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Raimi Gbadamosi pays tribute to the late Stuart Hall in a reflection upon the role of the black artist.

In 2004, Stuart Hall had this to say in “Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three ‘Moments’ in Post-war History”:

In the ritual exchange of stereotypes around the body between ‘race’, gender and sexuality, racism had deployed its most violent and destructive fantasies. This could not be undone by simply reversing the terms, whereby in a single move ‘black’ became ‘beautiful’ – a strategy of positive imagery which was briefly tried but proved inadequate. Instead of subverting a system of representation, reversal leaves it intact, only standing on its head! Indeed, as we know, nothing can protect the black body – a signifier caught in the endless play of power – against reappropriation.

I am going to focus on this essay as a pointer, as I am in a position to choose a text relevant to me then and now. In this essay, Hall analysed the waves of Black artistic production in Britain, and his discussion provided me with a way of understanding myself as an artist, and highlights the schisms apparent in visual culture that surround me in Johannesburg.

I am reminded here of the video for You Got Me by The Roots (featuring Erykah Badu); a tale of complicated love, visualised, that the song pushes through a narrative of work, trust, and desire. In the video, Black Thought, the rapper, walks around bodies collapsed and inert in the cityscape. He eventually lies down next to one of the bodies, and the world comes to life. Through it all, Erykah Badu reassures him, it is more than love; it is support, and faith, and the confidence that all will make sense at some point.

“Stuart Hall continues to be a conceptual lodestone for a number of generations of artists and thinkers.”

In “Black Diaspora Artists in Britain”, Hall historicizes an approach to modernism and beyond by Black artists, which led to a redefinition of art and artists in contemporary Britain and elsewhere. He tells of the generational shift from conformity born of faith in the Colonial system to anachronism that only the descendants of conformists are capable of. In this, Stuart Hall continues to be a conceptual lodestone for a number of generations of artists and thinkers.

Britain was fortunate; it had and has the likes of Stuart Hall, and CLR James, and Rasheed Araeen, and Lola Young, and Sarat Maharaj, and Paul Gilroy – the list could go on for quite a while-- and out of that came the possibility to address a complex and complicated system of cultural, economic, social, sexual, gendered and political exclusion that did not have to name race and class as a basis for maltreatment but could function on this basis nonetheless. And yet Black Britons cannot rest on their new found authority, for the system does not rest either.

‘The Empire strikes back’ is one of those phrases that still holds the opposition to a self-satisfied hegemony together. One thing learnt was that naming must never be given up, and while it is possible to celebrate Britain’s claim to an easy adoption of national and racial others (after it no longer has the capacity to exploit them and their resources), and the children of the ‘independence Age’ of the 1960s realised they had a valid claim to their home in the face of constant and continuing rejections by the mother country: One should never forget who the Empire really was and is. (Some had an Empire, some were the Empire)

Writers like Buchi Emecheta, who chronicled the period when Stuart Hall arrived in the United Kingdom through writing her own novels, told the type of stories Britain would rather forget, and John La Rose gave the gift of books to sustain the cultural and critical needs of an articulate black population. I have to pause and address the question of ‘black’ as a collective definer, a political position reliant on difference, but not on skin colour, even as skin functions as the marker of the difference. As a Black British Artist, blackness defines the terms of engagement, and still does, especially when in Johannesburg I get straight-on stares suffused with racial hate in the vegetable shop, because I dared to ask...
for passage past another shopper, and voices filled with welcome embrace me amidst discarded city-centre ruins. And for the doubters, context is everything, as Hall taught, it allows for meaning in the smallest things.

This was the black body, presented as a moving signifier – first, as an object of visibility which can at last be ‘seen’; then as a foreign body, trespassing into unexpected and tabooed locations; then as the site of an excavation. This is the body as a space or canvas, on which to conduct an exploration into the inner landscapes of black subjectivity; the body, also, as a point of convergence for the materialization of intersecting planes of difference – the gendered body, the sexual body, the body as subject, rather than simply the object of looking and desire.²

Even more complicated is the acceptance of artificial classifications beyond race. Hall provides tools for dealing with the imposed representations of what it is to be made subject, and his progression into the arts seems natural; it meant and means the role of artists too became significant in a struggle to be seen, to achieve a voice strong and loud enough to be heard and addressed, and to establish a viable collective identity. Where else does the fiction of lived existence loom larger, than in the art gallery?

Terms like Black and Ethnic Minorities, BEM for short, may have emerged as a stratifying strategy, and have seen success in polarising positions, individualising experience, and rendering the collective presence vulnerable to new definitions from the outside. But they too will fade away in the face of a conscious and informed self-appraisal.

I listened to Raheem DeVaughn sing You, and the question of representing a collective self loomed again. Hall is clear on this in his writing: the self is responsible, we have control over what is seen, and the Empire will strike back. I had to play Angie Stone’s Brotha to complete my picture, or would Erykah Badu’s Otherside of the Game been more suitable?

NOTES

REFERENCES
In her essay on new African literatures, Ashleigh Harris draws on an interrogation of form to delineate the ways in which African authors such as Chimamanda Adichie and NoViolet Bulawayo, schooled in American creative writing programmes, fail to convincingly capture the everydayness of African experience. For Harris, the positioning of these writers “in and for America”, compromises their ability to effectively engage with “African spaces”.

Of the five authors shortlisted for the 2013 Caine Prize for African Writing, three reside in the United States. Indeed, Tope Folarin is the first winner of the prize not born on the continent and his winning story, ‘A Miracle’ is based on Nigerian expatriate life in America. Only 5 of the 14 winners from the inception of the prize in 2000 are permanently residing in Africa (or at least, were at the time of winning the prize). Of course, following Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, we might agree that the Caine Prize is not “the arbiter of the best fiction in Africa”. In her somewhat tetchy dismissal of the significance of the prize in an interview with The Boston Review, Adichie states: “I don’t go to the Caine Prize to look for the best in African fiction…. I go to my mailbox, where my workshop people send me their stories.” Adichie is referring to the Farafina Trust writing workshop that she runs annually in Nigeria. Nevertheless, precisely because the Caine Prize attempts to bridge the gap between individual mailboxes and global readerships, it is a useful gauge for observing trends in contemporary African writing. And, while I ultimately agree with Adichie that the prize is by no means representative of African writing, it is certainly indicative of the broader trend that I am highlighting here: a steady turn in a significant amount of African writing away from everyday life on the continent towards immigrant and diaspora experience, which is occurring (unsurprisingly) in resonance with the emigration of many of Africa’s top writers to the global north. A significant amount of recent successful African fictions evidence this trend, amongst them Chris Abani’s The Virgin of the Flames (2007); NoViolet Bulawayo’s We Need New Names (2013); Brian Chikwava’s Harare North (2009); Teju Cole’s Open City (2011); Zakes Mda’s Cion (2007); Taiye Selasi’s Ghana Must Go (2013) and, even Adichie’s own, Americanah (2013), though this last does also deal with the complexities of repatriation, too.

Eileen Julien has called such novels “extroverted African novels”, those being novels that are more often than not written “by novelists who...are living beyond their countries’ borders”, and which “speak outward and represent locality to nonlocal others, be they expatriate communities abroad, other African nationals on the continent, Japanese, Europeans, Brazilians, or U.S. students.” (Julien 2006, 684). We might argue that such texts be applauded as a reversal of the expectations of autochthony in African writing, a rejection of the blunt assumption that African writing should only be about Africa. We would, indeed, do well to look at these narratives as part of Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe’s prompt that we ‘revisit the frontiers of commonality’. They write:

Though the work of difference has performed important functions in the scholarly practice that sought to undercut imperial paradigms, it is clearly time, in the case of Africa, to revisit the frontiers of commonality and the potential of sameness-as-worldliness. This is a far cry from a proposition that would aim at rehabilitating facile assumptions about universality and particularity. After all, the unity of the world is nothing but its diversity. As Jean-Luc Nancy argues, “the world is a multiplicity of worlds, and its unity is the mutual sharing and exposition of all its worlds – within this world.” As for the “sharing of the world,” it is, fundamentally, the “law of the world.” (Mbembe & Nuttall 2004, 351; citing Nancy 2000, 185)
Yet, following Julien, who writes that this is “not simply a matter of a novelist’s intention to ‘write for’ a hegemonic or international audience but of multiple features that traverse or inhabit a text...[What] passes for the African novel is created by publishing, pedagogical, and critical practices.” (2006, 685), my assertion here is that African writing in the global north has not, on the whole, succeeding in finding the forms that would carry this ‘sameness-as-worldliness’. That is, for the most part, this body of writing is capitulating to a notion of literary form that, I hope to argue, is not in dialogue with African everyday life and as such eliminates Africa as one of the sites upon which form is (globally) contingent. As Nuttall and Mbembe remind us, ‘all knowledge is contingent on other knowledges’ and, as such, ‘we must read Africa in the same terms we read everywhere else’ (2004, 351). The inverse is also true: we must read everywhere else in the same terms we read Africa.

I am not suggesting that there is such a thing as authentic African form. Instead, prompted by this year’s Johannesburg Workshop of Theory and Criticism (JWTC) on ‘The Life of Forms’, I wish to ask a series of questions around literary form and how it is sculpted by the economic, social and material contexts in which it emerges, and what this might mean for contemporary African fiction in the context I describe above.

At this year’s session of the JWTC, architect Eyal Weizman outlined his notion of ‘forensic architecture’, which he explains elsewhere thus: “Rather than to the human agent, forensic architecture needs to be tuned to the history of materials, surfaces, structures, and form,” and thus understand that the “…skins of buildings are complex membranes registering minute transformations in environmental conditions as much as abrupt events.” (115) Weizman uses the term ‘political plastic’ “to describe the way in which the elastic spaces of the frontier – roads, barriers, colonies, military bases – register in their layout and form the forcefield around them.” (116) I wager that we might do well to consider the form of literary texts, too, as ‘political plastic’ registering the shocks and waves of the everyday, as much as the grander historical forcefields surrounding them. Unlike the building, which is constantly in the process of being formed and deformed by these external pressures, we have traditionally read the form of the text as a completed action. I would like to rethink that commonplace here, suggesting that the form of a literary text cannot be diminished to being understood as simply the fabula or syuzhet of the Russian formalists. Rather, this approach to literary form, returns us to the material history impacting the creation of that form and, as such, is a matter (a material, if you will) that expands well beyond any individual articulation in a specific text. In this sense, the forensic approach I am investigating does not at all resemble the forensic literary approaches of the New Critics, whose dissection of the text emulated and co-constructed scientific methods of empirical research.

A concrete example of a literary approach that reads form in this sense is Mark McGurl’s The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing, where he provides an account of “the remarkably smooth entry of the discipline of creative writing into the U.S. university over the past fifty years” (21), and considers how this reproduced “the spirit of communal endeavour and mutual influence found in the Paris and Greenwich village café scenes of an earlier era” (5). For McGurl, the institutional history of creative writing programs in US universities cannot be understated in the form, aesthetics and tendency towards self-reflexivity of postwar American fiction. Indeed, it is the key site in which American writing has formulated its distinctive postwar characteristics of what McGurl calls “technomodernism”, “high cultural pluralism” and “lower-middle-class modernism” (32). These have become the forms of a certain material, economic and institutional history, forms that now pervade, often unconsciously, postwar American fiction. McGurl’s brilliant analysis of how these major tenets in postwar writing are formulated in the pedagogical principles underlying creative writing programs is too detailed and nuanced to outline here, but of greatest importance for my own argument is his insistence that the creative writing program has consistently produced the idea of ‘creative writing’ as a dynamic triangular interplay between ‘authentic experience and observation’ (“write what you know”), ‘creativity and freedom’ (“find your voice”) and, ‘craft and tradition’ (“show, don’t tell”) (23). The formation emerging from within this triangular conception of creative writing that concerns us most here is what McGurl calls ‘high cultural pluralism’: that which “combines the routine operation of modernist auto-poetics with a rhetorical performance of cultural group membership pre-eminently...marked as ethnic” (56). Importantly, “the high cultural pluralist writer is... called upon to speak from the point of view of one or another hyphenated population, synthesizing the particularity of ethnic – or analogously marked – voice with the elevated idiom of literary modernism.” (57) McGurl’s remark carries greater force when we consider the increasing number of successful contemporary African prose writers, particularly novelists, who have sharpened their skills in MFA creative
writing programs, or as fellows at these departments, in the United States and elsewhere. This list of MFA graduates includes some of Africa’s most renowned authors, including Chimamanda Adichie, NoViolet Bulawayo, Mukoma Wa Ngugi, Chris Abani, and Chinele Okparanta; while writers who have had residencies in creative writing university departments include Binyavanga Wainaina, Brian Chikwava (in the UK), Teju Cole, Helon Habila, and Henrietta Rose-Innes. What is of particular significance here is that the African writer’s presence on the creative writing program is predetermined as the sign of ‘the high cultural pluralism’, thereby calling that writer to write in an ethnically inflected voice of literary modernism (to paraphrase McGurl). This issue has received relatively substantial debate when it comes to the content of the African texts in American writing programs. Think, for example, of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s narrative in her TED talk ‘The Danger of the Single Story’ where she recalls “a professor who once told [her] that [her] novel was not authentically African,” recalling McGurl’s ‘authentic experience and observation’ (“write what you know” 23). The professor in question was clearly a creative writing instructor who, says Adichie, went on to tell her that her “characters were too much like him, an educated and middle class man.” It is this scene that, perhaps, McGurl misses out in his account of the centrality of the creative writing program in American letters: the African writer, an increasingly likely presence on these programs who corroborates the program’s claims to being ‘highly culturally pluralist’, is not expected to write what she knows, but rather to write to a script of Africa already determined in the minds of American readers. This is, of course, precisely Adichie’s point, but the matter is far more complex when we refract it through the lens of form in the terms I am trying to grapple with here.

If we read form in Weizmann’s terms, as political plastic shaped by the infinitesimal events of the everyday, it is instructive to consider McGurl’s discussion of the émigré writer, Vladimir Nabokov’s literary career in America. In this approach, Nabokov’s experience as an émigré, after his flight from the devastation of second-world-war Europe to the comparative haven of US university life, is as significant to the fiction that he was writing at the time as are his mundane frustrations with his work as a teacher of basic Russian at first Wellesley and then Cornell University. The irritations of the frustrated writer, making a living through teaching, becomes as significant in McGurl’s reading of Lolita and Pale Fire as the broader socio-historical forces that tend to dominate criticism of Nabokov’s work. Mcgurl’s methodology has an element of Weizman’s forensic in its reading of the American postwar novel as a kind of political plastic, overtly shaped by the immediate and even mundane everyday material contexts of lives of work, education, administration and bureaucracy (all of which prove to be as significant to the formation of a novel as to the daily, barely perceptible, deterioration of a building). It is important to note that the specific precarity of the émigré in immediate post-war America is precisely what necessitates Nabokov’s work as a second-language teacher. The lines between the superficial and the seismic, the mundane and the epic become all the more knotted, the more precarious the life of the writer is.

So what happens to form in the African émigré experience, or when African writing is validated only by virtue of its participation in a broader form of American fiction? Another architectural intervention at the JWTC prompts further contemplation in this regard. In a paper ‘Poor Form’, Joshua Comaroff and Ong-Ker Shing elaborate their notion of awkward form, which...frequently appears at the historical interface of language and type. In such a moment, the resources of an existing vocabulary are put under pressure by changes in scale or composition, required by accelerated socio-economic development. The transitional building appears ill-formed, as its devices are maladapted to its task (20).

If we take NoViolet Bulawayo’s highly acclaimed, Booker Prize shortlisted, We Need New Names (2013) as an example, I would claim that this novel demonstrates what emerges in the meeting point of the émigré writing on the political plastics of the American writing academy (note that Bulawayo received her MFA from Cornell University). We Need New Names is, indeed, an awkward book. That is not to say, ‘bad’. Indeed, as Nabokov’s equally awkward Pale Fire indicates, the awkward may be the very beginning of new and significant forms of cultural expression. Form cannot move forward without those who venture into the realm of the awkward. But the odd structural break in the text between the sections set in Zimbabwe and those set in the US, are indicative of both an awkwardness in syntax, as well as the problem of form in the sense I am trying to capture here. The book reads as two stories written for creative writing class: the first driven by the content demands of ‘writing what you know’ as the member of the group bringing the high cultural pluralism into the group. Here we get Africa, in all its colourful, intense, impoverished, traumatic detail through
the eyes of a young girl, Darling, whose experiences instantly evoke a sympathetic response in the reader. Then, quite suddenly, Darling is in America, trying to manage the culture shock of that shift as much as the reader is trying to make sense of the suddenness of the contextual shift. This second half reads as the cinch in the deal of making this an American fiction: in writing the immigrant experience of the protagonist Darling, Bulawayo tethers her 'Africa' ("write what we expect you to know") to the American context ("write your American everyday") in a way that leaves both sections oddly unsatisfying. The everyday of Africa, quite masterfully rendered in the first section, is reduced to a kind of backstory for the real narrative: life as an immigrant in America. As such, I would argue, African everyday life becomes subsumed into the demands of American readership. The problem of narrative form (an awkward and inadequately motivated break in the middle of the novel) becomes indicative of a greater underlying awkwardness: the positioning of the African writer in and for America.

“African everyday life becomes subsumed into the demands of American readership”

Adichie’s short story ‘The Shivering’ from her 2009 collection The Thing Around Your Neck provides another example of this awkward form. This story, set in Princeton, portrays the budding friendship of Ukamaka, a young woman writing a PhD in English Literature and trying to come to terms with a recent break-up, and Chinedu, a man living (unbeknownst to Chinedu) illegally in the US, under constant threat of deportation. The story develops in the interstices of what Chinedu does not say about his situation, whilst Ukamaka prattles on about her previous boyfriend. When the reveal comes that Chinedu is homosexual, the implied threat behind what his forced return to homophobic Nigeria might entail becomes all the more poignant. Underneath this nuanced and understated account of two young Nigerian émigré’s growing friendship lies the seemingly extraneous and unidimensional setting of Princeton university. As Adichie occasionally tethers her narrative to street names or recognisable buildings in the university town, one begins to feel the shape of the institution itself emerging underneath the skin of the text. Yet, other than marking the class differences between the two protagonists, Princeton has little to do with the story. Indeed, one wonders whether the setting for the story emerged out of Adichie’s own time in Princeton as a Hodder Fellow in 2005-6, which may give substance to a reading of the story as exemplary of the high cultural pluralism generated in these settings. But less speculatively, we might consider McGurl’s observation that in the Program Era the campus novel has been “a conspicuously flourishing genre” (46) and that “the proliferation of universities as settings for novels is...what we might call a thematic symptom of a larger shift in the institutional arrangements of postwar literary production.” (47) In McGurl’s analysis, the university setting works to give the novel the "honorific status of literature" (47), a question that might concern us when reading Adichie’s story. For not only does the story’s immediate setting evoke the Ivy-league, but the character Ukamaka makes casual reference to Wharton, UPenn and Bryn Mawr too. This evokes the publishing industry’s obeisance to the US university as the ultimate arbitrator of literary worth evident in the inevitable inclusion of authors’ MFA degrees somewhere in the paratexts of a novel: an inclusion that appears particularly important when selling texts by non-American authors. The evocation of the academic institution in Adichie’s text, I argue, has a double function of articulating Ukamaka’s class assumptions (which are in part what actively silence Chinedu), but also embeds the story itself in this cultural capital, performing itself as ‘good literature’. As such Ukamaka and Chinedu’s story is hardly exemplary of a ‘sharing of worlds’ in Nancy’s sense, but rather a performative of the African-in-America as a confirmation of the high cultural pluralism of the American university.

What this amounts to might indeed be excellent African-immigrant writing, but as this literature seeks validity within a notion of creative writing and the novel produced in the global north, what happens to the writing of the spaces of Africa? Teju Cole’s highly acclaimed Open City (2011) might be a case in point. Though I do not have time to discuss it here, it suffices to note that this book, which is being hailed as a great African novel, almost entirely circumvents the everyday reality of Lagos.

My concern here has to do with yet another material factor: over and above the problem of resources that mobilizes so many people with the means to leave Africa to do so in search of better life circumstances, is the problem of publishing resources across the continent. With little access to local publishers, African writers are increasingly turning their attention to where the money is: overseas prizes, fellowships, publishing and distribution. But these mechanisms are distinctly not a machinery for Nancy’s sharing-the-world. On the contrary, they demand both content and formal reshaping; one, I argue, that is no longer fully conversant with everyday life in Africa. This observation returns me to Comaroff and Shing’s argument about awkward or poor form whereby, “form becomes awkward or fails to suspend its contents in a kind of anodyne or harmonious
expression – what architects call ‘resolution’” (18) and in which the “the transitional building appears ill-formed, as its devices are maladapted to its task” (20). In order to truly unpick the significance of such architectural observations for the realm of literature, we must first ask what the ‘task’ of the literary might be in our present moment? After the revolutionary politics of the avant-garde to undo the violence of subjectivity itself; after the literatures of witness and collective memory that have been so present across postcolonial literatures, as well as in postmodernism; what do we see as the task of literature today? The question is too large to be adequately addressed here, but the forensic methodology that I am promoting would enable a view of the literary as the potential for sharing-of-the-world, in Nancy’s sense, open. That is to say, literature need not tell a story of nationhood, or location as an index to identity or nation, or even continent, but it should be the site from which vernacular cosmopolitanisms are produced.

These ideas clearly resonate with Kelly Gillespie’s recent account of CODESRIA’s ‘Africa N’ko: Africa in the World: Debating the Colonial library’ conference held in Dakar 2013. As Gillespie notes the common theme across the conference that “even as we take the signs of Africa seriously, we must not be trapped by a parochial Africanness,” and that Africa’s “place is in the world, and...despite an ongoing structural condition of African structural marginalisation, [Africans] must proceed as if the world is [theirs].” (46) For Gillespie, the key problem though, is how to go about the writing of African cosmopolitanism, which should be “a thick archival stream for our experimental use”. I wish to refract this question through the issue of the contemporary African novel, here, paying particular attention to the economic and historical forces that are shaping its form. In this sense, I am in agreement with what Gillespie describes as the “most provocative suggestion that emerged from the conference”, that being that the best way to go about “this audacious work of writing African cosmopolitanism, was to take inspiration from contemporary African artists” (47). We might add that producing vernacular cosmopolitanisms (see Bhabha and Pollack) can become the task of literature only if we see the act of literary writing as a kind of opening of the text (as in Weizman’s political plastic, or membrane of the everyday life) to the impact of the everyday.

This is not to say, however, that by simply being in the everyday of African life, means that the forms of the literature somehow automatically fall into place. Indeed, the debate about the South African publishing industry that occurred in 2007, prompted by literary academic Michael Titlestad’s review of Kgebetli Moele’s Room 207 and Gerald Kraak’s Ice in the Lungs, is a case in point. In his sharp criticism of Moele’s book as ‘unfinished work’, Titlestad points to the awkwardness of the entire assemblage of the novel, which he describes as a “shapeless textual pastiche” that “traffics rather tediously in the aura of authenticity as it meanders from one seemingly unmotivated encounter to the next”. Part of Titlestad’s point is that the publishing industry is overproducing this type of awkward, poorly formed, literature because “in the wake of the truth commission, we know that many individuals’ stories have been excluded from the public domain and publishers are, like other South Africans, concerned to redress this exclusion”. Titlestad ultimately claims that “publishers are prefiguring our literary history” by “deciding in advance what the national literary scene is” (47). Indeed, this does not mean that Moele’s book is the poorer for failing to achieve a European form of city writing, but rather because it relies too heavily on those forms that are not in dialogue with his content: life in the African city today.

I am making an argument for the contingency of form (as political plastic) and content in the making of African cosmopolitanism and in our interpretation of African literature. And, I am arguing that if African writing becomes dominated by texts formulated in spaces no longer conversant with everyday life in Africa, the capacity of that writing to be the reservoir of African cosmopolitanism will be severely attenuated.

The good news is that these nascent forms (because the pace with which everyday life across the globe is altering demands ever new forms) of the African city are being successfully and artfully developed on the continent. I leave this paper with two brief examples of publishing sites that are resisting a situation in which the global publishing industry is ‘prefiguring our literary history’. Chimurenga and Kwani? are two literary journals, based in Cape Town and Nairobi respectively, both of which include trans-national African writing
across multiple genres and which use both technology and print to open up new formal possibilities. For the most part, scholars have seen these literary papers as a site in which up-and-coming African writers can prove their art before entering the global publishing arena. I would like to suggest that these sites are exemplary of African cosmopolitanism, that their very materiality is conversant with African everyday life and as such are the key sites in which we are seeing African writing shed the skins of its forbears (both European and African).

These sites of literary production are self-consciously bringing form to their surface; making overt the political plastic underlying their conception and distribution. As such, literary journals like Chimurenga and Kwani? might be best approached through what David Fieni, a scholar of graffiti and tagging, calls ‘nomad grammatology’. In ‘What a Wall Wants, or How Graffiti thinks’ Fieni describes this approach thus:

[Nomad grammatology is] not a theory of walls, graffiti, mobility, illegality, or sovereignty; instead, it is a practice of reading and a form of experimental cooperation between different kinds of writing. Nomad grammatology does not claim to speak for the subaltern; rather, it sees the positioning of subalternity and attempts to think in relation to this positioning (75-6).

Like Weizman’s building, which comes alive to the possibilities of different kinds of reading and writing (over) in the forensic approach, Fieni’s wall comes alive to a new realm of affect under the (re)inscriptions it undergoes in becoming a surface for graffiti and tagging. Thus, for Fieni,


This attention to the moment of writing reemphasises the significance of the everyday in all acts of signification. But more than that, it draws attention to the ways the deforming of the letters actively reforms the wall. If we read the literary text with this re-emphasis on these three factors: the moment of writing, the need to deform old forms so as to break the awkwardness that they impose, and how this leads to the reforming of the structures of capital that the publishing and book industries are shaped by, we may get to something like the approach I feel is required in the reading of contemporary African writing.

**WORKS CITED**

OCCUPYING SPACE: THE BATTLE FOR POLITICS

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Helena Chavez Mac Gregor reads recent modes of global protest in order to argue that claims made by civilians of and against the state are no longer simply asserted through a battle over representation, but have transitioned into a politics of occupation that prompts a rethinking of the very meanings of the political.

For more than a decade, the construction of politics has been determined within the logic of exception and sovereignty. Although at the end of the twentieth century the Balkan conflict already heralded a logic of war, following September 11th, the early 2000s were marked by terror, creating a foundation where, following the proposals of Carl Schmitt, the specific difference from which to determine the political was to be found once more in the figure of the enemy.

Regardless of the fact that this seems to be the norm of civilizing political logic, something has changed in recent years, from the “Arab Spring” to the student movements in Chile and the United Kingdom, from 15-M in Spain to Occupy Wall Street in the U.S.A., from the mobilizations leading up to and following the elections in Mexico to the protests for transportation in Brazil. All different forms of protest, impossible to catalogue within a simple group or category, but which nevertheless challenge us to imagine what sort of politics is outlined in this new configuration: political forms that surpass what we had called “social movements,” “civil disobedience,” “revolution” or “resistance.” Occupations of space that have implied a change in the conversation, a force that appears constantly under siege, obliging us to ask what it is that appears in the outbreaks of protest, after its possibilities of rupture, but also after its limits and its dangers. It is possible to think that the different mobilizations emerging in much of the world signify a fissure in the logic of political philosophy, reiterating the question of the significance of a category that, after years of living under the paradigm of violence/right and exception/sovereignty, has become the question of claims, of the spaces of appearance, of the forms of representation and distribution; a questioning of organization that manifests a disagreement that seems not to want to assume the condition of bare life and other figures of exception.

Without conflating these processes, certain traits do present themselves as constant across almost all of these episodes of mobilization. For one, there is a growing discontent in the face of exclusion from politics itself, whether in “authoritarian” regimes or in supposed “democracies,” which has led people to take over streets and plazas, and to seek out forms of association and assembly in a clear show of disagreement with existing politics of participation and distribution. Another constant we can identify is these protests’ struggle with the communications media, a battle not just over what the media transmit, but also over the forms of representation that they have created in order to produce identification, and which attempt to reduce the forms that do appear to pre-determined “enemies:” a terrorist, a hooded thug, an anarchist, an extremist, an illegal immigrant, etc. It is clear that the role of the media in the contemporary world is played out within the alliances they forge not only with specific governments, but also with economic powers with whom they attempt to produce audiences and spectators (as support and legitimacy) rather than forms of the public.

In Mexico, the recent demonstrations of the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores por la Educación (CNTE, a teachers’ union founded in Mexico in 1979 as an alternative to the mainstream Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación [SNTE] by...
teachers in the Union from the poorer, southern states of Mexico) between April and October 2013, have met with a strong media campaign discrediting them. The sort of strategy followed by this faction of the teachers’ union takes a classical format of putting pressure on the federal government through blocking traffic and taking over spaces like the Zócalo or blocking access to the international airport in Mexico City. The kind of representation that most of the media generate is ideal for provoking a generalized rejection by civil society at large, wherein what once again comes to emerge, with commentaries both on television and in social networks, is a contempt that is sustained by a profound classism and racism. The violence of the rejection, embodied in a series of representations – poor, lazy, dark-skinned, etc. – contributes to the diminishment of the right of social protest in the seek of individual interests.³

“Against conditions of representation, “occupation” of space has functioned as a destabilization that forecloses the possibility of exclusion.”

Against conditions of representation, “occupation” of space has functioned as a destabilization that forecloses the possibility of exclusion. On one hand, channels and networks of communication are occupied, making political use of technology not just as a matter of creating a space of contagion and dissemination, but also forms of empowerment that allow for a type of action in the network that establishes forms of constant organization and research.⁴ And, on the other, in an occupation related to but not determined by the previous one, public space is occupied through an emplacement of the body, suspending the everyday logic of spaces and finding, at the moment of assembly, a shared program that suspends distances, whether these be social, class-based, of agenda, or of political party, to create a moment of effervescence and of disidentification where other sorts of enunciations, performativities and affects are put into play.

These modes of occupying space mark changes of emplacement, localization and grammar wherein occupation as a political tool calls into question its state and military use. As W. J. T. Mitchell asserts in the text “Image, Space, Revolution: The Arts of Occupation”:

For years, many of us have been thinking of participation primarily in these terms: as the imposition of martial law on a resistant population, the proliferation of dictatorships in the name of resistance to communism (or fundamentalism, or terrorism), and the fostering of “freedom” (for markets and speculative capital, nor for human beings). But now, suddenly, the word “occupation” has taken on a new meaning: the reclaiming of public space by masses of disenfranchised people; the peaceful, nonviolent seizure of places in an effort to provide a new beginning; a foundational space for justice, democracy, and equality. (Mitchell 2013: 105)

This appropriation of space raises important questions about how to re-signify politics, where what emerges, beyond a social movement properly so-called, is a battle for the space of appearance.

One way of understanding this struggle for space is via the construction of politics as a mode of appearance that takes as its basis Hannah Arendt’s argument, in which action and speech create a space between participants, a space of appearance wherein I appear before others as those others appear before me. This form precedes any construction of the public, as a result of which the space of appearance is no longer an ontological condition of space, but becomes rather a mode of doing, of action, in which occupations (and here we should not limit ourselves strictly to bodies assembled in the street or plaza) activate a claim not just to the space but rather to the public. That is, they create space through appearance, suspending any idea of politics based on “belonging,” “rights,” or “origin.”

This principle of appearance from which Arendt begins is prevalent in recent arguments – by Judith Butler and W. J. T. Mitchell, among others – and allows us to think politics from a frame that takes complete leave of the paradigms of political theory, or that allows us at least to problematize the frame. What form of relation can be created out of an affirmation that renounces an ontology that is a logical consequence a pure abandonment, of being disposable entities who participate in their own condition of exclusion? Appearance enables the creation of a politics wherein there is no longer a “law” of distribution, but rather a
series of historical conditions that may be questioned, debated and disarmed.

One possibility presented on the basis of aesthetics is to problematize the frames of the configurations for thinking about how these distributions appear and then to interrogate them. I propose that we think of aesthetics as a condition of possibility upon which the politics of appearance is established, and that determines how that which appears does appear.

By following Kant’s proposals on aesthetics, postulated in the Critique of Pure Reason, where he postulates the transcendental aesthetic – space and time – as the condition of the possibility of all experience, revised subsequently by Foucault and re-conceived by Rancière, it is possible to situate aesthetics in its relationship to experience. This field is presented as the structure in which the forms of appearance and the representation of that which appears are determined, from which the forms of the perceptible are distributed, generating a distribution of political visibilities and enunciations.

Rancière argues that aesthetics is a distribution of the perceptible that determines a mode of articulation between forms of action, production, perception and thought. With this Rancière means to point out that the political is first and foremost a battle over perceptible/sensible material that generates modes of visibility regarding the things that the community considers ‘able to be seen’, as well as the appropriate subjects who may see. This ‘seeing’ in no way refers to a subject’s condition or capacity, but rather to a configuration and production of knowledges out of the forms of appearance of intersecting actions and reactions.

Aesthetics is thus a distribution of the perceptible that establishes the political as a field of visibilities. Rancière’s phrasing of the problem follows Kant, insofar as he asks about the conditions of possibility of experience, in order to work with it in a Foucauldian manner, starting from the question of the “a priori” that is no longer a given structure but rather an historical formation of knowledges – visibilities and enunciations – and thus to question how what can be ‘seen’ is shaped, and how this ‘seeing’ determines subjects’ participation in the political.

In the framework proposed by Rancière, there is an “aesthetics” at the core of politics, that can be understood “as the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to experience” (Rancière 2000: 2013) but politics, in Rancière, has two meanings. On the one hand, le politique, or the political as translated in English, that can be identified with the police as the general law that determines the distribution of parts and roles in a community as well as its forms of exclusion. On other hand, la politique, or politics, “which only exists in intermittent acts of implementation that lack any overall principle or law, and whose only common characteristics is an empty operator: dissensus” (Rockhill 2004: 90).

The distinction is important, since it eliminates any “original” distribution. It is evident that any configuration of the community is historical and can be questioned in the enunciation on the part of certain subjects who have been defined excluded. Following Rancière’s argument, one could say that the problem for the configuration of these subjects who “have a part in not having a part” is not the place they ‘naturally’ occupy outside the community, but rather the very law that determines what can be considered community.

It is clear that there is no given inside or outside. It is thus a ‘police’ that generates a determined politics of appearance where subjects are produced within a set of dispositifs, to use Foucault’s term, from which the specific forms that circulate and give shape to specific distributions and classifications are established. If, however, we leave the frame of apprehension that marks this politics of appearance, we might be able to see other forms in which this figure appears in order to render the law of their appearing contradictory and assume a force that would require us to think of politics as a field of action rather than one of representation or identification:

I now propose to reserve the term politics for an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration – that of the part of those who have no part. [...] Political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place’s destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise; it
Politics can be thought of as a manifestation that undoes the perceptible ordinations of the police order by way of a series of interventions that, through the idea of the actualization and corroboration of equality, allow the frames of appearance to be transformed so as to open up other fields of experience. This notion of politics breaks with classical and modern political theory, which seek their foundations in the community. Here, the only principle is that there is none, and that politics is an activity that makes it possible for the distribution of the perceptible to be questioned.

Rancière’s argument about the “aesthetics of politics” is interesting, in that it makes possible a complication of Hannah Arendt’s argument about the space of appearance since, through Rancière’s distinction between politics and the political, appearance marks two moments: on the one hand, the logic of appearance as police, and on the other, its moment of contestation as politics. It is from this idea of appearance as action that it seems to me we can understand a part of that which is being activated in some of the occupations of space as protest that we have witnessed in recent years. This allows us not to fall into a kamikaze hope for revolt which has been a temporality and a conditioned duration because they always end up ceding, whether due to police or military pressure, or from the very exhaustion of the bodies of the police. Space of appearance, to use Arendt’s category, cannot be reduced to “occupation” of the street as it involves the constructions of the public sphere that works in a sustained way; it occupies public spaces and then withdraws; it collaborates with other groups and insists, through an almost artistic action, on generating a claim that confronts the lack of legal frames for death and forced disappearance. Space of appearance, thus, cannot be reduced to “occupation” of the street as it involves the constructions of the public sphere that can emerge in virtual spaces, artistic practices or other forms of the common.

In these “occupations” what is at stake is not a “new” political model, but rather a change in the conversation about what politics means. This is not to say that these mobilizations, for lack of a better term, should go on to create a change in structures, in the modes of governance, or in national trajectories. What is happening is of great complexity, given that these kinds of protests, encounters, and outbreaks – which are not articulated into a “social movement” in the classical sense – have a temporality and a conditioned duration because they respond to a rupture of order and of everyday life that always ends up ceding, whether due to police or military pressure, or from the very exhaustion of the bodies of the country are living under siege, the conditions for a possible occupation of space -in the classical sense- are very limited. It is impossible to reduce the appearing-as-space of politics to the occupation of the street. We must think of other forms of appear and of appearance beyond the moment of the “swarm.” One interesting exercise that seems important to mention is “Bordamos por la paz”5, (“We Embroider for Peace”) Collective who, since 2011, have been creating a “memorial” of embroideries, which are made in both public and private spaces with the names of people who have been assassinated (red thread) and those who have disappeared (green thread). This collective, which has cells throughout the country and the world, works in a sustained way; it occupies public spaces and then withdraws; it collaborates with other groups and insists, through an almost artistic action, on generating a claim that confronts the lack of legal frames for death and forced disappearance. Space of appearance, thus, cannot be reduced to “occupation” of the street as it involves the constructions of the public sphere that can emerge in virtual spaces, artistic practices or other forms of the common.

In this sense, something that allows us to think of the diverse occupations of space that are being generated around the world is that there is a claim for other logics of appearance, that there is a disagreement about the mode of distribution, participation and the very definition of life. It is important to emphasize that this space of appearance, to use Arendt’s category, cannot be limited to the street or the plaza as Judith Butler has warned. In the case of Mexico, which is experiencing a “civil war”, it is undeniable that because many parts of the country are living under siege, the conditions for a possible occupation of space -in the classical sense- are very limited. It is impossible to reduce the appearing-as-space of politics to the occupation of the street. We must think of other forms of appear and of appearance beyond the moment of the “swarm.” One interesting exercise that seems important to mention is “Bordamos por la paz”5, (“We Embroider for Peace”) Collective who, since 2011, have been creating a “memorial” of embroideries, which are made in both public and private spaces with the names of people who have been assassinated (red thread) and those who have disappeared (green thread). This collective, which has cells throughout the country and the world, works in a sustained way; it occupies public spaces and then withdraws; it collaborates with other groups and insists, through an almost artistic action, on generating a claim that confronts the lack of legal frames for death and forced disappearance. Space of appearance, thus, cannot be reduced to “occupation” of the street as it involves the constructions of the public sphere that can emerge in virtual spaces, artistic practices or other forms of the common.

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that expose themselves to extreme conditions. These spaces are not permanent, nor can they be. They are moments loaded with affectivity, emotion, imagination, rebellion, and empowerment, but that necessarily confront both the question of organization and the dilemma of what to do with respect to the law and rights. There are immensely interesting cases of processes that have been triggered or potentiated by the moment of outbreak or of “swarming”, but which supposed a different working logic. One of them is the Plataforma de Afectados por las Hipotecas (PAH, Platform for People Affected by Mortgages) in Spain, which has, for several years, created a platform of social work that attempts, by way of legal contestations and escraches [protests that target powerful individuals in their daily lives], to put a stop to evictions. PAH took to the streets in November 2010 with the Stop Evictions campaign, which gained even more momentum during the movement's mobilizations on May 15 of that year. PAH became a meeting point for people in danger of losing their homes, organized locally by citizens and activists to provide legal advice and promote acts of civil resistance. 6

What seems to be important, beyond moments of effervescence, is to attempt to work within what these processes open up, in the forms that appear – perhaps only to disappear – and to attempt at that point to undertake a slow, constant labor of inquiry, of critique, of imagination and of organization. It is a matter of not exhausting oneself in the difficulty of transforming current conditions – above all the articulation between economy and violence generated by capitalism – and toppling over into indifference or into extreme forms of direct action. After the repression of outbreaks, it is quite common for there to emerge forms of resistance closer to direct action, or in the case of countries with a long history of guerrilla warfare, to forms of uprising that run back into logics that are well-suited to power’s forms of representing “the enemy”.

In Mexico, the beginning of the new presidential cycle, 1st of December 2013, began with the demonstrations of self-described “anarchist” groups who have taken protest to be a space of direct action. Beyond formulating a judgment on these forms of confrontation, the question that arises is whether such operations can allow for the emergence of a political space. The very evocation of “anarchism” already signals the central problem, which is that such tactics are found in a type of classical political logic with which authoritarian governments, as is Mexico’s, know how to play very well: by polarizing civil society with media campaigns that discredit through fear: deploying, shock groups, infiltrators, political repression, etc. It is clear from the tragic cases of Libya, Egypt and Syria that the danger of these appearances is that they clash with logics of power that do not want to lose, or to give up their forms of administration, and the consequence is war. In this sense, it seems important to maintain the battle for space, which does not assume the street to be the only form of appearance, but rather maintains tension out of paradoxical forms from which identification would be impossible; an appearance that would make possible subtle but constant operations from which working processes and processes of legal inscription and insertion could later be unleashed in order to be able to generate processes of a broader temporality, and where the curve of the outbreak would be a moment of explosion, but not the only way out.

The process of imagining a new politics will take time, and will not only depend on what appears but also on the work done with it, on knowing how to metabolize the energies of protest without succumbing to the daydream of catharsis, on being able to take ad absurdum the productions of representations and the distribution of places and functions in order to keep seeking the fissure where politics could be something beyond abandonment and exception.

NOTES
1 Translated by Dr. Christopher Michael Fraga
2 This text was developed thanks to the Postdoctoral Grants Program at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, during a Postdoc at the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM.
3 Confront messages that circulate on the web: “#CNTE teachers come from coastal states = dark-skinned, smelly and troublesome, coincidence? I think not.” (Twitter feed @Zorritoooo, August 27, 2013); “If I’m late to class tomorrow because of the CNTE’s gang of Indian servants, I’ll kill their children and rape their cunt wives (no, better to kill them)” (Twitter feed @RaulJMNz, August 23,
Currently there are several research groups generating new methodologies that attempt to explain the great complexity of the uses of technology in these outbreaks and what seems to be a “technopolitical” logic that makes it possible to argue that the use of these channels greatly exceeds the simple viral moment, positing strategies and tactics that allow for a new political organization. See for example http://datanalysis15m.wordpress.com/ (accessed October 29, 2013). This sort of analysis does not imply forgetting that the counterpart of the political uses of technology is the explosion of a market that collaborates with increasingly sophisticated forms of surveillance.

http://bordamosporlapaz.blogspot.mx/

IS PHILOSOPHY BLUE?

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In what follows, Lewis Gordon theorises the nodes of intersection between philosophy and blues music and in so doing argues that blackness, as a philosophical and rhythmic condition, signals both the universal and the modern.

I here offer a portrait of the blues as a philosophical medium. A critical way of looking at the world from the perspective of the African diaspora, what, we may ask, can we learn from looking at philosophy in blue?

There are many ways to talk about the blues. Here are two. First, the blues is a form of black music. That is pretty well known. Second, the blues is a condition that transcends music. The music is, in other words, an expression of the blues. A philosophy of the blues, or perhaps blues philosophy, is more concerned with the latter.

That blues music is known as a form of black music already occasions some of the pathologies of dealing with things black in western academic thought and research. As W.E.B. Du Bois observed in The Souls of Black Folk more than a century ago, to speak of that which is created by black people is almost always to address not only problems but also the realities of people treated as problems themselves. No wonder black people have the blues. In North America, the ascription became metonymic, as the late Amiri Baraka’s eponymic book Blues People attests.

Part of the problem, however, is (sorry for the awkwardness) the problem’s failure of problematisation. To illustrate, Jean-Paul Sartre had spent some time with Richard Wright in Harlem during his visit to the United States in 1945. Sartre purportedly asked Wright to tell him about ‘the Negro problem’.

‘What Negro problem?’ Wright responded. ‘There is no “Negro problem”’. There’s a white problem’. We could carry Wright’s insight to the presuppositions of thought in relation to people and things black. The presumption is that black music must be a particular, even more—specific—kind of music bereft of universal significance. As black music, the blues encumbers the burdens of a presumed particularity awaiting the illumination of universal analysis.

The result of this presupposition is at least two misconceptions: the first is that because it is black, blues music is trapped in its own particularity, which means it can only offer that which refers back to itself—which is invariably experience. This makes the music in effect unreflective in that, simply as experience, it suffers from trying to figure itself out. Its metanarrative is thus not a reflective one, until, of course, it receives the universal light of theory and analysis and receives meaning. The music thus suffers from a peculiar crisis of legitimacy at the level of thought: it could only express and attempt to but never justify itself.

The second result is at the heart of the logic of particularity and universality. Du Bois, in his discussion of double consciousness, noticed that what is often called ‘particular’ tends to include the contradictions of society. Thus, the effort to construct the dominant and the normative ‘pure’ often involves disassociation, rejection, disavowal, and denial of so-called ‘dark’ elements of society. In effect, the dominant claim to universality is often premised on a false assertion; namely, its universal scope through simply ignoring what transcends it. The presumed particular, however, requires admission of just that, which means attunement both to its limitations and transcending them. In effect, the former requires an artificially limited reality and the latter demands admitting the artificiality of that limitation. In effect, it means the so-called particular is at times more universal in scope than the proclaimed universal. Let us call this potentiated double consciousness.

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The message to be learned should now be obvious. That blues music, as black music, may actually be more universal than avowed or proffered classical and modern music, though in truth such comparison is like contrasting apples and oranges without remembering the nutritional value of both. It may be so not only through an incorporation of the elements of avowed universal music but also through reaching into territories the latter dare not venture. The first claim to universality is simply a formal consideration. The second, more complicated matter emerges when we reflect on what blues music is about and also what the blues are about. Before exploring that, we need take an additional consideration on the formal question of blackness and the blues.

The formal argument of metareflective admission of contradictions could be called a ‘dialectical’ argument. It advances knowledge through acknowledging moments of false universality. There is, however, something more at stake in this reflection. It also points to the limits of dissociative and nonrelational models of thought. The metaphysical critique here is against what could be called the notion of ‘self-contained substance’. The idea that there could be a self-sustained
thing as the ‘really real’ is one best reserved, in this
critique, to the gods. The alternative model admits rela-
tionality, where the reality of a thing is a relation-
ship it has with other series of relations. This relational
view means that there is always another side of thought
to be considered in every act of thinking; there is, in
other words, a contingent and dark side symbiotically
related to and serving as a condition of all thought. If
this is correct, then purification rituals are futile efforts
of self-denial, cultivations of false security, evasions of
reality, or, simply, bad faith.

By bad faith, I mean the effort to evade freedom,
to hide from responsibility, through investment in a
version of the self and reality that is not only false but
also such that one seduces oneself to believe what one
ultimately does not believe. While often examined at an
individual level, the concept is such that it always re-
quires a bad relationship with evidence (a very public,
appearing phenomenon). To make oneself believe what
one does not believe requires taking oneself out of a re-
lationship with evidence through investing in contra-
dictory activity such as ‘non-evidential evidence’, ‘rela-
tions of no relations’, and so forth. In effect, evidence,
which is a social phenomenon, loses its sociality. Bad
faith wages, in other words, a war against social reality.
It also attacks human existence as relational.

As to exist (from Latin, ex sistere) means to stand
out, to emerge, to appear, bad faith is an attitude of
disappearance, either of the self or of others. In either
version, there is the attempted eradication of relation-
ality. These aspects of bad faith lead, further, to a pro-
found struggle with the body and embodiment, for one
cannot appear except through being somewhere and
other things cannot appear without that to which they
appear also having a point of view. In effect, then, bad
faith, although studied as a condition of consciousness,
is also that of the body by virtue of the inseparability
of consciousness, embodiment, and freedom: it is, in
other words, always bodies in bad faith, and as they
live in a world sullied with incomplete selves, mallea-
ble and immalleable things, the relation to all without
seeming closure, the realisation of purity as a projected
ideal instead of reality.

This conclusion of bad faith’s attacks on relation-
ality turns much of Western thought on its head. For
Plato, as we know, was antipathetic to the shadows,
which he regarded as mere appearance to be overcome
through insight into purified reality. From the perspec-
tive of potentiated double consciousness, that would
actually be a flight from reality instead of an emersion
into it. Real things, after all, cast shadows. Philosophy,
in other words, would in this sense exemplify a form of
neurosis.

