

Routledge Studies in Anthropology

AFRICA AND URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY

**THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL
CONTRIBUTIONS FROM CONTEMPORARY
FIELDWORK**

Edited by
Deborah Pellow and Suzanne Scheld



Africa and Urban Anthropology

This volume offers valuable anthropological insight into urban Africa, covering a range of cities across a continent that has become one of the fastest urbanizing geographic areas of the globe.

Consideration is given to the structures, social formations, and rhythms that constitute the definition of an African city, town, or urban space, and to current concepts for thinking about African cities in the twenty-first century. The contributors examine topics including notions of belonging, the effects of globalization, colonialism, and transnationalism on African urban life, the cultural dimensions of infrastructure and public resources, mobility, labor issues, spatial organization, language, and popular culture trends, among other themes.

The book reflects on how the ethnography of urban Africa fits within anthropology and urban studies, and on new theoretical concepts and methodologies that can be created through anthropological fieldwork in African cities. It will be of particular interest to scholars and students from anthropology, African studies, and urban studies, as well as sociology and geography.

Deborah Pellow is a Professor Emerita in the Anthropology Department in the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, New York, USA.

Suzanne Scheld is a Professor in the Anthropology Department at California State University, Northridge, USA.

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Contributors

Augustine Agwuele is a Professor in the Anthropology Department at Texas State University, San Marcos, TX USA.

Rose Marie Beck is a Professor in the Institute of African Studies at Leipzig University, Leipzig, DE.

William Bissell is a Professor in the Anthropology and Sociology Department at Lafayette College, Easton, PA USA.

Rudolf P. Gaudio is a Professor in the Anthropology Department at Purchase College, State University of New York, Purchase, NY USA.

Ulf Hannerz is a Professor Emeritus of the Social Anthropology Department at Stockholm University, Stockholm, SE.

Jennifer Hart is an Associate Professor in the History Department at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI USA.

Saida Hodžić is an Associate Professor in the Anthropology Department at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY USA.

Danny Hoffman is Bartley-Dobb Professor for the Study and Prevention of Violence in the Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, WA USA.

Jok Madut Jok is a Professor in the Anthropology Department in the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY USA.

Dolores Koenig is a Professor Emerita of the Anthropology Department at American University, Washington, DC USA.

Anne S. Lewinson is an Associate Professor in the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Berry College, Mount Berry, GA USA.

Jemal Yusuf Mahamed is a Lecturer in the Geography Department at Jigjiga University, Jigjiga, ETH.

Adeline Masquelier is a Professor in the Anthropology Department at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA USA.

Fiona McLaughlin is a Professor in the Linguistics Department at the University of Florida, Gainesville, FL USA.

Kader Mohamoud is a Lecturer in the Geography Department at Jijiga University, Jijiga, ETH.

Mary H. Moran is a Professor in the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Colgate University, Hamilton, NY USA.

Garth Myers is the Paul E. Raether Distinguished Professor of Urban International Studies Trinity College, Hartford, CT USA.

Matthew Nesvet is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Miami Dade College, Miami, FL USA.

Deborah Pellow is a Professor Emerita in the Anthropology Department in the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY USA.

Suzanne Scheld is a Professor in the Anthropology Department at California State University, Northridge, CA USA.

AbdouMaliq Simone is Senior Professorial Fellow at the Urban Institute, University of Sheffield, Western Bank, Sheffield UK.

Angela D. Storey is an Associate Professor in the Anthropology Department at the University of Louisville, Louisville, KY USA.

William John Suk is an independent scholar of Anthropology in Kingston, Ontario, CA.

Daniel K. Thompson is an Assistant Professor in the Anthropology Department at the University of California, Merced, CA USA.

Rijk van Dijk is a Professor of Religion in Contemporary Africa and its Diaspora, University of Leiden, Leiden, NL.

Katja Werthmann is a Professor at the Institute of African Studies at Leipzig University, Leipzig, DE.

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Like most intellectual pursuits, this book has gone through numerous iterations, as we the editors and our contributors have gone through the vicissitudes of life. As we think back over the time we have spent in consultation with one another, with our authors, with our publisher, it is with joy that we welcome the completion of this volume.

Suzanne and Deborah are members of different academic generations – we first met when Deborah was a faculty member in anthropology at Syracuse University and Suzanne was a graduate student in anthropology at CUNY Graduate Center. We've seen one another over the years at anthropology and African Studies meetings, and we have served together on the CUAA (Critical Urban Anthropology Association) Board. It was our basic interest in urban Africa that brought us to this project. There are many books on urban anthropology and many on African anthropology. Up till now, no one has put together a compilation on urban African anthropology. There are scattered writings on the topics but nothing comprehensive. Over the years, anthropologists have written on African urban subjects, such as the market, voluntary association groups, the tensions of ethnicity. Given shifts in anthropology, urban studies and African Studies, we felt that an edited book that reflected these changes and anticipated new avenues of research is warranted.

We are ever thankful to our authors for their patience and fortitude in the completion of this volume. They beautifully captured the new methodologies and foci in their chapters. As is so common, other African urban anthropologists wanted to contribute, but unfortunately the timing did not work for them.

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Part I

Introduction



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1 Africa and Urban Anthropology

Theoretical and Methodological Contributions from Contemporary Fieldwork

Deborah Pellow and Suzanne Scheld

By 2030, 80% of the entire world's population will live in cities. This trend has reinforced the participation of anthropologists in the analysis of urban growth and change, defining distinctive features, appearances, qualities, and problems, as well as the emergence of unique and shared forms of urbanisms around the world. There is also a long tradition of anthropologists working in sub-Saharan Africa, for decades largely in rural townships and villages. And there are those who have combined the two, focusing their energies on African cities, observing the impact of the West, differences from the countryside, the new roles and relationships engaged in, the qualitative difference from so-called traditional society. Over the last 50 years, urbanization has become one of the most remarkable features of the African continent. Based on demographic studies, approximately 27 million people lived in urban centers in Africa in the 1950s, a time of increasing urbanization on the continent. Today, approximately 567 million people live in African cities (Kanos and Heitzig 2020; OCED/SWAC 2020). This growth is staggering and necessitates the reclassification of the urban, as new cities emerge in the interior and density has increased in existing cities. Despite these changes, and a tradition of anthropological research in and of the urban agglomeration in sub-Saharan Africa, there has been no volume published that focuses on urban African anthropology.

We hatched the idea for this book at a conference, as we were conversing about our respective urban West African research. I, Deborah, was trained in the 1970s in British social anthropology, at a time when urban anthropology was broadening and focused on issues related to adaptive strategies, social stratification, social identity, and poverty. I went on to observe urban community processes in Ghana, especially in Accra, the capital located in the south, and subsequently Tamale and its environs, the gateway to northern Ghana. I, Suzanne, was trained in the 1990s with an accent placed on neo-Marxist perspectives of the urban. In anthropology, eclecticism was beginning to replace identifications with theoretical traditions, and urban anthropology was taking a turn toward spatial concerns. I went

on to observe urban processes in Dakar and their extensions within urban spaces of the Diaspora. Our different relationships to our discipline and the sub-field of urban anthropology, and our observations of urban centers in different parts of Africa – each with distinct political, economic, and historical contexts, and at distinct points in the arc of urbanization on the continent – sparked many engaging discussions and the need for a text to highlight anthropology’s contributions to illuminating the urban of Africa.

The Urban

Everyone assumes everyone knows what a “city” is, that we are all on the same page when discussing “the urban”. But what is it? Can one generalize to all cities? How are African cities defined? Approaches and definitions vary, even from country to country. Researchers within the United Nations consider the city in terms of population size. Their commonly used term is “urban agglomeration”, which has its own complex history and diverse meanings (Fang and Yu 2017), but they use it to refer to

the population contained within the contours of a contiguous territory inhabited at urban density levels without regard to administrative boundaries. It usually incorporates the population in a city or town plus that in the suburban areas lying outside of, but being adjacent to, the city boundaries.

(United Nations 2017 [1998]: 188)

Population thresholds also vary for what makes a locale a “city”. The most frequently adopted threshold is the numerical range of 2,000 and 5,000 inhabitants. Despite the obvious growth of cities in Africa, there is no common definition (for a list of definitions of the urban by African country, see Moriconi-Ebrard, Heinrigs and Tremolieres 2020: 20).

Early urban theorists set the stage for the urban to be defined in terms of population thresholds. The classic definition was coined by Louis Wirth, a prominent member of the Chicago School: the city is relatively large, dense, and a permanent settlement of heterogeneous individuals (1938). Would this apply to Timbuctoo, considered a city when Horace Miner (1953) studied it in 1940, and it had a population of 6,000? Cities appeared about 10,000 years ago. According to Aidan Southall (1998: 4), “The first cities had only a few thousand inhabitants, but were, none the less, the largest population concentrations of their time, just as are the metropolitan conurbations of today, with their fifteen to twenty million populations...”.

Robert Park, a founding member of the Chicago School and a colleague of Wirth’s, expanded the definition of the urban to include a notion of space or “environment”. He writes that the city is not merely a congeries of persons and social arrangements but also an institution with institutional character. As a place and a moral order, it is constituted by a division of

labor, the fragmentation of social roles and a cluster of separate worlds. Its size and character allows for a range of behavior, freeing its denizens from old cultural restrictions (1915). Georg Simmel (2010 [1903]), another early sociologist, emphasizes the social, rejecting the definition of the city as a spatial entity with social consequences, in favor of a social entity that is formed spatially; it is constituted by complex networks of social interaction. The hallmark of modern metropolitan life is the massive (over)stimulation of the senses stemming from the environment in general.

Some definitions strive to capture the diverse streams of stimuli in the definition of the urban. This can lead to lengthy definitions. Miles Malcolm, Ian Borden, and Tim Hall (2000), for example, attempt an all-encompassing definition of the urban:

A city is a place, a bounded entity marked by a particular core and density. It is located at a given geographic position, spreading outward until it ends at the outermost suburb. And yet a city is more than this....A city is a set of objects. In it we find significant spaces that constitute urban life... Yet different cities offer different constellations, different arrangements... A city is, then, a set of practices. IT is the place where things happen and people act....The city is invisible. It is the place of exchanges and flows....A city is a set of beliefs....The city is urban professions....The city is a place of the spectacular.... (1).

Even those who identify the city as a bounded entity observe that it is far more than this. Marc Augé (1995) theorized the urban as comprised of anthropological places and “non-places” or “elsewheres”, sites that don’t appear to have histories or identities (e.g., airport and bus terminals, alleyways, shopping malls, and other spaces of consumption and transient movement). This idea builds on the notion of “invisible cities”, a concept popularized by Italo Calvino’s novel (1974 [1972]) where what makes the city “materialize” is not the visible infrastructure, but the effervescence of social interactions, and one’s imagination which brings it all together and into view. In other words, cities are produced according to cultural values and lifeways. They are also represented as cultural products. This meshes with Max Weber’s (1958 [1921]) notion that the city is not one style of life but one set of social structures, that can produce a manner of styles, that it encourages social and individual innovation, it incorporates different forms of practice, cosmopolitanism, and thus is an instrument of change. This also resonates with David Harvey’s notion of the city (2008), insights that have been informed by other 19th-century observers of the urban such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: given that the city reflects cultural values and represents cultural products, inequalities are therefore embedded in the urban; the city is a site of many struggles for power and can be used as a means to control populations and resources. Harvey’s work has inspired many studies of the “neoliberal city” and

its systems which undermine the public realm (see Fairbanks and Lloyd 2011) and calls for urban planning and policy that promote diversity, equity, and the “just city” (Fainstein 2020).

At times, anthropologists have found it fruitful to explore “types” of cities rather than debate the nuances of specific definitions. For instance, Setha Low (1999: ix–x) analyzes a typology of contemporary cities including the “divided city”, “contested city”, “global city”, “modernist city”, and the “postmodernist city”. Andrew Irving (2004) notes another grouping: “the discursive city, the mythical city, the physical city, the poetic city, the underground city, the late-night city, the working city, the women’s city and the men’s city” (p. 1–2). When researchers have turned the lens toward urban Africa, they have identified types such as “indigenous”, “Islamic” “colonial”, “European”, “dual”, and “hybrid” cities (O’Conner 1983), and the “classic colonial city” (Freund 2007).

From what we have just outlined, regardless of its definition or categorizations the urban is complex. Added to the challenge of defining the urban are questions regarding the extent to which aspects of the urban are universal. In Urban Studies, there is a long history of assuming concepts of the urban derived from studies of cities in the global north are applicable to urban Africa. However, numerous concepts have been critiqued for their limited relevance including: “slums” and “squatter settlements” (Okpala 1987), the “informal and formal” economies (Hansen 2000; Lindell 2010), the role of production in economic growth (Hansen and Vaa 2004), the causes, features, and necessity of impact of “development” (Ferguson 1999), and the notion of cities as “world cities” (Mbembé and Nuttall 2004; Robinson 2005), among many other examples. What then is the urban in Africa? What is the future of the African city (Simone 2004)? And, what is the place of Africa in the study of cities in general?

The Urban in Africa

Researchers, urban planners and policy-makers discuss numerous challenges to studying and knowing urban Africa. There are challenges to obtaining reliable statistical data as it is often unavailable (Parnell and Pieterse 2015), and the pace of change is so fast that urban planning becomes rapidly outdated. Despite the challenges, there are several distinguishing patterns.

The urban in Africa is rooted in a deep past. Beginning in the 3rd or 4th century, a system of trade linked North Africa, the Mediterranean, and Europe. This was extended to the Saharan and trans-Saharan areas of savannah and forest around the 7th century, peaking between 1300 and 1600. It was due to commodities that were produced in each region. It has been said that during the medieval period, West African trade was more significant to North Africa than was that with Europe. Based upon the Saharan trade, centers for craftsmen and government emerged. They

expanded with the growth of trade and the production for trade, cohering as states. In West Africa, these states, made up of cities, began to appear in the 9th or 10th century. They peaked between the 13th and 16th centuries, their decline due to the arrival of Europeans far to the south on the coast.

The rich history of early urbanization in West Africa is often interpreted as “the” history of urbanization in Africa, a trend which may be due to the resilience of early African cultural forms such as customary law and land-ownership, as well as institutional support in West African universities for urban studies (see Coquery-Vidrovitch 2005 for a discussion of African research). However, similar patterns of early urbanization took place on the east coast of Africa. Early city-states stretching between modern-day Somalia and Mozambique engaged in a dynamic trade network that crossed the Indian Ocean and extended into Persia, India, and China. The growth and development of these city-states were influenced by the dominance of the Portuguese and Dutch, as well as Buganda (in modern-day Uganda).

Urbanization began later in Southern Africa. Whereas historic structures and architectural ruins signal an urban past on the east and west coasts of Africa, Southern Africa is marked by evidence of “agro-towns”, open spaces where settlements of between 10,000 and 20,000 individuals were formed (Freund 2007: 4–5). Some agro-towns persisted into the 19th century and coincided with European forces that were fueling the growth of Cape Town and Durban, and other coastal cities in the region (*ibid*).

Large-scale migration is another shared feature of urban Africa (Amin 1974; Bocquier 2004; Packer 2006), although some researchers caution from overestimating the extent to which it accounts for the current explosive growth of cities (Fox 2011). Studies of migration were undertaken as early as the 1940s as researchers of the Rhodes-Livingston Institute, a quasi-autonomous research center in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) explored the integration of rural migrants in emerging cities in the Copperbelt (Epstein 1958; Mitchell 1956) (see Werthmann in this volume). Others also examined migration in West Africa (see Banton 1957; Gugler and Flanagan 1967) and Southern Africa (Sapire and Beall 1995). African sociologists, geographers, and historians have also been contributing to this body of work for over 50 years (see Mabogunje 1968). Studies of migration have largely emphasized rural-to-urban flows; however, circular migration is common in Africa and accounts for the enduring ties between African cities and their rural hinterlands, another shared feature of urban Africa (see Förster and Ammann 2018; see Moran in this volume).

Studies have noted other shared features, including sprawling suburbs, the spread of informality, disproportionately large primate cities, conflicts over land ownership, and youth as a particularly large demographic (Edgar Pieterse and Susan Parnell [2014] as cited in Förster and Ammann 2018). A wide income gap between urban elites and the majority of others, and extensive and persisting poverty also mark African cities. For example, Packer (2006) observes that in Lagos, a home to millionaires in the early

2000s, “only 0.4 percent of the inhabitants have a toilet connected to a sewer system”.

The question remains whether the African city can be the “silver bullet” to resolve economic issues. Some discuss African cities in pessimistic terms and as failures for not becoming the generators of economic growth (Kessides 2005; Lall 2020). Others argue African cities have been constrained by the legacy of colonialism and the vestiges of colonial political systems (Potts 2009). In either case, the urban is a site for reworking who has power and control over resources within the city and nation.

Increasingly, the cosmopolitan and interconnected aspects of African cities are highlighted in studies. African cities are places of experimentation for new roles, relationships, work, and the material environment. They are circuits for migration and commodity exchange. Their formal institutions are connected to other cities in the world through goods, money, processes, and modes of communication. They host the circulation of people, things, and ideas via individual travel and trade. New processes become available, often heralding the advent of cosmopolitan tastes and behavior, the acceptance of difference, the advent, and incorporation of change. We presume “cosmopolitanism” as African elites as well as youth influencers draw on the ideologies and symbolism of achieved knowledge and insight across national and international boundaries (Appiah 2006; Breckenridge et al. 2002). Both act to change their own trajectories, thus are producers, not simply recipients, of ideas and practices. Some observers have discussed cosmopolitanism in urban Africa as expressions of “parallel modernities” (Larkin 1997) and “multiple modernities” (Hodgson 2001; Pellow 2015), emphasizing the unique ways in which indigenous, colonial, and contemporary cultural forms are combined in order to articulate the human experience in a specific moment of time and place in the world.

Contemporary Perspectives on the Urban in Africa

Leeds (1979) has observed, “that which is urban is *always* a matter of degree” (230). Simmel pointed out so many years ago, too, the importance of social interactions in urban contexts (2010 [1903]). Cities are diverse in time and space but there is a thread of continuity. In considering the commonality of all cities, large or small, Southall (1998: 4) identifies them as the “greatest points of concentration and of increasing density in their time and space” – taking in people and their social relationships, built environment, production and consumption, information and communication, all correlated with the division of labor, role differentiation, and specialization. Urbanization, that process of city-making, refers to both the human as well as the material and technological aspects and their interrelation in the process. Given this, statistical approaches to studying the urban cannot capture the whole story. We assert on-the-ground ethnography, the hallmark methodology of anthropology, affords a perspective onto the urban

including the hustle, movement, rhythm, informal transactions, exchanges, rituals, symbols, sounds, smells, and affects, among other intangible dimensions. De Boeck and Plissart (2014) write about the invisible aspects of urban Africa such as beliefs and notions of spirituality that contextualize the appearance and events that take place in a city. How does one see this without being on the ground/under the ground? African novels so often have captured the intangible, experiential, embodied, and emotional aspects of the urban, and have been important pedagogical tools for conveying a sense of urban Africa. What matters, as we see it, is an inclusion of the social and cultural, the qualitative in portrayals of urban Africa. This approach in combination with others provides a sharper lens on African cities than a mere statistical account in an annual report.

The aim of this book, therefore, is to explore understandings of urban Africa from an ethnographic perspective. The volume includes 21 case studies conducted in 12 countries in diverse regions of the continent. The cities discussed in the book include Abuja, Accra, Dakar, Dar es Salaam, Johannesburg, Juba, Manantali, Niamey, and Zanzibar, as well as others. In addition to addressing diverse cities, this book examines different kinds and sizes of cities and diverse topics such as concepts of belonging, the effects of colonialism and transnationalism on African urban life, the cultural dimensions of infrastructure and public resources, labor issues, mobility, popular culture trends, spatial organization, urban art, and youth movement.

The authors who have contributed to the volume are equally diverse in terms of their affiliations with American and European academic institutions and in rank within the field of Anthropology. Both permit the volume to acknowledge varying theoretical and methodological traditions in Anthropology, affording the volume the opportunity to discuss new and innovative theory and methods as well as current theory and methods in historical perspectives. Our authors also have diverse relationships to their field research. Some authors are natives of Africa, others who are non-Africans have come of age in Africa and have established deep personal and professional ties within Africa. All are committed and passionate scholars on a mission to share their knowledge about Africa and to contribute to improving cities in Africa.

The second Part, *Knowing the City and Urban Imaginaries*, presents differing approaches to “the African city” through the anthropological lens. Ulf Hannerz opens with a retrospective on his own work in the Nigerian town of Kafanchan, to which he returned ten times. It was as he saw it an emergent time in urban anthropology, a time when most ethnographers preferred doing research in smaller villages. When he was doing his early field work, photography did not play much of a role in the final product. It is toward the frames of photography that Danny Hoffman addresses himself, as a methodology to use toward understanding contemporary African life, in his case Monrovia, Liberia. In asking what it is that urban

anthropologists know about African cities, Katja Werthmann questions the primacy of the Rhodes Livingstone Institute by presenting early contributions that have been unknown or disregarded. William Bissell expands on the mediated lens, urban ethnography of media in an East African context opens up new perspectives on African cities, showing how an urban ethnography of media in an East African context opens up new perspectives on African cities. The last chapter in this Part, by Anne Lewinson, explores how professional-class urbanites in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, engage imagination and aspirations as they aim to produce future young professionals.

Part III, *Urban Spaces*, takes the reader to five different regions in sub-Saharan Africa, providing five different perspectives on the spatialization of urban culture. Jok Madut Jok's chapter focuses on Juba, the capital of Africa's newest nation, the Republic of South Sudan. Jok chronicles the divergence between reality and residents' expectations of how the city and its services developed. Dolores Koenig takes us to the secondary, inland city of Manantali in Mali, site of a newly constructed dam that has spawned the cultural, economic, and political growth of the city. Jennifer Hart takes us back to the colonial period in the Gold Coast (Ghana), tracing the persistent efforts among members of the Accra Town Council to ban corn mills and distilleries in African neighborhoods. We see the process of informalization unfold a byproduct of ongoing spatial, regulatory, and economic politics. In South Africa, the suburb of Tshwane, South Africa's capital city, is home to some of the most securitized buildings, neighborhoods, and private estates in the world. William Suk takes us 20 km west to the decaying inner-city public housing development Schubart Park, which has become a welcoming shelter to the country's most marginalized and insecure populations. The last chapter in this Part is comparative: Daniel K. Thompson, Jemal Yusuf Mahamed, and Kader Mohamoud discuss methods and results from a study of scalar transformations in Jigjiga, a borderlands trade city in eastern Ethiopia. With a focus on trans-spatial linkages, they analyze how businesspeople strategize their livelihoods.

