recently and survived. A man had fallen into a shaft one night after drinking too much *nipa* and had died on the refuse heap below.

The fading light now drove Eusabio upwards to the crumbling roof, level with the ficus trees sprouting from the uppermost balconies. ‘The birds bring them here in their faeces,’ commented Saratiel, conjuring an improbable but lasting image.

‘Try getting some of the children near the edge of the building,’ the writer recommended to the photographer, adding, as he advanced towards the children with his notebook out in front like a bible, ‘I shouldn’t worry about it, they seem to be gravitating towards the lip anyway.’

Shortly afterwards, the tour was interrupted by a young woman who had spotted a lens trained from the roof in her direction, and had concluded that a movie was being made about her life without her consent. Eusabio poo-pooed her mounting wrath, while Saratiel bravely attempted to make certain distinctions between the invasiveness of still and filmic media.

‘The woman is angry,’ said Saratiel, ‘because last year a Belgian filmmaker made a documentary here without her consent.’

It was quite obvious by now that the committee made a small business out of allowing journalists to pry into the ecology of The Grande.

There was little to say after this. The tour was at an end, though it seemed that everyone was reluctant to descend through the dark, infested building again to the entrance. There was very little will to do anything.

Eusabio had Saratiel communicate the standard rate.

Avalon in Two Monuments

KHULILE NXUMALO

First: Wrought Iron Monument

As we raft the rivers of Babylon, to carry us
Pile ourselves, across its reedy waters of burden
Into a rasped stretch burying weekends, after burying weekend
Pass while our feet eat the dust
Of a red soil, piece of terminal land

See us follow the slow hearse, hit a send-off song
Wreath with plastic flowers, as life is life, what's there to do
Besides the tears just telling tales, garments just flap
Lifted by a naughty wind, to do this in a cemetery,

Leave behind an iron-wrought burglar sculpture
A plastic 2l bottle filled with water
Softly dug into the grave's final mound

First vote of thanks, then all voices fain in tune all together
With hoary hollers, strange winds pervade, like percussive arrangements
Whirl, wrangle, curl, whichever direction you want to turn

If ever, as forlon heaven's, our ever distant heaven, oh heaven
Happens to walk across the graveyard, we will
Put a face of tombstone
To encage, wind up this particular bereavement, because
There's so many more, others

Present here is a helping we rotate among our members
Women of the society, take each other's place, line up
And wave out, like the departing spirit needs, on each side
A long pole leading out to...

As is life sometimes, in these sections of the graven
Land, terminal way beyond futility
Of a grave,

Unless of course, that's the day things stun
With a glad a yellow splurged wide in the air outside
One long and sprightly Sunday,

One that anyone
Of us, can claim to ever have lived to bury in,

In some burying days
It's glad to have hands lift us up,
Giant hands, withal but sweet of their sway,

Abundant nets, days that beg for somebody please
Blow me to smithereens, I twitch when a witch pricks out to
And it does try engrain itself on some part of me,

I like my lover's
Touch, it attracts me to my many perspectives,

In my place,
Every thought's crawl tempted to devise an excuse, the looks on you
When no one saw you, walk up the street
Coming to the funeral, each heart-beat torn by guilt and doubt,
My row with a *babalaas*, as I stagger, as I fall to pieces.

Lord, give us this day,
More force for new beginning, as life, is life
It just repeats the dismal phrases of dying,
I summon today, big reasons, funerals
Looking beautiful, as life, is life, repeated promised days,

More linking hands
Fingers that permeate, for beautiful days
We have find no words for.

As life is, this life, above all else, how many of us
Are linking hands?

To trip the devils with them, as we were burying our dying,
Lord, give us this day, some abandon

All our previous efforts
All the efforts
All of the time
All tones
All the sulk of stones we have known, our patient's temperature
Where it is mythical, where it is a chimera shilly-shally.

I am feeling populous in a web of fallacy, dreamland
Is winding down, a purr shimmers, will become a taste
Punched onto my laptop, stirred, sealed into a folder
I don't know how long a dream's afterglow will keep or glow, or how It
may look, dreams,

With their cross-purpose, their foreboding
Their tangled tripe and intestines, their real ritual
Flow of blood.

There is a zone, wherein, I am ten fold, of things I knew before. I am a fool, I
nearly raze my Head into our asbestos roof, I woke up desperately firm, inside my
Blood pipelines, a clocked ticked, when a deadline starts to pursue You, out of
your own house.

Into the buses and tents we collided with everyone
Into everyone,

Lord, give us another effort to plough more, prolonged like
These leaves of an aloe, in the metal tub at the gate sway
In the tiny, perturb, circles, sway, as if to say
There's just too many frequent funerals, in this, *nowaday*.

Second: Marble Tombstone Monument

How dare we forget
How the hospitals have begun to smell like death
How dare we forget, our own smell in between the distance

Looking far ahead, looking for miracles, that will never repeat
Everything smells very muted.

A smell, just does not echo back,
Like a boring tune, flat, falls on its back

What are the words, with what? What is their future
All the words we have not uttered

With what words do we join up
Memory mountain messengers
With our dearly departed rotting in front of our eyes,

The scalpel, the sizzled foeticide radiation tower, the smell of
The hospital equipment, bulging of Baragwana, or any other

Machines that help those in need of breathing,
Are long past their knell of rusting locomotion, not long ago
I heard them say Avalon, as well, has long reached, long past
Its sell-by date. **On a beautiful day, clog upon clog**
Of long haul convoys, saddled on hymns to rub the wounds of the bereaved, outside, it is
a jam of traffic. At long last our funeral's procession has just entered the green metal rod
gates, Avalon, the land
That locks in our ghosts, we drive toward fresh open graves, to open, let
Loose the dead one's spirits,

Where they go, is it fascinating, is it confounding
Is it an opaque grid of gated passages?

Now, as we slowly toll, tombstones relapse backwards
Into this section of south western township piece of earth, and Everywhere you look,
tombstones have been beaten up, lost a leg to stand, their necks have cracked, and they
are collapsing.

The section where our white little coffins buried our little, our babies, is a parched gravel
elevation, a look like a life lived without a fire, a necklace made of trash moment, after
moment, full circle without attaining any goals. No footprints, no crunches of the feet of
visitors.

Reminds how much, this is such a mad city, that I have seen a girl, white girl, I am told
grew up chasing goats in the eastern cape.

One big day, when the planet of venus stretched out loud.
On that day we are told, planet venus is in charge of us.

A planet venus they say is *donerig* inclined

A planet venus will speak of its secret chambers
Its long gain, how it can simultaneously be expanding women's stomachs.

Venus, a planet aligned, the earth slinks, her many many women,
Some of our eyes made to sparkle, sparkle with sparks that bewitch.

Such was one beautiful day when we linked the cemetery to
Our hands, linked it our screams, strapped it to the short life of ecstasy.

On another Sunday, the zion priest bore out his arms, speaking

As he was waving the flaps of his garb,
He feathered these times with a call

For new words
To be uttered, that those words
Must bury us, must ferry us across

We enter our grave, and at once we look
Aligned to the slant of sunrays.

It was not to be, so on all the days of the funerals, it was
Not so that it
Was a beautiful day,

At times the day was as incompetent, as when the coffins
Stop, fall into a stand still, that ignites in us
Twisted, surreal, portrayal, where we've stirred the dead,
In a stew of bas lucks, and *sticky somethings*, someone is said
To have thrown at you, you and yours, that's why we live in this
Short distances, separating us, huddled, to know that's why it should be
That makhelwane's coffin froze like fright, face to face with horror sound effects, at the
floor of a grave.

Lord give us, now and again
That glad yellow, when it has risen, when it
Has carried us into the new Monday,
The sun was setting
As it curled

The way we walked, we talked, they way
Our tears welled, our grief sated from hence,

Like a silent sheep was our mutter about a new
Zeal to utter, the new words spoken about by the
Overflowing garments of the priest,

Words as radiant as the belly button of the sun,
Beautiful words spoken into our telephone ears

A cemetery of pain, and bereavement
Wail, in the voices of our dead mothers, fathers, others

We are now leaving the gated passages of our Avalon
Death is the most certain of
Everything we think we know...

And the frequent whacks that keep bringing us here?

They look like they have very short fingers, in all their ways and in all their words. In all of their tones, in all of their inkblots, in all of their fuming spheres, striated right across all those that are still alive, that is why I will say, today is still digging us deeper, is still untenable like a stranger, still a torrent, these are the starlights of our terrible, terrible time.

Avalon

NICOLE TURNER

Thapelo wakes up strangely, underwater. It takes a while to realise it's not him in the water but Irene. She is wallowing noisily in the bath, throwing water onto the floor. As if she could splash herself awake. He is on the couch. It is a weekday, obviously. The sounds of his house and from the suburb outside are ferocious and hurried. The TV is on. The Learning Channel.

He rolls over, pulling the smoky blanket around him, and tries to go back to sleep. It is neither comfortable nor warm under the blanket on the couch. He is hurting in patches where his clothes have slept inside folds of flesh. There is the imprint of an embroidered cushion on his face. To make matters worse he is slobbering. Next to his head he senses three empty wine bottles and the stink of a wet ashtray.

Thapelo finds a lone cigarette in the crumpled packet on the floor. His hand searching the cold floor for a lighter finds a box of matches. He lights the cigarette and then lies back to stare at the television teacher talk her way through a complex formula, a lurid geographic backdrop behind her. He is amazed at how ugly she is but he can't help feeling some grudging respect for the way her eyes burn with love of higher-grade mathematics.

He's never watched much television, until these last few weeks. Now the television is an intimate: a place of friends who make him cry and put him to sleep. Something to wake up to.

Irene stalks through the living room with a shake of wet curls and a pointed look in his direction. He hears the sound of her hands slapping body lotion onto her legs. He thinks about the small red pocks and graceless stubble that her shaving produces in places he likes best; her underarms and calves. Now there is the whine of her hairdryer.

Thapelo jumps up, snaps the TV off and slips into the bathroom locking the door. For a moment he just stands there, staring at the puddles on the floor. He can smell Irene's 'organic' shampoo and her discarded underwear is curled up like a dead spider under the basin.

He washes himself in a few inches of lukewarm water. Irene has used all the hot water again and as usual she has not washed the bath. Tiny close-shaved hairs cling to her oily waterline. He can feel them sticking to his skin. He finds it difficult to like anything about her right now.

He can hear her heels pacing in the kitchen, the opening and closing of the fridge, the rattle of a teaspoon in a cup of coffee. Soon she will be gone. He moves fast. Dressing in a series of jerks, hopping on one foot to pull a sock on, he says: 'Can you drop me in Sandton on your way to work?'

'Why?' says Irene.

'I have to pick up the suit. I need it for the funeral.' There's silence from the kitchen and then she says in a small voice, 'OK.'

‘Thank you,’ Thapelo says with deliberate politeness. She is next to him now, tapping his wrist with a pale finger. Talking to him like he’s a little kid.

‘Sorry, I forgot... about tomorrow. Would you like me to iron a shirt?’

Thapelo turns his back to her. She has never offered to iron a shirt before. ‘I didn’t think you knew how to iron, didn’t you have servants to do that for you?’

She’s waiting in her car when he comes out and she stares out of her window, intently, when he gets in. ‘Does this car have a dress code?’ he asks without smiling. He is wearing a nylon tracksuit and sneakers. She ignores him and drives aggressively through the obstacle course of speed bumps and checkpoints of their suburb.

‘Did you set the alarm?’ she eventually asks.

‘Yes,’ he says, although he didn’t.

‘How will you get home?’

‘I’ll take the taxi, like other black people.’

Irene swallows hard. ‘Fuck this,’ she says eventually. The traffic is slow, more than usual. Near the Atholl off-ramp there is a pile up, with traffic backed up for miles. Only a few cavalier taxis are brave enough to run the apron. ‘Fucking maniacs,’ Irene says.

‘It feels different when you are in them,’ he says conversationally but the remark makes her seethe. ‘You always do that,’ she says sadly.

They both stare at other people in the cars edging around them. A minibus looms alongside; the people in it do not move or speak. They are swaddled in winter jackets and squashed together like orange segments. Silently and without expression all the people in the minibus look down into their car. This communal attention stops the bickering.

There is uneasy silence until they finally draw level with the accident. Metro cops in reflective jackets keep their backs to the carnage, their shiny faces to the traffic. Thapelo turns his head away when he sees the minibus lying on its back, its seats ripped apart. He knows there will be body parts on the road. Irene takes it all in, craning her neck to get a better view she almost bumps into the car in front of them.

‘For God’s sake Irene.’

‘Fucking taxis!’

Thapelo fiddles with the car radio, looking for anything but Classic FM. Above the static Irene announces: ‘I am so glad that you are alive.’ She mentions his accident innocuously enough, but he feels her accusation. ‘Yeah,’ is all Thapelo manages as he gives up on the radio and sits back.

It hurts to think about the night he trashed the Beemer, almost killing himself and Dumi. They were drunk and high when they collided with a robot in Orange Grove. Club smoked people had poured out of 206 to witness the spectacular wreck. Dumi had used the opportunity to get phone numbers from the pretty girls who all tried to nurse him. Taphelo remembers the crunch of metal and the frailty of being made of flesh, blood pouring over Dumi’s laughing eyes. Now Dumi is dead, anyway.

He knows that Irene is anxious, that she wants to make things better so he’ll go back to work and stop drinking himself to sleep every night. He wishes she would stop being so Settler about it and just scream at him. She doesn’t.

‘I might go see my mother,’ he announces.

Irene stares ahead, trying not to panic. Every time he has been missing for days and come back smelling like booze, sweat and cunt, he has simply said the talismanic words: ‘I went to Soweto to see my mother.’ She sees huge waves of pain coming like evenings alone in a dark house when his cellphone is off and he is missing.

‘Are you coming back?’ she asks.

Thapelo ignores the question. ‘You can drop me at the Square,’ he says, ‘or if it’s easier, behind the library.’ Irene chooses the Square. Thapelo tries to kiss her cheek but comes away with only the smell of her face. ‘Thanks. See you later,’ he says, keeping it casual. As he walks away, into the gloom of the parking garage, he thinks he hears the wheels of her Clio spin but he doesn’t look back.

Burrowing into the mall he keeps his head down. First the bank and the hungry churning sound of money being spat out. The notes are unnaturally clean and crisp. Without checking his balance he stuffs his wallet and enjoys the feel of it nestled fat against his thigh.

He moves hungrily past displays of candy-coloured winter boots, miracle cures and frosted Martini glasses to stalk the counters of the food court considering his options. Young kids who should probably be in school are running riot in platform shoes. When he was a kid the place to be was Town. Now Sandton City occupies the mythical place once held by Carlton City: a place of dreams and gleaming underground passages where it is always summer and shops announce in giant red lettering as if it were an unusual thing for a retail outlet to do – SALE!

He eats methodically, leaving half of his coffee behind as the yearning inside him identifies itself as nicotine craving. He buys a pack of *gwais* and trudges back toward the open air of Nelson Mandela Square, recently marked by a super-sized and strangely undignified statue of the statesman, arms open wide to welcome worshippers at the style shrines.

He leans against Madiba’s huge bronze thigh and tries to feel the sun but the cold, he decides, is inside him. He smokes three cigarettes, watching a passing parade of suits and shiny shoes, before he heads back in, patting the old man’s knee in a gesture of affection.

He takes the elevator two steps at a time, racing past dumbstruck shoppers watching their own reflections in windows full of options. Levinson’s Gentleman’s Outfitters, is a small patch

of familiarity for him. He lurks at the shopfront remembering his uncles and their reverence for those who wore 'Jewish' from the smart shops in Town, where heads were measured and Florsheim shoes were shiny enough to start veld fires.

Somewhere in the back a gunmetal grey wool suit, mostly paid for, its trousers let out just a little, is waiting. Waiting for him and the funeral.

An old man whom he calls Mr Levinson (although his name is probably Cohen or maybe even Smith) is behind the counter, arranging ledger books. Thapelo pays the balance for the suit that is brought out to lie across the counter. Prodding it, Thapelo can feel it slither around in its plastic skin. Mr. Levinson smiles his funeral smile and asks, seeking detail: 'Your friend, was he the guy they wrote about in the paper? What a shame, how terrible, how very tragic.'

'He was a prince,' Thapelo says, struck to the stomach with pain and irritated because he suspects the conversation will turn to the usual platitudes about the magnitude and horror of crime in South Africa.

To close that option down Thapelo says, 'If we're the crime capital of the world how come we can't hijack or burgle properly? We don't have burglars, we have bunglers.' Mr Levinson blinks, then he sighs and puts his pencil back behind his ear. Thapelo drapes the funeral suit over his arm and, thanking the old man sincerely, he leaves.

Once again Thapelo is deep underground. He moves around the mall, looking, touching and moving away when shop assistants hover. He wants everything and he wants nothing. He wants to be alone more than anything. He covers the same ground over and over, the suit singing a synthetic song of chaffing against his tracksuit. He hates the cheap shit in the windows of Mr Price. He hates himself. He does not really know what he is doing. All he knows is that he has fallen apart.

It feels like hours before the corridors feed him towards an exit. The sun is thin and emasculated on the concrete arteries that feed Sandton City; there is the stink of petrol and a hovering smell of coal fire. Thapelo has not been on a minibus taxi for at least eight years.

Squinting in the smoky glare, he looks for a place to put his finger in the air. Nothing is where it used to be. When he sees the back end of a few sorry looking taxis further down the road he follows his township nose into a palisade-fenced rank. In the almost heat of a Johannesburg winter lunchtime the place is desultory, there is the smell of *wors* and shoe polish. Shadows are cold. Thapelo leans on the flank of an empty minibus, waiting, in a small patch of sun.

People drift into the rank and climb aboard the taxi like timid animals at a watering hole. Thapelo lounges apart, outside, his funeral suit hanging off one cocky finger over his shoulder. The yellow cursive letters on the taxi's rump say *Home is Home*. To get home he will have to take a taxi to town and then change to ride back in the same direction. It will take more than an hour, depending on traffic, and his suit will get creased. If he drove home from here, it would take fifteen minutes.

A driver appears from nowhere and the taxi lurches into the traffic. Money is collected with an easy prattle and gentle tapping of shoulders. Then there is a silence filled with noise as the taxi pushes down the N1 and slips into town.

Alongside of the concrete bunkers of the Noord Street rank the minibus stops for just long enough for the passengers to clamber out. Then it is gone. Thapelo is left standing in the street, slightly lost. So much has changed.

Behind the rank there is a new hawker market, selling cheap little necessities: nylon socks, beanies, loose sweets, miniature tins of Zambuck and lumps of beige clay for pregnant women to chew. He has to make his way to Bree Street, to catch the taxi that prowls the streets of his suburb, dropping domestic workers and picking up gardeners.

De Villiers street is awash in gospel music.

He walks when he can and skips and weaves when he has to, negotiating the sliver of space between shop displays and hawker stands: the single person width given to pedestrians. Worshippers are spilling down the stairs of the United Church of the Kingdom of God. Burglar bars stand between him and rapidly blinking displays from the outfitters shops, remnants of the old Town.

It takes a block of bobbing and weaving, moving like a new initiate through the sidewalk malls remembering the smell of kitchen floor polish, the hint of beer and musty sex smells behind dark broken doors, before Thapelo really knows where he is going. Nostalgia and airbrushed memories engulf him. His father in the form of perfectly ironed khaki trousers, the groin worn half way down the thigh, the legs too short, mixed with the sound of his mother drunk and crying. He will go to see his mother, after all.

A dank smell of old earth and buried things draws him into one in a long row of muti shops. Behind the counter there is an Indian man with an impenetrable face, almost as blue as his shirt, like a storm riding over the city. Horsehair whips are rubbing against Thapelo's face and lizards are playing trapeze in the ceiling and there's no time to window shop.

There is a strange exchange of money and Mphephu. The herbs are wrapped in newspaper, stuffed in a flimsy grey plastic packet and pushed across the counter. The money – 10 rand – is refused. The man won't take the cash directly from Thapelo, nor will he even meet his eyes. So Thapelo flattens the note on the counter and then pushes back to the street.

Across Diagonal Street he finds a general dealer where the only action is at the lotto machine. No one is buying the stuff piled to the ceiling in the twilight of the shop's belly. Thapelo circles the shelves until he finds a pack of small, childish birthday candles in multicoloured candy stripes with little florets to hold them upright. At the counter he picks a tin of snuff from a dusty pyramid and asks for matches. This Indian smiles and takes the money from his hand.

In the taxi metromall across Bree Street he buys a cheap beanie to shield his ears from the unfriendly cold and then he boards a taxi to Chiawelo. The old lady sitting next to him tells him where to get off for Avalon, and he settles against her, longing to put his head on her bosom and sleep. The afternoon sun is seeping into the taxi turning it into a hot box. Thapelo enjoys the heat as the taxi squeaks and screams past vanishing mine dumps toward Soweto.

He is startled awake when the taxi stops at Baragwanath Hospital. He thinks about his mother and starts to practice what he will say to her. All the way down Old Potch Road he is revising his promises, prayers and pleas.

The rows and rows of brown and grey houses look sad but in him they evoke the romanticised memories: his granny playing the wireless, eating porridge in the back yard, playing barefoot soccer in streets where he learned intelligence, dance moves and sex.

Halfway through Chiawelo the taxi pulls up – by prior arrangement – next to an awkward metal tree fashioned from exhaust pipes. The driver shouts, without turning his head, 'Avalon'. It is awkward to get out from the back seat, but he manages to salvage some dignity and swing the door closed without looking back. Then he is trudging down a dusty tar road. Past signs for safe abortions and small derelict stalls selling offal and *madumbis*.

Wind is blowing dust across the thin tar of the road and Thapelo feels conspicuous. He knows he may look strange, dressed for gym and carrying a suit over his shoulder, walking the long way to Avalon past Somoho, the Soweto Mountain of Hope.

There are two-roomed brick houses to his left, to his right a row of plain shops selling beer, coal and building supplies. His feet are getting dirty, the red dust of Soweto that makes him ache with untilled memories. The street is quiet and Thapelo is lost in thought, but suddenly a hearse blocks his way. *Chiawelo Funeral Undertaker and Mortuary* says the lopsided signage over a thick coat of white paint.

The long car, which looks like it started life as a sedan taxi before being converted to carry the dead, is parking in front of a shop full of coffins and plastic wreaths. Thapelo enters and stands in front of the display of red, orange, pink and blue plastic flowers arranged in cake-size whorls. The flowers are ugly and when he prods them through the cellophane they yield clumsily, but he doesn't think his mother would mind. He wonders if she would expect flowers at all.

A woman emerges from the back to take 50 rand for a yellow wreath. His mother likes yellow. The flowers are stuffed into the packet with the snuff, candles and Mphephu, Thapelo walks on. Men with friendly faces are tending Somoho vegetable patches next to an empty and cold looking rondawel constructed for tourists. Perhaps, Thapelo thinks, so they can contrast the matchbox houses with an idea of the innocent African before colonisation. There are no tourists climbing the Mountain of Hope. They are probably all drinking cappuccino, ogling Winnie's house and buying souvenirs in Orlando West.

The small brick houses give way to shacks. His sports shoes are crackling on tufts of burned brittle grass. The smell of smoke, the quiet of the township in the afternoon before children come home, the patches of burned earth and the sharp thin light do not depress him. It feels good to be home.

Thapelo walks over the railway bridge toward the slatted vibracrete walls of Avalon. The occasional car passes, sending up dust, but Thapelo is alone on the wintry road, with only the roar of trucks on the road to Eldorado Park in his ears, muffled by a dense and angry wind.

Avalon, Eldorado Park, Meadowlands... what kind of tyrannical bureaucrat could come up with such tauntingly lovely names for places of exclusion and violence? Nearing the gates he lights a cigarette, battling to get the coal burning in the wind, but after two drags that make him giddy he is grinding it into the dust. He doesn't want his mother to smell smoke on his breath.

At the gates of Avalon he starts to feel the cold. The wind is numbing his ears and his eyes are smarting. He pulls his new beanie over his ears and it helps a little. Dust is travelling in sheets across the ground.

The winter grass is hard, brown and occasionally yellow but mostly charred and black. The last time he was here, some years back, it was summer and they drove in sad convoy to his mother's grave. That was 1995, just after Joe Slovo died. His mother is not far from Joe Slovo, in Block A. He knows he will recognise her when he sees her.

He follows the signs on the palm-lined concrete avenue that point to Slovo's grave. Not long ago a prominent businessman was hijacked in Avalon, but the cemetery is quiet, a few vehicles crawling between the rows of graves – all facing the same way, all facing away from the sun now dipping towards the horizon, shining starkly in his eyes.

There is a shortcut through a vast and brittle swathe of tiny graves, unmarked but for rusted numbered pegs. Thapelo skirts the area. He knows his brother and sister are buried there, but

he doesn't know where and he wouldn't know what to say to them. They were ghosts that haunted the small house in Meadowlands; ghosts that made his mother drink and swear in the later years.

There are few headstones in among the hostile shining pegs, each numbered and driven close together into the hard ground, to mark baby and child-sized graves. There are no footprints in the burned grass, no soft loving steps from mothers, fathers, sisters or brothers. No flowers either. He wonders if his father is also buried in Avalon, along with Hector Pieteron, Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph and countless, less famous, but dearly beloved mothers, sisters, brothers and fathers. His mother never spoke about what had happened to the man she said was a snappy dresser and a heart breaker. 'You are just like your father,' she said a few times, when she was drunk and angry at the world.

Her grave is a modest mound of dirt, surrounded by a small feminine wrought-iron cage. There is no headstone, not until he pays the last installment on a hulk of marble to be erected and kept wrapped in plastic until the unveiling ceremony. In silence he clears away the dead weeds and sweet wrappers around the pile of stones. He hangs his funeral suit over his mother's grave and for a few minutes stands there staring, feeling childish and humbled. In among the pebbles and weeds are perished petals from forgotten funeral wreathes. After almost 10 years they resemble something organic. When he picks up a blue petal it crumbles between his fingers.

When the grave is roughly clear he moves quickly. He pins the birthday candles in the earth near the head of the grave, hoping the wind will let him light them. The new yellow wreath replaces the old rotting one above the candles. Then he rifles through surrounding graves until he finds a discarded plastic bowl. He pushes a chunk of *Mphaphu* down into the bowl and stands back, the tiny green round of snuff in his hand. He is ready to talk to his mama.

Wait, he must move the suit.

Looking around for a suitable place, Thapelo changes his mind. He scans the cemetery, there are a few trucks plying the paths, but no one near him. The wind bites and scratches his skin as he undresses. For a moment he laughs at himself, crouched in his underwear behind a pink marble headstone. Then he puts his new funeral suit on, the lining soft against his skin. He hopes his mother won't mind his sneakers.

It is difficult to light the candles in the wind. He only has one box of matches so he does it deliberately, shielding the grave with his funeral-suited body. It takes half a box before the candles splutter, then he lights the *Mphaphu*. After a few minutes smoke comes pluming out to fill the air with a familiar fragrant smell. He can hear the flowers popping as they burn.

Solemnly he stands at the foot of the grave, sprinkling black snuff over it.

'Hello mother, it's Thapelo.'

He can smell the urea in the snuff, he sprinkles more, aiming next to the grave so the wind will carry it to its mark.

'I am here to ask for your forgiveness. I have not been here for a long long time. I have not been a good son.'

The wind whistles through the headstones and a cargo truck hoots a long slow melancholic note across the charred landscape. Thapelo searches for himself, for words, then they come, rushing out breathlessly. He apologises for not having paid for the headstone and for not coming earlier,

for not observing the rituals a good son should. He tells her about the white woman he lives with. 'I think you'd like her, she's very headstrong just like you. Her name is Irene. I haven't even told her that you are dead. But I will now. I will. I promise.'

Thapelo makes a great many promises to his mother. The yellow wreath is on fire, lighting up the whole cemetery as the last of the afternoon sun catches its petals. The earth seems to breathe in. The grave looks lovely, almost peaceful, like a child's rumpled bed. Thapelo retrieves his tracksuit and walks away. He is not supposed to look back, but he does, just once to see the yellow that marks his mother's grave and how it sets the whole cemetery alight.

Trudging back through the graves, all facing him now, the wind and the sun on his back help him to move quickly through the gates of Avalon and past mottled brown dots of houses in the dark that is settling like fog over Soweto. Crossing Old Potch Road he climbs into the first taxi that stops, and only when they have left the township and are hurtling over the highway toward a city turned gold by the last light of sunset does he realise what he has done. He urges the taxi to go faster. He wants to go home.

The Psychogeography of Loose Associations¹

SHERIF EL-AZMA

Psychogeography is a practice that rediscovers the physical city through the moods and atmospheres that act upon the individual.

Perhaps the most prominent characteristic of psychogeography is the activity of walking. The act of walking is an urban affair, and in cities that are increasingly hostile to pedestrians walking tends to become a subversive act.

The psychogeographer is a ‘non-scientific researcher’ who encounters the urban landscape through aimless drifting, experiencing the effects of geographical settings ignored by city maps, and often documenting these processes using film, photography, script writing or tape. In this way the wanderer becomes alert to the metaphors, visual rhymes, coincidences, analogies and changing moods of the street.