This neurosis is, however, also insightful. It is a
story told not only about the dark side of reality but
also about the aspirations understood through the met-
aphor of unshackling. At the heart of the purification
project is also one of liberation and freedom. The error,
however, is to make this flight one from the relation-
ship with the broader dimensions of reality to its form
alone. Perhaps a different kind of relationship is called
for?

This last question brings forth an understanding of
why the blues emerged out of blackness, why, as Louie
Armstrong used to lament, and Ralph Ellison pondered
in Invisible Man, there was so much blackness in blue
or the blues.

The blackness that contextualises the blues is, af-
fer all, one of a peculiar misery wrought from a philo-
osophical anthropology gone mad. The modern world,
premised on the expansion of an old theological order
into a global secular one, led to whole groups of people
having to ask, as Frantz Fanon observed in the penulti-
mate chapter of Les damnés de la terre [The Damned
of the Earth, but known in the English translations as
The Wretched of the Earth]: (1) In reality, what am I?
This question, I have shown in my books Existentia
Africana and An Introduction to Africana Philosophy,
leads to at least two additional ones: (2) Could I ever be
liberated from dehumanizing misery?, and (3) Are my
questions justified? Do I make sense? Generalised, this
becomes: What are we? What is freedom? Is reason
possible, and if so, does it even make sense?

The dehumanisation of black people—not only in
the form of many being forced into the status of prop-
erty but also in many being subjected to the legacies
of presumed subhuman status—makes the first query
a logical consequence. It also makes sense that people who were enslaved, colonised, and subjected to social conditions of disenfranchisement would reflect on the meaning of freedom. And finally, it makes sense that people whose efforts to question their condition are often challenged in the form of their supposed intrinsic lack of capacity to question their condition, would be concerned about problems of justification.

Oddly enough, this portrait of blackness is similar to the fundamental tenets of philosophical reflection. Philosophy, after all, begins with questioning, and such questions lead inevitably to the metareflective one of the questioner and her or his capacity and legitimacy in making such an effort. This identification of a link between blackness and philosophy raises an additional consideration: both, after all, are born of dissatisfaction and the experience of standing on shaky ground.

Blackness faces a problem, for example, of legitimacy and psychoanalytical melancholia. By this, I mean the formation of its identity through a process of loss without the clear experience of ever having what is lost. To be black is to be a rejected site of normative life in the modern world with the realisation of being indigenous to that world. As there was no reason for people to have considered themselves black before the set of forces that brought blackness into being as a negative term (that is, in relation to people, seen as not black, standing as higher or more valued beings), all blacks ultimately face the condition of not belonging to the only world in which they could possibly be indigenous. This contradiction raises a condition of blackness in the modern world, one that is nothing short of blue.

“One contradiction raises a condition of blackness in the modern world, one that is nothing short of blue.”

One must ask, however, why such a plight would be characterized by a word also designating the color blue? Debra Devi, in her Huffington Post Arts & Culture article ‘Why Is the Blues Called “the Blues”?’ speculates its origins in the 17th century English expression ‘the blue devils’, referring to intense effects, even hallucinations, from severe alcohol withdrawal—in other words, a killer hangover. (Think, also, of ‘the Jones’ in reference to heroine withdrawal.) The expression was eventually shortened to ‘the blues’. This account doesn’t explain, however, why the color blue was used in the expression ‘blue devils’. Blue, as we know, could refer to something positive such as ‘blue skies’, but darkened, it also refers to that moment before evening turns to night. Cultural history could also point to the use of blue among West African ethnic groups, where it could refer to the regal (when bright) and in its indigo form to mourning (see, for example, Catherine E. McKinley, Indigo: In Search of the Color that Seduced the World). What is clear is that the blues emerged when these worlds, African and European, converged in the new world in conditions of misery whose reverberations echo to the present. This adds a dimension, perhaps psychoanalytical, to the European premise of drunken after effect: the high of modern exploitation and profit wreaked the low of the morning hangover; reality always has its price.

This reading makes not only blackness modern but also its correlative values and expressions. In this sense, blackness speaks to something that modern life may reject but find unable to avoid—namely, its relation to elements it prefers to discard. If this is correct, then the affective expression of this reflection is indeed the leitmotif of modern thought. Attempting to overcome its contradictions, to make itself complete and one with itself, leads constantly to epistemic rupture, ontological dependence (relationality), and the ethical onus of responsibility for the meaning, maintenance, and transformation of each. The project becomes extra-systemic, and this realization leads to a transformation of modern humanity from what could be called expectations of childlike naivety of a consistent and neat world (a perpetual party, no?) to the adult sensibility of paradoxes, contradictions, and life’s unfair burdens. What else is that but the blues?

The blues tell us, for instance, that what is reasonable to take on isn’t always rational. Racism, as those who suffer it experience and understand, is never reasonable but always offers itself as coldly logical and always, to the chagrin of many analysts, rational. As Fanon puts it in his provocative essay ‘Racisme et culture’: ‘The racist in a culture with racism is …normal. He has achieved a perfect harmony of economic relations and ideology in his environment…. Race prejudice in fact obeys a flawless logic. A country that lives, draws its substance from the exploitation of other peoples, makes those peoples inferior. Race prejudice applied to those peoples is normal’ (my translation). Someone (other people) is always wrong.

These reflections thus already point to that second sense of the blues, which challenges philosophy to be such that it deals with some of the contradictions posed by logical argumentation (validity) that is not always reasonable. Philosophy, it reminds us, if true to itself, must be radical in its reach, which means it must also be self-questioning and thus confront its relationship to those elements, whether mythic or rhythmic, that it erroneously attempts to avoid.

In this sense, philosophy, at least in its modern incarnation, has every reason to sing the blues, and it may be more true to itself when its possibilities are explored through the resources of blues people, those who, given this unfolding analysis, are no less than
**modern people.** The blues, in other words, is the leitmotif of modernity.

We could go further, however, as we saw in our early reflection on Plato, and read his evocation of philosophy as facing an opportunity to learn from the blues but in effect fleeing it. Evading the blues, in other words, pushes philosophy on a neurotic path akin to the effort of colonising reason through constraining it to the dictates of instrumental rationality. Reason, in other words, demands even encounters with, as Fanon observed in the 5th chapter of *Peau noire, masques blancs* [*Black Skin, White Masks*], unreasonable reason. Addressing such a seemingly contradictory phenomenon ironically calls for reasonable action, and to make it more apparent, doing so *reasonably*.

Fanon, ironically, faced such a situation in his early reflections on the blues. As he reflects in ‘Racisme et culture’:

Thus the blues, ‘the slave lament’, is presented for the admiration of oppressors. It is some stylized oppression returned to the exploiter and the racist. There is no blues without oppression and racism. The end of racism is the death knell of great black music…. (my translation)

This is an extraordinarily asymmetrical reading of the blues. The error Fanon makes here is the fallacy of causal permanence, where the conditions that lead to the appearance of a phenomenon become those by which the latter are maintained. Born of suffering, the blues, according to Fanon, could only be maintained by that specific maladiction. Thus the white who listens to the blues is, in Fanon’s reading, entertained by the suffering his political location has created. Yet this would mean that identification with an aesthetic production requires an intimate link to its emergence. Many people, however, not only enjoy music that is not intimately linked to their personal experience but also attach their own experience to music born of a different one. Another’s suffering social misery could be artistically personalized and enjoyed in terms of one’s personal suffering. As Kierkegaard’s famous depiction of the poet in *Either/Or* attests, we are referring to

An unhappy man who in his heart harbors a deep anguish, but whose lips are so fashioned that the moans and cries which pass over them are transformed into ravishing music. His fate is like that of the unfortunate victims whom the tyrant Phalaris imprisoned in a brazen bull, and slowly tortured over a steady fire; their cries could not reach the tyrant’s ears so as to strike terror into his heart; when they reached his ears they sounded like sweet music. And men crowd about the poet and say to him, “Sing for us soon again”—which is as much as to say, “May new sufferings torment your soul, but may your lips be fashioned as before; for the cries would only distress us, but the music, the music is delightful.”

Kierkegaard’s description points to the beauty of poetry and music born of suffering, but he doesn’t answer the question of why the reader or listener is able to identify the beauty as such. There must be something that connects the audience to the performance. It is not only black people who sing the blues and listen to it. *Many other people do.* There are nonblack people listening to the blues in Australia, Brazil, China, India, Korea, Russia, everywhere. I very much doubt all of them imagine themselves as enslaved blacks on cotton and tobacco plantations or those occupying prison cells in an unfair criminal justice system. To understand this, one would have to delve more deeply into what the blues are. Suffice it to say here that the earlier arguments about double consciousness, potentiated double consciousness, and the dark-side of theory pertain to the blues: all address dimensions of life that must be confronted though difficult to accept. In that regard, they reveal, as we have seen, the particularity of misconceived universals, and in doing so, paradoxically transcend their own particularity into a more universalising practice. Thus, while born of black suffering, the blues *speak to modern suffering itself.* It thus speaks to anyone confronting the entrails of modern existence, and since that also relates to postmodern existence, transcends its specificity. As Ellison put it in *Shadow and Act*:

The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one’s aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.

The blues is about dealing with life’s suffering of any kind. Because of this, it is, again as we have seen, the leitmotif of modern life. Black people, we should remember, were produced by the modern world. Their aesthetic production speaks to the age as do few others. We need only think through the many musical manifestations of the blues that have permeated the 20th century and continue into the 21st such as swing, jazz, rhythm and blues, soul, rock n’ roll, beguine, mambo, salsa, samba, rock steady, reggae, calypso, and,
now, hip hop. Though this list seems disparate, all have roots in some blues form. Moreover, there are aspects of the blues that exemplify their own aesthetic sensibility. Blues music is full of irony. Its sadness exemplifies an adult understanding of life that is both sober and, ironically, sometimes happy. It is a non-delusional happiness often marked by self-deprecation and critical evaluation, the kind of happiness or good humor that is a realization instead of a diversion. It is the beauty of moonlight versus sunshine, although the blues dimensions of a sunny day could be understood through our realisation of how much could lurk in what is hidden in plain sight. Think of the numbness one seeks from alcohol and the reflection offered by the blues, that numbness gets one nowhere.

All blues productions remind us that life is not something to escape but something to confront. And it does so in its very form. The classical blues structure is full of repetitions, for instance, that reveal new layers of meaning about the cyclicality of life. And in this structure, although a story is retold, it is understood at different levels; the effect of which is cathartic and after which is a renewed understanding of the point of origin. The blues agent thus takes responsibility for her or his existence, and in doing so can also transcend its conceptual framework in flights of imagination. This dimension of blues performance, marked especially in bebop, whose genealogy points back to the blues, did not always amuse white patrons of black exoticism, an observation that Fanon did not fail to notice. He reflects in Les damnés de la terre:

A memorable example, and one that takes on a certain importance because it is not entirely about a colonial reality, was the reaction of white jazz experts when after the Second World War new styles such as bebop established themselves. Jazz could only be for them the broken, desperate nostalgia of an old nègre [Negro or “nigger”], taken with five whiskies, cursing himself and the racism of the whites. As soon as he understands himself and the world differently, as soon as he raises hope and forces the racist world to recoil, it is clear that he will blow his trumpet to his heart’s content and his husky voice will ring out loud and clear (translation mine).

Bebop transcends the misery of blackness fetishised by white critics and consumers of blackness into the genius of raising the bar and possibilities of musical performance.

So we return to some elements of blues form, structure, and performance. We should not, however, reject so easily what could be called ‘the blues wail’ or ‘moan’. It is not only an expression of suffering but also a reflective one. It transitions, in other words, from the prereflective to the level on which there is metastability and self-reference. This means, then, that the blues calls to something often overlooked as an aspiration of blues people, something manifested beautifully in bebop, which we could, by extension, consider as an anxiety of modern life: aesthetic and ethical maturity. Racism is a form of degradation that attempts to bar certain people from rights and privileges of adult life, such as the dignity of images of self-worth, while contradictorily blaming them for their lack of access to these conditions. That is why people who become objects of racism are treated as perpetual children, people under guardianship of a supposedly adult race. There is the problem of insult evident here, but there is an additional consideration to bear in mind: the degraded subjects are adults. They are thus faced with adult responsibility while being treated as immature subjects. This frustrating situation has an existential dimension if we were to reflect on the conditions of enslaved peoples who made daily ethical decisions, were aware of doing so, but suffered the designation of being property. Nearly every blues performance and lyric brings out this contradiction. How could one be responsible for so much over which one does not have control?

We see here the primordial distinction between how things appear and what they are. But the difference isn’t always very clear. There is repetition in the blues, but each re-instantiation of a theme is uniquely significant. There is repetition without being the same. It is usually at a point where there is a chord shift in terms of the music (moving to the dominant fifth) where revelation occurs. This moment of revelation is often ironic in that it points back to the singer or subject’s role in the condition at hand. We could call this ‘an assertion of adult sensibility’. Here the blues artist, after outlining the conditions of suffering, and also embodying the suffering itself, raises the question of agency and responsibility. I call this adult sensibility because it points to a central moment in development that all parents at some point, as parents, reveal to the child who must now grow up: Life is rarely fair, and one must, often, improvise.

Regarding the latter: That improvisation is a hallmark of black music. An important element of improvisation that is often overlooked is that it is not random and the improviser faces responsibility for each creative formulation. As with jazz, melody, harmony, and rhythm set the stage for what could no longer be expressed with words. It signals to the call, always, to express the seemingly ineffable.
With regard to the former: One of the difficult things about the relationship of reason to justice involves what to do with injustice. There is much injustice with which life’s continued struggle must contend. To cry out loud against this injustice is not simply a revelation of wrong but also an acknowledgment of having been wronged. To do so as a wail or moan is to assert the value of self—for if one were not valuable, why should anyone be concerned with what has transpired?

The blues thus brings from the inner-life of the afflicted also an axiology of defiance, and what else is there that emerges from that but one of the most feared offenses of racially dominated subjects—namely, dignity.

Much of blues performance, whether through music, written texts (such as those by James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, Richard Wright, among so many others) and ironically so in those of Frantz Fanon, because of his at first being critical of the blues, brings forth the human struggle for dignity to levels political and metaphysical. That the upheavals that constitute modern life threw so much of humanity into uncertainty makes it no wonder that this sensibility reaches from Siberia to New Zealand, Canada to the campsites of Antarctica, and around the planet from Brazil to Angola to Vietnam.

I could go on, but in this short discussion, I simply want to close with the opening query. Philosophy, when it reflects on its condition, cannot help but be blue, for, as Karl Jaspers observed in *Philosophy of Existence*, it is a long hymn to Reason, but such a beloved is, as we know, one who does not always behave.
THE COST OF JUSTICE

Jonathan Klaaren
Visiting Professor, WiSER, Wits University

In his paper, Jonathan Klaaren critiques the disjuncture between South Africa’s constitutional enshrinement of legal rights and the limited access to justice experienced by most of its population. Klaaren identifies the prohibitive economic burdens of access to legal representation as an institutional failure that remains the legacy of apartheid, and suggests possible avenues forward.

INTRODUCTION

Although South Africa’s legal and constitutional regime is one of the best in the world, meaningful access to justice remains largely a function of economic resources. This briefing paper examines the reasons for -- and controversies around -- the costs of legal representation in South Africa as well opening up the concept of access to justice more broadly. Framed within the social justice concerns of the Public Positions series, the paper largely conceives of the legal services sector as a market consisting of the producers of legal services, the consumers of legal services, and the product itself: legal services. The aim here is to ask the social justice question of this ‘market’: over the long term who is meant to bear the costs of justice? The state? Citizens? Corporates? Donors?

“The aim here is to ask the social justice question of this ‘market’: over the long term who is meant to bear the costs of justice?”

WHERE ARE WE? WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATE OF ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA?

There are at least three ways in which we could measure access to justice: a national survey of need, a sketch of the quantity and quality of available legal and advisory services, and a comparison of average costs (legal fees) to average household income.

Although it has not been done in South Africa, a national survey of household needs for legal services could probe the extent to which households use formal legal services to resolve disputes. According to Legal Aid South Africa, “In 2010/11, 2,728,305 civil matters (including new cases, trials, motions and judgments) were processed through the lower courts. It is not known which proportion of these cases required legal aid assistance. It is however predicted that demand for civil legal aid is set to increase and therefore the gap between supply and demand will continue to increase.” (LASA, 2012).

That said, it is also remarkable that a tradition exists of the poor in South Africa seeking and using formal legal services in many of their dealings with the state and market (Bradford 1987, Hirson 1990, van Onselen 1996). Indeed, the poor in South Africa were arguably in a better place from which to access justice 80 years ago than today (James 2007: 146; Beavon 2004).

Another way to assess the state of access to justice would be to survey the cost structure of the legal services market. Legal services in South Africa are expensive, particularly for the poor. In 2005, AfriMAP concluded “the major barrier to access to justice in South Africa remains the high cost of legal services... [T]he average South African household would need to save a week’s worth of income in order to afford a one-hour consultation with an average attorney.” Things do not seem to have improved significantly. In 2013, Dugard and Drage reported that “[SERI] clients with a monthly income of R 600 ... are frequently charged fees in the region of R 1,500 ... just for an initial consultation.” (2013). Even in terms of High Court rules (which are often interpreted loosely) a 15-minute consultation may cost R177.50 and a page of drafting can be charged at R50 (Holness 2013). These fees restrict access to justice for the poor, especially civil justice.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEGAL PRACTITIONER</th>
<th>IN TRAINING</th>
<th>FRESHLY QUALIFIED</th>
<th>W/ 5 YRS EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>W/10 YRS EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>SENIOR</th>
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<tr>
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<td>R1200/hr</td>
<td>R2000/hr</td>
<td>R35000/R40000+/day</td>
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<td>R2300/hr</td>
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<td>R700-1100/hr</td>
<td>R700-1200/hr</td>
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</table>
which is largely not available from Legal Aid South Africa. These fees also restrict access to justice across the board for the not-so-poor, for instance persons in a household earning over R6000 a month and thus not qualifying for Legal Aid.

As the table of average fees for legal services below makes clear, legal costs in South Africa are substantial. Costs may well be higher as hourly fees for South African lawyers vary considerably (DNA, 2009). Public interest litigation is often but not always done on contingency or at reduced rates.

Another and final way to assess the state of access to justice in South Africa is to look at the quantity and organization of the providers of legal services – e.g. the legal profession (Godfrey 2009, Godfrey & Midgley 2008). The assumption is that the figure of lawyers per capita might be a rough proxy for access to justice. Indeed, as detailed in the next section, South Africa appears to have fewer lawyers per capita than many of its trading and economic peers.

There are a number of organizations employing persons to provide legal services in both the public (including not-for-profits) and private sectors. These include various services offered by the Department of Justice. Of particular interest here is Legal Aid South Africa, discussed further below. Outside government, there are sectors such as the public interest law community, consisting of both donor-funded NGOs such as the Legal Resources Centre and of pro bono units of commercial law firms, university law clinics and a number of NGOs engaging both in rights education and in providing free and open access to law (on the latter, see e.g. SAFLII, http://www.saflii.org.za/). Finally, there is also a network of community advice offices and paralegals providing legal advice. For instance the National Alliance for the Development of Community Advice Offices (NADCAO) claims membership of 230 community advice offices with 500 paralegals across South Africa, out of a total paralegal population of 3500 (NADCAO Submission to Parliament, 2013 at 2.13, 3.1).

A growing number of firms, especially within the financial sector, provide legal services for profit without using the traditional structures of the legal profession. For instance, firms such as Legalwise, Scorpion Legal, and Clientele Legal sell group legal services. Traditional banking groups also sell legal services. Indeed, the growth in the labour market for legal skills in the first decade of the 21st century is attributed primarily to the financial services industry (DNA, 2009).

One estimate of the total legal services market in South Africa as of 2009 is R11,573 million, which constitutes 0.7% of GDP (DNA, 2009).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>LAWYERS</th>
<th>POPULATION</th>
<th>PEOPLE/LAWYER</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1,143,358</td>
<td>303 million</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAZIL</td>
<td>571,360</td>
<td>186 m</td>
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<td>61 m</td>
<td>401</td>
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<td>82 m</td>
<td>593</td>
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<tr>
<td>INDIA</td>
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<td>1237 m</td>
<td>1,237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRANCE</td>
<td>45,686</td>
<td>64 m</td>
<td>1,403</td>
</tr>
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<td>SOUTH AFRICA (LSSA)</td>
<td>24,356</td>
<td>52.9 m</td>
<td>2,176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KENYA (KLS)</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>41 m</td>
<td>4,100</td>
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<tr>
<td>MALAWI (MLS)</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>14.9 m</td>
<td>49,666</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

WHERE ARE OUR EMERGING ECONOMIC PEERS?
This section briefly surveys how the issue of access to justice is being addressed in other societies, especially Brazil and India which might be considered our peers in terms of per capita GDP and some aspects of their history.

As one can see from the above table, South Africa has substantially fewer lawyers per capita than either Brazil or India, though more than African countries sharing a British legal tradition, like Kenya and Malawi.
THE COST OF JUSTICE

Perhaps surprisingly, South Africa has only one quarter as many lawyers proportionate to its population as does Brazil, as well as having fewer lawyers per capita than India.

Both Brazil and India have engaged institutionally with providing legal services to the poor. In Brazil, “[the Brazilian bar’s] Ethical Code of 1930 established free services to the poor as an obligation. Now, following the impoverishment of large portions of the legal profession, the Bar began to view its mission as the protector of market spaces for the legal profession.” As a compromise, pro bono service may only be provided to NGOs, not to individuals, at least within the state of Sao Paulo (Chen and Cummings). The Brazilian experience points to a potentially worrying trend: the bifurcation of the legal profession into corporate and non-corporate spheres under pressures of a globalizing market may result in the reduction of broad-based professional support for access to justice.

In India, “Legal Services Institutions are government funded bodies led by the judiciary and comprising a range of stakeholders including those earning below USD 2000 annually, all women, children, Schedules Castes, Scheduled Tribes, people in custody and those living with disabilities etc. They are also mandated to create legal awareness and assist people in settling their disputes using alternate dispute resolution mechanisms.” (Harvard PLP, 2011).

SO, HOW DID WE GET HERE?
The current dearth of access to justice in South Africa is causally related to at least four factors: (a) the political and institutional legacy of apartheid, (b) state expenditure largely focused on criminal rather than civil justice, (c) a legal profession that has been to a great extent unregulated, and (d) several foundational rules of the legal system, militating against access to justice.

First, the financial and institutional costs of undoing apartheid organizations were considerable, not to mention addressing the simultaneous unraveling of the bureaucratic ethic in SA public administration (Chipkin & Meny-Gilbert, 2012).

Second, there has been an unintended consequence of constitutionalizing the right to legal assistance. The immediate effect of the Constitution was to increase state spending for legal representation for men. This was because, completely understandably, the courts developed and enforced the constitutional right to state-financed legal representation in criminal matters (Budlender, 2004). Women who are underrepresented in the accused population thus did not benefit proportionately. The judiciary has refused to develop a constitutional right to legal representation in civil matters (Dugard, 2008).

Third, in its economics, the legal services market has largely been self-regulated through apartheid and into the current post-apartheid era. Early in its development, the legal profession often worked closely with the mining industry and other business sectors (Chanock 2001). Nonetheless, questions have continually been raised about the efficiency of this market. For instance, one claim is that the split nature of the legal profession – the practice for a client to use an attorney to brief an advocate -- often duplicates services and costs (AfriMAP 2005: 146). This has led to some attention to the profession from the Competition Commission and negotiations against the backdrop of the Legal Practice Bill. Arguably, the self-regulated nature of the profession has allowed several segments of the profession – in particular advocates and corporate lawyers – to enjoy levels of remuneration which are high by South African standards. Nonetheless, the salaries of even these South African lawyers are relatively low by global standards (DNA, 2009).

Finally, there are several formal doctrines of law that are understood to reduce access to justice (Budlender 2004, Dugard 2008, Humby 2009). One is the still relatively narrow ambit of the South African doctrine of class action. Class actions hold out the promise of addressing legal matters on a cost-efficient basis by litigating on behalf of hundreds of persons at once. It is only as of 2013 that the Supreme Court of Appeal confirmed the availability of class actions for statutory and other non-constitutional rights as well as for constitutional rights (Children’s Resource Centre). Another formal doctrine often understood to be contrary to access to justice is the basic South African rule on legal costs. The South African rule is that the loser pays for the costs of legal services on behalf of both parties before the courts. Other jurisdictions adopt a rule where each party pays its own legal costs regardless of the outcome. The loser pays principle is often argued to reduce access to justice by inhibiting persons from...
WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE TO ADDRESS THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE GAP?

The legal profession has addressed the justice gap in at least three historical episodes. First, the profession has been interested in the provision of state legal aid largely for criminal matters since its formal establishment in 1969. Second, the profession provided significant support (as well as opposition) for the establishment of the PIL community in the late 1970s. Some firms also established public interest divisions during the 1980s that were quick to take up foreign funding for anti-apartheid lawyering. Most of these divisions shut down with the end of such funding around 1990. Third, over the past ten years or so, the large firms in particular have either re-launched public interest divisions with a pro bono slant or have joined in various institutional schemes designed to increase to a small but significant level the professional provision of pro bono services (Holness 2013). Building on the profession’s tradition of voluntary pro bono, calls have been made and continue to be made to mandate pro bono for lawyers.

The above efforts apart, the post-apartheid legal profession has arguably prioritized transformation of personnel over access to justice, driven by compliance with the Legal Services Charter and Legal Services Bill, spending more of their energies on ‘aspects dealing with the ensuring of corporate legal work being spread out to include black members of the profession.’ (Klaaren, 2009)

On the side of the public sector, the most significant development must be the transformation of the Legal Aid Board into Legal Aid South Africa in the 1990s, and the accompanying shift from the judicare system (where the state bought legal services from the profession) to LASA providing free legal services for qualifying individuals through state-salaried lawyers. Persons are not eligible who earn more than R5500 per month (after tax), who are in a household that earns more than R6000 per month (after tax), or who own a house worth more than R300,000. This organization now employs more lawyers and presumably provides a greater quantity of legal services than any other organization in South Africa. LASA was providing “legal services at all criminal courts through its 64 justice centres and 64 satellite offices and as at March 2011 employed a total of 2,489 staff, of which 1,932 were legal staff.” In 2012, LASA was “providing legal assistance to approximately 420,000 persons per annum and legal advice to over 200,000 persons per annum across South Africa “. Criminal cases remain at least 90% of LASA’s docket.

At the formal political level, sufficient consensus has finally been found among the ordinary members of the Parliamentary committee dealing with the Legal Practice Bill from both the government and opposition parties to bring that legislation near passage in 2014, despite opposition particularly from the advocates. That piece of legislation has some specific provisions (ss 34 and 35(4) & (5)) that aim to address the justice gap. One mandates the SA Law Reform Commission to investigate among other topics, “the manner in which to address the circumstances giving rise to legal fees that are unattainable for most people” (s 34(5)(a)). The timeline for reporting is two years after the commencement of the final Legal Practice Council, which will follow on from the interim National Forum on Legal Profession (which may exist for three years, s 96(1)), discussing the current R490m budget for the structures running the legal profession. The other mandates the final Council to investigate the statutory recognition of paralegals. Further, it is potentially significant that “access to justice” is the enduring (if somewhat elusive) framing concept chosen by the government and the ANC for its policy on reform within the legal system and the governmental structures for the administration of justice (Department of Justice, 2012).

CONCLUSION: WHAT MIGHT BE DONE?

This section aims to identify and highlight the structures and systems which can (and cannot) be addressed.

On the internal professional approach, more can probably be done to coordinate and organize pro bono, although there are limits to such an approach. Holness is correct to conclude “if mandatory pro bono is to be successfully implemented in South Africa, then there needs to be enforcement and regulation mechanism[s] in place to ensure that the quality of the service provided is of a sufficient standard to ensure access to justice for the poor.” (2013: 154). The existing s 29 of the Legal Practice Bill at least seems inclined towards at least a minimal requirement for some mandatory pro bono, albeit in five years’ time. More significantly, there are institutional initiatives that can be taken to increase the quantity, quality and effectiveness of pro bono legal services such as greater diversity and formality of networks of pro bono providers and greater linkage to advice offices.

However, while the private sector can do more, the public sector can do and should do even more.

On the approach of reforms outside of the profession, several initiatives appear possible. First, the
funding to LASA could be increased with the scope of legal aid widened to civil justice matters. A different version of this reform would support the establishment of the right to representation in significant civil justice cases for the poor. Second, one could support the approach (used globally) of unbundling legal services within the market, as to some extent the Legal Practice Bill does. This might support more innovations such as telephone hotlines and pro se assistance centres. Advice offices of this type could partner effectively with greater pro bono coordination. Third, greater attention might be given to promoting new products (such as legal services insurance), competition and global innovation within the legal services market through attention from the competition and trade authorities as well as from a regulator. A fourth approach might latch onto the Legal Practice Bill institution of community service and attempt to institute a state-supported network of community advice and service organisations with significant staffing by law graduates prior to their service as candidate attorneys. One variant residing in the private sector but with some state support might build upon university law clinics or the burgeoning LSSA-supported legal practice schools to start up small firms—with government support through medium-term contracts—employing candidate attorneys and/or new graduates to provide legal services in civil matters.

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INTERVIEW D’ACHILLE MBEMBE
PAR CATHERINE PORTEVIN

Dans cette interview réalisée par Catherine Portevin pour Philosophie Magazine (numéro de février 2014), Achille Mbembe explique les raisons de son retour sur la catégorie polémique du « Nègre » dans les conditions contemporaines.

Philosophie Magazine: Votre Critique de la raison nègre fait évidemment signe à la Critique de la raison pure de Kant. Pourquoi?

Achille Mbembe: Si je me retrouve avec Kant, c’est dans sa démarche critique par rapport à la raison. Pour ma part, j’ai voulu explorer les conditions dans lesquelles cette rationalité a inventé un sujet, que j’appelle le « sujet de race », autrement dit un sujet dont on ne sait quelle est la part humaine et quelle est celle de l’animal, de la chose ou de la marchandise. J’ai ensuite voulu savoir comment ce sujet, dont on nous dit qu’il n’en est pas un, peut organiser sa « remontée en humanité » selon la belle expression de Frantz Fanon.

Mais si je fais signe à Kant, c’est surtout au fondateur des Lumières, de la rationalité moderne occidentale et de cet universalisme au nom duquel on a conçu des catégories inférieures de l’humanité. Nous savons désormais que cette idée a causé maints ravages physiques et psychiques dans le monde durant des siècles. Kant lui-même, le grand philosophe de la raison, perd la raison lorsqu’il s’agit de parler de l’Afrique. Je voulais donc signifier, à travers ce titre, que l’histoire des Lumières est incomplète si on n’écrit pas, dans le même mouvement, l’histoire de sa part nocturne, obscure, voire obscène.

PM: Vous reprenez le mot « Nègre » à votre compte. Non pas pour chanter, comme Senghor, la beauté de la Négritude, mais pour construire une philosophie du sujet « au-delà de la race ». Comment le faire en utilisant la catégorie même qui l’a assigné à la race ?

AM: Il ne suffit pas de se débarrasser du concept de race, ou de le refuser, pour qu’il cesse d’être opérant, ou pour que le racisme disparaîsse. Il faut plutôt tenter de le faire exploser de l’intérieur. J’ai voulu comprendre en quoi, pour quoi, et comment « le Nègre » a été, aussi bien pour la pensée occidentale que pour la critique moderne d’origine africaine et diasporique, une façon de dire le monde, d’instituer un certain ordre. Ce terme a une très longue histoire et remonte à la naissance du capitalisme au XVè siècle, dont une pulsion primitive consiste à vouloir effacer toute distinction entre les êtres humains et les choses.

La tragédie de l’Europe qui a inventé ce terme aura été de se complaire dans l’auto-contemplation alors même qu’elle se projetait à la rencontre de « nouveaux mondes ». Confrontée à ces mondes lointains, l’Europe ne s’est posé qu’une question et une seule : cet autre, « est-il un autre homme ou un autre que l’homme ? ». C’est pourquoi je dis qu’une grande partie de la philosophie occidentale pense le monde en termes de relation du même au même, de renfermement sur soi et jamais, ou si rarement, en termes d’habitation du même monde par tous. Elle pense en termes de compartiments, différenciations, classifications et, au bout du compte, ségrégation. Ces désignations de « races », d’« espèces » et de « Nègres » sont toute la part répulsive, primaire, inavouée, qui accompagne en parallèle le discours moderne sur l’homme, sur l’humain, sur l’humanité, sur les droits de l’homme. Dans cette économie, une place spécifique est accordée à l’Afrique. Elle représente fantasmatiquement le pays natal de l’homme couplé à son animal. Le Nègre libère des pulsions irrationnelles qui n’ont cessé d’irriguer la part délirante de la modernité. Comme le remarquait Gilles Deleuze, il y a « toujours un Nègre, un Juif, un Chinois, un Grand Mogol, un Aryen, dans le délire ».

PM: Se débarrasser du fardeau de la race est un programme qui, pour vous, concerne autant les opprimés que les oppresseurs ?
INTERVIEW D’ACHILLE MBEMBE PAR CATHERINE PORTEVIN

**AM:** C’est en tout cas l’objet de la critique d’origine africaine depuis la fin du XVIIe siècle. Chez Frantz Fanon en particulier, ce projet s’apparente à un refus de la castration. Fanon conseille au colonisé de tourner le dos à l’Europe, c’est-à-dire de commencer par soi-même, de se tenir debout hors des catégories qui l’ont maintenu courbé. La difficulté n’est pas seulement d’avoir été assigné à une race, mais d’avoir intériorisé les termes de cette assignation ; d’en être arrivé à dé-sirer la castration.

Ce que propose Fanon est un véritable chemin de cure. Celle-ci commence par et dans le langage. Elle requiert un colossal travail sur soi et, éventuellement, l’exercice d’une violence dirigée contre le système colonial. Sans libération du désir et son réinvestissement dans des affects nouveaux, on ne peut pas, du moins dans la logique fanonienne, se débarrasser du fardeau de la race.

Mais dans d’autres situations — je pense en particulier aux États-Unis — se libérer du racisme passe par une myriade de pratiques de figuration et d’insoumission. C’est le travail qu’entreprendrent les anciens esclaves au lendemain de la Proclamation de l’émancipation (Emancipation Proclamation), ou encore après la guerre civile, voire lors des grandes mobilisations des années 60 pour les droits civiques ou au sein de l’expérience des Black Panthers. Le but, chaque fois, est de sortir d’une représentation figée de soi-même et des incessants allers-retours entre haine et fascination, ressentiment et désir de vengeance. Toutes ces prises de place, toutes ces tentatives de se donner un nouveau visage, un nouveau nom et une autre vie ont une dimension politique certes, mais aussi spirituelle, onirique et artistique. Il s’agit de se donner les moyens de rêver autrement, de passer à un autre type de production désirante. Telle est d’ailleurs l’une des fonctions des nombreuses églises afro-américaines ou des musiques telles que le jazz et le blues.

Cette figuration de soi n’a de sens que si elle débouche sur une recomposition de la cité dans son ensemble. Dans le cas sud-africain, cette recomposition de la cité n’est possible que si l’opprresseur et l’opprimé s’entreprennent ensemble, un processus de réhabilitation. Car le racisme détruit autant celui qui le pratique que celui qui le subit. Le sujet raciste étant un sujet qui défaille, le retour à une relation de réciprocité est une des conditions de sortie de « l’état de race ». C’est pour moi l’apport central de l’expérience sud-africaine. De l’Afrique du Sud nous vient l’idée selon laquelle nous sommes condamnés à vivre exposés les uns aux autres, les bourreaux et leurs victimes, parfois dans le même espace. Il faudra par conséquent penser la démocra-tie au-delà de la juxtaposition des singularités tout autant que de l’idéologie simpliste de l’intégration. Par ailleurs, la démocratie à venir se construira sur la base d’une nette distinction entre « l’universel » et « l’en-commun ». L’universel implique l’inclusion à quelque entité déjà constituée. L’en-commun présup-pose un rapport de coappartenance et de partage, de mutualité - l’idée d’un monde qui est le seul que nous ayons et qui, pour être durable, doit être partagé par l’ensemble de ses ayant-droits. Afin que ce partage devienne possible, l’exigence de justice et de réparation est incontournable.

**PM:** Comment votre ancrage en Afrique du Sud s’est-il décidé et qu’y trouvez-vous encore aujourd’hui ?


La ville de Johannesburg est un chaudron, le la-boratoire privilégié d’une urbanité « afropolitaine », c’est-à-dire annonciatrice de ce que sera le XXIe siècle africain — une urbanité hautement matérialiste, bigarrée, créole, transnationale et plastique. L’Afrique du Sud est un pays complexe, le fruit d’une histoire à la fois sombre et éclatante. Vivre là, c’est être confronté au quotidien à ce passé funeste et à ses innombrables traces dans le présent, à la manière dont la Bête (le racisme, les inégalités et l’exploitation) continue de se métamorphoser, produisant sans cesse de nouvelles métastases dans le corps social.

C’est aussi être solidaire des luttes qui s’y sont déroulées, certaines se poursuivant sous des formes nouvelles. On se sent souvent claustrophobe, avec l’impression de vivre dans un pays aux mille potentialités mais frappé par une atrophie de l’imagination. Le plus terrifiant, c’est le sentiment que ce pays, peut-être, ne sera pas à la hauteur de son Idée.

**PM:** A la suite de Foucault et de Fanon, la psychanal-yse et la littérature sont très présentes dans votre tra-vail. Pourquoi?

**AM:** Ayant grandi au Cameroun, dans un milieu où j’en étais conscient - les phénomènes psychiques qui tiennent au monde de la nuit et de l’invisible font partie de la vie de tous les jours, il était logique que je
m’intéresse à la psychiatrie et à la psychanalyse mais aussi aux arts, à la littérature, à la musique. C’est une façon pour moi de prêter attention à l’expérience que les gens ont des surfaces et des profondeurs, du monde des lumières et celui des ombres, sachant que les significations dernières, il faut aller chercher du côté ténébreux de la vie, dans ces lieux où le langage se fait proliférant : la musique, la danse, les masques, l’ornementation, les décors, la foule des signes et des objets. C’est aussi pourquoi Michel Foucault et Frantz Fanon, tous deux si sensibles au psychisme, aux questions de la domination articulées à celles du souci de soi, m’ont ouvert des champs que ne saurait saisir la modernité des questions très radicales, voire extrêmes, qu’un Kant (mais il n’est pas le seul) n’a su ni entendre, encore moins poser. Au demeurant, ce qui me frappe – et c’est un point encore inaperçu par la philosophie ou trop souvent idéologisé - ce sont les convergences ou les échos entre les pensées nègres (Blyden, Dubois, Césaire, Senghor, Fanon, Glissant) et une pensée juive de tradition allemande - Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Buber, Bloch, en particulier.

**PM:** N’êtes-vous pas en train de dépasser la question « postcoloniale », pour dessiner un sujet post-post-colonial ?

**A.M.** : Il faut faire la part des choses. S’interroger sur la postcolonie, qui est pour moi à la fois un temps spécifique et une formation particulière du pouvoir (voir bibliographie), n’est pas exactement la même chose que ce que l’on appelle, dans les milieux anglo-saxons, les études postcoloniales. C’est aux États-Unis, à la fin des années 1980, je les ai découvertes, de façon distante à dire vrai. A l’époque, tout comme aujourd’hui d’ailleurs, je les trouvais assez pauvres philosophiquement. Les théories postcoloniales ont ceci de particulier qu’elles sont comme un fleuve aux multiples affluents. Pour moi, elles constituent moins une théorie qu’un ensemble de questions critiques et à l’opposé de certains de mes amis dont Jean-François Bayart, je n’ai, à leur égard, aucune hostilité. Mais le courant postcolonial, en effet, est en partie daté, non pas pour les raisons qu’avancent ses pourfendeurs français, mais simplement parce que son raisonnement repose, consciemment ou non, sur une Europe comme centre du monde. Or tel n’est plus le cas. Il n’y a pas, comme l’y invite Dipesh Chakrabarty, à la « provincialiser ». Elle s’est d’ores
et déjà « auto-provincialisée ». Tel est l’événement fondamental de notre âge et il faut le saluer parce que, désormais, nous pouvons nous poser d’autres types de questions, voire revisiter les vieilles questions à partir de nouveaux angles.

Ainsi doit-on, par exemple, se demander si le déclassement de l’Europe s’accompagnera d’une extinction du racisme qu’elle a si longtemps porté ou si « le Nègre » est une catégorie qui survit déjà à ceux qui l’ont inventée. Car le type de « race » que produit le capitalisme à l’ère néolibérale a, au fond, quelque chose à voir avec ce qu’aura été la condition nègre entre le XVe et le XIXe siècle. Il s’agit d’une nouvelle « race » qui transcende les questions d’apparence, de couleur de peau ou d’origine. Le nègre n’est plus seulement l’homme noir, africain ou d’origine africaine, mais tous ceux qui aujourd’hui forment une humanité excédentaire au regard de la logique économique néolibérale. Il ne s’agit plus seulement de traiter les êtres humains comme des marchandises mais d’instiller dans le sujet humain le désir de se vendre soi-même, c’est-à-dire de devenir un objet. De ce point de vue, on assiste à un devenir-nègre du monde.

Et cela pose à nouveaux frais toutes les vieilles questions de l’émancipation, de l’aliénation, de l’auto-aliénation. C’est l’idée même de sujet qu’il nous faut repenser à l’heure où le drame, pour des millions de gens, ce n’est plus d’être exploités, mais d’être plus exploitables. En Afrique du Sud par exemple, près de 40% de la population est sans travail. Comment rendre compte de cette production spectaculaire de, non pas un reste, non pas un excédent, mais un superflu de l’humanité ? Face à de telles réalités, certaines des catégories centrales sur lesquelles la théorie critique s’est appuyée pour asseoir son projet d’émergence à l’état adulte, comme disait Kant, font grève.

PM: Citoyen Camerounais, formé en France, vivant et enseignant aux États-Unis et en Afrique du Sud, historien, mais aussi philosophe, anthropologue, politiste... vous aimiez passer les frontières ?

AM: J’aurai, toute ma vie, été un passant. Non pas un nomade ou un exilé, mais un passant, quelqu’un qui aura campé aux frontières.

PM: « Passant », c’est ainsi que vous qualifiez aussi l’être africain. Qu’entendez-vous par là ?

AM: L’histoire africaine sur la longue durée peut être interprétée à partir de la thématique du passage, du passant, du passeur. Les cultures d’Afrique se sont formées dans la circulation et la mobilité. C’est pourquoi les frontières et le sentiment d’enfermement qu’elles provoquent sont vécues de façon si traumatisante, à la fois à l’intérieur du continent et en rapport avec le reste du monde.

Plus largement, je suis convaincu que le passant figure le sujet de demain. On pourrait imaginer une reconfiguration du droit cosmopolite sur la base de la figure du passant. Ce nouveau droit garantirait à chaque habitant de la Terre le droit de séjourner, sans visa, à tout le moins temporairement, dans n’importe quelle partie du monde où la vie vous conduit. Un tel droit serait inné, distribué à proportions égales entre tous les habitants de la Terre. Les droits de l’homme, lorsqu’ils conçoivent le droit d’asile par exemple, le font en regard d’un droit humain fondamental qui est le droit de vivre là où on est né, le droit de vivre « chez soi ». Or, à l’heure des grandes mobilités humaines et de l’urbanisation du monde, le droit de circulation, égal pour tous et partout, devrait être le nouveau droit humain fondamental. Mais le danger aujourd’hui, c’est au contraire le rêve de communautés sans étrangers, ce désir d’apartheid, qui hante notre monde.

PM: Un sujet cosmopolite, c’est finalement votre ultime signe vers Kant et sa vision de l’hospitalité ?

AM: Il faudrait prolonger son projet de « Paix perpétuelle » dans un monde qui a radicalement changé et n’est plus dominé par l’Europe. Dans un monde, le seul que nous ayons, dont nous sommes tous les ayant-droits, et qu’il nous faudra impérativement apprendre à partager s’il doit être durable.
LOCATING THE CITY IN WINDHOEK: REGIMES OF THE LEGAL AND OTHER ASPECTS

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Addressing a critical lacuna in studies of Windhoek, Ellison Tjirera argues that the affective and material habitation of its spaces by residents contradicts its legal exclusion from full status as a city. Reading its colonial past alongside its post-colonial present, he explores the ways in which Windhoek’s emerging built environment reflects official desires for the “city to come” that may or may not be in concord with those of its denizens.

SETTING THE SCENE

Windhoek is one of those urban centres in Africa South of the Sahara, which has evaded sustained attention and academic interest within the rubric of urban studies in Africa. This raises some questions: Is it (Windhoek) some mundane and negligible urban centre in the south-west of Africa not worthy of writing into the register of urban studies / cities on the continent? Did Windhoek or Namibia for that matter, assume a peculiar trajectory after decolonisation? And what is the character of this trajectory? These questions acknowledge contributions from a number of interlocutors who, I argue, fell short of adequately ‘writing the city (Windhoek) into being’.²

David Simon is one writer who has demonstrated sustained academic interest in Windhoek. He has been writing about Windhoek since the 1970s and his PhD dissertation (Simon 1983) was on this city that currently has roughly 326 000 inhabitants (NSA 2013). Among other aspects, Simon touched on issues of ‘informal’ trading, desegregation and urban apartheid, urban planning conundrums and urban poverty within the rubric of urban change in Windhoek (Cf. Simon 1984; 1986; 1985). For the purposes of this article, I will focus on what could be called the ‘regimes of the legal’ regarding the making and/or status of Windhoek.

This focus is rendered important by the express belief that apart from giving cities their legal status, local government law dictates whether or not cities can conduct their own affairs without interference or only with express sanction from the state legislature (Frug and Barron 2008, p. 3). Indeed, local government law specifies which services will be provided locally and which will be provided by others (op. cit.). It follows that city dwellers have to operate within the parameters of legal provisions of one sort or the other. However, as I will discuss later, a city is by and large defined by the unwritten popular imagination of the city dwellers rather than by the law. But first, a little bit of history of Windhoek is worth sketching.

The modern beginnings of Windhoek date back to 1890 with the arrival of the German Schutztruppe (occupying forces) under the command of Curt von François and the construction of a fort (Cf. Gewald 2009: 259; Dierks 2002: 73; Hartmann 2004: 28), the Alte Feste (old fortress), as it is popularly known. It is the oldest surviving building in Windhoek (see Figure 1) and was declared an historical monument in 1957.³ History has it that in the mid-19th century, control over Windhoek was contested between Jonker Afrikaner’s Orlam Nama and the OvaHerero under Samuel Maharero (Simon 1995, p. 139). Windhoek’s literal meaning in Afrikaans is ‘windy corner’ and its origin is thought to be a contraction of Winterhoek – a mountain range in the Western Cape behind Jonker Afrikaner’s home town (op. cit.). The OvaHerero people call Windhoek Otjomuise (steaming place) while the Nama christened it |Ae||gams (hot springs) (Cf. Pendleton 2006: 3; Hartmann 2004: 27). Both names are a reference to the many hot and warm springs surrounded by clouds of evaporating water which marked the site until the 1950s (Heywood and Lau 1993, p. 19).

REGIMES OF THE LEGAL VERSUS POPULAR IMAGINATION

In 1909, Windhoek gained municipal status before being proclaimed a city in 1965.⁴ Veracity of the latter is suspect, and for this reason I am treating the ‘fact’ concerning the year in which Windhoek was supposedly granted city status with a caveat as supporting proclamation(s) and/or ordinance(s) proved elusive. One of the Namibian dailies ran a story on 16th...
September 2013 quoting the Minister of Regional and Local Government, Charles Namoloh, reminding Windhoekers if not Namibians, that Windhoek is not a city (Immanuel 2013). According to Namoloh, Windhoek is yet to gain official recognition as a city. He maintains however, that the government is working towards gaining this recognition (op. cit.). The Minister was backed by a Windhoek based lawyer, Etuna Josua, who argued that the term “city” does not exist in Namibian laws as it was used in repealed pre-independence legal provision(s) (op. cit.). As I demonstrate later in the article, reference to the aforementioned legal provision(s) in search of Windhoek as a city is a legal myth. Not surprisingly, this ‘un-citying / de-citying’ of Windhoek is contrary to vox populi as the box below shows.

**BOX 1 REACTIONS TO ‘WINDHOEK IS NOT A CITY’**

The Namibian [online version], September 16, 2013.

“Old policies/acts need to be amended. This need to be corrected asap. City of Windhoek just sounds great…” - Sheni Shiwa.