Part IV, *Urban Infrastructure and Mobility*, opens with Garth Myers' analysis of the complicated life of the transversal geographies across and between places that increasingly define existence everywhere. He focuses on Zanzibar to describe its cosmopolitan globality. In her chapter on Capetown, South Africa, Angela Storey writes about what she calls *fixed impermanence* or a *constant temporary*, how residents in an informal community cope within temporary spaces and infrastructures that have seemingly become permanent. Rose Marie Beck takes us back to Zanzibar, to Stone Town, doing experimental ethnography, as she uses the materiality of cables, pipes, street-lamps, and cctv cameras in the alleys to talk about the city. The last chapter in this Part, by Rudolf P. Gaudio, focuses upon motorcycle-taxis and informal ride-share taxis in Nigeria's capital city Abuja. He analyzes the class, gender, and ethno-racial dimensions of the embodied experience of moving, or trying to move, in this urban space.

In recent years, the anthropology of space and place has gained traction, and a significant element in this sub-field is belongingness. Part V in this volume deals with the Power of *Urban* Belongingness. Four anthropologists take us to cities in four different states: Liberia, Ghana, Botswana, and South Africa, two of them introducing the rural-urban axis. Mary Moran writes about the ties between urbanites and their rural roots during the two periods of the Liberian Civil War (1989–1997 and 1999–2003), when many people pursued strategies of moving back and forth between rural and urban spaces, which could only offer temporary shelter from the violence. Saida Hodžić's subject population of urban NGO workers and civil servants in northern Ghana derive their authority from being from the rural area but they “perform urbanity” in their development work among ailing women. Hodžić interrogates what happens when the premises of development projects demand that the urban workers disidentify from their commonality with their rural clients and portend to be more advanced. Rijk van Dijk debates the concept of African urban religious diversity and whether expectations regarding forms of social support by diverse groups remain uniform. In urban Botswana, he has found, churches have become engaged in a quest for social relevance to peoples' everyday circumstances. The last chapter in this Part by Matthew Nesvet explores how the study of borders and urban migrants' experiences in South Africa can illuminate the porousness of urban property boundaries and how immigrant rights are linked to migrant land access in the post-apartheid city.

Part V focuses on the ways in which language in the African city has become representational in the city – signs, graffiti, announcements. The three chapters are based in West Africa – Senegal, Niger, and Nigeria. Fiona McLaughlin explores the written environment in Dakar, namely, the ways in which that city's surfaces reflect the literacy environment and constitute a reading and writing public – the walls, signs, billboards, in which multiple scripts and languages compete for attention. She argues that the linguistic plurality of Dakar's written environment reflects an active and useful strategy for participating in public life. Adeline Masquelier's chapter focuses upon the phenomenon of unemployed, unmarried men in Niamey who hang out in informal discussion groups or tea-circles that take over the streets at night. Known as *fada*, each is a locus of self-narration, analyzed through an exploration of the names, signs, and symbols young men inscribe on the walls against which they sit. Augustine Agwuele is the last author in this Part, taking us south to the Yoruba cities of Ibadan and Lagos in south west Nigeria. He focuses on *ohun* (voice) as a creative linguistic and behavioral response in spaces of urban contact such as motor parks. It provides a quick retort, a socio-political commentary, a satirical pose, providing the user with socio-linguistic capital.

The final Part consists of a chapter by AbdouMaliq Simone, as he contemplates assessments of urbanization, of boundedness, of what is urban and what is rural, the enclosing of places to benefit certain populations, the

makeshift resources of marginalized inhabitants who have overcome lax governments and produced new constellations of activity and resource creation. Musing about possibilities and deficiencies, in the penultimate paragraph he observes that “it is not easy to disentangle availability as precarity and subjugation and availability as generative resource and capacity”.

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Part II

Knowing the City and Urban Imaginaries



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2 Kafanchan

A Nigerian Town and Its Global Horizons

Ulf Hannerz

In the early 1960s, as one British prime minister put it, a “wind of change” was blowing across the African continent, as new countries became independent. I was following these developments closely in the newsmedia, and took a special interest in the largest of these countries, Nigeria. Beginning my undergraduate years at Stockholm University, I found anthropology to be the discipline that might provide me with a framework for such interests. And I took time out for a journey to learn about the country firsthand, in large part a long journey by rail.

So that is how I first came to Kafanchan, only passing through. The train I was on stood still at the railway station for an hour or so, as Nigerian trains tended to do. There were lots of people on the platform: travelers with all kinds of packages, people who were meeting them or taking leave, peddlers of all kinds. But the rail line seemed to be all that connected this place to the world. There was an impressive hill rising abruptly some distance away. As dusk began to fall, the train moved on. But in a way I have been on the same track ever since, and somehow the name of the town stuck in my mind.

Not much later I found the new novel *Blade among the Boys* (1962), by Onuora Nzekwu, a member of the first generation of Nigerian fiction writers (also including Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Wole Soyinka – I was reading them all). There was Kafanchan again. Nzekwu began his book with something like a mini-ethnography, portraying Kafanchan as it had been in its earlier decades. Nzekwu was born there himself, and one senses that he was a railway child. Local life revolved in his book around the activities and the rhythm of the railway.

I would not come back to Kafanchan for more than a decade, however: my continued academic efforts and Nigerian history for some time did not match. In the late 1960s Nigeria descended into political chaos, with military coups, ethnic massacres, and for a couple of years a civil war, as one part of the country attempted to secede to form an independent Biafra. So I got involved in a study of an African-American neighborhood in Washington, DC, instead (Hannerz 1969) (Figures 2.1 and 2.2).



Figure 2.1 Ulf Hannerz and Chief Ladipo, head of the Yoruba community in Kaffanchan. Credit: Ulf Hannerz.



Figure 2.2 Silver 40, sign painter. Credit: Ulf Hannerz.

In the early 1970s, however, I saw the chance to return to my interest in Nigeria. This was to be primarily a project in urban anthropology, itself an emergent research field at a time when most anthropologists still preferred villages, but a field to which my experience in Washington had turned me. Much existing urban anthropology, whatever there was of it, had involved studies of smaller entities within cities, such as my Washington neighborhood. The next challenge was to develop the anthropology of entire urban communities, and this is what I wanted to try next.

So where would I go? Now I remembered Nzekwu's novel, and thought that on my reconnaissance trip to find a suitable field site, I would have a look at Kafanchan first.

Quickly enough, I decided that it suited me well, and I liked it. For the next ten years, I returned there for a number of field work periods.¹ It was a good, mostly peaceful, rather prosperous period in Nigeria. The export income from the developing oil industry at least to a degree helped heal the wounds of the civil war. The currency, the naira, was playfully referred to as the "petronaira," and kept going up in value.

By the early 1980s, however, my field involvement with Kafanchan and Nigeria came to an end. The economy of the country was no longer doing so well, dissatisfaction with what had for some time been an elected civilian government grew, and a few weeks after my last field stay in Kafanchan, there was another military coup. Then followed a series of increasingly unpleasant military regimes. There seemed to be no public order worthy of trust that could offer some safety net for a foreign ethnographer's everyday activity.

What, then, did I do during my field periods in Kafanchan, what were my experiences and discoveries? And first of all, where more precisely is this town? It is almost at the geographical center of the country, in what used to be referred to as the "Middle Belt," in what is now Kaduna State. By road it is now some 180 kilometers (110 miles) from Nigeria's capital Abuja, slightly more than a three-hour drive if the roads are OK. But at the time when I was doing my field work, Abuja did not yet exist. I made a quick visit to see the site where it was planned to be built. By then there was only savanna, much like what surrounded Kafanchan.

Nigeria had other, much older cities. In the north of the country, the land of the Hausa people, there were large trading centers like Kano. In the southwest, closer to the South Atlantic coast, the Yoruba people had large towns based on agriculture, of one of the earliest types in world urbanism.² But then during colonialism other kinds of urban communities had developed as well – many of them small, more manageable for an urban ethnographer.

Kafanchan was one of these.

The town had grown, partly according to plan, partly in a spontaneous, rather wild form, around that railway junction almost at the geographical center of Nigeria. To begin with, the indigenous peoples of the area – Kaje,

Kagoro, Kaninkon, Jaba, and other smallish ethnic groups – would only come into town very occasionally. In his novel, Onuora Nzekwu allowed his young protagonist to notice that they hardly wore any clothing, and that the women often had only twigs of leaves between their legs. That young protagonist belonged (like Nzekwu himself) to Igbo people, migrants from the south. There were many of them, not least working on the railway. But people of varied ethnic groups had indeed come to Kafanchan from all over Nigeria. Most of them were Christians, divided into various competing congregations. Yet then there were also the Muslim Hausa from further north, who had established a precarious dominance in the area in a 19th-century *jihad*, and actually had their position strengthened a century later, in the colonial period.

After playing a major part in the military conquest of Hausaland, Frederick Lugard, eventually Lord Lugard, became the first governor of a united colonial Nigeria. Lugard had had a zigzag (but upward) career in the service of the Empire – through Uganda, Burma, and Hong Kong – so he developed a sense of colonial management which he could use in Nigeria. This was a huge territory, with an almost entirely indigenous population, and it required a low-cost form of imperialism. Consequently, Lugard adopted the principle of “indirect rule,” which could be inspired by India where maharajas and other old-style rulers had in large part been left to run many things in their established ways. In Nigeria it would mean identifying, and sometimes inventing, “native authorities,” and outsourcing local government to them under the supervision of what was often a quite sparsely distributed corps of district officers. In Kafanchan, this meant transferring the court of the Jemaa emirate to a site next to the new railway town, and placing the latter under its rule. Consequently, Kafanchan had many churches, and one central mosque. And the emir and the British district officer had to find a somewhat haphazard way of governing an internally highly diverse set of townspeople.

By the time I came there the town was not quite a half-century old. It was small enough so I could walk around it in a couple of hours, a place for literally pedestrian field work.

Nigerian population censuses have been notoriously unreliable, but it probably had some 15,000–20,000 inhabitants, and was growing. I tried to learn about many things, but my central concern was its overall structure, as shaped particularly by the relationship between ethnic diversity and the division of labor. At this point, activities connected to the railway junction were still central, but a great many kinds of other ways of making a living had assembled around that. There was a sizeable market place, many kinds of artisans, offices, and schools.

The branch office of one bank, and so forth. As for ethnicity, local diversity was obvious. (The term used was “tribes.”) But when my Kafanchan study began, this was also a very current topic of interest in anthropological thought more generally. An influential study by Abner Cohen (1969) was

indeed Nigerian-based: an ethnography of the Hausa community in Ibadan, migrants to the southwest of the country. Personally, I was influenced by my Norwegian friend and colleague, Fredrik Barth, whose important edited volume *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* had recently appeared (also 1969). Especially in African urban anthropology, I could also draw inspiration from the innovative ethnographic, conceptual, and theoretical work of the “Manchester School,” for example, by Clyde Mitchell and Arnold Epstein, not least in their development of network analysis as a way of coming to grips with internally diverse sets of social relationships.³ Yet it was clear that not all African cities and towns were like the mining centers of the Central African Copperbelt. Kafanchan was certainly of another kind.

I did as much participant observation as I could, in different settings in the town, and I did a lot of interviewing. There were only two long-term expatriate residents, an Irish priest at the Roman Catholic mission, and at the small hospital a Hungarian doctor in exile. (This was the time of the Cold War.) I saw little of either of them. I visited Isa Muhammadu, the emir of Jemaa, at his court a couple of times. Mostly I sought out petty traders in the local market place, and artisans of different kinds: carpenters, tailors, sign painters, barbers, photographers. Some of them I could interview daily for a week about their interactions, to get a sense of their personal networks. At times, I worked with locally recruited young field assistants, who did some standard interviewing while also offering their own insights into town life.

The Biafra War was not so many years back in the past, and while it was not a topic on which I concentrated attention, I could not help learning about its effects on Kafanchan. The conflict had started early in 1966, when young Igbo officers staged a military coup, and seized power in Nigeria. The reaction was strong in the Nigerian north, with its majority Hausa population. There were many Igbo migrants in their area, beginning to arrive there in the colonial period, often with more education from southern mission schools, doing office work but also establishing themselves as petty entrepreneurs, traders, and craftsmen. When their ethnic brothers were now in power nationally, the northerners feared Igbo domination. So there followed pogroms aimed at the many Igbo migrants in the northern cities and towns.

The Igbo community in Kafanchan had at first believed it was safe. After all, it was strong, numerically and in other ways. But then there were rumors that lorry-loads of men eager for a fight were on their way from further north, and the emir had declared that he could not guarantee the safety of the Igbo. So more or less all of them hurried away, in large part by train, leaving from what in a way had been their railway station. Far from all made it back to their homelands, as many of them were massacred on their way.

As the Igbo left, Kafanchan became for a time something like a ghost town. The houses they had abandoned were ravaged. Doors and zinc roofs

were carted away. When rainy seasons came and went, mud brick buildings fell apart. But by then locals, and more migrants from elsewhere in the country, had begun to fill some of the empty spaces.

The war lasted from 1967 to 1970. When it was over, the Igbo came back to Kafanchan – some of them literally returnees, others newcomers. They could not so easily reclaim those more lucrative niches which had been theirs in the past, as these often depended on government contracts and connections. But they were again very noticeable as traders in the lively Kafanchan market place. One of my good friends, and key informants, was a young Igbo who ran a stall there mostly selling soap and cosmetics, to a female clientele. Shadrack had been set up in business by an older brother, who had his own stall nearby, selling another slightly more expensive line of goods. Moreover, there was already a young teenage relative helping Shadrack with odds and ends. The Igbo, then, were repopulating the Kafanchan market by way of chain migration.

How come they were doing so well again? The answer may be multifaceted: the Igbo were hard-working and privately rather spendthrift. But when I talked to Shadrack about such matters, he would also emphasize the central role of Onitsha, a major city in Igboland, on the River Niger. The huge Onitsha market had a uniquely large supply of imported goods, and it had recovered quickly after the war. Igbo traders, wherever they had established themselves in the reborn diaspora, would try to get to Onitsha to pick up supplies, if they could afford the journey. That is where they would go, for example, for electrical items, textiles, or cosmetics. Traders of other ethnic groups were more wary, uncertain whether the Igbo wholesalers in Onitsha would be as well-disposed toward them. Would they get cheated? As Christmas approached, and Shadrack was planning a purchasing trip to Onitsha, I gave him a small loan so he could expand his line of goods to include some ladies' shoes.

The Hausa in the Kafanchan market place, for their part, traded not least in the sort of vegetable produce which was brought in from further north: onions, tomatoes, peppers. And they were the butchers, with special connections to the Fulani pastoralists with their herds close to Kafanchan, Muslims like themselves, and supplying the meat. More local garden produce was brought to the market each morning by women from neighboring villages, while their men mostly remained out there in the fields.

Away from the retail trade in the market place was the town's only major export business, the ginger trade controlled by quite affluent Hausa businessmen. The ginger was grown in neighboring villages. On the outskirts of the town there were also some pig farms, raising animals which would be sent to the south of the country by train. The pig farmers were of local ethnic groups. The Hausa, being Muslims, would certainly have nothing to do with pigs.

Among those artisans with their shops along streets a little away from the market place – again, tailors, carpenters, sign painters, and the like – I

could note their current stylistic preferences, but also the organizational fact that they often had an apprentice or two, taken on for a fee, to learn occupational skills. This involved a spread of skills, often although not always across ethnic boundaries.

I could conclude that some townspeople, apart from brief encounters in the market place, and passing people of other groups in the streets, could live their lives more or less encapsulated within their own ethnic groups. Others, however, involved in some kinds of business ventures, would get to know partners and some customers reasonably well, and develop a degree of personal trust and even friendship across boundaries. People involved in more administrative tasks, such as in local government, also formed networks of more internal diversity. Sociable contacts were cultivated in the evenings in a number of palm-wine bars and beer gardens. Members of those local ethnic groups who had, to begin with, had little to do with Kafanchan but who had gradually made it more of their town, could be well represented in such social contexts. In *Blade among the Boys*, Onuora Nzekwu had already portrayed town life as divided by religious allegiances. This remained true; but a great many of the locals belonged to one church, with its roots in one North American evangelical Protestant mission which had for some time offered both organizational and ideological tools – not least through its network of schools – for opposition to Muslim power as locally represented by the emirate.

Since Kafanchan was not so old, I could rather readily aim at some time depth in my study. I did oral history interviews with elderly people who had been there almost since the founding of the town, and occasionally I would take a couple of days off (at times because participant observation had become so intense that I needed a break, and some cooling off) to go to Kaduna, the regional capital which had a branch of the National Archives. There I could read the filed reports from the colonial District Officers who had been stationed in Kafanchan for different periods until the end of the colonial era. As it turned out, this could also lead on to a minor instance of what would later become known in anthropology as a “multi-site study.” Shortly after one of my Kafanchan field periods, I had a term in England, at the University of Manchester, and I was able to track down a couple of those former Kafanchan colonialists. The town had not been a prestige placing, so my two informants had been rather young when they got there, in the 1950s. In our encounters they excused themselves at first, saying I could really not expect them to remember much. Yet since I knew their reporting, I could refresh their memories, and they would soon be reminiscing about their activities, and about the local notables they had written about – some of whom I knew. They could remember the aging Hausa emir of Jemaa (father of the emir at the time of my research), head of the “native authority,” preferring to stay out of the way of the white men, but rather unpredictable and inconsistent in whatever decisions he was supposed to make. And they remembered organizing the annual festivities of Empire

Day. One of them had also reported to Kaduna about how Kafanchan celebrated the coronation of Queen Elizabeth.

All this was basically intended as a local study. But serendipity is part of field work, and a variety of experiences also took my interests in a direction I had not planned for. Some of my new acquaintances among the townspeople saw me as a potential resource person, a gatekeeper to a wider world. One of them could suggest that we go into the import-export business together – and with the Nigerian oil export economy booming at the time (with the oil found in the southeast of the country), bringing about a certain modest affluence at least in some circles, he clearly had mostly the import of fairly sophisticated consumer goods in mind. Another suggested that I take this bright, promising young relative of his along when I leave, and put him into my university overseas.... so he could then come back and become prosperous and powerful, an asset to his kinspeople. There was a term for such a person in Nigerian English: he (or more seldom a she) would be a “been-to,” someone who had gone abroad and returned with skills convertible into power and prosperity. To begin with, I usually embarrassedly changed the subject, finding such topics distractions from my purpose of finding out what town life was actually like. But gradually I realized that this was where at least some of the story was. Townspeople’s visions of the present and the desirable future often involved extended horizons. In a fashion, this dusty town around the rail tracks was turning into a sort of world city: an observation post for growing global interconnections.

There were hardly any real “been-tos” in Kafanchan – I only knew one, a Yoruba petty entrepreneur who had had some technical training in Germany but was better known as a freelance preacher for a revivalist church. But I also discovered that this was a recurrent type in the Nigerian fiction writing of the times. Here there tended to be less optimism. Chinua Achebe may remain best known for his *Things Fall Apart* (1958), depicting the arrival of Europeans in Igbo precolonial society, but his somewhat later *No Longer at Ease* (1960) is the tragic story of a “been-to,” torn between modernity and tradition, between the universalist principles of his overseas training and his new job, and the more particularist claims of local or kinship loyalties.

Openness to a wider world was also demonstrated in other ways in Kafanchan life. On the other hand, there could be more enthusiasm when some popular music band would come through town on tour. These were times when new styles of Nigerian music proliferated: highlife, juju, Afro-beat. They drew on older regional forms, but also involved new instruments, new technology, and new organizational forms, imported from elsewhere in the world. From the street loudspeakers of the hole-in-the-wall record shops in Kafanchan (still mostly offering their goods on vinyl) I could hear American soul music, Caribbean reggae, and American televangelists, but also the current hits of rising or established Nigerian stars.

Through my young field assistants, I could also gain some insight into youth culture.

They talked about their friendship circles and their pastimes, and showed me their photo albums.⁴ There were not many private cameras in Kafanchan, but again, there were a number of commercial photographers, in demand for special events, as well as for individual and group portraits. In the personal albums, pictures of friends of both sexes, family members, and other acquaintances were combined with cutouts from newspapers and magazines, depicting sports or movie stars, luxury cars, and intimate scenes. Thus the albums showed not just individuals or groups, but also wider landscapes of the imagination. The street signboards of other businesses (painted by local commercial artists) could also hint at sources of inspiration far away. Ringo Star, the Kafanchan tailor, did not actually know of the origin of his name with a member of the Beatles (and consequently misspelled it on his signboard). He had been called that by the master to whom he was once apprenticed. It seemed commercially useful, however, in attracting young men who came to have their bell-bottom trousers sewn by him.

Talk of “been-tos,” and the street-level view of a growing Nigerian popular culture in its varied forms, provoked my scholarly curiosity in new directions which would leave a mark on my work for a long time, away from Kafanchan as well. I was on a track from urban anthropology to transnational anthropology – although the two were not so separate, since urban centers at various levels figured conspicuously as key points in organizing global contacts and flows.

As I sought for terms to fit my observations in Kafanchan into some sort of Big Picture, I realized that prevailing views in Academia and in public debate, as they were at the time in Europe and North America, did not meet my needs. The conventional wisdom of modernization theory as well as of the somewhat later, more radical critiques of “cultural imperialism,” was that a more interconnected world would primarily lead to uniformity and cultural loss. (At the time, the term “globalization” really had not yet entered the public vocabulary – as a keyword, it was hardly present before the 1990s. Yet when it appeared and spread, it turned out that it, too, could be taken to mean more uniformity.) But what I saw in Kafanchan was a cultural openness, an encounter between cultures which was marked by a global structure of centers and peripheries, but also involved much new cultural creativity.

Then I learned that a few colleagues, here and there in the world, also trying to make sense of the wider cultural orders and processes of their time, had found useful analogies in what linguists had been saying about Creole languages.⁵ These were mixed forms, with historical roots in two or more languages meeting in a contact situation. But they had developed into something more than limited contact languages. They had become

complete languages, mother tongues for people who could conduct their entire lives within them. And at the same time, they often remained in touch with the languages out of which they had grown – not least the standard, prestige form of some language based in one of the metropolises of the world. Creole languages bore the mark of the colonial situations of the past, and the postcolonial center-periphery relationships which followed them into the present.

As with language, it could be argued, so to a considerable degree with culture. So I saw the lively cultural diversity of Kafanchan, in its openness to the world, in terms of a creolizing cultural process, which I felt had its parallels, with variations on the theme, in many parts of the world. The centers were not everywhere the same, and need not be constant forever. In the era of “been-tos,” there was certainly still the soft power of Britain, the old imperial power.

Later, it has become obvious that the United States has become the more attractive alternative. The flow of culture would not always be entirely in the same direction either. It happened that the kind of West African popular music I heard in Kafanchan would later be described in New York and London as “world music.”

Again, this was in the 1970s and 1980s. As we approached the end of the 20th century, the interest in new culture emerging through cultural openness and mixture would be reflected in a wider intellectual vocabulary of partly overlapping terms: apart from creolization, hybridity, crossover, fusion. To a degree these concepts had their homes in different academic disciplines, and involved different emphases. But they all suggested that cultures had permeable boundaries, if they had boundaries at all, and that openness need not result in the end of diversity.