The Cairo Psychogeographical Society was formed in 1989. It is an independent collective of ever-changing members. Unlike official scientific or cultural entities, whether governmental or nongovernmental, the Cairo Psychogeographical Society is not networked, nor does it communicate with other research centres dealing with architecture, urban planning or geography at large. Neither is it an organisation that receives financial support from development funds, commercial companies or individuals.

The society also does not announce its existence publicly by any means. This extreme isolation is partly due to the criticisms the society received regularly in conferences as well as in the press. Critics constantly attack the society for ‘a lack of validity due to its inability to produce any scientific discussion or actual discoveries.’

A more severe criticism states that the so called “society” is a collective of rich, bored, leisurely hobbyists who crave the construction of their own myths – myths that in the end only satisfy the members’ own vanity and ambitions for infamy’.

The society has no headquarters, no address, and no apparent managerial structure. Its members communicate through e-mail, SMS, and very occasionally meet each other in person. These occasional meetings are called ‘research actions’, and are used for members to collaborate and perform recorded, preplanned walks in specific areas of the city.

Since 2002, traces of the society’s activities on the internet have become increasingly scarce. By 2007, the Cairo Psychogeographical Society blog seemed to suggest there was only one member left. He uses the alias **W** when the blog is online.

¹ This piece was first published on www.citysharing.ch

It is difficult to compile and archive society research actions and material due to the blog's intermittence online. The information compiled here is an edited selection of the research actions, correspondence, personal blog entries and photographs left online by W in the course of one very active period between Wednesday October 11, 2007 to Saturday October 14, 2007.

11 October 2007 (7:26am)

Investigation of lines of 'hidden energy' that flow between the public insurance company buildings in Downtown Cairo. The buildings include both government-owned 'Misr el Ta'meen' and 'Al Shark el Ta'meen' insurance companies.

This action was performed early in the morning, with much less traffic and fewer pedestrians than usual. The psychogeographer began at a random insurance company building, then proceeded to locate others from memory. The action stopped when memory-recollection possibilities were exhausted or when there was a major obstruction to the completion of the action, such as intervention from authority, accidents or other incidents. Brief notes concerning the personal mood of the geographer were taken, as well as map points (Fig. 1) and a photograph of each building.

Point 1: The corner of 26th of July Street and Suliman Pasha Street (Fig. 2)

- slight adrenaline rush at the beginning
- marks of weakness on three pedestrian faces
- feeling as if the air is heavy
- gastric activity, but not upset

Point 2: Alfya pedestrian street corridor (Fig. 3)

- thoughts of a glass of tea, the temperature of the object felt by the palm, while gripping
- the Army...

Point 3: Emad el-Din Street (Fig. 4)

I look at this building because I cannot photograph the one next to it (on its left from this angle). The one next to it is similar; it is part of the same structure. I cannot photograph it because it contains the Greek Consulate.

Point 4: Oraby Street from Ramses Street (Fig. 5)

- Two boys from Shabramant
- mini shampoo packets



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Point 5: Ramsis street (Fig.6)

- obstruction
- argument with police officer about photographing
- picture taken after the point made that ‘everyone has a camera on their mobile phone’

Point 6: Mostafa Kamel Square, corner of Mohamed Farid Street (Fig.7)

- light exhilaration

Point 7: Talaat Harb Street opposite Hoda Sharaawy (Fig.8)

All the points meet at the centre of the square just as Haussmann intended.

Point 8: Side street off Hoda Shaarawy (Fig.9)

- no congestion
- light thought

Point 9: Bustan Street corner (Fig.10)

- Saudi Arabia

Point 10: Saudi Arabia (Fig.11)

Point 11:

- I can't go on...



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

I step outside and look to the east at this building. (Fig. 12) I hear the stalker coming from behind me. He asks me what I'm photographing.

‘I am photographing it because I like it,’ I answer.

‘A living museum... Cairo...’ he says.

It has a nice ring to it, until I really think about it.

I look down. I feel awkward, although I act otherwise.

I hear him speak. He is talking to me.

‘We have a new type of ruling,’ he says. ‘A rule of small groups elevated to positions of absolute power by random pressures, and subject to political and economic factors that leave little room for decisions. They are representatives of abstract forces and have assumed power through a surrendering of the self. They are rulers by accident — inept, frightened pilots at the controls of a vast machine they cannot understand, so they bring in experts to tell them which buttons to press.’

I think of who ‘they’ might be. Perhaps ‘they’ are a non-governmental institute that deals with architecture, art development or geography. The stalker is a guide, and the job of the guide is to summarise information that might exist in a certain space and time. Guides also centralise and filter history, not only in an attempt to make the traveller a continuation of it, but also to comfort the traveller in some way by making him feel that the centre of this megacity is actually a village.

Like all other centres, a mythology surrounds this one, a mythology essential for the gravitation of being. Like all other centers, the ‘vintage’ is fetishised, personal histories are redeveloped, sometimes forged and illusions of historic continuity are mused on. The centre is an illusion, a spot where wishes come true, so naturally they began to guard it like a treasure; for who knows what wishes a person might have.

“Do you know William Burroughs?”

“I know this building,” I answer. “I took an 8 mm film of it in 1997, and on that day at precisely 11:47 a.m. I crossed the footbridge to Horreya Café.”

Back in the café, the stalker starts to read me lines from a compilation of short stories by Burroughs entitled *Interzone*.

‘A miasma of suspicion and snobbery hangs over the European quarter of Tangiers. The café, by reason of a location, that allows for the best views of people passing through the Socco. Cars are barred from the Socco at 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 midnight. The Socco Chico is the meeting place, the nerve center and the switchboard of Tangiers. Practically everyone in town shows up there once a day at least. Many residents of Tangiers spend most of their waking hours there.’

The Cairo ring road encircles the city, provides access to the Giza Plateau, 6 of October City, the Cairo—Alexandria road, Bolak el Dakrouf, Imbaba, then across Warak Island to el Marg, Cairo International Airport, the Cairo—Ismailia Road, New Cairo’s satellite cities, then round again to Katameyya, Maadi, Helwan, Mansoureyya, then full circle again to the pyramids.

The map on the right is a route drawn by W. (Fig.13) The red lines define the areas where he was hesitant to take photographs from a car driving at approximately 80 km/hr. The gaps are the pictures that were taken. This interpretation of the ring — road map illustrates fear — the fear of being stopped by a person claiming the authority to halt his research action. It is a map that illustrates the fear of being guilty while attempting to create a personal survey of the megacity.

This is a map of the area surrounding the Digla Valley protectorate on the edge of the Maadi suburbs. A member of a group called the “Hash House Harriers” drew it. (Fig. 14)

The “Hash House Harriers” is an international group of social, noncompetitive running and drinking clubs. “Hashing” has frequently been described as “a drinking club with a running problem.” The organization of the HHH is completely decentralized, having absolutely no national offices or leadership structure. W became interested in the group for their mapmaking and topographical skills. Beyond his interest in drawing decent freehand maps to scale, W found the need to make contact with other groups that he mistakenly considered “psychogeographical.” The splintering of the Cairo Psychogeographical Society pushed him to come out of isolation. Unlike Thomas de Quincy’s opium fueled drift around London in the nineteenth century, W felt great loneliness and a desire to belong. Unfortunately, his lack of social tact in making contact would often push him further into isolation and near depression.

A normal Hash House Harriers run consists of laying trails in the ground (using markers such as grain, flour, or red lentils) for runners to detect and follow. These include false trails, shortcuts, traps, and trail breaks. The “pack” or “hounds” follow the trail from marked points called “checks.” From these “checks” the “pack” will survey the surrounding terrain in an attempt to find the continuation of the trail. (Fig. 15)

After the trail has been successfully detected and completed, the “pack” will arrive at its final point, the “Hash Bunker.” This is where members can socialize with one another and drink beer.

The different members assign themselves nicknames such as “Hugeness,” “Bad Lay,” “Erect Runner,” or “I Want Dick.” Other rituals and activities during the celebration are unannounced and spontaneous.

October 12, 2007 (11:43am)

Dear Sirs,

My name is W and I belong to the Cairo Psychogeographical Society.

I am extremely fascinated by your group’s activities, especially those of navigation, trail-making, and detection. I was wondering if you or your colleagues would care to spare some time for a quick research interview on map-making, trail detection, and topography in general.

Yours sincerely, W



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

October 12 2007 (11:58am)

Dear W,

We are not interested in being part of your research.
Good luck on finding other useful subjects for your work.

Yours sincerely, "M.B." (Director of the HHH)

October 12 2007 (12:07pm)

Dear M.B.,

I am afraid that you misunderstood my intentions. I am not interested in a journalistic-style interview, nor do I plan to concentrate on your group's drinking games.
As I mentioned before, map-making, trail detection and navigation are my real interests. Please reconsider my request.

Yours, W

October 12 2007 (12:18pm)

Dear W,

We don't have maps, we just go for walks. I would appreciate if you refrain from contacting me or other group members about your so-called research.

M.B (Director of the HHH)

The previous four items of correspondences between W and the HHH are transcriptions of e-mails entered in the Cairo Psychogeographical Society's blog at approximately 1:23 p.m. on Thursday, October 12, 2007.

The blog then went offline at approximately 3:30 p.m.

Thursday October 12, 2007 (6:55pm)

fatigue, marked weight loss, flu-like symptoms, muscle pain, joint pain, intermittent low-grade fevers, itching, sleep disturbances, abdominal pain, changes of appetite, nausea, diarrhea, dyspepsia, cognitive changes, depression, headaches, mood swings

Skateboarders form another group addressing physical geography. Skateboarding produces space, but also time and the self. Paths are molded by the contours in the ground, space is redefined, reused and subverted. Cairo is a newcomer to the parade of skater fashion. It seems naive to propose that skating as a lifestyle is resistant to the capitalist economy of production and consumption.(Fig. 16)

What W seems to like about skaters is the fact that they are kind of brave. They exert themselves upon the surrounding environment without fear or guilt. They are also decentralised – not particularly serious, but totally aware and sensitive to the space around them. Trails of different angles and contours can be traced from the marks left by the boards. Each line is a record of an action – an action involving a movement within different spatial vectors. Intensity, friction, impact, and momentum can all be felt on the wooden pages of history.

In spite of how the skater lifestyle has been commodified, can it be argued that skaters use space, yet give nothing back?



Fig. 16

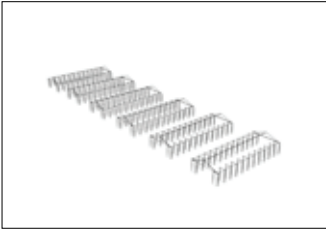


Fig. 17

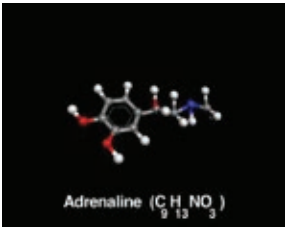


Fig. 18

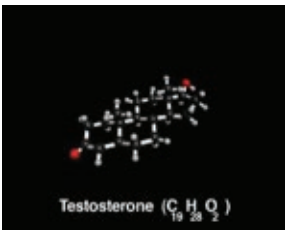


Fig. 19

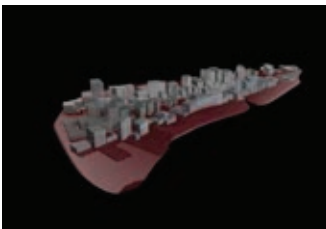


Fig. 20

Fig. 17 shows a 3-D model of Oboor, a market for wholesale produce, or ‘the stomach of Cairo’. I prefer to call it the ‘mouth of Cairo’, because it is the primary location receiving agricultural produce from farms and distributors around the Nile Delta. It is the nutrition funnel through which the whole city is fed. The market was moved from Rod el Farag some fifteen years ago in the mid to late nineties. The market itself has been organised in rows of storehouses that are divided into small shop rooms, which are owned by the same traders that would have otherwise been in Rod el Farag, and others as well.

The adrenaline hormone is released into the bloodstream in situations of stress or fear. When it reaches the liver, the hormone raises blood sugar levels. It also increases the heart rate, increases blood flow to the muscles, reduces blood flow to the skin, widens breathing tubes and dilates the pupils of the eyes. (Fig. 18)

The testosterone steroid hormone is primarily secreted in the testes of males. Testosterone is the principle male sex hormone and an anabolic steroid. Testosterone plays key roles in health and well-being. Examples include: retention of muscle mass and strength, libido, penile-erection frequency, and mental and physical energy. (Fig. 19)

There’s a new member on W’s message board. The alias is ‘Flanaé’, resembling a French word meaning ‘to walk around dizzy without direction almost in a childish excitement’.

Thursday October 12, 2007 (8:33pm)

Dear W,

Did u notice the map of garden city? If you take a turn, you end up in the same place. It’s designed as an art deco pattern. perhaps to keep people in or to protect expats and keep them near the british embassy at that time. From the top, the planning is completely form over function. Can me and you wander it together?

yours, Flanaé

W feels his liver growing. Not only that, but he discovers that it is shaped like the island of Zamalek, the left lobe being Gezira, the Opera and the Cairo Tower, and the right being residential Zamalek. (Fig. 20)

Zamalek Fish Garden, Friday October 13, 2007

‘picture this; I woke up, realized I’m late, then I rushed to work, i found the office shut...it’s Friday. You know... It’s the first time in ages that I leave the house on a Friday. The second I entered the park i felt happy, as if I’m dreaming ... I’m not going home’

The Cairo Psychogeographical Society’s blog disappeared again on Friday October 13, 2007. The last entry was a set of pictures illustrating the last action to date. The action involved a wander around Zamalek using a certain order of direction. Two right turns and a left turn, and so on. If a dead end or obstruction was encountered, then the opposite code of direction was employed (two lefts, then a right). The action is considered complete when all possibilities are exhausted. One photograph of either a perspectival view of the street or a visual detail is taken at every point. (Fig. 21–25)



Fig. 21

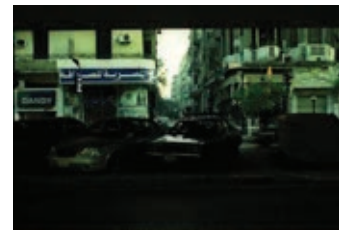


Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25

Tailor

JONNY STEINBERG

I remember quite clearly the moment I first heard an episode from Rufus Arkoï's story. Not the familiar tale that he told to whomever came to see him in New York – of the street corner gangsters he recruited into his sports club, or the child soldiers he turned into soccer players – but *his own* story.

We were sitting together in his centre one winter's evening speaking of nothing in particular. The children were filling in the big square blocks of a puzzle, while the old folk were practising their alphabet.

'Did I tell you that I was a tailor in Liberia?' Rufus asked, apropos of nothing at all. 'I *sew* real well. I sew *real* well.'

He tugged at his sleeve. 'This tracksuit top: I could make one as good as this. Put on a zipper. Finish it off. No different from the one in the store. In Liberia, it was a business. I was *19 ... years ... old ...* and I was making kits for the national soccer team, for the national basketball team. I was making *money*. A *lot* of money.'

Tailoring came up once more a few weeks later. We were in the middle of a formal interview. I had put on my voice recorder and asked him to speak of his childhood in Liberia. He was talking of soccer, of how his youth was soccer, soccer, soccer, and I asked him whether he was a goal scorer.

'No,' he replied. 'Scoring was not one of the things I looked forward to in playing. I made plays. I supported the forwards, the main feeder connecting the goalie and the defenders to the forwards. I made a lot of goals, a lot of goals. I was an entertaining human being.'

He had slid, quite seamlessly, between one's quality as a footballer and one's quality as a person, and as I noted this to myself, he began telling me of his big injury.

'It was in 1979. I was still in high school. The injury lasted for a year and a half. My knee. I was practising for a game with a rival Catholic school. The field we were practising on was very bad. I was looking for a ball in the air. My leg went into water. My whole knee was twisted. From the erosion in the field.

'That was the end of playing for me. When I eventually went back, I was so scared. I didn't want a collision. I didn't want my knee to be touched. It wasn't properly healed.'

'Is that when you went to tailoring school?' I asked.

'No. Oh no. I went to tailoring school when I was 11 years old. I graduated when I was 14. I graduated from designing school at the age of 14; I could make a *suit*.'

'What took you to tailoring school at that age?' I asked.

He shifted in his seat, throwing his shoulder into the story. He must have been telling it for the umpteenth time, but the satisfaction in his face suggested that it was as fresh as it ever had been.

‘My father, you know, he was a funny guy. He didn’t know how to handle me: how to handle my *explosion*. I just grew very, you know, *ambitious*. At age 10, 11, I mean.

‘Put it like this. The principal walked in and told my father to keep me at home for a while. I was just too *smart*. They couldn’t *deal* with me. I mean, I was not *normal*, I was above normal growing up. Every year, people get one promotion, I had to get double promotion. I didn’t go to second grade or fourth grade. Principal said, “No! Stop him! Where is he going?” The school wanted me to stay back. I had no control over it.

‘My father was looking around for something to *contain* me, something to *slow me down*. Something is not right with this boy. Let me slow him by challenging him to sew. So, he sent me to an old guy, an old tailor, and bought me a brand new machine, at the age of 11.

‘Old guy said, ‘What are you bringing...?’

‘My father said, “Look, this guy is all over the place; he’s doing all kinds of stuff. I want to get him busy.”

‘At 12 and a half, 13, I became the primary helper of this old guy. I increased his production over 200 per cent. I increased his income. This old guy, relying on this 13-year old to hem skirts, to press clothes, to put on buttons.’

‘You did all this after school?’ I asked.

‘All after school hours. I got home at 1:30, had to be in the shop by 2 o’clock. Stayed in the shop ’til 5, 5:30. Soccer went on between 5 and 7. So between 2 and 5, I focus on that. Then I’d say to the old man, ‘I need to go and play soccer.’

‘He’d say, “Your father don’t want you to play too much soccer.”

‘I say, “I need to go play.”

‘He say, “Listen, go play, make sure you back by 7, so we can lock up the shop.”’

People began walking into Rufus’ centre and it became rude to continue. I switched off the voice recorder and we started talking of other things. Sometime later in the evening, I mentioned Rufus’s tailoring in passing. He frowned and grew distracted and a niggling expression came over his face, as if the way I was speaking of his story demonstrated that I hadn’t understood its significance.

‘The design for the soccer kit,’ he said, ‘it came to me in a dream. The old man and I had been thinking, thinking, thinking, for days on end. How do you *do* this? There was no one to *guide* us, no design to *copy*. You know, the neck, the v-line; it is so hard to make it so that it doesn’t wrinkle. Some use an iron to hide the crinkle. But you can see that immediately. And then it came to me in my *sleep*, how to do it. The whole thing, the neck, the sleeves. I woke up. I went straight to the workshop. It’s working! It’s working! The next day, I show the old man a *soccer kit*.

‘He says, “Who taught you this?”
‘No. It came in a *dream*.’

He sat back in his chair and looked at me, and I nodded and smiled, and now his brow creased in frustration. I still didn’t get it. He stood up, as if the weight of his point required him to throw his entire body into it, and as he spoke, he gesticulated with arms scooped in front of him.

‘This was *Liberia*. Nobody had ever made a soccer kit in the whole *country*. Always, since the beginning, our kits had to be *imported*. There was no *precedent*. There was nobody to go to and *ask*. That is why I became *rich*.’

Rufus’ childhood began in Bomi Hills, a town some 40km from Monrovia. That is where he was living when his father, Joseph Arkoi, sent him to the old man to learn to sew, and where he began playing soccer. Joseph Arkoi was an indigenous Liberian, a Loma, and a blue-collar man: he was a driver, employed at a hospital, which, along with practically every other institution in the town, was owned by the Liberian Mining Company, the country’s first exporter of iron ore. The Company paid very well by the standards of Liberian blue-collar labour, its employees constituting something of a privileged guild. Joseph Arkoi’s success would show in the size of his family – he would have 14 children, borne by several wives – and in the fact that he would save enough money for one of these children to attend an elite Catholic school.

When Rufus was 14, the Liberian Mining Company closed down, and much of Bomi Hills with it. Arkoi Senior began the monumental task of relocating his family to Monrovia. Rufus was among the first Arkois to go: he was sent to live with his older brother in a house the family was building, and to attend St Patricks School, among the best in Monrovia. Why Joseph chose Rufus for this privilege, Rufus says he does not know. The house into which the Arkoi family would move was in an area where not a single other child went to a private school. It stood on Twelfth Street in the suburb of Sinkor.

Were two Monroviaans to meet on the street and fall to talking some time in the 1970s, and were one to remark that he lived in Sinkor, the other would immediately know, on the basis of his interlocutor’s speech and dress, on which side of William VS Tubman Boulevard he lived: coastside, or landside. The piece of Sinkor that fell between Tubman Boulevard and the sea was wealthy. Today, decades of war have scrambled the city’s social geography and coastside is no longer universally rich. But you can see from its architecture what it once was: the houses set far back from the road, high walls, the remnants of ornate landscaping; one imagines homes full of heirlooms and the portraits of dead patriarchs.

Landside was another world. It was inhabited primarily by country people, rather than by Americo-Liberians, and primarily by people of modest means. Yet it was also sought after, for in the middle of landside, on Twelfth Street, was William VS Tubman High School, among the very few public schools in Monrovia reputed to be very good. Tubman High would educate several of the men who went on to topple the country’s last Americo-Liberian government.

A visitor walking along Twelfth Street, his back to the coast, soon passes the buildings of Tubman High on his left. Whatever the time of year, it is hot, 32C on a mild day, and the sunlight is stark and punishing. A block or so later, the road narrows without warning and becomes a pedestrian passageway. Today it is lined with market stalls at which hawkers sell potato greens, fresh chilli and fish; when Rufus first saw it, it was empty. Some 50 or so paces on, the passageway breaks into several forks and the visitor suddenly finds that he is in a labyrinth, the houses built close together and on the very verges of the paths. The labyrinth seems to shut behind you as you walk. The rest of Sinkor is gone, the harsh sunlight is muted and you sense that you are in another place now, with its own damp smells and echoing voices. This is where Rufus lived.

To understand how this labyrinth came to be, you must keep walking. For once you come out the other side you are suddenly in marshland, the mangrove-like reeds chest-high, the squelching of mud underfoot. Sinkor is a very old settlement: the Vai lived here long before the Americo-Liberians arrived. But in all its history, nobody bothered to build on this particular piece of land before Rufus's family and their ilk arrived. It was far too close to the marsh.

That is how the Twelfth Street labyrinth came to be. Nobody else wanted it. And so, in the mid-1970s, poor people migrating from the countryside to Monrovia began to put up houses there. The government gave up the land for nothing.

The Arkois seem to have forgotten how Rufus' father came to hear of the Sinkor marshland. They remember only that he sent his wife's younger brother to Monrovia to occupy a piece of ground and begin construction. The brother-in-law's name was Joseph Wayfather Saykor, a gaunt, wheezing, visibly ailing man who wore only a pair of shorts and sat on a bench in the shadow of the house he had built. I interviewed him eight days before his death,

'This was a free place,' he told me, 'a government place, not a private place. We never bought it. The thing you had to do is, you had to put something down so that another family would not take the piece of land you had chosen. So we put up a shack, and we slowly built the house around the shack, little by little.'

People from across Liberia built on this marshland, and it became a truly cosmopolitan place, one of many languages and ethnicities. A family from Ghana even came here: the Frederickses. They built a house right in the middle of the marsh, on an island one approaches on a rickety bridge, the sludge not far beneath one's feet. The island became known as Fredericks Island, and the old matriarch who built the place with her husband still lives there. Rufus was to grow very close to her sons.

When I interviewed the dying Saykor, he had, resting on his lap, two photographs, each in an ancient frame. The first was a portrait of himself as a young man, his face very strong, his eyes boring into the camera lens with a look that bordered on ferocity. The other was a group photograph of a soccer team.

'Can you tell me which is Rufus?' he asked, smiling weakly.

He was instantly recognisable – half his current size, to be sure, his leanness and narrowness something of shock when one considers how much he now invests in his heft – but the eyes, the strong curve in the upper lip, were Rufus through and through.

Saykor took me into the house. A dark corridor bisected it, four rooms on either side. Each, I imagined, had housed a son or a daughter together with an entire nuclear family; the house's architect had squeezed as many spaces of privacy as its confines would allow. It had about it the air of a place that had once thrived, but had long fallen into disrepair. The ceiling was grey and rotting and missing in places, and the walls had clearly not seen a coat of paint in many years.

At the end of the house, the corridor opened into a room, the only one almost as wide as the building itself.

'This was Rufus' sewing room,' Saykor said, almost with reverence. He paused, looked around, took the place in. 'Rufus sat *here*, his machine on *this* table. Ben Fredericks sat *here*, and his brother sat *here*, and his cousin Frederick Richardson sat *here*. You see, whoever wanted to find Rufus knew he would be here. And the boys came. Rufus was a magnet. People wanted to be around him. By being with him, they learned to sew. And when they learned to sew, their lives changed.'

As I lingered around Twelfth Street over the following days, the meaning of Rufus's sewing slowly became clear. A great deal had changed because of the war; most of the people one met on the street had not lived here more than a few years, and the name Rufus Arkoi meant nothing to them. But everyone who had been here in the 1970s knew of him. Even people in their early 20s – born at the time Rufus left for the United States – if their parents had come of age on Twelfth Street, then they had heard of Rufus Arkoi.

'Wasn't he a tailor?' a young writer called Aaron Weah asked me. Aaron had just told me that he grew up on Twelfth Street, and I immediately asked if he knew of Rufus. 'Wasn't he a tailor and the owner of a football club? I heard his name a lot when I was small.'

The boys in the Twelfth Street labyrinth were poor, the sons of outsiders who had built homes on a marsh in a city whose wealth they had no right to claim. The boys came to Rufus while he sewed, through his friendship they learnt to sew too, and from sewing they began to inhabit improbable futures.

'George Fredericks became a tailor and taught tailoring at Don Bosco Polytechnic,' Saykor told me, counting off his long fingers the ghosts of those who had occupied Rufus's sewing room. 'Kpada went to Nigeria and sewed for a living there. Jesse Cooper prospered as a tailor. They all made a living in this line.'

At his centre in Staten Island, surrounded by his unruly toddlers and his ageing students, Rufus had spoken of his sewing as if he were a conjurer of magic. I had felt a twinge of embarrassment, wondering whether he was making himself foolish. But there are people on Twelfth Street who knew of his sewing room as a magical place for a bunch of boys gathered there in the afternoons after school, and each walked out with a career.

The bare bones of Rufus' soccer story are simple in the telling. It was the beginning of 1980, he was 17 years old and had just finished high school. There were many soccer clubs in his section of Monrovia. One of them approached him to be their president.

'Why they brought me in?' Rufus asks. 'Being a tailor at a young age, I made lots of suits for myself. I dressed *well* as a young boy. I dressed very, very well. That was appealing to people.'

In my mind, I see the young Rufus swaggering out of the labyrinth into the blunt sunlight on Twelfth Street, a bowler hat low on his brow, a good suit tailored close to his lean frame. His nonchalance is studied, but out of the corner of his eye he watches surreptitiously for the heads he has turned. 'Who *is* that man,' he imagines people wondering.

'So this team brought me in,' he continues. 'That was a development I will never be able to measure in my life. What it did for me is immeasurable.'

The team was called the Eleven Eagles. It was a junior team, the players in their mid and late teens.

'There was always a problem with space in Sinkor,' Rufus recalls. 'Many, many teams, not enough fields. As a junior team, we always lost out. When the older guys were playing you couldn't play. And the older guys were *always* playing. So, either you play very early, or very late.'

And so a familiarly heroic tale begins. Scratching out time and space in the margins of Sinkor soccer, the Eleven Eagles grow very disciplined and very good. For a year, they nurture their growing talent, unseen, unnoticed. And then, out of nowhere, they spring: they pick on the very best of the older teams, the Massive Invincible Eleven, and challenge them to a duel.

‘The game was set down for a holiday,’ Rufus says. ‘I haven’t got involved in a soccer game like that ever again in my life. On that day, if you were a criminal, you could walk into Sinkor and take what you like. You could walk into anyone’s home. The town was empty. Everyone was at the game. There had never been a game so emotional on the Tubman field on Twelfth Street. My side won 2-1; we won 2-1.’

And so Rufus tasted glory twice on Twelfth Street, first as a tailor, then as the president of a soccer club. He had become a young man associated with the audacious, the sort in whose trail others wished to walk. But there was trouble ahead.

‘This was 1981,’ Rufus continued. ‘There was a tendency at the time for people to overthrow government. Everywhere: in school, in the soccer clubs. Because a year earlier people had seen the government of Liberia overthrown.’

‘A young man set up a coup against me in Eleven Eagles in May 1981. So, I got the news, “Rufus, you have been overthrown”. I was very wounded. I was too wounded to fight back. I said, “Fine, I’m sick and tired of this.”’

‘A group of guys from the club got together. They said, “Rufus, you must fight this coup. Look, you built the team from nothing. We were nowhere before you came.”’

‘I said, “Yeah, but this is a revolution. I have to go.”’

‘So these guys around me said: “Rufus, if you go, we are not staying.” They said, “Why don’t you form your own team?”’

‘I said, “Are you serious?”’

‘They said, “If you don’t do it, no one will do it.”’