“Windhoek is acceptably known and recognized as a city and it will remain in the hearts of the people, although the law says otherwise”. - Mae-Tako.

“That is so confusing, if then Windhoek is not a city. But how to be called the cleanest city Africa, if it is not a city?” - Helao Silas.

“So the Windhoek city police is an illegal entity or what does this mean?” - Kakunde

“I don’t know why you have got time to waste, who discovered this now after 23 year of Independence…now who is responsible for that mess??” - Shaya Platform Junior.

“Oh shame to hear this surprising news, Honourable Namoloh let’s make it very fast and change where we can and call it a city officially cause Windhoek is our capital city.” - Barnes Uwu-khaeb.

“So we don’t have a capital city, uf shame, let’s turn Windhoek municipality or whatever is called into a city honourable minister. I suggest Swakopmund to be the second capital city.” – Varry.

“What is the fuss about? Windhoek is a City and no two-ways about it. The only City in Namibia for that matter and the cleanest City in Africa. Whatever people are saying about it, these are just polemics!” – Popepy.

Comments by readers of The Namibian clearly indicate how jealously the status of Windhoek as a city is guarded by the ordinary people. The fact that some readers fume at the statement that Windhoek is not a city to an extent of declaring it a ‘mess’ in need of swift correction is revealing. Therefore, the Minister’s assertion was a legalistic exercise which nonetheless does not negate Windhoek’s ‘cityness’ and as such is tangential for our purpose. I am using cityness in the sense that AbdouMaliq Simone does, that is, ‘the city’s capacity to provoke relations of all kinds’…and cityness being ‘the city as a thing in the making’. “[A]t the heart of city life is the capacity for its different people, spaces, activities, and things to interact in ways that exceed any attempt to regulate them” (Simone 2010: 3).

After gaining political independence in 1990, Namibia passed numerous laws to align its statute books with new realities while at the same time asserting its statehood. On 28 August 1992, the Local Authorities Act No. 23 was signed into law (GN 166/1992, GG 470). It repealed the Municipal Ordinance 13 of 1963 as amended by Municipal Amendment Ordinance 29 of 1965 – whose provision(s) arguably granted Windhoek city status – and a raft of no less than 91 apartheid era proclamations and ordinances. Surprisingly, a close reading of the Municipal Ordinance 13 of 1963 as well as the Municipal Amendment Ordinance 29 of 1965 makes no reference to the word ‘city’ (Cf. Laws of South West Africa 1963 (1964, pp. 138 – 489); Laws of South West Africa 1965 (1966, pp. 130 – 137)). It thus appears that Windhoek was never proclaimed a city in law as the Windhoek based lawyer Etuna Josua and the writer Brenda Bravenboer would like us to believe. However, the origin of this legal myth is worth digging into. A preliminary scrutiny of the laws of the then South West Africa shows that the principle Municipal Ordinance 13 of 1963 was amended no less than 21 times between 1964 and 1988, devoid of any hint at declaring or proclaiming Windhoek as a city. Nonetheless, road signs pointing in the direction of ‘Windhoek City’ are ubiquitous and it would be bizarre to contend that all these inscriptions are nothing but a fortuitous misnomer. On the other hand, when people are heading towards the
city centre, the references used are town, dorp⁶, kOn-
doropa⁶ or kOdolopa⁶.

Apart from the fact that most if not all scholarly
references to Windhoek invoke the word city (Cf.
Rogerson 1990; Simon 1986; Frayne 2000; Pendleton
2006; Peyroux 2001), it is also the only urban centre
in Namibia with a separate police force called 'City
Police'. Moreover, the highest decision making body
of Windhoek’s Municipality is referred to as the ‘City
Council’. The foregoing brief fixation on the word ‘city’
is predicated on the assumption that we can indeed
analytically speak of Windhoek as a city, the strictures
of legalistic definition notwithstanding. “The city is
not merely a physical mechanism and an artificial con-
struction – it is a state of mind, a body of customs and
traditions, and of organised attitudes and sentiments
that inhere in these customs and are transmitted with
this tradition” (Park 1925: 1). After all, the city is first
and foremost an idea (Mbembe 2013: 10).

“As is evident from the foregoing, the law granting
Windhoek its city status does not reside in the
Tintenpalast (Ink Palace), but is embedded in the
imagination of ordinary men and women roaming its
streets. Constructed in 1912-1913, the Tintenpalast is
the building which houses the parliament of Namibia
(Cf. Tonchi, Lindeke & Grot彼得2012: 417; Gewald
1999: 28). Versions of the meaning differ. The building
was christened Tintenpalast (Ink Palace in German)
either because of ink that went into laws of the country
or because of enormous amount of paperwork during
the construction period.

VIGNETTES OF CULTURAL ECONOMY

Historian Jan-Bart Gewald offers a provocative case
study of Windhoek with regards to how, in his words,
“city planning – being the manipulation of urban land-
scape – can be used to obliterate history” (Gewald 2009:
256). Physical colonial vestiges such as monuments
and other artefacts provoke intensely emotive debate
in Windhoek. As the Namibian government seeks to rid
itself of monuments that glorify the colonisers of yest-
teryear, fierce opposition emerges from Namibians of
German descent in their attempt to reassert their place
in Namibia’s history and of Windhoek in particular.
Gewald maintains that “the current Namibian govern-
ment and the municipality of Windhoek have sought
to inscribe upon the landscape a specific understand-
ing and interpretation of the historical past” (op. cit., p.
256). He hastens to recognise the latter is indeed along
the lines of varied administrations that preceded the
current Namibian administration. The Reiterdenkmal
(equestrian monument) which was until recently sta-
tioned along Robert Mugabe Avenue invited contesta-
tions with racial undertones after government moot-
ed plans to relocate it 13 years ago (Cf. Bause 2008;
Kaapama 2008; Tjihenuna 2014; Vogt 2008). On 19
August 2009 the Reiterdenkmal was moved to make
way for the new Independence Memorial Museum,
only to reappear shortly after, but some hundred me-
tres away from its previously prominent place (Zuern
2012). However, this was to be a temporary and per-
haps iteration of the Reiterdenkmal in the realm of
public display and social life. In what appears to have
been a well calculated move, the equestrian mono-
ment was removed from public view on the evening of

Windhoek is not a city. ©Ellison Tjirera

Tintenpalast. Source: reiseberichte-blog.com

The Reiterdenkmal. Source: New Era 2013
December 26, 2013 while most *Windhoekers* were holidaying outside Windhoek or immersed in a laid-back festive mood with their families in the Capital (Smit 2013).

The removal of colonial historical artefacts bespeaks the reconfiguration of the cityscape and not least the shifting sand of power relations within the memory politics of independent Namibia. It is not surprising that when the cityscape undergoes a controlled metamorphosis, some sections of society will be displeased – particularly when this change involves disposing of artefacts important to their identity and sense of history.

**PYONGYANG IN WINDHOEK**

Apart from the removal of artefacts deemed undesirable in a particular era, reconfiguration of the cityscape involves the installation of new monuments. The question of what is added or created is as important as who is commissioned to undertake the project of creating. In this endeavour, Namibia courted the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Since its political independence in 1990, the Namibian Government has commissioned the Mansudae Overseas Project – a North Korean construction and design firm – to work on no less than three projects.

The collaboration began with the Heroes Acre Memorial, located about 10 km south of the Windhoek city centre. Inaugurated in 2002, the Heroes Acre honours the liberation struggle and was completed by Mansudae Overseas Project over a short period of thirteen months (Kirkwood 2012: 19). Another project to be executed by the North Koreans followed in the form of the new Namibian State House in the posh suburb of Auasblick, south-east of Windhoek.

The most recent installation to accentuate the presence of North Korea’s capital city in Windhoek is the Independence Memorial Museum along Robert Mugabe Avenue. This museum was recently inaugurated on the eve of Namibia’s 24th Independence anniversary (NAMPA 2014). On the preference for North Korean architectural projects in Windhoek, Kirkwood insightfully concludes:

> [t]he decision by Namibian leaders to award architectural tenders to the Mansudae Overseas Project is not based on economic concerns or preference for Mansudae designs, but is instead motivated by a desire to emulate authority, cohesiveness and directed nature of a visual culture specific to Pyongyang. In Namibia, the construction of Mansudae designed buildings and monuments asserts a decisive break with architecture and memorials associated with colonial regimes, and in doing so foregrounds the authority and modernity of the postcolonial government (2012: iii).

**CONCLUSION**

The fraught history of Windhoek has provided historians with ample fodder to feast on. For this reason, Windhoek has been historicised disproportionately since the 17th century. Alas, what I would call the “sociology of Windhoek”, for lack of a better phrasing, is at best sketchy. Of course the history of Windhoek is an important window through which to theorise its present. In my attempt to “write Windhoek into being”, two issues stand out. Firstly, there exists a schism between the law and what constitutes the ordinary people’s perception of what Windhoek is. Legally speaking, Windhoek is not a city – but an unwritten law which proclaimed Windhoek a city exists in the form of popular opinion housed in the moving bodies of ordinary *Windhoekers* and Namibians. At the slightest provocation of being reminded that Windhoek is not a city, ordinary people express outrage and disappointment. Secondly, Windhoek’s cityscape bears the imprint of Pyongyang, represented by construction projects awarded to the North Korean firm, from the State
House project to the Independence Memorial Museum which was recently inaugurated and bound to assume a privileged position in memory politics of Namibia.

NOTES
1 PhD Candidate, University of the Witwatersrand, WiSER Fellow. This piece is an extract from my PhD emerging research.
2 I owe this phrasing to Lindsay Bremner (2010) Writing the City into Being. Essays on Johannesburg 1998-2008 (Johannesburg: Fourthwall Books)
4 Mossolow (1972, p. 63). But see Bravenboer, Brenda (2004), Windhoek Capital of Namibia (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan Publishers) - who argues that “[t]he ‘Alte Feste’ has never been officially proclaimed as a National Monument (...).” p. 16. One wonders if the dissimilar ‘facts’ on the same issue is purely a matter of semantics or something else – Mossolow uses the word ‘declared’ while Bravenboer talks about ‘proclaimed’
6 Largest English language newspaper in Namibia by circulation with some sections in Oshiwambo (Namibia’s mostly spoken indigenous language with +50% speakers).
7 Town in Afrikaans; b to town in OtjiHerero; c to town in Oshiwambo.
Interview with Rem Koolhaas, in which he reflects on his research project in Lagos, Nigeria with the Harvard Project on the City (started in 2000, but so far unpublished) and on the interactive film Lagos Wide & Close, directed by Bregtje van der Haak (presented as an art installation and DVD in 2004 and available online as of July 2014). Rem Koolhaas is the director of the Venice Architecture Biennal which opens on June 5, 2014.

RK = REM KOOLHAAS, ARCHITECT
BvdH = BREGTJE VAN DER HAAK, FILMMAKER

BvdH: I would like to talk to you about Lagos. I think it’s about 15 years since you went to Lagos for the first time, and in 2001, we went there together for the first time. We’ve seen some of the information you collected appear here and there, but the research project in its entirety has not been published yet. What has the reception been of your findings as presented in lectures so far?

RK: I think there are two things: I think that, in Africa, the reception has been very good. There was a sense of welcome because we were looking at Lagos and trying to understand Lagos. I think there was also a good reception of the idea that we were not simply coming to Lagos and trying to analyse it, but that we came with Harvard students who were “married” to African students. Therefore the project also involved sections of the Lagosian population.

Outside Lagos, the reception has been on the one hand great, because I think the material that we introduced was deeply surprising for most people. It had to be, because Lagos at that point was poorly understood and there weren’t many documents of it. So I think the fact that there suddenly was a flood of visual material, was very interesting. On the other hand I’ve also been taken aback and – to use a melodramatic word – “traumatized” by the hostility of part of the reception. For some, the sheer fact that I would go as an architect and inject myself in the heart of Lagos, was seen as a kind of cynical enterprise and any part of my judgment or my analysis was questioned. First of all, it was questioned because people did not trust my motives, and they also felt that there was not enough empathy and not enough declaration of empathy to start with.

This has made me very aware that we are now in a period of our cultural mentality where analysis itself is becoming almost controversial. And where, before we look at anything, we have to first declare our empathy and be deeply empathetic, with all the symptoms of empathy, before we can proceed. One very good example of that was, for instance, the fact that we used the president’s helicopter, which was universally seen as a form of “distancing” and even as a form of cowardice, because we wouldn’t dare to be on the ground. It was seen as a kind of escape, even though one of the classical elements of the architectural apparatus is the “bird’s eye view”, because from above, in a bird’s eye view, you can capture and understand things that you cannot understand from the ground. So it’s simply part of an arsenal of analyses. But “an arsenal of analyses” in itself already sounds suspect in the current cultural moment, I think.

BvdH: How do you explain that scepticism?

RK: Well, so, I partly explained it. I think at this moment the notion of the architect is probably highly charged; an identity automatically assumed to have motives. It is assumed that one of your motives is to change a particular situation or to profit from it. And the fact that I was there not necessarily as an architect but simply as a researcher is not recognised in how people look at architects currently. I was there as a Harvard professor. The word “architect” is now so charged that it automatically triggers suspicion, I think.

BvdH: Suspicion of what?

RK: The suspicion of ulterior motives, and the suspicion of bad motives, and the suspicion of condescension, and the suspicion of insensitivity and the suspicion of whatever, you name it.

BvdH: Profit?

RK: Yeah, profit, ultimately, to benefit from it.
BvdH: But people didn't read the book, because the book hasn't been published. So what exactly were they critical of?

RK: That's what's so interesting. The whole thing has a kind of strange virtual quality, because there was no book, even though the book was announced. So, in that sense, I was also guilty of provoking this situation. People could only respond to the visual symptoms, and not to the substance of the whole thing. That is perhaps why the symptoms became part of the perception in such a strong way. In retrospect, I really think that I made a serious mistake, and did a serious injustice to the energy of the first groups of students, by not publishing the book as it was. But it was exactly this kind of culturally correct pressure, and to some extent intimidation, that made me think twice in terms of producing something that was blatantly not doing justice in every sense to the situation. So I was caught in a trap. On the one hand, there was a lot of fresh observation, a lot of intelligence. On the other hand, it didn’t have the language or perhaps the tone that political correctness expected. And I was simply maybe not courageous enough to bring it out in that particular form.

BvdH: But generally, you are not so easily intimidated by criticism.

RK: I know, and so I’ve often wondered why I didn’t do it, but I think that in this case actually, I’m not intimidated personally. It’s different if it’s about my own performance, or what I do or what I think. But in this case, ironically, I also felt a huge sense of responsibility for not caricaturing, or not ridiculing, and not being simplistic, to these people. So that made me vulnerable, my own actual empathy made me vulnerable by wanting to be scrupulous.

BvdH: Does the suspicion in the reception also have to do with this image of a tall white man looking at Lagos?

RK: Well, that was definitely part of it, of course, but again, more from the outside than inside of Africa. First of all, I was a tall white man among even taller Nigerian men, and I never felt any kind of resentment or reservation from that side, from the side of Lagos or the country. It has been a hugely welcoming and, of course, hugely humorous reception.

BvdH: Back then, you said: “When I look at a picture of myself standing at a crossroads, a traffic point, I think it looks strange. But when I stand there, it doesn’t feel strange.” Do you think that this sort of inhibited attitude in the Western engagement with Africa is keeping us from embracing it more closely, from really engaging with it and understanding it on different levels?

RK: In retrospect, it is very clear to me that I was not the first one to feel such intimidation. If you look at it as a kind of general pattern, this intimidation actually had kept Africa under wraps, literally, and had kept Africa removed from us. And therefore, this intimidation written large was responsible probably for a lot of the more tragic aspects of Africa. If we had been much freer, we could have engaged with Africa, as we did with China, by simply saying: “What can I do here? How can I operate here? And how can I have an interaction here which is not based on special pleading, but on naked interest.”

BvdH: What naked interest?

RK: Naked self-interest and naked interest of the other party, the other side.

BvdH: So Africa is…we’re denouncing it something?

RK: Well, I think that, yes, by being so careful we’ve been denying it a form of engagement, a form of uninhibited and free engagement. That is definitely what I felt.

BvdH: Do you feel that has changed over time? It’s been almost fifteen years now.

RK: I think it has changed enormously because, first of all, Africa has been taking care of itself in many different cases, in ways that are plausible and more robust than perhaps we could have thought. So there isn’t the same emphasis on delicacy and sentimentality anymore. And I think perhaps another thing that has contributed to it, is that we’ve been confronted much more with our own chaos and our own weaknesses and our own organisational ineptitude. So perhaps we are more modest now in the way we look at these places. And our lack of modesty was also one of the reasons why we couldn’t really engage.

BvdH: Are you referring to the economic crisis unfolding in Europe and America since 2008? When we talked first, it was just after the Enron case, and I remember you said: “Look, corruption is taking on
a whole different meaning. It’s going to be so much harder to maintain that Africa is corrupt now.” How has that changed since then?

RK: Those are really visionary words now and when we started looking at China, we said: the one thing that we need to do is change the content and the concept of “corruption” and really find out what “corruption” is. I read in a book about China that corruption is “any financial means necessary to bring two parties together”. So it’s a form of understanding there.

BvdH: But economies in the West also turned out to be much more corrupt than we knew before. Corruption proved to be structural, not simply an aberration.

RK: Yes, it’s a ubiquitous practice, so we need to integrate it in some way in our thinking. Which is not to say that I am an active advocate of it.

BvdH: Not yet.

RK: No I’m sure it will never happen.

BvdH: Have you been back to Lagos?

RK: Yes, I’ve been back a number of times. Every time, it has been really wonderful, on the one hand seeing improvements, and, on the other, also seeing that some of those improvements, for instance in traffic flows, have eliminated some of the phenomena that we were most interested in studying. What we were particularly interested in is how failure generates opportunity, given a certain form of creativity and necessity.

I read George Packer’s article about Lagos again and what he seems to be most indignant about is that we did not continually say: “These people have no choice.” That we do not say: “They have to do this because they otherwise wouldn’t survive.” That there is on our part no indignation about their condition and only some kind of aesthetic slumming. But I still maintain that would be the wrong reason and that there is a real creativity in Lagos, that doesn’t exist anywhere else and enables people to make the best of terrible situations.

BvdH: You made a distinction between choice and options, which I think is interesting. Do you still see that now?

RK: It’s still the case, but some of the most interesting things disappeared. For Lagos, that’s a good thing probably. And as you observed recently, other things and other conditions are still exactly the same, like the street markets. At some point, I met the governor and some of the people who currently make a difference in Lagos, and what I discovered is that a more regular Lagos is not a Lagos where the tradition of planning intelligent infrastructure or collective facilities has been restored. Instead, it’s now leapt one phase further, where what happens is ultimately determined by developers working with the state. So it has shifted to a commercial model of development that we also know in America, in Europe, and in Asia.

BvdH: So is Lagos becoming more like other megacities?

RK: If you look at the visual language, and the visual language is of course mostly Photoshop, then the ideal Lagos is a version of Dubai. I can understand that, because I see the virtues of Dubai. Saying that the ideal Lagos is like Dubai is not a form of condemnation. I can understand that is the new ideal.

BvdH: But is that the same all over the world?

RK: Yes, I think it’s very similar all over the world. Currently, there is the connection between China and Africa, but there is another very strong connection, that people are less alert to, which is the connection between the Arab World and Africa. Most of Eastern Africa is planned from Arab countries, and particularly Dubai, and they’re also beginning to work in West Africa. So what I can predict over time is a really close connection between the Arab World and Africa, closer than between China and Africa. It runs through Islam, on the one hand, but also through Christianity, and other commercial connections, and, of course, there are also traditional connections between Lebanon and Africa, that have been very intense. A lot of Lebanon is now in Dubai, so I see signs everywhere that this is going to be the biggest involvement.

BvdH: Do you think the Arab world is going to be a bigger influence on Africa than China?

RK: Yes, much bigger, and much more authentic also. I think there is a kind of compatibility and involvement there. Of course, there are also many Indian people who operate from Dubai, simply reinforcing already long existing ties.

BvdH: Do you think this idea of China sort of colonising Africa all over again is overrated, or misstated?
RK: I think there are really two big tragedies in the last 20 years. The first one is the way in which America and Europe collectively misunderstand China, and the second big one is the way Europe and America collectively misunderstand Russia. Those two mistakes are having a colossal impact on our daily lives in every sense and I think they’re based on fundamental misunderstandings. In the case of Russia it meant thinking that it was a kind of hopeless party that was on its back and didn’t need to be taken seriously, and that therefore was treated like nothing, basically. And in the case of China, it meant such systematic misreading of motives that the result is the same. What do you think? You also have real experience.

BvdH: Well, I think China does have a large impact at the moment. There’s a lot of Chinese capital going to Africa, and it’s changing more than European development aid, I think.

RK: That’s for sure, because they’re basically building an infrastructure.

BvdH: But I also think that the children born out of these relationships will be a new generation of Chinese-African and Arab-African kids. I think they will have a new worldview, in which Europe and America are not very important.

RK: Out of the picture.

BvdH: At the time you were also sort of starting to get irritated with the market economy and with its effects. Now I think those effects are much stronger, and much more inescapable in a way. How do you feel Lagos relates to that right now?

RK: I want to go back very soon, but before I’ve seen it in its current form, I don’t want to say anything about that.

BvdH: But part of your interest in Lagos was that it was a city disconnected from a global system. Now, can you say that Lagos is disconnected?

RK: No, I’m sure it’s much more connected to the global system now. And that was why our timing, in a way, was impeccable, because maybe we inadvertently discovered the last terra incognita, the last moment of any disconnected point in the world. That might be an interesting way of reading and re-reading it, because I’m still very interested in doing something (on Lagos – BvdH) immediately after this Biennale, I will work on it. I still don’t know how to do it. I want to weed out the first wave of impressions and I also want to write something from my perspective about that whole experience. In retrospect, to have been there is a much more unique condition than we realised at the time.

BvdH: Do you recall an image or a situation which represents that?

RK: That represented the purity of non-connection? Many. It is also important to recognise that we were not only in Lagos. Before we went to Lagos, we drove 5000 kilometres through Nigeria to see it and to understand what kind of relationship Lagos had to the rest of the country. We wanted to see the rest of the country first. So we had a fairly complete sense of how it then operated. I think globalisation now is not only economic connections, not only Chinese investment, not only relations with Dubai, but probably also the intensification of Islamic and Christian conflict. It seems that a lot of the tensions that currently characterise global divisions are important in Lagos, or in Africa, or in that part of Africa. So I think that’s also a form of globalisation.

BvdH: But is there one thing you remember, or one moment that represents that time in Lagos?

RK: Yes, but I always rebel against this kind of question. One moment? There were hundreds of moments. And it was the fantastic kaleidoscopic quantity and intensity of experiences that really brought the whole thing home.

BvdH: You said: “I want to become the storyteller of the friction zone.” What did you want to get out of it?

RK: Now you’re a little bit guilty of the same thing. Really, when I go somewhere, I do not want “to get
something out of it”. I want it to influence me, and to eventually produce something about it. That is really my most authentic motivation. So, in that sense, I’m not worried that I didn’t get anything out of it.

BvdH: But how has Lagos changed you?

RK: Well, I think it has changed me in many ways. I think it reinforced confidence in terms of understanding larger patterns and larger coherences, it reinforced my confidence in terms of talking about really complex situations in a way which does them justice. Actually, it also, of course, intensified and reinforced an emotional register that was perhaps born in Indonesia and deepened in Lagos. And it reinforced endlessly my openness to Africa.

BvdH: Would you like to build in Lagos?

RK: I was alluding to it when we talked about my meeting with the governor. He was suggesting that I could maybe do a bus station at the end of one of the bridges, and that we could on the roof of the bus station do a kind of market. So there was an exceptional moment, when it seemed I could almost directly write myself into the script that was unfolding. That was very beautiful, because it coincided with my increasing discomfort about the way architecture is used as a tool for the articulation of individual values away from a public dimension. So the idea of doing a bus station in Lagos would have been a crowning achievement in my vain search for a utilitarian use of architecture. But, so far, it hasn’t happened.

BvdH: Why not?

RK: I think it was the money, or there was another developer for the project. And actually there was another project for creating a loop around the lagoon that had a lot of commercial backers and maybe that won.

BvdH: Has Lagos influenced for example the CCTV building?

RK: (thinks) Well, what I’m always looking for is a demonstration of imagination on every level where it happens. In the case of CCTV, I have a collection of self-made building implements, because there was a general kind of poverty, so that the workers had to make many different tools themselves. And so it’s recognising urgency across different cultures and moments that is really one of my passions, you could say. So it was more a matter of finding similarities even in extremely different environments, moments, and conditions, then it has influenced it. I would not say directly. And actually it was in the same year, so do you think one influenced the other? Would you construct an influence?

BvdH: No. It seems like two different worlds. That’s why I wonder sometimes how they connect inside your mind. Maybe they don’t?

RK: I remember that my relations with other architects underwent a serious and traumatic break when, at the end of a 10-year-long series of conferences in the Guggenheim Museum in New York, I presented work on Prada and Lagos in one presentation, and was therefore talking openly about the stretch that is implied. Then it was still the 20th century, the last moment of the 20th century, and as we were going to the 21st century it was simply too much for the audience to accept. So I was almost thrown out of the room. And I remember Peter Eisenman saying: “I don’t want to hear this kind of combination! I can’t handle it!” And I think that is one of the few really wonderful sides, which by the way is of course your experience too, of a profession that injects you into different conditions. I think there’s a great similarity between journalism and architecture.

Just one more thing: one of the really kind of strange things about Lagos is that of course my perception of it itself changed a lot, because initially I thought it was all self-organisation and then, in the second instance of looking at it more carefully, I saw that it was the interaction between a contemporary infrastructure that was planned to be a very smooth system, that was then falling into disrepair, and that, in this disrepair, triggered all these other possibilities. And so the self-organisation was there, but it was inscribed in a larger and dysfunctional system. The relation between this dysfunctionality and the self-organisation, was the essence of that city. So, ironically, that gave me a much stronger conviction that one could actually plan something. So initially I used it as a weapon or rhetorical device against planning, but after I discovered that relationship, I used it for the opposite and it convinced me that planning was not always as futile as I was claiming. So that is important to say, because that was perhaps the best recapitulation of what Lagos did with me. Initially, it confirmed scepticism, and then it confirmed a belief in something, and, presumably, a more sophisticated involvement with planning.
We did not yet talk about the assumed influence of Lagos on my own behaviour and my own life, in terms of being more direct and more able to go straight to a goal. I think, for me, the strongest effect was in a small architecture project for a house, which refused to come to a conclusion. I’d been wrestling for a long time with the client before I went to Lagos, and when I came back, I was able to translate that concept for a house into a competition for a concert hall and that, for me, is the strongest effect in architecture. That kind of directness or ability to jump from one condition to another is still part of my relationship to architecture.

BvdH: In urban planning in Europe and America, the big shift, or the latest fashion if you wish, is that the grassroots or “bottom up” approach is now facilitated with digital tools. It involves the idea that we can now all build our own cities and neighbourhoods, and from there construct new kinds of cities. With digital networks and the end of top down planning in the West, are we becoming more like Lagos-with-digital-means? But Lagos is also becoming digital very soon, so we’re becoming more like each other, I think.

RK: Well, you know the most famous thing we said: “Looking at Lagos we’re not looking at something ancient, but we’re looking at the future.” So it would be easy to say now: “Yes, that implication is entirely right. We sensed that more than 10 years ago.” But that is not so true. I’m working on the Venice Biennale now and the digital is also an important part of that. I think that we’re very lucky we’re now speaking after Snowden and that this conversation would have been very different two years ago than it can be now, because two years ago, I think we could have constructed that argument (about grassroots planning with digital means—BvdH), but now I think the illusion that “bottom up planning” exists as something that is not part of a much larger umbrella of surveillance and control is no longer tenable. So, ironically perhaps, I would venture maybe a hypothesis that the digital is not the triumph of the bottom up movement but the final termination of it, or the ultimate impossibility of it, because all bottom up efforts are somehow absorbed and accumulated in these big banks.

BvdH: As a kind of total surveillance?

RK: Maybe not total surveillance, maybe we need a new fantasy or new names for it, but the idea that you can assemble groups that then freely determine their fate through new digital means is highly naïve, I think. If you look at the Arab Spring as a supposed feat of digital mobilisation, and if you look at the kind of situation now, that speaks for itself in terms of which illusions we should abandon.

BvdH: I think, in Lagos, an interesting part of your analysis was the idea of “foregrounding”. What you said earlier about looking down from the helicopter of the president, was also an inspiration for the film. I decided to separate wide and close shots as two ways of looking at the same thing and to run them in parallel to tell the same story about Lagos from two different perspectives. Do you think, looking back, that this is still a productive way of looking at a city? Can you envision bringing that into some kind of publication or apply it to other things?

RK: Yes, it’s incredibly interesting for me and it’s also interesting now for the Biennale. We have made a kind of scan of Italy and in that scan we present for every single location or zone in Italy, both a movie and an architectural project, and what we see in the movies is that the reading of an image as foreground and background is absolutely part of the tradition of movies, or maybe it is the essence of movies.

We’ve looked at the film I Fidanzati (1963) by Olmi. At the time, I thought it was perhaps a slightly trivial story about two lovers, but if you look at it now, you see this unbelievable formal masterpiece where the foreground is bodies in various states of undress and in various events and the background is always this kind of impassive architectural grid or stage set. So yes, I think it’s a productive way of reading, but it probably came from movies. It’s the essence of what movies do: actors in the foreground against a background. So I’m constantly wondering about the connection between film and architecture, but that was probably a tool of film that was a productive way of looking at an urban situation.

BvdH: The growth of cities has not stopped. At that time, you said: “The megacity is where modernisation takes place, that’s why I’m interested in it.” Now, you’re interested in the countryside. How come?

RK: The first time I went there I was circling Lagos by going through the entire country. And it was actually one of the first times I became aware that it’s not a simple situation of countryside and city, but that there was an enormous amount of traffic and that you could not really survive in the countryside without the connection to Lagos, and vice versa, you could not survive in Lagos without the connection to the countryside. So that hypothesis is also how China is going to develop. It’s not that everyone should move to the city, but that
there should be kind of informed relationship between the two.

So to answer your question: “Why do you look at the countryside?” A very simple answer is: because of some accident in my biography, I went to Switzerland and could over 25 years see the evolution of the countryside there. At some point, the evolution was so enormous - it was subtle, but it was radical - that it became possible to imagine that if you wanted to look at real modernisation, you should look at the countryside. Not only did the kind of population change completely, but also every process changed. Automation creates a hugely different relationship between land and the digital. There are farms where the interaction with the farm takes place behind the desktop. Farming is done with the mouse, triggering processes in the real earth via digital means, sometimes even via drones.

And also for our obviously larger and larger needs, you see that in certain cases large scale elements are no longer fit for the city but are transported to the countryside, from data server farms to huge agricultural complexes. So I see the first signs that the countryside will be on the one hand a territory for sentimentality, tourism and alternative wellness, and the on the other hand all of those other needs. I expect that the countryside will develop a highly Cartesian degree of organisation to enable the supposed freedom and frivolity of the city. The city has funny forms and the countryside is your rigour.

BvdH: Will you go back to Lagos?

RK: Yeah yeah, very soon, because as soon as this Venice Biennale is over, I want to go.

BvdH: And publish?

RK: And publish, I need to publish. We are now working on selecting the 300 key images and to describe why they are key. That will be a record of the whole experience, both in images and in words because I think they are equivalent in terms of importance. I will also look, hopefully, in the larger context at what we should do with all the different versions that have been produced of the Lagos book. The original version, which is full of excitement and wonderful interpretations, and all the other, more thorough things we did after that. So we have to find a way to make that whole history of revision accessible.

BvdH: Back then, you said that Lagos made you more direct and more visceral. But it seems to have paralysed you too.

RK: Well in books I’m kind of reluctant to accept the term paralysis. You could also call it gestation. I think to not have done it immediately perhaps serves also a good purpose ultimately, or it enables you to do another thing, because obviously it’s added ten years or fifteen years about Lagos, but also fifteen years about the rest of the world and fifteen years about myself. So I think that could be an interesting connection.

BvdH: I think you need to do it for Lagos, because I remember Funmi Iyanda, the talkshow host and social geographer, saying: “After this, after you publish your book, finally we will get rid of the caricature of Lagos being this filthy dangerous place that everybody should avoid, including African experts on cities.”

Video still. Rem Koolhaas shot by Jean Counet, directed by Bregtje van der Haak (lagos.submarinechannel.com)

RK: Well I think your DVD did a lot of that already though. How many were sold?

BvdH: I have no idea. I have to check.

RK: I really would love to know, because say that a book about Lagos would have sold maybe, if you’re lucky, 30000 copies. I’m interested how close your film would be.

BvdH: Maybe similar.

RK: Yes, so then I think it has done its work.

BvdH: When you look at the film now, do you think it’s outdated?

RK: It’s a film of a moment, I don’t think it’s outdated at all. Maybe we can go back together and see.

BvdH: One last thing, a more general question that has been on my mind and is also recurring in my own
work. I think part of the criticism and the complicated reception of your Lagos research has to do with a notion of criticality and with a lack of clues as to how, in this time, the 21st century, living in a sort of accelerated capitalist engulfment of a densely networked, increasingly digital world society - we can critically engage with the new issues surrounding us. I think there is a lot of confusion about what it means to be critical in this time and I think we need new options or ideas about how to be and do that in a productive way. How can we be critical in the original sense of “kritein”, the Greek word for exploring, researching.

**RK:** Well, I think there is a kind of really obnoxious process going on where every intention is only recorded when it is announced first. So if you’re critical, you have to say “this is a critical look at” and you have to use a certain vocabulary, you have to use certain words, you have to take certain precautions, you have to reassure everybody of your criticality, but also of your empathy. We need at the same time to ignore and to counteract it, because if you really start behaving that way, your life is a nightmare. But we also have to talk about it, and I’m trying to talk about it in different ways myself, saying that this constitutes a nasty loss of fluidity and that thinking needs fluidity, because if you want to retain a statement in a certain narrowly defined zone, that is automatically the exact opposite of what critical thinking or criticality really is. You have to have access and move in every terrain that you think needs to be covered for a real critique. So for me it’s very clear. Criticality now is exactly what it was for the Greeks, a mental attitude to be critical about everything, including yourself, and not something that needs a kind of poster or quotation marks first. I think theory is, in its best sense, that: the liberation of a terrain on which you can move to try to penetrate a certain mystery. That for me is theory, but to be limited to preannounced results or a declared limited zone of inquiry is not interesting.

**BvdH:** You think we can move out of that?

**RK:** I think the worst thing is to lock ourselves in a position of inevitability. Clearly, there are inevitable things about our lives, but when I work in my office and I see that just on this floor about 20 people are working on ideas, then I am not so worried that I’m locked in a kind of prison. I think it’s an effect of being free to pursue what I want to pursue, it probably takes a lot of energy, but this is the crucial thing.

**BvdH:** Is Lagos in any way visible in the Venice Biennial?

**RK:** No.

**BvdH:** Is there a Nigerian pavilion?

**RK:** No, there will be some kind of West African... We were working with Kunlé Adeyemi of NLE architects on a West African presence. In the end it didn’t work, but we will have lectures. So in that sense, it will be present.

(RK shows us a stack of his various unpublished books about Lagos, prepared by his team in the past ten years. Some of the dummy books are completely designed and have a logo of the publisher on the cover).

**RK:** I think this was a kind of brochure we did before any other book. And I think it’s actually wrong that one of the key figures in this whole thing has not been mentioned, Edgar Cleijne, our initial guide, a Dutch photographer who knows Africa inside out and guided our steps there. I don’t know what this is, I guess it is a slightly more elaborate version… This was the first book the students did. And I’ve just been rereading parts of it.

**BvdH:** Which year?

**RK:** I think it must have been 2002 or something. I really should do a kind of reconstruction. This was a version that we worked on with Adeyemi, an electrical engineer and architect also from Lagos, who was in our office and actually moved to New York to work with 2x4 (graphic designers – BvdH) on the whole
book... I think this is the most extreme version that we achieved at the time.

**BvdH:** It even has a publisher logo printed on the front. Why was that not published?

**RK:** (sighs) I think in the end a final lack of concentration. It was of course an intense period and I don’t know.... And then this one, 2009. The irony is that each of them could have been published and maybe the first and last one are the most interesting.

**BvdH:** How are they different?

**RK:** They are each different and we tried scrupulously to be more factual and to do historical research on the different territories. You should look at it yourself. So on the one hand it’s an enormous source of regret, on the other hand an enormous source of potential.

**BvdH:** Has it changed your image of Africa?

**RK:** It has clarified my image of Africa and of course it has intensified my relationship with Africa. After Lagos, I’ve been to many different countries, both the West and East coast, and it confirmed in general my impression of Africa as an unbelievably intelligent and creative part of the world.

**BvdH:** How do you see the future of Africa?

**RK:** Well, given the first part of the answer, I think it can only be positive and creative. Basically, I hope and could actually envisage that if the current phase of economic thinking ends, and if the current phase of fairly exploitative consumerism ends, that Africa makes a contribution.

**BvdH:** How?

**RK:** I really don’t know how. We’re seemingly stuck with this system, but that condition can only mean that, in the end, people will rebel and find something different. Isn’t it so?

**BvdH:** Because it’s so extreme?

**RK:** Because it’s so extreme and so counterproductive for so many people, and so humiliating also to be part of it.

**BvdH:** So that might be the source of something?

**RK:** I don’t know, but basically, every territory that is undergoing this intense transformation and economic growth is given a lot of initiative to find things, or a lot of possibility to redefine things. I mean, China has, if you really look at it. If you look in retrospect at what they have contributed, it’s probably really important. Not on the level of economic thinking, but maybe in some other way, such as how to rethink development or how to undo poverty. So Africa, certainly, if it has that moment, will also generate a new and different kind of thinking.

**NOTES**

**REFERENCES**
http://www.submarinechannel.com/web-docs/dvd-lagos-wide-close/
**INTRODUCTION: IMAGINING AFRICA’S FUTURE CITIES**

**Stephanie Bosch Santana**
Harvard University

Stephanie Bosch Santana introduces a selection of essays produced for Achille Mbembe’s “African Future Cities” seminar held at Harvard University in the second half of 2013. She frames the pieces gathered here in light of a growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship figuring African urbanism as a site of creativity and crisis; exploring tropes of migration, alterity, spectacle and uncertainty as they play out across the imagined terrains of African futurities.

The images of Africa’s “future cities” are resplendent. Hope City, to be built on the outskirts of Accra, Ghana, appears as a cluster of tapered cylinders like otherworldly cocoons rising out of a red, barren landscape. Designed by an Italian architect in the (supposed) style of Northern Ghanian roundhouses, the towers are drawn in such a way that they seem to be in motion, each spinning rapidly on its own axis, as though propelling itself into the future.

The images of Eko Atlantic, currently under construction on land reclaimed from the sea on the edge of Lagos, Nigeria, are equally fantastic. Designed by an Italian architect in the (supposed) style of Northern Ghanian roundhouses, the towers are drawn in such a way that they seem to be in motion, each spinning rapidly on its own axis, as though propelling itself into the future.

The African continent’s rapid urbanization has created a variety of new city forms such as these. Whether real or imagined, already built or existing only as architectural plans and sleek images on billboards and websites, these future cities embody a number of contradictions.

The African continent’s rapid urbanization has created a variety of new city forms such as these. Whether real or imagined, already built or existing only as architectural plans and sleek images on billboards and websites, these future cities embody a number of contradictions. Often designed to be “sustainable” and “eco-friendly,” they are fuelled at least in part by the extraction of finite resources (oil, minerals, and natural gas) and thus have complex relationships to the natural environment. Africa’s future cities are also frequently planned on the peripheries of existing metropolises and threaten to inscribe new forms of urban apartheid even as they inspire visions of a more equal and prosperous future. While often funded by foreign investors and designed in architectural firms in faraway New York or Abu Dhabi, these cities have a way of working themselves into local popular imaginaries such that farmers who will be displaced by Kinshasa’s plans for the ultra-modern Cité du Fleuve are able to muse, “Yes, we’ll be the victims, but still it will be beautiful” (De Boeck 85).

Indeed, many of the images of Africa’s projected urban futures are beautiful, captivating. So much so that a recent slew of articles has been dedicated to discerning whether these master plans will become realities or remain fantasies. Whether or not one of Hope City’s towers will eventually stand as the tallest in Africa (for the moment the project has yet to break ground), it and cities like it are indicative of the increased blurring of boundaries between the fantastic and the real, the actual and the virtual. Achille Mbembe (2013) suggests that in our age of image-capitalism, where the image has become a “techno-phenomenological institution,” our ideas of (and desires for) the future are increasingly shaped by images and mediated by screens. Today’s rapidly diversifying digital technologies accelerate the circulation of these images. In addition to multi-media websites, many of these future cities also have their own Facebook pages where they share photos, accept friend requests, and post status updates. Kenya’s Tatu City writes encouraging messages wishing its followers a wonderful weekend, a Happy Easter, and even congratulating Uhuru Kenyatta on his election as president. Eko Atlantic posts more informative project updates, for example the pictures of a recent visit to
“Do these cities enhance our capacity to dream or do they arrest our imaginations?”

the development site by schoolchildren who say they hope to one day live there. Most bizarrely, Hope City—or perhaps someone posing as it—posts cryptic riddles and jokes on its page. For cities that do not yet exist, they certainly have active social lives.

In addition to what these cities’ virtual presences suggest as to the subjecthood of things and what Mbembe hails as a new form of animism under late capitalism, they also raise questions as to their impact on our own imaginative faculties. Do these cities enhance our capacity to dream or do they arrest our imaginations? In her provocative essay in this volume, Jessica Dickson discusses the capacity of science fiction to “punctuate” reality with fantasy, creating “gaps” that allow us to “think with vocabularies that do not exist.” Similarly, by trading in the fantastic, do the images of these cities create space for us to think in new urban forms? Or do they capture our fantasies, making it difficult to think outside of the corporate futures that they signal? In other words, do they circumscribe our vocabularies with neo-liberal ideologies or do they inspire us to articulate the future in new ways?

If the essays collected here are any indication, these images of the future urban—if at turns arresting, inspiring, and controversial—are ultimately productive. Achille Mbembe’s “African Future Cities” course, which he taught at Harvard University in Fall 2013 (and that generated the majority of the essays collected here), opened with these images, sparking a number of essential questions about the future and future-thinking: In what ways does the African future city look like as imagined through literary and artistic forms, and how do these visions converge or diverge from those of architects, urban planners, government taskforces, and multinational corporations? While broadly concerned with images and manifestations of futurity, the papers in this collection take the African future city as a useful theoretical lens through which to consider entangled temporalities, spatialities, and visibilities. How are ideas of the past, present, and future made visible in these city forms? What do urban forms and their representations reveal about the relationship between the real and the virtual, the psychic and the material? How can we move beyond the repetition of existing forms to imagine new ones? Together, these essays provide a variety of new insights into the imaginative practices and resources through which Africa’s future cities are being made and remade.

As the essays in this volume show, future-thinking in Africa is far from limited to billion dollar commercial projects like Hope City and Eko Atlantic. In addition to driving economic growth, the continent’s burgeoning cities are also its creative epicenters, where local resources are mobilized daily to respond to complex and evolving urban realities. Taking us into one of Accra’s most infamous slums “Sodom and Gomorrah,” Debbie Onuoha reveals what some of the survival strategies of informal urbanism look like: residents set up ad hoc markets, build makeshift homes on the banks of the polluted Korle Lagoon, and mine e-waste dumps for copper and other useful metals. These informal urban strategies are often in conflict with government sanctioned visions of the future, leading to official “solutions” that are sometimes as impractical as they are violent—as in the case of municipal “decongestion” policies in Accra. Onuoha argues that these policies betray authorities’ fears of losing control over the movement of people and goods and that the positioning of the informal as “congestant” shows its underlying associations with the transgressive, the unclean, and the foreign. Rather than purge the city of informality—a virtual impossibility—Onuoha argues for the importance of integrating informal practices, residences, and economies into cities’ future urban plans.

Mark Duerksen’s essay on Rem Koolhaas’s still-unpublished study of Lagos also addresses the relationship between urban planning and informal infrastructures. Koolhaas’s fame brought international attention to his approach to Lagos as a site of innovation rather than tragedy or chaos, as a place from which the rest of the world could learn, and is indicative, as Duerksen argues, of a larger paradigm shift in African studies. Duerksen notes that Koolhaas and his team had a particularly keen eye when it came to observing and documenting Lagosians’ innovative repurposings of the city’s space and materials. Koolhaas’s insistence that Lagos was a city that “worked”—indeed, a city that represented the “terminal state” of metropolises in the global north—generated heated debate amongst urban planners, policy developers, and historians, many of whom accused Koolhaas of romanticizing informality and ignoring the political, economic, and historical factors that had contributed to Lagos’s current state. In fact, rather than eschew planning, Duerksen emphasizes that Koolhaas came away from the project with a renewed sense of its importance: formal plans, which are never executed quite as intended, provide an essential starting point for informal interventions. While acknowledging some of the shortcomings of Koolhaas’s study, Duerksen suggests that it should be supplemented with ones that are similarly embedded in local
cultures and urbanisms and committed to articulating them on their own terms—outside of Western vocabularies and imageries.

In his essay “Where There Are No Others,” Eric Reinhart gives further credence to the idea that it is to the global south that we must look in order to better perceive the shape of the world’s urban futures. Through a consideration of Chicago’s “Lakesides”—a massive development planned for Chicago’s notoriously poor and black South Side—Reinhart shows how “dual” or “corporate” cities such as this have their antecedents in predatory, neoliberal development and structural adjustment policies that have plagued much of the global south for decades. More than new forms of urban planning, Reinhart argues that these developments signal new modes of “entrepreneurial” governance. Mega-developments like Lakeside and Eko Atlantic “represent the most advanced form of neoliberal urban governance and the most spectacular culmination of the public-private partnership to date” and will have dire consequences for their victims: namely, the poor and working classes who will be increasingly displaced and disenfranchised from what essentially constitutes a new form of corporate citizenship. Like Eko Atlantic or La Cité du Fleuve, Lakeside will have its own public services, schools, and police force; it will circumvent rather than seek to address the challenges facing the existing South Side community. Overall, these new cities seek not only to marginalize the working classes and the poor but to erase them altogether from visions of the future. Reinhart cautions, “We are planning cities in which there are no outsiders, no signs of the uninhabited futures.” The novel’s minor and major characters, which include migrants, hustlers, record-producers, and internet scammers, re-write the city as they move between its various spaces—from Hillbrow, where many Zoos reside, to the stylized, socially-exclusive city-suburbs of Rosebank and Newtown, and also to the city’s more or less invisible spaces—the underground drainage systems and the mine dumps on the city’s outskirts that recall Johannesburg’s history as a site of racialized, migrant labor. While these informal infrastructures are often improvised and driven by necessity, they are based on a web of entangled interpersonal relationships and inflected by race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality as well as Zoo status. Furthermore, while Hillbrow is depicted as a space of criminality, its informal networks ultimately forge community and connection, unlike the city’s gated suburbs, which create havens for the wealthy, and ultimately fester and rot from the inside. Reading Zoo City, one suspects that satellite cities like Lakeside and Eko Atlantic may suffer similar fates. However, unlike the futuristic images of these cities, which suggest an estranged reality

While there are many reasons to fear the birth of what Reinhart heralds as the “corporate charter city”—a city with no past—a number of essays in this volume also give hope as to the power of imaginative and aesthetic practices to reclaim and transform urban spaces, often by activating multiple temporalities simultaneously. Whereas urban plans are future-oriented out of necessity, literary and artistic representations have greater freedom to seek the future in the past and in alternative presents. In her essay on Angolan artist Kiluanji Kia Henda, Dariel Cobb showcases the artist’s interventions into the urban space of contemporary Luanda through playful representations and appropriations of public monuments. Statues occupy an important place in the metropolitan landscape as forms where urban planning, public art, and state ideology meet to contest visions of the city’s past, present, and future. Cobb argues that by placing fashion designer Shunnoz Fiel dos Santos atop a pedestal once occupied by the likeness of Portuguese colonist Paolo Dias de Novais, Henda engages in a practice of temporal mixing through which he uses the past to “catalyze and ignite possible futures.” Cobb sees Henda’s historically conscious, site-specific work as standing in contrast to the many tabula rasa developments that are currently being developed across the continent, suggesting that the Angolan government’s commissioning of such projects from foreign architectural firms displays an overall poverty of imagination. Artists like Henda are breaking out of the molds prescribed by these international firms and re-writing the city as they move between its various spaces—from Hillbrow, where many Zoos reside, to the stylized, socially-exclusive city-suburbs of Rosebank and Newtown, and also to the city’s more or less invisible spaces—the underground drainage systems and the mine dumps on the city’s outskirts that recall Johannesburg’s history as a site of racialized, migrant labor. While these informal infrastructures are often improvised and driven by necessity, they are based on a web of entangled interpersonal relationships and inflected by race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality as well as Zoo status. Furthermore, while Hillbrow is depicted as a space of criminality, its informal networks ultimately forge community and connection, unlike the city’s gated suburbs, which create havens for the wealthy, and ultimately fester and rot from the inside. Reading Zoo City, one suspects that satellite cities like Lakeside and Eko Atlantic may suffer similar fates. However, unlike the futuristic images of these cities, which suggest an estranged reality
that may exclude us, Dickson argues that Beukes’s use of science fiction and fantasy to evoke an alternative Johannesburg encourages us as readers to participate in the “cognitive work” of imagining the city’s past, present, and possible futures.