So my periods of field research in Kafanchan came to an end. In the 1990s, I turned to another project: a study of the work and life of newsmedia foreign correspondents.⁶ This was a multi-site study, with field periods primarily in Jerusalem, Tokyo, and Johannesburg, involving mostly-intensive interviews with correspondents based in these cities, as well as following their reporting, in print and on radio and TV. Johannesburg was the place where many “Africa correspondents” stayed, between reporting trips elsewhere on the continent. A European or American journalist might cover all of Africa south of the Sahara from there, some 45 countries.

While in Johannesburg, I was certainly curious about what those roving correspondents could tell me about their experiences in reporting on Nigeria. In fact there was not so much of it. Under the recent period of military dictatorship in the country, they had mostly not been let in. Nigeria made for difficult travel in other ways as well.

Yet a little later, there was one time when international newsmedia people flocked to Nigeria. It was toward the end of the 1990s, I was at home in Stockholm, and watching the evening news on CNN International. Then suddenly something unexpected came up. There was one correspondent on

the screen reporting from Kafanchan! In a day or two, the *New York Times* also reported from my Nigerian town.

The emir of Jemaa, Hausa traditional ruler, had died, aged 95 – I suspect that his age was really somewhat uncertain, and approximate. The government had announced that he would be succeeded by his son. A great many in the local population had disapproved, so they had stormed the palace, burned down parts of it, and chased the new emir away on his coronation day. The uproar had also caused some deaths.

That may well have been the first and last time that Kafanchan made it into world news, and evidently it was a matter of serendipity – the news people had found one thing when they were looking for another. After many years of military dictatorship Nigeria was on its way to democratic politics. General Sani Abacha, the rather unsavory head of state, had died under somewhat mysterious circumstances, and now the world's newsmedia were gathered in the capital Abuja to witness the inauguration of the newly elected president, when they heard of some dramatic violence in another town not so far away. So at least some of them hurried over there.

Watching that reporting on my Stockholm TV set, however, I could add background knowledge for myself. Again, I had met the old emir Isa Muhammadu a couple of times, and seen him in his public appearances on Muslim holidays, when his colorful entourage would move along Kafanchan's streets – drummers in front, the emir in a carriage under a large umbrella, horsemen in gowns and turbans. At the gate of the emir's palace praise singers would make their appearances. But most of the townspeople seemed to pay only distracted and unenthusiastic attention. Many of them tended to see the emir's court, in that garish green little palace at the outskirts of town, as a largely undesirable remnant from the past. And they were inclined to assume that Isa Muhammadu would be the last emir. Yet now the departing military regime had apparently made it one of its last decisions to fill the vacant job of "traditional ruler" in Jemaa Emirate. That early administrative invention of Frederick Lugard once more cast its long shadow over Kafanchan.

If that is the only time the town made it into world news, I have kept looking for occasional news about it on various websites of Nigerian newsmedia. After elected civilian governments came back, the early decades of the 21st century have continued to be marked by recurrent violence in and around the town: conflicts over ecology and land between farmers and pastoralists have coincided with religious conflicts between Christians and Muslims (turned even more complex by the rather volatile internal diversity of both religions).

Later on, too, for this town with a railway junction as its original *raison d'être*, it was certainly a historical irony when the Nigerian railway system eventually came to a nation-wide close-down. As the population of Nigeria grows quickly, however, its towns and cities also grow. By the early 2000s, Kafanchan was estimated to have some 80,000 inhabitants.

Notes

- 1 My work in Kafanchan is presented in several publications (cf. Hannerz 1976, 1979, 1982, 1985, 1989).
- 2 The geographer Paul Wheatley (1970) has noted the significance of Yoruba traditional urbanism in the context of comparative urban studies.
- 3 Among the noteworthy publications of the “Manchester school” are Clyde Mitchell’s *The Kalela Dance* (1956) and his edited volume *Social Networks in Urban Situations* (1969), and a number of articles by Arnold Epstein (e.g. 1959, 1967). For an overview of its contributions to urban anthropology in the 1950s and 1960s, see Hannerz (1980: 119–162).
- 4 I have drawn on this, and other aspects of the language and expressions of Kafanchan youth culture, in a more general essay on the material tools of identity work (Hannerz 1984).
- 5 I was particularly inspired by an article by Johannes Fabian (1978), discussing the emergent cultural forms of popular music and painting, in what was then Zaire, in such terms. My own engagement with creolization as a global process, with a point of departure in Kafanchan, is manifested in Hannerz (1987).

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3 Beyond the Rhodes Livingstone-Institute

Anthropological Research in Urban Africa from the 1930s to the 2000s

Katja Werthmann

Introduction

According to a received notion that has been dispersed through introductory chapters of edited volumes and overview articles, urban anthropology in sub-Saharan Africa began in the 1950s with the studies on the Copperbelt mining towns in colonial Northern Rhodesia by researchers at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, later known as “Manchester School”. However, there were social anthropologists who went to urban field sites before and parallel to them. Ethnographies of urban Africa from the 1930s onwards addressed a number of questions that remain relevant until today, such as for instance: what happens to rural people who move to the city? How does city life change gender roles, intergenerational relations and ethnic identifications? How do people make a home in the city? What kinds of livelihoods do they pursue? To whom does a city belong and who belongs to the city?

Social anthropologists aim at understanding life-worlds from their interlocutors’ points of view through participant observation. An anthropologist should “see the city as it lives by looking at it ‘over the shoulders’ of the city dwellers”, as Agier (2015: 23)¹ paraphrased Geertz who, in turn, paraphrased Malinowski. Such a perspective should by definition rule out Eurocentric and normative approaches to the study of urban Africa. Did anthropological research in urban Africa in the 20th century live up to this ambition? What have anthropologists come to know about Africans’ own views on the cities they live in?

Many important contributions by social anthropologists on city life in Africa, especially by female, African and Diaspora authors and in languages other than English, are little known even within urban anthropology, and much less so in the neighbouring social sciences and general urban theory. This chapter provides an overview of anthropological works on city life in Africa from the 1930s to the 2000s. Each subchapter looks at a particular period and discusses a few more and less well-known works.

The Period 1930–1940s: Female Pioneers in Urban South Africa

In conventional chronologies of social anthropology, the first half of the 20th century was a period of consolidation and professionalization at university departments and other research institutions. Ethnographic fieldwork became the standard format of research. Anthropologists studied “Others” who were categorized in terms of their relative difference from modern polities and societies, e.g. “segmentary” or “pre-modern”. However, a few female anthropologists like Winifred Hoernlé, Monica Hunter (Wilson), Ellen Hellmann and Eileen Jensen (Krige) made early ventures into unusual field sites. Winifred Hoernlé, the “mother of social anthropology in South Africa” (Bank 2016: 18), spent four months in a “location” (African quarter) in Windhoek in 1922 – the same year in which Malinowski published “Argonauts of the Western Pacific”. In a report to the South African government of South West Africa, she “sought to expose the appalling living conditions” of Nama communities who had been decimated by the brutal German colonial regime (Bank 2016: 36; Gewald 2007: 18). In contrast with earlier researchers who had “treated Nama informants as laboratory subjects” (Bank 2016: 36), Hoernlé aimed at a more personal contact with them. Later, as a lecturer at Witwatersrand University, Hoernlé encouraged young researchers to study cultural and social change in South African cities which were the destination of labour migrants from rural areas.

In 1932, Monica Hunter spent some months in the “locations” of East London and Grahamstown. Her book *Reaction to Conquest* (1936) includes chapters that dealt with her observations in those quarters. More than 20 years before Max Gluckman’s (1960: 57) famous aphorism: “An African townsman is a townsman, an African miner is a miner”, Monica Hunter stressed that “the values in town are European, not tribal” (Hunter 1936: 437). Christians tended to socialize with fellow members of congregations, but there were also other groupings such as unions, associations and clubs. Young girls and women enjoyed both school education and leisure activities such as “tennis parties” (273). Hunter observed a “developing class of business women” (270) who ran shops, cafes, hotels and were involved in beer-brewing. Spouses did not necessarily know the amount of each other’s earnings. There were different expectations about what a husband should provide and tensions over “pin-money”, but on the whole relations between husbands and wives were more relaxed in town due to the absence of in-laws (274). Hunter stated that “the fact that economic struggle is keener under town conditions, and that everything is on a cash basis, is breaking down the old sense of the mutual obligations of kin” (449). At the same time, some men and women managed to save enough money to acquire property and to live on rents. In the final chapter “What Bantu think about it” (554–574), Hunter notes: “Bitter comments are made

on the hypocrisy of Europeans who claim to be Christians, and yet enforce a colour bar even in their churches” (560). This chapter also describes Africans’ emerging initiatives and organizations such as strikes, independent churches and the African National Congress (ANC).

Monica Hunter married Godfrey Wilson, the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute’s first director. After his suicide in 1941, she published their jointly written book on social change (Wilson & Wilson 1945). This was before the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute’s major output on urban life on the Copperbelt began in the mid-1950s. Monica Wilson was the first woman to be appointed as a full professor at a South African university (Rhodes University, Grahamstown) in 1947.

A month after Hunter had set out for East London in 1932, Eileen Jensen Krige started a household survey in three “locations” of Pretoria (Bank 2016: 250–251). In her article on “Changing Conditions in Marital Relations and Parental Duties among Urbanized Natives” (1936), she noted that almost every girl in those quarters had one or more children before marriage. While premarital sexual relations in “tribal” areas had existed, they had been monitored by the communities. In town, young people became more independent of parents and elders. Most unmarried mothers became pregnant while working as domestic servants to Europeans. Jensen Krige illustrated the moral double-bind that created social pressure on these girls. One girl said: “People are queer and one can never please everybody. In the three years during which I kept company with Solomon (a location boy) without having a child, people talked about me, saying they were sure I must be barren. Then when my child was born their tongues wagged again, this time to the tune that they had expected better of me!” (5). Jensen Krige observed that both rural injunctions and urban social and legal conditions made it easier for “unattached males” (7) to shirk their responsibilities as fathers. However, she also pointed out the constraints on men: “Many young men find it impossible to get married owing to the expense of helping to provide for the illegitimate children of their sisters; their own illegitimate children are provided for by the family of the girl, the whole forming a vicious circle” (10).

Although Jensen Krige commented: “Culture contact between Bantu and European (...) is creating havoc in Bantu domestic institutions” (22), she described the creativity of town dwellers in adjusting both rural and urban social institutions to the realities of city life. She also observed that women in town had “far greater powers and independence in marriage negotiations than would be possible under normal tribal conditions” (15). Jensen Krige later taught at Natal University where she became a full professor in 1960.

Ellen Hellmann did fieldwork in what she called a “slum yard” named Rooiyard in Johannesburg for a year in 1933 and 1934 and wrote a master’s thesis on her findings (Hellmann 1935, 1948). As a white woman, Hellmann could not stay in Rooiyard, but she visited daily during the week. Three of Hellmann’s findings stand out: first, women beer brewers were a major economic force even though their activity was illegal. Thus, Hellmann

highlighted a characteristic feature of economic life in African cities that Keith Hart (1973) called “informal income opportunities” 40 years later. Second, she noted a pronounced individualism in Rooiyard, which contradicted stereotypes about the persistence of African kin and ethnic bonds: “Each family fends for itself” (1948: 88). Third, she observed a distancing from the Christian faith after migration to the city. Confronted with the huge discrepancies between their lives and those of the whites, “bitter animosity” (Hellmann 1935: 58) arose among the Rooiyard inhabitants and many turned to “new forms of magic” (60) such as for instance services by traditional healers in order to get employment or attract customers. Hellmann saw this as a reaction to social and economic change and not as a persistence of “primitive” religion which was the prevalent notion at the time. Hellmann was the first woman to obtain a doctoral degree at the University of Witwatersrand in 1940.

These early urban studies by female anthropologists are rarely mentioned in introductory texts on social anthropology. In his review of the role of female scholars in the history of South African anthropology, Bank (2016: 277) states that scholars like Monica Wilson, Ellen Hellmann, Audrey Richards, Hilda Kuper and Eileen Jensen Krige were “creative to a degree that has not fully been appreciated”, but some were too modest to stress the importance of their own contributions. Others, like Hellmann, left the academic world and continued as social activists, so they had less influence on future generations of anthropologists, as did Monica Wilson. Some later-generation social scientists regarded these women as too “liberal”. Bank refutes such judgements and stresses:

Their interest in documenting the rich and diverse possibilities of cultural expression were, in all cases, based on a profound rejection of the racially based forms of nationalism that dominated in Europe and South Africa during the first half of the twentieth century.

(Bank 2016: 274)

To be sure, the works of these early scholars is problematic in some aspects from a present-day perspective. Notwithstanding their role as pioneers in exploring urban Africa and the lasting merits of their publications as ethnographies and social critiques of contemporary South Africa, Hunter, Hellmann and Jensen Krige held some normative views about how city life for Africans should (not) be. They wrote of social change in terms of “disturbance”, “dislocation” and “disintegration” (Hellmann 1935: 61; Hunter 1933: 269; Jensen Krige 1936: 1). But all three also showed that people in town appropriated European ways of life selectively. They pointed out that men, women and children enjoyed greater individual freedom in towns or had at least a wider range of options for pursuing personal ambitions. That this freedom could result in new forms of pressures was another matter that they also addressed, as for instance through Jensen Krige’s insights

on premarital pregnancies. All three authors' works were also pioneering in their focus on women's lives. In both rural and urban South Africa, women were subject to rules, authorities and conditions they could not always shape themselves. Hunter, Hellmann and Jensen Krige were careful not to describe women as a socially homogeneous category, and to highlight various ways of dealing with the often difficult living conditions and contradictory moral frameworks in town.

The Period 1950–1960s: The Rhodes-Livingstone Institute and Beyond

Since the 1920s, a number of copper mines had opened up on the Copperbelt of British Central Africa. Tens of thousands of mine labourers were recruited from rural areas and housed in mining compounds. One governor pressed for the establishment of a research institution for studying social change in rural and urban areas in order to improve administration. The Rhodes-Livingstone Institute (RLI) was opened in northern Rhodesia in 1937. The institute's history has been extensively discussed by Brown (1979), Werbner (1984), Musambachime (1993), Moore (1994), Schumaker (2001), Gewald (2007), Colson (2008) and others. Its first director (1938–1941) was Godfrey Wilson who conducted research in the mining town of Broken Hill (Hansen 2015). This was an “early effort to (...) go beyond the tribe as the primary unit of analysis” (Schumaker 2001: 56) that became a central feature of the institute's later work in urban areas. Wilson was succeeded by Max Gluckman who had studied under Hoernlé. Gluckman transformed the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute into an innovative research institution. He left in 1947 to take up a temporary lectureship in Oxford but his relation with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute continued. His successor as director was Elizabeth Colson who headed the institute until 1950. In 1949, Gluckman took the chair of the Social Anthropology Department at Manchester University. He kept sending researchers from Manchester to do fieldwork in South-Central Africa in collaboration with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, developed a system of field training and encouraged research on urban issues by colleagues like J. Clyde Mitchell (who headed the institute from 1951 to 1955) and Arnold Epstein. Merran McCulloch (Fraenkel) who served as administrative secretary during Mitchell's directorship (Schumaker 2001: 186) later also did an urban study (Fraenkel 1964). Although the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute was a colonial institution, anthropologists were considered as “negrophiles” (Schumaker 2001: 60) by white settlers and as potential trouble-makers by mining companies. Some companies prohibited anthropological research on their premises altogether or withdrew permissions they had previously given.

The “Manchester School” became especially known for their urban studies and for the development and refinement of methods such as the combination of surveys with the analysis of “social networks”, the “extended

case method” and “situational analysis” (Evens & Handelman 2006). Among its seminal studies were Mitchell’s (1956) analysis of the “Kalela Dance” and Epstein’s (1958) study about politics. They showed that African city dwellers and mine labourers refused to be governed on the basis of assumed “tribal” affiliations, and that “tribal” names in town acquired new meanings. Until today, the studies by the “Manchester School” are valued because they put processes, networks and conflicts at the centre of the analysis of social structures and relations which made anthropological research more compatible with the study of changing and complex societies.

The members of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute were not the only ones who turned to doing research in urban Africa in the 1940s and the 1950s. Georges Balandier in France began studying African societies and cities in the 1940s which ran counter to other strands of French Africanist anthropology such as the Griaule “school” on African cosmologies that neglected the colonial context in which it worked. Balandier also devised an innovative approach to empirical research. His book about Brazzaville (then French Equatorial Africa) that first appeared in 1955 was based on empirical studies by a team of anthropologists, geographers and sociologists who compared the African quarters (“black Brazzavilles”) Poto-Poto and Bacongo between 1948 and 1951. The team employed a variety of methods and research tools, including the collection of 250 biographies, 150 questionnaires, 50 Rorschach tests and intelligence tests for pupils (Balandier 1952).

Brazzaville had grown considerably since the Second World War due to large-scale infrastructure development. Whereas almost 40% inhabitants of Bacongo originated from the Southern region of Bas-Congo and had already been born in the city, Poto-Poto was characterized by a fluctuating population of “strangers”. To Balandier, Poto-Poto appeared as “more city” than Bacongo because of its heterogeneity, density and the possibilities for experiencing modernity through work, consumption and “liberation” from “customary” environments (1985: XIII). Balandier pointed out three central conditions of African urban life: (1) The necessity to earn a monetary income which meant working under unfavourable conditions dictated by the white colonialists; (2) the necessity to cohabit with strangers, which in Balandier’s view led to a uniformization and an impoverishment of culture; and (3) a fundamental change in social relations, especially the relations between men and women. Since there were more men than women in the city, many women could choose their partners. The greater self-determination of women obviously resulted in feelings of insecurity and fear on the part of the men (1985: 233). Balandier observed the emergence of new social types such as the *évolué* (“evolved”, i.e. educated person, white-collar worker) or the *grande femme* (“big woman”). One of the chapters of the book summarizes nine life histories that cover a range of types of city dwellers, e.g. a “magician”, an old and a young city dweller, a worker, a “visionary”

and a successful business woman. Balandier had a tendency to portray “the Black” (*le noir*) mainly as a victim of colonization and the expansion of a capitalist economy, even though he himself pointed out that 60% of the respondents of a survey preferred the city to the countryside despite all hardships (Balandier 1985: 198).

Moore (1994: 99) claimed that Balandier was “well acquainted with and profoundly influenced by his British predecessors and contemporaries”, but when he published the Brazzaville book in 1955, the major works of Epstein and Mitchell had not yet appeared, and he did not cite Gluckman or the Wilsons. Balandier worked parallel to his British contemporaries, and like them he was also interested in rural-urban migration, social change and processes of “detrribalization”.

A few years before Balandier’s Brazzaville book appeared, a study in a city of the Gold Coast (Busia 1951) had shed light on similar phenomena of change in urban West Africa. The author Kofi Abrefa Busia had obtained a DPhil in Social Anthropology in 1947 at Oxford University. He had decided to study anthropology after he had worked with Meyer Fortes on a social survey in Asanteland in the 1940s (Ntarangwi, Babiker & Mills 2006: 17). Busia was appointed as a District Commissioner under the British Colonial Service in the Gold Coast from 1942 to 1949. In 1947–1948, he conducted a social survey in Sekondi-Takoradi for the Chief Commissioner of the Cape Coast Colony. Sekondi-Takoradi was an important commercial centre that attracted a large heterogeneous workforce seeking employment in mines, railway, harbour, trade, commerce and public services. The published results (Busia 1951) cover the issues of housing, occupations, married life, school, municipal government, associations and “social failures”.

Busia (1951: 1) stressed that a social survey was “Applied Social Anthropology”. His account of Sekondi-Takoradi contains a number of direct observations, short biographies and statements by interlocutors like this young unemployed man: “I left school in December, 1946. My father who is employed in the Railways looked after me. I live with my mother now. She provides my clothes and food, etc. My mother is a petty trader in saucepans and basins. I want to become a Locomotive Driver, but there is no vacancy. I have applied to become a Policeman. At present I help my brother who is a fitter” (Busia 1951: 62). Busia commented: “Many mothers with tears in their eyes told of their struggles to educate their boys and girls, and of the pain at having these children still dependent on them, two or three years after they had left school” (63). On a more positive note, Busia’s study also documented new ways of life, e.g. leisure activities such as football, lawn tennis, cinema and ball-room dancing (81).

Apart from observations such as youth unemployment despite education, Busia offered early insights into youth culture. In one subchapter, he described the “Pilot Boys”, many of whom obviously were what today would be called “street children”. They lived on

stealing, gambling, acting as guides to sight-seers, or directing European sailors and soldiers to prostitutes. (...) They appear to have been greatly impressed with the American soldiers, for many of them attempted to copy their mannerisms and dress. (...) These pilot boys are strongly attached to one another. Though there is much rivalry and jealousy among the separate gangs, within the gangs there is intense loyalty and confraternity.

(Busia 1951: 96)

Busia concluded that Sekondi-Takoradi exhibited symptoms of “maladjustment”. The transition from a “small, homogeneous, self-subsistent community to a large, heterogeneous, dependent community” was fraught with contradictions and tensions between “traditional culture” and “European ideas and values” (117–118). Perhaps not surprising in a report to the colonial administration, Busia did not discuss the sources of these contradictions further, but proposed a number of social welfare measures. Busia later became the first African professor at the University College of the Gold Coast in 1954 where he taught at the Department of Sociology. In 1969, he became Prime Minister of Ghana.

Not only Busia and Balandier, but a number of other anthropologists outside of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute conducted fieldwork in African cities between the 1940s and the 1960s. In 1940, Horace Miner arrived in Timbuktu (Mali) with his wife Agnes to explore whether phenomena such as secularization or criminality only existed in Western societies or were a general feature of city life (Miner 1953). Rouch (1956) studied labour migration from the West African Savannah to the coastal cities of Ghana. In 1952–1953, Michael Banton (1957) studied “tribal life” in Freetown (Sierra Leone). Around the same time, Philip Mayer (1961) and his wife Iona studied rural migrants in East London (South Africa). Hilda Kuper (1960) and Absolom Vilakazi (1962) published on the Indian community and on social change among the Zulu in Durban (South Africa). Plotnicov (1967) provided an in-depth account of the lives of 16 men in Jos (Nigeria).