‘We started throwing out names for our new club. We threw out all sorts of names. One of them said Roza, the initials of my name: Rufus O Zumo Arkoi. Everyone was, “*Yeah*.” It sounds like a soccer team. *Roza*.”’

‘On June 9, 1981 we founded Roza. Eighty per cent of the guys from the Eleven Eagles came on. I sewed the uniform. We started playing games. We played our first 11 games undefeated.’

Rufus has left out what is surely the most important part of the story. He could have a club named after him because he could pay for its upkeep, and he could pay for its upkeep because of his success as a tailor. Already, from his earliest days, he was turning the magic he sewed in his father’s front room into a public legacy, an institution that would bear his name and refigure the world in some way.

Sinkor was home to several dozen soccer teams, but only two soccer fields. There was no system, no co-ordination. The president of Roza would meet the president of Executive Eleven on the street, and agree to play at 4pm on Sunday at Tubman High. The two teams would assemble at the venue, only to find that five other matches were scheduled for the same time on the same field.

‘Nobody ended up playing,’ Rufus recalled, ‘because nobody had a right to the field. After the second time this happened to us, I said, “Listen, we can’t allow this to go on: we need a broader organisation.” This was the beginning of 1982. I said, “We all need to come together to communicate who will play on the field when.”’

‘We formed the Sinkor United Sports Organisation, Susa. It is still in existence today. It covered the area from the border of Congo Town to the German Embassy. Within that area, you had more than 50 soccer teams: 50 teams that thousands of young men looked up to. We broke the teams down into divisions, into leagues. The excitement that this new form of competition created throughout Sinkor: you walked down the street, it was the *only* thing people were talking about. “Eagles are a point behind Roza, and playing them at 3pm tomorrow. Wow! Wow!” Sinkor had never known something like this.’

‘News got around. Other parts of Monrovia wanted the same excitement. The model was the first of its kind in the Liberian Football Association’s history. People saw the model. Said,

“This is gen-i-u-s.” The Association came to see me. How did he build? How did he? How? They took the model away and implemented it in other areas.’

And there the story might have ended, were it not for the fact that Samuel K. Doe’s People’s Redemption Council had at this stage been governing Liberia for more than a year. By now, Doe was dimly aware that he could not run Liberia as a united nation. And he was acutely aware that he trusted nobody enough to run it for him. What he could do, though, undeniably and with great accomplishment, was play soccer.

Long before his name became known throughout the rest of the country, Doe was an accomplished soccer player in his home county, Grand Gedeh, a goal maker like Rufus, as skilled with his left boot as with his right. Doe knew that young men across Liberia were mesmerised by soccer, and that the Congo Town elite had always looked down upon it, encouraging its own young men to play American basketball. The very spectacle of a soccer player governing the country was perhaps the most convincing evidence available that the old regime was dead. And so, improbably, Doe at times fancied that he might govern Liberia through soccer. Under his rule, the boundary between soccer and politics, indeed, between soccer and the world, began to blur.

To be fair, the old regime had dipped a cautious toe into the world of soccer, but in a manner that only pronounced its distaste. In the 1950s, when President William Tubman was accruing clients and allies among indigenous chiefs, there was much talk of building a united Liberian nation. The statues depicting the founding of Liberia no longer showed black American discoverers hoisting a flag over a landscape won by conquest. Instead, a man in a morning coat shakes hands with a man clad in a loin cloth, their meeting taking place under the aegis of a priest. The two parties appear to be equals.

In much the same spirit, Tubman began taking an interest in soccer. He began to invest lavishly in Liberia’s only elite-dominated team, the Invincible Eleven, or, simply, IE – founded in the 1940s in Monrovia’s elite high school, the College of West Africa, where Azariah Sirleaf would study – and charged it with the task of thumping the indigenes soundly. Educated indigenous Liberians involved in radical politics supported Mighty Barolle, a team for which the elite did not care much. The rest of the sides in the national league were little more than fill-ins: Firestone ran a team, and each county mustered together a side. But the significant rivalry was between IE and Barolle. The elite supported the former, those who wanted to overthrow the elite supported the latter, and when the two sides clashed, the stadium was filled with thoughts of treason.

On an afternoon in early November 2008, I met a man who had watched Doe govern Liberia from close quarters. His name is Reverend Emmanuel Bowier. Doe appointed him Deputy Information Minister a few weeks after coming to power. By virtue of serial feats of expedience and wiliness, Bowier managed to remain in Doe’s cabinet almost until the end. It was only in 1989 that he fell out of Doe’s favour and repaired hastily across the border, an execution warrant following not far behind.

‘It is hard to describe the transformation of the meaning of soccer from the day Doe came to power,’ Bowier told me. ‘Under the old regime, it remained a poor boys’ game with nowhere to go, a game of the street. With Doe, soccer is suddenly touched with the magic of state power. The big teams are now transported to their matches in the presidential Cadillac. The Liberian national team, the Lone Stars, get a foreign coach. And when they have a home game, there is a national holiday. Nobody goes to work.

‘Before, there was no money in soccer. Now, Doe builds a housing estate for the national team. And the Liberian Football Association, before, it was run on a shoestring. Now, Doe throws a million dollars at it. All of a sudden, to be a soccer administrator is a very big deal. There

are several very powerful men in this country who rose because they happened to be in soccer administration in 1980.’

It was more than simply a question of elevating soccer. The sport became personally connected to the president in ways that were almost mystical.

‘Say a big game was coming up,’ I was told by a man named Barent Karr, who has been playing and coaching neighbourhood soccer in Sinkor since the 1970s, ‘A clash, say, between IE and Barolle. And say that on the eve of the game, one of the star players is injured. It is imperative that the president be informed. A presidential car comes to the player’s house to take him to executive mansion. Doe receives him, and asks to see the injury. Then he puts the player’s injured leg on his lap – to give him courage and inspiration, to heal him.

‘It was impossible for a big game to kick off if President Doe had not yet arrived at the stadium,’ Karr continued. ‘If the President was late, the game must wait. It was as if soccer was only made possible by the fact that the President watched it.’

By the end of 1985, after he had brutally put down the Quiwonkpa coup, effectively turning the populations of entire counties into permanent enemies, Doe probably knew that he was incapable of ever running Liberia peaceably. Tubman’s political accomplishment was to have centralised power in his office. Doe could only imagine what that must feel like. Inside and outside his government were growing centres of power he could neither control nor trust, and whose workings were increasingly opaque to him. According to Bowier, soccer became his refuge.

‘It became a way for him to escape the realities of power,’ Bowier told me. ‘It allowed him to relax. Until he finally joined the Freemasons in 1988, soccer was really his only contact with Liberians outside his own ethnic group. It was a non-security issue. It was non-threatening.’

Perhaps rather than a refuge from, it was a substitute for the exercise of power. The things Doe began doing with soccer smack of panic, of unseemly urgency. He genuinely seems to have confused the business of political governance with sport.

‘Every cabinet minister and his wife had to support a soccer team,’ Bowier said. ‘That meant you had to put down what you were doing and attend all of their games. Never mind that you are abroad on government business. You make sure you are back in Liberia for the weekend when your team is playing. If Doe sees that you are only pretending, that your interest in sport is faked, your political career is finished.

‘Go and speak to a man called Peter Jallah,’ he continued, warming to the theme. ‘He was Doe’s Minister of National Security. There came a point when Doe could not watch a football match without Peter being present. Wherever Peter was, Doe’s jet would come to fetch him.’

‘What about you?’ I asked Bowier. ‘Did you have to show Doe that you were serious about sport?’

‘It was very difficult,’ he replied, ‘because I really didn’t care for it at all. Once, I arrived at my office to find an instruction from Doe that I must go that very day to a sports shop on Carey Street and buy a Mighty Barolle uniform. The instruction said I must put on that uniform, and report for football practice that very evening.’

‘What happened?’ I asked.

‘I was a clown on the football field! I was useless! I was sent home after ten minutes.’

Improbably, Rufus is reluctant to admit any connection between his dream on Twelfth Street and Doe’s Liberia. When I asked him what the end of Americo-Liberian rule meant to him, he replied blandly that he had no truck with politics.

‘Many of the boys on Twelfth Street attended Tubman High and they were very into politics,’ he told me. ‘They were *consumed* by politics. But me? Truth of the matter? Coups, political instability: it didn’t affect me, as long as it didn’t interfere with soccer. I sewed and I played soccer. That is all.’

‘But there is surely more to say than that,’ I pressed on. ‘This was the most significant thing to happen in Liberia in more than a century. What did it mean to you that indigenous Liberians were in power?’

He paused for a long time, reluctant to answer. ‘What did it mean to me?’ he finally replied. ‘Having an indigenous person in the leadership? It gave me hope that I would have a better future in Liberia. Before Doe, I couldn’t imagine my generation ever reaching leadership at its highest level. Now, we all felt we had an opportunity. Government was no longer remote. The officials, some came from my neighbourhood. Young guys, almost all of them very interested in soccer. You could call any of them, invite them to come and see your programme. You felt at ease. I thought to myself, “You know what? I can be this, I can be that.”’

For a man who likes to paint his world in flamboyant colours, he has presented a strangely muted picture. In truth, Doe’s ascent to power appeared to have blasted a corridor between Twelfth Street and national fame. When I finally visited Monrovia with Rufus, and he walked down the famed street of his youth for the first time in a long, long while, he could no longer curb his inhibitions and his memories of the early Doe years spilled out of him.

‘This is where Moses Bapi lived,’ he said excitedly as we walked away from Twelfth Street one evening. ‘He was in charge of Doe’s security. The last secret meeting they had before they carried out the coup, it was held *here*. Twelfth Street was a big street, a big political street, Doe himself came here. It was about one in the morning, the dead of night. He drove in here in a white Honda. He was driving himself. He was here to pick up Bapi.’

One day unacknowledged and invisible, the next day Twelfth Street was touched by power; some of the most elevated men in Liberia were pedestrians on its streets. And this magical rise from nothing was inseparable from soccer. To play on a Sinkor field in 1979 was to be going nowhere. The walls surrounding your world were close and high, your vantage point utterly vistaless. By 1982, that wall appeared to have vanished, and you could imagine that you could see forever. The soccer in your neighbourhood was now organised and serious. Important people took Saturday afternoons off to come to watch you play. If you were talented, if you shone, there were scouts watching closely, scouts employed by the famous teams from the national league. In a year, in two years, you could become a household name.

This is what happened to some of the boys who played in the leagues Rufus had helped to found. They became wealthy. They became famous. People saw it happen to boys they had known all their lives. And Roza was one of the best teams in Sinkor. To wear one of the jerseys Rufus had sewn was to imagine being steps from glory.

Once a year, all the teams in Sinkor competed against one another in a two-day tournament dubbed the Olympics. For the duration of the tournament, teams could field guest players from other parts of Monrovia. In 1982, a Sinkor club called the Green Eagles fielded a 16-year-old guest player from Claretown, a poor neighbourhood at the other end of Monrovia. The boy was dazzling. When he returned the following year, much of Sinkor turned out to watch him play. His name was George Weah. Before his career was through, there would not be a soccer fan on the planet who had not heard his name.

A decade and a half later, when Weah ran for president, he stood up on platforms and told his young supporters of soccer in Monrovia before the war: ‘I will bring those days back. They will return.’

Across Sinkor, people were dreaming and Rufus's name was part of this new dream life. In the narrow world of Twelfth Street, the name Rufus O Zumo Arkoi became associated with breadth. To spend the afternoons in the front room of his father's house was to learn to sew one's way to riches. To take the field in a jersey he had sewed was to take a step towards greatness.

And yet, if Twelfth Street was widening, by the mid-1980s, Liberia itself was narrowing, the meanness and paranoia of its post-coup politics increasingly evident. I put this to Rufus: 'You are a Loma,' I said. 'By the mid-1980s, Doe was giving positions to Krahn people and no one else. Is that why you left for America?'

'That's not really true,' he replied with a hint of irritation. 'No, that's not true. Yes, Doe was a Krahn man, and Krahn people saw Doe as an opportunity to come into government. And they came. But, Doe...' He was palpably annoyed now. My comment had offended him. 'If I had been in Doe's shoes, I would have done the same. Obviously! Obviously knowing the history of Liberia, I would feel very comfortable surrounding myself with my own. Immediately. That's easy. I wouldn't do different from what Doe did. No, I wouldn't do different. Knowing what I know about Liberians. I wouldn't do different.'

'Knowing what about Liberians?'

'That they are hypocrites. They would deceive you so quickly. They come close to you, but secretly they are bringing in their own, until they have critical mass, until they can move you out of the way. So, if I were Doe, I would bring in my own.'

'There is little trust in Liberia,' I comment uselessly.

'Very little.'

'Why?'

'That's how we are as Liberians. Put it like this. Here, a simple place.' He gestures to the room around him, his centre, Roza's space. 'People will see it, and see me being successful. They start building jealousy. That's all.'

'They want to throw you out?'

'Exactly, exactly. So I need to have friends I trust. When I leave, they will protect these computers for me. Even inside Roza. I come to meetings every day with others, they come out of the meeting and they say many negative things about what we're doing here, and stop others from joining the club. Yet they come back and have more meetings with me.'

'What is it about Liberia that produces the suspicion and the jealousy?'

'I always say it is because of how our families are structured: one man, four wives, four sets of children, four sets of goals, not one set of family goals. Jealousy among the four sets of children. This mother is only looking at the interests of her children and is wishing that those children from the other mothers do badly in life. That's the family structure. That's the society.'

When he told the story of how his club came to bear his name, he had spoken with uncharacteristic bashfulness, as if it had happened in spite of him, as if it were almost an accident. It was in fact the essence of the matter. He branded the club with his name to caution others from stealing it. Whether you run the government of Liberia or a soccer club on a dirt road, you build a shield of clients and kin and acolytes as hastily as you can. And even on them you must not turn your back for long. Whatever is yours is yours to lose.

Adrift and Exposed

WORDS BY IAIN CHAMBERS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ISAAC JULIEN



Not to search for the reason of Isaac Julien's *Western Union: Small Boats* (2007), but rather to reason *with* the work, to speak in its vicinity: what follows is the log of one possible route. The trauma of modern-day migration, here most obviously deepened and dramatised by the dangers of crossing vast and inhospitable spaces – the Sahara and the Mediterranean Sea – is also the trauma of the split in the unified image of the world that seemingly reflects and respects only our concerns. Subsequent fragmentation disseminates the insistence of possible and impossible transits and translations in which the refused, the expelled and the marginalised dissect and multiple the horizon. These are shards of history that are also parts of us. The narrative unwinds, confused by rhythms, tonalities and accents that befuddle the desire for a secure semantics and the reconfirmation of *our* world, of our possession of the account.



The images we confront are not mere representations, supports for a pre-existing narrative. They are themselves the narration, fragments of life lived, imagined, yet to come. The ubiquity of the sea is not a mere background to a human drama, but perhaps that ‘dumb blankness, full of meaning’ (*Moby Dick*) that speaks of an indifference to the liberal agenda in which ‘ethical standing and civic inclusion are predicated upon rationality, autonomy and agency’.¹ The screen of the sea, like the cinema screen theorised by Gilles Deleuze, proposes the dehumanisation of images as the visual is freed from the subject and released to yield its autonomous powers.² We are brought into the presence of a contingent, temporal relation and the multiplicity of the present that is irreducible to its representation. This proposes the Deleuzian prospect of an altogether ‘more radical Elsewhere, outside homogeneous space and time’.³ Between perception

1 Cary Wolfe (2008), ‘Learning from Temple Grandin, or, Animal Studies, Disability Studies, and Who Comes After the Subject’, *New Formations*, 64, p.110

2 Claire Colebrook (2006) *Deleuze for the Perplexed*, London and New York, Continuum

3 Gilles Deleuze (1986) *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, tr. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, p. 17



and a response emerges a zone of feeling, a resonance, a vibration, the power of an *affect* that inaugurates a passionate geography, an ‘atlas of emotion’.⁴

We are presented with time that exists beyond the linguistic act of nomination, beyond the subject that produces its image. This is why for Deleuze – and here we can return to the immediacy of Isaac Julien’s work – art is not the expression of humanity or an underlying unity, but is rather the release of imagination from its human and functional home. Impossible we might say and yet a necessary threshold that a non-representational and affective art seeks endlessly to cross. The veracity of the image is now to be located elsewhere, it is no longer a simple support – realism, mimesis – for narration, but is rather the narrating force. These are not images *of* life, but images *as* life; a life already imagined, activated and sustained in the image. There is not first the thought and then the image. The image itself is a modality of thinking. It does not represent, but rather proposes, thought. This is the potential dynamite that resides within the image: it both marks and explodes time. This is the unhomeily insistence of the artwork, its critical cut and its interruptive force.

‘I met History once, but he ain’t recognise me.’⁵

4 Giuliana Bruno (2007) *Atlas of Emotion*, London, Verso

5 Derek Walcott (1992) ‘The Schooner Flight’, in *Derek Walcott Collected Poems 1948-84*, London, Faber and Faber, p. 350



From the Black Atlantic to today's Mediterranean: a political and poetical passage in which the voice of the great Creole poet of the Caribbean entwines with the prophecy of Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history, in which the past – no matter how much it is denied and ignored – continues to interrogate and illuminate the dangerous landscapes of the present.

If the Mediterranean is the mythical poetical space crossed by Ulysses, it is a space that has also hosted those such as Polyphemus and Circe, Medea and Calypso, or Caliban and Sycorax, who have 'spoken of reasons that are inexpressible in the rationale of *logos* that triumphs in the Occident'.⁶ In the tempest of the modern world, where a mythical Mediterranean is today brutally vernacularised in the fraught journeys of anonymous migrants, Caliban returns as an illegal immigrant and Prospero's island, mid-way between Naples and Tunis in the 16th century drama, becomes modern day Lampedusa.

The language that frames the world always remains susceptible to appropriation by monsters, slaves, blacks, women, homosexuals, witches, migrants: the excluded who speak of the unexpected, hidden, things that have not been authorised. Here the ghosts of history interlace the passage of poetics, creating powerful and disturbing images, difficult both to ignore and to

⁶ Monica Centanni (2007) *Nemica a Ullisse*, Turin, Bollati Boringhieri

digest. In this disruptive geography it becomes both possible and necessary to rethink the limits of the world and the Mediterranean we have inherited; it becomes possible to open a vista on another Mediterranean, on another modernity. In this particular passage we are invited to follow a route already indicated by Adorno in his celebrated work on aesthetics, in which he suggested that art works ‘provide the historical unconscious of their epoch’.⁷ Aesthetics declines into an ethics that promotes a poetics that exceeds the political thought that thinks itself capable of rendering the world transparent to its will. Here poetics anticipates a coming community. Such a prospect is secured in the premise that the right to migrate is a human right that sustains a democratic sense of the world. Today’s migratory movements – overwhelmingly from the impoverished south of the planet – propose an unauthorised globalisation, a diverse worlding that has not sought *our* permission.

Faced with the actual political and cultural resistance to this prospect on the part of the First World, it is the case to insist that the passages and perspectives traced by artistic languages propose an ethics-aesthetics capable of undoing, interrupting and interrogating the existing powers of explanation. This also means locating such observations in the actual politics of panic where, under the apparent threat of illegal immigration, the liberal state has rendered the state of emergency permanent. In the subsequent scenario it appears that we are the victims and the immigrants are the enemy to resist. What the continual elaboration of legislative and repressive measures actually reveals is the persistent structural violence applied *against* the foreigner. For it is not the despised stranger who is the source of violence, rather the violence lies in *our* reception, in our refusal to receive the immigrant. Through processes of exclusion and definitions of subordination, the figure of the migrant turns out to be not *external*, but *internal* to the formation of modernity. In the elaboration of state legislation, in the social and political authorisation of government and in the legitimisation of a consensual cultural lexicon, the foreign, immigrant, body becomes central to the articulation of such key concepts as citizenship, culture, democracy and freedom. In such a matrix, repression and racism are not individual, but *structural* qualities.

When one speaks of the social and cultural integration of the immigrant, of her eventual inclusion in the social and political sphere, it is automatically assumed that there already exists a clear and fixed definition of the culture that will eventually absorb (and annul) the foreign body. As Édouard Glissant would put it, these are the certitudes that are cemented in intolerance.⁸ One’s own culture is always certain, secure in its knowledge and authority; it is the other culture that must bend and contort itself in order to be recognised in its necessarily subaltern condition. Here there emerge a series of responses that insinuate themselves in multiple levels and sectors of contemporary society: from laws and state jurisdiction to that sense of identity elaborated in the texts of a national literature and history, to the diffusion of a common sense sustained and amplified by the mass media. Everything seems clear, even obvious in its implacable clarity. The power of the language employed is at one and the same time the language of power.

If this brutal clarity serves to reinforce that sense of identity required by the modern nation state, it also reveals the refusal to interact with the interrogation posed by a seemingly foreign body. In the best of cases, there is the prospect of toleration rather than repression, and always the proposal of regulation through the application of *our* laws, and *our* economic, cultural and political needs. Here the integration and the assimilation of the stranger impose the public cancellation of all of his or her signs of historical and cultural belonging. Reduced to what the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (after Hannah Arendt) has called ‘bare life’, the immigrant is required to strip herself of all those signs that might transmit a diversity that would disturb a culture that pretends to tolerate and eventually integrate her. The logic of superiority is explicit. Already stripped of all in the passage northwards, across the desert and over the sea, the migrant, if she or he makes it to the European shoreline, is required to become a ‘bare life’, denuded of his cultural costume, her social inheritance, reduced to a negated, private, memory. Yet the migrant does

7 Theodor W. Adorno (2004) *Aesthetic Theory*, London, Continuum

8 Édouard Glissant (2005) *La cobée du Lamentin – Poétique V*, Paris, Éditions Gallimard

not arrive from an external and distant elsewhere, he or she is always and already a part of *our* world, part of a modernity that precisely reveals in the irruption of the migrant to be not only *ours*. The ambivalence of our tolerance of other cultures is also the symptom of a complex, emerging modernity that refuses simply to reflect and respect only *our* needs. Those who come seeking work and improved life prospects in the cities of the West have in a significant sense already arrived long before their departure from home in Africa, Asia or Latin America. They too are modern subjects, subjected, as we all are, to the planetary political economy already foreseen by Karl Marx 150 years ago. They too move in 'scapes' elaborated by capital, using the languages of a modernity that has become the modern world. In other worlds, this modernity is also theirs. They are not merely the objects of planetary flows managed elsewhere, but are also subjects able to bend, transform and translate the languages of modernity in senses, directions and possibilities not necessarily authorised by *us*.

Contorted black bodies gasping in the foam, abandoned on the beach in silver body bags among the sunbathers, or else writhing on the decadent palace floors of European hierarchies, replay history's darker rhythms, sounding modernity's heart of darkness, collating the Black Atlantic memories of slavery and racialised oppression to the present-day Mediterranean.⁹ Frantz Fanon, writing more than 50 years ago, reminds us of this deadly objectification: 'I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.'¹⁰ Once again, listening to Derek Walcott, a possible opening, appears as:

*'the dark stain
spreading on maps whose shapes dissolve their frontiers'*¹¹

An immediate, imprecise, proximity is the side of globalisation, promoted by capital's radical de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation, which we are deeply reluctant to accept. We obviously prefer *them* to be objectified as non-modern, tied to distant places and traditions, secured at a distance in their underdevelopment. When we speak of tolerance, we are instinctively speaking of the one-sided exercise, or negation, of *our* tolerance. We never refer to the toleration that might come from the non-occidental and, presumably, non-modern world. This toleration and repression – the extension and retraction of *our* world – invariably acquire political and cultural forms that seek to halt the planet, circumscribe the disturbance and deflate the (global) processes in which immigration, together with structural poverty and ecological disaster, is one of the most dramatic announcements. A politics capable of receiving the historical and cultural complexity proposed by contemporary migration points to a rough, unwelcome and unguaranteed passage between national, and even more local, pressures, and that 'planetary thinking' proposed many decades ago by the vital Mediterranean and Sardinian thinker, Antonio Gramsci.

Yesterday's migrant who left Genoa or Glasgow bound for Buenos Aires, and today's migrant who leaves Senegal to be abandoned on Lampedusa, are separated in time and differentiated in space, but united in the same history. In the face of contemporary migration, there are frankly far too few willing to listen to those phantoms that constitute the historical chains that extend from Africa 500 years ago to the coasts of southern Italy today and which link together the hidden, but essential, narratives of migration in the making of modernity. To negate the memory evoked by the interrogative presence of the modern migrant is somehow to register an incapacity to consider one's own troubled and always incomplete inheritance in the making of the present. Among human rights, perhaps the right to migrate in order to improve one's life's prospects should be recognised. After all, Europe's poor, from Scandinavia, Ireland and Scotland to the northern shores of the Mediterranean (including some 26 million Italians), have exercised this right for several centuries. In this precise historical moment, however, we live in a world in which for the vast majority migration is a crime. Globalisation not only

9 The scene of a black body writhing on a decorated, palatial floor, directly references the famous ballroom scene in Luchino Visconti's cinematic recreation (1963) of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard* (1957). In both cases, the very same space – Palazzo Gangi in Palermo – traversed by the aristocratic decline of Europe and today by the anonymous south of the world, is transformed into the diverse and ambivalent places of planetary antagonisms.

10 Frantz Fanon [1952] (1986) *Black Skin, White Masks*, London, Pluto Press, p. 109

11 Derek Walcott, 'The Migrants', http://www.miserabili.com/2004/08/23/derek_walcott_the_migrants.html



concerns the migration of capital at a planetary level, but also of bodies, cultures, histories and lives. While the former is considered inevitable, the latter is both fervently resisted and increasingly criminalised. It has been estimated that in the coming decades one-sixth of the world's population will be migrants and will almost certainly be criminalised for this.

Here the migrant's time – as a figure of negated and repressed time – becomes the migratory time of modernity. The distant shore and the marginal world that is hidden and ignored becomes immediate, is literally figured and exposed by the body of the feared foreigner, the despised stranger, the abhorred migrant. The migrant's time creates a slash in our time through which modernity itself migrates and subsequently returns bearing other senses. At this point in the time of the world, 'language will never be mine, and perhaps never was' (Jacques Derrida).

The images of *Western Union: Small Boats* propose an unavoidable encounter; its aesthetics expose an intractable ethics, a style of thinking. We are drawn to think *within* the images. The provoked interval remains open to interrogate the anxiety to return to that normality which requires the expulsion of the migrant in order to continue the hegemonic sense and direction of the world. It is perhaps only here, in the open and vulnerable scene promoted by art, that it becomes possible to promote for an instance an unexpected proximity: that instance of unhomeliness before the unexpected in which we temporarily recognise the other, the foreigner, as a part of ourselves. Such an interruption, affected by the autonomy of the image, proposes a diverse Mediterranean and modernity. As the great contemporary Arab poet Adonis suggests, it



is probably only here that it is possible to ignite a dialogue between temporarily equal partners. Here in poetics, in the perpetual movement and migration of language, there already exists the critique of the actual state of affairs. Living language to the full is to touch the transit, the transformation and the translations of what is yet to come.

Here, as Adorno once suggested, we might begin to acquire a familiarity with the idea of not feeling at home when we are at home. In this state of vulnerability, the discourses that secure and anchor us in the world, the authorised knowledges that have disciplined and directed our understandings – from historiography, anthropology and sociology to literature and philosophy – now find themselves challenged by the same displacement and unhomeliness that they seek to explain.

To return to Derek Walcott: ‘I met History once, but he ain’t recognize me’. Perhaps it is only in the oblique gaze and the excessive and errant language of poetics that we manage to travel to where the rationalist analytics of the social and human sciences do not permit. The languages of the arts invariably leave politics wordless. For the artistic configuration of space-time, images *as* life and becoming, allow us to harvest the essential truth of the complex ambivalence of a historical constellation that does not simply mirror *our* passage.

It is the singular intensity of the images becoming *Western Union: Small Boats* that demands a new way of thinking.



Mining Sounds: Lagos-Cairo

A Personal Reflection on Soundscapes

EMEKA OGBOH

“I would be somewhere, and the everyday sounds suddenly seemed as interesting to me as the sounds of any music I could hear inside the concert hall. They just seemed so rich that I wanted to document moments of listening. I came to regard the act of listening as a way of making music. I regarded it as a creative activity – finding music in the environment around me.”

Bill Fontana

Sitting on the low wall underneath the Obalende bus park flyover on a hot Lagos afternoon, these words of Bill Fontana easily come to mind. His insight on music, creativity and environment underscores my creative interventions on Lagos and its glut of everyday sounds. I am lost in trance, totally oblivious of the immediate surroundings except for the syncopated nature of the bustles and hustles that characterise the Obalende bus park. This has completely taken me. I am not just listening, I am also documenting this moment of listening as part of my Lagos soundscapes project – an artistic enquiry to examine the status of Lagos as a mega-city through a sum of its acoustic character. With these recordings, I create an archive of sounds that are definitive of Lagos, and I also creatively utilise these sounds (raw or retouched) as installations in virtual and public spaces.