Other resources that are mobilized to envision alternative futures include the spiritual. As Greg Marinovich suggests in his photo essay on Kimbanguism, a Christian sectarian movement founded by Simon Kimbangu in the Belgian Congo in the early 1900s, city-dwellers often turn to religion in order to fulfill needs left unaddressed by the state. These needs are material—including health and educational facilities—as well as immaterial: Kimbanguism provides its followers with networks and imaginative resources that allow them to survive in a chaotic and challenging urban landscape. Marinovich’s photographs also give insight into the importance of both ritual and memorialization in relation to built forms and the physical environment, from parades that imitate government ceremony at the mother church’s 37,000-capacity temple to the humble prison wall that serves as a material reminder of Kimbangu’s imprisonment and sacrifice.

Many of the essays collected here address the methods, disciplines, and perspectives through which we study the city. Duerksen notes the various ways that Koolhaas and his team explored Lagos—first from the removed safety of a car, then on foot, and finally, in the President’s borrowed helicopter (the method that has drawn the most vocal critiques). Each of these vantage points provided new and different insights into the city and how it functioned. Against those who objected to Koolhaas’s method as reductionist and essentializing, Duerksen reminds us that Koolhaas approached the city first and foremost as an architect, with an interest in built form, and not as a political scientist or anthropologist. If the bird’s eye or helicopter view that Koolhaas finally adopted represents one means of apprehending urban environments, many of the other essays in this volume engage with the more fragmented, partial, and embedded perspective of the walking subject. For example, while Reinhart is concerned with the historical, economic, and political factors leading to the growth of the global corporate city, he also takes us imaginatively into the space of Chicago’s South Side, walking us through its abandoned buildings to the barren field where Lakeside is to be developed. Standing on the water’s edge, we see its past—the steel mills that once stood there—and also envision its future. Similarly, through the inclusion of substantial portions of text from Zoo City, particularly those that take us into Johannesburg’s different urban spaces from the perspective of the novel’s protagonist, Zinzi, Dickson also highlights the value of seeing the city from the ground level, through eyes that feel like our own but that we share with someone else—which is of course one of the most powerful aspects of literary fiction. While these essays gesture to the importance of an embodied perspective, Darja Djordjevic and J. Antonio Campos engage most explicitly with the experiential dimension of urban forms and the relationship between materiality and subjective in their contributions. While Djordjevic considers how Rwanda’s development agenda crystallizes into urban forms and products that shape lived experience in Kigali, Campos meditates on the role that affect plays in the making of the city.

In contrast to the satellite cities discussed above, Rwanda’s capital Kigali is one of the few places where a major overhaul is planned for the city’s existing space (Watson 2013). As Djordjevic describes in her essay “Accelerated Kigali,” Rwanda’s current development policies are striving to overcome the nation’s traumatic past and to “make up for lost time” by speeding it into the future, a process that “is about rewriting the temporal requirements that we typically associate with the teleology of modernity.” In its efforts to become an ICT hub and middle-income country by 2020, Rwanda is leaping over some of the developmental stages typically associated with modernization (such as industrialization) and implementing swift policy changes to facilitate growth without giving Kigaloi much time to adapt. Guiding us through the Centre ville, Djordjevic observes the ways that this telos of acceleration has been translated into Kigali’s urban forms—such as the new numeric system for naming streets and the switch from French to English as the official language of instruction in schools—suggesting that it has created in its inhabitants a sense of constantly being “pushed along” and needing to “catch up,” as well as a nagging fear that perhaps quality is being sacrificed in the name of speed.

Campos’s experimental, multimedia piece is based on the author’s experience of walking through the city of New York after a painful breakup and suggests several hypotheses regarding the role of affect in place-making. Campos filmed his walks through New York—each of which was accompanied by a particular soundtrack—and later reconstructed his experiences in written “mosaics.” Urging us to see these narrativizations of his walks as performances of his practice rather than as mere illustrations of it, Campos emphasizes that it is through storytelling that theory emerges. Seeking to build on De Certeau’s work in L’invention du quotidien, Campos argues that while attentive to the work of memory in the making of place, De Certeau “pays insufficient attention to the sentimental state of the walking subject.” It is rather the walker’s emotions that
“function as conditions of possibility for the serendipitous encounters and unexpected itineraries that constitute the enunciation of urban space.” Campos explains that as he walked through Harlem and later through Times Square, his particular emotions of anger and sadness following his breakup allowed certain memories to emerge rather than others. These emotions, in turn, were products of a deeper, ineffable force, of affect. Drawing attention, for example, to how a green stoplight transports him to the beach in Italy with his former lover, Campos theorizes affect as “the fluid cementation of the connection between subjecthood and materiality,” demonstrating how the self and the material world together “tamed” affect into the particular emotions that shaped his walks in New York City.

Such approaches to urban space—which consider not only how the city structures the experiences of urban dwellers but how they in turn produce the city—might seem far-removed from the purview of traditional urban planning, but how might they be integrated into the urban plans of the future? In their vivid designs for low-income housing development in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, Kwabena Abrah-Asiedu, Edward Becker, Osaruyi Igiehon, and Kayla Lim provide an image of what urban planning that takes into account local experiences, infrastructures, and social, cultural, and environmental factors might look like. These plans, which seek to grow public infrastructure while also creating opportunities for future private investment, draw upon local knowledge, materials, and structures, such as the Burkinabe wall, in order to create housing that works in harmony with local agriculture and commerce. Unlike most Burkinabe urban compounds, this development is designed vertically rather than horizontally in order to maximize space. Envisioned as bordering a greenbelt area where crops are already being grown informally, the development will encourage further agricultural activity through the building of grain silos as part of the compound’s walls, which will later be turned into communal chimneys as the need for living space increases. The compound’s inner walls will help to protect crops from street traffic while the outer walls serve as important spaces of sociality. In the beautifully rendered images of the project, for example, we see this outside wall as a busy space of commerce and community: women sell mounds of vegetables grown in the greenbelt, children play, livestock roam, people chat, and vendors sell their wares. Abrah-Asiedu et al. also note that the housing project will preserve existing informal footpaths that crisscross through the greenbelt, thus facilitating access to its future homes and businesses and preventing the development from being isolated from the present landscape and community in the way that Eko Atlantic, Lakeside, and Hope City will be. I take the preservation of these paths as symbolic of the project’s overall commitment to working with, rather than around, informal infrastructures and also find it to resonate with many of the essays here in its concern with the experience of walking the city. It is an example of urban planning that takes seriously the way that urban-dwellers themselves contribute to the city’s creation.

By incorporating existing informal structures and ways of being into their vision for future low-income housing, Abrah-Asiedu et al. help us to think with new images and to create new urban vocabularies. The images of the project are equally, if not more, captivating than those of mega-developments like Hope City. As Jacques Rancière (2007) suggests, the power of the image is always two-fold. Images speak silently of others—with images that retain their “liberating power” and “incommensurable singularity,” qualities that Rancière attributes to the speechless image and that are so necessary for radically new imaginations of the future, but that are also more inclusive and that speak of both a common past and a shared future (34). The essays collected here—which offer us glimpses of the streets of New York and Kigali, Henda’s appropriated pedestals, informal structures along the Korle lagoon, and Kimbanguists at prayer—provide a kaleidoscope of counter-images of the urban future. Together, they make visible new ways of imagining Africa’s future cities that are rooted in practices of connection and collectivity.

REFERENCES
I was born on October 30, 1981 in Mexico City. A day and thirty-two years later, I woke up in Manhattan with a broken heart. A wonderful relationship had come to a sudden end on the 20th, after almost eight years of sharing our lives together. We resided in Mexico City, Marseille, and Nairobi. We traveled Mombasa, Lamu, Mumbai, Kigali, Firenze, Barcelona, Paris, Antananarivo, London, El Paso, and Juarez. Her name was Jeanne. It still is. The Marseillaise. In the fall of 2012, I had gone to Chicago as a PhD student in anthropology, while she was pursuing her own career in academia back in France. Would we still be a couple if I had stayed or if she had come?

These useless thoughts invaded my mind during that rainy morning in New York. Gray sky. I had an appointment at 1:30 with Claudio Lomnitz at Columbia University. And I thought I had enough time to abandon myself to regrets. So I did. But by noon, I left the apartment (I was staying at the temporarily rented flat of a friend, who was in town for work). Distracted as I was, I scratched on a piece of paper the Google instructions to get to campus—but of course, they were all wrong.

I got onto the subway, northbound. By the time I realized how long it was taking, I was already in the Bronx. I exited and asked for directions to Columbia University. And I thought I had enough time to abandon myself to regrets. So I did. But by noon, I left the apartment (I was staying at the temporarily rented flat of a friend, who was in town for work). Distracted as I was, I scratched on a piece of paper the Google instructions to get to campus—but of course, they were all wrong.

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A few meters down 125th Street, I noticed a sensation of strangeness and disgust in my stomach as Filastine’s “Gendjer2” played on my iPod. I couldn’t understand the lyrics—the track is a reworking of an old Javanese resistance song. Therefore, it would be difficult to say that the song, as speech, was the cause of this sensation. Rather, it was something about the somber tone and sorrowful pitch of the singer’s voice, the mournful intensity of the cello, the sedate rhythm of the bass, the drums, and the sudden electronic rasps that which nurtured this strange vibration inside me. My breathing accelerated, as my throat dried and tightened. I felt that crackling static electricity behind the eyes that comes when one is about to break into tears. I sighed. But I held back.

I stopped walking, reached inside my pocket, and took the iPod out. I went back over my steps and activated its camera. I felt a compulsion to document the stimuli around me that, in conjunction with the music, had seemingly triggered the estrangement. It was Halloween, and the street was particularly colorful, loud, smelly, and crowded. I wanted to share this sudden occurrence, this impossibility to feel affectionate toward my surroundings, with somebody—with Jeanne, to be honest; but I knew this would not happen. With Gendjer2 playing softly in my headphones so as not to miss the soundscape of the streets, I filmed my walk, carefully placing the iPod at the level of my eyes and delicately moving it as I moved my own gaze.

As I returned to the corner of Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and West 125th Street, the stoplight switched from red to green and sent a beam of light onto my face. With that flash, a stream of images flooded into my head. It is August 2012... I see Jeanne sunbathing next to me, lying on the stones and the sand. It’s warm. We are in Sardinia, Italy, enjoying what would be our last vacation together. I am busy reading Farah’s Knots. I look at her and feel overwhelmed by her beauty, lucky to be there with her, just
the two of us. I see our future together, fellow travelers until the end of our days, and I want to tell her about my infinite love. But I tell myself I will do it over dinner or after finishing the chapter. I carry on with my reading, and the urge eventually fades, one page turning into another, pages turning into events, events into plots. I go through the entire book without saying a word. Jeanne and I have a last swim at 6 o’clock, and I think again of telling her. It would have been simple. I could have caressed her face, looked deep into those green eyes, and promised yet again to love her always. But somehow I persuade myself that she already knows. I have caressed her face, looked deep into those green eyes, and promised yet again to love her always. But somehow I persuade myself that she already knows. I stay silent. We shower. Over dinner we talk politics and somehow I persuade myself that she already knows. I stay silent. We shower. Over dinner we talk politics and revolution. The usual.

In New York, the green light blazed again. Along with the siren of an ambulance and undistinguishable fragrances in the air, it brought me back to the present. But perhaps not quite. When I turned right on 125th Street, I profoundly regretted my decision not to remind her of my commitment. This inner lament was like a whisper that turned the shrill resonance of the ambulance into the tender ebb of the waves of the Sardinian sea. And again, the past emerged. I see us sitting at the restaurant. I feel the sand on my skin that the shower failed to remove. I taste Sardinian Torbato (a white wine from the northwestern Sella & Mosca estate). I feel the softness of her ears as I caress them and explain to her again why I like to do this. I tell her that when in amicable or romantic love, I touch other people’s ears as an expression of my affection. I hear her telling me then that she has always detested this habit.

As I thought of reasons why, my mind returned to the street. I saw trash piled next to its intended container, schoolgirls chitchatting, the ambulance I had just heard. I saw Fedex, Sprint, Payless Shoes. I saw a street stall with little crystal pots and incense, and the source of the fragrances I had smelled. The Bank of America, a cradle missing the baby, bags, beanies, distorted music, a red van. The smell of cumin made me think of the extent of time that I had been moving from Europe to South America, back to Europe, to Africa, and then back to Europe again. Exhausting. A passing truck revealed a store banner across the road. It read “America’s Kids.” I kept turning my gaze to the left, following the trajectory of the truck, until I had made a right turn and saw a 10-story building, the Theresa Hotel. In black spray paint, I read this legend tagged on one of its walls: “Harlem.” That is were I was. I was in an iconic neighborhood, where exclusion, unemployment, poverty, and racial segregation had, at some point, hypothetically, although a remarkable artistic sensibility at the turn of the twentieth century had originated. I thought of colonial governmentality, Frantz Fanon, and his wretched of the earth. “Regulate the movement of bodies, group populations by skin color, dispossess them: you end up with a ghetto” – I told myself. Harlem, the exemplar of the world that the United States builds with its cities. Harlem. As I walked it, I realized I lived now in the United States, this “country of racists” which Fanon hated so much to the point of refusing to receive medical attention here.

I turned back around again to recommence my walk, catching in passing the word “Place” on the façade of a store. I thought of Michel de Certeau and the personal execution of space. I then read “Signs make $$ and sense” on a small billboard at ground level. I thought about commodities and value. I thought about capital and migration. And I saw Sardinia again. I saw Marseille. I saw Jeanne at the airport gate, and I smelled our last kiss. Amidst this remembering, I was once again interrupted. A lady with a party hat and a set of balloons drew my attention back to the street, and I started looking at shop windows and ongoing sales. Immediately, as I lifted my gaze slightly, I saw in front of me the legendary Apollo’s marquee. Some letters that I could not read disappeared, and the word “Unspeakable” emerged against the background of white light.

Place, signs, the unspeakable: these terms seemed an adequate characterization of what my walk had turned into. My walk became an awakening. Spontaneously sauntering through Harlem was a permanent, chaotic stimulation of my sensorium. Through this practice, I faced the materiality of the city. I confronted its aural, olfactory, visual, and tactile qualities. And these dimensions of the urban experience honed some evaluative dispositions outside the purview of my consciousness, dispositions that were present by virtue of a yet ungraspable loss (the end of the most important love relationship that I have had so far). I thus became aware of my irremediable loneliness. And I found unhappiness. My turbulent mobility from Mexico City to Juarez, and then to Marseille, and next to Nairobi, and now to Chicago had repeatedly separated me from friends. It had distanced me from my father, mother, and brother. It had finally made Jeanne and I grow apart. Movement, I realized, had paradoxically left me...
lying still. It had isolated me in the United States. And by walking New York, I unexpectedly reckoned with the fact that I was yearning to go back home.

Initially I thought I was hankering after a return to Nairobi – that city of red dust and matatus (public transportation minivans) in which Jeanne and I had been so happy together. But it soon became obvious to me that I was longing for an elsewhere that had suddenly vanished. My happiness was not in Malakal Courts, apartment 2b, in the expatriate neighborhood of Westlands, Nairobi. Because my residence for the past eight years had not been fixed, I understood that “home” was none of the spaces that I had occupied. I had inhabited instead the warmth of Jeanne’s arms along our trails of movement. She had been my abode and therefore, now I was homeless. Down in the streets of Harlem, I abruptly awoke into the melancholy of migration.

In other words, by seeing, smelling, and listening to the city, the affective—that strange force that I felt in my stomach when I started walking—mutated into a propitious condition for the experience of my sad transnational wandering, a discursively mediated emotion. Concretely, in the moments of slowly trudging over wet tarmac along the sidewalk of Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard, painstakingly trying to forget Jeanne, my memory, stimulated by the green luminescence of the stoplight, subverted the order imposed by the infrastructure of New York—the zebra crossings, bus stops, and traffic signs—and transformed this city into the most woeful site I had ever visited. New York metamorphosed. It became the saddest place I had ever made.

I thus related to its materiality as a signifier of my wretchedness as an unwilling migrant. In this sense, the materiality of the city participated in the constitution of my own subjectivity. It had an effect on me by virtue of the agency that my emotional circumstances granted; emotional circumstances, in turn, which were themselves made possible by the sensuous intervention of surrounding objects in my affective state. The traffic light ceased to be simply a directional instruction in the city. It became a triggering agent of the work of memory and its subsequent labor on space. It transformed into a place through the practice of a sorrowful walk. And allowed melancholia to imbue it with meaning. The traffic light became a mirror in which I saw myself as a lonely intellectual migrant.

“New York metamorphosed. It became the saddest place I had ever made.”

But all these were, of course, afterthoughts. That day in New York, the last thing I could do was theorize. My eyes welled up. Spasms in the back of my neck reminding me how much I longed to go home, pushing me to face my surroundings not as the cosmopolitan dreamworld that I had chosen to construct, but as a nightmarish manufacture, as someone else’s world confronting me and impelling me to reckon with the fact that back in Mexico I could not sell my intellectual labor, that I was somehow forced to migrate. No. I could not think calmly, let alone theorize. All I could feel was that these desires no longer seemed mine. I felt alienated.

Filastine’s “Gendjer2” stopped at this point of my walk. I had to cut the video recording and play the track again. Then I saw a stall selling pirate movies from around the world—some seemed to come from India, others from West Africa. As I turned on my axis, an old man wearing a black mask, personifying a monster, used his cane to dance to the rhythm of a song playing from the next stall. He roared at me and moved his hand in a catlike way. I misconstrued the gesture and apologized for recording, but he was just being playful. My next vision was of a small girl wearing a ladybird outfit with flimsy black antennas that ended in round red tips.

I continued walking uphill and arrived at Columbia University, three and half hours late for my appointment. Dr. Lomnitz had left, of course, so I sat on the central square in front of the library and lit my cigarette. IPod still recording, trembling, I dialed Jeanne’s number. I told her that I would go to Paris during the winter—“for what?” she asked. “There is nothing left
to be done,” she said. I covered my sadness with lies: I told her I was going for tourism. The truth is that I wanted to be available to her if she wanted to talk. I was giving myself as a gift, aware that this offering would not be returned. I was loving her, still. An hour later I went back to the apartment. That night I barely slept. And if I did, I do not remember.

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The theoretical argumentation of this essay, therefore, relies on the montage itself. It does not utilize the video or the narration as illustrations of the points made. Rather, it only became possible with hindsight, as suggested above. To be sure, the video and my own written recall of events served as data. Together, they functioned as a mnemonic device, my fieldnotes. However, I was only able to reclaim the meaning of my experience as a melancholic place-maker as I collated the recording of one walk after the other, as I pasted Filastine’s tracks on the images, and as I resided in narrative space—all in a manner as similar as possible to how I inhabited the physical space of the city. In other words, the purport of retelling my walks through images and narrativity lies not in the story that is recounted. It rests instead on what these media do. With De Certeau, I believe that to acquire the silent labor of memory by which my walks were executed and to intimate the affective capacities of my body and the sentimental inclinations made thereby possible, the telling of a melancholic walk through the streets of New York should not try to describe the personal operations of the walking subject. It must perform them. Retelling consummates theorization by emulating practice (See De Certeau, et al., 1990 passim). Narration, on paper or in video, must carry out the walk to allow theory-making to surface.

Moreover, while this work might seem to be the product of an extremely singular episode in my life, it is far from a return to the individual as unit of social analysis. Its object of study is a number of modalities of social relations, namely, the relations that the subject is able to establish with materiality (Navaro-Yashin 2012), absence (Ho 2006), mobility (Ingold 2007), imagination (Mittermaier 2011), and hoping (Miyazaki 2004).

This essay thus makes two submissions. First, while De Certeau effectively juxtaposed a concept of the city as the tactically engaged, artful place-making of its inhabitants against received ideas about an improbable passive consumption of architecture and urban planning, his account pays insufficient attention to the sentimental state of the walking subject. As is well known, De Certeau simultaneously deployed and questioned Foucault and Bourdieu. After Foucault unveiled the heterogeneous and unexpected power effects of institutional logics, De Certeau deduced that to the disciplinary production of space there must be corresponding practices of place (De Certeau, et al. 1990, 101-107, 178). De Certeau, upholding the proviso that the procedures of an entire society not be reduced to the framings of surveillance, utilized Foucault’s analytical grid to examine the instances of everyday life that seemingly lie outside of institutional space (14, 107). Furthermore, he rejected the hypothesis of a habitus on account of the fact that practice, because of its improvisational character, continuously refuses the enscence of structures as locus for the genesis of people’s ways of doing (108-123). Instead, De Certeau aimed to
discursively theorize that which individuals themselves are unable to grasp through discourse (139-140). He intended to acquire the know-how that lies—imperatively and invisibly—in the travelling from the knowing to the doing, a judgment (142-147). To account for place-making, De Certeau was after the study of an art of doing.

For De Certeau, the image of a circular movement captures the elementary aspects of practice. A space independent from the subject appears as point of departure. Movement starts not with what the space dictates, but from what the memory of the subject recalls. The lesser the time memory has to predominate over action, the more radical its effects will be in observable practice, thus revamping the distributional properties of space. De Certeau: “Memory mediates spatial transformations. Under the ‘opportune model’ (kairos), it produces a restorative rupture. Its strangeness makes possible a transgression of the law of the place. Out of its undiscoverable and mobile secrets, a ‘coup’ modifies local order” (161, my translation).

More specifically, memory works on practice through singular mobile alterations of perception (163-165). Its labor imprints details of an elsewhere onto a place that is not its own. It adds particular fragments and pieces that draw harmony over the eventful. And it takes these details from one object to the next without letting any one of them stand permanently for what they seem to be. The labor of memory comes through a stream of fluctuating particulars in the mind that makes that which is seen turn into other. Silently and surreptitiously, the certain “something else” that emerges through the effects of memory returns in the retelling of practice. To study the labor of memory on space, in sum, a narrator must recount the intimate memories that made the corner of Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and West 125th Street a place where he experienced sadness.

Nevertheless, this analysis must reckon with the fact that the emotional circumstances in which the walker finds himself or herself prefigure the work of memory on tangible and intangible objects (objects in the phenomenological sense, meaning, all entities which can be subject to predication; see Husserl 1907). And thus, with the potential of these emotional circumstances to function as conditions of possibility for the serendipitous encounters and unexpected itineraries that constitute the enunciation of urban space. Put differently, the significance of shop names and colors in advertisements and marquees; of neon and sunlight; of horns, bells, and sirens; of the tarmac and cement; of other people’s bodies, voices, and walking; of the cold wind; and the greasy taste and smell of a Times Square hot dog—in short, the significance of the materiality of New York—was made possible through the flow and labor of certain memories rather than others. And this flux depended largely on the emotions that I felt during that particular period of my life. Sadness, despair, frustration, anger, and anxiety set a particular mood that allowed the memories of breakup, of my ex-partner, and of the Italian beach to stream down into my consciousness. Now, these emotional states were triggered as a deep force made me feel each organ in my body. This force was an excess. It was an impersonal, ineffable threshold. A transition. Frightening. It was a vibrating incoherence. It was the feeling of a nascent feeling.

A posteriori, I realized that recent social science literature refers to this palpitation as “affect.” Arising from the specter of Spinoza and his concern with the aptitudes of the flesh; from the Durkheimian interest in sensuous social effervescence; from the fascination that Tarde, and after him Simmel and Benjamin, had with the mimetic faculty which attains its zenith in urban life; from a less acknowledged debt to Mauss’s and Jousse’s respective attractions to bodily techniques and socially shared corporeal rhythmic motions of storytellers and reciters; and from a non-Cartesian tradition in philosophy well exemplified by Deleuze arising from all these sources a body of research has developed around a certain pre-subjective, yet social, terrain of human potential. By the term “affect” many scholars designate a momentary circumstance which precedes semiotic and linguistic mediation, a space where forces inscribed in the flesh set the body in an in-between-ness, i.e., an undetermined capacity to act or to be acted upon (Gregg & Seigworth 2010). Seigworth and Gregg, in the introductory note to a useful collection of essays, write: “affect can be understood...as a gradient of bodily capacity—a supple incrementalism of ever-modulating force-relations—that rises and falls not only along various rhythms and modalities of encounter but also through the troughs and sieves of sensation and sensibility, an incrementalism that coincides with belonging to comportments of matter of virtually any and every sort” (2).

It is true that the deployment of the notion of affect must be wary of melodrama. All too easily the thinking of affect may slide into a romanticized desire to touch upon the seemingly un-mediated essence of our selves, an essence that must be—so this desire dictates—either uncorrupted by the signifying logic of culture and/or an embodied but unconscious social vitality (Mazzarella 2009). Theorizing this bloom-space of indeterminate potentials, the analyst thus faces a dilemma. Either he admits the impossibility to go beyond the “wounds inflected by language” on us and accepts that affect must be conceptually mediated, or he deals with the implausibility of discursively mapping the silent traces of the
social on our flesh and falls for the illusion of affective immediacy (Mazzarella 2009, 293-4). Theorizing affect may place the analyst between Scylla and Charybdis. But, according to Mazzarella (2006), the fantasy of the non-existence of mediation—what he calls “the politics of immediation”—can be avoided if the analyst remains alert to the fact that mediation inherently poses its own masking; it masks itself (Mazzarella 2009, 303). The autonomy of affect, he argues, is an illusion of our own folklore. Therefore, the study of the “affective fact” must focus on the oscillation between the appearance of immanence and the discursive and cultural qualification by which it is expressed (304).

Hence, I have used the materiality of New York as the focal point to analyze this oscillation. Following Navaro-Yashin (2012), I take materiality and self as co-productive of the emotional “taming” of affect, which shaped the memories that in turn shaped my walking experience. Let me explain. Navaro-Yashin, against the assumption of a subject/object divide, in her latest book investigates the phenomenological bridge linking together Nicosia residents with their previous neighbors who were forced into exile in Northern Cyprus in 1974 following the partition of the island between Turkey and Greece. The houses, buildings, and collections of personal belongings left behind as well as the streets in downtown Nicosia standing near the wall built to materialize partition, bear an enormous affective charge for current dwellers. In the experience of everyday life of these people, the presence of such things vibrates. It consequently has effects on the modes of self-identification that they exhibit and allows them to attribute to material objects a certain capacity to effectuate the appariation of their ex-neighbors (13-17). In this way, materiality pushes Nicosia residents into translating affective vibrations into feelings of guilt and regret by “I take materiality and self as co-productive of the emotional “taming” of affect, which shaped the memories that in turn shaped my walking experience.”

facing them with the lingering presence of those who have left.

Similarly, for me, it was the materiality of the city that detonated my conscious effort to fuse the pains in the back of my neck, the uneasiness in my gut, and the static in the back of my eyes into an articulate emotion. Materiality, that is, sparked what I have called “the taming” of affect. As it became sensible data, it allowed me to subsume the intensity of affect into a discursively formed repertoire of possible sentimental states. Materiality helped me to force affect into sadness, melancholy, despair, longing. It stimulated the awareness of my own becoming, the awareness that immanent intensities of the flesh gave themselves to perception through the discursive qualification of their potential; they were given, thus, through the negation of their own apparent ineffability, without foreclosing the emergence of new intensities as my walk progressed.

I am not suggesting here that I tamed affect into a culturally specific way of suffering, into a “Mexican” way of suffering as it were. Rather, my discursive taming of affect elaborated on the entirety of my socialization. Neither am I intimating that the potentiality of my affective state preconditioned the experience of certain feelings and not others. Perhaps a different material disposition of the city could have elicited happiness and joy from the same interior force. This is to say that while both my discursive repertoire of emotions and the inscriptions of social forces on my flesh were dependent on the milieu in which I grew up—educated in Mexico, France, and the United States, professionalized in Kenya and Mexico—neither determined the ultimate experiential outcome of my walk in New York.

Instead, both were the medium for materiality to act upon me and for my memory to act upon the material. Both emotion and affect were the groundwork for my relation to objects in the city, such as stoplights and marquees, and to objects experienced through the city, such as imaginings of absence, migration, and hope. To sum up, through an apparent immediacy of affect which I mediated conceptually by virtue of the agency of materiality, I grasped my becoming: I understood neither my “true” inner affective self, nor the symbolic social inventory by which I qualify the world, but rather, the co-productivity of the material and self in the experience of practice, in this case, in the invention of a stroll.

It is in this sense that affect seems to accomplish a bridging. By laying bare my sensations of alienation and non-belonging to a world (i.e., the world of traveling and studying abroad), it linked the “exterior” surroundings to the constitution of my “interior” self. In agreement with Navaro-Yashin’s findings, it seems that neither a roughly psychoanalytic view nor a Latourian agent-less assemblage of objects could fully account for this phenomenon (See “Introduction” in Navaro-Yashin 2012). To cap this aside then, the second theoretical submission of this text is that affect, in theory, could be construed as the fluid cementation of the connection between subjecthood and materiality—a theme that is already being explored in current anthropology (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005; Mittermaier 2011).
The next morning I showered. But I couldn’t recognize myself in the mirror, so I spent some time doing my hair. I was looking for me. I was alone again, my friend having left early in the morning for a professional breakfast. Headphones on, I hit play on Filastine’s “Circulate False Notes” and started recording again. I left the apartment, went to the pharmacy. Aloof, I looked at the headlines of the *New York Times*. Syria was on fire. Selfishly, I thought of my own problems, my own petty bourgeois problems. I was on the east coast because of an exchange program with Harvard. Although I had never been happier in a classroom, the thought of returning to Cambridge suddenly felt as alienating as being in New York or Chicago. I was out of place.

I later met my host at the corner of 42nd Street and 2nd Avenue to give her the keys. After our encounter, I walked down 42nd Street. I knew that my trajectory would take me to the New York Public Library, where I would spend a couple of hours reading, and further down it would set me at the gate of Times Square, that fortress in the heart of Manhattan. For this walk I played Filastine’s “Spectralization.”

After the first few steps, I realized how impossible it had become for me to generate an atmosphere of artificial solidarity in the company of strangers. I looked a taxi driver straight in the eye and I felt the same indifference from him as from the tops of the towers guarding the sidewalks on both sides of 42nd Street. The windows of buildings and the eyes of people acquired a disturbing similarity. At 3rd Avenue I awaited the crossing signal, looking at other pedestrians, trying to engage their gaze with very little success. I kept going. I walked past Grand Central Station, remembering my father, my mother, and my brother. I heard the music of the mariachis that had played at my dad’s last birthday party almost two years ago. I missed them, and I felt profoundly lonely.

I tried to find calm by smelling the perfumes of passing ladies. The sweet scent of peaches and melon coming from a girl wearing a pink beanie was particularly soothing. She was standing a few meters away from my provisional destination: the library. But the peace that her aroma provided was momentary. My last attempt to fight back isolation was a quick approach to a policeman sending texts through his cellphone and an old man in a brown raincoat standing next to him, looking at the traffic. Neither seemed to notice my presence. Instead, I decided to seek refuge in the silent order of academic articles. I stepped inside the library, stopped the music and the recording, sat down, and read.

About three hours later, I left the building. When I exited I pressed play on my iPod and switched the camera on once again. The song was “Juniper,” a joyful track that suited the extremely bright light of New York’s afternoon sun that reflected on the building windows down 42nd Street. The combination of the sound and the light injected me with hope and optimism. If my decisions thus far had brought me here, it would be my decisions that would bring me back to the kind of life that this trip to New York had me longing for. I thought about the precariousness of academic employment in the United States and the similarity of that situation in France. There seemed to be no advantage between struggling to find a job here and struggling to find a job there. At that instant, I looked straight down Americas Avenue as I was crossing it and caught the beams of the sun right in my eyes. I would rather face competition for a teaching post over there—I thought—closer to her. I was surprised by the powerful presence of Jeanne’s absence.

My thoughts then absorbed me. I was so engaged with introspection that now I cannot remember why I stepped down off the sidewalk after crossing Americas Avenue. I have the memory of the smile of a girl who looked at me with curiosity. But if it weren’t for the video, I would not be able to recall how I got to the south entrance of Times Square. I can only remember thinking about how privileged I was to have the material guarantees to pursue the kind of life of my choosing, to fight back isolation and alienation, to select the continent and the city in which I wanted to live. The turbulence of my migration was nothing compared to that of those many Mexicans I had met in the United States working in supermarkets, kitchens, and bars. I
felt ashamed of my initial impulse to compare myself to them.

A siren wailed loudly and I found myself at the gate of Times Square. The sound connected almost naturally with the next track in Filastine’s album, “Informal Sector Parade.” For someone seeing Times Square for the very first time, the track was perfect. The number of advertisements, screens, and neon lights is such that no thoughts are allowed in that space. There is no room for them. And the song was equally frantic with percussions, trumpets, and electronic beats. I entered the square by walking through a makeshift hall made out of wire fences. Public works were taking place and a series of smaller sized fences in orange delineated my path. On them hung huge printouts of twisted eyes, which stared at the passing crowd. I stopped and looked up. In case I needed a reminder, a luminous sign told me the name of the place again: “Times Square.” I stopped, taking a few seconds before crossing the next street. I looked to the left and saw a huge screen with images of the city: dozens of people crossing the sidewalks, taxi roofs, and Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro. Cities represented for the city, reminding everyone of the inexorable urban future—and present.

The joyful moments I had just experienced after leaving the library faded. Times Square was excessive. It thrust me again into the realization that I would have to keep moving from country to country until I could secure a tenured position. How could I have a solid relationship with anybody if I was condemned to move around all the time? I remembered a fellow anthropologist at Columbia who described us as sailors—renounce a sedentary life, have a love at each port, she said. I felt a surge of adrenaline in my stomach as I came across Elmo, Minnie, Mickey Mouse, Iron Man, and Woody. I felt asphyxiated. The track on my headphones added to the torture. It glutted my environment with sound as though I was listening to two iPods at the same time.

I kept going until I finally heard silence and murmur in the track. I found a hot-dog stand at the exit, as it were, of Times Square. I ordered one for five dollars, quite pricy. I talked to a man as I was eating. He was from Haiti. Fortunately, he told me a joke that calmed me down before I went home to reflect again on the perpetual—and terrifying—nomadic life I had chosen.

CODA

I left New York the next day. Several weeks later I saw Jeanne in Paris. We sat on a bench on Boulevard Raspail and drank two bottles of champagne that we had been given as presents by the waiters at an Ecole Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales cocktail who we had helped in setting the tables as they were running late to receive the guests. I told Jeanne my recent thoughts on love. When a partner is lost, I said, he or she is irreplaceable. Because a partner is part of a particular dream of how life should be, when he or she is gone, it is the entire dream that falls apart, a world that vanishes into thin air. Of course one will meet somebody else, and another dream will be built. But this makes love relations a series of unique dreams and not a series of exchangeable partnerships. She interrupted me abruptly. And all she could say was, “I don’t imagine ever going back to you.” That pain in the back of my neck returned—but this time I couldn’t record anything. I turned my head and saw pedestrians running away from a sudden drizzle, as I cried silently.

REFERENCES


ENDNOTES

1 This essay is a history of such mutability and hybridity written from a transnational vantage point. Admittedly, it unfolds in a landscape that differs from those in which the rest of the companion articles take place. And it thus may seem geographically unfit for this special issue on “African Future Cities.” However, the tapestry of events and memories that I have woven together with theory to recount my experience of pathos can be construed as a modest contribution towards the writing of a cultural history that relates Nairobi to New York through the formation of my subjectivity [for a discussion of the idea of “cultural history” that I am working with, see Howard Caygill, “Walter Benjamin’s concept of cultural history” in Ferris, D. S., ed., The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 73 - 96].

Being the place in which I lived with Jeanne for three years, Nairobi represents the opening of a horizon from which my walks in New York became possible. It profoundly shaped the remembrances of my love relationship. And therefore, it stands as one of the main conditions of possibility for my personal execution of New York. In this sense, Nairobi and New York come to be historically entangled through the workings of my memory onto the materiality of both—they are linked by virtue of the fictive narrative in my own mind which posits the story of my life as the total inscription of my travels from Mexico to Europe and to Africa. They are both temporary destinations in the raveled mesh of spaces along which my mobility has been occurring.

In making this claim, I move to a Benjaminian view of history which echoes in De Certeau’s own understanding of space-time relations. For Benjamin, history is an image that foregrounds the present experience of the past and presents in constructivist forms of narrative a created constellation between past, present and future (See Walter Benjamin, “Edward Fuchs: Collector and Historian” [1937], in Eiland, H. and Jennings M. W., eds., Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935-1938, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. pp. 260 - 304). Benjamin’s historical materialism aims at putting us in contact with a present experience with the past rather than of it. In other words, the story of New York that I tell in this text is written with my Nairobian life.

In a similar vein, for De Certeau the labor of memory, combining with each wanderer’s personal style of appropriating the symbolic order and of using the norms of walking, makes each stroll unique and thereby actualizes the present of the city (De Certeau, et al. 1990 passim). During a walk, memory writes a history of a present experience with the past. It accomplishes this feat through two processes. It suppresses contiguity and makes discontinuity generative. As we see in this text, memory turns stoplights into sandy Italian beaches—through a rupture of the contiguity between the stoplight and the street. And through motion per se, it amplifies detail and prolongs the city, making the walk in Harlem a part of that in Times Square and that in Times Square a part of that which took place in Second Avenue—it ties together a here with a there. Memory, thus, displaces New York and inserts it in a larger story of which Nairobi is a part.

In a nutshell, the story in this essay sets forth a fragment of the history of contemporary patterns of mobility—patterns which link cities across Africa with the rest of the world—patterns which shape the imagination of what is yet to come, i.e., unwilling migration, redefinitions of “home,” and the melancholia that ensues.
LUANDA’S MONUMENTS

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The photograph shows a man standing on a monumental pedestal, arms akimbo, occupying the home of some forgotten statue. The man is Angolan fashion designer Shunnoz Fiel dos Santos; the now-removed statue bore the likeness of Portuguese colonist Paulo Dias de Novais, who claimed the small coastal settlement that became Angola’s capital as São Paulo da Assumpção de Loanda in 1575. In the 2011 series “Redefining the Power,” Angolan artist Kiluanji Kia Henda depicts Fiel atop different vacated pedestals across central Luanda. In Redefining the Power IV, Fiel is wearing a grey one-piece outfit with flared trousers, a dark green cap, and long braided dreadlocks down his back. In another, he’s reciting poetry wearing bright colors—a green jacket over a red shirt, layers of blue skirts over yellow short pants, and red stockings. In a third, he’s dressed in black and purple, holding out the symbol the American musician Prince used as a pseudonym. Henda’s photographs use Shunnoz Fiel’s sartorial playfulness to pose serious questions about Angola’s historical memory—its four centuries of colonial conflict followed by three decades of civil war—and to introduce into public dialogue more inventive and imaginative notions of the nation’s future. Henda harnesses and reconfigures the layers of meaning represented by public urban monuments, what Pierre Nora (1989) calls lieux de mémoires (“sites of memory”), and rather than stripping them of affect, repurposes empty pedestals as sites for the public contestation of Angola’s future. This is a temporal exercise, mixing up the past so as to catalyze and ignite possible futures. Henda’s political engagement, characterized by a seductive mix of humor and pathos, exemplifies the power art has to challenge and expand society’s oneiric capacities. The project “Redefining the Power” does exactly this—invites critique of Angola’s political, social, and economic policies by asking simply, who does Angola want to be?

PLANNING LUANDA: THE CITY AND ITS MONUMENTS

The present disordered fabric of urban Luanda, the landscape surrounding Henda’s work, is a direct reflection of its political history. Under Portuguese colonial influence (1575-1975), Luanda’s urbanization followed the governing principles of various European models, disregarding the indigenous “essence of its built environment,” deemed both fragile and confusing. “Entire cities were thus designed and built from scratch...” (Macedo 2012, 90). Initial efforts were modest, beginning with a series of hilltop forts overlooking the harbor; late-Medieval constructions of thick-walled stone around which clusters of houses gathered and new roads were cut. Luanda was a mercantile post and hub of the slave trade, but full time residents were few. Over the centuries the city crept down the slope onto the harbor side, forming waterfront avenues and radial plazas in a roughly interconnected grid. These plazas were typically punctuated with statues of Portuguese heroes from what came to be called “The Age of Discoveries,” each named for the man depicted, such as Largo Infante D. Henrique—the only such plaza to retain its name following Angola’s independence. These stone men atop their towering pedestals served as much to reassure Portuguese colonial citizens as to hector native peoples. Each was a public proclamation of Portugal’s domination, a celebration of military and technological prowess presented as cultural superiority embodied. Not until it was consumed by the political ramifications of the last convulsions of colonialism did Portugal claim Luanda as the capital of a large and growing settler society. In the epoch prior, from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century, the European population of the city remained relatively stable. Despite road building and other small-scale infrastructure projects, neither the architectural density nor the outline of the city changed significantly until the twentieth century. As a result, the choice and placement of monuments became one of Portugal’s most noticeable planning interventions in this period.

Urban planning took on new agency in the twentieth century, as the Portuguese government in Angola began to reimagine and transition itself from an imperial colonial power to a “pluricontinental” settler society. Luanda’s rising population, including many more Portuguese immigrants, and Angola’s increasing importance to Portugal’s economy (first through diamond mining and later through oil extraction) led to a succession of new master plans. The 1942 urban plan diagrams developed by Etienne de Gröer and D. Moreira da Silva are somewhat outmoded and are reminiscent of Ebenezer Howard’s 1902 treatise “Garden Cities of To-Morrow,” which advocated the creation of small satellite cities to depopulate congested and polluted industrial city centers in England. The 1952 plan by João António Aguiar features a much more contemporary, Modernist, rationalist network of roughly rectangular blocks, similar to plans developed by Le Corbusier—for whom Aguiar once worked—and Josep Lluís Sert for Bogota, Columbia in 1948. Aguiar also designed plans for several other Portuguese colonial cities in 1952, including São Tomé, Cabinda, and Huambo (“Nova Lisboa”), the last of which stands out for its French Imperial style, representing the grandiose goals
of Portugal’s fascist Prime Minister António de Oliveira Salazar, who held office from 1933-1968. Salazar’s dream of an Estado Novo (“A New State”), also called “The Second Republic,” was in reality a conservative, authoritarian, pro-Roman Catholic regime which justified Portuguese imperialism as a check against the spread of communism and the growing economic power of the NATO alliance, of which Pedro Manuel Santos writes Portugal felt compelled—as an unfortunate necessity—to be a part.

Aguiar’s urban plans were commissioned just after the complete restructuring of the Portuguese colonial system in 1951. Salazar declared that the colonies were no longer to be treated as tributes to the nation, but to be officially considered as provinces, with parliamentary representation, a notion Kiluanji Kia Henda refers to as a “myth.” References to “colonies” and “colonialism” were removed from political rhetoric, department titles, and official documents, and replaced with the term “ultra-marine” in a gesture towards unity that imagined Portugal neither as a nation nor as a paternalistic empire, but as the capital of a global lusophone culture. Novo Lisboa was to be the seat of this enterprise in Africa. This gesture, partially in response to anti-colonial criticism from the UN, extends and justifies a political vision publicized between the world wars (but which is arguably much older). At the 1934 Colonial Exhibition in Oporto, a map ostensibly “drawn” by military officer and politician Henrique Galvão was presented depicting Portugal and its colonies, colored red, superimposed over the rest of Europe, colored yellow. It’s title, Portugal Não é um País Pequeno (“Portugal is Not a Small Country”), points to the motivation for many of the nation’s political choices; that is, this was a European power unwillingly on the decline. Like a geopolitical Napoleon complex, Portugal imagined itself enlarged by the territory of its colonies, casting an imposing shadow across European neighbors that had outpaced Portugal—Europe’s oldest continuous colonial power—technologically, economically, and in commensurate political power. These maps also served to remind the nation that were it to lose its colonies, retaining control only up to its traditional national boundaries, it would in fact be quite small, and would furthermore lack a self-reinforcing system of colonial trade and wealth accumulation.

Like the colonies themselves, Portuguese colonial monuments were also rhetorically reframed under Salazar as spectacles of Estado Novo, celebrating what Walter Benjamin would call the “cult” value of traditional aesthetics as a popular vehicle for political memory in public space (Verheij 2013). During the
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1936 dedication of a monumental statue of Portuguese conqueror Mouzinho de Albuquerque at the center of a new square in Lourenço Marques, Mozambique, the interim Governor-General José Nicolau Nunes de Oliveira observed statuary this way:

The work of art, even when carved by the hands of genius and warmed by its divine breath, always falls short of the artist’s dream, and even more of the votive intent that anxiously searches to reveal itself in it. I do not know, however, what better suited homage a thankful nation can pay to those noble men who conquered immortality for her.... (qtd. in Verheij par. 29)

Gerbert Verheij argues that the void between the statue and its referent, its failure to be animated by its human form and its lack of aura or specific presence, aims to “produce a distance between historical representation and present reception, opening up space for the manipulation of its meaning. In a certain sense, the failure of the image as representation is necessary; it produces a distance to the historical referent which allows it to appear as something above history, as myth” (par. 31). The monumentality of the statue—an aesthetization of politics—combined with the evacuation of personality, is representative of the Estado Novo as well as of the monuments of other fascist regimes. Totalitarian art uses political aesthetization to reclaim the past in the name of a supposed nationalist (or ethnic) tradition, fusing aspects of social narrative around an all-encompassing idea of the State. Like totalitarian architecture, it is meant to “create not only a new physical space, but also a mental space that could serve as a medium between the idea and its implementation” (Rudovska 2012, 77). In the colonies, these aesthetic objects occupy and infuse shared lieux de mémoires with messages meant to artificially impose difference rather than a sense of belonging, to reinforce the existing hierarchy in new terms. The monument is a locus that represents the mythic secular sublime amidst the banality of day-to-day life, creating “a space in which a community can see its own mirror image” (Verheij par. 51). Only after the removal—the “symbolic death”—of such statues can free people begin to “build their own place upon the ruins of the past” (Verheij par. 65).

Thus even as the Estado Novo proclaimed itself a welcoming, non-racist vehicle of lusophone culture under the guise of “lusotropicalism,” it simultaneously concretized Portuguese dominance across public space at home and abroad. In the 1940 Exposition of the Portuguese World in Lisbon, for instance, the ethnographic section “put actual colonial subjects on display” (Sapega 2008, 22), which seems quite contrary to Salazar’s rhetoric of Portuguese imperialism as “of a humanistic, hybrid, non-racist kind” (Peralta 2011, 197). This Janus-faced stance continued throughout the 1950s into the early 1960s with the construction of new towns, the erection of new statues, and the inscription of jingoistic phrases on public buildings and in public plazas throughout Portugal’s territories. In the main square of Lourenço Marques, Mozambique, the message Aqui também é Portugal—“This is also Portugal”—was laid into the pavement directly in front of the town hall during the 1960s (Verheij par. 18).

In Luanda, a third series of master plans were initiated in 1961 by architect Fernão Simões de Carvalho.
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These focused primarily on the development of high-speed roads, including Luanda’s main boundary ring road. Carvalho was also concerned with Luanda’s rising inequality and class separation and sought to promote mixed residential communities through the distribution of high- and low-rise Modernist housing. His planning effort was contemporaneous to the start of the Portuguese Colonial War in Angola, and ended unfinished (that is, without a final master plan) in 1964, after Portugal had suffered numerous military losses across its global territories.