Together with South African colleague Archie Mafeje, Monica Wilson published a book on the township of Langa in Capetown where Ruth Levin had previously done a study about marriage (Levin 1947; Wilson & Mafeje 1963). Wilson and Mafeje were interested in the question of social coherence in Langa. Most of the fieldwork was carried out by Mafeje between 1960 and 1962 (Bank & Swana 2013). One of the questions he asked was: “How do you identify people? In a crowd how do you sort them out in your own mind?” (13). Based on the responses and on participant observation, three categories emerged: (1) Migrant labourers, (2) “semi-urbanized” people, (3) “urbanized” people whose homes were in town (15). These were further subdivided into the “townee” or *tsotsi* type on the one hand, and the “decent people” who emulated the white “middle class” on the other. Terms that people used for the description of themselves and others were

iibari (“flashy young men”, 21), *ooscuse-me* (“decent people” or snobs, 26) and *amagoduka* (“those who go home” or country bumpkins; 16). “Townees” or *tsotsis* (“town toughs”, 7) were also called “location boys”, *ooclever*, “bright boys”, and “spoilers” (2) after famous gangs of Johannesburg. Young *tsotsis* were called *ikhaba* “half-grown mealie-stalk” (23). The more mature *tsotsis* were called *ooMac* (from Scottish “Mac”). They were “still wild”, but more respectable (24). “Their wives, *ooMackazi* (...) are expected to settle down as housewives, (...) not brewing beer as older women may, for a beer-brewer may be arrested, and for young women that is shameful” (24). These social categories lived in different kinds of dwellings such as married quarters, “barracks” (dormitories for single men), “flats” (double rooms for single men) and “zones” (single quarters; 4). They differed in terms of attitudes, behaviour, dress, language and consumption preferences and rarely mixed socially.

Wilson and Mafeje (1963: 181) concluded:

Something new is growing in towns; its mark is the intense vitality, the aliveness, that appears in dance and song, in the jiving of the *ikhaba*, and the Merry-Macs band, in the irrepressible humour of the townees, and in a flexible changing language.

Mafeje’s detailed descriptions of associations, clubs, jazz bands, conversations, the ways “people walked and talked” (Bank & Swana 2013: 268) and portraits of individuals provided a lively picture of a South African township based on an “insider” perspective. Together with the earlier South African studies, the book can be read today as both a seminal contribution to urban anthropology and as a social history of urban South Africa during Apartheid.

In the late 1960s, two books by anthropologists on cities in former Belgian Congo appeared: Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain’s book on women in Kinshasa (1968) and Valdo Pons’ book (1969) on a neighbourhood of Kisangani (then Stanleyville). Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain studied linguistics in Paris where she was the first Haitian woman who obtained a doctorate from the Sorbonne. She went on to study social anthropology in Great Britain under Malinowski and Evans-Pritchards (Crowley 1978). Later, she published widely on various topics and is currently being re-discovered as an important scholar on Haitian creole and folklore. Comhaire-Sylvain had already written about voluntary associations, women and youth in Lagos and Léopoldville (e.g. 1950, 1951) even before Balandier (1952) published his first text on the Brazzaville study.

In her book about women in Kinshasa, Comhaire-Sylvain (1968) presented findings from two fieldtrips that had taken place before and after independence, in 1943–1945 and 1965 respectively. The book is based on a broad array of sources, e.g. administrative documents, broadcasts, journal articles, statistics, questionnaires, conversations, surveys, group

discussions, visits, walks and second-hand information. It provides numerous details on many aspects of women's lives and activities like education, marriage, professions, housing, associations, leisure, fashion, self-images, children from "mixed" relationships, and contains 22 short biographies of women. In the 1940s, neither African men nor women could own land in Kinshasa under Belgian administration. Education for girls was only available in Christian missionary schools, and most women in the 1940s did not regularly interact with any white person outside school and church. In terms of civilian status, women were always dependants of a man (husband, lover or male relative) and did not have their own IDs, with the exception of some "independent" women who worked in salaried professions or other occupations. This had not changed considerably in 1965. Although Africans were now allowed to settle in better, formerly European parts of the town, women had to bear the brunt of compensating for insufficient infrastructure through fetching water from public pipes or reducing visits to friends in distant quarters because of transport problems.

Comhaire-Sylvain's book provides a wealth of material on women's lives in Kinshasa just before and after independence. It contains vignettes that offer illuminating insights into male and female views on contemporary urban life. For instance, when she asked men in the 1940s whether their wives worked, they would say no. Confronted with the fact that their wives sold vegetables in the market or firewood from their homes, the men would retort: "But no, she does not work, she is just making do (*elle se débrouille*)!" (Comhaire-Sylvain 1968: 29). In 1965, a questionnaire about attitude changes of spouses in the past 20 years provoked answers like: "Our mothers believed that the man was the boss, we don't", but also "women are still being seen as servants or objects of pleasure" (175).

Pons (1969) provided a detailed account of "Avenue 21", a neighbourhood in Stanleyville (Kisangani). The book is based on fieldwork conducted in 1952–1953 in the framework of an interdisciplinary study (UNESCO 1956: 229–492). For his in-depth "community study", Pons focussed on 23 compounds laid out in a straight line that faced each other across one end of Avenue 21. This was a relatively quiet, multi-ethnic area. Pons spent much time in the courtyard of a man named Lusaka who became a key informant. His compound was a "nodal point" (139) of social contacts between long-term residents and newcomers. The colonial impact on the way people conceived of themselves under the new order was reflected in discourses about "civilization": "It was common to hear two men discussing a third in terms such as he is 'a very civilized man', he is 'only a little civilized', he is 'not quite civilized', he was 'civilized long ago', and so forth" (10–11). Comparing such conversations, Pons concluded that "'civilization' denoted familiarity with 'urban' norms, an attitude of mind responsive to non-traditional associations" (148).

In spite of the ethnic heterogeneity and high turnover of inhabitants of Avenue 21, the neighbourhood appeared as a socio-spatial unit where

anonymity was impossible. Pons asked: “how were social relations maintained in a situation containing so much fluidity and diversity?” (258). He concluded that many inhabitants of Avenue 21 were remarkably tolerant and flexible in social situations where norms and expectations were often open to negotiation (260–261). Depending on the particular constellation in one interaction, individuals could selectively refer to or mobilize a range of possible relationships and the associated moralities: “bonds of tribal ‘brotherhood’ were closely interwoven with bonds of ‘neighbourhood’ and ‘family friendship’, and this plurality of ties tended to overlap and to cut across each other in a way which provided *some* stability and cohesion” (262; emphasis by Pons).

These two studies in Congolese cities are examples of contrasting approaches to urban Africa in the same historical phase just before and after the end of the colonial period, and parallel to the works by the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. While Comhaire-Sylvain gave a more general overview on the situation of various categories and groups of women in Kinshasa, Pons “zoomed in” on one particular urban space and the social relations between its inhabitants.

The fieldwork by the authors cited so far was mainly conducted during the colonial period, but their individual relations with, or attitudes to, colonial governments reveal the complexities of the colonial contexts, especially for African and Diaspora researchers (cf. Tilley 2007). Busia was himself a colonial administrator, but he was also a member of a highly educated national elite that would take over government positions after Ghana’s independence in 1957. Comhaire-Sylvain came from a Diaspora country that had recently fought US-American occupation and where women did not have the right to vote until 1950. She was clearly sensitive to the conditions which colonization had created for women in Kinshasa but did not formulate an explicit critique.

One major event for comparing notes on urban Africa in the 1950s – and a rare occasion where Anglophone and Francophone scholars met – was the international conference on industrialization and urbanization co-organized by the UNESCO and the International African Institute which took place in Abidjan in 1954 (UNESCO 1956). Among the participants were Georges Balandier, Arnold Epstein, Ellen Hellmann, Paul Mercier, J. Clyde Mitchell, Cyril and Rhona Sofer and Aidan Southall. Since the UNESCO was a supra-national organization, it was perhaps not surprising that the contemporary colonial conditions were not openly criticized in the conference book. By that time, however, anti-colonial and independence movements were well under way in most African countries, and Ghana became independent in 1957. After 1960, many now independent African nations had other priorities than pursuing social science research on urbanization. Anthropology had been discredited as “colonial discipline” and many new universities did not establish anthropology departments (Ntarangwi, Babiker & Mills 2006).

Until the 1960s, migration from rural areas to cities and social change remained the dominant themes of many studies both by researchers of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute and others. Another dominant topic was “detrribalization” vs. “retribalization” or the transformation of ethnic identities (e.g. Bernus 1969; Cohen 1969). Although ethnic affiliations were and are an issue in many urban interactions, they are not relevant in all of them, and not all researchers shared the sometimes obsessive interest in “tribalism” (for criticisms of the “ideology of tribalism”, see Mafeje 1971; Magubane 1971; Uchendu 1970). Some researchers studied emergent forms of social and political organization and of sociality such as for instance voluntary associations (e.g. Kuper & Kaplan 1944; Little 1965; Meillassoux 1968). Most German Africanist anthropologists at the time were not interested in urban Africa, but Zwernemann (1967) wrote a review article about recent publications on urban Africa. The same was true for French anthropology, with a few exceptions such as Balandier’s colleague and friend Paul Mercier who published on aspects of urbanization in Dakar (e.g. 1965).

The Period 1970s–1980s: Informality, Residential Systems and Women

The 1960s were a period of optimism that soon gave way to disappointment in the 1970s and 1980s when the promises of “development” did not materialize. This was especially visible in cities that kept growing but were not geared towards providing even basic amenities to the poorer inhabitants. Many new town dwellers could not find decent work, and others who had been employed lost their jobs and had to “muddle through” somehow. This inspired a number of studies on the so-called informal sector.

A seminal publication of the 1970s that resulted from ethnographic fieldwork in urban Africa was Keith Hart’s text on “Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana” (1973). Hart had studied a particular group of rural-urban migrants, the Frafra from northern Ghana in the southern Ghanaian cities of Accra and Nima. He found that workers had to pursue several livelihoods simultaneously and combine various sources of income in order to make ends meet. Hart pointed out that informal occupations were vital for both poor wage-earners and for jobless persons. He analysed economic and census data, proposed a typology of formal and informal income opportunities and presented cases of particular persons that vividly illuminated the economic hardships of city life and the creative, but not always successful strategies for overcoming them. Hart went on to discuss concepts and policies of “employment”, the relationship between “formal” and “informal” sectors and the informal sector’s capacity for growth. Since then, these questions have been central to many studies by the International Labour Organization as well as numerous works on informal economies in urban Africa by anthropologists and other social scientists (e.g. Hansen and Vaa 2004; King 1996; Ndione 1994). However,

Hart's proposition to compare "the scope and relative attractiveness of informal opportunities" (89) in old cities like Accra with newer ones on the Zambian Copperbelt was not taken up.

A little-known strand of research in urban Africa were the studies on changes in social structures and "residential systems" in Francophone Western Africa in the 1970s. Balandier had founded the Laboratory of African geography and sociology (*Laboratoire de géographie et de sociologie africaines*) at the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique* (CNRS) in 1967 and encouraged younger researchers to pursue urban studies. A multidisciplinary research project under the direction of geographer Émile Le Bris (Le Bris et al. 1987) compared seven cities in Senegal (Dakar, Saint-Louis), Mali (Bamako), Togo (Lomé), Niger (Niamey), Nigeria (Ile Ife), and Central Africa (Bangui). The team distinguished between three types of urban residential space: (1) "Ancient" quarters that had been left intact by the colonial administration, (2) allotments (*quartier loti*): planned quarters with a grid structure under state administration whose inhabitants had legal tenure, and (3) spontaneous quarters, self-built by "neo-urbanites" (*néo-citadins*) in the periphery where there was a high risk of expulsion. Inhabitants of such self-built quarters often "copied" official models (e.g. grid structure) in order to prevent demolition. Le Bris et al. (1985: 21) called this "urbanisme des pauvres" (urbanism of the poor). The researchers found that built units such as the compound were flexible in terms of architecture and inhabitants. The compound was not identical with a "family". Many compounds housed a changing combination of nuclear families and other relatives who moved between various residences, depending on life cycle, marital status and current occupation.

Anthropologist Annick Osmont who was a member of this research group and provided a case study on a compound in Saint-Louis had earlier conducted research on an innovative housing project in Dakar, a so-called "Castor" (French for beaver) project (Osmont 1978). Castor projects had emerged in France in the aftermath of the Second World War as a solution for the lack of affordable housing. Cooperatives committed themselves to self-help and mutual support for constructing. The Dakar cooperative started building a housing estate in 1955 and finished in 1958. During several field visits from 1966 to 1969, Osmont worked on the history and present life of the estate through interviews, documents and participant observation. Osmont was struck by the fact that practically all houses had been transformed from the moment reimbursement for credits had finished and builders had become owners. The model house for a nuclear family that had consisted of one living room, one parent's bedroom and one room for children was adapted to the needs of the Castor community. All three rooms were now used for sleeping by whoever happened to live in the house at any one time. During the day, practically nobody stayed inside the house. Instead, the backyard became the real social centre of each plot. Additional rooms were built on the second floor of houses and in backyards. A small central square in the estate originally designed as a public meeting space

was never used as such. Men's tea groups met regularly directly outside of the houses on the pavement. Osmont found that the "Castors" had become a closely-knit community whose members referred to themselves as a "family" (83). Even 15 years after its foundation, men's most important social reference groups were the teams of ten men that had constructed each other's houses. One's social status within the estate was still determined by the function in those teams (e.g. "the carrier of bricks") instead of the person's present occupation or social standing.

Perhaps due to the fact that this project was so exceptional and that her results did not fit well into contemporary approaches in French anthropology such as structuralism, Osmont's study did not even become widely known in French anthropology, let alone outside of France. Today, it must be recognized as an innovative contribution to new forms of communities and self-help in urban Africa.

The 1970s and 1980s were also the decades when feminism, "women's studies" and Neo-Marxist approaches inspired new perspectives on women in urban Africa. Ghanaian anthropologist Christine Oppong, who had previously studied middle class marriages in Accra (Oppong 1981), edited the volume "Female and Male in West Africa" (Oppong 1983) with chapters on the work of urban women, e.g. factory workers in Ibadan (Di Domenico 1983) and Accra (Date-Bah 1983). Other important collections include Bourguignon (1980) and Bay (1982). There were studies on various categories and occupations of women such as Yoruba traders in Awe (Sudarkasa 1973), Muslim housewives in Khartoum (Ismail 1982) and Kenkey makers in Accra (Rocksloh-Papendieck 1988). Studies like these contributed greatly to more nuanced views on the huge variety of economic, political, social and religious environments of women in cities of Africa, and on forms of individual and collective female agency.

The 1990s–2000s: Mining Labour and Miners' Life-Worlds

The breakdown of the Soviet Union triggered global changes in the 1990s, among them regime changes in Africa as for instance the end of Apartheid in South Africa. The 1990s also brought an expansion of "neoliberal" policies which aggravated the differences between wealthy and poor inhabitants of African cities. In some countries, especially those which were economically dependent on commodity exports, these differences had already increased since the 1980s.

In his book *Expectations of Modernity*, James Ferguson (1999) describes the effects of retrenchment on mine labourers in the city of Kitwe on the Zambian Copperbelt after the drop of copper prices on the world market. These workers were encouraged to "return" to the countryside by the government. Ferguson took issue with the earlier Copperbelt studies of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute because of their "modernist metanarrative" (16). According to Ferguson, this narrative consisted of a presumed linear

progress from rural Africans who only worked in town temporarily to a fully urbanized and prospering workforce who had cut off rural ties. In Kitwe, Ferguson observed what he called two contrasting “cultural styles” or “signifying practices” among mine labourers, one “localist” and one “cosmopolitan” (Ferguson 1999: 91). The “localist” style made reference to rural life-worlds. Even men who had been born and bred in town “performed” a localist style when they were interested in maintaining relations with rural kin. The “cosmopolitan” style was based on urban or globalized forms of consumption and behaviour. Ferguson stressed that both styles were eminently urban. Cosmopolitan urbanites had great difficulties to “return” to the countryside because they were not prepared for taking up rural livelihoods and were less able to mobilize support by rural relatives than the localists. These mine workers’ “expectations of modernity” had clearly been disappointed. Ferguson’s book was widely acclaimed but it also received scathing criticism. Sichone (2001) accused Ferguson of bad ethnography due to his lack of language skills. In fact, Ferguson’s ethnography appears as much less “thick” than, for instance, Mafeje’s detailed observations of different urban types in Langa (see above). Statements on “styles” are based on Ferguson’s research assistant’s interpretations during instances of “people watching” (e.g. Ferguson 1999: 108), but it is not clear whether these interpretations were confirmed through cross-checking. Kapferer (2006: 150–151) refuted Ferguson’s argument about the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute’s researchers’ “modernist” notions by pointing out that they could hardly be blamed for not divining economic decline 30 years after their time. He also pointed out that Ferguson’s book was not really debunking, but rather reformulating the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute researchers’ central arguments on the situatedness and complexity of urban practices.

Some other works that focussed on the living conditions of industrial labourers that appeared in the 1990s were the study of the everyday lives of migrant labourers in South African industrial gold mining compounds in the Johannesburg area by Dunbar Moodie and Vivienne Ndatshe (1994) and Mamphela Ramphele’s book *A Bed Called Home* (1993) on single-sex labour compounds in Cape Town.

Forms of housing for black South Africans in towns, cities and mining compounds during the Apartheid regime were unpleasant under any circumstances, and some even more than others. The labourer’s “hostels” studied by Ramphele were either under direct authority of employers or under the jurisdiction of local authorities. Although some hostels were regarded as better than others, they were all insufficiently equipped and maintained. There was a severe lack of infrastructure for personal hygiene, cleaning and cooking. Hostels were subdivided into blocks and these, in turn, were subdivided into sections. Each section had a certain number of beds in it and could be accessed through a door. In the parlance that developed in the hostels, a “door” became a synonym for a dwelling unit that was shared by several inhabitants. Elected representatives of “doors”, mostly elderly men called *izibonda*

(headmen), managed these units. They enforced sleeping and lock-up times, arbitrated in disputes and regulated access to empty “bed-spaces” (Ramphеле 1993: 60). The bed-spaces consisted of wooden bunks or concrete slabs the size of a single bed. Mattress and bedding had to be provided by the occupants. Contrary to legal stipulations, many workers brought wives or girlfriends and children with them. A resemblance of privacy could be achieved through a curtain around the bed. A bed-space in a workers’ hostel offered a minimum of shelter and represented the right to be in the city:

Every aspect of life here revolves around a bed. Access to this humble environment depends upon one’s access to a bed; it is the basis for relationships within the hostels and places of employment. One’s very identity and legal existence depend on one’s attachment to a bed.

(Ramphele 1993: 20)

Ramphele (1993: 30) saw these hostels as “a symbol of the denial of personhood” of black Africans by the Apartheid state. She understood her book not as a merely academic endeavour, but as a contribution to the Anti-Apartheid struggle. Ramphele’s life as a political activist has been deeply intertwined with this struggle.

Works on artisanal mining demonstrated that urban ways of life exist outside of cities (e.g. De Boeck 1998; Grätz 2010; Walsh 2003; Werthmann 2009). The turn to artisanal mining is frequently interpreted as a response to poverty. In opting for mining, however, people also opt for a specific life-style that is markedly different from village life. One important characteristic of artisanal gold mining camps in Burkina Faso was that they offered alternative life-worlds for young rural people as well as for many others who did not fit in or had been expelled from rural or urban communities of origin (Figure 3.1). During their stays in mining camps, temporary sojourners became part of a translocal community of “people of the hills”. Although mining camps were made of straw, they were clearly urban in terms of social relations and consumption patterns (Werthmann 2008, 2010).

In the 1990s, more works on women appeared (e.g. Sheldon 1996). Topics of anthropological research in urban Africa diversified further in the 2000s and resulted in works about the trade in and consumption of second-hand cars and clothes in Cotonou and Lusaka, drugs in Dakar and media in Kano (Beuving 2006; Hansen 2000; Larkin 2008; Werner 1993), about particular social categories and groups such as musicians in Bamako and students in Ouagadougou (Mazochetti 2009; Polak 2004) and about images and discourses in the representation of Accra (Pinther 2010) (Figure 3.2). Anthropologists contributed to the edited volumes on the “African Neighbourhood” (Konings & Foeken 2006) and on “new urbanites” in the Sahara-Sahel area (Boesen & Marfaing 2007). While these and other works provide in-depth insights on the lives of Africans in cities, the cities themselves often only serve as a backdrop. It is not always possible to get a sense



Figure 3.1 Mining camp Burkina Faso 2008. Credit: Katja Werthmann.



Figure 3.2 Ouagadougou, 2009. Credit: Katja Werthmann.

of the relation between the respective city as a whole and the particular life-world studied within it.

Overlooked and Understudied Topics

Many contributions by anthropologists about city life in Africa since the 1930s have been overlooked in more recent accounts. In his review article on “Urban Anthropology in the 1980s”, Roger Sanjek (1990: 152) listed

the “liabilities” of urban anthropology before the 1980s which included neglecting the middle classes, women, youth, grassroots political action and urban religion (to be fair, Sanjek already recommended re-reading Hellmann). In another review article about trends and methods of anthropological urban research, Christoph Antweiler (2004) drew up a list of lacunae. According to him, more research should be done – among others – about small and medium-sized towns, housing estates and urban phenomena outside of cities. De Boeck, Cassiman and Van Wolputte (2009) as well as Amman and Sanogo (2017) also claimed that there was a lack of research on small towns and secondary cities in Africa. All of these topics, however, had already been studied by Africanist anthropologists when those articles appeared, and not just recently. Here I will just look at two of them: small towns and housing estates.

Apart from the fact that researchers in geography and development studies have been interested in small towns and secondary cities in Africa for some time (e.g. Baker 1990; Bertrand & Dubresson 1997), small towns have long been an important research field in Africanist anthropology. Peter Gutkind published an article on “The Small African Town in African Urban Studies” in 1968. A small Ghanaian town was the field for Maxwell Owusu’s (1970) seminal study on post-independence politics. Joan Vincent (1971) worked on the “big men of a small town” in Uganda. Frances Dahlberg (e.g. 1974) published several articles on the Ugandan town of Lira. Ulf Hannerz (e.g. 1976) drew many of his ideas on urban anthropology from his 1974 fieldwork in the small town of Kafanchan in Nigeria. Small towns were an important topic in the work of spouses Christine Obbo (1988) and Aidan Southall (1979, 1988, 1998). Ouédraogo (1997), Werthmann (2004) and Hilgers (2009) worked on towns in Burkina Faso. These works on small towns and secondary cities remind us of the fact that urban life in Africa does not only take place in capitals or megacities, they elucidate small towns’ “intermediary” positions on a rural-urban continuum, and they explore these towns’ significance as economic interfaces, arenas of local politics and particular social life-worlds.

Besides Osmont’s (1978) study on the Castor project in Dakar (see above), housing estates had early been studied in Kampala (Uganda). Aidan Southall and Peter Gutkind (1957) studied forms of dwelling in colonial “Greater Kampala” which included three government housing estates. Building on their work, David Parkin (1969) compared two housing estates for an emerging middle class in Kampala East. Ralph Grillo (1973) worked on a housing estate for railway workers. These three studies provide detailed ethnographies of the everyday lives and work of male and female inhabitants of the housing estates. The “Kampala Trilogy” shows that national and ethnic affiliations were relevant for socio-professional specialization, which, in turn, was connected to what kind of urban space the respective groups inhabited. Access to government, municipal or company housing estates was restricted to particular occupational categories or groups. There

was both mixing and “ethnic clustering” (Southall & Gutkind 1957: 133) among the inhabitants of “suburbs” and estates. All three studies mention different reputations of housing estates or sections within them, and attempts at social mobility through “moving up” to better housing estates.