Obalende, which is a major bus park, bus stop and bus route in Lagos, has become my favourite sound foraging turf. In the course of my ongoing *Lagos by Bus* audio series, I have visited Obalende most frequently, either while en route to other bus parks, given its centrality as a transit hub, or heading strictly to Obalende for recording sessions. I am continually intrigued by its immense cultural diversity, a melting pot of sorts for the ethnically rich and diverse Lagos; a microcosm of Nigeria, a country of more than 150 million people and with more than 250 ethnic groups.

Yoruba is the predominant language spoken in Lagos together with Pidgin English, hence in the Lagos soundscape recordings it is a major audio highlight. Yet, in my recording sessions at Obalende, it is not out of place to hear the continuous interjections of popular music rendered in other Nigerian vernacular languages. In one instance, Flavour’s hit, *Nwa Baby*, rendered in Igbo dominates a corner of the Obalende atmospheric space. Around where I sit, the Hausa hawkers selling sweets and cigarettes chat away. Above this din, I can hear indistinct and not easily recognisable languages and dialects from both stationery and mobile hawkers.

It is practically impossible to take in all the happenings at Obalende visually, the endless sea of human traffic and countless yellow buses merging in and out of the other, impinge and obstruct ones vision. Sound becomes the most potent way of creative interrogation; you have to rely on your ears as the main auditory channel for reading the cacophonous landscape. As a commuter,



you have to rely on your ears to locate the bus that will take you to your destination. In my creative engagement with Obalende as a site of human enterprise and mobility, I am interested in the relationship between passengers and objects of mobility (buses); how passengers are able to successfully locate the correct buses going to their individual destinations amid the chaos.

As someone invested in sounds, I am particularly focused on the interesting link between the spoken word as sound and mobility, especially when the line of vision is impaired by the *tromp l'oeil* and almost surreal effects that characterise Obalende. Here, I am speaking of verbal mapping in the sense that passengers seek out voices of bus conductors to direct them to the correct buses leading to their respective destinations. Obalende and Lagos bus routes, in general, are acoustically mapped in careful cartographic delineations. As a passenger, you have to listen carefully to the verbal maps emanating from the bus conductors or else you end up taking the wrong bus.

I wager to say that these verbal maps are proof of authenticity, without which Lagos would sound like any other city in the world. Lagos is not the only city in the world where there are loads of intractable traffic, hawkers, generators and loud street music going on ceaselessly. Yet, it is probably the only city in the world with these peculiar verbal maps. And, they abound plentifully in bus parks. The verbal maps extend beyond the bus conductors – who, like opera conductors, direct passengers to their buses – to include street vendors calling out to potential customers, who return the calls if interested in their wares. This dialogue of commerce adds an interesting dimension to the soundscape. In all, the visual is trumped in favour of sound or spoken word and its many simulacra.

From my vantage point, I listen and document all the happenings. I do not go about setting up microphones and wiring up to some fancy sound recording equipment. For one, Lagosians are averse to any sort of invasion, and in this case of having any kind of recording equipment pointing at them. Second, one has to be very agile, mobile and quick to hit ‘start’ and ‘stop’ record buttons when capturing Lagos. Things happen impromptu here. Rare chances or blips in the moment have to be captured and at the same time you have to save recording space.

I try to look very casual, as much as possible as not to be conspicuous. This is a pretty tough challenge given my 6’6” frame. I use a binaural microphone most times, connected to a portable recorder, which I carry in my bag with an external backup USB battery pack and memory cards for long recording sessions. With these sound foraging devices I delve into this acoustic world of *okadas* (commercial motorcycle operators), commercial buses, vehicle horns, hawkers, commuters, confidence tricksters, salesmen and monophonic verbal maps.

My choice of binaural microphones is the fact that they are inconspicuous. They look like earbud headphones and hence, allow me to operate incognito. More importantly, they help for two-channel recordings that are created by placing two omni-directional microphones in or close to the ears. This technique allows for the accurate capture of sonic information coming from all directions, helping to produce very realistic recordings when listened to through headphones.

Although my recordings, which are composed of various generated elements, might be considered as noise by many – hence the street notion, ‘Lagos is noisy’ – I consider these elements as raw properties of music sounds such as pitch, dynamics, tone, colour and duration. But more importantly, they are stanzas and sonnets in my orchestra of Lagos soundscape. Under the flyover, just by the intersection of crossroads, is where all these sounds converge and it is my favourite spot. I observe yellow buses spewing passengers and listen to their inputs to the Obalende soundscape composition. Interesting additions are phone conversations, arguments, and shout outs. These soundscapes are composed in every passing second and when put together they create an unexplained buzz that defines the acoustic character of Lagos.



Lagos, like any other city, has a peculiar buzz that derives from its soundscape and which helps to create a sense of place. In some instances, two cities can share some peculiarities as well as differences. Here, I am thinking about Cairo's soundscape and how it reminds me of Lagos, particularly its vehicular traffic, insane gridlocks and the sea of humans trudging the sidewalks of its downtown. The first time I really paid attention to Egypt's soundscape was while inside the Ramses train station, which reminded me of Obalende. Although the visual impressions and auditory effects are not exactly the same, for some unexplained reason I did get the Obalende buzz right there.

After spending three weeks in Alexandria during my first trip to Egypt, I was disconcerted by the serenity and quietude of the city and was beginning to long for the chaos of Lagos. As I disembarked from the train at the Ramses train station in Cairo, during my return journey to Lagos, I picked up the energy and rush and was quickly transported back to Obalende. It felt like alighting from a bus in Obalende. It was Lagos in North Africa. What Cairo shares with Lagos includes, among others, vehicular intensity and the frequency of the use of car horns. Both cities are also projected as major African mega-cities and currently share a population of more than 35 million between them.

In Cairo the teeming crowds navigating the city, the vehicles, their horns, loud cries of hawkers, commercial and private drivers, loud music and the accentuated calls for prayer generate the melange of sounds. I have never been to any other cities where car horns are as indiscriminately abused as they are in Cairo and Lagos. 'Abused' is probably a misnomer, because these horns are actually functional. Car horns in both cities are used for warnings, to hurl insults as well as for on-road intimidation. The car horns are also used to stake unique identities on the part of commuter buses and other kinds of commercial transportation in Lagos. These cars are fitted with melodious horns to attract attention. I heard exactly the same type of horn coming from vehicles in Cairo, which suggests the same function.

In Cairo, however, car horns transcend these pedestrian functions and are more creatively used during weddings. A convoy of cars making its way to the wedding venue starts a specific 'horning' beat, which is picked up by other cars in solidarity and as witnesses to the wedding. Even when other cars are not part of the wedding's motorcade, they join by tooting their car horns in unison. This situation is infectious and the 'wedding beat' soon fills the streets in celebration of the wedding ceremony. I found this quite remarkable.

One thing I really enjoyed was hearing birds on the little trees in downtown Cairo. Imagine these birds being able to coexist and feel safe in the midst of all the noise and people. They also contributed to the soundscape.

I am still not very sure why Ramses train station reminded me of the Obalende bus park. Maybe it is because they are both transitory and connecting points for commuters, and hence have almost the same kind of produced sound. Or maybe it is because I had my Egypt sonic baptism at the Ramses station. For now I have tied it down as favourite a recording space as Obalende. Ramses station is proof of how sound plays an active role in connecting us to places, acting as mnemonics. The few times I have come back to Cairo, after my initial sonic experience, I have been at peace with the sounds of the city. I always settle in once we leave the airport, looking forward to 'sounding out' the city as my taxi crawls through the traffic on its way downtown.

Viscerally speaking, I know Lagos and Cairo are sonically connected, but I have not done as extensive work on Cairo's soundscape to enable me shed more light on this relationship. However, I have been listening to Lagos for some time now and paying close attention to Obalende. During a recent post-recording listening session, I discovered that the bus park authorities just added a new bus route. In my last recording I did not hear the new route being verbally

mapped. It also dawned on me that the vocals emanating from the bullhorns located where the Yaba-bound buses are situated had been announcing 'Ibadan' all the while. It took me more than a month to realise this. The proximity to the Oshodi-bound buses (right opposite) did not help matters. Oshodi is my favourite in situ verbal map and I always get carried away listening to the bus conductors calling it.

Recently a new bullhorn went up, advertising the Ajah route in a way that reminds one of a radio station play. First, there is 60 seconds of music to attract your attention, and just when you begin to pay attention the music is disrupted by the verbal mapper announcing the bus routes. It is an excellent strategy to ensure that announcements are heard above the din in this cacophonous space.

There is a new salesman (called a *Dogaman* in Nigerian parlance) lurking by the Ojuelegba-bound buses selling a variant of medicine, which he claims cures all ailments, from syphilis to gonorrhoea. He also advertises a 100 per cent herbal and very potent local Viagra. There is the Fuji musician, who stands beside Oshodi-bound buses hawking his album. He has been operating from this same spot since the beginning of my Obalende recording sessions. Business must be good or he would have relocated. The ice cream guy has changed his push-truck soundtrack from the regular jingle to Celine Dion's Titanic soundtrack. The latter was a big hit in Nigeria and maybe it could boost his ice cream sales.

Moving beyond the on-site sounds and visuals of Obalende, I have come to the realisation that it is easier to focus and listen when sounds are transferred to a different space, such as a studio or a gallery, where interfering visuals become less obstructing. The visuals become less of a hindrance to the auditory organ when placed in a space different to the recording space. At Obalende I get distracted by a lot of things, which poses a major hindrance to the creative task of recording. When I am back in my studio with the recordings, I can completely lock into the sound, reimmerge myself in the sounds of Obalende, as they stream through my earphones.

There are no buses or *okadas* or conductors or hawkers present, but their presence can be heard. I bring the exterior into the interior and I am forced to listen and observe with the possibility of selecting a different soundscape at a flick of the button.

I intend to share this experience of the Lagos soundscape project and open people's ears to the city. However, Lagos is only a point of departure as I expect to widen my immersive scope to include other cities that I have visited or intend to visit.

I wonder, how will downtown Cairo sound when layered over the Obalende bus park?



Everyday is for the Thief

An Excerpt

TEJU COLE

I

One goes to the market to participate in the world. As with all things that concern the world, being in the market requires caution. Always, the market – as the essence of the city – is alive with possibility and with danger. Strangers encounter each other in the world's infinite variety; vigilance is needed. Everyone is there not merely to buy or sell, but because it is a duty. If you sit in your house, if you refuse to go to market, how would you know of the existence of others? How would you know of your own existence?

When I start speaking Yoruba, the man I've been haggling with over some carved masks laughs nervously. 'Ah oga,' he says, 'I didn't know you knew the language, I took you for an oyinbo, or an Ibo man!' I'm irritated. What subtle flaws of dress or body language have, again, given me away? This kind of thing didn't happen when I lived here, when I used to pass through this very market on my way to my exam preparation lessons.

The Tejuosho bus stop is a stone's throw from where I stand. It is a tangle of traffic – mostly danfos and molues – that one might be tempted to describe as one of the densest spots of human activity in the city, if only there weren't so many others: Ojuelegba, Ikeja, Oshodi, Isolo, Ketu, Ojota.

'Well now that you know I'm not a visitor, you will agree to give me a good price, abi?' He shakes his head, searches for excuses. 'Oga, times are hard, I am not charging you high.'

He still suspects me of carrying more money than I know what to do with. The masks are beautiful, but the rate he's asking is exorbitant. I leave his shop and move on. Other vendors call me: 'Oga, look my side now I go give una good price.' Others simply call out: 'oyinbo.' Young men sit in the interiors of the small stalls on rafia mats or on low stools, their limbs unfurled. They are passing time, waiting for the next thing, in bodies which are designed for activity far more vigorous than this. I move through the warren, which is just like a Moroccan souk. It is cool and overstuffed, delighting in its own tacky variety, and it spills seamlessly into the cavernous indoor shop. Piles of bright plastic buckets line the entrance, and beyond them, the cloth merchants – these ones are women, alhajas – who are swaddled in laces and look out with listless gazes. The hall is not well lit. It is as if the outdoor market is reclaiming for itself what had been designed to be a mall. It was my favourite of all the markets, because of this interior coolness which, nevertheless, refused to be genteel. The only movement here is from the stream of customers and the slow surveillance of the standing fans. The concrete underfoot is curiously soft, as if tempered with use. Then I emerge to sunlight, and the sudden hysteria of car horns and engines. Six roads meet here, and there are no traffic lights. Congestion is the rule and there is rarely any exception. Here, I'm told, is where the boy was killed.

He was 11 years old. He snatched a bag from inside the market, six weeks ago. I know the rest, even before I'm told: I've seen it before. At least, I've seen it in its constituent parts, if never all at once. I watched in fragments and was unimpressed, as children are, by whatever seems to them to be normal. I was still a child when I learned to stitch the various vignettes into a single story. The desperate grab, the cries of thief – an ordinary cry anywhere else, but in a Lagos market, it thins the blood out with fear – the cry taken up by those who never saw the original grab, but who nevertheless believe in its motivating power. It was like the day I was at the garri stall with my mother, when I could have been no more than seven. Cries of thief, thief. Then the chase that arises organically and with frightening swiftness out of the placid texture of the market, a furious wave of men that organises itself into a single living thing. And then the capture of the felon – there is nowhere to run – his denials and, when those inevitably fail, his pleas. He doesn't get far into the pleas before he is pushed – all this I've seen, more than once – kicked, beaten with what never looks like less than personal aggravation. The violence is intimate, interspersed with curses. The stolen purse has, by now, made its way back into the hands of madam, and she has cleared out of the scene. If nothing was stolen, nothing is returned, but the event must run its course.

Someone pushes me out of the way. I am daydreaming at the market, making myself a target. This is pure idiocy. I check my pockets, make sure I still have my wallet on me, and push my way into the crowd that has gathered in the intersection. Traffic is stalled. I have come for this, to see with my own eyes where this thing happened.

The boy – eleven, but he has eaten poorly all his life and looks much younger – is crying. He is trying to explain something. Someone told me to do it, he says, that man over there. He points. It's futile. A wiry man steps forward and slaps him hard. It's not a bag, it turns out; it's a baby he's accused of stealing. Everyone knows that you can use a stolen baby to make money, to literally manufacture cash, in alliance with the unseen powers. An old car tyre – from where? – has been quickly sourced. The boy's clothes are torn off, he is knocked down repeatedly. Space has been created out of the congestion. A gaggle of school girls, in green and white school uniforms, has joined the spectators. And a new twist: in the crowd, there stands a man with a digital camcorder. The single eye of his machine collects the event: this fragile body, which, shed of clothes, is now like a dark sapling whipped about in the wind. The tyre is flung around the boy. He is losing consciousness but revives into panic when he is doused with petrol. From the distance, two traffic officers – the ones they call Yellow Fever – watch. The splashing liquid is lighter than water, it is fragrant, it drips off him, beads in his woolly hair. He glistens. The begging stops. He stops begging and he is not yet lit. And then only the last thing, which is soon supplied. The fire catches with a loud gust, and the crowd gasps and inches back. The boy dances furiously but, hemmed down by the tyre, quickly goes prone, and still. The most vivid moment in the fire's life passes and its colour dulls and fizzles out.

The crowd, chattering and sighing, momentarily sated, melts away. The man with the digicam lowers his machine. He, too, disappears. Traffic quickly reconstitutes around the charred pile. The air smells of rubber, meat and exhaust.

In a few days, it will be as though nothing happened. There are those who will copy the tape, it will move around, perhaps provide some grim entertainment for the men in the shops, or in police stations or homes. It will finally be broadcast on the national news, to outrage and in an instant forgetting. I cannot find the will to hunt the tape down, but I hear about it here and there. A wick, nameless, snuffed. And what if he was only 11? A thief is a thief; his master will find another boy, another one without a name. The market has seen everything. It must eat. It does not break its habits.

For my part, I need to find the *danfo* that goes from here to Yaba. It only takes a moment. The conductor's song draws me, to the other side of the pedestrian bridge. The vehicle is newer than most. It has a sticker on its back window: 'God's Time is the Best Time.' And under that another one: 'He's a Fine Guy.' I enter the bus and leave the scene.

II

At times, the absurdity makes one laugh. Other times, the only possible response is a stunned silence. Shortly before I left New York for Lagos there was a plane crash in Nigeria. A Bellview aircraft plying the Lagos–Abuja route went down three minutes after take-off, into forests near the village of Lissa in Ogun State. None of the 117 passengers on board survived. A government inquiry was promised, and there was much public hand wringing and talk about a time of national prayer. While I am in Nigeria two months later, a plane belonging to the Sosoliso airlines goes down on the Abuja–Port Harcourt route. One hundred and six people are killed, and there is a single survivor. The victims include 75 school children returning home for the holidays. Almost all of them are pupils of the Ignatius Loyola Jesuit boarding school. There are harrowing scenes of parents contending over the bodies of children burnt beyond recognition. Many of the parents witness the accident, because it happens on arrival, when the plane overshoots the runway. The fire department has no water, and can only watch as the plane incinerates its passengers. A few days later mothers of the dead children stage a peaceful protest in Lagos. At the march, these mothers, some of whom lost as many as three of their children, are tear-gassed by police, and that is the end of the matter. There is no further protest and there is no redress.

A phrase I hear often in Nigeria is *idea l'a need*. It means: ‘all we need is the general idea or concept.’ People say this in different situations. It is a way of saying: ‘that’s good enough, there’s no need to get bogged down in details.’ I hear it time and again. After the electrician installs an antenna and all we get is unclear reception to one station, CNN, instead of the 30 pristine stations we had been promised, the reaction isn’t that he has done an incomplete job. It is, rather: ‘we’ll make do, after all *idea l'a need*.’ Why bother with sharp reception when you can have snowy reception? And once, driving in town with one of the school drivers, I discover that the latch for the seatbelt is broken. ‘Oh pull it across your chest and sit on the buckle, he says, *idea l'a need*.’ Safety is not the point. The semblance of safety is what we are after.

Around the time the second plane goes down, I am planning a journey to Abuja from Lagos. I think I can take the chance but no one else in the family agrees. I buy the ticket anyway, and fly less than a week after the plane crash. I have great faith in the laws of statistics. But on that flight, I ask myself: when was the last time two commercial flights went down in the same country within six weeks of each other? And if two, why not three. The Nigerian situation is special. There is reasonable cause for fear. Nigeria Airways, the national carrier, went defunct after years of mismanagement. In its stead, foreign airlines ply the lucrative routes between Lagos and Europe. A number of private ventures supply the flights within Nigeria and West Africa. There are several flights each day between Lagos and Abuja. But Africa, which accounts for less than four percent of the world’s air travel, is where more than a quarter of all plane crashes occur. The official inquiries into the Nigeria crashes reveal that many of the private airlines use old planes. Some of these aircraft have been in service for more than 30 years. They are *tokunbo* planes, bought after they have been discarded by European carriers. This is a recipe for disaster in Nigeria’s poor maintenance culture.

Another serious part of this problem is corruption. The aviation authority failed to enforce a recommendation that all planes older than 22 years be removed from service. Had that recommendation been followed, the recent disasters might have been averted. As it stands, there is little doubt that substantial bribes have changed hands to keep the old planes flying. On the day of my outbound flight, the government grounds the Sosoliso and Chanchangi airlines. The ban is lifted shortly afterwards. On the day of my return to Lagos all Boeing 737 planes in the country, regardless of airline, are grounded. This leads to long delays at the airport. There is no explanation from Virgin Nigeria when we finally board our flight, six hours late.

Thinking about Nigeria’s situation brings to mind the cargo cults of Melanesia who cleared runways in the forest and constructed “control towers” out of bamboo and rafia in the belief

that these structures, parodies of modern aviation, would bring material blessings from the sky gods. Much like these Pacific islanders, Nigerians do not always have the philosophical equipment to deal with the material goods they are so eager to consume. We fly planes but we do not manufacture aircraft, much less engage in aeronautical research. We use cellphones but we do not make them. But, more importantly, we do not foster the ways of thinking that lead to the development of telephones or jet engines. Part of that philosophical equipment is an attention to details: a refusal to be satisfied with only the broad outlines of a system, an engagement with the creative and scientific spirit behind what one uses.

Abuja, Nigeria's capital city rises out of the Sahel like a modernist apparition. The avenues are clean and broad and the government buildings are imposing, with that soulless, vaguely fascistic air common to capital cities from Washington DC to Brasilia. The National Mosque is a gigantic sci-fi fantasy, like a newly-landed alien mothership. The National Cathedral, a spiky modernist confection, is nearing completion. These houses of worship, in competition with each other for prestige, are two of the most prominent buildings on the city's skyline. The Thai restaurant to which my friends take me for dinner is as tastefully appointed as any I have seen elsewhere in the world. It is also far more expensive than most Nigerians can afford. The bowling alley we go to afterwards has neon lanes, thumping music and fashionable young people. But are these the signs of progress? Yes, partly. Business is booming, there is free enterprise and with it the hope that people might be lifted out of poverty.

But it is as yet a borrowed progress and it is happening in the absence of the ideological commitments that can make it real. The president of the Federation is unable to get away from constant God-talk and in this he is very much like his constituents. President Obasanjo's hobby-horse is the 'image' of the country. He believes that the greatest damage to Nigeria is being done by people who criticise the country. These unpatriotic people are, in his opinion, the ones spoiling the country. He insists that the only real flaw is in the pointing out of flaws. One should only say good things. After all no society can claim perfection.

Although the buildings and roads of the capital city suggest a rational, orderly society, the reality is the opposite. Supernatural explanations are favoured for the most ordinary events. Uncle Tunde told me a story about his father who had passed on a few years ago, a jovial, chain-smoking fellow whom I met twice as a child. For years, the old man never went to bed without having a half-pint bottle of his favourite tonic: the stash of Guinness Stout that he kept hidden under his bed. By all accounts, he was an interesting character. He died peacefully in his sleep, at the impressive age of a 106. But after his death, there were still family members who muttered that someone must have used black magic on him. '*W'on se baba yen pa ni: someone did the old man in.*' Nothing happens for natural reasons. There's a widespread belief in the agency of magic and malefaction. In addition to this animism is the recent epidemic of evangelical Christianity that has seized the country, especially in the south.

Church has become one of the biggest businesses in Nigeria, with branches and ministries springing up like weeds on every street and corner. These Christians are militant, preaching a potent combination of a fear of hellfire and a love of financial prosperity. Many of the most ardent believers are students in the secondary schools and universities. This is the worldview in which prayer is a sufficient solution for plane crashes. Everyone expects a miracle, and those who do not receive theirs are blamed for having insufficient faith. Partly in response to this, and partly from other internal urgings, Islam has also become extreme, particularly in the north. Some of the northern states, such as Zamfara, are de facto theocratic entities in which sharia is the law of the land. Staying opposite the Zamfara State House in Abuja, I could not sleep for the constant wailing emanating from the official mosque in the compound.

Nigeria's disconnection from reality is neatly exemplified in three claims to fame the country has recently received in the world media: Nigeria was declared the most religious country in the world, Nigerians were found to be the world's happiest people, and in *Transparency International's* 2005 assessment, Nigeria was ranked sixth from the bottom out of the 158 countries assessed in the corruption perceptions index. Religion, corruption, happiness. Why, if so religious, so little concern for the ethical life or for human rights? Why, if so happy, such weariness and stifled suffering?

The late Fela Kuti's prophetic song 'Shuffering and Shmiling' still speaks to the situation. This champion of the people was also the fiercest critic of the people. He spoke fearlessly to our absurdities. 'Shuffering and Shmiling' was about how, in Nigeria, there is tremendous cultural pressure to claim that one is happy, even when one is not. *Especially* when one is not. Unhappy people, like grieving mothers at a protest march, are swept aside.

Harare North

An Excerpt

BRIAN CHICKWAVA

You spend the morning sitting under the tree, but by about afternoon Shingi maybe relax or feel pity for me. He wave olive branch and start talking about where we is going to spend the night. I have been whipping them pounds out of Sekai and she have now decide to take few more weeks off in Zimbabwe. I don't want to go sleep at they house and spend time with Paul. Shingi don't want to go to his relatives and leave me alone in them streets.

'If I t..take you to m...my relatives they is not going to be happy,' he say. 'Maybe I s..stay with you for the night and then we s..see.'

I have also help him in the past when he don't have graft and his family have him on the ropes about money issues while he try to spin jazz number of having graft.

'You are kind man,' I say to him. We is back on talking terms. He don't want to take me to his relatives because they already propaganda against me, I know.

'Where are you from?' It's this man that have Karl Marx's beard. He sit cross legged and hunch over his left arm while the other hand stroke his beard. He have siphon part of his beard into his mouth and is chewing. Our eyes clash and me I look away.

Under the tree, sitting opposite me is three faces. Three faces and they two dogs. They sit silent on dwarf brick wall that border the lawn area, each wait for his turn to take swig from bokkle that is doing the rounds. Some few steps to they right is three dreadlocked Rasta faces, one of them try to cheer them up, hobbling around and singing and shaking them mangled dreads. Karl Marx's beard at the corner of dwarf wall, to the left of them three faces and they dogs. I don't want to answer questions from no one right now. He get the score without me saying one word.

Shingi come back to the tree with flyers for free concert called African Guitar Virtuosos or something at Southbank. Before he even sit down I tell him we should just start heading to Southbank because me I don't want staying here with this Karl Marx guy.

'Bada nepakati,' Shingi instruct me. With both hands me I hold the loaf that he buy from supermarket when he leave me alone under the tree. I pull and it tear in half. Shingi grin in nervous way and he look at them people around us. The bus is full and everyone on the bus point they eyes at us.

I apply myself on the bread. This feeling that I have not have in years now come over me; my senses get more fire. I clutch the half loaf between them arm and ribs and rip into it with them fingernails. The warmth of bread against my body, together with it the happiness of discover the freedom to tear down loaf of bread on London bus, send message of good will to my bones. I feel free.

Then out of the blue sky we get ourselves some fan: one small plump boy sitting with his mother leap to his feet with big eyes. He wear t-shirt written, 'Made Of Money'. Shingi have good talent at reading them people so he see quick that likkle boy Made Of Money is in grip of big hunger. He break small piece from his bread and stretch out in that good old uncle kind of way, and hand it to the likkle man. The horror look on the likkle boy's mother's face can kill a hippo. She look on but she is helpless. I can see that she want to stop she son from taking the bread but hold sheself back because she is frightened of the racialism thing. She remain on she seat, and only watch with sickly smile as she son hit the bread with more fire.

Southbank is crawling with them Africans in they colourful ethnic clothies, it make you feel like you is not African enough. Many of them is also all them lapsed Africans because they have live in Harare North from the time when it was okay to kill kings, queens and pigs. You can tell because they carry smiles like they have take over the palaces at last. We is only one wearing jeans. But this is make up for by fact that after the concert we have good cheerful smiles because of the one person who have had the sense not to lumber himself with them ethnic things, that's the original native from Kinshasa on stage.

The guitar men step onto the stage. Three of them. All of them is dressed in flashy African clothes except for him the Kinshasa boy. The other two guitarists is just lapsed Africans, but they is busy spinning clouds of jazz numbers that they is Tanzanian and Cameroonian and whatever they can think of. But the worst is him the one that want to be Cameroonian; he change his costume three times during the show. Three times, I count it. Even girls don't do that.

Cameroonian man twang away while his Tanzanian friend is busy ripping away them lines off his guitar. But the original native from Kinshasa – he is dressed in jacket and tie and is sitting on stage like lost school boy. Even when he was introduce at the start of the show he look like he have heaps of confusion on his face, you know like what it's like when the native has just hit Harare North.

Kinshasa boy wear black oversize jacket and them baggy grey trousers; you can tell these is clothes that he is suppose to have taken to dry cleaner but maybe somewhere in the township the original native decide that this is something that he can handle with box of Surf powder and bucket of water: they is puckered and getting all out of shape in that way that make them more African than them thousand cotton garments with blue lizards, green fish and ethnic patterns. This give us big cheer on them our face.

Shingi, he have big grin ripping through his face right up to them back teeth. The music crackle away like rhythm of them hooves of group of donkeys at full speed gallop. Shingi's attention is fix on Kinshasa boy, who is looking at them the other guitar men with mix of shyness and absent minded style that often hide native impatience. He tag along nowhere near his limit, while them other two is at full gallop.

Suddenly something snap inside his head and Kinshasa boy get off his stool. From the way the hairs on my back stand on they ends, you know that now something is in the air. He throw left leg forward in that playful way like he say, catch it if you can. But this is that style that is awkward by purpose, you know them those crazy 'I don't care' ape-style *ndombolo* moves. He step and sway. He peep. At you. Sometimes.

Kinshasa boy. He do sharp feint. He sway and step. Bobbing head. Phantom step; he almost shake. One jink, and it send the whole audience swaying the wrong way. Then it come, one deadly sideways leap of the eyebrow that kill all the xenophobia, hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia and yugoslavia that exist in Harare North.

His trousers, they flap mad. Like some flag in middle of big storm. Now he cling to his guitar with more fire now and hit the crowd with heap of notes that come out of his guitar faster than speed of dog with ten legs.

'My friend, you, civilian person like you, if you is not careful you will drop small poo in your pants because of this pleasure,' me I tell the man sitting next to me with high wattage grin on his face.

Even them, the other guitarists is now just onlookers like us. And when Kinshasa native start to get down to stepping on the rhythm with some mental *ndombolo* footwork, whipping his own back with them hot riffs, too many truths that cannot be named crawl out of they holes and start crawling everywhere.