Angola was declared an independent nation in 1975, but already during the war Portuguese statuary began to be removed from plaza pedestals in central Luanda. Despite Portugal’s insistence on shared cultural memory, Luanda’s removal of these statues of famed Portuguese explorers, which represents Luanda’s denial of their colonists’ right to claim Angolan cultural heritage, runs parallel to Lisbon’s refusal to honor “anticolonial liberation heroes” with statuary in all the decades since (Sieber 2010, 112). The only colonial-era statue in Luanda to be completely destroyed, however, was the war memorial located in Largo da Maria da Fonte, Luanda’s main market square today known as Largo do Kinaxixi. Sculpted by Henrique Moreira and dedicated in 1937, this memorial in honor of Portugal’s World War I dead depicted Victory with her sword aloft flanked by two Portuguese soldiers in period military garb. The figure of Victory was also understood to be Maria da Fonte, a nineteenth century Portuguese hero who helped foment a popular revolt. The statue sat atop a monumental Modernist pedestal characteristic of industrial, socialist architecture of the 1930s. In April 1975, just prior to the official declaration of independence, the statue was destroyed using dynamite, whereupon it was replaced by a Soviet military tank (Gillemans). The tank’s origin is significant. Throughout the Portuguese Colonial War the MPLA, a resistance and liberation group that held sway in Luanda and succeeded to the presidency, was funded and supplied by the USSR, in direct refutation of Salazar’s anti-communist stance. In November 2002, a new statue was erected in its place upon a similar pedestal, a monumental bronze of Queen Njinga Mbande (1582-1663), one of the best-documented and most successful African rulers of the early modern period.

During her lifetime Njinga Mbande, also known by several other names including “Dona Ana de Sousa,” expanded her territory and resettled former slaves while holding the Portuguese at bay along the coast of modern-day Angola. She led men into battle through multiple wars, and was celebrated for her wit, intelligence, political acumen, and military tactics. In her statue she is depicted standing, calm and composed, wearing an interpretation of traditional garb more modest than historically accurate, grasping an ax in one hand and looking into the far distance, seemingly ready for any confrontation. The simplicity of the sole figure of Njinga Mbande commands more presence than that of the previous World War I memorial, dwarfing Maria da Fonte in historical importance if not in physical stature. The memorialization of Njinga Mbande, who lived contemporaneous to Paolo Dias de Novais, is a direct rebuttal to the statues of men who embodied Portugal’s empire and once commanded the city’s squares. The Queen is taller than any of those figures, cast in bronze (which gives her flesh a brown color), and female, in all ways different from Angola’s Portuguese conquerors except one—she too is a military leader.

In Balamuka (Ambush), 2010, Kiluanji Kia Henda photographs the statue of Njinga Mbande in exile, awaiting the completion of new construction around Largo do Kinaxixi. The monumental bronze finds itself in a courtyard facing the deposed statues of Luís Vaz de Camões, Dom Afonso Henriques, and Pedro Álvares Cabral, among others. Henda stages a twelve-part confrontation simply by turning his lens. That Henda recognizes the political implications of public monuments, their embodiment of shared social values, history, and collective memory, could not be more clear. An earlier work, Transit, 2007, shows the dismembered sections of a statue of Paolo Dias de Novais on the ground, preparing for transport to the Museum of the Armed Forces, a former Portuguese fort in central Luanda, where it and many of its compatriots can be found today. During a lecture delivered at the Tate Modern in 2010, Henda explained that this statue does “not [have] a place of exhibition... they don’t know how [or] where to keep it. So I had this feeling that this monument became like a citizen which his visa has already expired, and so it should be back to the point of origin.” This was the beginning of the artist’s interest in the fate and function of Luanda’s monuments, particularly during the first decade of Angola’s peaceful self-rule.
The populism personified by the monument of Njinga Mbande has not yet extended to post-independence planning in Luanda. Urban planning remained dormant throughout the Colonial War, and later, the Angolan Civil War, until 1992, which marked the beginning of a brief armistice. In 1994, an isolated upper-middle class neighborhood was developed south of the city, appropriately called “Luanda Sul,” populated primarily by government officials and their families. Little has been built for the vast majority of the city’s population, 80 percent of whom live in musseques, the local term for slums (Macedo 2012, 93). In fact, the most significant planning moves to affect the poor have been the clearing of their homes from land over which they hold uncertain legal tenure. Most of these citizens arrived in Luanda during the Civil War, fleeing rural areas that had transformed into battle zones. With Luanda’s formal infrastructure only capable of supporting a population of 500,000, as the city swelled to 18 million it could not maintain its quality of life (Power 2012, 999). Rather than developing a comprehensive regional plan to extend water, power, and sanitation, or a plan to build more permanent, legal urban housing, Angola has instead turned toward the global market for “solutions” which offer maximum profit. Since the end of the civil war in 2002, Angola has sought out development agencies from China and the United Arab Emirates to deliver master plans, publicly touting a “south-south” model of mutual economic benefit that in fact enriches very few private parties.

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Given that China is Angola’s primary foreign investor and trade partner, it is not surprising that Luanda’s current model for modernization is an idealized, high-technology version of Chinese urban development circa 1960, built by Chinese workers using Chinese equipment (Power 2012, 995). By 2025, Angola’s new geography will feature urban decentralization, the full-scale development of new cities tabula rasa, isolated industrial and special economic zones, and extended road and rail infrastructure. However, as Power argues, despite the publication of glossy brochures filled with positive pro-development rhetoric, Angola lacks any systematic or transparent national development policy. What has been built emphasizes segregation and citadelization along class lines, a spatial system that effectively criminalizes the poor, directly counter to Carvalho’s 1960s-era aspirations for urban housing models that would consciously comingle different classes. The fear of the lower classes as vectors of crime, violence, and general disorder has become so entrenched that a Lebanese developer, Dar Al-Handasah, proposes to dredge Luanda Bay between the mainland and Chicala island, narrowing its thin land bridge so as to protect newly planned “archipelagos of utopian luxury” from the unwelcome incursions of informal housing and its residents (Power 2012, 1010). Other projects underline the government’s internal corruption and ineptitude. The new city of Kilamba, for example, was meant to house 500,000 middle-income residents, but with apartments selling for a minimum price of $120,000 US, it is far too expensive; acres of buildings remain empty.

Planning in Luanda has progressed only in fits and starts, shaped during the colonial period by dominate European models such as the English garden city, the French imperial capital, and the ‘International Style’ of Modernism. Each new plan has negotiated Portugal’s evolving relationship to its colonies. Yet only at the book ends of Portuguese rule—in the beginning and during the penultimate years prior to Angola’s independence—did statuary play a dominant role in asserting cultural superiority. The messages initially asserted by figures from the Age of Discoveries were reinforced and reiterated during Portugal’s fascist Estado Novo period. Since independence, the role of statuary has regained its recognizable force as a vehicle for reshaping and reclaiming historical memory. Beginning with the demise of Portugal’s “Victory”—the World War I memorial—the post-civil war period has been witness to renewed visions of Angola’s history and identity, most notably as embodied in the figure of Njinga Mbande. Contemporary urban plans for Luanda, however, are banal expressions of market forces and lack any power for cultural mobilization. It is this striking contrast, between city and statue, which raises the stakes for the...
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Kiluanji Kia Henda, *Mussorongo*, 2009, photo print mounted on aluminum, cm. 150 x 100, courtesy Galleria Fonti Napoli

many empty pedestals inhabiting downtown Luanda. Could these pedestals become sites for renewed popular dreams? Or will they too be stripped of their potential for inclusion and inspiration?

HYBRIDITY: MONUMENTS, MEMORY, AND ART

It is against this backdrop of both historical and contemporary government-sanctioned disempowerment and confusão (confusion) that one must situate Kiluanji Kia Henda’s work. Drawing upon Žižek, Šakaja and Stanić suggest that autoreferencing via architecture and monument building is part of how a nation “finds its sense of self-identity by revealing itself as already present in its tradition” (2012, 503). The monument enables the state to promote a particular reading of the present as embodied by selected celebrations of the past. The statue of Njinga Mbande, for example, brings her centuries-old story of resistance to the awareness of contemporary Angolans, and integrates it with the history of recent conflicts that enabled the nation’s enfranchisement with the end of colonialism. In this juxtaposition of temporalities, the location of Mbande’s statue is instrumental.

Yet the complexity of Angola’s multilayered constituency—diverse politically, ethnically, and economically—complicates any hegemonic vision of the nation’s future. The horrors of the civil war, how Angolans treated one another, rival those of the colonial era. Because official narratives of history are often used to legitimize the crimes of the past, history itself places the monument—its symbolic manifestation—in an uncertain position. “With this abiding link between the means of articulating history and an abhorrent past, the very notion of the monument appear[s] untenable” (Stubblefield 2011, 1). With the civil war very much present in the memory of Angola’s citizens, the permanence of any monument—wrought in materials meant to last generations—could elicit distrust and suspicion were a more controversial figure or event chosen for memorialization.

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Henda’s work asks Angolans to consider what should happen to Luanda’s cultural legacy as embodied in its statuary. Should Paolo Dias de Novais stay with his fellows at the Museum of the Armed Forces, a left-over outlier without a true home? Does the Portuguese founder of Luanda deserve honor, ridicule, or indifference? The suspended animation of the dismembered statue in *Transit* suggests perhaps a mixture of all three. For statutes that have outlived their public purpose yet still possess considerable social-historical residue, the “strategy of relocation—[a] change of place from central to peripheral areas” is common, particularly among nations of the former Eastern Bloc (Šakaja and Stanić 2011, 506). A statue from the main public square may be removed to a quiet residential neighborhood, where its aura is diminished but not forgotten. The valiant allegorical worker upon his pedestal in front of the once state-run factory can now be found on the ground in the courtyard to its rear. Parks that cheerfully and ironically display a collection of ideologically obsolete statuary are not unknown; examples include Memento Park in Budapest, Hungary and Fallen Monument Park in Moscow. Such locations act as the nation’s “hybrid memory-scapes,” serving to contest new identities by retaining a layer of older, outmoded ones; or they might simply allow citizens to celebrate their nation’s break from the past by retaining the symbols of that past defanged and decathedced in the present (Light and Young 2010, 1453).

The son of a former government official, Henda is a member of the bourgeoisie who has come to reject monocular visions of Angolan society. Born in 1979, Henda has lived his entire life—until 2002—in a war-torn country, learning his craft from photojournalists documenting the Civil War (Afonso 2011). The process of an artist in Angola in many ways mirrors the liminal nature of Angolan culture, a society with the possibility of being born anew. Just as the artist invents new worlds and composes new realities, so too have Angolans required flexibility and inventiveness to survive. Henda describes being “original” as an artist a “huge challenge,” particularly “in a country where every[one] has to be creative to overcome many problems. It’s like improvisation as a way of living.” In his series of portraits of residents from the musseques, “Portraits From a Slippery Look,” 2009, Henda
photographs sartorial trend-setters and celebrated dancers of *kuduro*, an emerging Angolan electronic musical style. As an artist, he seems to have found himself reflected in the redemptive qualities of aesthetic celebration amidst such impoverished conditions. This has impacted his politics as well as his sense of place within Angolan culture. As Henda (2010) declares:

> It makes no difference which kind of system we live in, if it’s capitalist or communism, mono or stereo party, those places [the *musessques*] they had like very autonomous ways to rule... The culture is hybrid, and intense, and extremely experimental. The high tech is really mixed with animism; and so we had new sound, new music... new dancing, new style, and so for me that was really important to make portrait[s] of this transition that the country is living. And the townships really they become like the place of inspiration.... And I think that any attempt to conceive any theories about this phenomena becomes useless and obsolete the minute they are created. This is a parallel universe.

The creativity and the individualism evident in “Portraits From a Slippery Look” emphasize the cultural hybridity Henda recognizes as emerging from Luanda's townships. Sartorial invention is as much a part of Angola’s transition, reimagining, and reemergence as its urban or industrial development. Henda’s partnership with fashion designer Shunnoz Fiel in the series “Redefining the Power,” 2011, is particularly appropriate for addressing issues of self-identification and cultural projection in Angola. Sartorial citation accrues power in a post-colonial context. As Jill Cole (2013) explains in reference to the integration of indigenous Ovihimba fashion within contemporary Namibian commercial culture, dress is a signifier for various modes of citizenship. Not only does dress reflect personal aspirations, costume itself carries deeply shared cultural and religious significance in a readily legible form. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (2010) tells us, religious traditions among Bakongo people, including costume, are direct antecedents of the carnival celebration in Brazil, reinforcing the debt of global lusophone culture to the sartorial creativity of Angola’s people. As one of the two designers for *haute couture* label Projecto Mental, Fiel embodies a nexus of cultural creativity that projects contemporary Angolan identity worldwide. Henda’s act of posing Fiel atop a monumental pedestal in place of 16th century Portuguese colonist Paolo Dias de Novais in *Largo do Lumeji*, or 19th century colonial Governor-General Pedro Alexandrino da Cunha near *Largo Rainha Ginga*, works to claim Angola’s future for those with the creative capacity to shape Angola’s culture.

“Redefining the Power” rewrites the semiotic force of past monuments, “those self-aggrandizing, heroic monuments that utilize their physical remove from daily life to reinforce the static and eternal history they articulate,” and makes apparent that the actors who will create and define Angola’s future may very well originate from the ordinary creativity of the everyday (Stubblefield 2011, 2). The temporal life of Henda’s monuments—as brief as the click of a camera lens—are counter-memorials which allow the “active negation of presence” to shift the political work of memorialization onto public discourse itself (1). That is, Henda’s photographs encourage speculation as to whether or
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not certain monumental pedestals in central Luanda should remain vacant. As James Young (1999) has noted regarding imaginative post-World War II German memorials, “In the end, the counter-memorial reminds us that the best German memorial to the fascist era and its victims may not be a single memorial at all—but simply the never-to-be-resolved debate over which kind of memory to preserve, how to do it, in whose name, and to what end” (9).

Questions about the power and legitimacy of monuments and memorials cross numerous social and political contexts. Memory, as a shared human experience, can be coopted or claimed, but never fully controlled by any state actor. In this way, Henda’s work in an Angolan context enters into conversation with similar debates globally. Luanda is at an important and potentially very powerful moment of urban transition. Emerging into a global neo-liberal economy following its earlier socialist culture, Luanda, like Zagreb, Croatia, is “rethinking history and negotiating its meanings,” which, Šakaja and Stanić write, is “one of the essential traits of the post-communist transition” (499). A potential way to further this transition is through the installation of new public monuments proclaiming new ambitions, important indicators of recodified memory though perhaps less “impressive” than the proliferation of new capitalist signifiers such as shopping centers and corporate offices (498). Just as Queen Njinga Mbande will soon look out over a new luxury shopping and office complex at Largo do Kinaxixi, what monuments that are similarly inclusive in tone might greet other sections of the city? Henda’s work suggests that, as in Bamako, Mali, these new national lieux de mémoire could be places “where citizens, especially young people, can engage in the performance of a shared history and national purpose” (Arnoldi 2007, 2). These yet to be realized sites will be interrogated by new sets of interpretive practices, engaging in a cyclical process of historical interpretation that allows evolving cultures to continually revisit unanswered social questions. Henda’s series “Redefining the Power” represents an intermediate, catalyzing step between forgetting the past and imagining the future. As Achille Mbembe (2013a) explains, the “future” is both a political and an aesthetic category with a profound role to play in postcolonial societies. “Futurism is a form of imagination that in practice is becoming a foundational dimension.” The capacity to imagine the future is necessary for genuine collective agency because it keeps open the possibility of its own existence. If societies are constituted on the means of controlling oneiric functions, as Mbembe argues, then by denying basic infrastructure, Angola has curtailed Luanda’s citizens’ temporal imagination by restricting their bodies to daily struggles, reducing them to a purely biological life. The creative fields, with their capacity to demonstrate, or “try on,” different guises of the future like so many different clothes, is key to the revitalization of Angola’s shared cultural dreaming functions. As Mbembe (2013b) states,

For Franz Fanon, the most brutal consequence of the injuries inflicted to those who had been subjected to abject forms of racial violation was an inability to imagine or project themselves forward in time while, at the same time, that is, imagining the future. Their sense of temporality had been crippled, as a result of which they had developed a specific illness—a faulty sense of a future they believed they could not control or shape.

Perhaps this lack of imagination is part of the reason why the Angolan government continues to look outside itself to the international community for urban development models. Kiluanji Kia Henda’s “Redefining the Power” offers instead a strong sense of place and of community, and a profound faith in the creative capacity of Angolans to control and shape their own representations.

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Kiluanji Kia Henda, Lady G, 2009, photo print mounted on aluminum, cm. 150 x 100, courtesy Galleria Fonti Napoli
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South African author Lauren Beukes turned heads when her book *Zoo City* (2010), a fantastical mystery/crime-drama set in a re-imagined present-day Johannesburg, became the first novel from Africa to win the prestigious Arthur C. Clark award for best science fiction novel of the year. Both the locale of Beukes’s story and its privileging of a perspective from the inner-city margins of post-apartheid society, aligns *Zoo City* with the nascent genre of postcolonial science fiction. While the circumstances of Beukes’s heroine, Zinzi—a young black woman, journalist-turned-hustler, recovering addict, ex-convict, living with Zoo stigma—allow for the narrative’s critical perspective on the “New South Africa,” Johannesburg as the quintessential post-apartheid city is as important a character in *Zoo City* as its protagonist. Moreover, the inner-city neighborhood of Hillbrow, which the book’s title more specifically signifies, is a space that has become closely associated with danger, criminality, marginality, and blackness. Yet Hillbrow is re-cast by Beukes as the center of *Zoo City’s* universe, and as such is revealed to be a pulsing cosmopolitan center of movement and activity at the heart Johannesburg’s imagination. In fact, so central is the re-imagining of city-ness in Beukes’s novel, offering an arresting and compelling angle of attention to Johannesburg and the subjectivities of its inhabitants, that I argue it warrants consideration within the growing canon of works on African urbanism.

In their introduction to *The Elusive Metropolis*, Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (2008) describe the particularities, contradictions, and challenges that African cities pose to “the global city” paradigm that “has dominated the study of the urban form” (1). This paradigm, the author-editors explain, has both largely pathologized cities in Africa and the global south with “the metanarrative of urbanization, modernization, and crisis” (5), and has failed to consider that truly global cities are “composed not only of flows of money, skills, knowledge, security, machinery, and technology, but also of ideas, people, images and imaginaries” (3). In addition to Mbembe and Nuttall, scholars like Jane Guyer, Filip de Boeck, Rem Koolhaas, and AbdouMaliq Simone (6), have taken up theorizing the African city as wholly modern in its own right, inherently interconnected to global modes of production, extraction, and circulation, and, however elusive in form, as the very site where new vocabularies of city-ness are being reborn (32).

As I hope to demonstrate, Beukes’s techniques of writing Johannesburg speak to the works of these scholars, and in turn their works offer insightful ways to read *Zoo City*. But furthermore, Beukes’s innovative mixing of genres, which combine elements of cyberpunk, neo-Noir, fantasy, and magical realism, permit the kind of multivalent possibilities for representing modes of African urbanity that are simultaneously technological, mystical, cosmopolitan, futurist, and persistently haunted by both the occult and the past. Below I explore how the genre of science fiction, broadly conceived, wields through its mechanisms of “cognitive estrangement” (à la Darko Suvin) the ability to open up “gaps” for theorization foreclosed by ethnographic realism. Such gaps carry the potential for new ways of thinking, writing, and theorizing the city.

To this end, I first consider *Zoo City* as a postcolonial, or “ex-centric” narrative and present the case made for science fiction as a method of critical social theory. I then outline the ways in which Beukes writes Johannesburg through her literary subjects and its significance to ethnography on South African urbanism. From there I consider how the fantastical elements of *Zoo City*—namely that of “Aposymbiosis” (or *Zoo*), “shavi,” and the story’s alternate timeline—do the kind of critical work suggested by Mbembe and Nuttall. But rather than go as far as to suggest “new vocabularies” for the metropolis, though the potential is certainly there, I posit that science fiction as social theory has the ability to provoke new insights into vocabularies of the present.
ZOO CITY AS POSTCOLONIAL SCIENCE FICTION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF “EX-CENTRIC” STORIES

As Eric Smith (2012) points out in his recent work, Globalization, Utopia, and Postcolonial Science Fiction, the years of the new millennium have witnessed “the phenomenal efflorescence” of science/speculative fiction (SF) narratives coming from outside the hegemonic centers of Euro-America that “address the exigencies of postcoloniality and globalization” (5). This new emergence of SF stories from what Jean Comaroff, following Homi Bhabha, has called “ex-centric” spaces is particularly welcomed by science fiction studies for which the imperialistic parentage of the genre had begged debates as to whether SF could stand outside of its own western paradigm (Csicsery-Ronay 2002; Rieder 2008; Smith 2012). In this regard, the similar histories (and later deconstruction) of science fiction as a genre and the discipline of anthropology—and their relationships to the colonial project—become noteworthy. As John Rieder explains, “the anachronistic structures of anthropological difference” through which “colonialism made space into time” by purporting an evolutionary model of cultural development was a key feature linking “emergent science fiction to colonialism” (6).

Anthropological theories implicated in the colonial ideologies of the 19th and early 20th century have been thoroughly critiqued by the discipline’s later practitioners (See Boonzaier and Sharp). Meanwhile, the imaginative centers of popular SF narratives of the same era remained largely Euro-centric and shared in this earlier anthropological imagination of Otherness cited by Rieder. While some of the “classical” SF canon promoted a positive appraisal of alien otherness, the subjects of radical alterity—the alien or the android—only gained acceptance when they proved to be “more human than human.” In such narratives, Vivian Sobchack (2000) explains, the positioning of aliens as “just like us,” rather than suggesting “aliens are us,” maintained alien-ness as difference and celebrated a new (or renewed) western liberal humanism rather than posing a challenge to it (138). This critical historicizing of SF also aligns with literary criticism’s rebuke of the genre’s tendency to code “humanness” as predominantly white and male, and position “us” firmly in Europe and America. The desire or terror of encountering radical alterity, in opposition to which humanness becomes understood, always came from exotic elsewhere. Rieder (2008) further argues:

It is as if science fiction itself were a kind of palimpsest, bearing the persistent traces of a stubbornly visible colonial scenario beneath its fantastic script. Or, to change the metaphor, it is as if science fiction were polarized by the energies of the colonial field of discourse, like a piece of iron magnetized by its proximity to a powerful electrical field. Both of these metaphors are ways of saying that science fiction exposes something that colonialism imposes. However... colonialism is not simply the reality that science fiction mystifies.... It is part of the genre’s texture, a persistent, important component of its displaced references to history, its engagement in ideological production, and its construction of the possible and the imaginable. (15)

As if proving a further step of this entanglement between SF and colonial history, from the new millennium then enters the more promising sub-genre of “postcolonial science fiction” that has only begun to be theorized with consolidation and rigor (See Hopkinson and Mehan 2004; Rieder 2008; Langer 2011; Smith 2012; Campbell and Hall 2013). Rather than purport a move away from the problematics of colonialism, this postcolonial turn in SF brings persistent tropes to the surface in the spirit of critique. The best description may be Nalo Hopkinson’s sign-off in her introduction to one of the first edited anthologies dedicated to the nascent genre, So Long Been Dreaming. Hopkinson describes postcolonial SF as,

...stories that take the meme of colonizing the natives and, from the experience of the colonizee, critique it, pervert it, fuck with it, with irony, with anger, with humor, and also, with love and respect for the genre of science fiction that makes it possible to think about new ways of doing things. (Hopkinson and Mehan 2004, 9)

Just as postcolonial theory has taken to task the history of western imperialism and the hegemonic narratives that claim to be universal by re-versing their logics and revealing the politics of knowledge that sustained them, so postcolonial SF usurps the tools of cognitive estrangement wielded by Western imaginaries and re-directs them. Here a kind of double estrangement is achieved. The perspective of the alien and the android, as metaphors for the colonized, alien-ated Other are privileged, and what is revealed is not “we are all human” but rather “we are [all] aliens” (Sobchack 2000, 138), and moreover, we are all postcolonial aliens.

In this way, “postcolonial” SF and “ex-centric” SF often connote the same thing, the aim of which Jean Comaroff (2009) has described as “the instructive dis-orientation that comes of looking at our own world from... a place beyond the traditional heartland of
Euro-America” (33). Both qualifiers of “postcolonial” and “ex-centric” can therefore also describe places within the (non-)traditional margins of Euro-America. They both invoke spaces outside the political boundaries of the West that remain within the imagination of Empire, as well as the growing spaces within Western boundaries that are perpetually without. The two terms can also be applied to works of afroturism, like that of Samuel Delaney and Octavia Butler, tracing back to the 1970s in the United States. Whatever their purview, postcoloniality and ex-centricity offer productive elsewhere not because they stand outside of the West, but because their perspectives come from spaces and subjects historically erased from, yet simultaneously constitutive of, Western narratives.

*Zoo City* is therefore both an ex-centric story and a postcolonial narrative. It is contextually grounded in a city outside of Euro-America, and moreover within Hillbrow: a ghettoized “ex-centric” space at the heart of Johannesburg and a well-known stopover for migrants hailing from other ex-centric spaces. As stated above, this also makes Hillbrow a thoroughly cosmopolitan center, one in which new claims to urbanity are being made by subjects previously relegated to the townships at the peripheries of the city or ostensibly “ruralized” under apartheid’s infamous redistribution of people onto a colonial landscape. And also, significantly, by those dis-located from outside of the “New South Africa.” The major and minor characters that inhabit *Zoo City* are these postcolonial subjects whose perspectives and positionality navigate the story. They include hustlers, foreigners, refugees, recovering addicts, sex-workers, criminals, and street hawkers. The protagonist’s path introduces the reader to city subjects outside of Hillbrow as well—to journalists, social workers, hipsters, clubbers, record producers, *sangomas*, shack-dwellers-turned-pop-stars, and notably, more criminals—more postcolonial, post-apartheid subjects inhabiting and moving between different city spaces and their various margins, re-writing the apartheid city as they do so. True to postcolonial form, *Zoo City* is therefore a story characterized by hybridity and movement, its ex-centricity revealed in its South African urban context of creativity, mobility, and multiplicity, and of global interconnection rather than provincial isolation.

**WRITING THE (ZOO) CITY: CHARACTERS AS INFRASTRUCTURE**

The bar is situated on the second floor of what used to be a shopping arcade back when this part of town was cosmopolitan central, with its glitzy hotels and restaurants and outdoor cafes and malls packed to the skylights with premium luxury goods. Even Zoo City has a Former Life. There was big talk about comebacks and gentrification a few years ago, which led to months of eviction raids by the Red Ants, with their red helmets and sledgehammers and bullhorns, and bright-eyed landlords buoyed up on the property boom bricking up the lower storeys of buildings. But the squatters always found a way back in. We’re an enterprising bunch. And it helps to have a certain reputation. (Beukes 51)

The recent history of inner-city Johannesburg is one of white evacuation and transient infiltration. As Simone (2008) points out, “roughly 90 percent of Johannesburg’s inner-city residents were not living there ten years ago” (72). Its cosmopolitan design had been intended solely for the ruling white minority, but through the late 1980s and ’90s as the apartheid system of governance moved from climactic crisis to its tenuous dismantling, most of its white inhabitants fled to gated suburbs at the city’s peripheries, leaving the inner-city available to former township residents, migrant laborers, and foreign nationals looking for work, effectively reversing apartheid logics of race and space (72-83). The neighborhood of Hillbrow has been described in both fiction and social science research as a place for economic opportunity, however irregular, informal, and fraught, as in Ziman’s 2008 film *Jerusalema*; for cheap accommodation while following pursuits elsewhere in the city, as in Mpe’s seminal *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001); and for escape—from the law, from family, and from the past. Zinzi’s motivations fit most easily into this final category.

It was inevitable I’d end up in Zoo City. Although I didn’t realize that until after the fifth rental agency had sneered over their clipboards at Sloth and told me they didn’t have anything available in the suburbs—had I tried Hillbrow? (60-1)

Throughout the novel, Beukes reveals the details of Zinzi’s sordid past to the reader: her drug addiction, her manipulation of her friends, family, and co-workers, her prison time, and the guilt she carries for the death of her brother. It is this death in Zinzi’s past that earned her the animal partner and the identifier of Zoo. The fantastic elements of *Zoo City* are discussed further below, suffice to say that in this alternative present imagined by Beukes, a syndrome or pathology has developed in recent history: those responsible for the death of another person—possibly as the manifestation of their guilt—develop a symbiotic relationship with an animal, the severing of which is fatal. This
post-humanist syndrome acts as a new form of stigma in Beukes’s novel. “Aposymbiosis” also operates as a flexible metaphor. At different points in the narrative it can reference HIV/AIDS, suggest social burdens with hidden potentials for empowerment, signify criminality, and unsettle boundaries of “humanness” altogether. While Zinzi’s move to Hillbrow is an attempt to escape her past, and save herself, it is the stigmatization of her Zoo status that makes Hillbrow the inevitable destination for her escape. Hillbrow, in reality and in fiction, has likewise been marked by its criminality.

In “Literary City,” Sarah Nuttall (2008) explores the representation of Johannesburg in fiction, particularly those written during the transition years between the late 1980s and early 2000s. Her questions offer productive entry points from which to consider Zoo City. For example: “What might a Johannesburg text be? How does Johannesburg emerge as an ideal and a form in contemporary literatures of the city? What literary ‘infrastructures’ are giving the city imaginary shape? Which vocabularies of separations and connectedness surface—and recede?” (195). Beukes offers her own experiences and methods for writing a re-imagined Johannesburg that is anchored to reality in ways that address some of these questions.

Beukes: I’m interested in all the possibilities of cities, the clash of cultures and economics—particularly in cities like Johannesburg, which is often seen as the New York of Africa, for its electric energy and ambition and pace, but also because it’s tough to break. As Kgebetli Moele (2006) said in Room 207, which I paraphrased for Zoo City, it’s the city of dreams—and nightmares.

I’m interested in psychogeography, the layers of history, how places are constructed and for what intentions and how those change, that cities improvise themselves. I try to make it as real as possible—especially when playing with the fantastic, you need to anchor it with real details. I do research trips, walk around and talk to people. It’s something I learned from being a journalist for Colors magazine, where the photographer and I always had an open brief around a particular theme and we would just go wherever it took us.

In researching cities, I have specific ideas in mind about certain periods of history or a location I want to use... but I also allow room to play, to adventure and see what emerges. It’s intuitive and it gives me a great excuse to wander around and talk to people and indulge my curiosity. (pers. comm., Dec. 1, 2013)

Keeping in mind Nuttall’s inquiry into literary representations of the city and Beuke’s fieldwork/informant based methodology for writing a realistic yet fantastic Johannesburg, I propose to include Simone’s theorization of “people as infrastructure” toward reading the written city. It is through Zinzi and the secondary characters in Beukes’s book that the reader comes to know this alternative, yet grounded Johannesburg. The narratives of these research-informed characters mirror the tenuous alliances fostered between marginalized city-dwellers that character-ize Simone’s essay on the inner-city.

Indeed, many of Beukes’s characters fit into and across the tropes of African subjects identified by Nuttall in fiction on Johannesburg. Especially relevant here are the figures of the sapeur, the migrant worker, the illegal immigrant, and the hustler. For example, a central subject to Zinzi’s experience in Zoo City is her love interest, Benoît—a Congolese refugee, animalled with a mongoose from his child-soldier past, working a series of jobs across the city. “Elias [the name on his uniform] was just the guy he filled in for when Elias was sick. The rest of the time, Benoît hustled. Odd jobs, man-on-the-side-of-the-road stuff, bouncer, labourer,
Vuyo, on the other hand—Zinzi’s “catcherman” for the email scams she drafts who also holds the drug debts that coerce her to write them—straddles subjectivities of the hustler-sapeur. Like the sapeur—a kind of sartorial exhibitionist—described by Nuttall (2008b), Vuyo is also a “figure of spatial transition, operating in the interstices of large cultures, participating in a cult of appearances, especially expensive clothing; a mobile individual...he circulates between countries, pulling off coups in otherwise invisible spaces in and between cities” (199). Vuyo moves skillfully between the shadow spaces and upscale clubs of Johannesburg, his coups and transnational mobility made largely possible through cyberspace. “I like to think of him hanging out in a huge sprawling Internet café adjoining a raucous street market in Accra or Lagos...but the truth is he’s probably in a dingy apartment like this one, maybe even right next door” (Beukes 2010, 39). When Zinzi finally meets her cyber-employer, it’s at The Rand Club, a real world “relic of Johannesburg’s Wild West days, when it was frequented by Cecil John Rhodes and other colonial slumlords” (42). Their meeting involves scamming a naïve American couple who have traveled to South Africa believing they can profit from financially assisting a dethroned “African Princess.”

I assume it’s Vuyo because he’s the best-dressed guy in here, in a suit and pointy shoes like shiny leather sharks. The patrons pushing the boundaries of their liquid lunch-hour have the same aura of clinging colonial nostalgia as the venue, with its chandeliers and gilded railings, caricatures of famous members, mounted buck-heads and faded oil paintings of fox hunts. Vuyo, by comparison, has the air of the fox that’s escaped the painting and double-backed [sic] to raid the kitchen.... Generically handsome with a ruby stud in his ear that hints oh-so-tastefully at danger. All the better to scam the pants off you. (42)

Zinzi herself is a master-hustler. She deftly utilizes the connections from her “Former Life” in journalism, as a suburbanite, and as an addict, and those she’s fostered since moving to Hillbrow, to enable her movements across the city. She alters her dress, her posture, her way of speaking—or writing when drafting her email scams—and carries her old business cards around to gain access to the spaces, people, and information she needs to get by in her new profession as a kind of magical private investigator: a finder of lost things.

Before continuing, an acknowledgement should be made of the slippages in analysis between the realities of living in Hillbrow and their representations in fiction. While social scientists have given ethnographic attention to the methods of survival at societies’ margins through what Simone describes as the “conjunction of heterogeneous activities” (71), many of which are admittedly deleterious, crime as depicted in fiction has in many ways produced a vocabulary for either appraising or condemning its actors as either resilient or amoral. Closely linked to this portrayal of crime and criminals is the representation of the State. Jean and John Comaroff (2004; 2006) have written extensively on perceptions of crime and disorder in post-apartheid South Africa, as well as on crime’s depictions in fiction. Crime fiction in the United States, for example, especially during the transitional years of The Great Depression, was imagined and mass mediated through subjects like the private-eye—narratives in which the tenuous moral economy and extralegal actors produced popular antiheroes. Comaroff and Comaroff (2004) continue,
... the outlaw embodies, often in deeply racialized guise, a displaced discourse about desire and impossibility, one as characteristic of the neoliberal moment in South Africa as it was of the Depression-era U.S. Here, too, the state is regarded with ambivalence, roughly in proportion to its alleged failure to secure the well being of its citizens. Here too, violence speaks elegaically of a very general angst about the anomic implosion of the established order of things. (807)

Without thoroughly investigating a comparison of the social realities of American cities in the 1930s to Johannesburg post-apartheid, given the private investigator protagonist and neo-Noir elements of Zoo City, it is not surprising to see characters courting a precarious line between chaos and order, shadow and spectacle. Furthermore, Beukes presents these characters, and the flexible in/formality of their maneuvers to make do in the city, in recognizably moral terms. While the heroes, anti-heroes, and clear-cut villains are more or less revealed in the end, their means of re-working city spaces in search of “regularity and provisionality,” to less revealed in the end, their means of re-working city spaces in search of “regularity and provisionality,” toward righteous, ambivalent, or nefarious means, prove similar to one another (Simone 2008, 69). Moreover Beukes’s heroes, anti-heroes, and villains are nearly all “animalled,” or “Zoo.” Nevertheless, as both ethnographers and Beukes herself has pointed out in a piece on “Writing the Other,” ethically portraying Johannesburg’s gendered, racialized, and increasingly vulnerable under-classes, requires research, imagination, and care.

There are several other characters whose storylines and personas illustrate Simone’s attention to the resilience, inventiveness, and precarious alliances of marginalized city-dwellers and their “attempts to derive maximal outcomes from a minimal set of elements” (71). These characters as infrastructure represent innovative if largely invisible modes of economic transaction in Johannesburg in which new zones of racial and class belonging and exclusion are forged as well as traversed, both hardened and made malleable, through connections fostered between people across physical and virtual spaces. Informal, shadow, and occult economies are therefore prevailing themes in Zoo City as barter, favors, crime, and magic represent available means by which urban slum-dwellers re-work the city in order to get by, or even become enterprising. More than innovative survivalists, however, what emerges through Beukes’s characters is also a striving for a new kind of ethical city-subject. One that tries to distinguish itself from other ways of being-in-the-city while under similarly constraining circumstances, as in the explicit distinction between Benoît’s resilient charm and D’Nice’s insidious ingenuity, and even more directly in Zinzi’s search for redemption. Made clearer below is how the ever-present animals of Zoo City, as extensions of their human subjects, unsettle notions of indivisible personhood by reference to magic and the occult, pulling the notion of characters as infrastructure even further into invisible realms of connection. At the same time, these animal-partners also point to old and new modes of de-humanizing subjection enacted through the more material infrastructures of Johannesburg.

CARTOGRAPHIES OF THE RE-IMAGINED CITY

Beukes’s characters—as infrastructure—also map the literary city of Johannesburg through their movements in the narrative. Zinzi’s imagined, mobile vantages thus characterize the novel’s urban spaces. While some spatial impressions are given in the excerpts above, those I wish to focus on here include the gated community, the city-suburb, and the invisible spaces beneath the city. In doing so, I take another cue from Sarah Nuttall (2008b) and “explore the imaginary infrastructures that surface” in Beukes’s novel, “producing writerly, metropolitan maps” (200).

Distinct to Beukes’s first person narration (through Zinzi) of Johannesburg’s suburban spaces are their descriptions as penetrable and cosmopolitan, yet characterized by architectures, technologies, and social modes of would-be separation and exclusion. The examples given below distinguish between the gated community, the city-suburb, and Newtown—an aptly named recently gentrified space edging on the inner-city—and suggest a difference in their physical and psychological distance from the city’s center.

The Gated Community: The car pulls away, a little more vigorously than required, under the boom, over a speed bump and into the rotten heart of leafy suburbia. The suburbs are overshadowed with oaks and jacarandas and elms... the grassy verges on the pavement are more manicured than a porn star’s topiary, running up to ten-metre-high walls topped with electric fencing. Anything could happen behind those walls and you wouldn’t know a thing. Maybe that’s the point. (80)

There used to be shortcuts you could take through the suburbs, but they’ve closed them off, illegally: gated communities fortified like privatized citadels. Not so much keeping the world out as keeping the festering middle-class paranoia in. (97)

Descriptions of gated communities as vulgar and pathological, as “rotten, festering paranoia,” emphasize their exclusionary practices as both undesirable to the
city as a whole as well as socially suspect. Contrary to the flexibility, improvisation, and openness—however risky—that characterize Hillbrow, the gated communities represented in *Zoo City* become the enclaves of the most nefarious deeds, occult and otherwise. The character most closely identified with this space and its representation is Odysseus Huron, himself an aging, bloated, secretive music producer striving to stay relevant by exploiting the fresh faces and sounds of teen-pop duo, the Radebe twins. Zinzi describes his estate:

> The pool is an enormous old-fashioned square, with mosaic tiles and a classical water feature of two maidens pouring out a jug of water. But the tiles are chipped, the lapis-lazuli blue faded to a dull glaucoma. The brackish water is a vile green, a skin of rotting leaves cloying the surface. Lichen has crept over the two maidens. Moss clogs the folds of their robes and the crooks of their elbows, blanking out their features like a beauty mask gone wild. Like someone ate their faces.

The prose here is riddled with foreshadowing. As we learn, beneath the pool lies Odysseus’s dungeon-like bunker where his occult solutions to his Own Former Life problems precipitate the story’s narrative climax. More than a hint at later plot points, however, the gated community represents—through the odious Odysseus—the new spaces of an economic apartheid trying to tap into the elusive streams of neoliberal capital from behind security walls. Rather than a place of escape or even reclusion, the gated community is portrayed as a stagnant and rotting imposition, as congesting the flows that otherwise connect the more open spaces of the city by trying to consume its energy while remaining apart.

In contrast, the city-suburb and Newtown are sites of movement and spectacle in which belonging is guarded with social sanction rather than security gates. The city-suburbs are spaces of hyphenation between center and periphery, while Zinzi’s reflections on Newtown illustrate a slightly different commitment to city-ness. Both are expressed as transitional spaces of exhibition used by emerging new city-subjects, and both are tinged with Zinzi’s characteristic cynicism.

The **City-Suburb**: I get the taxi to drop me off in Rosebank and find the nearest payphone. It’s an anachronism that the mall even has a working payphone, but I guess it caters to the traders at the African market and teens who have run out of airtime. Or the dubiously agenda’d, like me….

We end up meeting under the fluorescent lights of the local Kauai, attracting the rapt attention of a cluster of well-pierced teens sitting around a plastic table loaded down with bile-green smoothies. While other passersby, the black-diamond hipsters and mall rats and suits, spare me only sliding glances reserved for people in wheelchairs and burn victims... (126-7)

**Newtown**: Vuyo insists on meeting me at Kaldi’s coffee shop in Newtown, the funkified art, theatre, design and fashion capital of the inner city. They burned this neighborhood down in the early 1900s to prevent the spread of bubonic plague, and it occurs to me that they should consider doing it again, to purge the blight of well-meaning hipsters desperately trying to paint it rainbow... I squeeze between the tables packed with actors, dancers, trendy new media folk, BEE venture capitalists in suits with no ties, and capitalist wannabes (also in suits, but with ties) who have the ambition but not the office space, and come to use Kaldi’s free Wi-Fi. (183)

Beukes’s impressions of Johannesburg resemble Nuttall’s commentary in other literature on the city. Referencing Hayden (2003), Nuttall describes what I have called the city-suburb as “what used to be thought of as the noncentral city parts of the metropolis, but which is becoming an increasingly dominant urban cultural landscape in Johannesburg.” *Zoo City* also “name-drops, as does the celebrity culture of the suburbs” and is “written in the spirit of the new journalism, echoing Hunter Thompson in which ‘resemblance to real life figures is entirely intentional’” (Nuttall 2008b, 208). The place names in the excerpts above are real, and they identify space much like the stereotyped personas that Zinzi describes inhabiting them; they are sites of visible surfaces, carefully stylized to project ways of being and belonging to a burgeoning, but tenuous middle-class, no longer identified by whiteness, but often built on a form of bluffing. They are spaces for meeting and talking and to be seen. Zinzi’s stigmatized
status made visible by the sloth on her back highlights this importance of appearances by emphasizing her own exclusion.

The cynicism that colors Zinzi’s narration of the spaces described above stems from her “Former Life” experiences (before becoming animalled/Zoo) as a suburbanite and an “outrageously expensive indie boutique kinda girl” (8), giving her an intimate knowledge of a different way-of-being in the city. This knowledge gives her a kind of power to “see through the bullshit,” as the saying goes, of those very appearances. We are given to understand her as a transient subject herself, lost or living in moments of purgatory between drug addiction, her “Former Life,” and an attempt at personal redemption. Redemption that she hopes to find in her search for one of the missing Radebe twins across the spaces of the city, and later, when her search turns to finding Benoît’s estranged family, outside of South Africa. Zinzi’s postcolonial subjectivity, her personal history, and her own hopes for the future, tint the representation of the city through her experiences of transitional belonging and exclusion, offering a commentary on the marginalized, urban subject of Johannesburg in social reality.

Zinzi’s search also takes her underneath the city, however, and to its outskirts. The more invisible infrastructures of Johannesburg become the sites of escape and disposal, and a reflection on the city’s past and structures of Johannesburg become the sites of escape however, and to its outskirts. The more invisible infrastructures of Johannesburg—come to surface in Zinzi’s search. These are spaces where Zinzi looks for lost things. They are invisible spaces written into literary being as Zinzi’s “shavi”—her magical talent—permits, or rather coerces her to explore.

**The Drains:** It’s not like I’m the world authority on Joburg’s storm drains, but I’ve been down here enough times looking for lost things to know the basic lie of the land. This is all unfamiliar. The tunnels are a scramble of pitch-black termite holes, some of them narrowing away to nothing, like whoever was digging them got bored and wandered off. The original gold diggings maybe, when Johannesburg was still just a bunch of hairy prospectors scrabbling in the dirt. (212)

**The Mines:** I drive out south to where the last of the mine dumps are—sulfur-coloured artificial hills, laid waste by the ravages of weather and reprocessing, shored up with scrubby grass and eucalyptus trees. Ugly valleys have been gouged out and tricked away by the ton to sift out the last scraps of gold the mining companies missed the first time around. Maybe it’s appropriate that eGoli, place of gold, should be self-cannibalising. (288)

Zinzi’s descriptions of the drains give the city a depth of character that contrasts to the street-level impressions of Johannesburg, while the mine dumps reflect on the ecological erasures created by the industrial origins of urbanism. Here, narratives of the past—of the abandoned mining infrastructures that gave rise to the city and the new wastelands of extraction that serve as dumping grounds for bodies made expendable via the historical, material, and social infrastructures of Johannesburg—come to surface in Zinzi’s search. These are spaces where Zinzi looks for lost things. They are invisible spaces written into literary being as Zinzi’s “shavi”—her magical talent—permits, or rather coerces her to explore.

Lastly, in contrast to the cynicism and suspicion that Zinzi conveys for the gated community, the citysuburb, and trendy Newtown, or her unease in the city’s underbelly, it is back in Hillbrow where the otherwise ugliness of urban decay and struggle reveals the possibility for beauty.

**Hillbrow:** Benoît ducks under a laundry line, sheets and dresses and shirts flapping like tethered kites. Everything takes on a muted quality fifteen floors up. The traffic is reduced to a flow and stutter, the car horns like the calls of mechanical ducks. The skyline is in crisp focus, the city graded in rusts and copper by the sinking sun that has streaked the wispy clouds the colour of blood. It’s the dust in the air that makes the Highveld sunsets so spectacular, the fine yellow mineral deposits kicked up from the mine dumps, the carbon-dioxide choke of the traffic. Who says bad things can’t be beautiful? (136)

Here it is the precarious alliances between the marginalized subjects of Hillbrow that tint the scene with optimism. Zinzi’s reflections on the sociality of Hillbrow conjure a cityscape simultaneously characterized by social degradation and vitality, one that is misunderstood by Johannesburg’s (less) other(ed) literary city-subjects.

People who would happily speed through Zoo City during the day won’t detour here at night, not even to avoid police roadblocks. They’re too scared, but that’s precisely when Zoo City is at its most sociable. From 6 pm, when the day-jobbers start getting back from whatever work they’ve been able to pick up, apartment doors are flung open. Kids chase each other down the corridors. People take their animals out for fresh air or a friendly sniff of each other’s bums. The smell of cooking—mostly food, but also meth—temporarily drowns out the stench of rot, the urine in the stairwells. The crack whores emerge from their dingy apartments to chat and smoke cigarettes.
on the fire-escape, and catcall the commuters heading to the taxi rank on the street below. (132)

In contrast to the suburbs and the inner-peripheries of the city’s center, Zinzi character-izes Hillbrow as a space of more genuine transformation: from ugliness into beauty, through connection rather than separation, and for solidarity through exclusion. As Zinzi explains above, Hillbrow is a social prison with open doors.

MINDING THE GAP

I turn now to the possibilities of thinking about urbanism with science fiction. By drawing attention to the imaginary elements that unmoor Zoo City’s narrative from realism, I explore the potentials that science fiction carries for approaching the social realities of the post-apartheid city. Nuttall’s (2008a) reworking of Foucault’s “stylizing the self” offers a method for appraising the fantastical elements that Beukes uses to fashion her novel. Nuttall draws on ideas of translation and “gap”—“between one meaning or text and another”—in describing how advertising, public images, texts, and the ways people dress and stylize their bodies while moving through the city remaps and reworks the surface of city spaces (93). For thinking through Zoo City, we might work with the “the gap” as a space of critical potential created with the cognitive estrangement between actuality and fantasy.

In particular, the role of “Aposymbiosis”—the syndrome or pathology that is the primary element of estrangement in Beukes’s novel—warrants further commentary. Added to this re-imagined world is also the existence of magic, or “shavi,” as the extrasensory abilities that accompany the acquiring of Aposymbiosis. While these fantastical elements of Zoo City can stand at different moments in the narrative for different metaphors, I argue, as others have (Stobie 2012), that the flexible signifier of Zoo-ness stands most strongly for criminality and criminalization. Although slippage persists between these two notions—the former suggests a way of being in the city, while the later is a social marking imposed from elsewhere—both gesture to events of the past that are carried into the present, and that have implications for the future.