During my own fieldwork among housewives who lived on a police housing estate in the old town of Kano (Nigeria), I found that these women had developed a sense of community and collective identity that transcended kinship, marriage or ethnic affiliations and related in a very specific way to the urban socio-spatial environment they inhabited (Werthmann 1997, 2002). These women’s identification with one particular neighbourhood was based on their shared social status as wives of civil servants, on the physical properties of the neighbourhood as a modern housing estate, and on the emergence of friendships among neighbours. They called themselves *matan bariki* (Hausa for “women of the barracks”), even though *bariki* was commonly associated with negative aspects of “Westernization” and non-Muslim behaviour such as the consumption of alcohol and drugs, gambling, *bori* spirit-possession cult, prostitution and the transgression of gender boundaries (cf. Gaudio 2009). Among the women on this housing estate, *bariki* rather signified belonging to a modern middle class. However, the women did not use the term *bariki* when they visited people in other parts of Kano. The only places where this name could be used on the basis of a shared meaning were in other police or military barracks and civil servants’ quarters. When a neighbourhood girl married a politician and moved to a newly constructed government housing estate, her friends joked: “*ta bar bariki, ta koma bariki*” – “she left the barracks and returned to the barracks”. As in other urban settings, derogatory names for social groups could be reinterpreted and reappropriated (e.g. Wilson & Mafeje 1963: 21 on “barbarians”).

In spite of decades of anthropological research in urban Africa, one aspect has been curiously under-researched: spatial orientation. How do people learn to move competently through urban space? The use of “mental maps” (e.g. Downs & Stea 1977; Lynch 1960) for the empirical study of orientation in urban space has rarely been applied to cities of Africa. One notable exception is Deborah Pellow’s long-term study of the Sabon Zongo quarter of Accra during which she collected mental maps in order to explore residents’ perceptions about boundaries and important features of the quarter (Pellow 2006).

In a recent research project, we explored what we called “socio-spatial navigation” in Bobo-Dioulasso (Burkina Faso) and Zanzibar (Tanzania) (see the contribution by Rose Marie Beck in this volume).² The goal of this project was to arrive at non-normative and situated conceptions of the urban in Africa. One of our research questions concerned “shared topographies” that are different from official maps or street names which are generally not known or used by inhabitants of African cities. Through “go-alongs” and “ride-alongs” with tour guides and taxi drivers, we found

that shared topographies include both visible and invisible landmarks. In both cities, the majority of commonly known landmarks are markets, hospitals and mosques that are relevant for city dwellers' everyday lives and practical needs. However, a number of names for landmarks refer to buildings or places that no longer exist, or to past events, or there is both an official and a popular name for a place. City dwellers have to learn these landmarks and their names in order to find their ways. This learning often happens during everyday movements in public transport. Passengers in collective taxis in Bobo-Dioulasso have to ride along until other customers have been delivered to their destinations, thereby passing places they would not otherwise know. Certain destinations become topics of conversation. When, for instance, one passenger asks to be taken to a healer, another one may comment on this healer's reputation and qualities. Their exchange makes a third passenger aware of the existence of this health provider. In this way, knowledge about particular resources and their location in the city is passed on in myriad everyday interactions between taxi drivers and their customers. Interactions in taxis also reveal that both taxi drivers and passengers have to dispose of certain skills for making the most of a ride. The drivers can be vague about the fare if the customer does not explicitly ask for it. Clients of an inexperienced taxi driver who does not know the city well can dupe him into going much further into a certain part than would be economically profitable. Older and poorer women in Bobo-Dioulasso use particular verbal strategies for coaxing taxi drivers into giving them a free ride. They address the taxi drivers as "sons", thereby obliging them to pay deference and to provide help.³ Such a strategy is probably peculiar for the city of Bobo-Dioulasso where certain forms of etiquette and moral economy are generally accepted even among strangers on the basis of shared sociocultural norms for gender and intergenerational relations (Werthmann 2013). For our interlocutors, the urban is clearly more than the material and social worlds they inhabit. It is a space of potentials that is constantly being assessed, explored and exploited.

Conclusion

Until the 1960s, many of the sub-Saharan cities where anthropologists did fieldwork did not have more than 100,000 inhabitants. Since then, some cities have grown exponentially. Kinshasa and Lagos are megacities today. Nevertheless, many characteristics of urban life that anthropologists have described since the 1930s seem to have changed in degree or scale only since then. Looking at photos in early anthropological studies on urban Africa, I was actually struck by how little seems to have changed. Apart from some differences in dress and hairdo, or the replacement of wood and metal by plastic, many of these photos could have been taken today in African urban neighbourhoods. Much everyday talk in cities still concerns gender roles and relations, the job-hunt and frustrated expectations,

or differences between rural and urban life-styles. The mushrooming of make-shift settlements and overcrowding, the lack of infrastructure, unemployment despite having obtained higher education and the prevalence of informal livelihoods are still there, and yet even megacities such as Lagos and Kinshasa continue to work somehow.

In this chapter I have shown that social anthropologists have studied city life in Africa for a long time. Their ethnographies go some way towards explaining how cities in Africa actually work. However, many important contributions by social anthropologists on city life in Africa are little known even within urban anthropology, and much less so in the neighbouring social sciences and general urban theory. As in other observed cases of “forgetfulness”, “denial” or “amnesia” in the social sciences (Bank 2016: 146; Fahy Bryceson 2012; Meagher 2007), some present-day scholars completely disregard most anthropological studies on urban Africa that appeared throughout the 20th century.

Why have numerous contributions by anthropologists to the study of urban Africa been overlooked even within the discipline (Robinson 2006: 38; Werthmann 2014), apart from the language problem? There are at least four possible explanations: (1) The lingering image of Africa as a rural continent. According to this image, there are no cities to speak of in Africa and therefore there cannot be an urban anthropology in or of Africa. (2) The related assumption that Africanist anthropologists still study mostly rural populations. Therefore, many scholars from other disciplines, and even anthropologists who work in other world regions, do not look to Africanist anthropological works as sources of information on city life or with the aim of comparison. (3) Some works did not fit into prevailing epistemological trends and were therefore neglected even by contemporaries. (4) Many ethnographies in cities were not intentionally designed and conducted as “urban anthropological” studies.

Despite some attempts of proposing a more unified research agenda (e.g. Gutkind 1974), there is no well-defined urban anthropology of Africa, but a plethora of ethnographies in African urban settings that can be placed in more than one sub-field of social anthropology (Sanjek 1990: 154). Nevertheless, scholars who call for “fuller, richer and more textured accounts of ordinariness in African cities” (Pieterse 2013: 27) are invited to have a look at the existing ethnographies. Even though a number of the earlier studies mainly stressed the hardships and crises experienced by African city dwellers, these works do offer insights into the agency of urban Africans that should not be neglected in academic and applied research on city life in Africa and in general urban studies.

An overview chapter like this is by necessity too short and selective due to limited space. I have tried to point out that there were important contributions to an anthropology of urban Africa before, parallel to and after the works of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. Many studies are worth re-reading, both as ethnographies of life in particular cities and as important elements of the history of anthropology.⁴

Notes

- 1 All translations from French to English in this text are mine.
- 2 Research project “Doing the City. Socio-Spatial Navigation in Urban Africa”, Institute of African Studies, Leipzig University, Germany, funded by DFG (2017-2020). Principal investigators: Rose Marie Beck, Katja Werthmann; doctoral students: Houd Kanazoé, Patrick Mlinga, Édith Nabos.
- 3 I owe these observations to Houd Kanazoé.
- 4 For a more comprehensive overview, see Werthmann 2022.

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4 Seeing the African Urban

Toward a Visual Anthropology of African Cities

Danny Hoffman

The façade of a Monrovia, Liberia corporate high rise expresses both the modernist aspirations of the capital city and its collapse. The rigid vertical grid of the structural supports is mirrored on the horizontal plane by the sidewalk and street. Two walking figures function as little more than architectural elements. Their primary purpose in the image is to give the building scale. Because they do nothing more than move across the frame in a predictable way, following the obvious line of the sidewalk, they add no particular ethnographic detail to the scene, beyond the banal observation that there is life and flow in the city.

It is what is captured *within* the frames made by the building's supports that convey the larger meanings about the nature of contemporary African urban life. The zinc sheets and spray painted "Keep Out" are signed by the Monrovia City Corporation (MCC), Monrovia's city government. But the warnings and barriers meant to seal off the structure from the surrounding city have been rendered meaningless: on the left by an orderly, if illegal, human intervention (the rectangular doorway that cheekily intersects the prohibitive text), and on the right by a full frontal assault on the zinc barricade, as though street life itself refuses to be kept out. Bits of other built form intrude at the left edge of the image simply because the dimensions of a full frame photograph and position of the photographer meant there was no mechanical way to exclude them. But these glimpses provide a conceptual hint that this is a scene extending beyond the frame and across this West African city.

On the whole it is an image that speaks to the uncertain authority behind claims to urban space in Monrovia. The messages scrawled on the building do not carry the force of law. They are no credible threat. Instead they represent a bold but futile attempt to claim the power to draw lines separating the public and the private on the urban landscape.

That fallacy is disrupted with both force (on the right) and humor (on the left). Neither the state nor corporate property owners have the power to direct movement in and through the city via its pronouncements and prohibitions alone. Attempts to do so will be met with both ludic and violent resistance. On reflection, the two walking figures provide a third

ethnographic insight. Indifference, too, is a viable urban strategy in the face of competing claims to the city.

Moreover, the walkers' presence renders the scene unexceptional. Like the ambiguous elements on the left side of the photograph, they suggest the banality of this scene of ludic, violent refusal.

Embedded in the details of the photograph is a theory of Monrovia. Attentive reading of those details becomes an act of Africanist urban anthropology. Liberia's capital has long been a place of tenuous property rights in the face of an authoritarian state. With limited up-country reach and seated in a city defined by waves of seasonal and informal labor, for many years Liberia's national government held absolute and capricious authority over the physical spaces of Monrovia. The city's residents, conversely, regarded their own presence on the land as temporary and insecure, their claims on urban space subject at any moment to being superseded by the dictates of the national government (see Hoffman 2017: 9–13; Fraenkel 1964: 52). What this image from 2012 suggests is that the "vacancy" (Piot 2010) of the post-Cold War West African state has upended the city's long-standing practices of urban claim-making. Today no single body has the sovereign authority to define urban spaces purely through its decrees. If the boundaries between public and private are to be maintained in Monrovia today, it will need to be done with physical force or impregnable barriers, not with warnings or the symbolic invocations of law.

A second image. The Sharia Al Muizz is one of Cairo's most photographed streets, a good deal of its medieval architecture having been carefully renovated for tourist photographic appeal. But in this photograph human forms dominate. Two ephemeral events of youth (a 20th birthday



Figure 4.1 Monrovia, Liberia. Central Business District. 2012.¹

celebration and a boy's gaze) take precedence over the state's preferred image of immutable religious faith or Egyptian greatness, expressed in built form. There are incidents and accidents of inclusion in the frame, but they are largely the inverse of Monrovia in Figure 4.1. The built environment reads as little more than a generic framing device, randomly caught in the camera's net. The small open square made by a street crossing is simply the supporting element in a fleeting social interaction captured in urban space. Here, too, however, a closer reading of the details of the image becomes an act of urban anthropological analysis. The social drama in the center of the frame derives its meaning as an urban event from its surroundings. On the right of the photograph the hats and camera straps denote tourists trudging dutifully up the road. On the left of the frame the handicrafts, postcard stands, and curios that cater to the tourist market.

These set a stage for the girl marking her 20th birthday with the help of an unseen photographer. She is here, in this square, to be photographed – surrounded but completely ignored by people who have traveled from around the world for the sole purpose of making pictures.

This is, then, a photograph about the politics and poetics of vision and visibility in contemporary urban space. For the girl at the center of the frame, the only thing that marks this site as a worthwhile backdrop is the presence of tourists and the infrastructure of tourism. She is a local mugging for the camera at a tourist destination, verifiable as such not by historic Egyptian architecture (invisible to the viewer of the image) but by the presence of tourists. If the tourists are participating in a fantasy of cosmopolitanism by consuming a simulacrum of Egyptian civilizational greatness, she participates in the same fantasy by situating herself among the tourists.

The boys' gaze in the image completes the theoretical argument of the photograph. To the tourists, she is invisible, despite her party dress, make-up, and massive Mylar balloons. To these city visitors, the present inhabitants of Cairo are unremarkable, indistinguishable background. Elements to be excluded from their photographs because Mylar balloons and frilly pink skirts do not belong in the image of Cairo's historic quarters. For the boys, however, it is the opposite. The line of tourists has no significance. They are, at best, a backdrop to the everyday practices of gendered looking on a city street.

As Filip de Boeck has written of Kinshasa, African cities are complex agglomerations of visible and invisible forces, and urban life is largely a process of navigating the politics and poetics of what can be seen under what circumstances (de Boeck and Plissart 2005, as well as Hoffman 2011: 959–960). The argument in Figure 4.2 is that in Cairo, the political economy of mass tourism has given the dynamics of visibility and invisibility a particular form. Invisibility on the urban landscape can be not only a literal fact but a social one. The camera can record multiple spectacles and how they interact, even if they are only selectively visible to those in the frame. It is an insight with particular resonance for Cairo. The photograph



Figure 4.2 Cairo, Egypt. Sharia Al Muizz. 2019. Credit: Danny Hoffman.

complicates a narrative promoted by Egyptian officials as they systematically extract the tourist infrastructure of Cairo from the fabric of the city. At the time this photograph was made, state authorities were relocating the holdings of the downtown Egyptian Museum from Tahrir Square to a fortified bunker closer to the Giza pyramids and the airport – a move justified by the safety, but also the visual purity, of the tourist experience of Egyptian history.

* * *

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 are both visions of African cities. Both frame human and built forms and the ways they intersect. If in Figure 4.1 it is the built environment that dominates and in Figure 4.2 it is the human, they each nevertheless share a common theme: visualizing the networks and forces that constitute the African city today. Each image captures a moment in time and space, a literal record of the moment the shutter was released. But each also speaks to larger themes in African urbanism. Moreover, each serves as a catalyst for thinking through the emergent, not-yet fully articulated flows and forces that characterize contemporary African city life. It is this capacity of the photograph to serve as a prompt for African city theorizing that I explore in this chapter.

The Family Portrait of African Urbanism

No two cities are the same. But there is a “family resemblance” among African cities, as Kwame Anthony Appiah (following Wittgenstein) puts it

(Adjaye 2011: 11). That resemblance, moreover, distinguishes African cities from cities elsewhere. There may indeed be what AbdouMaliq Simone has argued is a “black urban” typology that groups African cities with their counterparts in Southeast Asia or Latin America (Simone 2010). But the African continent’s urban spaces enter history and the global economy differently from those in other parts of the world. Differing from one another, of course, but nevertheless subject to global discourses in which the labels “Africa” and “African” produce specific outcomes on and for this continent (see Ferguson 2006: 1–23).

Another apparent verity: what makes a city *African* and what makes African urban spaces *cities* has something to do with the conditions under which people “learn to dwell” (Heidegger 1993) in that space and with the inventive forms that their experiments in dwelling produce. Those practices and conditions of dwelling frequently defy the Cartesian logic of conventional urban planning, architecture, and urban sociology, much of which imagines a very different kind of city space. Certainly the logic of fixed urban “geometry” seems woefully inadequate for understanding African cities (Njami 2001: 72; see also Robinson 2006; Myers 2011). Finally, there is the truism that social theory itself is forever playing catch-up to the hyper-innovation of urban living on the continent. Artists may be equipped to explore the African urban condition, according to Mbembe and Nuttal, but theory struggles to keep pace with the experimental, innovative practices that many African urbanites most deploy to make a city life possible (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004: 352).

Each of these truths makes the camera and photography a critical, if underutilized, tool for urban research in Africa. The architectural historian Swati Chattopadhyay attributes the mismatch between urban theory and the actual functioning of most (if not all) cities to the fact that the terms and frameworks of urban analysis were invented to describe city forms that rarely exist as they once did or as they were imagined to be. “The structural changes that have occurred in cities around the world in the last two decades,” she writes, “have strained the limits of our existing vocabulary” (2012: 19). To develop that missing vocabulary, to find new terms for understanding the city as space and as lived experience (the kind of urban inquiry at the heart of the anthropological project), we need to learn to see the city differently. A “new optical field,” Chattopadhyay writes, is what is called for if we are to develop new ways to think and speak the urban. Vision is the foundation for developing theoretical concepts of the city.²

This anticipates a second proposition. Any photography of the city, Jane Tormey has argued, is a “provocation” rather than “a presentation of facts” (2013: xvi). Because photographs have “the capacity to speak beyond the literal reference to objects” (xvii), taking them seriously as ethnographic statements blurs the distinction between artistic practice and social theory.³

Thinking of photographs and their ethnographic potential this way cuts somewhat against the grain of the traditional role that photography has

played in anthropology and in qualitative social science more generally. Two analytic modes have tended to dominate ethnographic engagements with the photographic image, both of which differ from the more formal, interpretive approach I adopt here. The first is a focus on the materiality of photographs, or analyzing photographs as “socially salient objects” (see Edwards 2002: 67). How, for example, do photographs travel across African social landscapes as forms of memory (see Sprague 1978, as well as Oguibe 2003)? How do photographic studios and their products mark a space of cosmopolitanism and modernity (Behrend 2013; Lamunière 2001)? Second, scholars have explored the way photography indexes power relationships, most notably in the colonial, tourist, or authoritarian state gaze. These are studies, in other words, that have less to do with photographs as such than with the unequal conditions of visual production (see, for example, Dlamini 2020; Lutz and Collins 1993; Poole 1997).

But emphasizing the relationships that produce photographic images or focusing on their socio-political lives as material objects generally comes at the expense of close readings of the critical insights to be found in individual photographs. In describing the reception of her exhibition *Okiek Portraits*, for example, Corinne Kratz notes how few viewers engaged her photographs as photographs, focusing instead on what they perceived to be raw cultural data contained in the images or on the design of their display. Few viewers seemed to actually look, *really* look, at the images (Kratz 2001: 187–188). But there is a good deal to learn from the formal analysis of even the most circumscribed photo-ethnographic encounters, as David MacDougall argues in his analysis of colonial-era postcards (MacDougall 2006). A reading of French photographer Jean Audema’s West Africa images that includes attention to the specific formal details within the frame, MacDougall argues, suggests a more complex relationship of image producer to subject than is normally allowed for in critiques of the colonial (or postcolonial) visual archive.

I therefore take my cue in this chapter from Gillian Rose, whose outline of a critical visual methodology for the social sciences begins with what she calls the “compositional interpretation” of images. The approach, she writes, “claims to look at images for ‘what they are’, rather than for, say what they do or how there were or are used” (2001: 34). Rose, following Nigel Whitely (1999), describes a frustration with social science analysis of image work that largely ignores the actual content and formal properties of photographs. While compositional interpretation should not be the limit of analysis, it can and should be its foundation: the Marxist, feminist, semiotic, psychoanalytic, and discursive approaches that Rose then outlines all begin with first learning to look critically and closely at what lies within the image frame.

It is through that compositional interpretation, what Rose calls looking with a “good eye” (2001: 34), that African city photographs become an occasion for theorizing the African city differently. Identifying the visual dynamics of urban photographs becomes an entry point to the African city.

Formal elements in the frame make visible the places where our existing vocabulary is, as Chattopadhyay would have it, inaccurate, unhelpful or incomplete. The goal is to use the image as a catalyst for articulating urban theory. The provocation of urban images constitutes the foundation of my project here. I want to suggest that innovation in Africanist urban anthropology can productively begin with the photographic image.

The examples in this chapter draw primarily from my own photographic work in cities around the African continent. For the purposes of this chapter I treat the photographs individually as stand-alone narratives of urban forms and processes in African cities writ large. They are visual variations on what Stone and McGranahan (2020) call flash ethnography: “compressed and intense, saturated with vivid imagery and affect; and crucially, ... self-enclosed: each a discrete whole, rather than an excerpt from a larger project” (Stone and McGranahan 2020).

My concerns here are primarily methodological. I begin by deconstructing that method in some additional detail, and then focus on roughly a half dozen examples of my own work from Liberia, Egypt, and South Africa set in comparison to the work of other urban theorists and urban image makers. In each case my goal is a theory of African urbanism, a divination of useful tools from the details of city life made available by the camera.

Sensing a New Vocabulary

Consider Figure 4.3.

At the height of the rainy season in this famously wet tropical city, a major downtown thoroughfare has flooded – again. The camera positions



Figure 4.3 Monrovia, Liberia. Central Business District. 2005.

the viewer of the image in the street, a fraction of a second after the figure moving across the picture plane has obscured the view of the street but also blocked the falling rain with his umbrella. There is no evidence that the point of view originates from the dry confines of a taxi or private car. The open sky and umbrella breaking the top of the frame further suggest a viewer unsheltered by the surrounding buildings. Like the two men in the intersection or the porter moving his wheelbarrow through the street, our experience of the photograph and hence our experience of the city is the experience being an unsheltered body navigating the street in the rain.

The start of the 21st century marks, roughly, a period of renewed attention to the possibilities of the visual in cultural anthropology and in ethnographic work more generally. This turn has been dominated by sensory work, or the use of visual media (both still and moving image) to explore the non-textual, non-linguistic, and phenomenological dimensions of the lived experience. African urban anthropology, and the work of fellow-travelers to which Africanist anthropologists have turned, have followed suit. The results have been rich and engaging. Anna Grimshaw, drawing on Michael Taussig (1993) and Laura Marks (2000), describes this as a haptic or embodied way of knowing (see Grimshaw 2002). Images, the argument goes, evoke an emotional or experiential feel that exceeds language.

For example, in the introduction to the Monrovia chapter of his monumental survey of African cities, David Adjaye constructs two grids of multiple images of urban facades. “Despite an increasing number of apartment buildings,” he writes beneath them, “the feel of the city is horizontal” (2011: 176). The first set of grids are what Adjaye labels “commercial” images, mostly streetscapes, storefronts and sidewalk enterprises. The second he calls “residential”: housing blocks and single family homes of various size and grandeur. Taken together, Adjaye is right: there are strong horizontal lines formed by the repetition of balconies in almost every shot, by lines of windows and by a handful of painted or ornamental elements that overwhelmingly run parallel to the ground. No single image is given pride of place in Adjaye’s portrait of Monrovia, and so one contemplates the images as a totality, collectively. The pages operate serially in the manner of a city symphony film, deliberately leaving impressions of qualities rather than narratives. Sensorially in these images, Monrovia is indeed horizontal.