Me I nearly throw £50 onto the stage, but Shingi hold my hand.

Towards a Politics of Mobility

TIM CRESSWELL

The past few years have seen the announcement of a ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Hannam et al 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006a), the launch of the journal *Mobilities*, and a number of key texts and edited collections devoted to mobility (Brenholdt and Simonsen 2004; Cresswell 2006; Cresswell and Merriman 2008; Kaufmann 2002; Sheller and Urry 2006b; Urry 2000, 2007; Uteng and Cresswell 2008). Work inspired by the new mobilities paradigm has informed an array of writing on particular forms and spaces of mobility ranging from driving and roads (Beckmann 2001; Merriman 2007; Urry 2004) to flying and airports (Adey 2004a, 2004b). This is not the place to review the work on mobility (see Blunt 2007). Rather, the overall aim of the paper is to discuss further the insights into the new mobilities paradigm, and further develop some of the ideas that have been associated with it (Cresswell 2006; Urry 2007). In particular, this paper develops the approach I utilised in *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (2006). In that book I outlined the role of mobility in a number of case studies, ranging from the micro-movements of the body to the politics of global travel. But, for the most part, mobility remained a singular thing. There was no detailed accounting of the various aspects of mobility that have the capacity to make it powerfully political. This paper, then, is an attempt to outline some key ideas for a mesotheoretical approach to the politics of mobility. Strategically, it uses ideas from other theorists and a variety of real-world examples. It does not subscribe to a singular theoretical model, but seeks to contribute to the development of a geographical theoretical approach to mobility. It is part of an ongoing process of mesotheoretical construction.

The paper seeks to meet these aims in two principal ways: First, by breaking mobility down into six of its constituent parts (motive force, velocity, rhythm, route, experience and friction) in order to fine-tune our accounts of the politics of mobility; and second, by developing the notion of ‘constellations of mobility’ as historically and geographically specific formations of movements, narratives about mobility and mobile practices, which reveal the importance of an historical perspective that mitigates against an overwhelming sense of newness in mobilities research. First, however, consider the notion of a new mobilities paradigm.

The new mobilities paradigm?

Bruno Latour has suggested that there are only three problems with the term ‘actor-network theory’ and they are the words ‘actor’, ‘network’ and ‘theory’ (Latour 2005). A similar point could be made of the new mobilities paradigm. First of all the word *paradigm* suggests the Kuhnian notion of normal science being transformed by sudden revolutions: where what went previously is unceremoniously tipped into the junkheap of academic history (Kuhn 1996). We have to be careful about such implications. Any study of mobility runs the risk of suggesting that the (allegedly) immobile notions, such as boundaries and borders, place, territory and landscape, are of the past and no longer relevant to the dynamic world of the 21st century. This would be wrong and, to be fair, does not seem to be the point of advocates of the new mobilities paradigm where moorings are often as important as mobilities. The second problem concerns the different

ways that new mobilities can be read. If the emphasis is on the word *new*, then this suggests an old mobilities paradigm. If the emphasis is on the word *mobilities*, then this suggests that old paradigms were about the immobile or sedentary. The second of these options seems untenable because movements of one kind or another have been at the heart of all kinds of social science (and particularly geography) since their inception.

In sociology, notions of movement and mobility were central to the concerns of thinkers such as Georg Simmel and the Chicago School sociologists, for instance (Park and Burgess 1925; Simmel 1950). If we think of geography, there have been any number of sub-disciplinary concerns with things and people on the move, ranging from Saurian concerns with origins and dispersals (Sauer 1952), through spatial science's fixations on gravity models and spatial interaction theory (Abler et al 1971) and notions of plastic space (Forer 1978), to feminist approaches and daily mobility patterns (Hanson and Pratt 1995; Pickup 1988). Transport geography, migration theory, time geographies, geographies of tourism – the list is endless. The same could be said of anthropology. So the question that arises: what is *new* about the new mobilities paradigm?

Despite all the caveats above, there clearly is something new about the ways mobilities are being approached currently that distinguishes them from earlier accounts of movement, migration and transport (to name but three of the modes of mobility that have long been considered). If nothing else, the mobilities approach brings together a diverse array of forms of movement across scales ranging from the body (or, indeed parts of the body) to the globe. These substantive areas of research would have been formerly held apart by disciplinary and sub-disciplinary boundaries that mitigated against a more holistic understanding of mobilities. In addition, the approaches listed above were rarely actually about mobility, but rather took human movement as a given – an empty space that needed to be expunged or limited. In migration theory, movement occurred because one place pushed people out and another place pulled people in. So, despite being about movement, it was really about places. Similarly, transport studies have too often thought of time in transit as 'dead time' in which nothing happens – a problem that can be solved technically. Mobility studies have begun to take the actual fact of movement seriously.

I have argued that mobility exists in the same relation to movement as place does to location (Cresswell 2006) and that mobility involves a fragile entanglement of physical movement, representations and practices. Furthermore, these entanglements have broadly traceable histories and geographies. At any one time, then, there are pervading constellations of mobility – particular patterns of movement, representations of movement and ways of practising movement – that make sense together. Constellations from the past can break through into the present in surprising ways.¹ Before moving on to six aspects of the politics of mobility it is necessary to define mobility as the entanglement of movement, representation and practice.

Movement, representation, practice

Consider, then, these three aspects of mobility: the fact of physical movement: getting from one place to another; the representations of movement that give it shared meaning; and, finally, the experienced and embodied practice of movement. In practice these elements of mobility are unlikely to be easy to untangle. They are bound up with one another. The disentangling that follows is entirely analytical and its purpose is to aid theory construction. Different forms of mobility research are likely to explore facets of any one of these. Transport researchers, for instance, have developed ways of telling us about the fact of movement, how often it happens, at what speeds and where. Recently, they have also informed us about who moves and how identity might make a difference (Bullard and Johnson 1997; Hoyle and Knowles 1998). They have not been so good at telling us about the representations and meanings of mobility either at the individual level or at a societal level. Neither have they told us how mobility is actually

¹ This use of the term constellation reflects the use of the term by Walter Benjamin (1999).

embodied and practised. Real bodies moving have never been at the top of the agenda in transport studies. Understanding mobility holistically means paying attention to all three of these aspects.

Physical movement is, if you like, the raw material for the production of mobility. People move, things move, ideas move. The movement can, given the right equipment, be measured and mapped. These measurements can be passed through equations and laws can be derived from them. This positivist analysis of movement occurs in all manner of domains. The physical movement of the human body has been extracted from real bodies and used to develop model mobilities for, among other things, sports therapy, animation and factory motion studies (Price 1989; Yanarella and Reid 1996). In cities, transport planners are endlessly creating models of mechanically aided physical movement in order to make transport more efficient or less environmentally harmful (Eliasson and Mattson 2005). In airports and railway stations modelers have used critical path analysis to measure the time taken to get between two points and then reduce it (Adey 2004a). So understanding physical movement is one aspect of mobility. But this says next to nothing about what these mobilities are made to mean or how they are practised.

Just as there has been a multitude of efforts to measure and model mobility, so there has been a plethora of representations of mobility. Mobility has been figured as adventure, as tedium, as education, as freedom, as modern and as threatening. Think of the contemporary links made between immigrant mobilities and notions of threat reflected in metaphors of flooding and swamping used by journalists and politicians (Tuitt 1996; White 2002). Or, alternatively, the idea of the right to mobility as fundamental to modern Western citizenship which is expressed in legal and governmental documents (Blomley 1994a). Consider all the meanings wrapped up in car advertisements or mobile phones. To take just one kind of mobile practice, the simple act of walking has been invested with a profound array of meanings from conformity to rebellion in literature, film, philosophy and the arts (Solnit 2000). Geographers, social theorists and others have been complicit in the weaving of narratives around mobility. We have alternately coded mobility as dysfunctional, as inauthentic and rootless and, more recently as liberating, antifoundational and transgressive in our own forms of representation (Cresswell 2001).

Finally, there is practice. By this I mean both the everyday sense of particular practices, such as walking or driving, and also the more theoretical sense of the social as it is embodied and habitualised (Bourdieu 1990). Human mobility is practised mobility that is enacted and experienced through the body. Sometimes we are tired and moving is painful, Sometimes we move with hope and a spring in our step. As we approach immigration at the airport the way our mobility feels depends on who we are and what we can expect when we reach the front of the line. Driving a car is liberating, or nerve wracking, or, increasingly, guilt ridden. Whether we have chosen to be mobile or have been forced into it affects our experience of it. Sometimes our mobile practices conform to the representations that surround them. We do, indeed, experience mobility as freedom as the airplane takes off and the undercarriage retracts. At other times there is a dissonance between representation and practice. As we sit in a traffic jam maybe. Mobility as practised brings together the internal world of will and habit (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Seamon 1979) and the external world of expectation and compulsion. In the end, it is at the level of the body that human mobility is produced, reproduced and occasionally transformed.

Getting from A to B can be very different depending on how the body moves. Any consideration of mobility has to include the kinds of things people do when they move in various ways. Walking, dancing, driving, flying, running and sailing – practices such as these have played important roles in the construction of social and cultural theory, philosophy and fiction. Take walking, for instance. We can think of the way Michel de Certeau uses walking to examine the spatial grammar of the city that provides a preconstructed stage for the cunning tactics of the walk:

The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. (1984: 101)

This story about walking replicates a number of literatures in which the walker is held forth as an exemplar of rebellion, freedom, and agency in the city – the pedestrian hero (Berman 1988) or the flâneur (Tester 1994). Practices are not just ways of getting from A to B; they are, at least partially, discursively constituted. The possibility of walking is wrapped up in narratives of worthiness, morality and aesthetics that constantly contrast it with more mechanised forms of movement that are represented as less authentic, less worthy and less ethical (Thrift 2004). And it matters where walking happens – the walk in 19th-century Paris is very different from the walk in rural Mali or the walk in the contemporary British countryside.

In addition to being a traceable and mapable physical movement which is encoded through representation, walking is also an embodied practice that we experience in ways that are not wholly accounted for by either their objective dimensions or their social and culture dimensions. Here the approaches of both phenomenological inquiry and forms of non-representational theory give insight into the walking experience (Ingold 2004; Wylie 2005). Similar sets of observations can be made about all forms of mobility – they have a physical reality, they are encoded culturally and socially and they are experienced through practice. Importantly, both forms and aspects of mobility are political – they are implicated in the production of power and relations of domination.

Six elements of a politics of mobility

By politics I mean social relations that involve the production and distribution of power. By a politics of mobility I mean the ways in which mobilities are both productive of such social relations and produced by them. Social relations are of course complicated and diverse. They include relations between classes, genders, ethnicities, nationalities and religious groups, as well as a host of other forms of group identity.

Mobility, as with other geographical phenomena, lies at the heart of all of these. Mobility is a resource that is differentially accessed. One person's speed is another person's slowness. Some move in such a way that others get fixed in place. Examples of this abound. Consider the school run that allows women (for the most part) to enact an efficient form of mobility so often denied them. At the same time it impacts on the ability of children to walk to school and makes the streets less safe for pedestrians. There is little that is straightforward about such an entanglement of gender, age and mobility. Consider the opening up of borders in the European Union to enable the enactment of the EU mantra of free mobility. This in turn depends on the closing down of mobilities at the borders (often airports) of the new Europe (Balibar 2004; Verstraete 2001). Speeds, slownesses and immobilities are all related in ways that are thoroughly infused with power and its distribution.

This politics of mobility is enriched if we think about it in terms of material movement, representation and practice. There is clearly a politics to material movement. Who moves furthest? Who moves fastest? Who moves most often? These are all important components of the politics of mobility that can be answered in part by the traditional approaches of transport studies. But this is only the beginning. There is also a politics of representation. How is mobility discursively constituted? What narratives have been constructed about mobility? How are mobilities represented? Some of the foundational narratives of modernity have been constructed around the brute fact of moving – mobility as liberty and mobility as progress. Everyday language reveals some of the meanings that accompany the idea of movement. We are always trying to get somewhere. No one wants to be stuck or bogged down. These stories appear everywhere from car advertisements to political economic theory.

Consider the act of walking once again. The disability theorist Michael Oliver has suggested that there is an ideology of walking that gives the fact of walking a set of meanings associated with being human and being masculine. Not being able to walk thus falls short of being fully human. Popular culture tells us that ‘walking tall’ is a sure sign of manhood: medical professionals dedicate themselves to the quest to make those who can’t walk, walk again. All manner of technologies are developed to allow people to walk. The effect of such an ambulatory culture, he tells us, can be quite devastating on those who are being treated. As Oliver puts it, ‘Not-walking or rejecting nearly walking as a personal choice threatens the power of professionals, it exposes the ideology of normality and it challenges the whole rehabilitation exercise’ (Oliver 1996: 104). Here mobility, and particularly the represented meanings associated with particular practices, is highly political.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly of all, there is a politics of mobile practice. How is mobility embodied? How comfortable is it? Is it forced or free? A man and a woman, or a businessman and a domestic servant, or a tourist and a refugee might experience a line of a map linking A and B completely differently. The fact of movement, the represented meanings attached to it, and the experienced practice are all connected. The representation of movement can certainly impact on the experience of its practice. Think about Mexican immigrants in the United States, for instance. Compare that with a member of a multinational corporation jetting between world cities. Consider the image of a train with Pullman carriages steaming through the landscape of late-19th-century America. Here is a description from a journalist in the Chicago News:

The world respects the rich man who turned to be a globe-trotter and uses first class cabins and Pullman cars, but has inclination to look over his shoulder at the hobo who, to satisfy this so strong impulse, is compelled to use box-cars, slip the board under the Pullman or in other ways whistle on the safety of his life and integrity of his bones (Ernest Burgess archives of the University of Chicago Special Collections, box 126: 13).

Here we have exactly the same act of moving from A to B but completely different practices of mobility and sets of represented meanings associated with them. The globetrotter sits in plush velvet seats and chooses from extensive wine lists, while the hobo travels close to death on a wooden plank precariously balanced on the same carriage’s axels. The mobile subject *globetrotter* signifies a different world from the mobile subject *hobo*. The narratives and discourses surrounding them make their mobilities possible and impact upon these very different practices. Indeed, just 50 years earlier the subject identities of *globetrotter* and *hobo* did not exist, just as the Pullman carriage or the transcontinental railroad did not exist. These mobile spaces, subjects and practices were all entangled in that particular moment.

There seems little doubt that mobility is one of the major resources of 21st-century life and that it is the differential distribution of this resource that produces some of the starkest differences today. But this argument is still more suggestive than specific. There remains the task of breaking mobility down into different aspects of moving that each have a role to play in the constitution of mobile hierarchies and the politics of mobility. In the process of breaking mobility down in this way we get some analytical purchase on how mobility becomes political. Below I outline six aspects of mobility, each has a politics that it is necessary to consider.

First – *why does a person or thing move?* An object has to have a force applied to it before it can move. With humans this force is complicated by the fact that it can be internal as well as external. A major distinction in such motive force is thus between being compelled to move or choosing to move. This is the distinction at the heart of Zygmunt Bauman’s discussion of the tourist and the vagabond:

Those ‘high up’ are satisfied that they travel through life by their heart’s desire and pick and choose their destinations according to the joys they offer. Those ‘low down’ happen

time and again to be thrown out from the site they would rather stay in If they do not move, it is often the site that is pulled away from under their feet, so it feels like being on the move anyway. (Bauman1998: 86-7)

Of course, the difference between choosing and not choosing is never straightforward and there are clearly degrees of necessity. Even the members of the kinetic elite, who appear to move so easily through the world of flows, must feel obligated to sign in to airport hotels and book first-class flights to destinations 12 time zones away. Nevertheless, this basic difference in mobilities is central to any hierarchy and thus any politics of mobility. To choose to move or, conversely, stay still, is central to various conceptions of human rights within the nation-state (Blomley 1994b) and within 'universal' regimes (Sassen 1999).

Second – *how fast does a person or thing move?* Velocity is a valuable resource and the subject of considerable cultural investment (Kern 1983; Tomlinson 2007; Virilio 1986). To Paul Virilio speed, connected to the development of military technology in particular, is the prime engine for historical development. In *Speed and Politics* and elsewhere he paints a picture of ever-increasing velocity overwhelming humanity. Even such apparently fixed things as territory, he argues, are produced through variable speeds rather than through law and fixity. He proposes a 'science of speed', or dromology, to help us understand our present predicament. The faster we get, Virilio argues, the more our freedoms are threatened:

The blindness of the speed of means of communicating destruction is not a liberation from geographical servitude, but the extermination of space as the field of freedom of political action. We only need refer to the necessary controls and constraints on the railway, airway or highway infrastructures to see the fatal impulse: the more speed increases, the faster freedom decreases. (Virilio 1986: 142)

At its extreme, speed becomes immediacy - the speed of light that Virilio claims is at the heart of globalisation. This is the speed with which information can travel around the globe having profound impacts of relatively solid, relatively permanent places (Thrift 1994; Tomlinson 2007).

But speed of a more human kind is at the centre of hierarchies of mobility. Being able to get somewhere quickly is increasingly associated with exclusivity. Even in air travel – where, since the demise of Concorde, all classes of passenger travel at the same speed – those 'high up', as Bauman would put it, are able to pass smoothly through the airport to the car that has been parked in a special lot close to the terminal. In airports such as Amsterdam's Schiphol, frequent business travellers are able to sign up to the Privium scheme, where they volunteer to have their iris scanned to allow biometric processing in the fast lane of immigration. This frees up immigration officials to monitor the slow lane of foreign arrivals who are not frequent business travellers. Speed and slowness are often logically and operationally related in this way. And it is not always high velocities that are the valued ones. Consider the slow food and slow culture movements. How bourgeois can you get? Who has the time and space to be slow by choice? As John Tomlinson has put it in relation to the Italian slow city movement, Citta Slow:

Citta Slow, in promoting the development of small towns (of 50,000 inhabitants or less) represents the interests of a particular spatial-cultural constituency and related localized form of capital. In a sense then, and without being unduly cynical, [Citta Slow] could be seen as defending enclaves of interest, rather than offering plausible models for more general social transformation. (Tomlinson 2007: 147)

For some, slowness is impossible. Consider the workers in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*. In its famous opening scenes we see a line of workers at a conveyer belt tightening nuts on some unspecified element of a mass production line. The factory boss is seen reading the paper and

enjoying a leisurely breakfast. This is interrupted only when he makes occasional demands for 'more speed' on the production line below. Here the principles of Taylorism are used by Chaplin to satirise the production of speed among workers through time and motion study. Here speed is definitely not a luxury. Rather it is an imposition experienced by those 'low down'.

Third – *in what rhythm does a person or thing move?* Rhythm is an important component of mobility at many different scales (Lefebvre 2004; Mels 2004). Rhythms are composed of repeated moments of movement and rest, or alternatively, simply repeated movements with a particular measure. Henri Lefebvre's outline of rhythm analysis as a method of interpreting the social world is richly suggestive. It brings to mind the more phenomenological conceptions of 'place-ballet' developed by David Seamon (1979) and recently reincorporated into a geography of rhythms by Tom Mels (2004). But unlike Seamon, Lefebvre delineates how rhythms, such as those visible on any such city square, are simultaneously organic, lived, endogenous and exterior, imposed and mechanical. Rhythm, to Lefebvre, is part of the production of everyday life; thus, 'rhythm seems natural, spontaneous, with no law other than its own unfurling. Yet rhythm, always particular (music, poetry, dance, gymnastics, work, etc) always implies a measure. Everywhere there is rhythm, there is measure, which is to say law, calculated and expected obligation, a project' (Lefebvre 2004: 8). Rhythm, then, is part of any social order or historical period. Senses of movement include these historical senses of rhythm within them. Even the supposedly organic embodied rhythms of the walker vary historically: 'Old films show that our way of walking has altered over the course of our century: once jauntier, a rhythm that cannot be explained by the capturing of images' (Lefebvre 2004: 38).

Crucially, for Lefebvre, rhythm is implicated in the production and contestation of social order for 'objectively, for there to be change, a social group, a class or a caste must intervene by imprinting a rhythm on an era, be it through force or in an insinuating manner' (Lefebvre 2004: 14). Indeed, it is possible to see a particular politics of rhythm across a range of human activities. The rhythms of some kinds of music and dance, for instance, have famously upset those 'high up'. Jazz, punk and rave are but three examples of rhythms that have proved anxiety provoking to certain onlookers (Cresswell 2006). In the case of rave this led to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994 in the United Kingdom, which explicitly referred to repetitive rhythms among its reasons for cracking down on people having fun. But rhythm is important in more sinister ways. Gait analysis can now identify bodies moving with curious rhythms in airports and mark them for extensive searches and intensive surveillance. A strange rhythm of movements over a longer time period can similarly mark a person out. Too many one-way trips, journeys at irregular intervals or sudden bursts of mobility can make someone suspect. Alongside these curious rhythms are the implicit correct and regular movements of the daily commute, the respectable dance or the regular movements of European business people through airports. There is aesthetics of correct mobility that mixes with a politics of mobility.

Fourth – *what route does it take?* Mobility is channeled. It moves along routes and conduits often provided by conduits in space. It does not happen evenly over a continuous space like spilt water flowing over a tabletop. In Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri's (1987) account of nomadology, it is not simply a case of free, mobile nomads challenging the 'royal science' of fixed division and classification. Mobility itself is 'channelled' into acceptable conduits. Smooth space is a field without conduits or channels. Producing order and predictability is not simply a matter of fixing in space but of channelling motion - of producing correct mobilities through the designation of routes.

More concretely, Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin (2001) have developed the notion of a 'tunnelling effect' in the contemporary urban landscape. They show how the routing of infrastructural elements ranging from roads to high-speed computer links warps the time and space of cities. Valued areas of the metropolis are targeted so that they are drawn into

'intense interaction with each other', while other areas are effectively disconnected from these routes (Graham and Marvin 2001: 201). Examples include the highways that pass through the landscape but only let you get off at major hubs. Or think of high-speed train lines that pass from airport to city centre while bypassing the inner city in between.

Think of the development of a commuter rail network in Los Angeles. Built at huge expense to facilitate speedy transit from suburb to city centre it effectively bypassed the predominantly black and Hispanic areas of the city. Although train riders were disproportionately white, bus riders were overwhelmingly black, Hispanic and female. A radical social movement, the Bus Riders Union (BRU), took the Metropolitan Transit Association (MTA) to court in order to halt the use of public money to fund the train system at the expense of the bus system. In court the MTA made the claim that train lines passed through many minority areas of the city, such as Watts. In response, the BRU argued that the population of areas the train lines passed through was not the relevant factor. The arrival of the train line had been matched by the removal of bus services. Although the bus services had stopped frequently along the corridor (serving a 95 per cent minority community) the train hardly stopped at all and thus tended to serve white commuters traveling comparatively long distances. In addition, the BRU pointed out that the Blue Line was built at grade (rather than being underground or elevated), and had resulted in a high number of accidents and deaths in inner-city minority communities. So not only did the rail system produce 'tunnelling effects' by passing through minority areas it was also logically and economically related to a decrease in convenient bus routes and an increase in rates of death and injuries among inner-city residents (Cresswell 2006).

Fifth – *how does it feel?* Human mobility, like place, surely has the notion of experience at its centre. Moving is an energy-consuming business. It can be hard work. It can also be a moment of luxury and pampering. The arrangement of seats on a trans-Atlantic flight is an almost perfect metaphor for an experiential politics of mobility. Upper, first, or connoisseur class provides you with more space, nicer food, more oxygen and more toilets per person, among other perks. Those at the back are cramped, uncomfortable, oxygen starved and standing in line for the toilet. And then there might be the body, frozen and suffocated in the undercarriage well waiting to drop out in a suburb of a global city.

Consider walking once more. Tim Ingold (2004) has described how walking (and pretty much all manner of travelling) was experienced as drudgery and work by the well-to-do: 'The affluent did not undertake to travel for its own sake, however, or for the experience it might afford. Indeed the actual process of travel, especially on foot, was considered a drudge – literally a travail – that had to be endured for the sole purpose of reaching a destination' (Ingold 2004: 321). Before the Romantic poets turned walking into an experience of virtue, 'Walking was for the poor, the criminal, the young, and above all the ignorant. Only in the 19th century, following the example set by Wordsworth and Coleridge, did people of leisure take to walking as an end in itself, beyond the confines of the landscaped garden or gallery' (Ingold 2004: 322). And even then the experience of walking was connected to the development of mechanised forms of transport, which allowed the well-to-do to get to scenic environments for walking. Poor people, unaffected by the peripatetic poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge, presumably did not experience walking in a new, more positive way. It was still drudgery.

Sixth – *when and how does it stop?* Or, what kind of friction does the mobility experience? There is no perpetual motion machine and, despite the wilder prophecies of Virilio and others, things do stop. Spatial scientists famously formulated the notion of the 'friction of distance' as part of the development of gravity models (Cliff et al 1974). Here it is the distance between two or more points that provides its own friction. But in a world of immediacy that is rarely flat and isotropic and where connectivity has become the most 'relevant variable in assessing accessibility', forms of friction are more particular and varied. As with the question of reasons

for mobility (motive force) we need to pay attention to the process of stopping. Is stopping a choice or is it forced?

Graham and Marvin (2001), in their consideration of a city of flows, draw on the work of Manuel Castells and Carlo Ezachieli to suggest that the new points of friction are not the city walls but newly strengthened local boundaries. 'Global interconnections between highly valued spaces, via extremely capable infrastructure networks, are being combined with strengthening investment in security, access control, gates, walls, CCTV and the paradoxical reinforcement of local boundaries to movement and interaction within the city' (Graham and Marvin 2001: 206). One of the effects of tunneling is to produce new enclaves of immobility within the city (Turner 2007). Social and cultural kinetics means reconsidering borders, which once marked the edge of clearly defined territories, but are now popping up everywhere (Rumford 2006). Airports are clearly borders in vertical space.

Often certain kinds of people, possibly those with suspicious rhythms, are stopped at national borders – sometimes for hours, sometimes only to be sent back. Black people in major cities across the West are still far more likely to be stopped by police because of racial profiling and the mythical crime of 'driving while black' (Harris 1997). In post-911, people of Middle-Eastern appearance in London are increasingly stopped by the police on suspicion of activities associated with terrorism. In the most extreme case, in July 2005, Jean-Charles de Menezes, a Brazilian man mistaken for a Middle-Eastern terrorist, was shot in the head seven times by police to stop him moving on a London underground train. Racial profiling also appears to take place in airports in Western nations where non-white people are frequently stopped and searched in customs or before boarding a flight. Friction is variably distributed in space and is an important component of mobility studies.

So here then we have six facets of mobility, each with a politics: the starting point, speed, rhythm, routing, experience and friction. Each is important in the creation of a modern mobile world. Each is linked to particular kinds of mobile subject identities (tourists, jet-setters, refugees, illegal immigrants, migrant labourers, academics) and mobile practices from walking to flying.

Constellations of mobility

The ways in which physical movement, representations and mobile practices are interrelated vary historically. There is no space here for a charting of changing constellations of mobility through history. A key point is to dampen the enthusiasm for the 'new' that characterises some of the work in the new mobilities paradigm and to illustrate the continuation of the past in the present. For instance, carefully controlled physical movement characterised a feudal European sense of movement, in which the monopoly on the definition of legitimate movement rested with those at the top of a carefully controlled great chain of being. The vast majority of people had their movement controlled by the lords and the aristocracy. For the most part mobility was regulated at the local level. Yet still mobile subject positions existed outside of this chain of command in the minstrel, the vagabond and the pilgrim.

As feudalism began to break down, a larger class of mobile masterless men arose who threatened to undo the local control of mobility (Beier 1985). New subjects, new knowledges, representations and discourses, and new practices of mobility combined. The almshouse, the prison and the work camp became spaces of regulation for mobility. By the 19th century, in Europe the definition and control of legitimate movement had passed to the nation-state, the passport was on the horizon, and national borders were fixed and enforced (Torpey 2000). New forms of transport allowed movement over previously unthinkable scales in short periods of time. Narratives of mobility-as-liberty and mobility-as-progress accompanied notions of circulatory movement as healthy and moral (Sennett 1994). By the 20th century, mobility was at the heart of what it is to be modern. Modern men, and increasingly modern women, were

mobile. New spaces of mobility from the boulevard to the railway station (the spaces of Walter Benjamin's (1999) Arcades Project) became iconic for modernity. New subject positions, such as tourist, citizen, globetrotter, and hobo came into being.

By the Second World War passports had become commonplace and nations were cooperating in identifying and regulating moving bodies. It was indeed bodies that proved to be the key element even as the scale of mobility expanded and speeded up. Although feudal vagabonds had their bodies branded like cattle, later travellers had to provide a photograph and personal details including 'distinguishing marks' for the new passes and passports that were being developed (Groebner 2007). Currently we are in a new phase of mobility regulation, in which the means of legitimate movement is increasingly in the hands of corporations and transnational institutions. The United Nations and the European Union, for instance, have defined what counts and what does not account as appropriate movement. The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative is seeking to regulate movement between the United States, Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean in evermore sophisticated ways (Gilbert 2007; Sparke 2006). Increasingly, national interests are combined with so-called pervasive commerce as innovative forms of identification based on a hybrid of biometrics and mobile technology are developed (Fuller 2003).