Through Aposymbiosis and shavi, Beukes builds a world where criminality is represented as an animal partner, as visible and sentient baggage that one carries around and must nurture—as Zinzi does, carrying her sloth on her back throughout the story. Yet being marked and consequently stigmatized as Zoo, or “animalled,” also carries a hidden gift. To have been pushed by circumstances into taking on the darker sides of the informal economy, to have caused the death of another, or to have willfully murdered, is portrayed here as an existence that comes with a unique power and perspective on the world. This power, or magic, held by the “animalled”—a word that suggests subjection from above—goes beyond the kind of “militant pessimism” of the dispossessed that, according to Tom Moylan, fosters a “focused anger” and “radical hope” characteristic to critical dystopias (qtd. in Stobie 2012, 370), though such a perspective certainly permeates the story. Rather this power is articulated as a unique extra sensory “talent” held by each animalled person. Zinzi can trace invisible threads linking people to their lost things, and things to lost people. D’Nice’s shavi is his ability to usurp “moments of happiness, absorbing them haphazardly like a sponge,” what Zinzi calls “a serotonin vampire” (56). Benoît’s shavi works by “dampening other people’s. He’s the static to [the] ambient noise, the fuzzy snow that cancels out other frequencies” (67).

No clear cause or definition is given for Aposymbiosis and this resistance to demystification allows it to speak to a range of metaphors that emerge alongside criminality. Beukes conveys this ambiguity surrounding Zoo-ness by including short chapters within the novel that offer divergent perspectives, voiced in different registers, around the appearance and character of Aposymbiosis. These interjecting chapters are as varied as a psychiatric recommendation for “Aposymbiotic individuals who exhibit psychic trauma” from their delusions (Chapter 18), a journalistic excerpt of interviews with imprisoned Zoos around the world (Chapter 10), and a documentary film synopsis about “Patient Zero” of the global “ontological Shift” that came with the millennial emergence of “Acquired Aposymbiotic Familiarism” (Chapter 8). This persistent openness and multivocal ambiguity allows for various forms of social marking and stigma—the psychological, the sociological, and the pathological—to surface at different moments in the narrative, drawing out multiple layers of meaning entangled with criminal identification.

In addition to these descriptions of Zoo-ness, its visibility, necessitated by the need to keep one’s animal close at all times, foregrounds different referents over others as Zinzi moves across the city. The metaphor that predominates is contingent on the “character” of the space being occupied. For example, while some buildings “have a policy,” other spaces, like the city-suburban streets with their emphasis on appearances, turn Zoo-ness into a curiosity: “the Goth kids have no shame. They’re practically staking me out. I raise one hand, busted-celebrity-mode, acknowledging, yes, it really is me, now please leave me alone…” (127). While stigma is “re-mixed” here with youth counter-culture,
what also surfaces in these moments of spatial contingency are specters of the apartheid-past in the city’s present.

While arbitrary categories of race and ethnicity were strictly codified and spatially designated under apartheid, the nineties brought a theoretical freedom of self-definition and movement across city-spaces that has nevertheless remained policed by old categories of race and new categories of class. As Nuttall (2008a) points out, however, the re-mixing of both nostalgic and nascent material culture, as technologies of race and class, can be seen to continuously reopen gaps of desire. This occurs alongside the neoliberal emphasis placed on identity and consumerism showcased on the streets of Johannesburg (113-115). In this way, the possibilities for understanding the past’s presence through the articulations of newness as difference, illustrates yet another advantage of the flexibility of Aposymbiosis as estranged signifier. Alongside the troubled past of the city rests the weight of Zinzi’s own criminal back-story, personified in the sloth that hangs from her neck. The possibility for redemption through transformation, a central theme throughout the novel, can therefore be read not just as Zinzi’s narrative, but also as the city’s.

What significance then lies in the presence of animals as partners in the city? The possibilities are manifold, as other SF authors have demonstrated. Most notably perhaps is Philip K. Dick’s Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep (1968), in which a religious morality has developed around the empathetic connection to animals, most of which are nearly extinct. In Dick’s novel, mechanical animals, or animal replicants have been developed for companionship while human replicants are used for labor in off-world colonies. Dick questions conventional notions of humanness, empathy, and emotion through human-animal-android relations and distinctions. A more recent example of fiction that takes its context from South Africa is J.M Coetzee’s Disgrace (1999), in which dogs appear as a symbol through which questions of humanness, redemption, and new forms of relation after apartheid are explored. This unsettling of animal-human distinctions also gestures to modes of racial dehumanization—and indeed criminalization—imposed under apartheid and perhaps re-emerging in recent trends of xenophobia, as discussed further below. Animals therefore have a wide-ranging precedence as literary signs that provoke attention to the boundaries and ethics of humanness. One of Beukes’s interventions in Zoo City is to bring this symbolism into conversation with African traditional religions.

Animals are closely associated with an invisible world of spirits and ancestors in African cosmologies, and Beukes draws on their identification as common witch-familiars, and their byproducts as powerful elements used in muti, when framing them as flexible signifiers in Zoo City. Perhaps the most provocative tangential chapter not mentioned above is taken from (the real) Penny Miller’s Myths and Legends of Southern Africa, which Beukes states in her acknowledgements, “haunted my childhood with its wonderful stories and distinctly disturbing illustrations” (353). The excerpt reads,

The mashave are spirits of foreigners, or of wanderers who died far away from their families and clans and did not receive a proper burial. Owing to this, they were never “called home”, but continued to roam restlessly through the bush. Homeless spirits like these are feared because they are always on the watch for a living host in whom to reside; as the spirit of a wonderer cannot go back to the land of his ancestors, it seeks the body of one who is willing to harbour him…. Some mashave-possessed individuals are even believed to confer skills in such improbable things as football, horse-racing or attaining good examination marks! (201-2)

Beuks’s invocation of Miller’s descriptions of mashave, re-articulated as “shavi” by the animalled of Zoo City, associates Aposymbiosis with “the spirits of foreigners” and implies a close connection of the Zoo signifier to the intensification of xenophobia in South Africa, typified by the rash of violence in 2008.

The recurrent criminalization and stigmatization of foreign Africans and the shadow economies that such-marked and impoverished subjects participate in to “make do” in the city were significant social realities at the time the Beukes’s writing that repeatedly surface in her narrative. Indeed, the very question of belonging in the city is provoked by the curious presence of wild animals in urban spaces, suggesting perhaps, a sense of feral danger and possibility. It is through these empathic animal-human attachments, however, that conviviality with shifting Otherness becomes possible in Beuks’s Johannesburg. And if we also appraise these animal-partners as Miller’s mashave, the displaced spirits of South Africa’s troubled past that many believe act as important social agents in the alliances forged in world the living, then the conviviality of the past with the present also becomes imaginable. Returning with these ideas to the text, it is Benoit’s story as a child-soldier-turned-refugee and his centrality to the book’s climax that further confirm the entanglement of criminalization, social exclusion, and redemption in the novel. His character also creates the opportunity for Zinzi to realize her own redemption as she leaves Johannesburg to
find his family—a mission she hopes will be, “the best thing I’ve done with my miserable life.”

**CONCLUSION: HOW ESTRANGEMENT AND SCIENCE FICTION WORK IN THE CITY**

While the flexibility of Aposymbiosis and shavi as estranged signifiers open up numerous gaps for theorizing the grounded city of Johannesburg, how can taking science fiction seriously contribute to the innovative methodologies undertaken by scholars like Nuttall, Membre, and Simone? As Jean Comaroff (2009) explains, estrangement as a method of deploying alienation toward enlightenment is not new. “The Russian Formalists referred to it as ‘defamiliarization’; the dramatist, Bertold Brecht, Frederick Jameson reminds us, called it the ‘estrangement effect.’” It relates as well to “the kind of unsettling discrepancy that W.E.B. Du Bois dubbed ‘double consciousness,’ and that Edward Said saw as the positive effect of exile” (32). Darko Suvin’s concept of cognitive estrangement as the combining of the cognitive, scientific rigor of describing “the real world” with an imaginary universe is also critical to this genealogy (qtd. in Renault 1980, 114). It is in the gap between the imaginary and the real that Suvin sees the potential for political critique (117).

The problem with Suvin’s description of cognitive estrangement, according to Renault, is its invocation of “the real world.” If estrangement simply created a gap to be filled between the reality (the referent) of criminality and the fantasy (the estranged signifier) of Zoo, then adding a SF element to Simone’s “people as in-structure” should simply produce new insights into “the real” city. “The reality” of this process is, of course, more complicated and thus returns us to the shared history of anthropology, science fiction, and Rieder’s palimpsest of colonial logics that postcolonial SF works to reveal. For ethnography, itself a rigorous mode of creative non-fiction, cannot escape its own need to estrange reality in order to make it legible. And not just to an audience of outsiders, but at all. Simone acknowledges this dilemma in his ending of *For the City Yet to Come* (2004) by citing Francois Woukoache’s film *Fragments of Life* (1999), in which a couple in a taxi are unable to move or speak as they witness the disparate stories taking place in the city. The couple remains paralyzed in their seats as if by some burden-some knowledge that cannot be conveyed in its totality, provoking Simone to ask, “what in the end can be said about the urban forces at work” (243) and, moreover, what language do we need to speak of it?

The work of ethnography and of science fiction in trying to re-present the city and its subjects are more similar than they are distinct. This is not to say that ethnography is closer to fantasy than reality, but rather that the fantastic of science fiction also deploys an anthropological imagination. What the estranging elements of SF accomplish is a “fiction twice removed” (Renault 1980, 117). It takes our representations of the world, rather than the world as it exists, and unsettles them. Its critical work lies not in its ability to move us toward better vocabularies for understanding the social realities of cities “on the ground,” or cities “yet to come,” but rather to make us think with vocabularies that do not exist. The cognitive leap that such an exercise requires—one that SF readers are particularly willing to make—provokes us to mine for meaning in the socio-cultural context of the work’s production. Aposymbiosis becomes criminality, HIV/AIDS, stigma, trauma, racialism, foreignness, and ancestral spirits, while shavi becomes agency, power, and a weapon of the poor. Flexing these concepts of “real world” sociality toward the gap created with estrangement, so as to make the story legible, dislocates these elements of social reality both from the starkness of their impact on material experience and from the regularity of their use that renders them mundane. Beukes has described this characteristic of her writing as a method to “short-circuit issue fatigue” (Pagan 2013).

**Beukes:** The world is often unbearable, from child refugees in Syria being raped to stabbings at Walmart over cheap TVs. We have to filter it out to be able to live our lives or maybe vent our outrage on Twitter and move on. The big issues are overwhelming and seemingly unsolvable. What fiction does is allow you an in through a personal perspective. You step into someone’s head, someone’s life and there have been several studies about how fiction creates empathy.

Science fiction allows you to push that even further. It’s allegorical and kinda sneaky. *Zoo City* is not about real-life criminals, like say, Sifiso Mzobe’s award-winning realist carjacker novel, *Young Blood* (2010), it’s about an ex-con turned email scammer with a magical sloth, but we can both talk about the context of society and poverty and trying to find redemption.

Science fiction allows for twisty thought experiments, what ifs, pushed to the limits, but to work it still has to carry a story. You have to be invested in the characters. You have to care. *(pers. comm., Dec. 1, 2013)*

The work of estrangement then, which remains dependent on the context of its imagining for the story “to work,” never removes us from the social reality and
materiality being signified, but rather punctuates it with difference that demands “cognitive work” on the part of the reader. The gaps created between the world and fantasy are productive precisely because they resist foreclosure or simple substitution. In Zoo City, this allows Beukes to re-imagine a Johannesburg in which the “hardened,” “bland realities” of life in the contemporary city are given renewed emphasis through a “presentist logic,” a term I borrow from Melly’s (2013) ethnographic critique of road-works in Dakar, as a contrast to the futurism so often associated with science fiction. What then surfaces in the estrangements of Zoo City are “vocabularies of separations and connectedness” (Nuttall 2008b, 195) that do not take the referents of their signifiers as given. In this way, Zoo City allows for the kind of openness and contingency for theorizing about the ideas, people, images, and imaginaries that characterize the African metropolis while punctuating the unspeakable and unknowable—that elusive shadow created by ethnographic realism—with the fantastic.

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ENDNOTES
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ACCELERATION KIGALI-STYLE

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I. MIND THE SPEED

In Kigali, folks don’t really read the street signs. To be fair, they have only existed since the summer of 2012, when in one fell swoop the Kigali City Council assigned new names to the more than 2,600 roads, avenues, and boulevards comprising Kigali’s lymphatic system. Prior to 2012, there were very few named streets in Kigali: most of those were in the downtown neighborhood known as Centre ville, and all bore French names. The new system relinquishes the symbolic, victorious, patriotic street names of post-independence Africa, like Avenue de la Paix, Rue de la Justice, or Boulevard Mandela. Rather, they follow an efficient numbering system, all starting with an abbreviation designating one of Kigali’s three districts (Nyarugenge, Gasabo, and Kicukiro). KN 324 for example, is a street in Nyarugenge District, while KK 109 is in Kicukiro District. In January 2014, I found myself back on one of Kigali’s ubiquitous moto taxis, ignoring my ever-growing collection of moto accident stories in favor of cheap speed. I gave the driver the number of the street sign I had memorized—just steps from where I was staying. He shook his head—enveloped in the trademark sturdy kelly green helmet, with a registration number painted on it in yellow—and affirmed the non-sense of this locational reference. I gave him the neighborhood name and said I’d guide him, and to the gas his foot went. Everyone I spoke with—taxi and moto drivers, residents, local merchants—told me decisively that Kigalois (residents of Kigali) had not yet learned the signs and did not yet refer to them. Indeed, I soon found that, for those of us discovering parts of the city for the first time or slowly assimilating to the sometimes indistinguishable, steep, rocky, burnt burgundy unpaved roads, navigating the city still entails a prepositional dance with your driver: iburyo, ibumoso, hepfo ya, hariya (right, left, down there, over there)!

It is not just the French street names that have disappeared, but French itself has been abandoned in favor of English. However, many Kigalois are not very comfortable speaking English. Of course they will greet a white woman in English and exchange pleasantries—graciously and patiently they will also let her practice her Kinyarwanda. But she may quickly discover that her interlocutor is in fact much more fluent in French. The clinicians and civil servants I work with in my research are also overwhelmingly Francophone, but in the process of improving their English. Rwanda changed the official language of instruction from French to English in 2008—a swift change, first implemented in primary schools, and then in higher education. Media and scholarly analyses explained the change as one motivated by the government’s desire to reposition Rwanda as a member of the East African Community, which is comprised mostly of English-speaking countries, such as Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya. Economic and business priorities aside, some highlighted the symbolic value of the linguistic policy shift as a rebuff to the former colonial power and involvement of Belgium and France, respectively. Of course, many Kigali neighborhoods, from Centre ville to Nyabugogo to Nyamirambo, still boast cobblers, hair salons, boutiques, office/school supply stores, pharmacies, clinics, hospitals, and NGO offices bearing signage in French, whether or not alongside Kinyarwanda or English.
“Acceleration defines Kigali in its achievements and triumphs, in its fissures and gaps.”

I consider numerical street signs and English as instantiations of a broader process in Kigali, that of acceleration. Acceleration defines Kigali in its achievements and triumphs, in its fissures and gaps. It seems that the order of the day defines experience in such a way that Kigaloi are constantly “getting up to speed” or “catching up” to changes long after they have been decisively implemented by a state that has an explicit commitment to accelerated development and leadership. There is a lag. Certainly, capitalist flows and processes have taken hold in Kigali as in many other African cities. However, here I am not invoking the Marxist idea of accelerationism, which states that to engender radical change, the dominant capitalist system should be augmented, and its growth accelerated, in order to catalyze the full re-alization of its self-destructive propensities. Rather, I mean acceleration akin to its definition in physics: the derivative of residents’ actual velocity comes to define a broader teleological project. This means that acceleration encompasses a recalibration of the actual speed of citizens in their everyday interactions, struggles, and routines. People are literally being pushed along, but they are not necessarily adapting. Rwanda’s national strategies are not simply about development, they also coalesce into a teleological project. The process is a kind of intensified upgrading of society, an attempt to bypass the West and its central telos, wherein a society must progress through necessary and sequential stages of development in order to become modern. Beneath Rwanda’s new teleological model, we might identify a desire to confirm the proposition that “in the history of the present, the global south is running ahead of the global north, a hyperbolic prefiguration of its future-in-the-making” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012, 19). There are high stakes involved in this process—acceleration as a teleological project is meant to enable an entire generation to overcome a recent past of extreme violence and ethnic divisionism, as well as the trauma and scars that endure from it. In accelerated urban and national developments—such as the naming or renaming of all city streets, the rapid classroom conversion to English, or the introduction of a cell phone service headquarters that is open 24/7—we see evidence of a nation-state’s attempt to outpace the “post-traumatic” period, to achieve development characterized by particular notions of efficiency and advanced technology in order to make up for lost time.

“People are literally being pushed along, but they are not necessarily adapting.”

This is a think piece about how in Rwanda, acceleration is about rewriting the temporal requirements that we typically associate with the teleology of modernity. Here, Rosalind Morris’s (2008) work on speculation and value creation amongst young South Africans facing the overwhelming catastrophe of the AIDS epidemic is especially useful. Puzzled by the exaggerated AIDS prevalence statistics that youth offer in a mining town in Merafong municipality, just south of Johannesburg, she uses an analysis of burial societies and insurance schemes to illuminate the “emerging dialectic between panic and rush (rush and panic) as it takes hold in the changing landscape of epidemic South Africa” (201). For Morris, the “rush” is one against time and fate, involving a panicked avoidance. In Rwanda, the “rush” is not against time and fate, it is a disposal of old time, catching up a nation in a “slow” Africa—it is a teleological race. Time is being expanded so that more events and changes can be fit into its units. The Rwandan “rush” is the effect of a projective developmental strategy that throws itself into the future with little calculation of the time needed for citizens to learn new ways and adapt, or of intermediate stages of resource and knowledge accumulation that might be necessary. These are dealt with ex post facto, after a change or national project has been initiated. This type of rush can be seen as a product of the panic engendered by the mass trauma of time, bodies, and generations lost to the genocide. This teleological race produces disjunctures, such as a
capital city in which no one uses the street signs and many struggle with English.

II. ACCELERATING IN THE CITY

How is acceleration to be seen and felt in Kigali? Here I will consider the central downtown neighborhood of Centre ville, touring its high rise office and retail buildings which are all near the Place de la Constitution, identifiable by its well-paved (like most of Centre ville) round about. Today, that Place is called KN 1 Round About, and the spokes that radiate from it have names like KN 4 Avenue and KN 2 Street—streets that previously had names like Avenue de la Justice. So the new street signs have also carried re-christenings for the phoenix city, ones that affirm a process of rationalization and efficiency within an accelerationist teleology by converting French names into abbreviations and numbers. A shift from the qualitative to the quantitative. There is Centenary House, owned by Cartas Rwanda, the organization of Rwanda’s Catholic bishops who initiated construction in 2000 for the 100th anniversary of Rwanda’s evangelization. Testament to the old and new temporalities of improvement, the building stands on the site of Cartas Rwanda’s former offices and was financed by the Catholic Church as well as a 1.5 million USD loan from Rwandan commercial bank Cogebank, which has a branch in the building. It’s rusty red with neatly spaced horizontal panels of windows on each story, and a curved facade of windows jutting out at one end.

Centenary House rents out office and commercial space—the income it generates finances the charity work of their group Caritas Rwanda—and some of its clients include Ethiopian Airlines, Flash FM radio, and Simba Supermarket, which is co-owned by a Rwandan and an Eritrean. Simba is one of Rwanda’s largest supermarkets, boasting a butcher, bakery, furniture and electronics, beauty and household supplies, and a restaurant café with indoor and outdoor seating. The café is full of Kigalois on lunch break, discussing business deals or mulling over their next university exam—when making plans to meet at Centenary House they say kuri Simba (at Simba). There is the occasional white tourist boasting predictable signs such as an enormous backpack or dreadlocks—perhaps they represent an ironic anachronism as seeming hippies in 2014 Kigali—as well as the occasional expat professional.

Across the street from Centenary House is UTC (Union Trade Center), a white concrete mall featuring the smaller Nakumatt: a 24-hour Kenyan supermarket with an inventory similar to Simba, only the store feels more like an African Walmart in terms of lighting, size, and quantity. UTC also contains the 24-hour MTN store (a major cell phone provider in Rwanda), clothing boutiques, restaurants, Access Bank, souvenir kiosks selling African-made wares and accessories, and a Bourbon Coffee shop. The 24-hour Nakumatt speaks further to the expansion of time itself that characterizes Rwanda’s teleological project of acceleration, and of the prioritization of quantity, though I am not claiming that quality is being sacrificed everywhere.

Then there is Kigali City Tower, built by the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) for $200 million USD, but without any publicly declared owner. Of course, this points to Africa’s position in a new era of globalization. Along with the predictable banks and stores including an ever-larger second Nakumatt supermarket, a Mr. Price, and a Bata shoe store, where the shoes are affordable for a middle class Kigalois (I bought a pair of comfortable city sneakers for the equivalent of $5 USD) and made both regionally and across the globe. On the third floor of the Tower one finds Century Cinema, which opened in March 2013. General Manager Charles Gasigwa told a reporter that the theatre’s machines are similar to those used in the US, and that the 5D screen is the first in all of Africa (Asimwe 2013). 5D? Yes, you didn’t misread that. The theatre offers 2D, 3D, and 5D movies—the ticket price increases proportionately to the dimensional order you desire (3000-5000 RWF or $4.42-7.36 USD at the current exchange rate). The 5D movie experience involves a 3D screen, a chair in motion, and surround sound. There is a scaling up of experience itself—Kigalois can accelerate through orders of complexity. Thus, the teleological race marks not only linguistic and infrastructural changes, but also leisure within Kigali’s developing consumption culture.

I also spent a solid hour at T2000’s two-story Chinese supermarket—more like a Chinese Target—on middle levels of 2000 House, a pavilion-style commercial high rise (built and owned by a Chinese firm) just down the hill from a gas station which faces Kigali City Tower. In the market one finds German hair
A review of recent literature on Kigali reveals a concerted engagement with the consequences of Rwanda’s accelerationist teloses. As one example, Tom Goodfellow, a scholar of urban and development studies in Rwanda, is one of the few who have thought about
the reasons behind the striking silence of Kigali’s majority of poor citizens and the absence of civic conflict (see Beall et al. 2013) that marks the city despite policies and structural developments that gradually marginalize them. In a comparative paper that considers urban politics in Rwanda and Uganda, he uses a heuristic dichotomy between “noise” and “silence” to capture the differential extent to which violent protest constitutes a regular type of state-society interaction in a given context. He argues the following:

In Kampala the regular mobilisation of urban informal groups into protests and riots has institutionalised a politics of noise, which has become rather self-reinforcing and serves certain functions for both political elites and ordinary city dwellers, even though this functionality may not have been created by design. In Kigali, by contrast, there is a marked absence of protest, and in part, this can be linked to the way city dwellers mobilise (and are mobilised) into orderly, structured community activities and self-policing: relatively silent forms of engagement which are institutionalised in the sense that they form “stable, valued and recurring patterns of behaviour” (Huntington, 1968, p. 12). (Goodfellow 2013a, 437)

This contrast forces us to consider motivation—why is it that Kigali’s citizens are never moved to protest despite developments such as expropriation of land for the Kigali City Master Plan? While he paints a rather straightforward portrait of how in Kampala, the city and the state learned a certain politics in the current moment, he gives a rather more complex account of the “politics of silence” in Kigali that takes into account political learning but also how recent history and experience play into this learning of social behavior. He acknowledges the pervasive impact of Rwanda’s top-down authoritarian government and the dearth of formal mechanisms for urban residents (such as market vendors) to express complaints, but goes on to make multiple assertions: a) avoidance of protest has become a social norm; b) most citizens assume that it’s counter-productive to confront the government directly; c) while some Rwandans have likely internalized certain aspects of the authoritarian government’s agenda for orderly, secure urbanization, both they and those who maintain internal resistance have regularly behaved in a way that “perpetuate[s] norms of relatively silent compliance” (447); d) strict social hierarchy and respect for authority have marked Rwandan culture for centuries; and e) silence is probably deeply valued owing to desires for social reproduction, stability, and self-protection. Goodfellow insists that since Rwanda yet lacks the technology and infrastructure for a modern “police state,” powerful social norms serve as self-reinforcing mechanisms in sustaining a politics of silence. However, another way of reading Goodfellow’s data is to conclude that Rwandans have internalized an ideology of acceleration to such an extent that they assume the rush of sudden changes but skip the stage or moment of urban protest and dissent that we associate with many histories, whether those of European, American, or postcolonial African cities. There is a link between silence and speed. The realization of a developmental telos based on acceleration hinges on a certain amount of silence—the silence that allows for school programs, street signs, and commercial ventures to be implemented relatively quickly. Abandoning French for English is also about silencing, at least for a while; a Francophone past and all its baggage is symbolically cast away, while many struggle to speak in a new tongue.

In his consideration of the Kigali City Master Plan, Goodfellow (2013b) reiterates the idea that Rwandans avoid protest out of desire for the wellness and stability of a still very fragile nation, but his message is a cautionary and pessimistic one: silence is not conducive to inclusive urban transformation, Rwanda yet needs to establish avenues for political contestation, and “the illusion of a conflict-free city, so appealing after the bloodbaths of the past, surely cannot last forever.” In another paper, Goodfellow and Smith (2013) contend that the Rwandan Patriotic Front’s consolidation of political control both nationally and locally, in tandem with a developmental agenda focused on attracting investment and integrating the population into the social and economic transformation of Kigali has changed urban security in ways that exceed expectations for post-conflict cities. Again, the authors caution that the chosen political mode for overcoming Rwanda’s catastrophic past carries its own limitations, and state that “the question remains as to whether Kigali really is a ‘model’ of development broadly conceived, rather than just a model of order” (3198). This interrogation offers us a moment to turn towards rural Rwanda, which is the majority of the country, in terms of physical space and citizens.

**IV. THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY, AGAIN**

With the respect to the development of rural Rwanda, the Belgian development economist An Ansoms has produced a number of insightful analyses of Rwanda’s agricultural sector reform and the vision expressed by its rural policies. Ansoms (2009) is concerned with the Rwandan elite’s ambitions for a wide-ranging re-engineering of rural society, which she defines as threefold:
The conversion of the agricultural sector into a professionalized motor for economic growth, centered on competitive and commercial farm units; the artificial upgrading of rural life via insertion of “modern” techniques and strategies into local realities while hiding poverty and inequality, and the transformation of Rwanda into a target-driven society at all levels. She reminds us that rural development policies are intimately intertwined with the position of elites and their relationship(s) with the peasantry, and should not be viewed as simply technical issues. In fact, her analysis exposes a powerful dichotomy between the rural and the urban, or the country and the city (pace Raymond Williams), at work in Rwanda’s accelerationist teleological project. The poor are seen as slow, stuck in another time zone—they too need to catch up, they need to be caught up to speed and upgraded like Kigaloi, and in a uniquely fast way. Ansoms openly criticizes the “very top-down developmentalist agenda” expressed by the “social engineering ambitions of the Rwandan government officials” (308). She laments a lack of opportunity for grassroots participation or for bottom-up feedback, the absence of a clear public vision of alternatives for Rwandans leaving agriculture following land holding consolidation, and the yet untapped though ample productive potential of small-scale farmers. Ultimately, she condemns the Rwandan elite for its seeming lack of political will to orient rural policies directly towards the rural poor, cautioning us to understand Rwanda’s vision of accelerated rural development as one that leaves behind the majority of Rwandans: poor small-scale farmers.

More recently, Ansoms and Rostagno (2012) have analyzed the progress of Rwanda’s Vision 2020 program, which the government incarnated in a document finalized in July 2000. Vision 2020 encompasses the government’s broad development aims to be achieved by 2020, structured by six “pillars”: (1) good governance and a capable state; (2) human resource development and a knowledge-based economy; (3) a private sector-led economy; (4) infrastructure development; (5) productive and market-oriented agriculture; and (6) regional and international economic integration (GOR 2000). Ansoms and Rostagno acknowledge that Rwanda is on track to meet the Millennium Development Goals in the fields of education and health care, and that the political leadership has been praised for its quality of technocratic governance and proactive approach to creating an appealing business atmosphere. However, they insist that “some indicators remain problematic” (427). They characterize Rwanda’s current development strategy as one of maximum growth at any cost, and denounce it as counter-productive to the aim of achieving the greatest possible poverty reduction given that its ultimate outcome is to concentrate strong economic growth in the hands of a small elite with limited trickle-down potential. The accelerationist teleological project crystallizes once again in an economic agenda of maximum growth at any cost. As Ansoms and Rostagno suggest, rapid-fire development may generate sacrificial costs.

They list many such costs: Land dispossession, evictions in Kigali, a lack of democratic freedom, little space for dissent and debate in civil society, a seeming lack of correlation between private capital injection into the Rwandan economy and poverty reduction/job creation, growing centralization of power despite the purported goal of decentralization in Vision 2020, the questionable quality of education given the sudden adoption of English as a classroom language, and so forth. Ultimately, Ansoms and Rostagno propose that Rwanda investigate and pursue a broad-based inclusive growth model drawing on existing strengths and the principle of capacity building among rural small-scale farmers, with investment in both smallholder, labor-intensive agriculture and investment in artisanal training centers and small-scale industries existing in the informal economy. They emphasize that a more inclusive, pro-poor model of growth is essential for poverty reduction and to avoid radicalization while fostering long-term stability and peace in Rwanda.

While Ansoms and Rostagno are vehemently critical of Rwanda’s actual success in achieving the development agenda laid out in Vision 2020, other scholars have highlighted how the document crystallizes a shared imaginary of change and temporal power amongst Rwanda’s political leaders and civil servants. In their characterization of Rwanda as a developmental patrimonial state, Booth and Golooba-Mutebi (2012) argue that “contrary to what happens with equivalent documents in most countries of the region, [the Rwanda Vision 2020 document] is a real point of reference for ministers and civil servants. The assumption underlying the vision is that if economic and social progress occurs fast enough, a new generation will emerge who are capable of fully assuming their national identity as Rwandans rather than privileging what divided them in the past” (391, emphasis added). Their empirical conclusion lends support to the notion that in Rwanda, there is a certain fetishization of acceleration amongst the nation’s leadership—if development and change can accelerate to their realization “fast enough,” an entire generation can overcome the trauma of Rwanda’s past of ethnic divisionism and genocide, assuming a new identity as unified Rwandans. The authors go on to assert, “Many critics of the regime see this as naïve and argue that reconciliation needs to be attended to in
a more direct fashion. But in so doing they also confirm that this is indeed the vision that drives policy” (391).

Finally, other scholars have foregrounded the Rwandan state’s direct surveillance of public discourse and how various formal institutions constrain Rwandan citizenship (Straus and Waldorf 2011). Andrea Purdeková (2011) has argued that a deep-seated belief that the state has “so many eyes” perpetuates the silence of Rwandan citizens. However, our analysis of such crucial issues cannot be reduced to the power of entrenched authoritarian government, particularly in a post-disaster, post-traumatic, recently reborn city.

Time as a cultural production and experience has always been a major object of anthropological inquiry. What is more, from the colonial period onwards, Africa was cast as a place of slow tempos against which the West could define its modern history of fast achievements. Rwanda’s present teleological project is an endeavor whose eventual success is meant to debunk that age-old narrative. The accelerationist teleology applied to and experienced in Kigali is meant to enable an entire generation to overcome a recent past of extreme violence and ethnic divisionism, in spite of all the scars that endure. In a moment where cultural change and social stability are framed around getting up to speed, Rwandan society is grasping for the possibility of outpacing the post-traumatic period, of leaving it behind in the dust. To live in Kigali is to be pushed along, to be reminded each day that one must catch up, upgrade, hurry up. It is a quotidian condition that does not spare people a certain sense of loss—loss of quality (whether of goods or of education); a lack of meticulous care; a certain silencing. And yet, in the wake of so many ruptures, this teleological breach may seem worth the sacrifice.

## REFERENCES


HOT AIR OVER LAGOS

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Rem Koolhaas admits he knew next to nothing about Africa when he decided to investigate Lagos as part of his Harvard Project on the City (HPC). In fact it was partly that unknown that attracted him to Africa’s megapolis: “this forced me to confront something I didn’t know anything about,” he recapped in a 2002 interview, adding specifically about Lagos, “there was no established interpretation” (Koolhaas and van der Haak). Over the course of half a decade of research, his own interpretation eventually became that “Lagos may well be the most radical urbanism extant today, but it is one that works” (Koolhaas and HPC). In the decade since Koolhaas wrote that sentence, numerous Africanists have praised him for seeking to learn from an African city, while perhaps just as many critics have roasted the quite-literally broad perspective (at times from a helicopter) from which Koolhaas “confronted” Lagos, its people, and its history.

“Koolhaas, in his typical effect, has heated up debates over how to study Africa’s growing cities and what conclusions to take away from those studies.”

With his completed manifesto on the city — Lagos: How It Works — still in limbo as he decides whether or not to publish its undeniably provocative content, Koolhaas’s Lagos legacy remains up in the air. However, that the project has had, and continues to have, an immense impact on the burgeoning field of African urban studies is without question. Koolhaas, in his typical effect, has heated up debates over how to study Africa’s growing cities and what conclusions to take away from those studies. These debates are spilling over into real world implications at a pace far faster than posturing-prone academics are used to, and, as evidenced by the redemptive transformations Lagos has undergone since Koolhaas’s Project on the City, Africa is not waiting for the dust to settle. This paper considers Koolhaas’s study of Lagos and the scholarly papers in response to it, summarizing and evaluating their stances, and suggests that the disagreements are representative of and informative to a larger paradigm shift well underway in the field of African and urban studies.

THE PROJECT

The story of Koolhaas in Lagos is a fascinating one. An international rock-star of an architect, at the spire of the architectural world (he would win the Pritzker Prize—architecture’s Nobel Prize—in 2001 while in the midst of his Lagos project), decides to turn his attention to Sub-Saharan Africa—a region where the phrase “urban Africa” still carries oxymoronic connotations and where none of his buildings exist to this day—to a megapolis at the height of its reputation as the world’s most dangerous city—a city whose population had quintupled to New York levels, while its investment in infrastructure had plummeted to Boise, Idaho levels. Yet for Koolhaas—who “started teaching at Harvard in order to be able to establish [his] own agenda”—the Project on the City was an opportunity to break free from the client-driven demands of the architectural market and to investigate what he considered to be a new and critical kind of urbanism (Koolhaas and van der Haak). He sensed that something novel was rapidly mutating in places like the Pearl River Delta of China (Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Macau, Shenzhen, and Zhuhai) and the Bight of Benin in West Africa, and suggested that these new urban centers could not be wholly captured by “painfully inadequate” architectural discourses that “perpetuate an image of the city which is essentially Western, and subconsciously insist that all cities, wherever they are, be interpreted in that image” (Koolhaas 2002, 175). According to Koolhaas, the HPC (begun in 1995) was an opportunity to develop that vocabulary, and from 1999 onward was a chance “to discover what we can learn from Lagos” (Koolhaas and van der Haak). In their ensuing study, Koolhaas...
and his team of Harvard design school students sought to understand the city’s “continued existence and productivity in spite of a near-complete absence of those infrastructures, systems, organizations, and amenities that define the word ‘city’ in terms of Western planning methodology” (Koolhaas and HPC, 652). Eventually, they made dozens of trips to Nigeria over the duration of the project, wrote several articles sketching the skeleton of what they had learned from Lagos, and produced two documentaries depicting Koolhaas’s wanderings through the city. Alas, his 580-page manuscript on Lagos remains unprinted, even though it has an Amazon webpage and an ISBN number.

What we are able to gather from these fragments? Although the articles, films, and interviews do not represent the complete version of all the evidence Koolhaas collected and thought about during his time studying the city, they do provide an idea as to how his thoughts progressed and to the big conclusions he took away from the project. Like anything with Koolhaas’s fingerprints, there are contradictions and clever ambiguities throughout the project—as Okwui Enwezor (2003) has put it, “perhaps no other architect fits this mould of cultivated dissidency better than he does” (110).

In 2001—two years after Koolhaas’s team turned their focus to Lagos—the HPC published their initial findings as a chapter in the book Mutations, which was comprised of a collection of essays reflecting on “the continuously accelerating phenomenon of urbanization.” On the first page of the chapter, Koolhaas’s HPC team laid out their principal tropes for Lagos. Their first point of emphasis was that Lagos “is still—for lack of a better word—a city; and one that works,” even “in spite of a near-complete absence of those infrastructures, systems, organizations, and amenities that define the word ‘city’ in terms of Western planning methodology” (652). Additionally, they set the tone that “anguish” did not define Lagos’s “exuberant existence” and would not characterize their study. Instead, their more celebratory approach was one that sought to see past grieving for a city in crisis in order to uncover the “ingenious, critical alternative systems, which demand a redefinition of ideas such as carrying capacity, stability, and even order.” By taking this bright-eyed road through Lagos, Koolhaas and his team distinguished themselves from Robert Kaplan’s well-known 1994 article “The Coming Anarchy,” in which Kaplan recoiled at what he found in Lagos and used the bleak vision he paints of its slums as a harbinger of the apocalyptic future awaiting mankind.

However, with regard to Lagos being ahead of the rest of the world, Koolhaas’s team could not have agreed more. To them, Lagos was not “en route to becoming modern,” or “becoming modern in a valid, ‘African’ way,”—an in vogue view around 2001 when Dilip P. Gaonkar edited a collection of essays entitled Alternative Modernities—but rather “a developed, extreme, paradigmatic case-study of a city at the forefront of globalizing modernity,” (Koolhaas and HPC, 652). Pushing the point further, they argued that “to write about an African city is to write about the terminal condition of Chicago, London, or Los Angeles.” This meant that to them Lagos suggested a “paradigm for [the city’s] future,” and, explicitly agreeing with Kaplan, was therefore a place that warranted “a new round of postcolonial ‘exploration,’ with different intentions [than those of colonialism and neo-colonialism] and a more intensive methodology” (718). To Koolhaas, Lagos was a future lab to be learned from.

The rest of the Mutations chapter reads like a collection of semi-disparate school reports, and it is likely that that is exactly what they were—write ups by Koolhaas’s team of Harvard architectural students on aspects of the city they had each researched (which would be the same format as the HPC’s Pearl River Delta report). The various sections explore the city from a smattering of angles, using subtitles such as “property,” “line,” “wall,” and “bottlenecked,” as entry ways into the city’s space. The chapter ends with a particularly well-developed few pages on the Alaba electronics market, which challenges stereotypes of Lagos as an isolated city detached from globalization, shining a light on just how interconnected Lagos is to other megacities such as Taipei, Moscow, Mexico City, Sao Paolo, and Dubai, where Alaba’s vendors travel to buy secondhand electronics. One unifying thread through all the chapter’s sections is their clear architectural, analytical emphasis on how Lagosians utilize space and material. Koolhaas’s team of architects-in-training is insightfully perceptive in noticing when Lagosians utilize structures and material in the city, such as cloverleaf exchanges, train tracks, and roads, for purposes other than those that their designers intended, and they catalogue these spatial adaptations in ways other observers might have missed.

In 2002 Koolhaas followed up Mutations with the release of a documentary, Lagos/Koolhaas, and a short paper, “Fragments of a Lecture on Lagos,” consisting of his admittedly essentialized summary of the project. These additions provided further contextualization as to how Koolhaas’s ideas on Lagos had evolved through the development of his methodology. On the first trip, he and his team largely observed the city from “a mobile position,” too wary to venture out into the city without the metal frame of the car as a barrier. From that vantage point, they were confronted directly with the immediate foreground of the city, which overwhelmingly had “an aura of apocalyptic violence” (175).
On the second trip, as they moved out on foot into parts of the city that had initially looked like random, smoldering “giant rubbish heaps,” they started to see “very elaborate organizational networks” underlying the city—networks that “could organize incredibly efficient transformations of garbage in a highly structured way.”

On the third trip, Koolhaas was able to rent President Obasanjo’s helicopter to aerially survey the city beyond the foreground, and “from the air, the apparently burning garbage heap turned out to be, in fact, a village, an urban phenomenon with a highly organized community living on its crust” (177). Counter-intuitively to the ethnographic sensibilities of many non-western scholars, for Koolhaas and his architectural eye, it was the trajectory of a broadening perspective that allowed him to eventually see Lagos as a conglomerate of “self-administered enclave[s] with strong rules and regulations that applied only within the parameter of those areas” rather than anarchic rubble.

In 2006 Koolhaas’s team released another documentary, Lagos Wide & Close: An Interactive Journey into an Exploding City, of mostly recycled footage from Lagos/Koolhaas, but with the added feature of allowing the viewer to select whether to view the documentary from a wide perspective (helicopter footage) or from a close street-level view, and also to select the accompanying audio tract: Koolhaas’s narration, interviews with Lagosians, or sounds of the city. This documentary seems to more representatively span Koolhaas’s myriad experiences and methods in the city.

“At first Lagos...reinforced his skepticism in the value of planning, but... he soon began to realize that the city would not work without the 1970s high modernist infrastructure projects... even if the people of Lagos used those cement and steel structures in entirely alternative ways...”

Before moving on to the reactions Koolhaas’s Lagos project received, a few points he made in a reflective interview in 2002 are illuminating as to what Koolhaas ultimately took away from the project. In the interview with Bregtje van der Haak (the creator of the Lagos documentaries), Koolhaas mused about his inspiration for the project, the sensations of being in Lagos, and, interestingly, how, as a result of his research on Lagos, he was coming around to a belief in planning, which he had previously written off as irrelevant during his years of endorsing post-critical commercialism. At first Lagos had reinforced his skepticism in the value of planning, but, in the interview, he recounted how he soon began to realize that the city would not work without the 1970s high modernist infrastructure projects created by the German macro-engineering firm Julius Berger—even if the people of Lagos used those cement and steel structures in entirely alternative ways to what Berger’s planners had intended. Koolhaas seemed to have arrived at the resigned opinion that planning projects would always be imperfect and already outdated as soon as they were constructed, but that the alternative laissez-faire attitude (the path that he implied humanity is on) would lead to the world being “a pretty horrible place.” From this realization, he suggested “we have to try to assume the role of planners, perhaps in a new way.” What would this new way look like? Koolhaas did not pretend to have the answer, and in another book on the Pearl River Delta he summarizes his predicament that is paradigmatic of the 21st century planning experience:

The absence, on the one had, of plausible, universal doctrines and the presence, on the other, of an unprecedented intensity of production have created a unique, wrenching condition: the urban seems to be the least understood at the very moment of its apotheosis. The result is a theoretical, critical, and operational impasse, which forces both academia and practice into postures of either confidence or indifference. (Koolhaas et al. 2001, 27)

It seems that for Koolhaas this dilemma called for more studies like the HPC to investigate emerging forms of urbanism in order to learn how new, persuasive, and credible theories for planning might be developed, suggesting that the foundation of these new theories would be an emphasis on sustained, embedded investigations of the people and cultures of the space to be planned.

THE REACTION

Immediately Koolhaas’s theories on Lagos had a polarizing effect. Enwezor recounts a visible illustration of this divide: “In a recent [2002] conference in Lagos, Nigeria, the full room was evenly divided between opposing camps of supporters (mostly enthusiastic young
students) and detractors (older observers, less sanguine about his theory of Lagos)” (110). Amongst scholars, the division was not necessarily split along age lines, but the reactions nonetheless have been sharply divided. Nearly everything about the project has been contested, from the argument that Lagos works, to the idea that Lagos is indicative of the future, to the methodology utilized in the study.

Leading the detractors has been Matthew Gandy, an urban geographer at University College London, who published a critical article in 2005 entitled “Learning from Lagos” reacting to the “new attention” Lagos had been receiving “not so much from development specialists or Africa scholars but from high-profile convergence of architectural and cultural theory and critical urban studies” (37). He splits the new attention into two camps, with the first characterized by Kaplan’s “eschatological evocation of urban apocalypse,” and the second exemplified by the “far more upbeat” attitude of Koolhaas and the HPC (38). The first half of Gandy’s paper is dedicated to contesting nearly every aspect of Koolhaas’s study of Lagos, charging Koolhaas with both de-historicizing and de-politicizing the city by treating it with a “neo-organicist” approach of drawing on “cybernetic metaphors of urban space as a multiplicity of networks ‘rapidly expanding, transforming, and perfecting’” (39). Gandy’s interpretation is that Koolhaas views the explosion of Lagos’s population and the accompanying plummet of infrastructure development as “simply an act of nature,” which sets up the rest of Gandy’s essay dedicated to what he might call a more realist interpretation of the city, historicizing and politicizing its underdevelopment from colonial through recent times (42). He explains how Lagos, like much of the third world, suffered from the structural adjustment “recipe for mass production of slums” in the mid-1980s when small scale farmers could no longer make a living and sought better opportunities by moving to Lagos in droves, while soaring interest rates simultaneously bankrupted the government and halted development programs (49). The resulting proliferation of informal economies were what Koolhaas and his team found in the early 2000s, and Gandy writes: “Like other admirers of the informal economy, Koolhaas seems to ignore its highly hierarchical, often coercive structures, and does not differentiate between the mini (or even major) entrepreneurs and traders on its summit and the mass of those barely surviving at its base” (47).

Gandy seems to have been severely put off by what he considers to be Koolhaas “marveling” at how Lagos works, and draws the cynical conclusion that for Koolhaas, “it is the city’s ability to sustain a market that is the sole signifier of its health” (52). Additionally, in keeping with his “realist” approach, Gandy does not agree with the “dubious logic” that Lagos is ahead of other cities, writing that “this is to occlude the fact that the very extremity of Lagos’s deterioration over the past quarter century has been linked in inverse proportion, to the capital accumulated in Chicago, London, and Los Angeles” (42).

Several other scholars have augmented Gandy’s critiques in the years since. In a 2010 paper entitled “Lagos, Koolhaas, and Partisan Politics in Nigeria,” Laurent Fourchard praises Gandy as “probably the author who has most undermined [Koolhaas’s essentialist] vision of Lagos,” and goes on to flesh out the argument that Koolhaas de-politicizes Lagos, elaborating on the political causes for the underdevelopment of the city that he believes Koolhaas ignored (41). He concludes by stating that the three (domestic) political reasons for Lagos’s underdevelopment are the independence era leaders’ obsession with expensive modernization projects that only benefited a small portion of the city, the financial neglect of Lagos after the federal government decided to move the capital to Abuja, and the continual antagonism between the federal government and Lagos State. Like Gandy, Fourchard sees Koolhaas as neglecting the complaints of Lagosians and being deaf to the conflicts over the city’s space: “If Koolhaas’ [sic] team has tried in a way to rehabilitate the Lagos informal economy, their perception is a romanticized rereading of the history of the city which underestimates the ceaseless denunciation by Lagosian [sic] themselves of the successive failures of their mass transportation and housing systems” (53).

Commenting specifically on the aerial photographs that Koolhaas included in Mutations and “Fragments,” Tim Hecker (2010) joins Fourchard’s criticism in arguing that “it raises the question of to what extent this representational strategy promotes a fidelity to the subject matter, in this case the citizens and the city of Lagos, by portraying a city through an aesthetics of immensity and the apocalyptic sublime” (256). He proceeds to describe the images as “a de facto celebration of poverty” and a “dystopic voyeurism of the contemporary megalopolis” (258).

To add one more example of criticism, Joseph Godlewski’s 2010 article, “Alien and Distant: Reflections on Lagos,” chimes in specifically with regard to van der Haak’s documentaries on Lagos, arguing that “the films clearly demonstrate the problems and contradictions evident in Koolhaas’s written work on Lagos. His inwardly focused imaginings of the city’s processes of ‘self-organization’ cause him to overlook the more convincing economic and political forces shaping it” (8). He goes on to expound on the aforementioned criticisms, emphasizing that Koolhaas had committed the error of doing “little to
subvert” what Godlewski considers the tendency to counterpose Africa as “mute, abject, and ‘otherworldly’ and beyond comparison” to the rest of the globalized world (16). These four authors represent the strongest criticism Koolhaas has received.

Evidently, raining ire on Koolhaas’s Lagos research has been a popular paper prompt for the past decade. But was the criticism entirely deserved? All of the above mentioned papers were well written and thoughtful, but this essay suggests that they were excessively critical of Koolhaas and the HPC.

There is no question that the rhetoric Koolhaas uses to describe his project and Lagos is at times extremely off putting, such as when in Lagos/Koolhaas he insults previous scholarship both within Nigeria and in universities around the world by saying sans irony that he “wanted to be first to understand how the city works.” Other moments in the articles and films are just as cringe-worthy, as Koolhaas seems at times oblivious to the respect and deference expected of a European male trudging around an African city and talking about the city as he might discuss New York, quipping things like, “when [Lagos] gets itself organized it will be extremely powerful,” that come off as insensitive to the colonial and neo-colonial legacy of exploitation and malicious neglect (Koolhaas and van der Haak). Another area of warranted scrutiny is his notion that cities like Chicago, LA, and London are “catching up with Lagos.” This bold idea inverts the teleological conception of Africa as lagging behind western advancement, but what Koolhaas has released so far only presents the idea in a superficial, provocative manner, leaving the assertion (purposefully?) ambiguous as to whether Lagos is the “terminal condition” of capitalism, civilization, urbanism, or something else. Certainly these aspects of the HPC are irksome and imperfect.