A similar conceit that photographs of the city convey an extra-linguistic sense or experience of place (Monrovia’s horizontality, for example, or its rain) runs through some of the most important and creative contemporary publications on African cities. Introducing the massive *African Modernism* volume assembled by the Department of Architecture at Zürich University, Manuel Herz writes that the photo-essays of built forms from Ghana, Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya and Zambia constitute “...a virtual stroll through the country’s main city in order to contextualize the building and give an impression of each city’s character” (Herz 2015: 14). Filip de

Boeck's extraordinary *Suturing the City*, a collaboration with the Congolese photographer Sammy Baloji, similarly positions images of Kinshasa as conveying above all a sensual experience of the city. They are, in de Boeck's introduction, an invitation to know the city in a non-verbal, impressionistic way. They do the work that words or narrative cannot.

"The present study," de Boeck writes,

is both a textual narrative of life and place in the urban setting as well as a visual study of things that *defy verbal narration* (my emphasis): the city's affective landscape, its moods and the ways in which it 'touches' its inhabitants...Sammy Baloji's photographs have helped me to take in and understand – and render – the feel of the city.

(De Boeck and Baloji 2016: 22)

This phenomenological capacity of photography to render the city sensible – literally sensible, as in comprehensible as bodily experience – is perfectly in keeping with contemporary scholarship on the camera as an ethnographic tool. While cultural anthropology's sensory turn has been cast as an alternative to a perceived "ocularcentric" Eurocentrism (see, for example, van Ede 2009), within the sub-field of visual anthropology it is the camera's potential to express embodied, non-textual meaning that has produced some of the most innovative and challenging scholarship. For filmmaker-anthropologist J.P. Sniadecki, for example, author of a series of stunning films in various Chinese cities, the camera represents the potential to convey an open, sensuous meaning unavailable through written text. "In *Chai-qian (Demolition)*, I structured the film to first privilege the primacy of the visual and aural so as to evoke a sensorial experience of 'being there,'" he writes (2014: 27). In other words, it is the camera's ability to be what words cannot be – open, ambiguous, and experiential – that makes it a compelling ethnographic tool.

These visual, sensual evocations of the feel of a city are undeniably powerful. But to serve as ethnographic "provocation" (to return to Tormey's word), city photographs must do more than simply evoke the sensual experience of place. They cannot simply be haptic icons. They must serve as a catalyst for narrating the scene, struggling for the conceptual vocabulary that makes the image make sense.

Ultimately, this is what Adjaye and de Boeck do with the images they make or engage.

Despite beginning with the horizontal phenomenology of Monrovia, for example, Adjaye is explicit that recognizing or conveying this "feel" is not the end-goal of the project. "The process behind this project," Adjaye writes in the introduction to *African Metropolitan Architecture*:

is based on a way of understanding how to make a language when the starting point is looking. From looking to language, we can construct

specific narratives that apply to those cities: what they might be, how they might grow and develop in the future.

(2011: 14)

De Boeck similarly describes Baloji's photographs of Kinshasa as tools that help him "render" as much as "feel" the city. Simon Njami, certainly one of the most astute (and poetic) commentators on African photography does much the same. Photographs open a space for contemplation of a single instant in the past, Njami argues. "And it is into the space opened up by these myriad interpretations that narrative, which may become writing, surges. Photography then becomes...the point of departure for a story" (1999: 20).

To return to the flooded streets of Monrovia in 2005, it is possible to read this photograph as an evocation of the non-linguistic, horizontal "feel" of the city or a phenomenological exercise in evoking water as an everyday facet of life. Even in the city's dense urban core as we see it in Figure 4.3, the sky remains wide open. The play of diagonal lines formed by the buildings as they disappear toward the vanishing point are at relatively low angles, reinforcing the sense that the skyline of Monrovia is squat. The dominant form in the frame is human and he dwarfs the buildings. What's more, he is impermanent. Just like the flow of water through the street, this is an image of a city that flows laterally rather than towering vertically. As a result, navigating the street in front of us (as viewers placed in the image) means first and foremost contending with water and contending with other urbanites contending with water.

But apart from conveying this haptic experience of the horizontality and wetness of the city, what else might an image like this do as urban ethnography? To begin to answer that question, I turn to a different photograph of a different Liberian city.

An Argument in Images: Imposed Geometries

In the exhibition catalog for *Africas: The Artist and the City*, Njami writes that:

It seems to me that as soon [as] one sets foot on the African continent, searching for the meaning of the city no longer refers in the least to any geometry, to any agreed or verifiable logic, nor to any urbanist ambition.

(2001: 72)

There has long been, according to Njami, an African *cit *, a populated space of political engagement, commerce, and "social organization." What fails, repeatedly, is the *ville*, the urban as an "administrative organization."

In the central Liberian town of Tubmanburg, the failure of urban infrastructure to organize the city's flows according to a fixed "geometry" is made literal by the collapsed canopy of a petrol station in the city center.

It is an image that works, as much ethnography does, through synecdoche. The metal shade of a petrol station, a ubiquitous utilitarian form, stands in for any number of mass produced geometries that fail to work as planned when deposited on the African urban space. Another effort to install a fixed urban form on the cityscape has been rendered absurd. But according to a good deal of contemporary theorizing of the African city, it's collapse is hardly useless to those creative enough to work with what remains.

For example, the failure of “urbanist ambition” is the subject of Rem Koolhaas’s (2002) now infamous series of lectures on Lagos, in which the architect and urban theorist explored how unworkable modernist planned infrastructures became the foundation for creative re-use by Lagos’s poorest citizens.⁴ Translating Koolhaas’s argument into Njami’s terms, in Lagos the postmodern *cit * exists by creatively working the material failures of the modernist *ville*. Under-utilized rail lines become market spaces, highway fly-overs become covered taxi stands and recycling centers.

But what is striking about Figure 4.4 is that despite a group of young men having taken over the derelict petrol stand to hand-dispense fuel, the actual architectural remnants that surround them are worthless. In contrast to the celebrated creative flourishing that, according to Koolhaas, is taking place in the ruin spaces of African cities – the hallmark of a new, more organic form of urbanism – architecture is a cheaply produced commodity that can serve absolutely no purpose in its current configuration. It is irrecoverable and in the way, nothing more. It is simply an object, largely blocking them from the view of a street that is, in any case, empty of customers. It is a disconsolate image, made more so by the swelling gray skies and the empty street. It makes the argument that there are limits to how much can be done



Figure 4.4 Tubmanburg, Liberia. Petrol Station. 2005.

with the ruins of architecture, and that the challenge for a post-colonial African city are compounded by having to work around the detritus of poor design and poorly made forms.⁵

Or consider a less literal photograph of ruin. In 1995, one year after South Africa's first truly democratic election and the rise to power of Nelson Mandela's African National Congress, while accompanying the South African Police "Flying Squad" in Soweto, I photographed two black policemen beating a *kombi* (taxi) driver (Figure 4.5). The literal violence captured in the image is, of course, central to what the image means. But equally significant is the urban landscape that surrounds the three figures. It is absent of other people. The houses are neat, cinderblock constructions typical of working-class South African neighborhoods. The flower garden on the right of the frame is well tended and tranquil. In short, nothing in the image speaks to a precipitating event or an extraordinary moment that might warrant the drawn gun of the policeman at left or the raised hand of the officer about to strike. It is an image of arbitrary and unprovoked violence. It reads as exactly what it was; an everyday encounter with representatives of the state (a routine traffic stop, as best I can remember) that resulted in the sudden exercise of state violence. It is a photograph of the formal state exerting its oppressive, racialized authority against its own citizens regardless of the race of those whose bodies actually perform the work of violence.

As Wangui Kimari (2019), writing about Nairobi, puts it, the racial composition of authority may have changed in the postcolonial city, but the "divide and rule" strategy of racialized colonial urban planning remains in how the police force interjects itself into the everyday lives of urban residents. What the camera afforded in Figure 4.5 was a way to isolate the ephemeral geometry of urban police violence as a logic of governing the



Figure 4.5 Johannesburg, South Africa. 1995.

city. The composition of the resulting photograph, violence set against a generic suburban landscape, opens the conceptual space for exploring how the city is shaped for an urban majority by the ruins of South Africa's administrative state.

The visual argument in each of these images suggests a variant on what architect and urban theorist Bernard Tschumi characterized as "event-cities" (see Tschumi 1994: 12–13). In such spaces, architecture – and hence the city itself – cannot be thought independently of the events that take place within them. In both images here, Figures 4.4 and 4.5, the "events" that make the city are occasioned by, and limited by, ruins. Therein might be an Africanist intervention to Tschumi's understanding of the modern city, one that emerges out of the "optical field" of images of the African city.

Grids and Flows

With that in mind, we might now reconsider the horizontal "feel" of Monrovia's downtown center in Figure 4.3. If the encounter or event is a theoretical provocation in Figures 4.4 and 4.5, it stands in rather stark contrast to a different provocation found in Adjaye's metropolitan photographs of Monrovia and in my own photograph of the city's rainy intersection – both of which draw heavily on the thematics of the urban grid and a theory of the city as a capitalist flow.

Adjaye's visual grids in *African Metropolitan Architecture* are strikingly similar to another of Koolhaas's famous projects, his rendition of Manhattan's street design and the city-argument that he extrapolated from it (1978). The modern urban grid, Koolhaas argued, is intended to facilitate commercial exchanges. In a city organized along a rational street grid, the architectural forms that take place within the negative spaces of the grid are largely insignificant. Even the most outrageous of architecture is irrelevant to the most important function of the modern city: allowing for the predictable flow of goods, people and ideas. Provided it does not interrupt the flows of capital exchange that are the real animating force of the city, what happens in any given "architectural" square is meaningless (see also Aureli 2011: 21–26).

Similarly, in Adjaye's grids of Monrovia images what happens in the individual structures pictured in the photographs is less important than the way they collectively facilitate the "horizontal" form of capitalism that take place *between* the forms. In African cities this is primarily the capital of small trade and cooperative labor exchanges and of "just-in-time" artisanal production – most of which takes place in and alongside the city streets. The individual built forms in Adjaye's images are more or less interesting as individual photographs. But what they suggest as a gridded collection is a milieu that channels the flows of the city, working as a collective without respect to any single individual form. "The more each 'island' celebrates different values, the more the unity of the archipelago as system is

reinforced,” Koolhaas writes (1978: 296) of Manhattan in a phrase with equal applicability to Monrovia as seen through Adjaye’s lens.

And, by extension, in Figure 4.3. Read this way, the subject of the photograph isn’t rain, it is the secondary role that the built environment plays to the constant flows of goods and people that make up the real work of the city. The intersecting figures of the laborer with his pushcart, the middle-class signifiers of the figure in the foreground (umbrella, collared shirt), the jumble of automobiles and bodies in the heart of the intersection, the rapid movement of water; these are the dynamic elements in the image. By contrast, the dead traffic light in the center has no power to control the pattern of movement, nor is there any vibrancy or sign of life in any of the repetitive patterns of the buildings that frame the actual material function of the city – all of which takes place in the street, regardless of the weather.⁶

The juxtaposition of urban commercial flows in the street and the irrelevance of the built form that frames it is even more pronounced in Figure 4.6. In the background the messy abandoned ruins of the EJ Roye Building, a 1960s era monument to Liberian aspirations of corporate modernism, stands in stark contrast to what actually orders the city in the postmodern, postwar present: the micro-economies of informal street trade. What’s more, it is an urban economy built around cheap Chinese and Nigerian imports. Where the EJ Roye Building might have once symbolized a national project of building the nation through a robust export economy, the real Liberian economy today is a street hustle, signified by disposable knock-off commodities. Or in Figure 4.7, shot under the highway near Cairo’s Ataba market. Here the massive city infrastructure of an elevated roadway stands silent in comparison to the petty commerce that actually drives much of the



Figure 4.6 Monrovia, Liberia. Two Views of the EJ Roye. 2005. Credit: Danny Hoffman.

economic life of the city. It is a more complex, more chaotic rhizome literally beneath Cairo's urban grid, one in which built forms do not channel flows of goods or people but stand silently apart from them.

In short, Cairo or Monrovia's urban grids may be functionally very similar to Koolhaas's Manhattan, but their brand of capital is very different. In Figures 4.3, 4.6 and 4.7 the flow of commodities through the urban grid is inseparable from the bodies of street hawkers. It is capital flow via the movements of human forms. Made visible in these photographs, how those differences are named becomes one challenge for an anthropology of the African city. And, as I take up in the next section, it demands a theoretical vocabulary that can encompass as well the immaterial labor of the image and imagination.

The Polymorphic View

Cultural Studies scholar Kobena Mercer, writing about Jean-Pierre Bekolo's surrealist film *Quartier Mozart*, describes Bekolo's "polymorphic view of African identities," and then draws a connection to African urban photographies. In Bekolo's films, city streets facilitate a girl's magical transformation into a young man, allowing her to freely explore the urban environment. The hybridity of *Quartier Mozart*, Mercer argues, is an extension of an idea already evident in urban photography, most notably Malick Sidibé's still photographs of Bamako youth culture in the 1970s (Mercer 1996: 77). Sidibé belonged to a generation of photographers who moved the portrait out of the studio and into the street (or the beach or the nightclub), relocating the spaces in which his subjects contemplated, expressed and experimented with their identities. Both Bekolo's film and Sidibé's images reference image-icons of global pop culture: Spike Lee, Michael Jackson and Lady Di for Bekolo, James Brown and bourgeois holiday snapshots for Sidibé. Both Bekolo and Sidibé therefore offer meta-commentaries on the place of the camera as an active force in the transformations of subjectivity and identity in African urban spaces. In other words, in the modern (Sidibé) and then post-modern (Bekolo) African city, the paths that the camera and its resulting images follow through the city is an important element in the kinds of transformative possibilities – and pleasures – the street affords. (See also Behrend 2013; Lamunière 2001; Oguibe 2003; and the collected essays in Peffer and Cameron 2013.)

The street photographers in Figure 4.8, shot on Cairo's 6th October Bridge, extend that lineage into the digital present. Inexpensive digital technologies and the possibilities enabled by cellphone money transfers have produced a whole industry of street portrait photographers who, in turn, render the city as a kind of fantasy backdrop. Couples, families, or single urbanites can re-imagine their place in urban space by instantly posting to social media shots with a sheen of professionalism, courtesy of portable



Figure 4.7 Cairo, Egypt. 2019. Credit: Danny Hoffman.

studio lighting and in-camera filters. The Nile and the city lights become the backdrop for the glamorous fantasy of a cosmopolitan life largely devoid of other Cairenes. Circulated through Facebook, WhatsApp or Instagram for the consumption of friends, colleagues, extended family or potential partners outside Cairo, these are images that signify worldliness – a visual mode of the “modernity bluff” (Newell 2012) through which many African urbanites make claims to cosmopolitanism and success. And, of course, through which they experience the pleasures that this urban fantasy affords.

But in Figure 4.8 both the ephemerality of the image and its mass production are immediately evident in the chaos that swirls around the photo shoot and the apparatus that makes it happen. The portrait might signify a certain kind of magical transformation, but its physical production is a street level petty trade. The hyper-speed of the bus, rendered as a blur in the frame, makes it clear that this photo shoot has in no way arrested the movement of the city around it. The fact that the softbox of the off-camera flash is supported by a second young man rather than a light stand signifies the cheapness of human labor and the on-the-fly nature of the photographic enterprise. The camera’s transformative magic is a street hustle, functionally indistinguishable from the wheelbarrow man’s labors in Figure 4.3.

In fact, extended to Figure 4.9, the theoretical argument might be that the African city street arguably makes most, if not all, exchanges a form of petty trade. The stethoscope and blood pressure cuff are the only visible credentials authorizing the foreground figure to diagnose illnesses in a Monrovia market. His clothing, gender, age, and relative position in the



Figure 4.8 Cairo, Egypt. Portrait photographers on the 6th October Bridge. 2019.



Figure 4.9 Monrovia, Liberia. 2005.

frame may speak to hierarchies that differentiate him from the girl selling water just behind. But their actual productive capacities in the image are flattened out as they ply their trades in the same productive space on the city street. What we are left in Figures 4.8 and 4.9 are images that speak to the triumph of a certain kind of African neoliberalism. Not only the commodification of all social services and the imagination, but their reduction to the commodity equivalent of disposable bags of water.

Conclusion

Olu Oguibe, the Nigerian artist and art theorist, has argued that there is a specific “ritual experience” of the photographic medium across the African continent: a way that the act of making photographs materializes multiple narratives, icons, and references in a single instant (Oguibe 2003). In other words, in African photography the emphasis is not placed on the image’s indexical fealty to its subject. The “substance of the image” (Oguibe 2003) lies in the medium’s unique capacity to materialize the aspirations and fantasies of its subjects.

Small wonder, then, that the figure most often associated with the photographer in narratives of African image making is the griot (see, for example, Andrew 2000; Mercer 1996; Stoller 1992). As a storyteller the griot’s responsibility is not simple repetition of well-known tales. The griot’s storytelling is shaped by the imperative to use the language, image, and performance to comment on the present and to shape the future.

In a short essay titled “The Writer, the Griot, and the Photographer,” Simon Njami, too, associates the photographer with the griot. But for Njami it is not exclusively the photographer who plays the griot’s role. Instead the photograph opens a performative space for the viewer (who may or may not be the photographer as well). The image becomes the historical raw material out of which “timeless truth” can be crafted and told (Njami 2001). For an African urban anthropology, it is this inventive capacity that I think makes the camera and its products an invaluable tool. A griot practice of inventing new stories from city images can and should be the starting place for a visual anthropology of the African city.

Notes

- 1 All photographs in this chapter are by the author.
- 2 There is overlap here with Gilles Deleuze’s history of post-war cinema (1989). There is no obvious or familiar way to live in a city newly altered by war, Deleuze argued. So in the aftermath of World War II Europe, the cinema camera became the privileged tool for thinking, inventing and ultimately naming new ways to inhabit new urban forms. The camera did not see the city. It saw the *future* city as it would be, or could be, lived.
- 3 Photographer and theorist Stuart Franklin makes a similar argument about documentary photography more generally. The realist camera’s record of events, he writes, is at once “journalistic” and “existential” (Franklin 2016: 5).
- 4 For critiques, see Gandy 2005 and Fourchard 2011.
- 5 This is an argument I have developed further in relation to Monrovia in Hoffman 2017.
- 6 In dramatic enlargements of this image, there is one individual visible in the window just over the shoulder of the figure in the foreground. The windows are barred, and the figure looks out at the intersection with her or his hands on the grate, as though looking out from the confines of a prison cell.

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5 Mediated Ethnography

Images, Infrastructure, and New Imaginaries in Urban Africa

William Bissell

Cities have long challenged anthropologists to push beyond classical assumptions of the field, both methodologically and theoretically. From its origins, ethnography was predicated on certain core techniques: long-term immersion; embeddedness in place; face-to-face contact; facility with local idioms and everyday forms; and a detailed sense of sociocultural complexity developed over time. Anthropologists may not have studied villages per se, as Geertz once quipped (1973:22), but they certainly studied *in* them a great deal, and for much of the field's early history anthropological methods hardly seemed well suited to encompass complicated urban formations. But beginning with the pioneering studies of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in the Copperbelt, Africanist ethnographers began to forcefully articulate how cities challenged anthropologists to think in new ways, showing how the discipline could be re-envisioned by grappling with daunting issues of urban scope and scale. In recent decades, as cities on the continent have dramatically grown in both size and importance, and the complexities within them have multiplied many times over, the urban challenges faced by anthropologists have only become more pressing and insistent. In the early 21st century African urban scholarship faces something of a paradox: despite the growth of cities and their overwhelming material weight and density, of late they seem much more intangible and hard to get a fix on. Cutting-edge Africanist ethnographers of late have focused on urban processes happening out of sight or under the surface, emphasizing indeterminacy, invisibility, shadow economies, and the ambiguities of knowledge (De Boeck and Baloji 2016; De Boeck and Plissart 2004; Ferguson 2006; Simone 2004). While these scholarly perspectives have placed critical aspects of 21st-century urban existence in Africa very much on the agenda, I'm concerned here with related questions of urban imagination and envisioning that have received much less attention: to wit, the rising importance of new technologies, forms of image-making, and modes of spectatorship in African cities. In this chapter, I argue that the urban ethnography of media in an East African context opens up vital new perspectives on contemporary life in African cities. First, cities have been increasingly deployed as settings/stages for African film spectatorship, generating revenue, creating

new media circuits, and deploying festivals as a means to put places on the map and stimulate indigenous media production. And second, at the same time that festivals are staged in cities, they also serve as public spheres for the circulation of images made by Africans for African audiences about African urban experiences in cities across the continent. Through the ethnography of the Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF) as both meeting ground and node in new media circuits, I will focus on cities as simultaneous stages, spheres, and subjects of African film and media—opening up perspectives on emergent pan-African urban connections.

Moving Images: African Cities and Cinema

Let us start with a series of recent urban images, drawn from across the continent, stressing the elusive and inchoate. *Take One*: Johannesburg is a city in constant motion, difficult to discern or define. Post-apartheid representations of the city have portrayed it “as a sprawling metropolis in constant flux, a disorderly and edgy place that is formless in structure, illegible in appearance, and difficult to decipher, manage, and negotiate” (Murray 2008:viii). *Take Two*: consider Lagos—on the one hand, celebrated by Rem Koolhaas and the Harvard Project on the City as a self-regulating marvel of improvisation and innovation, a vision of the future that leaves Western models of urban development in the dust; or, alternatively, Lagos is condemned as outsized and out of control—the very emblem of urban apocalypse, characterized by chaotic growth, infrastructural incapacity, grinding poverty, corruption, and crime. Whether described in dystopian or utopian terms, its urbanism is still amorphous, a “city that is simultaneously growing, dividing, polarizing, and decaying” (Gandy 2005:52). *Take Three*: in Kinshasa, one encounters a “growing incapacity to make sense of the urban site and understand the rules that govern urban life.” In Lingala, one often hears phrases such as *namoni clair te* (“I don’t see clear”), *eza trouble* (“it is murky”), and *mystique*—“difficult to place, interpret, fully fathom, or understand. As one of the organizing tropes of Central Africa’s city life, the word *mystique* seems to capture rather well the overall quality of urban existence in all its opaqueness and elusiveness” (De Boeck and Baloji 2016:89). Evocations of ephemerality, of intangibility, and ambiguity seem to be characteristic tropes of the contemporary African urban scene, going along with the heightened importance of images and the cultural work of the imagination (Appadurai 1996; Malaquais 2006). But while ethnographers have focused on the complexity of urban forms and the perplexity of their informants, this does not mean they have simply thrown up their hands at the opaqueness of it all. Images and the imaginary are never simply intangible or ineffable; they are always connected to (or conducted by) material infrastructures and technologies, and should be studied as such. The proliferation of African image-making that interests me here isn’t just floating out somewhere in the ether, but rather is inextricably linked to

new urban sites and settings that are all too material: deregulation and the growth of private broadcasting channels; satellite TV and packages of digital channels; the rise of digital streaming; Internet cafés and providers; the widespread diffusion of cellphones; and new sources of image distribution or display, including video halls and African-centered film festivals on the continent.