One of the latest developments in mobile identification technology is the Radio Frequency Identification (Rfid) chip. These chips have been attached to objects of commerce since the 1980s. The Rfid chip contains a transponder that can emit a very low power signal that is readable by devices that are looking for them. The chip can include a large amount of data about the thing it is attached to. The Rfid chip is readable on the move, through paint and other things that might obscure it, and at a distance. It is, in other words, designed for tracking on the move and it is being used on people. In Manchester airport a trial has just been conducted in which 50,000 passengers were tracked through the terminal using Rfid tags attached to boarding passes. The airport authorities have requested that this be implemented permanently. Washington State, together with the Department of Homeland Security, has recently conducted a trial involving Rfid tags on state driving licences, allowing the users to travel between the states participating in the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. These tags can include much more information than is normally found on a driver's licence and can, of course, be tracked remotely. It is experiments such as these that have led some to predict the development of a global network of Rfid receivers placed in key mobility nodes, such as airports, seaports, highways, distribution centres and warehouses, all of which are constantly reading, processing, and evaluating people's behaviours and purchases.

Information gathering and regulation such as this is starkly different from the mobility constellations of earlier periods. Regulation of mobility, to use Virilio's (2006) term, is increasingly dromological. Virilio and others argue that previous architectural understandings of space-time regulation are increasingly redundant in the face of a new informational and computational landscape, in which the mobility of people and things is tightly integrated with an infrastructure of software that is able to provide a motive force or increase friction at the touch of a button (Dodge and Kitchin 2004; Thrift and French 2002). The model for this new mode of regulation is logistics. The spaces from which this mobility is produced are frequently the spatial arrangements of the database and spreadsheet.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to raise a series of questions about the new mobilities paradigm and to suggest some ways in which a mobilities approach can develop. I have suggested two caveats it is necessary to take on board in contemporary mobility research. One is an awareness of the mobilities of the past. Much that passes for mobilities research has a flavour of technophilia and the love of the new about it. In this formulation it is the current that is mobile, whereas the past was more fixed.

Taking a look back into history, consider the role of the medieval vagrant in the constitution of contemporary mobilities. It was the presence of these masterless men that prompted the invention of new forms of surveillance and identity documentation that form the basis for what is going on today in airports and at national borders (Bauman 1987; Groebner 2007). The figure of the vagabond, very much a mobile subject of 15th-century Europe, still moves through the patterns, representations and practices of mobility in the present day (Cresswell 2010). We cannot understand new mobilities, then, without understanding old mobilities. Thinking of mobilities in terms of constellations of movements, representations and practices helps us avoid historical amnesia when thinking about mobility. Reflecting Raymond Williams's (1977) notions of emerging, dominant and residual traditions that work to shape cultural formations, we can think of constellations of mobility similarly. Elements of the past exist in the present, just as elements of the future surround us.

The second caveat is that, in addition to being aware of continuities with the past that make contemporary mobilities intelligible, we need to keep notions of fixity, stasis and immobility in mind. Although there is a temptation to think of a mobile world as something that replaces a world of fixities, we need to constantly consider the politics of obduracy, fixity and friction. The dromological exists alongside the topological and the topographical.

Finally, in addition to recognising the importance of historical constellations of mobility in understanding the present, mobility itself can be fine tuned through considering its more specific aspects, each of which has its own politics and each of which is implicated in the constitution of kinetic hierarchies in particular times and places.

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Straight, No Chaser

NICK MWALUKO

I'm doing research on women before my transition into manhood. I figure a new body with a new penis will lead to a radically different sex life, so I want to prepare before my surgery. Most researchers prefer books. I prefer living subjects. Knowing first-hand how to handle a straight girl is crucial to my survival as a new man. Plus, I doubt a book has been written that explains how to achieve orgasm when a new penis meets a mature pussy. By the way, if a doctor or other medical professional plans on writing that book, I'd be more than happy to volunteer my services.

Back to my research. I have narrowed my options to three types of women – a three hundred-pound whore of any race; a white girl and black girl in the same bed for what I call a 'switcheroo session'; and anonymous. In French – *l'anonymat*. I prefer the French pronunciation because it leaves a tinge of expectation; the weighted lift of an early exit sits on my tongue when I say it in French – *l'anonymat*.

I have a list of 'must haves' for my subjects. All the girls have to be anatomical females. They have to be straight, meaning zipper straight, meaning strictly straight. By strictly zipper straight, I mean they must have no curiosity or experience with the same sex, ever. So, say she's jogging one night down a poorly lit path sheltered by trees, cushioned by falling leaves, and she notices a squirrel and thinks, 'how cute'. If she suspects that fuzzy, cute squirrel is butch, she should run in the opposite direction; an urgency to wash her hands if a cashier accidentally grazes her palm during an exchange; or nauseating terror in a lesbian bar. Strictly zipper straight.

Luckily I know a three hundred pound whore at Joe's, the corner bar down the street. She likes me. I'm not bragging, she told me once when she was drunk that I'm her type. I was flattered so I returned the favour by taking a good look at her. Sweet rump with ankles styled after the neck of a beer bottle. Not bad at all. But how do I ask for some ass? In the movies I notice this is often a point of conflict or heightened tension. The scene slows down for clipped but serious dialogue when a straight guy asks a straight girl for some ass. He rests his arm along the couch, all cool, sipping his beer. They do a close-up on his eyes for added intrigue as he stares into space before he pops the question. What should I do? Ply her with more drinks? Be polite? Hint, and then hope she takes the lead? It's not like the stakes are high – a whore doesn't say 'no' too often – but the point of my research is procedure, knowing how to act straight when I transition to a man.

'Do you want...?'

'Sure, Hon, let's fuck after the next round of beers.' She doesn't look at me.

We drink some, I pay plus tip, and then we struggle up the staircase with a six-pack 'til we reach my room at the boarding house.

'I have to use the bathroom.'

‘Sure, sweetie, you go do that while I make myself comfortable.’

There are tools. There are tactics. There is terror. Life’s mysteries get no deeper than three hundred pounds of leg wide open for a fuck, believe me. I can take a sixteen-inch, custom-made (dildo) from the shelf and plough away all night in the dark with the lights off, refusing to take off my clothes. Or tongue and finger it with lesbian magic, then go for the kill with the twelve-inch in the suitcase under my bed, take her by surprise when she’s resting. Or we can talk into the night, only I can’t say a word, not one. I can’t say I’m scared, but I have to sleep with her to make myself a man like Daddy was, a man the only way I know how.

More drinks, more silence, I’m working it, wondering if she’ll break wind while I’m in between licking away. It crosses my mind that this is more work than I expected, that she’s getting more pleasure from it than I am. Head back, eyes closed, moaning with poetic force while I’m working it, digging deep like a miner for coal. With her eyes shut, I wonder if she’s thinking of me or someone else when she finally orgasms, then the bed falls thump to the floor and my neighbour downstairs comes up the rickety staircase, pounds on my door, says he’ll call the cops if I don’t stop with the late-night antics.

We don’t look at each other. We just dress, stare at the styrofoam cups now and again between gulps. I make mental notes while she rolls up her stockings.

You did the do, Man! Congrats.

Lesbian technique works really, really well on her. Licking, finger fucking, etc. Big asset.

Must use on straight chicks when I transition into a straight man.

Maybe, just maybe, there’s a lesbian in every relationship. Or maybe every relationship needs a lesbian. Maybe every man needs to learn how to love a woman the way a woman loves a woman. Maybe the best relationships, maybe the best couples are made of three – a man, a woman and someone else.

‘Where’s my wallet?’

I notice while straightening up that money is missing.

‘How should I know where you put your wallet?’

‘You little bitch, you’ – I got an excellent education in talking to women from listening to my dad talk to my mom – ‘You little bitch you. When’d you steal it? While I was on top of you, then you hid my money in your fat, creamy cunt, you whore.’

She bolts down the stairs. I lift the mattress off the floor where I see a wad of bills and spilled coins. I feel awful, so awful I sink to the ground. Me and my big ugly mouth. She hadn’t taken a thing, not one red cent, not even her own pleasure in the end. With all my nasty talk, she went away quiet and clean. Sure, she isn’t much, but she is a human being, maybe all the more human because her weakness is so pure. I’d call after her, but she’s far away by now. Plus, I don’t know her name. I go back to Joe’s, ask the bartender if he’s seen her. He says he’s seen her, sure.

‘But I can’t serve you,’ he goes. ‘Not anymore. Please leave.’

I Have Always Meant to Fail: from Abiku to Abikuisms (Speaking of Nigeria and Road Desire)

ISOJE CHOU

Apropos on the problem

Movement in Nigeria is as much about livelihood as it is about a culturally specific modus operandi of frenetic movements between ‘here’ and ‘there’. What directs deeper anxieties in these, move beyond the socio-economic into certain inner compulsions informed by mythic narratives. An instance is the myth of Abiku.¹ Supported in the cultural memory through a range of familial, religious and artistic/literary output, Abiku flourishes in the portrait of a mythic driving force, an ancestral impetus of movement, failure and desire. In its tenet concept of *road* as itinerant vagrancy, Abiku represents both *the problem* and a challenge to the existing pastoral idea of ‘African sociality’; whereas, in its application, Abiku mutates as what is coined here as *Abikuisms* to give face to a worrying excessive individualism collectively performed. Applying a previously unmade link available in sacred Ifa texts, this essay explores the myth of Abiku to suggest a double-layered impact displayed by the collective cultural psyche and how the individual psyche is impacted by ancestral inheritance.

What is ‘the problem’?

So prevalent is the Abiku in the collective psyche of the Nigerian imagination², its significance ought to be explored beyond generalised literary and popular applications. Portrayed as both myth and phenomenon Abiku describes an individual on a chronic (self-directed) mission of movements between oppositional worlds of heaven and earth, *the problem* being the hybrid (ancestral, human) nature of this movement and its vagrant itinerancy (chronic, incomplete). Through its organising code of chronic movement directed by individualistic will, the Abiku presents the problem of perversion of the procreative accumulative goal of movement. Consequently, the action that must be carried out by the family or society to prevent itinerant vagrancy and sever the human from ancestral interference is a system of ritual intervention performed by the sacred community. In ancient Edo mysteries, along with Life (sea, abundance, fertility, future – represented by Olokun) and Earth (world, continuity/stability, lineage, present – represented by Orunmila), Death (mortality, movement, path, suffering, experience), whose messenger is Esu, is one of the ‘siblings’ of creativity to establish the existence of humans on earth. Coming from the Sea (abundance, Olokun) but intrigued by Death (experience, Esu), the spirit-child is the individual capable of fruitful continuity but for his/her own ancestral peculiarities, favours a life of wandering existence. In full disdain of representatives of Orunmila (familial, society, law and order – who in turn are forced to intervene), Abiku defers death by dealing directly with the divine trickster, Esu.

Known across West Africa as the mirthful psychomp hanging about crossroads to trick humans with an existential riddle, Esu is the death dispenser – the clincher – who ensures mortality. However, in the context of Abiku, it is in the abstract concept of Death – that is, Ifa’s feminine principle of Death as Life – that the Abiku matrix is fully realised³. In the Ifa divination system⁴, life consists of two principles, Life (*Ogbe*, father, male, represented by I) and Death (*Oyeku*,

1 Or Ogbanje, both being the Nigerian version of the West African spirit-child myth. Although both names describe the same phenomenon, what is true for one might not hold true for the other. For our purposes, I shall refer always to Abiku in its specific connection to Ifa (Orunmila).

2 Abiku being more within the esoteric realm of literature, media and sacred divination; the word Ogbanje is more likely to be used on the streets of Lagos, with the popular assumption that the terms are interchangeable.

3 Ifa’s feminine principle of Death as Life is Oyeku. In this essay, I may refer to Oyeku as ‘Deathmother’. The oppositional force, Life, is represented by Ogbe.

4 Ifa in the Yoruba refers to a system of divination (practiced across West Africa under various other names, such as Afa in Togo and westwards, and Orunmilla among the Edo and surrounding peoples). In Ifa, consultation with the gods is made through sacred oral texts depicting principal forces represented by a binary code system of I (masculine, Life) and its ‘returnings’ II (feminine, Death).

mother, female, represented by II)⁵. In the Yoruba, Ifa speaks of Oyeku's II as 'coming and returnings' – that is, as the *continuing* force. In this sense, Oyeku's Death principle (her 'coming and returnings') is a conduit for lived experience and comprises death qualities of movements, experience and the capacity for suffering. It is here, in the Deathmother, that we find the mythic narrative of the itinerant vagrant Abiku: the deferment of 'death' for ongoing Death.

A masculine rising, Abiku takes on the feminine death qualities of Oyeku's 'coming and returnings' to direct its take on 'Life' as an ongoing question of Difference and Movement. An intrepid vagrant, the Abiku establishes in Oyeku (that is, in the Death principle) its organising concept of *road* not as death, but as self-exploratory movements of Death as the creative force. In the eyes of the family and society however, the *problem* Abiku presents stops at the deferment of death achieved by the Abiku in its manipulation of Esu. Though Abiku merely employs Esu as trickster-jester guide in its wandering existence of 'coming and returnings' (Death), the family/society/law sees neither the symbolic idea of quest nor the chaos of experience, but rather the introduction of mockery and trickery (for which Esu is well known) into the family home of continuity and procreative stability.

If in the ancestral sense of Time as cyclical, the Abiku is merely 'on the road', moving between 'here' and 'there' of the existence of things, in the perception of 'town of people' (family and society), Abiku is a distortion of how life ought to be lived in all its linear goal-oriented fullness. Its hybridity, its difference and solitary movements (through death⁶) are offensives to the procreative society of blood and lineage. Abiku schemes in direct opposition to and as perversion of the African idea of a Complete Life⁷ to pose in its collapse of the borders between heaven and earth a mockery of law and the human order of things. Left alone in the individual, Abiku supports the need for self-invention, self-reflection and refusal. In the eyes of family and society however, Abiku is a kind of pathology: *the problem* of worrying individuality that perverts established ideas of 'home'.

What really is 'road'?: the significance of II⁸ (Mapping mythic strains in the vagrant)

Before we move on to Abikuisms, we must first understand the concept of *road* in Abiku. In extant oral Abiku literature, the *esé*⁹ in Odu¹⁰ Ejiose states: '...*the child who does not die but returns to road is road...*' Road and its 'returns' are the double-bodied attributes of II as the feminine principle of Death. If I is 'Life' then II is 'two lives' or 'life returnings': *life in its processes of being*. As 'two lives' or 'life returnings', Oyeku's II is synonymous with the physical act of dying (supervised by Esu) as well as the abstract idea of Death as the creative force. The sign II connotes movements between spatial realities as well as the *nonplace* of in-between subjectivities. The sign II suggests the true existence of Abiku as lived experience of (preferred) in-betweenness. It marks both the loneliness of the hybrid Abiku and its preference for associative,

5 Oyeku stands in oppositional but complementary relationship with Ogbe.

6 Some Abiku are deemed blockers of the maternal womb who simply 'lock-up' its earth mother's womb by holding back its birth – an act perceived as a gesture of death, since prolonged barrenness is nearly as dreadful as death itself. This is true of the Ogbanje among the Edo, for whom Ogbanjes are a gift/curse from the river goddess Ogbankuan, river wife of Olokun.

7 That one is born, flourishes, buries one's aged parents and dies in respected old age buried by one's own children.

8 The interpretation and links I make here are the result of diverse research methodologies. These take into account folk and popular, theoretical, literary and the ethnographic psychoanalytic, including the experiential particularly plumbing the area of personal cultural familiarity. My research work in Nigeria included conversations with professed Abikus (or Ogbanjes), as well as interviews with key babalawos (priests of Ifa), Ifa babalawo Kayode the awise of Oju Ota, and particularly, Ifa babalawo Eleibuon the awise of Oshogbo, whose compound I resided at during my 2003 visit to Oshogbo. Under guidance, I was allowed access to rituals and consultations with clientele of the babalawos to observe fully the processes of divination. On some level, the connections that I draw here are creative interpretations. However, my feeling is that, in terms of religious texts and beliefs, including experiences associated with the same, we are talking of infinite meanings and interpretations. For this reason too, connections I draw might not, in fact, be agreed upon by every babalawo.

9 Also written as 'ise' or 'ase', an *ese* is a prayer toward something), a saying or line on oral poetry. An *ise* has the power to recognise the problem and well as arrest (fetter) it.

10 An Odu is a verse in oral Ifa literature. In the Yoruba, an Odu consists of *esé* or incantation, which might serve as a prayer. These often appear as poems and can be quite lively. Odu are sacred and number 256 in total. An authentic babalawo is one who knows the entire 256 verses by heart. Although a history of 'committing to memory' was part of the apprenticeship toward professional priestly practice, it is not always possible to find a priest who can truly recite the entire 256 verses by heart.

non-linear relations based on ideas and shared interests. The sign **II** is flexibility and chaos and counterbalances Ogbe's Life with Death, light with dark, victory with uncertainty, success with process and so on. This series of opposition to Ogbe's life qualities are death qualities absorbed by Abiku in its adoption of the feminine forces of **II**. An excerpt of a verse found under Oyeku Meji is as follows and pertains directly to Abiku:

*Death taught me also, I said
 Death stored in a calabash head
 Growing, spreading all over the ground
 Death taught me thinking
 Creeping gradually covers the bole* (Gleason et al 1973: 52)

The chronic road travelled between *here* and *there* ultimately meets at the crossroads, that is, toward some sense of direction. However, when Esu, the guide at the crossroads, has been co-opted, the confrontation at the crossroads results not in direction but a pluralism of subjective realities, of discourse and the soul, fully aware that located at non-place are repetitions, recurrences and hybrid positionings where the centre has no hold. The rationalist, unified ideal loses its place to the reasonable but irrational. The schism between self and society informs an existential unease, but the Abiku forges forward to overlap, at the intersections of ideas, the divergent lives and peripheries encountered. This is Abiku road. It is at Abiku road that the despair of a creeping unease grows, spreading and thinking where the guide is not *death* of the flesh – not Esu's domain though he heartily provides riddles and mirth – but *in Death*, meaning the Deathmother herself. The shifts between excesses (body) and emptiness (spirit), between experience and existence, between life and Death, that *death calabash* full of life plagued by those certain anxieties, these are the stuff of Abiku road.

The In-between Space of Road: Road as Nonplace (a diagram/the many roads)

HERE	NONPLACE	THERE
<i>earth</i> (family, town)	(quest)	<i>heaven</i> (self, ancestral)
<i>body</i> (material)	(hunger and suffering)	<i>spirit</i> (spiritual being)
<i>mother</i> (stability, lineage)	(orphanhood)	<i>Deathmother</i> (uncertainty, creativity)
<i>art</i> (history, form)	(style, spirit: form and content)	<i>artist</i> (spiritual autobiography)

Abiku, Abikuisms and the problem: Nigerian road desire

In Nigeria today, Abiku is at once taken as descriptive of ‘identifiable’ Abiku person. Meanwhile, we must consider the possibility that indeed demonstrated in the contemporary Nigerian city is a continuation of ancestral strains that renders active certain aspects of the myth in odd manifestations. As a kind of ongoing struggle in the collective psyche, instigated perhaps by the socio-economic pressures alongside others, the Abiku defining concept of ‘road’ presents interesting connections between the mythic narrative (of the death-obsessed Abiku) and ‘road desire’ in Nigeria – itself a phenomenon compounded by fervent Pentecostal-evangelical born-againisms.

Abikuisms is a distortion of a distortion. A misreading of a critical and dynamic ritual perversion, Abikuisms is *the problem* as attitude and behaviour – a national phenomenon, which, far from addressing the issue of ‘road’ and the dynamics road unveils, imitates, as a kind of warring tool, superficial aspects of *the problem* and attaches to the concept of movement purely acquisitive goals instigated by the fear of death. The sum of such mimicry is what is coined here as *road desire* which, in the context of the collective psyche represents the embodiment of attitudes attributed to myths through irrational desires for material acquisition in the belief that an unreasonable outlook will bring about the end of suffering. ‘Road desire’ is the starting point of Abikuisms. Subsequently, Abikuisms become the extremes of ‘road desire’ through the excessive application of what is assumed to be ‘Abiku will’.

If the power of the Abiku is believed to be natural ability for effortless charm and wealth generation – attributes much admired by others in the Abiku – Abikuisms is an attempt to embody Abiku in its most acquisitive interpretation. While such acquisitive powers are supposedly disregarded by the so-called Abiku-person due to oppositional ancestral possession of his/her ‘head’, Abikuisms must be seen as the willed assertion of so-called Abiku attributes. The myth of Abiku represents the heights of potency possible in the self: a *mythic privilege* whose acquisitive powers equals the intensity of its pathology. Thus, though pathologised, the ‘effect’ of that mythic privilege is in fact the desired order. The notion of Abiku as “privileged, apart” (Soyinka 1981: 16) is enormously seductive because to *be* Abiku, or at least be perceived as having some connection to supernatural ‘privilege’, is to possess an awe-inspiring mythic access in the simultaneous accumulation of wealth and alleviation of suffering. On the evangelical level, it is a seduction coupled with Abiku mythic narrative spliced into the Pentecostal Evangelical ‘born-again’ idea of being ‘chosen’, that is the corresponding ability to bring to earth material abundance attributed to heaven, while simultaneously banishing Esu and Chaos long since simplified as Satan and Confusion respectively.

For an increasingly evangelical society that demonises its mythic histories and religious belief systems, the seduction here is one fraught with misconceptions and righteous agitations. The problem becomes how to wear one’s disapproval of *juju* and at the same time brandish one’s access to mythic potency. In Lagos, to astounding visual effects, pastors such as Helen Ukpabio, the Nollywood actress and producer¹¹ often include the ancestrally-chosen coterie of ‘Ogbanje, Abiku and mamiwata’ in their mission against ‘witches and principalities’. Meanwhile, as pastor-actress-exocist, Ukpabio never fails to instill a visible, palpable sense of her own personal power. For the reason that knowledge of Abiku lies at its most superficial, to be called ‘Ogbanje’ is to be accused of communicating with Satan, archenemy of our particularly fervent brand of evangelical born-again. That said, the ability to create palpable visual effects that wound people to one involves being in possession of special powers that go beyond the lukewarm attempts of Christianity into another space: a space that is mythic, ancestral, potent; a space that traverses heaven and earth, high and low – the Abiku space.

¹¹ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helen_Ukpabio

Although the seduction principle attracts however, the ‘curse’ that Abiku metes out remains. Strange as it sounds, this becomes a possible explanation for why in Lagos in particular or Nigeria as a whole, the warped assumption that appropriation of Esu (Satan’s) Confusion and Trickery supposedly transforms into one’s ability to master circumstances of strife, hardships and suffering. As the *nowhereness* provided for in Abiku sets in on national, public proportions, the result is widespread religious and social exigencies to ‘conquer the devil within’ in frenzy of death deferment claims, where the individual’s *will* to defer death meted out by Esu is exponentially augmented as the mastering of Confusion and Trickery through no other than the model Abiku, Jesus Christ. Abiku co-opts Esu but the problem of present day Nigeria is the double-edged embodiment and demonisation of Esu for Jesus.

The suggestion here is that we have lost all understanding of Death; that what we have in its place is a new terror over death. Failure or inability to understand and reflect on *movement* as something other than material accumulation of travel and the commute is the corresponding failure to appreciate the disaster lurking in frenzied death deferment claims. So terrified are people of death in Lagos and across the country that everyone claims its deferment by personal connections, personal *juju* or, for the born-again, ‘*Jesus name*’.

If Esu, now Satan the devil, is strife, traffic jams, mistrusts and shouts of distress, Abikuisms are displays of unreasonable actions under the fronting of having overpowered death (conquered Satan). This is why in Lagos, a grown man shouts, chest palpitating, fronting as a conqueror of death to ask, *Do You Know Who I Am?* On a Lagos road every driver is a king in waiting. To be Nigerian is to have witnessed and know at heart, the frontings of death in the eyes of another; to ‘dispense’ death – the illusion, that is – is to have *Abikuisms*. Though tailored after Abiku, as forced ‘procurement’ of the lesser part of Abiku *will* governed by Esu, Abikuisms is obscured application of supposed mythic will. While on the positive side, Abikuisms is what props the countless number of Madame Kofos of Balogun Market as they respond to an increasingly capricious capitalist economy with shockproof smiles, it is Abikuisms that directs the refusal to stand back a little, to ease off the over-assertion of self. Abikuisms manifests in the merchants’ smiles as they do in the national attitude of ‘*push me, I push you*’.

Can we truly apply ancestral mysticisms such as Oyeku, Abiku, Esu, Olokun to actual movements of bodies and the fraught nature of relations known as *the (Nigerian) problem*? What is *Abikuisms* as opposed to *Abiku*? Why is the former clearly made problematic here? Firstly, as myths do, Abiku speaks to the existence of *a problem*. Secondly, any study of Ifa as it pertains to Abiku reveals that key to the mythic narrative of a two-fold manifestation of errant vagrancies and excessive individuality is that the problem identified is also the problem addressed. The prevalence of a worrying disintegration of borders addressed in the story (the myth) is also a system of self-correcting mechanisms of rituals of identification and ‘fettering’ (of the problem) contained within as the story itself. The *esé* that *the child who does not die but returns to road is road* suggests that *the subject is the story is the problem itself the resolution*. The myth of Abiku is the recognition of a problem as it is its own ‘arrest’ or fettering.

Conversely, Abikuisms is yet to attach to itself rituals of arrest and quell. Rather, Abikuisms operates on the distorted idea that the absence of limits to one’s actions is the fullest extent of one’s personal power. If Abikuisms has a mythogeography it would be as terrain of everyday terror, as a torrent of repeated application of force in which the abused body or system is exaggerated beyond its natural dynamics to a mangled state of confusion and the body-terrific. Here the identification of the problem cannot automatically effect self-correcting mechanisms within the recognition of the problem as problem. This is because distortion in Abikuisms is not critical. It is submissive to the established confusion and respects, as its ultimate aim, a hierarchy of connections operating on power assertions through terrific personal access. The result is the

ultimately passive assumption that duress is action and confusion, activity. If Abiku undermines the status quo, Abikuisms is all affirmation, where warped notions of privilege and personal power overtake civility and nation building. When states of inaction and confusion are taken for activity and action, the middling space of human aggression and shared mutual abuse becomes, paradoxically, the way 'up' to peace of mind and freedom from worries.

In the essay, 'Climates of Art', Wole Soyinka calls for the diviner, the "creative hand" needed to "earth" the worrisome Abiku (Soyinka 1998: 258). What Soyinka believes must be earthed is Nigeria's unstable politics, which Soyinka treats as a manifestation of the vagrant Abiku. Thus, initiated by Soyinka perhaps, to date, the word Abiku is often used in popular and journalistic writings to refer to the problem of Nigeria's unstable politics. Yet, Soyinka and others speak as if the politics and politicking in a nation are completely foreign to the way of being of the people of that nation. *The problem* of Nigeria is not one of a recall to clever myth parallelisms, but rather a situation of direct mimic and unwitting embodiment of the pathological. Abikuisms is wholly modern, current and in practice. It is a collection of gestures presumably in possession of the deferment of death, but which are in effect tragic embodiments; and nowhere is this demonstrated as in the carrying out of so-called political leadership duties.

Abiku of 'I' and the society of 'we'

Though chiefly formulated on the rather prevalent nostalgia of a pastoral, cordial Africa, the larger context of African philosophy may serve as a kind of measuring tool if we are to understand, not only the extent of *the problem* of present-day Nigeria in broader terms, but the interesting detour that the Abiku matrix presents. The Congolese philosopher, Tshiamalenga Ntumba coined a Lingala-based word, *Bisoité*, to describe, to paraphrase, an ontological way of seeing one's self in Africa. From the Lingala, *Biso* means 'us' or 'we' and *Bisoité* is, according to Ntumba, a social philosophy of 'usness' or 'weness' (Ntumba 1985: 83). In the article, 'Old Gods, New Worlds', Kwame Anthony Appiah explains that in (traditional) African societies, argumentative confrontation is discouraged and that by virtue of a communalism, the (traditional) African has a personal identity that is substantially based on 'group identity' (Appiah 1996: 223), or what Mbiti describes as 'I am because we are, and since we are, I am' (in Nyasani 1989). In other words, for the African, so absorbed is 'I' in the interiority of a fully resolved 'us', that the 'I' might not in fact exist, certainly not as an autonomous being having its own interiority, its own inner persuasions and desires.

In thinking about 'road desire' and *the problem*, we cannot help but consider that the sociality examined from Ntumba to Appiah is innocent of the changes in certain African cities; that perhaps something has been lost. Or should we simply accept that Nigeria is a case different from other African nations? On the other hand, in terms of Abiku movement and discontinuity – its excessive *will* against structures of authority, claims to the natural communalism of the African mind could only lead us to consider the possible tyranny woven into existing traditional praxis and the customary codes of conduct that support them. Like all ritual perversion, the very existence of the myth is a system of correction as instances of what in fact exists as problem. The concept of *road* in Abiku matrix must be seen not only as an act of conflict and discontent expressed within and against the system, but also as a process of address (to a problem), a wily system of control set in place by the community.