However, the relentless claims that Koolhaas disregards poverty, history, and politics are likely overblown. Perhaps Koolhaas brought this criticism on himself with the brash, attention-grabbing language of claiming to explain “how Lagos works,” which implied a far deeper theory and investigation than the one he has provided to date (Lagos/Koolhaas). But the criticisms lose sight of the fact that Koolhaas and his team of Harvard Design School students turned to Lagos with an architectural perspective, searching for insights into how the city “works” from a built environment point of view—how the city spatially and materially accommodates its millions of residents. To interpret the study as attempting an existential explanation of how Lagos operates on all levels is an easy way to construct a straw man. Koolhaas acknowledges that “of course politics plays a huge role,” but his project was not a political scientist’s investigation into the political structures underlying the city (Koolhaas and van der Haak). Whether or not Koolhaas is blind to the suffering of the city’s poor might be countered by asking whether the somber “realist” accounts of Gandy and Fourchard are blind to the agency apparent in Lagosians’ ability to innovate and organize the space around them in spite of the powerful economic and political forces acting upon the city. Whether Koolhaas’s approach flattens out the multitude of Lagosian actors will be briefly addressed in the conclusion, but his work studying the strategies of people on the ground can undoubtedly illuminate untapped potential and inform future planning projects.

In the conclusion of Godlewski’s article, he pauses and breaks out of the Gandy and Fourchard hyper-critical discourse, writing:

So far, my assessment has been primarily critical. However, upon closer inspection the limitations of the research seem to suggest alternative approaches. Koolhaas’s initial intuition to examine Lagos as a way of countering architectural and urban theory’s chronic Eurocentrism can be seen as a qualified success. If he hadn’t taken on Lagos, I, a Western-educated white male, arguably wouldn’t be studying it all. The celebrity status and institutional mechanisms behind Koolhaas and the HPC are seemingly able to generate interest in a diverse range of topics, Lagos notwithstanding. The resulting discourse, laudatory or critical of the project, has started to fill a gap in the literature about this city of 12 million inhabitants. It can be read as one of many contributions to the growing sense that architectural theory should address global practice rather than singular moments in the Western world. (16)

Godlewski’s last minute epiphany into the broader significance of Koolhaas’s project invokes the alternative ways other scholars have chosen to more
enthusiastically welcome the project, emphasizing first and foremost the significance of an international trendsetter deciding to learn from an African city. This is not to say that these scholars have been uncritical of Koolhaas, but rather that they have been more inclined to guide and supplement his research rather than to rebuff and ridicule it.

For example, in a 2007 essay documenting the innovations and adaptations of Nollywood, Jonathan Haynes, after summarizing Gandy's criticisms, argues that Koolhaas needs to be "given [his] due" for making the "point that existing vocabularies and analytical frames of reference from urban planning and other disciplines are trapped in an almost entirely negative contemplation of Lagos's deficiencies and failures and are inadequate in showing how things actually operate" (132). Haynes perceives the value of studies of African cities that do not proceed with a presumption of finding crisis and failure but rather seek to learn from African innovations and adaptations. Similarly, AbdouMaliq Simone, one of the foremost thinkers of African urbanism, tacitly acknowledges Koolhaas with the first line of his influential 2004 book, For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities, in which he suggests that it is time to reassess the conventional notion that “African cities don’t work” (1). In doing so, Simone looks deep into the “specific social, political, and economic practices” of four African cities, suggesting in Koolhaasian fashion that these practices “might act as a platform for the creation of a very different kind of sustainable urban configuration than we have yet generally to know” (3, 9). Likewise the expert of Kinshasa’s urbanism, Filip de Boeck, strikes an appreciative tone in this passage:

Le travail de Koolhaas a eu un mérite important, il a rendu la ville africaine visible et digne d’être étudiée à un niveau précis, et il a aussi jeté les bases d’une discussion plus large entre architectes-urbanistes, sociologues, anthropologues et démographes. Dans son analyse de Lagos, il survole la ville avec le regard d’un oiseau, un regard froid mais aigu, pour y déceler un grand nombre de points névralgiques au niveau des infrastructures et y dessiner les flux des hommes et des transferts.

Koolhaas’s work has had a significant merit, it has made the African city visible and worthy of study at a precise level, and he also laid the groundwork for a broader discussion between architects and urban planners, sociologists, anthropologists and demographers. In his analysis of Lagos, he flies over the city with the perspective of a bird, a cold but sharp look, in order to detect a large number of nerve centers in terms of infrastructure and in order to map flows of men and movement. (3)

Yet de Boeck also does not hesitate to note that although “Koolhaas portrays a chaotic city of several million people without wanting to import foreign solutions,” he does so “without holding a deep understanding of what, in this apparent chaos, is implemented through local strategies and mechanisms to go beyond mere survival” (3). This is an important issue for future researchers that requires further consideration beyond this paper.

Jean and John Comaroff (whose son Joshua Comaroff was a member of Koolhaas’s HPC team that wrote the chapter for Mutations) have perhaps been the scholars to most comprehensively theorize the significance that others have sensed in projects like Koolhaas’s. In the introductory chapter of their 2012 book, Theory from the South: Or How Euro-America is Evolving Towards Africa, they put forth the thesis implied by the first half of their title that the global south—the area most affected by the structural violence of neoliberalism—should be looked towards, not solely as the victim of that violence, but as an eccentric hub of alternative theories grounded in those experiences that are “producing and exporting some ingenious, highly imaginative modes of survival—and more” (18). The Euro-America is evolving towards Africa half of their book’s thesis cites and expounds on Koolhaas’s idea of Lagos being ahead of the west, fully elaborating Koolhaas’s vague proposition into a more nuanced ("partially parodic") theory that warns against swallowing the notion of “alternative modernities” too easily, as this platitude avoids accounting for real geographic inequalities created by “the inherent propensity of capital to create edges and undersides in order to feed off them” (11). Here the Comaroffs agree with Gandy’s assertion that Lagos’s current condition is indeed connected in inverse proportion to the capital
accumulated in Los Angeles, London, and Chicago. However that reality does not prevent them from making the “pointedly provocative” argument that the global south is “ahead” of the global north. Rather the fact that the global south—as a frontier for neoliberal experiments—feels so many of the impacts of neoliberalism before the global north reinforces their argument that the global south is ahead of the curve (for better or worse) and is thus afforded privileged insight into the workings of the world at large” (112).

CONCLUSIONS
Regardless of whether one considers Koolhaas a callous interloper or a post-colonial visionary, the Nigerian art critic Okwui Enwezor is right that “no one can deny the fact that Koolhaas’s ideas have left a huge impact on our thinking” (118). As demonstrated in this paper, numerous reactions have been penned in response to Koolhaas’s endeavors in Lagos, and his terminology of a “city that works” (and its subsequent variations such as Simone’s suggestion that African cities are “works in progress,” and the title, Lagos: A City at Work, of a 2005 collection of essays and photos of contemporary Lagos) and of “a city at the forefront of globalizing modernity” have been imprinted on the lexicon of the discipline. This fact is particularly striking because, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Koolhaas knew little about Africa before founding the HPC.

But what is there to take away from Koolhaas’s Lagos project and the deluge of responses it attracted? Again to quote Enwezor, who has written the sharpest essay considering Koolhaas in Lagos, “we may perhaps notice the remarkable paradigm shift that drives Koolhaas’s recent Project on the City, first elaborated in the Pearl River Delta research, then in Shopping, and recently in Lagos” (113). This paradigm shift of examining exploding metropolises as grounds of innovation and creative strategies and theories rather than as just the impoverished tragedies of structural forces seems to be precisely the implication and significance signified by the robust reaction to the project. Koolhaas turned his architectural eye to Lagos at an auspicious moment (or perhaps in his opinion inauspicious, as he has seemed defensive of the scrutiny his project has attracted) when a paradigm shift was already under way within the field of African—particularly urban African—studies (and more broadly within ethnography and anthropology as suggested by Enwezor). Koolhaas’s writings and documentaries therefore served as a high profile reference point to bring these shifting assumptions and methodologies into a wider discourse. Subsequently, a good deal of hot air was generated over Lagos by scholars such as Gandy, who did not seem to grasp the larger implications for Koolhaas’s study and the compelling reasons to supplement it rather than refute it in entirety.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Gandy, Hecker, and Godlewski do not have geographic specializations in Africa, and as a result were oblivious to these larger implications of Koolhaas studying Lagos. While all of their papers contained valid critiques, they were not what could be considered “constructive criticisms.” After charging Koolhaas with de-historicizing and de-politicizing, their own attempts to recount the history and politics of the city treat Lagosians as voiceless victims in a narrative of domination. While the Comaroffs agree that Africa along with the rest of the broadly defined “South” have borne the brunt of neo-liberal, anti-theory politics, they also suggest that historical narratives of domination are misguided, in that these histories further marginalize the people of the global south in removing their agency from what has always been a dialectical historical process. There needs to be further research to form a deep understanding into the people of Lagos and their particular, long histories, including the process of how they have imagined and created alternative systems of infrastructure sometimes out of recycled materials and other times through communal connections as described in Simone’s essay, “People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg.” Without learning from this deep, localized archive of knowledge, future solutions will always consist of external models for solutions that are imported into the city from elsewhere. Again, as the Comaroffs make clear, neo-liberalism’s powerbrokers will always be willing to supply vulnerable regions with deceptive models that extract wealth and leave behind pollution and scarcity.

The mushrooming of new, detached cities from scratch in much of Africa—funded by international investors to create protected enclaves for businesses and wealthy elites—points to the most recent external “solution” for African urban areas. Meanwhile, authors such as Philip Harrison (2006) supply another vision of urban planning in Africa, one in which planners are deeply embedded within communities and engaged in “border thinking” in order “to reconcile, or at least engage with, alternative ways of seeing and thinking, and produce new and creative fusions” (332). It is this kind of vision that could potentially provide a framework for how, as Koolhaas wrote, “we have to try to assume the role of planners, perhaps in a new way” (Koolhaas and van der Haak). African cities might then become places not to serve the market but to serve their inhabitants, as the attractiveness of cities is that they provide the density and concentration of knowledge to create systems that efficiently respond to the needs of their citizens.
With Africa’s urban future accelerating forward at historic rates, there is little time to over magnify the errors of Koolhaas and his team when much more constructive work could be done to supplement and encourage more influential international figures to learn from particular African modes of adaptability and innovation. However this is not to blindly follow Koolhaas into the cockpit, as several authors mentioned in this essay have lauded the overall symbolism of the project, while still critiquing him in an affable way that does not detract from the project’s greater symbolism. Careful consideration of the implications of what is learned from African cities is required; there is legitimacy in Gandy’s warning that Koolhaas ignores hierarchies of power and flattens out the people of Lagos. Additionally, as James Ferguson cautions, neo-liberalism is capable of appropriating this trend of valuing informalities in grotesque ways such as assuming that informal markets can support unemployed laborers. Nonetheless, with these cautionary points noted, this paper urges more headfirst Koolhaesian dives into African cities, helicopter optional.

REFERENCES

ENDNOTES
1 Based on the Lagos State Budget Data for the year 2000 as reported in the 2007 World Bank Report entitled Nigeria, Lagos State: State Finances Review and Agenda for Action (chart on page 39), which calculated the total expenditure for Lagos State to be 26.209 billion naira, which equaled approximately 304,826 million dollars (around 400 million dollars in today’s value). This is only 50 million more than Boise Idaho’s (a city of around 200,000) 2013 budget of 350 million, as published on page 2 of the “Executive Summary” of the City of Boise’s FY 2012/2013 Two Year Budget.
OUAGADOUGOU MODERN

Kwabena Abrah-Asiedu, Edward Becker, Osaruyi Igiehon and Kayla Lim
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Burkina Faso and its capital city of Ouagadougou are on the verge of radical transformation. While Burkina Faso remains one of Africa’s least urbanized countries, with only seventeen percent of its population residing in urban areas in 2001, its cities and towns exhibit a growth rate greater than five percent annually; at that rate, over one third of all Burkinabe will be urbanized by 2030 (UN-Habitat 2006, 188). Additionally, the capital city of Ouagadougou is projected to double in population from 1.8 to 3.6 million within the next decade. “Such rapid urban growth has increased competition over the allocation of urban land titles and a design proposal, explores what challenges outlying rural villages. Based upon the studio research conducted both at Harvard and in Burkina Faso, the authors concluded that misconceptions of western modernism as a productive housing-development model for the Sahelian city negatively influence opportunities for contextually appropriate and sustainable-development strategies.”

While certain western importations such as the limited access highway and interchange system have been effectively implemented - resulting in quantifiable benefits for the city - rarely are such skin-deep replications of western systems effective. The conception that what is ‘modern,’ or progressive, in one geographic context is appropriate for dissimilar contexts is fundamentally flawed and should be re-examined. Ouagadougou’s rapid growth, extreme Sahelien climate, agrarian-rooted urban populous, tribal cultural influences, import-based economy, high poverty rates, and lack of stable financial systems differentiate Ouagadougou from the cities upon which current ‘modern’ urban models are based. “It is possible to conceptualize modernity in such a way as to avoid both eurocentrism and the type of ultra-relativistic, third worldist interpretation of the term that views it merely as an ideological means for the further advancement of western cultural imperialism,” states Nicos Mouzelis in the essay “Modernity: a non-European conceptualization” (Mouzelis 1999, 156).

The perspective of modernity that Mouzelis offers is important to the understanding of development in Ouagadougou precisely because it offers an outlet where development can be both localized/culturally-specific while also being ‘modern.’ Considering the high-degree to which Burkinabe developers capitalize on the public’s belief that western-modernism is progressive or capable of increasing status, the switch to a more Mouzelian conception of modernism within Ouagadougou’s housing real estate market would provide the framework for development rooted in the methods and means of local culture. This localized system of development is more financially and socially sustainable and engenders developmental frameworks

The specific challenges of designing and planning for affordable housing in Ouagadougou were undertaken last Fall by a studio course at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design led by Francis Kéré. The authors conducted research while visiting Burkina Faso including meetings with local government officials, developers, architects, builders, fabricators, townspeople, and tribal chiefs in the city of Ouagadougou, as well as additional site visits to

RECONCEPTUALIZING ‘MODERN’ HOUSING PRACTICES RELATIVE TO LOCAL CONTEXTS

The French have historically had a heavy influence in Ouagadougou, most noticeably through the city’s expansive boulevard arrangement and the composition of its most iconic architectural elements, namely the Memorial to the Martyrs, a concrete replica of the Eiffel Tower. These examples are residual evidence of the country’s past utilization as a French colonial hinterland and concrete manifestations of the European-to-African grafting of French urban ideologies.

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that provide a greater degree of financial flexibility for the developer.

While the concept of ‘modern’ is an evolving notion defined through the collective consciousness, Burkina’s recent struggles to elevate its stature as a ‘modern’ nation through the built form of its capital city emphasize a direct, and ineffective, grafting of western-development models to solve Sahelian problems. The current dichotomy between methods of planning and construction for the wealthy (e.g. low-quality, single-family detached homes primarily constructed with imported materials) and housing for the rapidly growing low-income populations (e.g. single-story low-rise housing clusters constructed of banco, compressed clay, and tin) illustrates that a greater emphasis must be placed on holistic residential planning strategies and infrastructural development.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND HOUSING

Adding to Ouagadougou’s housing crisis is the city’s limited infrastructure. Most residential neighborhoods tie into a fragile electrical grid—if any grid at all—and sewage is primarily disposed of in pit latrines. Clean water is rare at the household level and most roads are dirt. Large airborne particulates from dirt roads, polluted water from both pit latrines and seasonal flooding, and polluted air from automobiles and wood-fueled cooking fires all negatively affect human health. While the new housing model attempts to respond to the failure to provide basic infrastructure and services to city residents, they fail to address the needs of the vast majority of the population who cannot afford the few housing options currently being offered."

Based upon this critique and the aforementioned characteristics of the local context at large, the authors have designed a system for affordable housing in which agricultural ‘silos’ would support agricultural production currently occurring in the city’s public greenbelt. As housing demand increases and the public greenbelt falls under insurmountable threat from development, the ‘silos’ shift function and begin operating as ‘collectives’—infrastructural chimneys—around which housing is constructed. While the ‘collectives’ act as an infrastructural seed, the housing they support rings preserved agricultural land. This system where agriculture supports housing and housing ‘plugs in’ to infrastructural seeds addresses Ouagadougou’s growth at an urban level. While the local government would initially fund construction of the ‘collectives’, standard methods of taxation on informal economic activity would replace government assistance. Collaborative construction, locally-sourced materials and sweat-equity, all familiar to rural-to-urban migrants, would support housing construction.

REFERENCES


NOTES

1 Ouagadougou’s Greenbelt rings the city, mediating between undeveloped land and the city’s dense urban fabric. The land is city-owned, but is currently occupied by informal settlements and agricultural production. It is understood that the greenbelt was only designated as such to receive grant funding and will be developed in the near future.
LOW INCOME HOUSING OUAGADOUGOU

Instructor: Francis Diebedo Kere
Osaruyi Igiehon, Ed Becker, Kayla Lim, Kwabena Abrah-Asiedu

SITE
The project site is located on the southern portion of Ouagadougou’s greenbelt and is bordered by a diversity of contextual conditions (i.e. North—N6 highway to Ghana, East—government subsidized single-family housing based on Western conception of nuclear family, South—dispersed low income slums and West—greenbelt). Conceptually similar to a Burkinabe urban wall, the project rings the site forming a catalytic threshold between informal agriculture on the site’s interior and an economically and socially dynamic streetscape on the exterior. Project phasing and formal diversity in the building mass ensure that the development is rooted in its local context and strengthens the socio-economic condition of its residents at each stage of its implementation.

HOUSING UNIT
Burkinabe familial structures are unique due to the prevalence of polygamy and housing constructions are predicated on extended family sizes, resulting in a “compound” housing typology. Rural villages are composed of multiple family compounds arranged around a central communal space. This aggregation of small housing units is flexible (i.e. it accommodates growth and adjustments over time) and efficiently responds to climate and the presence of livestock. This rural housing type has been grafted into Ouagadougou’s urban context by migrants and now composes a majority of the city’s residential arrangements. Housing in the Burkinabe context has historically been a horizontal construction, resulting in rapid sprawl as rural to urban migration increases.

Based on this precedent, the project proposes a progressive and innovative vertical model for the compound dwelling. Family compounds are each adjacent to wet walls that handle sanitation and water quality issues. The individual housing units are also tied into a passive cooling and air purification system using water drip and charcoal to improve temperature and air quality. Units are small enough to conform to social standards, but allow for ample storage space, additional sleeping space and livestock-human separation. Most importantly, housing units tie into “collectives,” or social and infrastructural nodes that organize a majority of the social and circulatory challenges of vertical compound dwelling.
A - Existing public space is currently zoned as part of the city's greenbelt. Informal agricultural production occurs on site.

B - Agricultural "silos" are constructed to enhance food production.

C - Agricultural silos shift function as housing demand increases and begin acting as "collectives," or infrastructural chimneys. Housing is built around collectives, ringing the site.

D - Primary informal paths are preserved

E - Existing paths slice through and fragment the ring of housing

F - The Eastern wing is sliced to allow ample, public pedestrian access from the N6 highway into the interior landscape

G - Agriculture is preserved. Each section of the ring is designed differently to respond to diverse contextual conditions.
The proposal integrates the Burkinabe conception of urban walls as a generator for economic activity rather than a protective or exclusionary device. At the urban scale, the new housing prototype protects agricultural and recreational land from the hurried pace of the streets, becoming a thickened wall that forms a threshold between commerce on the outside and production on the inside. At the architectural scale, the wall is interpreted as a plinth at the base of the building that houses formal commerce, generates informal activity, and facilitates the inclusion of tenants in the local economy.
LIKE JEWELS IN A NECKLACE, COLLECTIVE GATHERING SPACES OCCUR REGULARLY WITHIN THE HOUSING WALLS AS COMMUNAL AMENITIES SUCH AS OPEN- AIR KITCHENS OR WATER COLLECTION DEPOTS.

LEARNING FROM OLD MOSSI COM- POUNDS IN BURKINA FASO, THE PROJECT'S FORM RELATES TO THE REGION'S TRADE WINDS, THE BUILDINGS OPEN TO THE SOUTHWEST'S COOL AND CRISP WINDS AND CLOSE UPTO THE NORTHWESTERN HAMATTAN'S DRY AND DUSTY FLOW.

PATHS

COLLECTIVES

CONNECTION OF SURROUNDING HOUSING SETTLEMENTS TO AND THRU SITE IS MAINTAINED BY PRESER- VATION AND INTENSIFICATION OF ITS WELL-WORN PATHS. THESE PATHS BECAME EVIDENCE OF THE INTENSITY OF HUMAN AGENDA IN AND THRU THE SITE.

TRADE-WINDS

PHASING

THIS PROJECT PROPOSES A PHASED STRATEGY TO ENSURE THE FEASIBILITY OF ITS DEVELOPMENT. ON ACCOUNT OF THE SUCCESS OF THE PROJECT'S INITIAL PHASE—AN INTENSE PROGRAM MIX OF HOUSING, COMMERCE AND SITE CULTIVATION ALONG THE EASTERN WALL— THE SUBSEQUENT PHASES CAN BE DEVELOPED ADAPTING ITS STRATEGIES TO CONDITIONS ALONG THE WALL.

DENSITY

THE DENSITY OF HOUSING PRO-POSED ON THE SITE IS DICTATED BY THE POTENTIAL OF COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY ALONG ITS STREET WALLS. GIVEN THE INTENSITY OF THE STREET LIFE ALONG THE EASTERN WALL THE PROJECT GAINS DENSITY THERE AND LOSES IT AS IT PROGRESSES WESTWARD.
CLIMATE AND HEALTH
Strategies include the following:
- rain water harvesting (A)
- double roof heat mitigation (B)
- extended overhang rain protection (C)
- future family growth ventilation planning (D)
- windflow particulate extraction (E)
- infrastructural collectives (F)
- orientation shading strategy to promote informal commerce (G)
- tax incentives for street side landscape businesses (H)
- interior orientation for heat and dust mitigation (I)
- air cooling/filtration floor ducts (J)
- agriculture integration (K)
- biogas generation from sewage collection (L)
KINSHASA’S HEAVEN ON EARTH

Greg Marinovich
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Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo and one of Africa’s largest cities, can be chaotic and terrifying—not only for most Congolese, but even for the Kinois, as Kinshasa’s residents are known. A former colonial outpost that has grown into a burgeoning metropolis, Kinshasa is “modern” in many ways, but still fails to deliver on promises to its poorer citizens. To access services that the state and the city do not offer, the Kinois frequently turn to religious movements that have filled the vacuum left by the state. Many people rely on their church bonds to survive—and sometimes even to prosper. Key among the Congolese churches are the various Kimbanguist movements and the church that is directly descended from the original movement’s founder, Simon Kimbangu.

Born in 1887, Simon Kimbangu was a devout Baptist catechist who received a divine vision to preach and heal. However, he was not allowed to use his powers of prophecy and healing, nor become a fully ordained preacher—racism in the churches followed the lead of the colonial state. He left the Baptists and began his own ministry.

On April 6, 1921, he was meeting with his disciples when a woman approached him and told him that her daughter had died. Kimbangu is said to have resurrected the dead child. Word of his powers spread rapidly in the lower reaches of the Congo River basin. The flood of thousands of Congolese to his rural home area was so massive that the Belgians feared the economy, based on cheap labour, would collapse. His message also disturbed the church and colonial authorities. He spoke of a spiritual liberation from the oppression of colonialism. Kimbangu claimed that as God’s prophet he could unlock the secrets of Christianity that gave the Europeans their wealth and power.

The movement grew and took on Messianic and nationalist overtones. Kimbangu was deemed a political threat, and within two months of his emergence he was arrested. A Belgian military tribunal charged him with sedition and sentenced him to death. This was commuted to life and one hundred and twenty lashes. He was imprisoned in Lubumbashi, thousands of kilometres east of his headquarters at N’Kamba village. The authorities clamped down on the movement and deported more than 150,000 of Kimbangu’s followers. Kimbanguists were also refused care at hospitals, and mission schools expelled their children. In response, they started their own schools and health facilities. The church went underground, led first by Kimbangu’s wife and then his son, and his followers increased, spreading beyond the BaKongo ethnic group.

Kimbangu died in 1951 after 30 years in prison, much of it in solitary confinement. Kimbanguism, however, flourished. There are now some 17 million Kimbanguists worshipping throughout central Africa. However, only relatively few, between one and three million, follow the mother church. Hundreds of sects arose after Kimbangu’s death, all claiming him as their spiritual father. Many of the sects contest the way the prophet’s family created a religious dynasty at N’Kamba, following the re-interment of Simon Kimbangu’s body there in 1960, and charge them with corrupting Kimbangu’s message.

Once an anti-establishment movement, Kimbanguism became the de facto state religion under Mobutu Sésé Seko after independence. Armchairs were reserved for the dictator and his wife at the N’Kamba church, which aped the structure of the ruling party all the way down to the identity cards they issued.

The Zairian doctrine of authenticity sat well with the church, as much of it reflected their belief systems. In the same way that Mobutu reinvented the very character of the Congolese as Zairians, so Kimbangism reinvents a new universe through a puritanical Africanism that denies any magic, polygamy, drinking, or witchcraft. This belief system was initiated by Kimbangu, who believed that his home village of N’Kamba was the Garden of Eden and that Adam and Eve were black. Yet, blacks had been excluded from the wealth and power of the industrial revolution because of original sin, and that original sin was the belief in witchcraft.

The 37,000-capacity temple that now stands on the holy mountain at N’Kamba was built with the help of ordinary believers once the church was unbanned. They carried rocks and stones several kilometres to the site. At the same time as the building program, Kimbanguist followers went to strenuous efforts to maintain the environmental surrounds of the village. A number of sacred trees and groves, important sites in Kimbangu’s own ministry, were preserved. This material dimension is thus an important aspect of the movement. N’Kamba is seen as holy ground by the Kimbanguists and, as such, shoes are always removed around the village complex: a sign of respect not only for the prophet and his God, but also for the very land on which he walked.

Among the many Kimbanguist sects, one finds far more humble churches than N’Kamba, often just a yard shaded by corrugated iron. In one of these churches, a service began with a pastor praying to each of the four compass directions, asking for power for the black people. North is to the red people’s power, the Moslems;
East is the black people represented by Kimbangu; West is to the yellow people; and finally the South is to Jesus Christ and the white man’s power.

Key within the churches are the powerful female Révélatrices. These women are mediums for the spirits. They prophesy and heal. The senior Révélatrice calls sick members of the community into a rear yard for a healing. Here, she prays and lays hands on them, splashing water on their faces. In the case of a young boy, tears rolling silently out of the corners of his eyes, she simply lays her hands on his head and moves on; his condition a mystery to me, a bemused observer.

The Révélatrices retreat into the background when the spiritual leader Kimbondo Nledi Mponda Mpadi takes over. He has the power to cast out demons, cure the ill and detect witchcraft. The spirit guides him through the throng and chooses those who need healing or exorcism. The prophet doesn’t remember any of the revelations he receives while invaded by the spirit, so an assistant hands him a notebook in which he scrawls symbols that are later interpreted. Then the spirit moves the prophet to the gate of the yard where he and a senior Révélatrice pray wildly, watched silently by non-church members from the street outside.

“In the frenetic pursuit of survival, churches within the larger Kimbanguist movement offer emotional, spiritual, and fraternal succor.”

In the frenetic pursuit of survival, churches within the larger Kimbanguist movement offer emotional, spiritual, and fraternal succor. The churches try to offer an ideal and alternate civic life that a failed state like the Democratic Republic of Congo cannot deliver—hospitals, schools, and social services. While the Utopian garden city of N’Kamba perhaps does not offer all it might as a buttress against the world, it, and the thousands of more modest sanctuaries, do offer hope of a better Earthly life.

All images courtesy of Greg Marinovich unless otherwise specified.
Kinshasa, as seen from the "Taj" restaurant in a building that (legend has it) was designed by Le Corbusier. March 2009. Photo courtesy of Leonie Marinovich.
The prophet, healer, and demonologist, Bishop Jacques Bisombolo of the Eglise Prophetique Vayika sits below a wax print of God’s envoy Simon Kimbangu, shown with his foot on the neck of a Belgian soldier in Kinshasa’s ghetto commune of Kimbanseke.
The prison wall in Lubumbashi where church legend has it that God lowered a ladder to the imprisoned Simon Kimbangu and called him to His side in Heaven. Kimbangu declined, saying there was still work to be done in the prison. Photo courtesy of Leonie Marinovich.
Church members, part of the guard, march at N’Kamba.
Papa Simon Kimbangu, grandson to the prophet Kimbangu, takes a phone call as his followers ask for blessings at N’Kamba New Jerusalem, the headquarters of The Church of Jesus Christ on Earth.
A worshipper prays fervently during Sunday service in the massive church at N’Kamba. The chairs are gifts from followers.
The wedding of two Kimbanguist couples at the Nytili parish Jan 05, 2008.
A segregated prayer spot for women, N’Kamba.
A Kapok tree, often seen as a repository of the spirits, in the village outside of N’Kamba church grounds.
The pool at N’Kamba, where Kimbangu used to send the sick to bathe, is used for rituals across Africa.
Carpet smooths the way for Papa Simon Kimbangu, grandson to the prophet Kimbangu, to make his way to Sunday Service, N’Kamba.
A portrait of Diangienda, the youngest son of the Simon who began the church after his mother’s death. This dynastic approach split the church, with many questioning why a son should inherit the father’s mantle.
Papa Simon Kimbangu watches the march past of believers, N’Kamba.
A révélatrice of the l'Eglise Universelle des Noirs puts her foot on a toddler brought for healing or protection from witchcraft during the end of year service in Kimbanseke, Kinshasa.
The end of year service of the "L'Eglise Universalle Des Noirs" or Mvuka MaBundu in the ghetto commune of Kimbanseke, Kinshasa, Dec 30, 2007. The church is an offshoot of the Kimbanguist church and was founded by Simon Pierre Mpadi. The current spiritual leader is Kimbondo Nledi Mponda Mpadi. The women in white are Révélatrices who heal and prophesy.
DECONGESTING ACCRA

Debbie Onuoha
Harvard University

Some of the big men who drive past us every morning to work feel we are a nuisance to the society. They wish they would drive to work without the sight of these young men and women who are making a living on the street. The AMA [Accra Metropolitan Assembly] must not decongest because of these men who believe Ghana was made for them and we are meant to be slaves.
– Yaa Mamuma (Pure-water vendor)

Where do they want us to go when we leave the streets? After all, I do not believe that our mere presence on the streets litters the streets so why the harassment? We are not mad men and women who are causing a nuisance or disturb the public peace; we are sane beings who are making a conscious attempt at trying to put in place measures to help kill the hunger that appears in our stomach from time to time.
– Philip Adjei (Cocoa drink vendor)
(Tagoe 2011)

Why the fixation with “decongestion” in Ghana’s local media and planning policies? How might decongestion speak to the perceived challenges of the nation’s growing urban centres? What can decongestion possibly reveal about policies of exclusion and the right to the city?

In this essay I examine “decongestion”—the removal of informal settlers and sellers from public spaces in Ghanaian cities. The above epigraph is taken from a blog post by journalist George Tagoe in the aftermath of one such undertaking in Accra. On a regular basis municipal governments announce a “serious decongestion exercise in the central business district” (Odoi-Larbi 2007). With the launch of each new endeavour, there is the promise that this time the activity will be more successful and more permanent than the last: “As we decongest the city, we will make sure that they [squatters] do not get back to the place [city-centre]” (GhanaMMA 2013). However despite the pervasiveness of decongestion as policy, the voices of those affected are often excluded from the official archives of the city, both in the media (e.g. newspapers articles, television programmes, and radio broadcasts) and in urban planning documents. Repeated decongestions and the subsequent excision of the urban poor from the pool of rights-bearing citizens, I will argue, points to fears about the uncontrolled flows of certain people and goods in Ghana’s urban centres.

These people and their goods pose a threat not only due to the fact of their movement, but because of the kinds of bodies in motion. This is such that in the same breath, hawkers can simultaneously be accused of wrecking the city by “spring[ing]-up” and “invad[ing]” public space (i.e. moving around too much, too suddenly) as well as by “loiter[ing] all over the metropolis” (i.e. not moving enough) by the Minister for Tourism (AMA 2005). Likewise, whereas open markets and slums must be destroyed to reduce the volume of people and vehicles entering the city-centre, high-end shopping malls and high-rise apartment buildings that surface nearby—and that also attract large crowds—are celebrated.

FROM THE WORLD’S FILTHIEST...

Near the end of 2009, the news that travel guide Lonely Planet had ranked Accra as the second worst city in the world hit many Ghanaians like a slap in the face. In a listing of the “9 least favourite cities,” compiled from feedback by the site’s members, the nation’s capital was described as “ugly, chaotic, sprawling, and completely indifferent to its waterfront location” (Wagle 2010). Ever since then, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly as well as its counterparts in other urban centres such as Kumasi, Tema, Sekondi-Takoradi, Cape Coast, and Tamale have striven through city upgrade schemes to improve the images portrayed of Ghana’s cities to the rest of the world. At present, some of these development plans include the construction of an external ring road to ease traffic in Kumasi and an environmental restoration project to “transform the filth-laden Korle Lagoon in Accra into a modern pleasure and transport complex comparable to those in Paris” (RadioXYZonline 2013). In each of these cases, decongestion is represented as a necessary first step without which future imaginations of the city cannot be ushered in.
Urbanization is fast-expanding in much of the global south. On the African continent alone, an estimated 50 percent of people will be living in cities by the year 2030 as compared to just 20 percent in the 1980s (McKinsey Global Institute 2010). After the discovery of offshore oil in 2007, Ghana’s economy has seen rapid growth and has been hailed as one of the fastest-growing in the world. This is made manifest in urban explosions as waves of people move from rural areas into its cities. Places such as Accra and Kumasi have witnessed an influx of new residents from the country’s less prosperous regions as migrants have sought better opportunities for self-advancement.

The rate of migration into these cities usually outstrips authorities’ abilities to plan and provide for the new residents in terms of accommodation, employment, and service provision. In Ghana, it is estimated that 45 percent of the urban population lives in slums (UN-HABITAT 2009) and that 45.9 percent of urban workers are engaged in activities in the informal economy (Ghana Statistical Service 2008). Thus “the cities of the future, rather than being made out of glass and steel as envisioned by earlier generations of urbanists, are instead largely constructed out of crude brick, straw, recycled plastic, cement blocks, and scrap wood” (Davis 2006, 18). When local governments struggle to meet the explosive infrastructural demand, informal settlements and markets emerge, providing forms of sustenance beyond the legal realm. In Accra for instance, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) is only able to process 60 percent of all waste in the city (Boadi and Kuitunen 2002), so in the absence of metropolitan amenities and utilities, people make do: in this case they dispose of garbage by burning it or dumping it into open waterways.

The designation of Accra and Kumasi as “Millennium Cities” by Columbia University’s Earth Institute in 2010 has been both a recognition of and an impetus for the efforts at urban renewal by the AMA under Mayor Alfred Vanderpuije and the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA), led by Mayor Samuel Sarpong. These have been aimed at transforming the capital city and the Garden City, respectively, into modern, globally competitive centres in order to achieve some of the UN’s eight Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Not surprisingly, decongestion schemes have since been intensified (Bentil 2011). Illegal slums and informal markets, which are visible manifestations of urban poverty, become a blot on the national psyche for authorities working hard to engineer modern metropolises. Therefore local assemblies attempt to purge spaces that may symbolize their failure to fully urbanize as intended. Especially in Accra and Kumasi, stories about decongestion campaigns, spearheaded by the mayors, frequently capture the national imagination through newspaper articles, television news reports, and radio programmes (Owusu 2009).

Decongestion, as it is thus presented in the popular media, involves the removal of all informal structures that clog up the streets in the central business areas (Adjovu 2009). This conception of informality extends to both work and home: street vendors as well as slum dwellers are the objects of such operations. In the case of the former, their activities on the “sidewalks” are said to hamper pedestrian movement and road traffic, as well as to create filth and general uncleanliness.

**Burning Waste Near the Korle Lagoon. Photo courtesy Debbie Onuoha.**

**Decongesting’ Ghana**

In the wee hours of the morning, assembled police, military, and fire personnel stand guard as the city’s decongestion Task Forces break down and burn kiosks and shacks—structures considered “out of place”—and confiscate valuables such as traders’ wares and/or slum dwellers properties (Ghana Broadcasting Corporation 2014). In some cases these items are redeemable upon the payment of a fine to the appropriate municipal authority. In others, they are lost forever. Many owners look on helplessly as their property is damaged or seized, and others try to intervene but are met with violent restraint by the law enforcement officials present (Appiah-Korang Jr. 2009).

Decongestion, as it is thus presented in the popular media, involves the removal of all informal structures that clog up the streets in the central business areas (Adjovu 2009). This conception of informality extends to both work and home: street vendors as well as slum dwellers are the objects of such operations. In the case of the former, their activities on the “sidewalks” are said to hamper pedestrian movement and road traffic, as well as to create filth and general uncleanliness.
Informal homes, on the other hand, are viewed as hubs of crime and grime, which stand to infect the city and need to be expelled (Obeng-Odom 2011).

With the informal destroyed, the city is cleansed (for the time being) and pedestrians commend the exercise. As one woman said, “it has made the sidewalks free and convenient to use. I hope that it does not become a nine day wonder as previous exercises” (Ghana News Agency 2013). The mayor may be in the headlines later that day for spearheading the amazing transformation of Ghana’s cities from some of the dirtiest and most despised only a year earlier, to greener, cleaner, emerging metropolises. While there may be complaints about the violent nature of the undertaking, or the corruption of officials who take evictees’ belongings for themselves, the “what,” unlike the “how,” is very seldom challenged. Writers might disagree with the methods or question the permanence of the clearance, but for the most part agree on the necessity of removing traders and squatters from the streets of central business areas. For example, in 2009, one writer from Kumasi, though he disapproved of the means, described the exercise as “a step in the right direction and therefore needs to be commended” (Yeboah).

“In the popular media, journalists, municipal authorities, and city-dwellers will often collectively refer to problems caused by the overcrowding of the city as ‘congestion’ and its solution as ‘decongestion.’”

The choice of the term “decongestion” for these eviction schemes is itself an interesting one. In the popular media, journalists, municipal authorities, and city-dwellers will often collectively refer to problems caused by the overcrowding of the city as “congestion” and its solution as “decongestion.” Out of context, the concept of congestion conjures very visceral imagery of a clogged respiratory system, obstructed by bacteria-containing phlegm, and an inability to properly breathe. Decongestion—its resolution—then becomes the relieving of the sinuses, usually by the application of some potent drug, in order to restore things to normal and healthy function.

Freud describes “[b]eauty, cleanliness, and order” as markers of the well-functioning body politic. By contrast, “A city that is not well organised will slump into squalor.” These are the words of a chief executive of the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Area who declared 2014 the year of “progress and development based on discipline and orderliness.” He went on to emphasize that “the Assembly and the Physical Planning Unit will use all lawful means to remove illegal structures from the city” (Ghanaian Chronicle 2014), thus illustrating the frequent aggregation of congestants, the unclean, and informality. Informal structures not only block public arteries, their presence—having been determined not by planners, but by their inhabitants themselves—challenges organization. This absence of official control is then presented as precursor to “squalor” and filth everywhere. In sum, informality is disorderly and therefore dirty. The three are one and the same. Or so goes the official logic.

Furthermore, informality is cast as an illicit and unwanted phenomenon that is entirely incompatible with the images of themselves that the nation’s cities intend to project into reality: e.g. an ultra-modern future-Accra that nevertheless retains the unspoiled natural environment of the past. At first glance, these goals may seem contradictory, however global cities have long sought to embody a middle ground between nature and civilization (Garreau 1992). Such was the case in Jeffersonian plans for 18th century American cities that alternated built-on plots with natural parkland as well as 20th century edge cities—office and retail spaces built into previously residential areas—whose horizons are a melange of midrise commercial buildings and treetops. In the search for this equilibrium between too little and too much development, pockets of informality are impediments because they are neither improved enough to be evidence of modernity nor sufficiently untouched to be considered spare land. Rather than an ideal combination, slums and markets represent the worst of both urban and rural worlds and thus must be removed.

Taking the city as a system and informality as congestant—that which obstructs function and flow—the eviction of settlers and sellers becomes a kind of urban cure. Using case studies of Accra’s largest pocket of informality, I will now examine these images: of interrupted urban fluidity as congestion, and “informal” people as congestant.

OLD FADAMA/AGBOGBLOSHIE

The biggest buzz around the issue of decongestion has emerged from Accra Central. Nestled between the Korle Lagoon and the Adadaimkpo Road, northwest of the city’s central business district, Old Fadama is the nation’s largest slum and houses about 80,000 people. In recent years, this particular slum, above all others in the country, has come to dominate conversations about congestion, with its destruction widely held as the catalyst for the resolution of a multitude of problems (Olotunji).

The distinction is sometimes made between two areas bisected by the main-road. Agbogbloshie, which could be described as a semi-formal settlement, houses one of Accra’s largest markets as well as the homes of
some of its traders and one of the sub-region’s largest digital dumping grounds. Although it did not necessarily start out as a slum, worsening urban poverty has led to the deterioration of living conditions in the area. Across the street, Old Fadama, which is near the banks of the polluted Korle Lagoon, is partly built on “land” filled in with sawdust and reclaimed from the lagoon. The region was repopulated in the 1980s when the Rawlings administration relocated traders from the demolished Makola market to Agbogbloshie, and again in the 1990s when displaced Northerners from the Nanumba-Konkomba war were resettled near the lagoon. The settlement has since gained notoriety, leading to its rechristening as “Sodom and Gomorrah” (Obeng-Odom 2011).

According to city policy, however, both areas are informal—as residences as well as trading centres—and therefore unwanted. Each has to go. Decongestion in Old Fadama/Agbogbloshie has several linked components: demolition of the slum, relocation of the market to Adjen-Kotoku and other locations outside of the city, the de-silting and revitalization of the Korle Lagoon, and the removal of the e-waste dump site. Taking these last two—the Korle Lagoon and the e-waste processing site—as my points of entry, I focus on decongestion as it relates to both the domestic (living) and the mercantile (working). I discuss not only how these sites and the area itself function as congestants in Accra, but furthermore what their designation as illegal-and-therefore-unclean, reveals about greater urban anxieties in Ghana.

MURKY WATERS ON A GOLDEN COAST: THE KORLE LAGOON

The Korle Lagoon is the main system by which the city’s rivers empty into the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Guinea. In recent times, direct comparisons are often drawn between waterways’ current states as “dead” and memories of them as thriving fishing centres during the earlier half of the twentieth century, as this excerpt from the Daily Graphic illustrates:

“The Odaw River has not only become a dumping ground for solid waste but also a receptacle for excreta, as some people squat along its banks to freely attend to the call of nature, even in broad daylight. As a result of this extensive pollution, the Odaw River is virtually dead. There is hardly aquatic life in the river, especially at the places where pollution is very severe. Many years ago, people used to fish in the river. (2012)”

Sources of pollution to the Korle Lagoon are many. Factories in the industrial area as well as the nearby Korle Bu Hospital’s mortuary dump wastewater into lagoon. Faecal matter, dumped into the sea by the city at the ironically named “Lavender Hill,” may backwash into the lagoon, and residents often throw domestic waste into the lagoon and its tributaries. Decomposition of these toxins depletes oxygen resources, and as a result plant and animal life cannot be sustained. Siltation also poses huge problems. Sediments washed-in from the banks clog the bed of the lagoon, block drainage into the sea, and cause the water to stagnate. The polluted lagoon does not just present a situation of stasis or stalled movement where continuous flow is expected; it also threatens deterioration. Stagnant waters pose a danger to human life and property: they breed mosquitoes, making malaria more likely; host pathogens which cause cholera, typhoid, etc.; and create risks of flooding since heavy rain causes the lagoon to spill over into neighbouring communities, damaging homes and other structures.

In the popular imaginary, however, as the quotation from the Daily Graphic illustrates, one major cause is cited for the state of the lagoon: Sodom and Gomorrah. The municipal authority and local media tout the dumping of domestic and faecal matter by the slum’s residents as the greatest dangers to a clean lagoon. Not only is the slum blamed for placing polluting items into the lagoon, it itself becomes emblematic of a pollutant in the cityscape. When residents successfully resisted forced evictions from their homes in 2002, they were subsequently held accountable for stalling the progress of the Korle Lagoon Ecological Restoration Project (KLERP), and thereby wasting the $89 million that had already been spent. In 2013, during another de-silting attempt—the $600 million Accra Drainage and Sanitation Upgrade Project—the slum was again cast as an impediment to progress, as the mayor called upon inhabitants to “do their part” as citizens by evacuating their homes in order to allow the project to continue for the benefit of all of Accra (RadioXYZonline 2013).
Interestingly, although denied the rights to social services, the residents were still expected to uphold their “responsibility” to the city by sacrificing themselves and their livelihoods for its progress. Essentially, the congestants were asked to remove themselves, or else the AMA would do so for them.

Not unlike the silt blocking the Korle Lagoon, Sodom and Gomorrah becomes a source of congestion, hampering growth and development within Accra. The slum in the CBD functions like a cancer in the heart of the city. In addition to obstructing flow and growth by hindering the realization of plans for the future development of Accra Central, this blockage also threatens the destruction of existing portions of the city due to flooding and disease.

EXOTIC TOXICS: THE AGBOBLOSHIE E-WASTE PROCESSING SITE

A quasi-commercial centre, Agbobloshie is home to one of Accra’s largest markets, a few “more permanent” homes and structures, and the infamous digital dumping ground. Like Old Fadama, Agbobloshie is scheduled for decongestion. Old and unusable electronics from Euro-America—computers, television sets, radios, telephones etc.—enter Ghana through the port-city of Tema and then make their way into the slum. Transporting electronics across the Atlantic began as the charitable provision of affordable used technology for developing nations but has slowly morphed into a plot through which Western companies skimp on recycling costs by dumping old appliances amongst the urban poor (Bock 2012). Plastic casings are burnt and copper wires sold for money, making these discarded machines an integral part of yet another informal market in Agbobloshie. The dump’s ever-billowing black smoke poses a health risk by releasing invisible toxins into the air that cause lung problems and cancer. In the fight against informality, some are more unwanted than others. Unlike their food-trading comrades who are to be relocated to the outskirts of the city, there are no plans as yet to resettle the workers at the dump (Ghana News Agency 2009). Like the slum residents, it is assumed that these artisanal workers will simply “go away” with decongestion.

In fact several local chiefs strictly oppose resettlement of any kind, arguing that the residents ought to go back to their own hometowns. In 2011, the Ga Mantse—the traditional head of the Ga state—pledged full support of the AMA’s initiatives on the basis that “those claiming to own the land, did not acquire it from the lawful owners” (Mingle). Ghana’s first president Kwame Nkrumah initially obtained the land surrounding the Korle from the Ga by promising to clean up the lagoon. Nearly a half-century later, since the land has not been used for the purposes for which it was acquired, many contend that it ought to be returned to its rightful owners. According to the ethno-linguistic groups who own the land upon which Ghana’s cities are built—the Ga in Accra or the Asante in Kumasi for instance—slum residents who hail from other regions of the country (particularly the faraway Northern Region) are impinging upon their birth right: their land.

But the slum dwellers’ unwanted-ness goes beyond ideas of pollution and poisonous smoke. On a deeper level, Agbobloshie symbolizes the challenges Accra faces in an increasingly globalizing world order: porous borders and the unregulated flow of bodies and goods into the city. The reality of foreign waste at the dump betrays not only Western corporate greed and irresponsibility, but also the powerlessness and ineffectiveness of the Ghanaian government to prevent the entry of such unwanted goods through its borders. In other words, the nation is like a body unable to protect itself from pathogenic invasion, from congestion. These goods ought to be detected and confiscated in Tema but instead move through the port and all the way to the middle of Accra. Such incursions occur from within as well as without: old electronics are not the only unwanted aliens in Accra Central. The people, like the things they burn, are matter-out-of-place. In descriptions of the digital dumping ground at Agbobloshie, we perceive a fear of the inundation of Accra by disruptive and uncontrollable foreign elements, be they people or things, aliens or citizens.