As these visual technologies remind us, cities and cinema have long been intimately interconnected. “Film is *the* urban cultural form *par excellence*,” as Tony Fitzmaurice (2001:19–20) observes. From the very beginning, cinema was inseparable from the development of new urban infrastructures—the elaboration, for example, of an electrical grid in urban settings, transforming the night into a time of urban commercialized leisure activity. Film also depended on the creation of mass publics in the urban sphere—new kinds of consumers and spectators seeking novel forms of experience and entertainment. Movie-making was both labor and capital intensive, requiring specialization, expertise, and a sophisticated division of labor, ideally suited to the density and diversity of urban spheres. As such, film production in the West was invariably located in cities, while exhibition was also centered there, linked to modernity and the novelty of the spectacle, the extravagant architecture of the movie palace, to celebrity, fashion, consumption, and the lure of mass audiences.

Elsewhere, colonialism, urbanization, and the cinema went hand in hand. As James Burns observes, “the early cinema age coincided with a remarkable burst of urbanization throughout the British empire” (2013:15). Colonial cities were linked into far-flung trade networks; they were sites of extensive migration, cultural exchange, and intermixture, with hybrid and changing populations; and colonialism was often premised on promises of technological progress, modernity, and development—all of which proved to be fertile grounds for the growth of cinema during the colonial period. Very soon after the first projection of moving images in Paris in 1895, films were already being shown in an array of African cities and rapidly grew into a staple of popular urban culture.

In the Tanzanian case, as Laura Fair has argued, rather than being backward or behind, “Tanzanians’ experiences [with cinema] were actually commensurate with global trends in technological appropriation, the rise of commercial public leisure, and engagement with transnational media flows” throughout much of the 20th century (2018:24). Cinema palaces defined the horizon of growing East African cities, built by urban entrepreneurs as civic institutions; architecturally grand and ambitiously named (the Majestic, the Empire, the Royal, Sultana, or the Metropole), cinemas were statement projects that conveyed aspirations for status—seeking to mark their urban settings as *au courant*, happening, desirable places to be.

But while urban Tanzanians may have flocked to the cinema, most of the films they saw there were foreign in origin—Indian films, Egyptian, Hollywood productions, Italian spaghetti Westerns, and Kung Fu films,

among others. For much of the 20th century, there was a significant absence of indigenous image-making as well as a dearth of depictions of life in African cities. African cinema began to develop only late in the colonial period, in the 1950s, and it was very much a francophone product—flourishing in West Africa, dependent on French funding for technical support and distribution, and decidedly focused on the art house or festival circuit. As a political and aesthetic project, however, premised on African self-determination and liberation, and seeking to overturn the hegemony of Western images, this cinema rarely found popular outlets at home. Post-colonial African cinema was inherently shaped by its material medium—celluloid film. Filmmaking hinged on gaining access to technical expertise and the means of production (cameras, lighting equipment, film stock, etc.) that were located, produced, or financed in Europe, thus reinforcing African dependence both economically and culturally. Production and processing of film stock were highly expensive, and numerous African directors lamented their continuing neo-colonial dependence on subsidies, support, or distribution from France—as well as the vagaries of the European festival circuit and the stereotypic expectations of what constituted a properly “African” film. These technological challenges became nearly insurmountable in the last decades of the 20th century, with mounting economic crisis, the growth in debt levels, state retrenchment and sharp declines in public subsidies, changing political conditions, and the shift away from national culture-building initiatives. Fewer films were being made, state bureaucracies for cultural production were shut down or sold, and channels for distribution were declining in number.

By the 1980s a deepening sense of crisis was pervading diverse African cities, on different levels and in different forms. Economic decline and urban stagnation signaled the end stages of a particular regime of postcolonial governance, and the transition to something new was marked by deep anxieties, intensified risks, ideological turmoil, and material uncertainties. The shift to postsocialism in Tanzania was attended by all of the myriad ills of neoliberal policies imposed elsewhere: uncontrolled urban growth, intensified levels of inequality, uneven markets, the decline of public services and investment, infrastructural decay, rampant corruption, and more widespread precarity. In ways great and small, globalization impacted Tanzania’s principal urban centers even as it remade the media landscape regionally, nationally, and locally. New players and possibilities entered into the scene, as liberalized policies coincided with profound technological changes—with satellite, cell phones, and video production opening up new indigenous possibilities for creation and connectivity and sharply reducing the barriers and costs of entry in media making, distribution, and display. “More than any other social formation,” Onookome Okome has observed, “it is the postcolonial city so defined that harbors the social and cultural apparatus that engineers the many forms of local responses from the periphery” (2002:320). This sociocultural apparatus has numerous

dimensions, but the heightened salience of images and the imagination are some of its most crucial features in the African urban milieu. The ethnography of emergent modes of envisioning can reveal diverse dimensions of the intersection between the city and cinema.

There are three interlocking dimensions that interest me here, all linked to the emergence of the Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF), which grew from modest beginnings in 1998 to an ambitious annual series of screenings and events, now over two decades old. First is the role of the city as a *stage* for spectacular transnational cultural happenings, embodied in events like festivals that gather crowds, require interconnection and density, involve cosmopolitan exchanges, and hinge on complex processes of image-making on several levels. Second, and related to this, is the fact that the city never functions as a mere backdrop for film festivals, but instead acts as the dense, overlapping, and interconnected *sphere* that makes such events possible in the first place. In East Africa, as elsewhere, festivals are not simply sites of spectacle and consumption. Instead, they rely on uses of culture as tools of economic growth, and in Zanzibar, the development of the festival has been intimately tied to the emergence of nascent culture industries, including the burgeoning growth of home-grown video production in Dar es Salaam and elsewhere, and these dynamics of image-making have unerringly echoed dominant urban forms and processes in intriguing ways, as I shall discuss below. But beyond stage and sphere, the city has also served as the increasingly prominent *subject* of the cinematic imagination, as Tanzanians find themselves engaging a growing wealth of urban images from elsewhere on the continent, even as they create and consume their own. In what remains, I shall highlight some of the key dimensions involved in these different aspects.

Urban Space as Spectacular Stage

Despite its tiny size and obscure location, Zanzibar holds an almost legendary status among travelers as an exotic island paradise laced with palm tree shores, timeless fishing villages, and lush spice plantations. Although a mere stone's throw from the mainland, Zanzibar has an identity all of its own shaped by the turbulent history which abounds with a colorful cast of characters from slave traders and sultans, to pirates and princesses. Every July, Zanzibar becomes a hotbed of activity celebrating cinema, music, performing arts, literature, and exhibitions across the island. Stone Town is the heart of Zanzibar island and it's in the magnificent historical venues along the waterfront that the stage for the Zanzibar International Film Festival is set.

(Promotion for ZIFF, quoted in Fieldnotes, 10 July 2010)

Set to evocative music and images of the islands, the words above played out in the promo film setting the scene for the festival in 2010, projected

each night in the Old Fort during the course of the ten-day event. It echoes many of the themes that have driven the growth of the tourism industry in Zanzibar in the last three decades, emphasizing the environment (paradise, palm tree shores, timeless, lush), the exotic, and the urban as a stage or setting for the festival (in Stone Town, the heart of Zanzibar, in magnificent historical venues along the seafront) (*See Fig 5.1*). Elsewhere I've written about the festival's relationship with urban heritage, architecture, and history, as romanticized and fanciful language has come to predominate in tourism promotion, journalistic writing, coffee-table tomes on fashion, décor, or food, and cultural festivals (Bissell 2012). The “stuff” of Zanzibari culture—architecture, carved doors, clothing, cuisine, and crafts—gets inextricably interlinked with the selling of space: commodification, tourist consumption, and urban restructuring. Globally, cities compete with each other to capture the profits generated through the tourism, spectacle, and entertainment economies, using the local as a means of setting themselves apart—branding themselves as unique and distinctive. Cultural festivals play an essential part in these processes, punctuating the annual flow of time with events that stand out in the calendar and demand to be seen.

ZIFF projects Zanzibar outward onto a global cultural agenda of events, while drawing in audiences to the island that otherwise might not come for the usual sun, sea, and safari tourism. Culture and heritage are used to set Zanzibar off from other tropical Indian Ocean destinations—Mauritius, the Maldives, the Seychelles—while exotic or romantic imagery is deployed to distinguish the festival from other film events: Durban, Dubai, FESPACO, and Cannes.

As a relative latecomer to the festival scene and located well off the conventional map of cultural events, ZIFF initially faced significant challenges to its viability and visibility. The festival branded itself as a



pan-Indian Ocean event, drew on images of the islands' "exotic" history as a cultural entrepot and multicultural space of exchange, and emphasized its cosmopolitan urban setting as a source of attraction. To some, showcasing film was a way to promote place—projecting images of Zanzibar out to the world while simultaneously marketing the isles as a destination or even as a backdrop for film shoots. At a session at the exclusive Serena Hotel on the seafront called, "Destination Marketing: Promoting Tourism through Film," Zanzibar's Minister of Labor highlighted the value of "selling the magic name of Zanzibar throughout the world": "If we are able to sell our name, it will improve our economy, and this is all due to ZIFF's effort." As she elaborated, "I take ZIFF as a tool, an important cultural tool....ZIFF has to be seen as a catalyst. We depend on tourism more than anything else—in the past we just had cloves and copra" (Fieldnotes, 2 July 2009). As this suggests, Zanzibar has undergone a significant shift from reliance on an economy of things to an economy of images and services. Just as industrial cities in decline elsewhere have turned to the arts and culture as a way to revitalize their urban cores, Zanzibar has shifted from a declining export economy based on a colonial monoculture—cloves—to emphasize up-scale tourism based on more intangible assets: history, heritage, entertainment, and cultural spectacles.

The rise of the festival has gone hand in hand with shifts in urban processes on a global scale, and the festival mirrors conditions in the city that stages it. In the African context, under the impact of neoliberal policies, the state has suffered cutbacks and withdrawn from primacy in urban regulation, just as we've witnessed the privatization of culture. Market forces have been granted new sway, preaching the values of up-from-the-bootstraps capitalism, entrepreneurial initiatives, and cultural self-reliance. Within African cities, structural adjustment has largely tended to consign citizens to their own devices, making their own way, improvising as best they can with the means at hand, relying on personal networks or kin, and hustling in the so-called informal sector or second economy. "African urban cultures are characterized by flexibility and improvisation. The structural instability and provisional quality of African cities are the very features that allow for the emergence of these creative responses" (Newell and Okome 2014:8). Cultural production and everyday life do not seem very far apart; indeed, they share a common ground in the city.

I asked a long-time ZIFF organizer about what difference the festival has made in Zanzibar, and she replied:

ZIFF helps open people's eyes and support filmmaking. We had very few filmmakers here in Tanzania, but right now we have many. Economically too—the festival attracts many visitors who pay for accommodation and food, they pay taxes, it creates employment for many youth, they work and get paid something. And the festival even fosters

the talents of Zanzibari youth, who start out here not knowing anything about film or about organizing a festival.

(Leila Hamadi, interview, 3 June 2014)

But in economic and cultural terms, the festival often finds itself in a precarious position—much like many urban dwellers. ZIFF has to generate enough resources to make the festival happen and has the responsibility to bring the event off, maintaining energy, funding, and support year after year; but as cultural entrepreneurs, they don't capture most of the profits that their efforts generate while bearing all of the risks and responsibilities involved. In response to a question at a press conference in 2011, Martin Mhando, the festival CEO, outlined the struggles ZIFF has faced: "ZIFF as an institution brings [in] much more money than quite a number of government organizations and a lot of other industries," he argued. He cited recent research that found that 6,000 tourists come for ZIFF, and with \$50 per person in tourist visa fees, on that basis alone there would be \$300,000 in revenue generated annually for government coffers. And, what consideration does ZIFF get in return? he asked, other than paying rents and fees with no support from the state:

I actually have to pay thousands of dollars to use that venue, the amphitheater [the Old Fort]. We have to pay for all of these venues around the Stone Town. And what are we doing? The only thing we are doing is making people [money], you know, all the tourists coalesce around Stone Town, bringing in more money. And these are tourists who have paid \$50 dollars, and then we tell them to come and spend even more money for that ... week in Zanzibar. And the government does not recognize that. It doesn't recognize that Busara [*the music festival*], ZIFF are actually the major earners of foreign currency that this government gets.

(Opening Press Conference, 14th edition of ZIFF, 18 June 2011)

The festival is never just purely an economic phenomenon. Over time, ZIFF has been characterized by a burgeoning range of goals, including promoting social development, supporting indigenous film training, activism on behalf of women and children, fostering cross-Indian Ocean ties, foregrounding pan-African film, and helping to build and support a local "culture industry," Bongo film, whose relationship to both filmmaking and display/spectatorship mirrors key features of the contemporary city. ZIFF and many other cultural NGOs have come to occupy a structural position quite similar to that of most urban residents in the so-called informal or second economy who live in unregulated and underserved settlements: forced to fend for themselves, to be entrepreneurial, hustle, and create their own chances in precarious and unstable circumstances. Nowhere does this resemblance come together more strikingly than in the phenomenon of

Bongo film, which is infused by this urban ethos in its production processes even as it serves to depict urban scenes marked by incessant hustling, striving, desire, and living by one's wits—making do as best as one can.

Bongo: City Space, Urban Aesthetics, Ethnographies of the Contemporary Moment

Promoting indigenous image-making has long been a stated goal of ZIFF, but it was not until its second decade that these efforts began to bear fruit. Initially, the festival began to institute a “Swahili night” featuring films in Kiswahili that were predominately attended by local audiences, but later this morphed into a substantial section of the festival devoted to Bongo movies, produced and centered on the mainland in Dar. *Bongo* means “brain” in Kiswahili, but is also colloquially the slang deployed for Dar es Salaam (and the cultural productions associated with it), designating the sprawling capital as a fast-paced place where you have to be on your toes, sharp-witted, and calculating—or the city will chew you up and spit you out (a theme in many Bongo films focusing on the migration of *wana-shamba*, or rural folk, generally used in the sense of “hicks” or “rubes,” coming to the city and receiving a fast and rude education in their untutored ways).

Bongo film production was largely centered in Dar, and grew up as a response to the spread of Nigerian videos in the local market. The first Nigerian videos appeared in Tanzania the initial year of ZIFF in 1998, and quickly saturated the market (Krings 2010). As one local filmmaker told me in 2013, “Four years ago, we started a campaign to make sure that we undercut the market for Nigerian films here, and replaced them with Tanzanian films.” “Bongo movies?” I asked. And he replied,

Yeah, Bongo movies. When we started, you could go to a Tanzanian's house and find them with 20 or 25 Nigerian DVDs! So, it was a tough campaign, but the first thing we did was to ensure that Tanzanian films could be easily acquired in their neighborhoods and that people started loving their own people who work in Bongo movies.

(Godfrey Kipeja, interview, 19 July 2013)

This campaign was an expression of some of ZIFF's core goals: first, to foreground Tanzanian stories, told by Tanzanians to a local audience, set on their own terms and turf; and, two, using the festival as a platform to facilitate and grow indigenous filmmaking throughout East Africa (*see Fig 5.2*).

The rise of Bongo film was facilitated by the very same factors that made Nigerian and Ghanaian video possible in the first place: ready access to the means of production, technological ease of replicability, and the domestic diffusion of cheap home video (and later, DVD) players. Bongo filmmakers



were able initially to copy popular Nigerian tropes and themes, while benefiting from the thirst for Kiswahili language movies, hometown scenes, and another nascent urban phenomenon: the cult of celebrity and creation of local stars. A long-time Tanzanian filmmaker and enthusiast of ZIFF told me that Bongo films also took over their aesthetic from popular preferences for Indian films, emphasizing story lines that are “emotionally charged and show everyday life”; the videos show “the daily life of a Tanzanian” (Remmy Majengo, interview, 15 July 2013).

Jonathan Haynes (2000) has noted that African video production makes very few concessions to the stylistic conventions of Western cinema. In Tanzania, videos typically eschew English for Kiswahili and are infused with specifically local idioms of place, kinship, morality, and urbanity. And through technological innovation, they subvert the old logic of underdevelopment and dependence that marked the first decades of postcolonial African film. Video makers are market driven, and they no longer depend on external European financing or expensive equipment imported from abroad—not to mention celluloid film stock, which was costly to obtain

and difficult to process. These are movies made by Africans, about Africans, for Africans—that either find a market locally or fail. The videos are shaped by the material realities and preoccupations of the urban milieu, and then reciprocally go out to reshape them, in turn. Video films are a quintessentially urban form that can be understood

as a complex flow of exchange and myth-making in which video filmmakers appropriate stories from social documents such as the newspaper, radio, television, and rumor mills and rewrite them into the peculiar art of the video film. Video narratives so produced then assume a life of their own, informing actions in the street. These actions are then recycled into the texts of new video films. Consumed in the domestic spaces and “video parlors” of rural and poor neighborhoods, the home video film places into circulation desires that go beyond the economics of the local poor. The role of the city ... is crucial.

(Okome 2002:334)

At one level, Dar (or Lagos or Accra) provides the quintessential nexus of infrastructure, density, organizations, creative talent, and specialization in the division of labor that allows for the emergence of new media industries. It serves as a central media hub that facilitates the widespread production, distribution, and exhibition of images and sound (Ritzer and Tomaselli 2018). The urban scene is punctuated by the pounding rhythms of Bongo flava and other musical genres, from buses, passing cars, on street corners, and pumping out of stores. The urban landscape is replete with the visual signs of cinema: posters advertising new releases or cultural events, street hawkers with piles of DVDs, video halls and other sites of exhibition, and rental shops (*see Fig. 5.3*).



And it is in cities, moreover, that filmmakers can cultivate diverse publics, finding sufficient audiences and creating enough buzz to allow them to survive. And cities are crucial lastly in the sense that they supply the imaginative themes and subjects of Bongo movies that draw audiences in—and keep them coming back. In terms of content, Bongo video—like video elsewhere on the continent—is preoccupied with the economic instabilities of contemporary urban lives: the insidious seductions of fast money and corruption; the moral ambiguities of novel and uncertain sources of wealth; rapidly changing social relations in the city and new models of fashion, gender, and sexuality; the lure of consumer culture and celebrity; and the instability and uncertainty of life under capitalist conditions in the new millennium. Many of these forces also drive the industry itself insofar as these urban economic realities shape the political economy of video production and distribution; the unregulated market shapes the making of the videos even as the social impact of unbridled capitalism serves as the subject of the movies themselves.

Producer-distributors wield significant power in Bongo film and have a sharp appreciation of the market forces that make cultural production possible—without it, they would not long survive. Even if a script isn't ready or a shoot finished, the producer will step in and take the project over, as a Dar-based director told me:

The producer is the distributor. If he himself decides—it [*the film*] is totally not ready yet—but if he knows it can sell about 500 DVD copies in Kariokoo [*one of the largest marketplaces in Dar*], he goes ahead and produces it. OK? To me, that is where a different culture comes in. The culture of the city [*Dar*] is a culture of film production that is completely different from the culture of global film-making or business.

(John Mtangi, interview, 13 July 2013)

Producers-distributors cast a calculating eye on the market, and cut films according to their viability in a highly competitive marketplace; when they feel they have a product that might generate enough profit to pay the bills and fund the next production, they cut it and move on. It is a restless, ruthless, relentlessly unsentimental field, where you are only as good as your last commercial hit and endlessly in search of the next new thing. Promoting, pressing, pushing—in this sense, production follows the economic logic of many of those caught within the “informal” sector in cities who are cast upon their own devices, hustling, striving to make do, and relying on the resources they can conjure up, call to hand, or con out of others.

Even as the big distributors seek to dominate the industry and crowd out potential competitors, they are haunted by potential threats. The very features that make their success possible—technological innovation, entrepreneurial hustle, market savvy—also threaten to undercut them at every turn. The risk of losses and rip-offs loom large in their imagination; as Brian Larkin has noted, media piracy is an inherent part of the fabric of

globalization in African cities, intimately linked to its organizational architecture (2008:217). Cheap and accessible technologies of image-making, copying, circulation, and display are fundamental components that made the video industry and its profits possible. But these features come with very real downsides, and distributors are always haunted by the possibility that others are stealthily ripping them off, stealing their films, selling unauthorized copies, and seizing the profits. Of course, these dynamics are characteristic in the context of a pervasive “second” (or shadow) economy where the lines between licit and illicit, regulated and unregulated, authentic and copy, remain highly indistinct. The urban ethos of being out for yourself, seeking an edge, could cut both ways; entrepreneurs might cut corners to gain advantage while feeling vulnerable to other hustlers who might opportunistically invade their markets. Remmy Majengo told me an anecdote about STEPS Entertainment, a major producer/distributor of Bongo films in Dar. Right next to their office in the city, an underground competitor set up shop and began to brazenly pirate their videos in classic Bongo fashion:

They have an office there, and the guy had an office right next to it. He would buy their movies there, then he would do dubbing there, and then sell them right here. But you couldn't readily distinguish his copies from the original. STEPS didn't know exactly how many films that they've made have been sold. They knew how many they had made but couldn't tell how many of their films were being sold truly. The films were being sold right there, by that guy! Those who went to buy films [from him] got fake [mbovu] copies. That is Bongo!

(interview, 15 July 2013)

The making of Bongo movies mirrors the conditions of life in the city itself, marked by instability and uncertainty, hustling and striving, the need to rely on your own wits to get by, generating something from nothing—and the persistent anxiety someone more cunning or clever or connected might be stealing your lunch, right from under your nose. Remmy Majengo, long active on the Tanzanian film scene, highlighted what he saw as the distinctive urban qualities of Bongo movies: “The word that I know that represents Swahili cinema in Tanzania is *Bongo movies*,” he insisted. “As we said, it is the culture of Bongo, the culture of the city, the culture of hustling, the culture of creativity, and saving your own life.”

Bongo films do not speak to everyone, of course. In many respects, they remain resistant to most of the aesthetic conventions of European cinema. During ZIFF, Bongo movie nights largely attract home-grown Tanzanian audiences, with *wazungu* (those of European descent) conspicuously absent. Many festival attendees come over by speedboat from Dar, with industry players and stars, as well as local media, and spectators are raucous, lively, and highly engaged, with Kiswahili being the operative language on-screen and off. It is an intensely local affair, as Tanzanians gather to

celebrate their own celebrities, performers, and visual productions. In Bongo movies, what audiences see are meaningful stories offered up in a language all their own, reflecting the distinctive Kiswahili idioms of the street and the rhythms of everyday life—a language, moreover, that European cineastes simply don't speak and hence cannot manage to understand. Bongo fans are drawn to narratives that reflect the realities of their lives, immersed in all the pleasures and perils involved with commodities and the consumption of popular culture, shot in their city with familiar sites and settings, reflecting its tensions, and expressing hopes and dreams of a better future.