Meanwhile, the arguments being made for the apparently resolved nature of the 'I/We' of African sociality serves the need for a broader understanding of the role of Abiku. What the myth of Abiku reveals are deeper discontents wherein the relationship of 'I/We' in African sociality is dynamic and unresolved. Set on the *road*, the 'child' in Soyinka's Abiku utters 'I' in the first instance as a point of conflict to suggest that the concept of *road* is the problem of the unresolved 'I' in 'We'. In Soyinka's poem, the Abiku protagonist appears critically in the very

first word and first line with a declaration of its self-defining individuality, 'I am' (McCabe 2002: 45–74), its individuality an unsympathetic assertion that deters possibility of reconciliation with the family and society it taunts. It furthers its self-definition by exhibiting detachment from *settled place*, from 'weness' – from mother's womb, family, lineage and community – to declare in the seventh stanza:

*Night, and Abiku sucks the oil
From lamps. Mothers! I'll be the
Suppliant snake coiled on the doorstep
Yours the killing cry (Soyinka 1967)*

Soyinka's *Abiku*, like the myth itself, alerts us to the reality that the status of Abiku – the status of the individual – is an uneasy position and its relationship with 'usness' problematic not simply because there are occasional individuals 'selected' in a gift/curse dichotomy of being 'privileged, apart' (Soyinka 1981: 16) but rather deeper strains of existential discontent run the course of the larger society dismissed and unacknowledged. What the Abiku myth exposes is the existence of an opposition to what is being argued for and dreamed in the nostalgia of Time Past espoused by African philosophers. If the African is inherently communal and empathetic, the Abiku position is paradoxical: it manifests not symbiotic but critical positions, its tone is not empathetic but cruel. The tone of Soyinka's *Abiku* is cruelly antisocial. It has the impersonal cruelty of wayward godless spirits; it describes the displaced one who, in rejection of community, lives in a stranglehold of Oyeku's Death forces unable to arrive at a sense of 'home'.

Yet, in terms of the collective, the myth of Abiku maintains the system of constitutive law and order by appearing to heed the irrational ancestral space. This is the element that Abikuisms misses. The differences between the note of individuality and necessary 'selfishness'¹² provided for in the Abiku and the subdued, somber tone argued as the authentic African by African philosophers is indeed a shrill one. The texture of this note must be seen however, not only as possible response to the tyranny of lineage and the domestic home, but as well, the resolution meted out by the community since the identification of the problem is, in Abiku, the solution. An organising concept, *Abiku road* becomes a way to curtail larger displays of a way of being considered unproductive and death-inclined. The entire Abiku matrix is in short an elaborate design drawn from the actual body of the Abiku child or person: chosen to expose tensions in the traditional idea of the African 'self' and 'home', that body performs for all, the need for stability within the constitutive, procreative order of things. Here, the distortions created by hybridity and difference are exorcised and placated through the pathologised bodies of the 'identified' mythic vagrants who *must move between places*.

The Abiku individual must examine his or her own existence as a consequence of his or her own actions and failures. This is indeed the kind of corruption that *road* invites. But more importantly for the collective, that 'corruption' is also the collective cleansing that the Abiku, by performing its *road*, provides for the community. An individuality opposed to the essential 'communocratic'¹³ society (of fixed place and fixed address of blood lineage and of group), the Abiku 'I' roams the associative anti-social collective of friends in heaven in opposition to the hierarchical rule of family and place. As 'thief of heaven'¹⁴ and as spatial vagrant opposed to the procreative wishes of family and normative order of society, the Abiku is the furtive loner, caught in a perennial state of never quite arriving.

But the community has had its way, naming and arresting and pathologising. While Nyasani provides that 'the individual exists also' (Nyasani 1989:15) there is indeed a preferred consensus across the continent that the African in his/her uncorrupted element exists in a *conflict-free* state of selflessness with others – a state of unbroken filial obligations and unquestioned fulfillment

12 Quoting Ifa babalawo Eleibuibon, the awise of Oshogbo during a personal conversation, Oshogbo 2004.

13 Sekou Touré (1959) *Présence Africaine*. Nos. 24 and 25,

14 Ifa babalawo's description of abiku.

– of customary duties. In the case of Abiku rituals, through the family the community sees itself as victim to a cruel punishment meted out by ancestral forces evident in the unblinking eyes of a child born to its despairing mother. Guided by ancestral forces, the Abiku child speaks the cruel note of refusal. However, the fettering of that methodically cruel note of refusal so concentrated in the Abiku, is set as example to curtail latent strains of the pathology in others.

Undoing Abikuisms: how not to miss ‘road’

Firstly, if the predominant attitudes in Nigeria stand diametrically opposed to the note of empathy and stability that Ntumba and Appiah find necessary to explain, it would be unimaginative to simply dismiss the contrary position in Nigerian towns and cities as strictly determined by endemic socio-economic factors. Nigeria is, according to Soyinka, a nation that suffers from ‘institutionalised politics of violence, manipulation, and disrespect for the law’.¹⁵ Following Soyinka, the idea of ‘Abiku jinx’ of Nigeria is widely applied in the popular imagination as what underscores ‘the problem’ of Nigeria. This so-called ‘Abiku jinx’ of Nigeria primarily focuses on grievous complaints about the chronic lack of basic infrastructure, such as water and electricity, and the instability of the government.

What Soyinka and popular culture fail to admit is the Abikuisms of the Nigerian psyche. A nation, its governments and infrastructures (or lack thereof), cannot be completely independent of the spirit – whether good or bad – of its people. Nor can it be devoid of possible mythic undercurrents running the collective psyche handed down from ancestral pasts. It serves no one if we continue to act as if Nigeria, the people, began in 1960 (or January 1 1901, being the start of its official colonisation by a foreign military and trading force). There are myriad diverse, possible, mythic areas to plumb. The myth of Abiku is deeply imprinted in the collective imaginative. Seduction and imprint earns prevalence. If Abiku or Ogbanje continues to be indentified as ‘actual persons’ possessed by ancestral errant-spirits, it is because of the continued prevalence of errancies and anomalies in the larger society. The myth of the ancestral vagrant has been retained because the problem, in all its lesser terror and ready seduction, remains. Further reaches and dynamics of Abiku mysteries must be reconsidered, but the myth is neither understood nor appreciated.

Nigeria manifests inchoate errancies of disorganisation and frenetic social, political, economic and personal relations directed by the excessive ‘I’. Although this ‘I’ has its advantages in the lives of a people with much to face, the logic of Abikuisms, its rationale in simultaneous demonisation and fear of death and its concomitant desire to take on the face of death – supports an alarming attitude of permission and claim. As the artificial embodiment of an unnecessary problem where original solutions may not hold, Abikuisms is an affliction, whose only release is in the group emotionalism of disorganisation and violence, manipulation and disrespect, which, as Soyinka puts it, has been ‘institutionalised’. But we fail to ask, why? Meanwhile, the roaring present continues where no questions are asked; a roaring present of sheer survival and hardships in the lives of a people embroiled in heartbreaking mutual mistreatment and mutual disregard for common human dignity.

Yet, even as the myth is revealed here as ultimately a tool for the continued normative order of things, Abiku is also organised on the idea of a *road* necessary to the larger scheme of Death as Life: the possibility of personal growth beyond vapid materialism. This is evidenced in the Odus if we only listen, not to the babalawos or popular wisdom, but to the texts, the deeper reaches of what the organising spirit of certain age-old myths attempt to offer us. In a society supposedly based on the homogeneity of will and continuity of hierarchy and the status quo, Abiku *road* is a declaration of difference and death and something in the ancestral supports this. The family/society/law understands death as a diagnosis of worrisome individuality, but from the perspective of the individual, the self seeks Death as ‘I’ – as the fulfillment of existence – in

15 <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Soyinka:+Obasanjo+and+me+%3B+Control+and+Prof+Wole+Soyinka+are...-a0171687366>

the unfettering of the spirit at the crossroads of self-knowledge; the beauty and the terror of knowing something of emptiness, that certain self-revelation that, after all the heaving, all the pain and suffering of humans, there is no point other than the point of a return to dust.

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Ground / Overground / Underground

MOWOSO

GROUND / OVERGROUND / UNDERGROUND is a project of the Congolese trans-disciplinary collective Mowoso. Its first showing took place in November 2010 at Afropolis, an exhibition on African cities curated by Christian Hanussek and Kerstin Pinther.

Ground / Overground / Underground is a project built in, around and through a range of different space- and time-states that exist as both separate and conjoined entities – as blocks that can be assembled and disassembled at will. The project allows Mowoso to experiment within an open system of networked creation: to develop work and research processes that result in multiple forms, each and all of which can be presented in different place- and time-scapes.

The starting point of the project is a series of videos, sound recordings and photographs made in 2009–2010 in three places:

- In Mbandaka (DRC), over the course of a six week SPARCK residency. The city of Mbandaka stands astride the Equator, directly below one of the single most important loci anywhere in our globalised 21st century world: the Geostationary Earth Orbit, which hosts a majority of the planet's communications satellites;
- In Kinshasa, the capital of DRC; and
- In Mikili: a hybrid, mythic 'third space' located in Western Europe.

Drawing on the materials collected and created in these places, Mowoso is building a polysemic, Afrofuturistic video performance / installation.

Melding fiction and faction, Ground / Overground / Underground tells the story of a very particular journey: the psychic path that a man must travel to make his way from the continent he calls home – Africa – to the West, the nucleus of 21st century digital globalisation.

The images and sounds at the heart of the project evoke dreamtime itineraries, all leading to Mikili, a place, a state of being and a state of mind that many young people in Congo hope against all hope to reach, because there, they imagine, they will find solace (comfort, means, luxury) to replace the violence visited on their land over the past 150 years.

In the world of Ground / Overground / Underground, hybrid identities rub up against and collide with one another in a postcolonial universe. Performances are filmed by Mowoso founding members Dicoco Boketshu and Eléonore Hellio: peculiar, poetic works 'starring' Boketshu, musician and artist Bebson Elemba (aka Bebson de la rue), Wemba (one of Congo's most famous wrestlers), performance artist Antoine Mofilinga and others. Objects, images and sounds appear and disappear, moving in and out of a post-industrial 'machine'.

Developed in partnership with activist architect Julien Beller, the Ground / Overground / Underground space machine toes multiple, intersecting lines spanning the universes of sci fi, DIY, time travel, pulp fiction and radical ethnography. Bearing witness to the sheer avalanche of electronic technology overtaking our world, it calls attention to the devastation wrought in Congo by the 'First World's' mad rush for coltan, a precious metal essential to the production of cell phones, satellites and missiles. Eighty-five per cent of the planet's coltan reserves are located in DRC, Ground / Overground / Underground reminds us, and because money is worth more than lives, millions have died there in wars fuelled by global capitalist greed.

(The texts by Mowoso that follow were originally written in French. They were translated into English by Dominique Malaquais).

Excerpt #1

WORDS BY ELÉONORE HELLIO AND DICOCO BOKETSHU

There are no words to say the heaviness of memory hardwired to this body since childhood. The anatomy is a prison, hostage to itself for lack of answers to questions it will not cease asking. Moorings lost, the eyes un-socket for rocket flight to Mikili – embedded paradise, a satellite circling concentric worlds. Lift-off happens in slow motion, as the mind worries what lies ahead and the limbs adjust to bear the weight of alienation. The identifiers have spoken: our PIN numbers decree who among us is worthy of flight. Prior to departure, the dream is clothed in designer illusions: an astronaut's suit, worn close and tight for strength and the confidence to proceed. (Self) hypnosis is advised, but questions linger as to the most effective means of reaching the desired state. Is it best to float, severing all ties to gravity, or sink, surrendering to the earth – neck-deep in dirt, head alone above ground, lest we forget to breathe? Either way, altered consciousness will drive all attendant transactions – how and who and why we become. That and atmospheric conditions on re-entry, as our pores dilate to take in the air on Mikili and the host planet's smog penetrates our lungs.



THE VOID: A MATTER OF SUBSTANCE



The chair is a constant. It is the seat of power – empty but no less loaded. Also the wobbly stool of the uprooted. Best not to think too hard about the pump that has ripped open and swallowed up all our land. A gaping hole remains: let us dress the wound, then lock away. And learn the art of balancing impossible equations: $x = \text{enigma} = \text{the promise of riches and hope}$. In time, the chief's vacated throne morphed into a confessional booth. Kneeling down, we whispered to priests sitting on high our strategies to outwit the wrath of God. We didn't know yet that their forgiveness was one with the bullets of their brothers in arms. In the face of death, sometimes we forget how to defend ourselves.

OUR EYES MIRROR OUR GRAVES



Bolombo cemetery. From here to there, a thread: the family. Try to follow its path. Signposts, clues, crumbs: everything has vanished. We cannot find the graves. They were marked, once, with bits and pieces of the deceased ones' lives, things we cast out in order to let go of the pain. Now everything is gone. Have the dwellings of our dead been absorbed by the trees and the vines? Nature may have decided it is time for us to shed our bodies and make for the stars.

FIRST YOU SAY SAMBOLE, THEN YOU SAY ZOBA



Sambole Zoba, kid 2 kid, a classroom with no benches or desks, chalk to write with or priests to wipe our minds clean. ... Here we learn nature's infinite lesson and the brain refuses to trade its synapses for a hard drive. In the end we see that everything was metonymy and stagecraft: the ancestors showing us the way around obstacles and regret.

NIAMA MAYI, SORCERERS' CROCODILE, SAYS



The crocodile from Mbandaka shrieked as, in his mind's eye, he glimpsed the powerful silence of those other crocodiles, standing stone cold still in a cement pond. It was decades ago: it was yesterday, at the Palais des Colonies, opulent spectacle at the southern edge of Paris. In the Métropole, innocence was growing thin. New imaginaries were required, stoked by peep-show erotica.

THE SINKHOLE OF COLONIAL DEBT



Inside this body in pain, the spirit takes off in mind travel. The trip uses up all the energy that's left. Sometimes silence is more loaded than sound, but how come nobody heard when I screamed by fucking head off?

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE



Departure: check. Destination: unknown. Point of entry: a hospital bed with iron bars in the age of the Leopard King. This is where I spend my first night on planet earth. The King is long gone, but his songs echo in the long hallways. They hover, rising like steam on the skin of water. Mobutu Elima ... spirit of Mobutu ... Mobutu Elombe ... warrior spirit ...

Bana Equateur miso nbgal

Equator's children: our eyes are wide open!

We were blinded by the words drum-drum-drummed into our every conscious hour.

ZAIREAN TRANCE



Mbandaka Mambenga. Forgotten city. Heyday passed, her shoulders sag: 32 years of dictatorship. Critical mass. Here, far from the political centre of things, an unfinished house surrenders to the forest. The leader had meant to live here but died first. Botutu, spirit of ill luck, hisses and crackles: in the courtyard, we have flipped the switch: a secret circle of fire swallows the flames of the past.

MEKALI: APPARITIONS



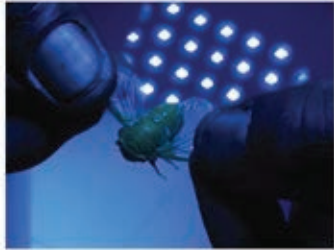
Bilima is a force that lives inside us, a force for combat, for protection and overcoming obstacles. To access it, we summon Mekali, a spirit who brings good or ill, depending on what we hold in our hearts. Mekali is prophylaxis against the fear within.

WALE



Wale. A challenge to defeat the spells cast by Esokodji the snake – evil reptile sent by those who would defeat us: adversaries, rivals, governments. Wale. A song. Small girls sing what none of us can say anymore. They sing that everything is fine when nothing fine is left at all. Sarcastic songs: good for stepping back into our skins. Funny-ugly songs: grimaces (crossed eyes, curled lips) to remember our beauty. For protection.

ADVANCED TRANSPACIAL INCIDENTS



Planet earth is coming undone. Where is Stanley? Satellite! Where is Vincent? Satellite! Where is Coquilhat? Satellite! Trajectories of rockets fired into the void" essential reading to master equatorial satellites loaded down with grey gold (aka cotton) in advance of cosmic-tropical forest avoid insatiable equatorial vehicle departing @ Equator today 0:00.
 "T" Tree of an article by Major General Casimir-Ernest Coquilhat, a Belgian mathematician, that contains the formula for rocket propulsion: the conversion of space travel. Coquilhat's son, Casimir-Alexis, went on to found the Force Publique, the single most violent arm of colonial repression under King Leopold II. Under Belgian rule, Mwambata bore Casimir's name; it was called Coquilhatville.]

MBANDAKA MIKILI



Shortly, the body will enter a multi-dimensional pipeline for passage from Africa to Europe. Motors rev, pigs squeal and the python wraps itself into a tight coil. One last battle in quest of a better world, where justice, equality and the laws of nature, untrammelled, prevail. What would it take to change the rules of the game? To be born white or yellow, not black, in a remote corner of Belgium or France?

Excerpt #2

WORDS BY ELÉONORE HELLIO

Kinshasa, DRC.

Again, fits and starts; further negotiations;
flip-flop back and forth blabla from the paper pushers. Born here?
Won't change a thing: if you want to leave this city, go to another province,
you need an exit visa. The war is inside us now. Under our skin.
Kin-ky. Desire moves in transit zones of current and sound, fluctuating,
flitting across urban scape. Live wires link intention and act. Or not.
This day, every day, in the capital city, battle lines are drawn to retain dreams,
forestalling the loss of illusion.

We're out. And here, finally. Mbandaka! Sun @ zenith, sidereal revolution,
nadir @ antipode. The Equator runs smack through the heart of the city.
Ancient astronomers knew about it; a boulder marks its presence now,
a geo-mythic rockpile, painted mustard yellow by a telcom company.

In the one spot further than all the others from the planet's centre of gravity,
neither in the North nor in the South, on the very axis of the tree of life,
we slipslide through infinite variations of the universal.
We take off – it's mind travel, now – in an incandescent flux of queries:
psychic thickness vibration. The ghettobound of this world have learned to live
outside the stretches of time, but that doesn't do much for the colour of the sky.

Conduct an autopsy on history's corpse (there will be no derogations).
Sift understanding from the ruin of its limbs. Put to use the anger.
See clearer in the face of what's been inherited – pretty ditties for murder
and highly specialised information deeded by those who passed through this place before us.
At what point, exactly, do we give up, knee deep in the shards of it all?
QUIET! Camera's rolling, but the film isn't done.
The official and his officious double are whisked away in a jeep.
A test: take dictation now! Everybody's scribbling away;
unless you've got an officer in the family, though, you're wasting your time:
they'll forget to collect your papers. Everything's gone fractal.
For now, at least, the middle way is the only way for me. Consent. Assimilate.
Mundele me; too visible.
Coming as I do, in the wake of centuries of beatings and deaths meted out by tyrants,
so many shaded my colour of pale, how could I not stand out? And so, silence.
Silence will be my key, opening onto a space where, possibly, a life might be built,
working thorough Fanon in the absence of Fanon, and with no words. I didn't expect this.
The sheer violence of it. Eventually, there will be utterances – once the wave has receded,
made its way into the depths of the river. Once it has gone and come back
to sweep the autopsy table and its theatre of operations clean.

Sadness – sadness like these – will not be tamed.
I am out of body even as the body goes about its everyday moves.
I listen to whispers swishing through the motorless city. For consolation.
I'm not waiting for anything anymore; a good place to be, really;
all that's left is breath. Mbandaka! Intimate archaeology. Our limbs do the talking.
For rhythm, the scansion of Kimongo verbs. Sounds captivate me. I understand nothing.
And so I listen. Someday, maybe, I'll learn the language. And die here, to no particular end.

Excerpt #3

WORDS BY ELÉONORE HELLIO

[Online directions: Take a walk along the avenues of Mbandaka.

Depart from the centre of town, planned by European architects working for 19th century Belgian monarchs. Observe the houses: ageing but held together nicely with a clever mix of unexpected materials and objects. Walk away from the centre. Local building forms gradually take over. Separations between streets, yards and living quarters begin to fall away. City dwellers re-appropriate their environment. Tranquility takes over. Urban space no longer stands in antagonism to other kinds of spaces.]

Swarms of butterflies, clouds and clouds of them now. We trail them down the long earth streets. In silence. Follow their movement: for now, for us, they will be dreams, memories, free (for an instant, only, but free) of the crisis we carry.

I don't remember asking the pharmacist's grand-daughter to catch a butterfly for me. But she's gone ahead and trapped one. She brings it to me: lipalala, lipalala, a live lipalala. Lost to the sky, it doesn't try to escape, let's us pass it from hand to hand, as each of us looks at it up close, pressing its wings hard between index and thumb. From the lipalala's tiny body, a shower of powdery scales: each set of fingers adds to the damage. Still, small suction as the lipalala seeks a foothold. In the end, it stops. And comes to a standstill on Bokungu's forehead.

Bokungu: mothman suspended before the shutter-click of my camera. I peer through the viewfinder with sweat-drenched eyes.

[Online dictionary: Mothman – peculiar creature encountered in several countries, seconds before a catastrophe. And after occasionally: in between the twin towers, for example, as they began their tumble to the Manhattan pavement on September 11th 2001. An inspiration, possibly, for the notion of the butterfly effect: a butterfly twitches its wings; the movement goes wholly unnoticed, yet sets in motion events leading to a cataclysm. Or its contrary (averts disaster). Offspring of Little Boy, the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, made lethal with uranium mined in Belgian Congo]

Bokungu: mothman or lipalala, identity in question, image exposed. How many shots would it take to make a portrait, one single picture, wide enough to bridge these many rivers?

Have I been online too long, lost myself to hyperlink labyrinths, or is it the opposite? Am I reconnecting with something elemental, the fundamentals of an experimental metaphysics? My thoughts turn to the wing twitches of our postcolonial now, to analog mounds of digital magma, to the impact of their invasive/evasive convulsions. I become the spontaneous entomologist of my own thought process, in a space where nothing at all feels anchored anymore, save the immense, magnificent void at whose heart we meet in this city astride the Equator. The butterfly-man of Mbandaka cannot be a mere presage; this much is clear. Everything we wanted to know of history we've learned already. If we loose our grip, it's because we choose to: we retain first right of refusal. Butterfly trapping has a long history here – centuries old. Butterfly collecting too. European kings were fervent adepts. For them, thousands of specimens were gathered, some very rare. Delicately, each insect was pinned to a pretty backing and set aside for further contemplation. In storage rooms, boxes, drawers, curio cabinets and famed museums. The story's much the same Mikili-way: sense is made of the world by skewering life, pinning it down, forests and tress left behind, appropriating everything in a frenzy of collection powered by too much information and too little thought.

In Mbandaka, people remember how fascinated the missionaries, the functionaries and other expatriates were with local butterflies. No: Bokungu is not wholly a mothman. When his dreads come out, antennas to the world, Rasta prophecies rule: some lions cloak themselves in butterfly garb, the better to prowl the land. No coincidence, then, his passage, now, through other streets half a world away; Mbandaka behind him, Paris (Belleville, to be precise) for the foreseeable future. On the streets he shifts shape, métisse extraordinaire, part bullwhip, part Babylon anthropocene.

Aaaah ngai eee Bonkena du Royaume Kongo Aaaah ngai eee Equateur Station Equateurville



Coquilhatville de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo et du Congo Belge Aaaah ngai eee Mbandaka du Zaïre et de la république

Démocratique du Congo Aaaah ngai eee Mbaka Aaaah ngai eee Ekanga Aaaah ngai eeeee

Excerpt #4

WORDS BY DICOCO BOKETSHU

I.

Through and invisible door

This voyage

Imaginary (imagined?)

Mikili:

So powerful a pull

Demanding sacrifice. And a death.

For paradise here we will risk a life there.

Because we believed in them. Believed when they said the sky was Technicolour blue, here, and the houses too.

In Belleville.

Belle ville.

Pretty city.

An answer, or half a reality: part for the whole of dreams we have always already shared. Since childhood.

And so now, life's latest phase.

Behind me: conflicts/ wars/ envies/ all of those whom I left there, tethered to a single grid of pain.

Life lived in hope and fear that someone, just one man, will gather wings enough to go.

To Belleville.

Belle ville.

Pretty city.

No false moves are allowed.

None, if I am to make real a dream I have always already lost.

Here, I have become a bridge back there. Forbidden to break. For a family left behind.

The earth has taken a tentative step.

And has found she's home to beings who don't give a crap.

Who crap on her.

And step on others, building staircases of flesh.

One man does what another man did to him; it's the order of things. The world changes and changes, too fast. Evil lives everywhere, and everywhere everyone wants to be quoted: call my name/my name first.

Because we do not know yet who we are.

Everybody's looking everywhere.

Some make history, make it up as they go.

To feel up, and high. Higher, highest.

To live in France.

Metropolis.

Metro police.

In Belleville.

The voyager – I – is a stranger in the pretty city, but that's not all.

This is not his first voyage.

It is his second: a voyage of the mind – imaginary travel begun even as a first trip is underway.

In quest, always, of the real reason for our attachment.

Our attachment to a fake.

To pretty pretty stories, fake through and through.

II.

The butterfly and I.

We belong to different species.

It's difference in a good way.

Still, we are both voyaging spirits: sight of us prophecies a visit.

We fly low, past seas of beetles beating the earth's crust

And consider coming to a rest.

Landing.

Falling.

And proceeding.

Breathing, because somehow we must cease feeling
the strangeness of who we are.

I doubt those who live in Belleville know their luck;
they (too) could have landed elsewhere.

The butterfly.

And I.

Fallen.

The departure is imaginary, the arrival not. These kinds of
realities you hold onto hard. Belleville/ Belle Ville/ pretty city;
it's everybody's talking about.

Itinerary:

- Home town: Bonkena, today Mbandaka, Equator province
(centre of the world)
- Congo River: on the water, grandly, all the way.
- Capital city: Kinshasa/ Kin la Belle/ belle belle ville.

So many days, so many documents, so many hours and days
and months waiting to be chosen, elected to move, shuffled,
like so many papers

- Kinshasa to paris: Kin la Belle to belle Ville.

8000km, but in transit no one gives it a thought:
the only thing you want to know is if the sky there really is
Technicolour Blue.

So much time spent dressing up the dream:
most who make it are disappointed.

But the real problem, the nut of it, is this. To fit in. To find a fit.
Any fit.

How to (take 1): in Belleville, shall I copy everything?

- Mbandaka to Belleville. This is how it is for me:
a pipe, a tube, a piece of pipeline just wide enough for one
man's body; you crawl in one side and come out on the other.
What memories you have, you store. A memory card will do.
Or a flash drive.

Crawl out and, this side, never once stop thinking.

You may be the last man on earth.

How will you know where and when and how to jump?

One friend bridges the here and the there, the four corners of
my earth, and my right, my one right, to the city: www.

I dream in Internet.

Everybody here is passing through.

Belleville.

Belle Ville.

Pretty pretty city.

She gives us one century. 100 years exactly. to know her.

And the hour is late.

I am:

BOKETSHU BOKUNGU ISATULI BAKALANGANYA
Born to BOKETSHU ISATULI nad BOKUNGU BALAMBA

Butterfly man.

I sit still, still in a pool whose mirror surface hides
the counter-shadow of another I, trapped in an empty screen.



Yeoville Studio:

Negotiating the Line Between Research and Activism

CLAIRE BENIT-GBAFFOU

Yeoville Studio is a community-oriented research initiative led by the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of the Witwatersrand in partnership with local Yeoville organisations and involving students from second year to PhD level, senior academics, local Yeoville leaders and residents. It is an initiative sponsored by Wits University, and supported by the French Institute of South Africa (IFAS) as well as the Goethe Institute in South Africa.

Yeoville is a vibrant and popular neighbourhood near the centre of Johannesburg: an area to which many African immigrants gravitate on arrival. Here they find social networks, invaluable resources and intractable social entanglements. The area is often described as a 'slum' by middle-class motorists who pass through it on their way to the city's airport, but it is one of the few inner-city areas where one can move in the street freely and in a variety of languages and outfits.

Yeoville is the location for the studio for one crucial reason: we found there enthusiastic civil society partners, namely the Yeoville Stakeholders Forum (YSF) and the Yeoville Bellevue Community Development Trust (YBCDT). Both these organisations are committed to building a community vision for the area and so the studio came as an empowering initiative in an already existing community dynamic. Studio personnel also had links to other groups active in the area, such as the African Diaspora Forum and the South African National Traders and Retailers Association.

Other reasons for choosing Yeoville are, like its very essence, myriad: it is a vibrant and diverse inner-city neighbourhood; it has a dense social complexity and a strong sense of local identity, which is based on a rich history visible in particular through its very specific art deco architecture. Yeoville is also conveniently located close to the university, and so easily accessible to students and staff. In addition to many shebeens and informal eateries and market stalls, Yeoville offers a range of friendly restaurants and cafes.

Important too, for the success of the initiative, are the long political and personal connections between Wits alumnae and the neighbourhood.

In dialogue with our community partners, Yeoville Studio defined four broad themes for research and engagement: Yeoville stories, celebrating African diversity, public spaces (and informality), and housing issues. Yeoville Studio 2010 focused mostly on the first two themes, in order to better know the place and the people. This was done through story-telling and listening, research and data gathering, exploration and exposure, public meetings, collective discussions and private conversations. The 2011 initiative has seen more direct and deeper engagement, at the request of our community partners, who appreciated the sense of community-building, pride and celebration that emerged from the Yeoville Studio 2010, but wanted more policy oriented and practical ideas on two key issues: trading and housing.