‘OUT OF PLACE’

Decongestion, as I understand it in this essay, is an inherently destructive process, which places an emphasis on the demolition rather than the recovery of unwanted places and people. Authorities seem to have made a conscious decision to remove informality from Accra rather than to encourage transformations that would make these structures and communities more suitable. That the reordering, cleaning, and development of the urban space is only possible by removing slum dwellers and street hawkers is indicative of perceptions of these actors and spaces as incompatible with the long-term plans for the city. Shacks and vendors’ stalls are seen as nuisances that do not belong in the collective, imagined future. This incompatibility is evidenced, for example, by the designation of Old Fadama and its surroundings as “Sodom and Gomorrah.” Although its origins are uncertain—in some cases it is attributed to a Ga chief, and in others to a municipal official—the name Sodom and Gomorrah conveys two perceptions of the slum and adjoining markets.

First is the opinion of Old Fadama as a space of transgression. In religious texts such as the Bible and
the Qur’an, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, or “the people of Lot,” were notorious for their sinfulness, sexual deviance, and social vices such as the sadistic torture of others. Likewise, in the media the Ghanaian version is depicted as a menace to Accra and its people—a nucleus of urban decay where drug abuse, prostitution, murder, crime, filth, disease, and homelessness are rampant and threaten to spill over into the rest of society, affecting “ordinary” citizens in more upper class parts of Accra (Olutunji). So polluted, the slum becomes a risk to the welfare of the city at large and its removal a necessary precondition for progress. In other words, slums are not only depicted as filthy and deviant, they are also considered harmful to society: for example, after clashes during national elections in 2009, Sodom and Gomorrah was declared to be a “risk to national security,” beginning a new cycle of decongestion attempts in the area (Afenah 2010).

The second implication of the slum’s name is temporal. God destroyed its scriptural counterparts with fire and brimstone in the Bible (Genesis 19:24) and a tornado of rocks in the Qur’an (Surat al-Qamar: 34). Despite repeated pleas by His highly favoured prophet Abraham, the city could not be spared because it did not even contain a minimum of five righteous inhabitants, on whose behalf all of the other sinners could be pardoned. There was nothing and no one that could stop the inevitable. To some extent, the name Sodom and Gomorrah in the Ghanaian context conveys the similar sense of an inescapable fate: widely perceived as transgressive and disruptive, there is the sense that such spaces are not worth saving and rightly deserve to be demolished. Their days are numbered; they have no place in the future, and it is only a matter of time until they too are removed. In this sense, cleaning the physical space around the lagoon also closely links to cleansing the city of perceived social and moral contamination generated by spaces such as Sodom and Gomorrah.

In Purity and Danger (2000), Mary Douglas identifies the origins of sociocultural and religious understandings of dirt and cleanliness. Beginning with Levitical prescriptions (i.e. laws handed down to the Jews in the Biblical book of Leviticus), she identifies holiness as “wholeness,” arguing that projects considered incomplete are inherently unclean (52-53). By this definition, informal dwellings—which may include unfinished buildings and are located amidst partially completed developmental initiatives (Korle lagoon, roads, sewerage etc.)—become “dirty” in more ways than one. As well as being unfinished themselves, informal spaces become undesirable when they are seen to encumber the conclusion of other programs around them. For example, woodwork is an important sector of economic activity in Kumasi, however the presence of a timber market in the path of the planned ring-road system transforms it into a congestant. As a hindrance to the completion of one of the millennium city’s key transport upgrades, these otherwise useful markets become a bother, and plans have since been laid to relocate them to “a settlement enclave at a more peripheral location” (KMPG 2008).

Another manifestation of un-holiness is indistinguishedness: the absence of contradiction between “what seems and what is” makes things unclean (Douglas 200, 57). Street vendors who exist in liminal space, not quite like the established shops on one side of them, nor like the moving cars and pedestrians on another, also become “filthy” in addition to the fact that wrappers from their consumed wares may litter the ground. In their place, different kinds of commercial spaces that are more compatible with the “millennium city” are planned and finished such as the Accra Mall, Marina Mall, and the new Oxford Street Mall. Unlike the informal markets where bargaining techniques and shifting bodily positions (from one stall to another) make every transaction a renegotiation, malls which offer restricted and dedicated physical space, fixed prices, and pre-packaged wares “sanitize” the city’s business deals by cleaning up its visual sphere.

BEYOND PRACTICALITY – INFORMALITY AS NATIONAL SCAPGOAT

It is important here to distinguish between the actual and the symbolic. Contrary to municipal claims, decongestion in Ghana, I argue, is not limited to mere environmental beautification and economic progress. At present, those who inhabit the shadow markets and settlements in Old Fadama are held solely accountable for the Lagoon’s pollution, yet descriptions of the “obnoxious smells for which the Korle Lagoon has been so notorious” date as far back as the Nkrumah administration, three full decades before the arrival of these settlers on its banks (Edusei 1963). It would seem that decongestion is about a lot more than just catching the polluters; rather serving as a tactic by which municipalities regain control over spaces whose growth has defied their plans.

On a practical level, the issue of the polluted lagoon need not necessarily be resolved by demolition but could be addressed by developing the slum in tandem with lagoon-rehabilitation so that the two are made compatible (Boadi and Kuitunen 2002). For instance, as residents point out, if proper sanitation and waste disposal systems were developed, they would no longer be forced to dump garbage into the lagoon:

How many times has the community asked the Mayor of Accra and his people to provide...
dustbins so we stop dumping into the lagoon? And they are saying that bringing bins means that they are legalizing the illegality! Thus the community sees this point [the Korle Lagoon] as a waste dump. Do you think they are wrong my sister? I think they should resolve the impasse with the community and find a better way of restoring the aquatic life and sanitation. (F., Resident of Sodom and Gomorrah for 20 years, interview with author, 2014)

The refusal of the AMA to provide this most practical of solutions—dustbins—indicates that there must be something else motivating decongestion, something other than the environmental claims cited by the city government. Similarly, destroying Agbogbloshie is no guarantee that e-waste will stop entering the country, or that another processing site will not emerge elsewhere to replace the old.

Neither is it simply a matter of creating empty, uncrowded spaces in the central business areas. A cartoon published in the Daily Graphic in May 2013 juxtaposes the replacement of informal traders from the Kantamanto market—who had a 50-year sublease for the use of the land—with an “ultra-modern railway hub and shopping mall.” This is despite the fact that in terms of people and traffic, both options would attract comparable movements of people into the CBD. Furthermore, as the cartoonist shows, meeting the Millennium Development Goals is better done by improving living conditions of city dwellers (by investing in their welfare) than through the creation of large concrete structures or even the destruction of old wooden ones. Campaigns to clean out informal settlers and traders cost authorities thousands of dollars each time (Adjovu 2003; Owusu 2009; Yeboah 2009).

Decongestion, clearly, is not simply a matter of practicality, neither is it the only means by which a city in Ghana could achieve its goals for progress.

Among the ancient Greeks and other societies, a beast such as a goat would be driven out of a polity after having the burdens and sins of its residents cast upon it in an effort to rid the city of its troubles. It goes without saying that in order for any of the cleansing effects of the practice to be realized, the animal must be expelled, sacrificed on behalf of all others and for the greater good. Informal elements in Ghana’s urban centres have come to function as these cities’ scapegoats: they are vested with blame for the entire city’s woes, such that their excision becomes a symbolic means of restoring order (and for authorities, becomes evidence of functionality). Where other forms of control have been lost in the city, urban ecologies provide an avenue for the re-imposition of order.

Evidence of this is found in some of the other claims about decongestion made by the AMA—assertions that may, yet again, be beyond practicality. Officials allege that the toppling of Sodom and Gomorrah will open the gates for the removal of other slums like it such as Babylon, Abuja, Neoplan, Old Passport etc., and cities will be totally decongested: “The decongestion of Sodom and Gomorrah would send the message across that the AMA is seriously bent on decongesting all slums and emerging ones in the city” (Ghana News Agency 2009). Equally likely is the possibility that evictees from Old Fadama will migrate to these other settlements, increasing, not decreasing, their presence in the urban landscape.

CONCLUSION

Though the term decongestion as applied to slum clearances appears to only be widespread in Ghana, such “toxic neighbourhoods”—caught between nature and urbanization, waste management and water conservation, land ownership, and control (Roosen 2010)—do exist in cities elsewhere in Africa. On the Lagos Lagoon in nearby Nigeria, the Makoko slum, where most dwellings are built on stilts in the water, is similarly spoken of in relation to the hazard it poses to health and the environment. Sections of the squatter settlement are habitually torn down in order to prevent blockages in the waterway (which could lead to flooding) and to prevent traffic congestion, whenever the outward expansion of the slum gets too close to nearby roadways (Neuwirth 2011; Bello et al. 2012).

As part of this quest to construct world-class cities, municipal authorities have targeted informal work and homes not only in Ghana but also across much of the developing world. Local governments fear that such shadow markets and squatter settlements will metastasize, reversing cities’ progress and paving the way for criminality, poverty, and destruction to run rampant. The periodic eviction of squatters and hawkers—who are cast as filthy and therefore irreconcilable with future plans for urbanization—becomes a display of competency for municipal authorities. Although the sheer violence—physical and economic—of these policies sparks some critique in local media, most seem to favour the removal of informality from the city. The point of contention is not whether decongestion will indeed beautify the city and improve its economy, but rather if the practice is sustainable and not just “an exercise that is vigorous from Monday to Saturday and completely dies out on Sundays” (Yeboah).

To a certain extent, discourses of decongestion in Ghana hint at concerns about uncontrolled mobility and flows in the city. The concern with fluidity involves both the chaos caused by the unchecked growth
of pockets of informality, as well as the motionlessness that results when these areas thwart the realization of other development goals. With millions of people under the municipality’s jurisdiction, no movement as well as too much movement are challenges that endanger the millennial city. In discussions of the Korle Lagoon, concerns about the natural resonate with perceptions of the slums at Old Fadama and Agbogbloshie: the fixation with decongesting a lagoon of pollutants extends to ideas of people-as-contaminant, and the common threat becomes one of inertia (and even worse, of regression). Likewise, efforts to remove electronic waste and its handlers betray fears of foreign invasion and porous borders.

“[T]he urban poor are to some extent being sacrificed for the sake of ‘urban prosperity’.”

Decongestion as applied to unwanted economic activity stops chaotic and uncontrolled movement in the city by expelling the informal congestants whilst at the same time clearing out the streets and making way for government-sanctioned flows of people and goods. Lastly, the targeting of hawkers and slum dwellers reveals that the urban poor are to some extent being sacrificed for the sake of “urban prosperity.” Cast as out of place, they are forcibly ejected from where they live and work—especially streets in the central business district of cities—in order to pave the way for the millennium city of the future to be built.

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WHERE THERE ARE NO OTHERS

CITIES WITHIN CITIES

Eric Reinhart
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Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will not die, but long after we are gone be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistence. Remember that our sons and our grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty.

– Daniel Burnham, Chicago city planner (1907 quoted in Moore 1921, 147)

The Urban League can only conclude that urban renewal ... is working great and undue hardships on the Negro population, and, on balance, is working more and more harm on the city as a whole. Basically, this conclusion arises from observation of the results of the pattern of racial segregation which Chicago now practices to an extent unmatched by any other large American city, North or South. So long as this pattern persists, urban renewal cannot achieve its great potential for good because residential segregation distorts the fundamental purpose of urban renewal by making it function within artificially restricted limits, and without the necessary utilization of city-wide resources. Thus the principle of ‘land clearance’ is perverted to ‘Negro clearance,’ and the great principles of renewing the city’s physical structure, and rebalancing and increasing its housing supply is inevitably defeated. With residential segregation, and the consequent ghetto-ization of the fastest growing segment of the city’s population, slum clearance tends to spread blight, rather than to cure it — and urban renewal, despite its good intentions and its great possibilities, becomes a distortion and a false promise.

– Chicago Urban League (1958, 5-6)

The aware black man in the ghetto tends to view urban planning more as an enemy than as an aid.

– Edwin C. Berry and Walter W. Stafford, Chicago Urban League (1968, 8)

The power to impose and to inculcate a vision of divisions, that is, the power to make visible the explicit social divisions that are implicit, is political power par excellence.

– Pierre Bourdieu (1989, 23)

LAKESIDE

As you walk towards Lake Michigan on E 85th Street in Chicago’s South Shore neighborhood, you will pass tens of vacant lots where working-class families once lived in homes in one of the city’s safest and most stable neighborhoods. Over the last three decades, deindustrialization has ripped physical and existential holes into this community where most households depended on the steel mills of South Chicago for their livelihoods (Walley 2013). Nearly all of the mills had closed for good by the early 1990s. Since then, as poverty has grown alongside what Chicagoans of the past have labeled “urban blight,” demolition of abandoned homes deemed havens for criminal activity has contributed to a visual representation of the more total transformation of a once-vibrant neighborhood into a devitalized urban space pockmarked by poverty and abandonment. The bulldozer and the cruising police car regulate the economies that have arisen amidst widespread joblessness and persistent disillusionment; they are today the most significant signs of public “investment” in the South Shore community of 49,767 residents (U.S. Census 2010).

If you continue walking east on 85th until the spotty rows of run-down homes abruptly end, you will face what is heralded by city government and private investors as the future of the South Side: nearly 600 acres of empty brownfield that runs into Lake Michigan. This is the last undeveloped lakefront parcel in the city of Chicago. From 1901 until 1992, it was the site of U.S. Steel South Works—one of the many enormous mills that clustered southward from this spot to form what was the largest corridor of heavy industry in the world. U.S. Steel South Works alone once employed over 131
20,000 workers. But let’s not get caught in the past; keep on due east after the asphalt of 85th ends, move over the several hundred meters of dirt road and onto the narrow sea wall that juts out more than three kilometers into the water. Walk atop this wall with the water lapping on either side of your feet until you reach the break in the wall through which massive barges once passed. Here, turn around. Had you stood in this spot facing the shore on a night 30 years ago, on your eyeballs would now be reflected relentless columns of blood orange flames shooting over 10 meters up through the sooty clouds pouring from the countless smoke stacks of the steel mills. The hot, dry waves of sulfur emanating from the mills would heat the mucous membranes of your nose as you haltingly took in the air of industrial South Chicago. Today, however, daylight reveals an unadorned shoreline and unobstructed views across an empty field into a black American ghetto. This is a community struggling against poverty and joblessness, aggressive incarceration of its young male members, and bleak, static visions of the future. But for the empty space that lies between this neighborhood and Lake Michigan, the future is an altogether separate matter.

The future of this empty lakefront field, these 600 acres backed by a violent and progressively abandoned ghetto but just 20 km south along the idyllic Lake Shore Drive from Chicago’s downtown, captures far more attention among city officials and private investors than does that of its neighbors. McCaffery Interests, a firm specializing in “underperforming urban real estate” that has teamed with the US Steel Corporation to develop this property, is commissioning digital visions of what is billed by many as the “future of the South Side” (Smith 2010). “Lakeside,” a $4 billion mega-development requiring an estimated $450 million in public funds, has been planned for this site and aggressively marketed to city and state administrations increasingly defined by public-private partnerships. A state governor and two Chicago mayors have swallowed the plan whole. It is now in its initial phases of construction, already with hundreds of millions in both public and private funding.

Marketing materials for what is to be the largest privately planned urban development in the history of Chicago depict a “city within a city” and “a global initiative for innovative living in Chicago.” The utopic urban existence that will arise here alongside Lake Michigan features 13,575 gleaming new homes in glass towers, 1.63 million square meters of upscale retail and commercial space, shopping malls, new schools, a 1,500-slip marina, and 125 acres of lakefront park along with new commuter rail and bus services. A projected 50,000 happy people will live in this urban oasis by its completion in 2040 (McCaffery Interests 2013).

The concept of a self-contained, self-sufficient new city within a city is at the core of these urban development projects. “New city” developments allow investors and municipal governments to imagine and manufacture futures unencumbered by weighty and persistent legacies of social, political, economic, and material infrastructural inadequacy (Cirolia 2013). Eko Atlantic, for example, is being built on 3.5 square miles reclaimed from the Atlantic Ocean just off Victoria Island.
in Lagos. Advertised as “the future in the making,” the new city is expected to soon be home to 250,000 residents in over 3,000 towers. It is to have virtually nothing to do with the existing Lagos infrastructure and urban fabric; it will instead build its own private power plants, sewage system, roads, schools, and light rail (Awofeso 2010). Future residents need never leave the confines of their privately policed and fortified island from which they will be able to look down through the floor-to-ceiling windows of shiny condominiums and follow the glare of the sunlight reflecting off skyscrapers across Eko Atlantic’s modern moat onto the more than 70 percent of Lagosians who continue to live in slum conditions (Johnson 2013). Recent figures suggest that approximately 10 percent of today’s estimated 21 million Lagosians have access to potable water; the vast majority has no access to sanitary mechanisms for disposal of human waste (Vanguard 2013). Diarrheal disease, most often due to contaminated water, is estimated to kill as many as 200,000 children under age 5 in Nigeria every year; many of these children are dying in Lagos (UNICEF 2013). As the city’s population swells from 21 million to what officials project will be 35 million people by 2025 (Al Jazeera 2013), the numbers of Lagosians defecating on shorelines while peering across the water at Eko Atlantic is not likely to decline.

In Eko Atlantic, as at Chicago’s Lakeside and each of the abovementioned utopian mega-developments in Africa, the spatial and infrastructural disconnection from the existing city and its residents represents the circumvention of too-obvious social, institutional, and operational problems that would require redress in more holistic urban planning and engaged responses to community needs. These plans, often drawn up in the far-removed skyscrapers of European or North American or Chinese firms, have no intention of effecting reform or an integral urban scape; instead, they propose to offer more comfortable, ordered surroundings to those with the means to escape their despoiled and “dangerous” neighbors, leaving the rising number of those in the left-over interstitial urban spaces of the world to fend for themselves (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012; Cirolia 2013).

“In Eko Atlantic, as at Chicago’s Lakeside....the spatial and infrastructural disconnection from the existing city and its residents represents the circumvention of... social, institutional, and operational problems that would require... engaged responses to community needs.”

The digitally manufactured images of these sparkling urban utopias present some of the most striking and fullest examples of what critical observers have termed “divided cities” (Wacquant 1994), “fortress cities” (Davis 1990; Low 1997), “citadels” or “exclusionary enclaves” (Marcuse 1997), “dominating cities” (Marcuse 1995), or “dual cities” (Harvey 1989; Sassen 2005; Low 1996). I will elaborate on the character of such “cities within cities” through the example of Chicago’s Lakeside; but let me first suggest some of the historical processes through which such urban forms have come to sit so comfortably in the heart of urban planning today.

As I have suggested, these privately planned developments have cut their teeth for the most part in the conveniently development-needy “developing world,” where they are the culmination of decades of neoliberal agenda-making in city planning. Or, rather, city non-planning. Following World War II, central control of land, construction, and city planning by the state was the norm in most industrially advanced countries (Gleeson and Low 2000). But as inflation and joblessness encroached on the Global North in the 1970s, ascendant conservative thought that would soon blossom into Thatcherism and Reagonomics asserted that although central state planning might succeed in creating housing, it could not create necessary economic growth and employment to go with it (Gleeson and Low). Neoliberal champions capitalized on perceived economic crises through political reforms that curtailed the state’s welfare and regulatory functions. Urban planning has since become increasingly defined by the ideological trilogy of competition, deregulation, and privatization (Gleeson and Low 2000)—commitments that have only intensified under globalization and the interurban competition it has fostered. State intervention in planning was criticized as counterproductive interference with the “invisible hand”; increasingly, faith was to be placed in “non-planning” and the unregulated global urban market to produce economic growth and supposedly associated socially optimal urban outcomes (see Alexander 1986). This turn in urban governance was shot through with pure market fetishism, wherein market-driven planning and its mode of construction would in and of themselves ensure employment and economic “growth.”

Postcolonial targets of international development became the most extreme playgrounds for this neoliberal political agenda and its adventurerist experiments. Development policy, as suggested by structural adjustment programs, centered on fostering entrepreneurial market actors and diminishing the involvement of the state in urban planning, housing construction, and infrastructural development. The World Bank, for example, published a policy paper in 1993 entitled “Housing: Enabling Markets to Work” in which recommendations
call for urban development policy focused on deregulation, privatization, and minimizing state intrusion on matters of land use, zoning, construction competition, and infrastructural standards. In settings of poverty and “underdevelopment,” there was a perceived need in development discourse to postpone public investment in order to create vibrant private sectors that could sustain growth leading to jobs and stable governance. Development would require carving out spaces for markets to emerge on their own terms, to hold and multiply capital, and to permit the unleashing of economic growth. By these means, the deregulated market would eventually raise the neglected poor out of abject poverty. These logics of development might have been most forcefully (and, for the rights of the poor, destructively) deployed in the postcolonial world’s underdeveloped spaces, but they have since come back to the wealthy nations of their progenitors in full force. The “growth machine” politics (Molotch 1976) embedded in this economic philosophy is now as powerful in contemporary American “global cities” like Chicago as it is in any of the urban centers of poorer countries down whose throats such politics have been funneled over the last four decades in the name of development.

CONCENTRATING (ON) THE GLOBAL CITY

Increasingly, it is the world’s megacities rather than its national states that house the world’s largest economies. The focus of government at all levels, from national to municipal, has moved from the provision of public welfare to the direction of public resources toward private investment in order to transform cities into (or to sustain their status as) “world” or “global cities.” Intercity competition and branding exacerbates the dissolution of the public into the private. Much of the logic of contemporary urban development and planning is predicated on providing the infrastructure to support massive private investment. Investment in basic infrastructure and in meeting the needs and protecting the rights/security of non-corporate city residents, especially the poor, is too often pushed into the background, if not sacrificed outright on the altars of the fetishized private market. In today’s municipal religion, the rights of the poor are expendable and represent pollution of the tranquility and aesthetic sheen of elite consumerist urban life.

Global cities are today “dual cities” wherein spatially selective divestment and reinvestment maps not onto the interests of existing residents’ welfare or “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1968) but rather onto the corporate visions of the future dictated through spectacular luminous images of glassy towers, spotless streets, and happy rich families (Sassen 1994). As luxury urban mega-developments set against backdrops of ignored poverty such as Lakeside or Eko Atlantic dramatically illustrate, “leapfrog” or “nodal” development is shaping space within cities as well as between them, in the Global North as well as the Global South.

The recently completed, $64 million publicly funded extension of Lake Shore Drive to the Lakeside Development makes clear the narrowly targeted, nodal character of the Lakeside project and the “investment in the South Side” it represents (Hilkevitch 2013). Lake Shore Drive is an iconic American highway abutting Lake Michigan and insulated along most of its 15.83 miles by grassy parkland on either side. Its extension 2.08 additional miles south from Hyde Park (the enclave neighborhood that is home to the University of Chicago and one of the largest private police forces in the country) provides future Lakeside residents direct access to the Chicago’s Loop without requiring negotiation of poor South Side neighborhoods—an uncomfortable and avoided activity for many white Chicagoans, even while insulated in their cars.

Reducing commuting time to downtown jobs may be the part of the rationale for the Lake Shore Drive extension that Lakeside promoters emphasize, although statements by the deputy commissioner of the Chicago Department of Transportation suggest it may not be as significant as imagined: “The new section of South Lake Shore Drive will provide an arterial-boulevard hybrid. If you are interested in a 30 mph beautiful drive, it is certainly a route you should consider taking. For ease and quickness of access, we would encourage drivers to remain on the expressway system” (Hilkevitch 2013). The most significant effect of the this new road that runs along Lakeside’s western edge adjacent to dilapidated residential plots lies not in shortened commuting times, but rather in its provision of a psychological connection to downtown and a clear division between Lakeside and the uncomfortably close South Shore neighborhood. It provides a visual and psychological corridor that links the development to downtown wealth and distances it from proximate poverty.

Dan McCaffery has long appreciated the importance of the highway to his project. He has repeatedly hailed the Lake Shore Drive extension as essential to the viability of the Lakeside Development and lobbied city and state governments for its construction (Gallun 2013; Doster 2014). He and his team understand, like the planners and journalists who have written about the extension, that it does “more than provide a bypass of residential areas to the west”; it also gives Lakeside “the edge it needs to attract retailers to its first phase” (Vance 2014). Edge, or the sharp demarcation of bounded urban spaces and the lines between them, is crucial to privatized urbanity. As “cities within cities” come to characterize planning and governance, as the
wealthy insulate themselves from the poor and leave those in the interstices outside the nodes of investment to the disorder that follows from planned public abandonment (disorder that neoliberal moralism attributes to deficient character and “cultures of poverty”), the provision of insulated corridors between the glass fortresses become crucial to the maintenance of the municipal brand.

Approximately 5,300 miles from Chicago, Rio de Janeiro provides an even more visually obvious model of the insulated node-to-node corridor. The Rio citiescape has witnessed a massive surge in public and private investment, the capital-multiplying goals of which are frequently indistinguishable as both typically share a marked disinterest in the poor (Zibechi 2013). Seeking to burnish its global brand, the city has been erecting walls along its major highways that function to block the adjacent favelas from view and to minimize the mobility of the troublesome populations therein (Gaffney 2010). These literal and symbolic barriers reflect an urban ideal in which the poor are not only unheard, but their existence is also unseen. Rio city officials protest this negative characterization of their plans and suggest that the walls are meant to augment quality of life in the favelas by blocking highway noise. To illustrate their commitment to community, they point to the invitation that the city has extended to favela residents to contribute—at sanctioned times—to the painting of murals on the highway-facing side of the walls (Gaffney). It is, in other words, an invitation for the poor to beautify their own incarceration and severance from the city. In Chicago, parallel efforts are made to obscure the targeted nature of the public investment in extending Lake Shore Drive. As the project manager for the Illinois Department of Transportation told a reporter, “We are taking traffic out of the neighborhood, making it a safer and more efficient travel area for the motoring public” (Rossi 2013). Bypassing systematically marginalized neighborhoods desperate for traffic of people and commerce thus becomes about protecting their safety.

In comparison to the highways of Rio, the extension of Chicago’s Lake Shore Drive as a corridor to bypass Lakeside’s impoverished black neighbors may seem subtle and benign, but it reflects a parallel perceived need in the global city to construct clean lines of connection unadulterated by capital-dampening visibility and spatial engagement with the poor. Were Lake Shore Drive not flanked by parks and Lake Michigan on its southern segments, perhaps Lakeside’s artery to the city would require Rio’s walls.

The municipal preoccupations embedded in such nodal investments and the linkage of nodes through insulated corridors reflects the effects of interurban competition of which David Harvey wrote in 1989, “the revival of interurban competition over the last two decades suggests that urban governance has moved more rather than less into line with the naked requirements of capital accumulation” (16). This competition has been driven by the rise of what Harvey has called an “entrepreneurial” approach to urban governance that has replaced “managerial” governance under late capitalism. Instead of focusing on local provision of services, facilities, and benefits to residents, urban governance has been transformed by globalization and resultant interurban competition into an entrepreneurial activity characterized by experimentation with progressively more creative, risky, and sacrificial mechanisms to accumulate capital for the private sector.

The jettisoning of public urban management in favor of competitive catering to corporate interests seems to have grown more dominant over the last two and a half decades, and this neoliberal ideology has again capitalized on crisis to tighten its grip since the recession that began in the United States in 2007. Confronting shrinking revenue and budgets and compressed further by demands for austerity, cities have turned to public-private partnerships in imagining and realizing the future. In Chicago, this has taken many forms, including the disastrous leasing of the city’s parking meters to a private company for 75 years (Stein 2008), the closure of 50 public schools in poor neighborhoods and reopening of some as privately-run charter schools (Ahmed-Ullah 2013; Lipman and Haines 2007), and the anti-redistributive allocation of “tax increment financing” funds (i.e. residents’ property taxes) to private companies to encourage their growth in the richest neighborhoods (Lester 2013).2 Harvey’s (2000) observations regarding the public-private partnership and its use to “feed the downtown monster” are being borne out in Chicago: “every new wave of public investment is needed to make the last wave pay off. The private-public partnership means that the public takes

Alex MacLean, UIC Imagebase. US Steel South Works site in 1996 after demolition.
the risks and the private takes the profits. The citizenry wait for benefits that never materialize” (141).

The public-private urban mega-developments that motivate this essay are yet further signs of this privatization of urban governance, but they provide some of the most stunning visual manifestations of its differential consequences for the rich and poor. The entrepreneurial governance behind such private-public partnerships has reconfigured the triangulation of the state, citizen, and corporation in urban space. As Peter Marcuse (1997) has articulated, “The role of the state in the contemporary process of spatial separation is also new; it reinforces and hardens the effect of market forces rather than, as has sometimes been the case under various pressures, trying to counter them” (229). These crystallized market forces have sharp edges for those at the periphery.

It is in this context that Marcuse claims that the nature of the ghetto in the post-Fordist U.S. city is no longer one of subordination and restriction, as in the classic modernist black U.S. ghetto, but is instead now the spatial concentration of the excluded and the cast-aways. Globalization, concentration of ownership, and privatization of the public sphere have created what Marcuse terms the “outcast ghetto.” The criminalization of poverty, omnipresent policing, and hyperincarceration of black men on the South Side of Chicago suggest that Marcuse’s dismissal of subordination and restriction as past is premature. But his concept of the outcast ghetto does point to an important shift. The political economy of the post-Fordist city is changing such that the residents of the ghetto are increasingly excluded from its future altogether rather than, as in the past, marginalized to facilitate exploitation by industrial capitalists.

When work disappears, as William Julius Wilson (1997) has shown, neighborhoods disappear with it. Low-level service jobs remain, but as the redevelopment of former industrial spaces suggests, labor in its conventional form is made obsolete by the global city. It is no surprise, then, that there is no space for the (formerly) working class in private planning for corporate future cities. Furthermore, the working class is not just obsolete and thus excluded from planning and resource allocation; rather, their very visibility is a threat to the image of the global city seeking to attract capital and its cohort of professionals. Entrepreneurial governance at once both sharpens inequality and must make it invisible so as not to compromise the city’s brand and the marketing of the utopic urban living of its residents.

This brings us to the present moment in a long history of racialized “urban renewal” (Hyra 2008) in Chicago in which hundreds of thousands if not millions of black Chicagoans have been displaced—first as part of efforts to address “urban blight” (Berry and Stafford 1968) and, more recently, to diffuse “concentrated poverty” (Metzger 2000) in favor of “mixed-use” development, otherwise known as gentrification. In deindustrialized Chicago, this is taking new and more complete forms. From a cynical but historically consistent perspective, it seems that the city has deployed policing, incarceration, school closures, systematic infrastructural neglect, and teams of bulldozers to expedite the evacuation of the working class from South Side ghettos. Perhaps urban planning will be the key step in dissolving the too-persistent past. A plan has already begun to be implemented, for example, to convert 13 square miles in and around Englewood, one of the South Side’s most economically depressed and depopulated black neighborhoods, into the largest urban farm in the country (Huffington Post 2012). There are 11,000 vacant lots (Moore 2012)—many products of homes demolished in the name of urban order—in this proposed black-belt-cum-green-belt in which the population has shrunk to less than one-third of 1960’s nearly 100,000 residents (U.S. Census). It seems that a strategy of “planned abandonment” (Metzger 2000) is at long last bearing fruit—the successful conversion of spaces once filled with poor black people to green spaces housing local produce for the gentrified West Loop and the North Side’s Michelin-starred restaurants.

But I have veered some miles away from the Lakeside development and have begun a foray into the surrounding South Side community that threatens to take us beyond the focus of this article. This momentary widening of the lens, however, lends context to the place of Lakeside in Chicago’s history and unfolding future. Bluntly put, Lakeside is the articulation, yet again, of a vision in which the existing working class of Chicago’s South Side has little part.

**REDEFINING COMMUNITY IN PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP**

“Community” as word and image features prominently in the Lakeside planners’ rhetoric (Besserud et al. 2013) and the development’s promotional website. The videos on the development website depict a beautiful, resort-like urban existence maintained by happy white families. Set in the future of the South Shore, a neighborhood today where over 95 percent of the residents are black and nearly all others are Latino, one is challenged to find a single non-white figure in the technologically sophisticated video renderings of Lakeside that feature hundreds if not thousands of future residents. In one still image, however, an isolated black man stands out in the upper right corner of the scene. He appears strangely out of place—socially
disconnected from the scene, with no one alongside him and no one acknowledging his presence. He is set apart not just by virtue of the darkness of his skin, but also by his distinctly formal clothing (as if his acceptance in this idealized community requires an unmistakably professional image), his robust physique that contrasts with uniformly slim white figures, and his boisterously upraised arms and shouting mouth suggestive of disturbance in an otherwise homogenously serene urban scene.

One suspects that the general omission of black figures from these complex visual productions is more reflective of the intended actual future of Lakeside than its developers or political backers would concede. Nonetheless, the project is marketed, and endorsed by politicians and a considerable number of South Shore residents, as an “investment in the neighborhood.” Something “sorely needed” by the “community,” according to the local politician who represents the ward (Smith 2010). Dan McCaffery, the head of the developing firm that specializes in gentrifying Chicago’s “underperforming urban real estate,” even alludes to the elusive creation of jobs: “When you think about the scale, and the fact that it’s been 25 years since that community was basically abandoned, with respect to a job-maker this thing [Lakeside] has got enormous potential consequences” (Lydersen 2013). But whose jobs will these be? As Mayor Richard Daley said during his first mayoral campaign in 1989: “This city is changing. You’re not going to bring factories back […]. I think you have to look at the financial markets—banking, service industry, the development of O’Hare field, tourism, trade. This is going to be an international city” (Lipman 2002, 387). Mayor Daley realized this vision over the next two decades of his tenure in which the fading of the South Side ghettos only accelerated (U.S. Census). Daley has supported Lakeside from its inception and stood next to McCaffery at its spectacular groundbreaking celebration, but he knows as well as McCaffery that aside from a limited number of low-paying service positions, the jobs that Lakeside brings will overwhelmingly not be jobs for the working class residents of the South Shore community.

Here we see what Tsing (2005) calls “friction” in the uses of “community”—a central obfuscating theme of the urban planning movement’s New Urbanism, which derives much of its “rhetorical and political power through a nostalgic appeal to ‘community’ as a panacea for our social and economic as well as our urban ills” (Harvey 1997, 2). What does community mean in this context and who is it for? If it is for the existing South Shore residents, then what kind of community does Lakeside portend when they will be priced out of its condominium homes and its “upscale” retail establishments — and perhaps kept out altogether by policing and security? What community can exist for them when the existing social, political, economic, and infrastructural realities that have depopulated and scarred the South Side of Chicago persist untouche—or are worsened—by this new “city within a city?”

One of the key selling points of New Urbanism and of Lakeside is the suggestion that a reconfigured spatial order will give rise to a new economic and social order, that it will rebuild and strengthen community (Harvey 1997). But the deflating reality is that this private megadevelopment, like Eko Atlantic or Tatu City or Cité du Fleuve, is a distracting spectacle amidst poverty written over by still-unaddressed problems. Although “community” is marketed as panacea for these problems (often as a rhetorical means of non-engagement), it is perhaps more accurate to say that it is offered as chimera—an always-hoped-for ideal that is never actually realized. Furthermore, the blame for the elusive-ness of community in the ghetto is perpetually dropped at the feet of those least responsible—its systematically disempowered occupants.

The South Shore has so long been ignored by all public investment other than policing that its residents are eager for nearly any development. But many recognize the irony of their position. “If it’s nice, shiny, and new, I don’t see why they’d include us,” said a man who grew up across from the Lakeside parcel and still lives there. “They’ve never included us in any particular way before, so, you don’t have enough people with the education to have the jobs to afford to buy the houses out there.” Or, as the young son of his neighbor captured it when speaking to a journalist, “The people that are richer are going to advance more than the ones that are in the middle” (Lydersen 2013). And many residents of the South Shore, where nearly one in three people live below the federal poverty line and more than half make
due with less than two times the federal poverty level, can only dream of being in the middle (U.S. Census). Another resident questions the logic of the development altogether: “Are we going to cater to rich people who don’t even live here? Or are we going to cater to poor people and moderate income people who already live here and are trying to cope? Does it make sense to build a lot of new houses when you have vacant buildings everywhere?” (Lydersen 2013).

It seems that the circumscribed space in which Lakeside is to materialize over the coming years will be revitalized and transformed, but it is only the already wealthy who will move in from elsewhere who will benefit, not its surrounding impoverished community. Lakeside, like the New Urbanism as understood by David Harvey (1997), builds “an image of community and a rhetoric of place-based civic pride and consciousness for those who do not need it, while abandoning those that do to their “underclass” fate (3).

**SPECTACLES OF COMMUNITY INVESTMENT**

If you take a walk through the Lakeside parcel from the south, set against open acres of unkempt grass you will see a donut-shaped web of metal rods supporting inclined sheets of Marine-grade plywood sealed on their topside with a shiny laminate. If it’s a dry day and still light out, you might observe spandex-clad track cyclists riding in 166-meter circles at around 45 miles per hour. Many of their bicycles were purchased for prices equal to roughly a quarter of the typical household annual income of the residents living just west of this wooden velodrome. Most if not all of these cyclists have come from the North Side or the wealthy Chicagoland suburbs. There are few track cyclists among the locals (Lydersen 2013).

This is the Chicago Velo Campus—a partnership with McCaffery Interests, intended to promote the Lakeside development and generate interest among potential investors and future residents (McCaffery Interests 2013). It’s an unusual promotional venture, but so was the 2011 bussing of 100,000 middle-class concert goers (Wallaey 2013, 149), the vast majority of whom had never set foot in the South Shore, to the Lakeside parcel for a music festival featuring the Dave Matthews Band—a bluegrass-inspired band with an overwhelmingly white fanbase (Hackney 2012). Rubble was hastily cleared from the site for the event—a spectacle framed by local media as a welcome rejuvenation of the South Side rather than a momentary safari on the part of whiter, wealthier Chicagoans. Busses picked up concertgoers downtown and dropped them off on the site’s open grasses. The stage was set up on the eastern-most edge of the site next to Lake Michigan and as far away as possible from the neighboring South Shore community, and from this promontory, the visitors could look north across the lake at the glimmering downtown cityscape.

The busses left as they had come. Spectacle had been created and sold, but nothing had changed for the South Shore community. To what degree this will foreshadow the effect of Lakeside on the South Side is, of course, not yet fully known, but it hints at a scaled-up neoliberal redux of familiar gentrification processes that Chicago has engineered time and time again to expand its downtown core south and west in the name of global city status and economic growth.

New “cities within cities” like Lakeside, and the urban futures they suggest, will challenge Bourdieu’s (1984) assertion that “each lifestyle can only really be constructed in relation to the other, which is its objective and subjective negation” (193). We are creating a new kind of exclusive enclave not by conventional gentrification in which gradual removal of poor residents creates increasingly exclusive spaces, but rather by the creation from scratch of a homogenous, utopian urban experience. We are planning cities in which there are no outsiders, no signs of the unincorporated. In our publicly privatized urban futures, the obsolete classes are kept outside. Joint membership of society, economy, and humanity is erased. Total spatial and existential polarization is the goal. We are creating insulated urbanities where there are no poor, no marginalized, no pasts. We are planning for worlds where there are no others. But like “community,” this is an ideal infinitely deferred.

“We are planning for worlds where there are no others.”

**FUTURELOGUE**

Fortress cities like Lakeside and Eko Atlantic represent the most advanced form of neoliberal urban governance and the most spectacular culmination of the public-private partnership to date. The global spread and increasing privatization of the private-public partnership suggests a future in which the public, and thus any hope of space for the underemployed and economically obsolete poor, may be erased altogether from the partnership. There are many eager harbingers of this future. Economist-cum-development-activist Paul Romer has proposed the establishment of “charter cities” in the Global South whose governance is managed by foreign states with better records of producing economic growth and controlling corruption (Mallaby 2010). Economists Ray Fisman and Eric Werker (2007)
have even advocated for allowing corporations to hold public office, arguing that they would be more effective governors and facilitators of economic growth than private citizens. Perhaps what we are seeing in sites like Lakeside and Eko Atlantic is the unarticulated blend of these adjacent neo-conservative ideologies of charter cities and unfettered corporate governance; perhaps what we are witnessing is the birth of the thinly veiled corporate charter city.

Utopian imaginaries, their aspirations to envision and realize a future that diverges from our dystopic dissatisfactions with the present, are inextricably intertwined with urban futurism and its planning. We are, in Deleuzian terms, seeking for difference amidst a perceived sea of disappointing repetition. But as the state has been slowly disemboweled in many places, metamorphosed into mega-corporation in others, and everywhere fundamentally transformed by neoliberal policy that has reduced it to looping economic crises and the political manufacturing of austerity, the doors have been swung wide to public-private partnerships through which the private sector is manufacturing our dreams for us. And dreams seem in demand now more than ever, both in the cities of the Global South that are increasingly economically relevant centers for global finance and are seeking to display and multiply their newfound global status, and in the post-industrial cities in the Global North that are desperate to retain glossy images amidst threatening urban decay.

“Make no little plans,” the iconic Chicago city planner Daniel Burnham famously preached. It is the big idea that captures, the spectacle that sells. The volume of Burnham’s dictum as it echoes between the skyscrapers of global cities is deafening, amplifying his guiding ideals of “order” and “beauty” above all others in urban governance. The values of the global city are being etched into the earth, poured into streets and cohering into walls that sever the poor from the official city future. The cities of the South, with cityscapes shaped by enduring histories as incubators for neoliberal experiment, are now supplying models for emergent global urban forms predicated on the primacy of corporate capital. Corporations excel in the production of utopian urban dreams, and they care little about those left out by their intentionally exclusive design. The dream market for future cities is burgeoning, heralding urban nightmares for most.

ENDNOTES
I am gratefully indebted to Jean and John Comaroff, Laurence Ralph, Guy de Lijster, Stephanie Bosch Santana, and Achille Mbembe for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.
1 Note that these citations are not intended to mark the first use of each term (although in some cases they do); they are given here simply as examples of their use. For a literature review of the anthropology of cities and many of these terms, see Low (1996).
2 TIF funds can only be awarded back to the neighborhoods from which the taxes were collected, effectively fostering the spatially bounded reproduction of wealth by supporting already wealthy areas and preventing redistribution to poorer areas. See Lester. Poor communities can also be designated as TIF districts, and although the relatively small tax revenue generated by this may have potential to stimulate some growth of private businesses in these areas, TIF designation can become a means of facilitating gentrification. Once taxes are raised as part of TIF district creation, poorer residents may no longer be able to afford to live in these areas. See Ralph (forthcoming), Patillo (2007), and Seligman (2005).
3 Unfortunately, Chicago Lakeside refused to grant the author permission to publish the digital images produced for the marketing of the development. Images and videos are available, however, on the development website: chicagolakesidedevelopment.com.
4 Fraser and Kick’s (2007) recent study of mixed-income housing developments in US cities meant to promote neighborhood revitalization and poverty amelioration showed that while place-based outcomes benefited investors, government, and non-profit groups, existing community residents are relatively underserved by mixed-income initiatives.

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FOOTNOTES ON THE OFF SHORE CITY

Achille Mbembe
WISER

Achille Mbembe conceptualises the “off-shore” as a means of reading the spatial disconnect between local communities and enclaves of global finance capitalism proliferating across African cityscapes.

At the start of the 21st century, we witness a renewed interest in the idea of the African future. Gradually, older senses of time and space based on linear notions of development and progress are being replaced by newer senses of time founded on liquidity and flows. Africa’s future is increasingly thought of as open, full of possibility and potentiality, even as pliant. This new cultural and political sense of time is constructed in a number of registers, from the economic to the fictional. It acknowledges that things are complex. And yet, in its emphasis on un-actualized possibilities and would-be worlds, it also relies on open narrative models. Critical in this regard is the study of emergent orders, forms of self-organization, small ruptures, “tipping points” that may lead to deep alterations of the direction the Continent takes.

One such direction points to the urban. Indeed, a major fact of the last decade has been the emergence of a new physical, spatial urban African landscape. This new urban landscape has three features:

1. It is typical of a new global era of vast infrastructural projects. In almost every part of the globe, wires, pipes, devices and cranes, stadia, palaces, casinos, shopping malls, skyscrapers, highways, tunnels, vast housing and apartment complexes signal a new era of construction.

2. Whether in Johannesburg, Abidjan, Kinshasa, Lagos, Luanda or Nairobi, gated residential enclaves are springing up. Most are serviced by their own infrastructures. The African urban can no longer simply be characterized as a mini-planet of slums.

3. In all these metropolises, a profound remaking of private property regimes is under way.

Once again, these developments are not unique to Africa. From Beijing and Sao Paulo to Jakkarta, Mumbai and Kuala Lumpur, mega-development is reinventing the contemporary Southern global city. In Asia especially, a similar process has been unfolding. Large, self-contained and multifunctional complexes have been growing along mass transit highways and railways lines. In Africa, urban infrastructure and densities are being stretched to the limit.

It is worth noting that contemporary Asian urbanism is a result of financialization. For purposes of accumulation and profit, finance capital is being fixed in highly stylized enclaves. Most of these enclaves feature glass architecture. Glass material is merged with technological innovations. The result is new mediated cityscapes.

These new articulations of finance capital and glass architecture are hardly surprising. After all, in the global casino we live in, fictitious and hyper-real forms of capital are increasingly the norm. For their circulation, they largely depend on flows. These flows are enabled, in no small part, by the coupling of glass and light in fiber-optic technology.

The African case is slightly more complex. The imagined futures of the African continent are powerfully influenced by global discourses on emerging markets, and, in particular, the idea that the Continent is the last frontier of capitalism. If contemporary Asian urbanism is a function of financialization, African urbanism is the result of extraction. But the logic of financialization and the logic of extraction are not antithetical. How they seep into each other has unfortunately not yet been properly uncovered. Whatever the case, global finance (both in its raw, extractive and specular form) is keen to invest in an African land and property market that is believed to be on the verge of a boom. Africa, after all, is thought to be on the verge of a new macro-economic time.

Here, capital has always historically operated as a boundary-making project. Such was especially the case during the nineteenth-century. Its fantasy has always been that of disentanglement. Ironically, after having been experimented in the Continent over the last few centuries, this same modus operandi is longer restricted to it. It has become typical of the way capital works globally in these early years of the 21st-century. Typical of the global era of disentanglement is the fantasy of the offshore — the offshore economy, but also its double, the offshore city.
Evoking the offshore, we usually think of an oil rig, a ship-like, floating structure. The oil rig is a quintessential symbol of an extractive economy. And yet, what is taken from the subsea is usually inserted into a production chain that goes from the subsea to futures markets. We also think of the offshore in terms of financial setups – those spaces where profit can evade or be hidden without too much friction or contestation. Contemporary global capital is haunted by the fantasy of the offshore in two ways: [1] in the sense that profit must be able to move easily from place to place; [2] in the sense that in moving constantly and easily from place to place, profit must be able to free itself from the entanglements required in each place. It must stay as far as possible from communities who might make claims on it.

“The 'offshore' is therefore an evocative metaphor of placelessness.”

The “offshore” is therefore an evocative metaphor of placelessness. It is a geographic location for sure. But more importantly, it is a set of socio-material practices that bring into being, or connect spaces where the production of profit can evade or minimize contestation. The off-shore city is therefore a boundary-making city. It is not simply a city with its own infrastructures, its own labor regimes, its own forms of expertise, its own rules, its own technologies - a city that requires massive logistical and infrastructural investment. It is a city that aims at distancing itself from local conditions. More importantly, it is the architectural manifestation of an economy in which profit is disentangled from the place in which extraction happens. Off-shore cities are created in such a way as to not seep into the crevices of their environment. They are meant to operate on the basis of internal self-containment.

They are typical of an age when capital and associated transnational companies aim to remove themselves from local social, legal, political and environmental entanglements. Their architecture is modular. Their prefabricated materials are not only disposable; they can also be reused elsewhere according to the principle of replicability, modularity and impermanence. A central project in capital’s work toward disentanglement, modularity in particular not only implies the use of mobile, compliant, and self-contained infrastructures. As a design, modularity enables one kind of work, setup or arrangement in one place to function just like another kind in another place.

Just like capital itself, the offshore city will always be haunted by the very entanglements it claims to sever. It will always operate in the shadows of the threat of overflow from the onshore. Under these conditions, what we need to keep tracking is the kind of work required to disentangle these new cities from the thick webs of politics, environments and socialities in which they are so intimately implicated.