As someone who teaches others about cities and ways to research them, I have always encouraged students to do so through small projects in defined neighbourhoods, in partnership with local organisations, and with findings and recommendations shared among all stakeholders.

Yeoville Studio built on this idea, and expanded it tremendously. It is now an initiative that involves the entire School of Architecture and Planning, all interested staff members (about 15

last year) and their related courses (about 20, involving 200 students throughout the year). Not only has the scale of the previous initiative grown, but the very nature of its research, teaching and partnership dimensions has also shifted.

Coordinating the studio is a demanding, and exciting undertaking. When I am tired, I picture it as a rapidly growing monster (a giant octopus, with an increasing number of active arms, taking over my brain, my thoughts and my dreams): the politics, the intertwining, the contradictions and the articulations of all the subprojects and their (teaching, research and community) dynamics, open unexpected and challenging avenues and become new subprojects with their own dynamics. When I am energetic, I see it as a unique and stimulating way of combining, and developing in a collective setting, my own passions in life: the activism that attracted me to South Africa in the first place (the exhilarating sense that one can contribute to change in society, or at least to build part of it); challenging and innovative teaching methods; and research that is strongly based in urban realities and their politics.

Perhaps Yeoville Studio is best described through the variety of projects undertaken by enthusiastic or reluctant, fearful or excited, overloaded or committed Wits students (most of whom have never set a foot in the area); by lecturers, many of whom grew up or lived in Yeoville in its 'golden years', and are through this initiative returning to it with a mixture of nostalgia, apprehension and curiosity; and by residents mostly curious and enthused, sometimes critical, grumpy or suspicious of the purpose and possible achievements of the initiative, but most often pleased with being taken seriously.

In the following examples I reflect more particularly on the fine line between research and activism – a line that Yeoville Studio is constantly negotiating.

The Housing Wall (advertisement for shared accommodation in Yeoville)



Yeoville studio and Yeoville stories

The Yeoville Stories workshops were organised every two–three weeks with a core group of 10–15 residents, who discussed their lives and practices in Yeoville through a variety of media. Through the workshops, the group produced a series of ‘Photomaps’ that were showcased in a much-celebrated exhibition in Yeoville. This group of residents also partnered with students to produce a series of walking tours of Yeoville – another way of celebrating both historical and everyday meanings of the neighbourhood.

Another initiative, based on students’ photographs of Muller Street, led to the presentation and discussion in focus groups, of the most liked, the most disliked and the most ‘realistic’ depictions of the street.

Heated debates developed around the photographs, the workshop triggering negotiations about what is, and what is not acceptable or desirable for the Muller Street ‘community’. Beyond aspirations for middle-class status (affirmations possibly emphasised by our very presence), it became obvious, almost irritating, that there was little room for the celebration or even the defense of popular lifestyles, practices and cultures. Discourses about clean, formal and orderly streets, well-kept children in private and closed spaces, and teetotalism and God-fearing attitudes were expressed forcefully by dominant characters, who sometimes adopted the lingo more familiar to the City of Joburg’s website (‘competitive city’, ‘world class’ etc). Although understandable in the face of very real local challenges, these dominant discourses obviously contradicted residents’ daily practices: shopping in convenient and cheap street spaza shops, appreciating the vibrancy and neighbourliness of the street (also as a response to the lack of space in overcrowded buildings); enjoying the entertainment activities and the dynamic social life and dense networks of community. Developing a legitimate discourse around people’s real practices, without romanticising the difficulties of everyday living conditions, became one of the Studio’s objectives.

These experiences were intensely positive, with sincere enthusiasm shared by participants and Yeoville Studio facilitators. They provided potentially longer-term prospects for development including: consolidating or creating social networks, locally and beyond; reversing the stigma attached to the neighbourhood; developing a sense of pride about the place as a basis for empowerment; and celebrating the neighbourhood, or at least some of its



Muller Street



Muller Street

(unique) aspects. On the other hand, a celebration of this potential could also have invited trends for gentrification –preparing the ground for private developers to step in, as was already the case in some parts of Yeoville. Albeit, some residents are not unhappy about this trend, for the Yeoville Studio the power of conservative and dominant discourses on what Yeoville should be, at the expense of alternative visions of a neighbourhood was a concern. Would it be possible to imagine a Yeoville that could develop and overcome its ills, but keep a (central?) place for its specific and vibrant popular practices?

Yeoville studio and African diversity

The xenophobic attacks of 2008 left Yeoville relatively untouched, yet it was in Yeoville that the African Diaspora Forum (ADF), an umbrella body of African migrant organisations in Johannesburg, was founded. The absence of mass violence against migrants in Yeoville could be explained by the relatively strong network of local organisations holding the neighbourhood together, in spite of some xenophobic public statements made by the local councilor at the time. We could not, however, ignore the existing xenophobic tensions in this very dense and fluid neighbourhood, where scarcity of housing and trading space fuels intense competition, as well as difficult living conditions. Furthermore, we did not want to frame the question of migration politics in a priori conflicting terms, even if the conflicts and their management were one aspect Yeoville Studio needed to address.

We began, in line with our local partners' endeavours, to study and stress the cultural diversity that this migration was bringing to Yeoville. Contributing, and consolidating the local YBCDT-ADF-YSF initiative of celebrating Africa Day (25 May) through an annual street festival, we embarked on a survey of formal and informal African restaurants. Second-year students, although not always au fait with the complexity of the licensing terrain that traders in the area must so delicately negotiate, were able to produce what became one of the (many) popular outputs of the studio – an African restaurants map/guide.

This became the possible starting point for a network of African restaurant owners or managers. The guide also inspired several local activists to develop a plan to train local tourist guides, and the YBCDT successfully applied for sponsorship for this initiative from the Gauteng government. The map, alongside other local initiatives, created a way for local residents to understand the economic (if not cultural and social) value of diversity and another future for Yeoville.

At the same time as we were attending innumerable public meetings (so as to update the community about the Studio, and solicit feedback), we regularly witnessed unashamed expressions of xenophobia. We were struck by the diversity of tactics used to address, respond



Muller Street

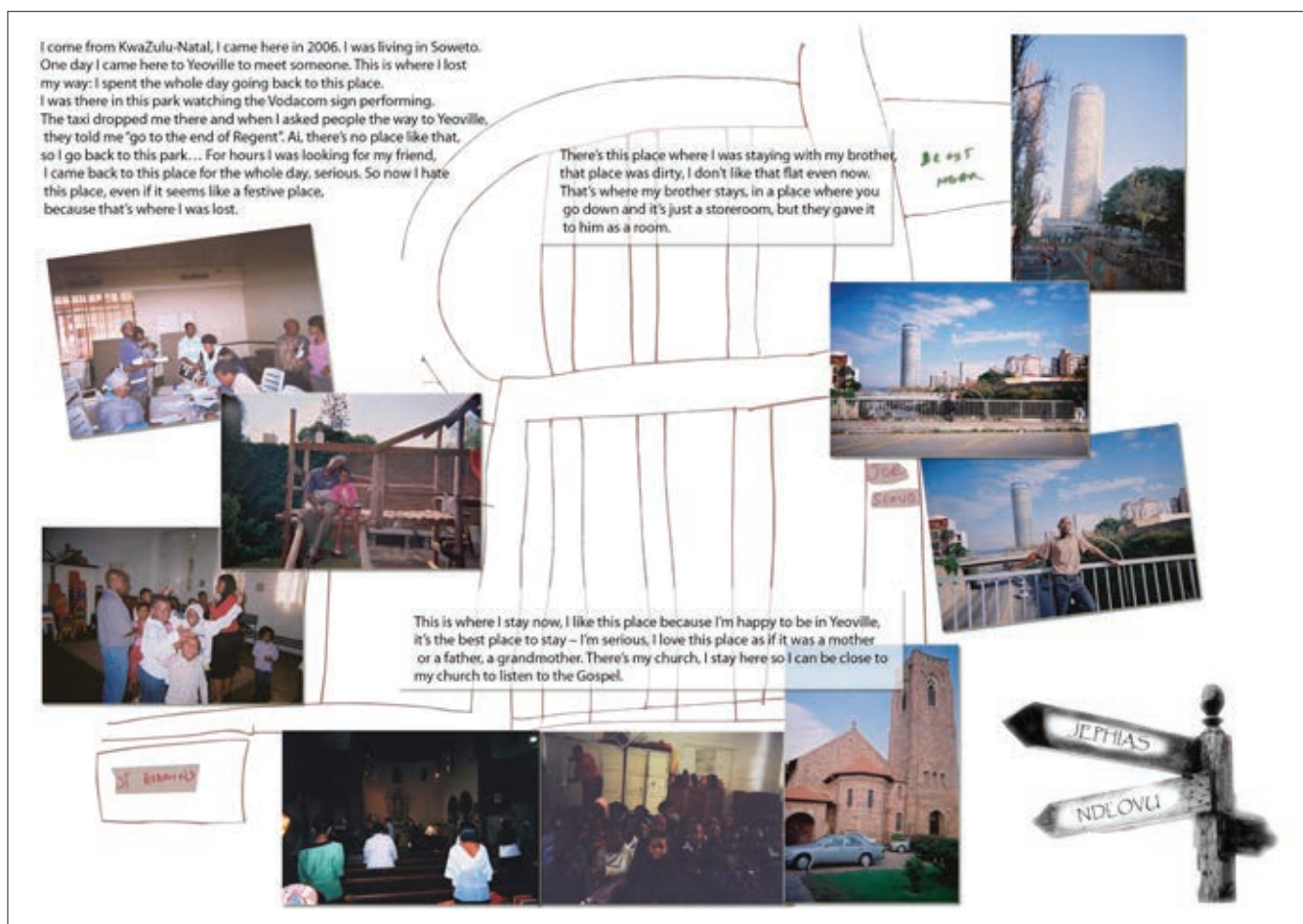


Muller Street



to and manage xenophobic expressions (from derogatory language to hate speech), depending on leadership and platforms. These included mostly sympathetic tolerance; often direct encouragement (leaders themselves inciting xenophobic discourses); too seldom uncompromising condemnation; and in exceptional cases, pedagogic deconstruction.

It was in these public meetings that we began to understand the constructed character of collective xenophobia, and the crucial role of local leadership in shaping different spoken and practised futures. It was also here that we experienced directly the frustrating gaps between research and activism: those which often rendered us, unbearably, silent observers. Because we were ultimately outsiders, intervening in these public meetings was difficult: our role as members of the Yeoville Studio was to make visible the visions of others about what Yeoville could be; to bring to the fore alternative discourses on diversity and migration; and to support our community partners with material that they could use in their endeavours to create an integrated neighbourhood.



Photomap by Yeoville stories workshop participant

Yeoville studio and public spaces

Yeoville Studio 2010 did extensive research on the various and intertwined forms of trading in Rockey-Raleigh Street, the main thoroughfare of Yeoville, vibrant with shops and restaurants public facilities, informal street trading (when the metro police are not in sight), a quiet mall (formerly a cinema, and for a short time Hugh Masekela's jazz club) and a local market opened in 1999 (on-street trading was banned thereafter).

Our research challenged a few preconceived ideas including the dominant view that street trading was unwelcome in Yeoville. Aside from the usual complaints about litter and congestion, street trading and traders were perceived by residents as convenient and friendly. The vast majority of shop keepers interviewed argued that 'without them Yeoville is like a ghost town'.

Other findings challenged the dominant understanding of the local market's economic difficulties: many perceived the limited success of the market as the consequence of street trading competition, but in fact it could be more convincingly explained by market design and management issues. Our research also highlighted that xenophobic tensions in the market were more often triggered by external pressure (local leaders eager to please their constituency; city policy creating scarcity) than by internal disputes among traders themselves. Finally, we also sensed that the traders' muted concerns about the new market management system (the 'smart card') were warranted, aimed as the system was at instituting tight control over market traders and tremendously weakening their autonomy.

At the end of 2010, as the market management company was in the process of issuing these 'smart cards', the city of Joburg called an urgent meeting with street traders and market traders. A rumour had been circulating that the city was to demarcate stalls in Rockey-Raleigh Street, leading struggling market traders to put up stalls in the street.

The city, encouraged by YBCDT, called for a negotiated practical solution to the issue, and proceeded to elect five representatives to a steering committee. Yeoville Studio volunteered to help explore solutions, as we had findings to support new ideas for integrated trading in Yeoville. The city reluctantly took note and we were eventually invited, 'as observers' to the trading steering committee meetings.

It soon became obvious that the street traders were intimidated and not able to properly raise their concerns in these meetings, in which market traders and the YBCDT made vocal proposals to remove them from Rockey-Raleigh Street. As the City's angry accusations against (female) street trader leaders' 'passivity', 'problem of attitude' and 'negativity' multiplied, we had to push the line between research and activism: we stepped in, offering Yeoville Studio's services to support street traders to articulate their views.

A workshop was organised in March 2011, in which street traders expressed strong views against being removed from their positions on Rockey-Raleigh. Yeoville Studio assisted them by writing a position paper on the matter.

At the next meeting, street traders presented their positions and Yeoville Studio presented its findings. These were politely contested by market traders, who ultimately decided it was politically more rewarding to side with the city and to blame street traders than to challenge the authorities about management of street and market trading in the community. The issue of the transition to smart cards and the stress that they imposed on traders, particularly those in arrears, was not properly addressed.

We proposed a workshop with market traders, to develop ideas to make the market more attractive. This suggestion was received with enthusiasm by market leaders, 'no matter what happens'. Yet, at the next meeting with the city, we were strongly attacked by those same leaders, who accused Yeoville Studio of being biased, of manipulating street traders, and of not having consulted them on our research on the market. In short, they shot down the studio and its work as a way to further undermine street traders. Thus the Yeoville Studio entered the political arena.

Spinning Translocal:

A Discography of Central and West African Hip Hop

JENNY MBAYE

Since its emergence in Senegal in the mid-1980s hip hop has become a translocal cultural phenomenon in francophone West and Central Africa. It is the only musical genre shared by the entire region – from Nouakchott to Yaoundé, Niamey to Cotonou, Dakar, Abidjan, Bamako, Ouagadougou and everywhere in between – contrary, for instance, to Malian Mandingo music, Ivorian Zouglou or Senegalese Mbalax.

The following discography is an introduction to contemporary francophone hip hop. It is extremely difficult to compile such a selection and many deserving hip hop artists from West and Central Africa do not appear on this discography. However, contemporary tracks (2005-2010) of some of the pioneers of the movement, as well as promising emerging artists, have been chosen in attempts to represent the great diversity in the genre. The list is far from exhaustive and necessarily subjective.

For the purposes of this discography, the countries under review are: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Gabon, Guinea (Conakry), Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Togo.



Artist: Djanta Kan
 Title: *Avoude*
 Album: Doto
 Country: Togo
 Release Date: 2005
 Website: <http://www.myspace.com/djantakan>



Artist: Lord Ekomy Ndong (Mauvaizhaleine)
 Title: *Jour J*
 Album: Jour J (single)
 Country: Gabon
 Release Date: 2009
 Website: <http://www.myspace.com/ekomy>
 Video Clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUZzrHTzCME&feature=related>



Artist: Smockey
 Title: *Faut pas chauffer le chauffeur*
 Album: CCP: Cravate, Costard, Pourriture
 Country: Burkina Faso
 Release Date: 2010
 Website: <http://www.myspace.com/smockey2>;
<http://www.myspace.com/smockeyonline>;
<http://smockey.fr/smockey2/>
 Video Clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=butJO-zDQcU>



Artist: Faso Kombat
 Title: *Boin Maanin*
 Album: Z'enfants de la patrie
 Country: Burkina Faso
 Release Date: 2010
 Website: <http://www.myspace.com/fasokombat>
 Video Clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PN_VIMjufZY



Artist: Sista Fa
 Title: *Milyamba*
 Album: Sarabah: Tales from the Flipside of Paradise
 Country: Senegal
 Release Date: 2009
 Website: <http://www.myspace.com/sisterfa>
 Video Clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSHvTsvW11>



Artist: Ardiess (feat Zeynab)
 Title: *Combien de temps?*
 Album: La recharge
 Country: Benin
 Release Date: 2007
 Website: <http://www.ardiess5.net>; <http://www.myspace.com/ardiessposse>
 Video Clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnQuL7xgW-k>



Artist: Didier Awadi (feat Doudou Ndiaye Rose)
 Title: *Dans mon rêve*
 Album: Présidents D'Afrique
 Country: Senegal
 Release Date: 2010
 Website: <http://www.myspace.com/didierawadi>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didier_Awadi
 Video Clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blbeT8ZFxno>



Artist: Amkoullé
 Title: *Kalan*
 Album: Ne Ka Mali!!
 Country: Mali
 Release Date: 2010
 Website: <http://www.myspace.com/amkoullé>
 Video Clip: <http://www.vimeo.com/14342121>



Artist: Daara J Family
 Title: *Tomorrow*
 Album: School of Life
 Country: Senegal
 Release Date: 2010
 Website: <http://www.myspace.com/daarajfamilyofficial>
 Video Clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bV4qTlyw2SQ&feature=related>



Artist: Nash
 Title: *Respectons notre corps*
 Album: Zié Dédjà!
 Country: Ivory Coast
 Release Date: 2008
 Website: <http://www.myspace.com/nashnouchy>



Artist: DJ Gold (ft. Zion Riddim Killah)
 Title: *Jeux de jambes*
 Album: Urban Africa
 Country: Burkina Faso
 Release Date: 2010
 Website: <http://www.myspace.com/goldnbeazrecords>



Artist: Waraba
 Title: *Nagioubagne*
 Album: Yomboul
 Country: Mauritania
 Release Date: 2006
 Website: <http://www.myspace.com/warababigpower>



Artist: Art Melody
 Title: *To Biiga*
 Album: Art Melody
 Country: Burkina Faso
 Release Date: 2009
 Website: <http://www.myspace.com/artmelodyrecords>
 Video Clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_944I8KXwi0



Artist: Moona
 Title: *Toutes les femmes de ta vie*
 Album: A fleur 2 maux
 Country: Benin/Niger
 Release Date: 2009
 Website: <http://www.myspace.com/moonahiphop>; <http://moonamusic.skyrock.com/>; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moona>
 Video Clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4QNaUe-8As>



Artist: Negrissim'
 Title: *My People*
 Album: La Vallée des Rois
 Country: Cameroon
 Release Date: 2009
 Website: <http://www.myspace.com/negrissim>; <http://www.negrissim.net/>
 Video Clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuWXjErjH94>

Supplements:

Artist: Degg J Force 3
 Title: *Lever le Rideau*
 Album: Street Live in Conakry, Boulbinet (short documentary)
 Country: Guinea (Conakry)
 Release Date: 2009
 Website: <http://www.deggjforce3.com/>; <http://www.myspace.com/deggjforce3>
 Video Clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVldJtJszeQ>

Artist: AURA
 Title: *Bienvenue à Poto-Poto*
 Album: Afrolution vol. 2
 Country: Various
 Release Date: 2000
 Website: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AURA_\(United_Artists_for_African_Rap\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AURA_(United_Artists_for_African_Rap))
 Video Clip: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qf1OamO1vg>

Contributors

Chris Abani is a Nigerian author and poet. His novels include *The Virgin of Flames* and *GraceLand*. He is the recipient of the PEN USA Freedom-to-Write Award, the Prince Claus Award, a Lannan Literary Fellowship, a Hurston-Wright Legacy Award and the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award. In 2009 he received the prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship for fiction.

David Adjaye is a London-based architect. Early on in his career he developed a reputation as an architect with an artist's sensibility and he is widely recognized as one of the leading architects of his generation. In May 2005, Thames & Hudson published his first book, *David Adjaye Houses: Recycling, Reconfiguring, Rebuilding*. He recently won the prestigious commission to design the new National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington DC which will open in 2015.

Doreen Baingana is the Managing Editor of Storymoja. She holds a law degree from Makerere University, Kampala, and an MFA from the University of Maryland. She has won the Washington Independent Writers Fiction Prize and was twice shortlisted for the Caine Prize. Her novel, *Tropical Fish*, is distributed by Storymoja.

Claire Benit-Gbaffou is a Senior Lecturer in the Wits School of Architecture and Planning. She is the coordinator of Yeoville Studio, and Acting Head of CUBES (Wits Center for Urbanism and Built Environment Studies). Her research interests include local politics, urban governance and community participation.

Iain Chambers is presently Professor of Cultural and Postcolonial Studies at the Oriental University in Naples. He is known for his interdisciplinary and intercultural work on music, popular and metropolitan cultures. Most recently he has transmuted this line of research into a series of postcolonial analyses of the formation of the modern Mediterranean.

Brian Chikwava won the Caine Prize in 2004 for his short story 'Seventh Street Alchemy'. His first novel, *Harare North*, was published in 2009.

Isoje Chou works in painting, drawing, sculpture, installation, performance and writing and at times uses found objects and literary or creative fiction in her work. Her work engages the social, cultural, religious and the political.

Sean Christie is a Cape Town based journalist. His research interests include trucking, diasporas and mining. He is currently working on a book about trucking in Southern Africa.

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 and the United States. His first book, *Every Day is for the Thief*, was published in 2007 in Nigeria by Cassava Republic Press. His most recent novel, *Open City*, was released in February 2011.

Tim Cresswell is a human geographer at the University of London. He is editor of *Cultural Geographies* and a member of the editorial board for *Mobilities*. He has authored four books on the role of space and mobility in cultural life.

Sherif El-Azma is an experimental video artist living and working in Cairo. In 2007 he began touring ‘The Psychogeography of Loose Associations’, a live performative lecture that positioned the artist behind his audience narrating a text while images, photographs, statistics and videos were projected onto a screen. Maurice Luca, one-third of the electronic music group Bikya, contributed live sounds while Nermine al-Ansari, using an electronic pen, produced live drawings of urban grids and other seemingly random doodles and notations.

Manu Herbstein has lived and worked in South Africa, England, Nigeria, India, Zambia and Scotland. Since 1970 he has made his home in Accra. By profession a Civil and Structural Engineer, he has contributed to the design and construction of power stations, bridges, water supply and sewage treatment plants, river works, highways and buildings. He is a Fellow of the British Institution of Structural Engineers and a Fellow of the Ghana Institution of Engineers. He is the author of *Ama: a Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, which won the 2002 Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book.

Isaac Julien is an installation artist and filmmaker. Julien was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2001 for his films *The Long Road to Mazatlán* (1999) and *Vagabondia* (2000). Earlier works include *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask* (1996), *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) and the acclaimed poetic documentary *Looking for Langston* (1989). He is currently a visiting professor at the Whitney Museum of American Arts.

Ed Kashi is a photojournalist, filmmaker and educator dedicated to documenting the social and political issues that define our times. Kashi’s images have been published and exhibited worldwide, and his editorial assignments and personal projects have generated six books. In 2008, *Curse of the Black Gold: 50 Years of Oil in the Niger Delta* was published. In June 2009 Kashi released his latest book, *THREE*, based on a series of triptychs culled from more than 20 years of image making.

Caroline Kihato is a researcher with the Development Bank of Southern Africa. She was previously Senior Lecturer in the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her research and teaching centres on public policy in developing countries and participatory planning. Her research also includes the impact of migration in African cities, focusing primarily on inner city Johannesburg.

Martin Kimani has been published in the *Guardian*, *Granta*, *The East African*, *Süddeutschen Zeitung*, *Farafina* and *Juxtapoz*. He also comments on development policy, conflict and terrorism on various BBC television and radio shows and in Australia, New Zealand, Kenya, and Rwanda. He is a fellow of the Africa Leadership Initiative and the Aspen Global Leadership Network.

Anna Kostreva held a 2009/2010 Fulbright Grant from the United States to South Africa as a visiting researcher at the University of the Witwatersrand. She led a collaborative project with young people about visualizing post-apartheid urbanism in Johannesburg at the Africa Cultural Centre. This work was exhibited during the FIFA World Cup and AZA2010. She is currently living and working in Berlin, Germany.

Victor Lavalle is a writer from Queens, New York. He is the author of a short-story collection, *Slapboxing with Jesus*, and two novels, *The Ecstatic* and *Big Machine*. In addition to fiction he has also written essays and book reviews for *GQ*, *Essence Magazine*, *The Fader*, and *The Washington Post*, among others.

MADEYOULOOK is a Johannesburg based collective comprised of Nare Mokgotho and Molemo Moiloa. The duo is responsible for the Sermon on the Train Series that held public academic lectures on metro trains to Soweto. The works of MADEYOULOOK are, as the name suggests, tongue-in-cheek interventions that encourage a re-observation of and de-familiarisation with the ordinary. In reworking and interrupting daily urban routine, viewers and/or participants are ‘made to re-look’ and question societal relations.

Dominique Malaquais is the author of two books and numerous scholarly articles, as well as essays, poems and short stories in English, French and Spanish. Her work focuses on intersections between emergent urban cultures, late capitalist market forces and political and economic violence in African cities. She is Associate Editor of *Chimurenga* and sits on the editorial board of the journal *Politique Africaine*.

Jenny Mbaye is a PhD candidate at the London School of Economics. Her research centres on hip hop and contemporary African culture.

Santu Mofokeng is one of South Africa’s leading photographers. His work explores themes of spirituality, space and belonging, and racial and cultural memory. His photography has been exhibited in France, Holland, the United States, Israel, Germany, Austria, Japan, Mali and many other countries.

Mowoso is a Kinshasa-based creators’ collective dedicated to outside-the-box art forms (video, sound, music, dance, performance, electronic networks) and urban hybrid cultures. The founding members of the collective are Eléonore Hellio, Dicoco Boketshu, Djo Vince Bombolo, Naneth Ebeus and Cédric Nzolo. Acting members include Bebson de la rue & Trionyx, Wemba, Zea Michel Ange, Bienvenu Nanga, Wingi Lopona Bilongi, Love Lokombe, DJ Angletto, Antoine Mofilinga, Mabele Elisi, Pisco Ewango, Laba, Sylvie Luwawa, Blaise Ebeus, Thomas Lucas, Christian Botale and Charles Tumba.

Nick Mwaluko is a playwright, journalist, and fiction writer. His plays include *Waafrica*, *Are Women Human?* and *S/HE*.

Khulile Nxumalo is a South African poet, writer and director. His debut poetry collection is titled *Ten Flapping Elbows, Mama*.

Emeka Ogboh is a Lagos-based new media artist. He co-founded the One Room Shack, a design team whose concern is chiefly in fashioning new ideas on creativity that employ both mainstream technologies as well as alternative creative strategies. He has participated in local and international media workshops and exhibitions including the Alexandria International Media and Lights Arts workshop (AMALA). He works in sound, media, and photography.

Jonny Steinberg is a South African writer and scholar. His books include *Midlands* (2002), *The Number* (2004), *Notes from a Fractured Country* (2007), *Three Letter Plague* (2008) and most recently *Little Liberia* (2011).

Sean O'Toole is a Cape Town based writer. His journalism has been widely published in *Frieze*, *Art South Africa*, *Blueprint*, *BBC Focus on Africa*, *Colors*, *Creative Review*, *Eye*, *ID* and *Kyoto Journal* among others. The recipient of the 2006 HSBC/SA PEN Literary Award, he published a collection of short stories titled *The Marquis of Mooikloof*.

Yvonne Owuor is a Kenyan fiction writer, conservationist, cultural activist and former Executive Director of the Zanzibar International Film Festival. Yvonne won the 2003 Caine Prize for African Writing for 'Weight of Whispers', a story told from the perspective of a refugee fleeing after the 1994 massacres. A number of her other stories have since been published, including 'Dressing the Dirge', 'The State of Tides', and 'The Knife Grinder's Tale'.

Nicole Turner is a South African descended from Irish convicts and English settlers who fled Europe for the Cape Colony in the early 1800s. She had a short-lived stint as staff writer at the *Hong Kong Standard* and spent several years roving around Asia. She's written for *Y Magazine*, *SL*, *Geo*, *Mail and Guardian*, *Business Day* and *the Sunday Times*. Her fiction has been translated into German, French and Chinese and has been published in English by *Chimurenga* where she is an occasional contributing editor. Now based in Cape Town she is working on a trilogy of crime novels.

Michael Watts is Director of African Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. The author of eight books, he has published widely on Nigeria and the Niger Delta over the last three decades. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2001 for his work on the impact of oil in Africa.



Featuring words and images by:

Dominique Malaquais • Martin Kimani • Manu Herstein • Victor LaValle • Doreen Baingana • Yvonne Owuor • Anna Kostreva. MADEYOULOOK Collective • Santu Mofokeng • Caroline Kihato • Claire Benit-Gbaffou • Sean O' Toole • David Adjaye • Chris Abani • Michael Watts • Ed Kashi • Sean Christie • Khulile Nxumalo • Nicole Turner • Sherif El-Azma • Jonny Steinberg • Iain Chambers • Isaac Julien • Emeka Ogboh • Teju Cole • Brian Chikwava • Isoje Chou • Mowoso • Jenny Mbaye • Tim Cresswell • Nick Mwaluko

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