Projecting Images at the Festival: Identity and New Imaginaries on Screen

“Films always talk about society, when you think about it.” I was sitting on a stone bench in Forodhani, a public park along the waterfront across the street from the Old Fort, conversing with a young Kenyan director who had just had the chance to show his first film at ZIFF. He stressed the newness of a filmmaking culture in East Africa, arguing that there was a perceived urgency to focus on stories that emerged from everyday life:

Character-driven films will probably start happening once we've told these stories of everyday life and juxtapositioning people in different situations. I think these are the stories people want to tell right now because they haven't been told; we just have such a young film culture, so we need to talk about these broader issues that are on our minds and affecting us, then eventually you'll probably see a lot more character-driven, personal focused films.

(Denis Kimani, interview, 6 July 2013)

From the first festival in 1998, one of the primary objectives of ZIFF was to “provide the inhabitants of Zanzibar and East Africa a rare platform to watch cinematographies related to their cultural background” (Zanzibar International Film Festival 1998). For years to come, such films were few and far between. While the hope of serving as a platform to stories that hadn't yet been told may have been a key goal of the festival, these films did not yet exist—and nurturing a nascent film industry was far beyond the capacities of the festival itself. Film culture was certainly not “young” in the sense of spectatorship; Tanzanians had been avidly going to films for well over a century (Fair 2018; Reinwald 2006), although most of the historic urban cinemas in Zanzibar—the Empire, Ciné Afrique—had recently closed, being converted into supermarkets or offices. ZIFF officials often highlighted how they were attempting to resuscitate a public culture of cinema-going in the city. Offering a wide range of contemporary African films otherwise unavailable; exhibiting films under open skies, in the dark,

with crowds hooting, laughing, crying out, and otherwise experiencing film *en masse*; fostering critical discussion and debate; and even launching campaigns to restore old cinema houses—these were all goals that ZIFF officials pursued as part of their cultural mission. But over time festival organizers also began to stress another aim: supporting local filmmakers, offering workshops for students, and stimulating the growth of an East African film industry. These efforts were always partial and incomplete; ZIFF often lacked sustained funding, organization, and focus to follow through on all their initiatives on a sustained basis. But the festival certainly contributed to wider developments regionally, and ZIFF had matured in tandem with the emergence of a lively cohort of young filmmakers in Rwanda, mainland Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, drawn to the novelty of telling tales in ways that had not existed before.

In 2011, I interviewed Maja Byrne, an Irish film scholar who had come to the festival every year for the last decade—a rare feat—and she recalled the first time she went into the Old Fort to catch a film at her first festival:

MAJA: I remember going in. I actually knew the Old Fort because we'd gone in, so I kind of knew that amphitheater. I just went in and I thought it was brilliant sitting outside. I can't remember what the film was. I can't remember the quality of the films, but you know it didn't kind of matter. Just being outside...

BILL: You're saying the quality of the films didn't matter!?

M: It didn't matter that much to me.... They had far fewer films from here. In fact, there weren't any.

B: Right. So, there was nothing from Tanzania, from Zanzibar.

M: Kenya, maybe one or two, maybe, there were probably some from Kenya. There was nothing from Tanzania, and nothing from Zanzibar.

(Maja Byrne, interview, 26 June 2011)

Maja attributed the paucity of East African films at ZIFF largely to the historical legacy of British colonialism—especially the didactic tradition of the Colonial Film Unit (CFU) and the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE), which turned out documentaries that were, in her terms, “made in quite a dull manner.” In British West Africa, at mobile screenings, these pedagogic works were often greeted by calls for more entertaining Chaplin films, as African viewers shouted out their complaints at the screen, “Where’s Charlie!” (Larkin 2008:95). Historically, then, any tradition of artistic or aesthetic filmmaking was lacking; exemplars and experiments simply didn’t exist; there was no funding for training, nor access to film schools; and paths to support oneself through film were similarly nonexistent. In the first decade or so of ZIFF, this meant they often had to rely on well-meaning NGO-sponsored advocacy films that often followed on the older British documentary tradition of BEKE or the CFU.

Of course, the paucity of an African presence in film was hardly just a Tanzanian (or an East African) issue. Many of the new wave of postcolonial African directors emphasize how they were motivated to take up a camera because they confronted a certain absence on the screen. Like many others, the Guinean director Cheick Fantamady Camera related how he grew up with a steady diet of American cowboys, identifying with Gary Cooper or Alan Ladd as heroes:

After going to see a film, we'd spend the whole night imagining what it would be like to be one of those heroes. But even when I was a teenager, I never understood why Africans didn't make their own films. At least, for years I never saw one single movie made by a Black director. I saw thousands of cowboys, all armed to the teeth, out in the American wilderness, just helping themselves to what they wanted.

(2010:210)

Similarly, the Congolese director Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda highlights how African representations often don't get represented within Africa itself. In Cameroon, he observes, you'll find plenty of French and German broadcasting, as well as lots of other overseas programming, "but you need to have a lot of patience to fiddle around with the remote control before you finally discover by chance an African broadcaster on channel 50" (Bakupa-Kanyinda 2010:224). The avant-garde Cameroonian filmmaker Jean Pierre Bekolo has spoken in similar terms of his motivation to take up the camera:

The idea was just to say generally that we Cameroonians, we Africans, exist—that we are also part of the world. We saw how other people reinforce their own identity and presence in their films, as if confirming their own existence on the planet. And it became increasingly clear how, in comparison, the only thing we had in front of us was a vast void. The need to fill that void was decisive in my choice of genre and the way I approached it.

(2010:205)

Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, this generation of African filmmakers, like their compatriots, found themselves challenged to construct cultural forms that reflected postcolonial identities, changing social realities, and urban lives. Yet at the time they routinely consumed older and imported media on the screen or television that made no place for them in the world—neither reflecting their everyday existence nor speaking to their hopes or concerns. Filling the "vast void" of Africa in world cinema; speaking back to the overweening hegemony of Western representations; and asserting the vitality and complexity of ordinary African lives were all critical objectives of postcolonial African cinema, and ZIFF is very much part of a

millennial next wave seeking to expand, broaden, and deepen African media representations beyond the art house, auteurs, and the Euro-American festival circuit. Building capacity in local image production is one part of this strategy, but so too is increasing the variety of platforms where African images can be circulated and screened—at home, in video halls, on TV, satellite channels, mobile devices, and public events and festivals. Indeed, these dual objectives were increasingly intertwined (see Fig 5.4).

The idea of making a mirror for one's own experience was echoed by emergent young filmmakers drawn to ZIFF. I spoke with Oscar, a Tanzanian filmmaker trained abroad who had just returned to Dar to direct a moody and stylish film noir set in the city. I asked him if it was a good moment to be making films in Tanzania, and he responded,

Yeah, it is a great time to be a filmmaker. I think better late than never, you know? It has been like a long time, and I have always—it is a little bit of an egoistic thing, but I have always been precious about film in Tanzania in the sense, you know, like when they made *The Constant Gardener* in Kenya, to me that kind of irked me a little bit, because it was like, well, you know, it should be someone from that area who is making that film, not some guy who made a great film, beautiful, but we want Tanzanian voices and Kenyan voices who are doing that.

(Oscar Valerian, interview, 20 June 2011)

In terms of fostering indigenous production, at some level, Maja was quite right: the quality of the local films being made didn't really matter. What



was more crucial was the fact that they were getting made at all—and then getting shown to local audiences. As Oscar stressed,

the real issue is just getting guys behind the camera and shooting. That's the only way that the guys [*learn*], and that is what I always tell them. Last night I was having a conversation with a guy who is really enthusiastic and he is talking about how he has been assisting mostly on stuff, and I say to him the best thing you can do is just shoot: make, make, make. You know? I say to him, look, if you can wake up in the morning, take your camera, any camera you can get your hands on, and go and film guys jumping off a boat for some ten minutes, cut some two minutes of it, and you've got something for your show reel, you know? Learning by doing is the most important thing.

(interview, 20 June 2011)

Teaching yourself through practice and making the most of what lies close to hand are familiar strategies to cultural entrepreneurs throughout the “informal” or second economy, making do and improvising to find footholds in the urban sphere. And there is nothing like seeing more film work emerge from young Tanzanians at the festival to inspire others to take it up and try their own hand at it, in turn—telling their own stories, or trying something different, or making it better. The more people on the ground you have picking up cameras and shooting, the more opportunities aspiring filmmakers get to watch, exchange, critique, and evaluate work, providing fertile soil for the eventual growth of a more robust field, with improvements in techniques and aesthetics emerging through experiments over time. Establishing transnational links with emerging African filmmakers elsewhere is a crucial component of ZIFF, as is the capacity to attract expatriate talent back from abroad—with enhanced opportunities to support their creative work through music videos or commercial shoots.

In that same year, 2011, an expatriate Tanzanian economist brought his first film to the festival, a full-length animated work called *Manzese*, set in a popular neighborhood in Dar by the same name. On returning to the city from Rome, the economist-director had been outraged by deterioration in conditions in local neighborhoods in the city, and was spurred to try and make the movie—which he did, self-taught, on his desk-top computer at home. After the screening, he apologized to the audience for the graphics, which didn't allow for fluid movement or naturalistic representation, and he emphasized that this was just his first attempt. With better equipment, he vowed with a flash of humor, he could make a better film than even *Avatar*. And yet, despite its technical limitations, *Manzese* vividly conveyed the look, language, and sensibilities of popular *mitaa* (urban neighborhoods) in Dar, as well as the struggles of one of its denizens to overcome official indifference, corruption, and infrastructural decay. The film centered on an ordinary resident's ethical refusal to simply go along and get along, seeking

instead to do what he can to hold out hope, however slim, for a better city—just as the filmmaker offered his work at ZIFF, provisional and self-funded, in much the same can-do, activist spirit.

By opening its doors to first-time and experimental work (even at moments altogether unpolished), the festival attracts new filmmakers to step forward—and reciprocally by seeing work showcased there, others are encouraged to embark on their own efforts. In discussion with a young Zanzibari woman who had long worked at ZIFF and was interested in development issues, I asked what difference it makes for Zanzibaris to watch local films, set in East Africa. “Yes, it makes a difference!” she exclaimed:

It opens their eyes to know that there are films about us that are being made in Zanzibar, Dar, Kenya. Initially people didn’t even know that there were films made in Kenya, Uganda, other neighbors, and that you could buy them and see them. Perhaps a few documentaries, maybe on TV, but you wouldn’t see fictional films. But by attending ZIFF, people realize, “Ahhh, so people in Kenya make great films like this!?” “Ahhh, so right here in Zanzibar there are things we can make films about—look at *Malkia wa Soka*. Someone came and made that right here!”

(Leila Hamadi, interview, 3 June 2014)

The reference here to *Malkia wa Soka*, or *Zanzibar Soccer Queens*, is telling. The Cameroonian director Florence Ayisi had been invited to Zanzibar by ZIFF, serving initially on the festival jury. She found herself drawn to the islands, and vowed to come back to make a film, eventually finishing *Malkia wa Soka*, about a pioneering women’s soccer club in Zanzibar, Women Fighters, and their efforts to field a squad in a social context that either doesn’t value women’s athletics, fund it, or where there are patriarchal resistances to allowing women’s participation. The film foregrounds the players and coaches with an ethnographic attentiveness to their voices, visions, and agency, while respectfully engaging divergent points of view on debates about Islam, gender, and soccer. I interviewed one of the assistant coaches well after the screening, and she said they were fortunate to be in the film,

because it made us popular. And when we became popular ... others came to see the team for themselves. Americans have come here. Different groups have come here. Swedes have come as well. Whenever they see the film, they say they want to see the team too.

(Aisha, interview, 12 July 2011)

As this suggests, Zanzibari crowds turn out for local fare enmeshed with their own social concerns and reflecting how and where they live, not in English or German or French, but the rhythms of Kiswahili you hear in

the streets. Coming out of a screening I ran into a cultural entrepreneur involved with Sauti za Busara (Voices of Wisdom), a pan-African music festival that was an outgrowth of ZIFF. He enthused over the Congolese film we had just seen, *Kinshasa Mboko Te* (*Kinshasa, Wicked Land*, 2013). He enjoyed the way in which it was grounded in the immediacy of everyday life, punctuated by urban rhythms, vividly conveying the feel of *uswahilini*—the popular neighborhoods where poorer Swahili folk live. He noted there were Kenyans, Rwandese, and Congolese in the audience, but few Zanzibaris—it was a shame, he said, the film couldn’t be shown at night, in the fort, where it might get a larger crowd. He definitely had a point: during the daytime, festival screenings are often held in smaller venues scattered around the city, and few Zanzibaris might be in attendance. But when local works are screening at night in the Old Fort, they can draw huge crowds—especially when Zanzibari or Tanzanian films are scheduled to be shown.

But urban tales from elsewhere focused on plucky or whimsical underdogs navigating the city as they face an uncertain fate could also garner popular acclaim. Take, for instance, *Swirl in Bamako* (2012) from Mali, shown just the night before. It focuses on the quest of Makan, who seeks to marry and settle with his beloved, but lacks the material means to do so as a simple woodcarver. On a whim he buys a lottery ticket from a friend’s kiosk and stashes it absentmindedly in his jacket pocket. Only later he discovers he has won the jackpot that can transform his life, if only he can get a hold of it. With a shock, he realizes he has left his jacket behind with a co-worker’s sister, who has given it to her boyfriend, who lent it to someone else.... And then a desperate chase through the city is on: the film features his quest through the alleys and byways of Bamako in hopes of recovering the jacket—and regaining claim to a sudden fortune that remains just out of reach. *Spoiler alert:* in the end, Makan, having gone through the wringer to get back the jacket, celebrates his newfound fortune with immense relief—but crossing a bridge, the winning ticket slips out of his friend’s hand and falls down into the river, swept away by the water below. At that moment, the crowd in the Fort let out a gasp and moan of regret, calling out, “Ohh-hhh!” in disbelief and deeply caught up with the central character and the vagaries of fortune to which he was subjected.

When asked what draws them to ZIFF or watching films in general, Zanzibaris often spoke of the capacity of film to transport them elsewhere—that is, to travel at least in your mind, encounter others, and to learn. Similarly, Abdullah also highlighted *elimu*, or the value of education. He had risen through the ranks of the festival over the years and enjoyed working behind the scenes, “because I am getting an education in here that I wouldn’t be able to learn in any school.” When I asked what he enjoyed about screening the films, he highlighted the fact of seeing them under open skies amidst an urban crowd, caught up in the audience’s reactions:

Nearly all the films I watch, I find that I enjoy them much more when watching in a crowd than when watching by myself. People's reactions, the noise, the laughing and grumbling, when they go "Aaahhhh!" "This is happening, and that is happening"—it all makes it so much better than watching at home. You can watch a film at home, and it would entertain and make you laugh, but that's about it. It doesn't make you happy, as it would if you were watching with people.

(Abdulla Mohamed, interview, 19 July 2013)

Others attached to the festival scene echoed these terms. I asked Godfrey, the filmmaker from the mainland with long experience working in ZIFF, if it was important to show films made by Africans to Africans within the continent itself. And he quickly responded,

Completely. Because they say, *mcheza kwao hutunzwa*. That's a Kiswahili saying, like, "When you're playing at your home game, you get more cheers." You know? So, if we can't start, if we can't start to watch our own films but we expect others to watch them, how can we possibly explain and showcase our culture? By watching our own films first, we can find a way to sit together and tell each other that this cultural mode is good, this cultural mode isn't good. So, even if you're asked, you can say if you want to know more about Africa, about Tanzania, about East Africa, watch this particular film. So, it becomes an opportunity for you to see and understand, because people's opinions and perceptions are different, and everyone has their own way of interpreting things. By watching our own films, it's a way of making us think more.

(Godfrey Kipeja, interview, 19 July 2013)

Playing on your home turf can certainly bring you greater appreciation—but it also changes the entire nature of the conversation and the terms of cultural exchange. Rather than confronting the void or seeking a means to mirror their own experience, urban Tanzanians increasingly "can find a way to sit together" and debate the moving images and modes of storytelling that they find most meaningful—and that powerfully reflect their place in the world. Much of this conversation may remain in circuits and terms located beyond the main currents of Western media and urban theory, which run the risk, of course, of becoming more provincialized over time—less able, in the end, to claim any global reach or purview. Attending to emergent practices of image-making in African cities is critical now, because it offers the prospects of a glimpse into alternative futures. "If I create a film that imagines a possible future," writes the Kenyan director Wanuri Kahiu, "different labels are imposed on the work trying to explain the shocking thought that a young East African woman can think beyond her station. She can imagine black women beyond this now" (2016:168).

Her point about temporality and imagination was echoed by Jean-Pierre Bekolo, who drew attention to the fact that the present in which we exist already represents an unlikely future that others once could only dream of—with the end of slavery, the termination of colonialism, the collapse of apartheid. So, who can say what is to come? Bekolo asks: “Since its inception, film has impressed us with its sci-fi special effects. I wonder if this is why we believe that it can show us the way to the future?” And as a filmmaker who has tapped rich veins of speculative images, he voices the hope that the visual imagination might open up new terrain: “In thinking about the future, I wonder if cinema can refine Africa’s future beyond the development perspectives of NGOs. Can cinema imagine our utopias and dystopias, and can it be the design lab for Africa’s reinvention?” (2016:117).

Conclusion

East African audiences have long been drawn to the cinema. Watching film has been valued as a means of engaging with others, of traveling to distant or unknown places, and an accessible source of learning, pleasure, and social debate. What is different now, however, is the fact that East African audiences, like those elsewhere on the continent, are increasingly engaging with a media environment suffused with stories produced and distributed closer to home—in African urban settings. As I have argued throughout this chapter, cities lie at the vital center of these emergent media worlds, drawing on circuits of creativity, connectivity, and consumption. Urban spheres are crucial in multiple senses, insofar as they serve simultaneously as stages, spheres, and subjects of African image-making. These different aspects intersect and interact in complex ways, and are often mutually reinforcing. Much of this indigenous filmmaking and spectatorship has been happening largely out of sight or unnoticed by Euro-American theorists of media and urbanism. Not resident in African cities or fluent in relevant languages or well versed in divergent aesthetics or local idioms, these scholars overlook or seem oblivious to much of this emergent work. But if anything, we’ve seen how recent Africanist ethnographers have highlighted the need to pay attention to urban phenomena that are intangible, ineffable, or even invisible. In this sense, we should follow their lead. Tuning into African-centered media emerging from diverse cities on the continent can only help broaden our vision and deepen our insights—removing the blinders from Western theorizing that keep us within a more parochial frame and that prevent us from having a more fully global vision.

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6 Class, Cities, and the Multiple-Disposition Habitus

Theoretical Insights from an African City

Anne S. Lewinson

We were crowded into the small living room of an apartment of a state enterprise's housing complex, attending an informal wedding reception. The couple's large celebration would occur "at home" in the rural area. The bride Mary, clad in an elaborate white gown complete with gloves, sat on a couch across the room, surrounded by a group of kinswomen. She was crying as they spoke to her softly. I ask my host (the bride's cousin) what was happening, and she said they were reprimanding the young woman. "She tends not to welcome guests properly, does not serve food even if it is there, keeping it for her family. They are telling her that now she must stop that behavior, start being generous." Mary's kin apparently saw weddings as a time to educate a young person about adulthood and took this chance to steer the bride toward culturally appropriate behavior as the main hostess of a household.

This 1995 vignette from fieldwork with professional-class residents in Tanzania's largest city occurred at one of the few home-based wedding celebrations I witnessed during that time period. Initially, it seemed like just another example showing that kin groups and cultural traditions were important to life event celebrations. Once I observed, reflected on, and wrote about these rites of passage as part of the evolving dynamics of African urban society, however, deeper meanings became evident. Why did Mary's kin feel the need to instruct this urban-based woman in values and customs associated with rural life? These parties formed powerful moments for operating in the fields of ethnic-rural¹ communities, local urban worlds, and globally circulating culture simultaneously.

Weddings and their attendant celebrations were particularly crucial sites for this process because families poured immense resources into these events and because they were moments to express and teach belonging in significant groups. Tanzanian urban professionals used such celebrations as well as other significant activities to envision and enact membership in a variety of communities, and therefore indicating that they habitually shift between multiple models for living.

Drawing on periodic research since 1994, this chapter will explore how urban professionals in a relatively small city illuminate wider-spread patterns in cultural transmission and membership in contemporary urbanism. This African case study is particularly informative because while Bourdieu's conceptual framework has been applied to few Sub-Saharan cases, its use in this case shows that the habitus is inherently flexible and that contemporary life prioritizes the ability to shift between dispositions, each linked to sets of specific practices and tastes. African cities illuminate this contemporary dynamic because their high proportion of relatively recent, generally mobile migrants have ongoing ties to ethnic groups, rural communities, schoolmates, and co-workers, thereby valorizing the ability to shift between cultural frameworks and their associated dispositions. The professionals clustering in these urban areas reveal both the utility of applying Bourdieu's frameworks to African contexts and how this continent's cities illuminate broader global cultural dynamics. Given the extensive mobility and shifting between cultural contexts which characterizes contemporary life, the concept of a flexible habitus which highlights shifting between dispositions and multiple sets of tastes from a variety of settings illuminates many urbanites' lives.

Learning Culture, Bourdieu's Habitus Concept, and Change

The scene opening this chapter involves not only enacting cultural principles, but also teaching them. We often think about cultural learning inter-generationally, with the older generation(s) instructing children and teens in their own familiar practices and beliefs.² This process lies at the heart of classic anthropological understandings of the life cycle (e.g. Mead 1928). The concepts of enculturation and socialization assume that young people (those at the start of their life cycle) come to function in the existing sociocultural world by learning desired behavior and mental states from older generations. It also assumes that the members of these elder generations act from their own training, that they teach young people to participate in the society they learned in their own upbringing. Therefore, rearing young people will reproduce the pre-existing socio-cultural system, at least initially.

This formulation of youth-rearing as cultural reproduction receives extensive theoretical exploration in Pierre Bourdieu's work. Bourdieu initially describes the habitus as "the durably installed generative principle of regular improvisations... a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions" (1977: 80–95). Words such as "durable," "installed," and "lasting" highlight that the resulting ways of living in the world is deeply rooted in individuals' biographies, largely from childhood and early life. As well, individuals' dispositions use "past experiences" in the present to guide their current actions (*ibid.*). Therefore, the past guides the present to a substantial degree, and this pattern would play out in raising children. To apply this classic formulation to our Tanzanian example, urban professional-class parents would seek to raise their children using the practices and principles

they imbibed in their own youth. As people who had dispositions instilled in their own upbringing by elders, they would be inclined to reproduce their own past experiences within the younger members of a society, thereby preparing them for lives as members of a relatively privileged group.

In its original form, the habitus concept highlights how past cultural patterns persist through the underlying power of economic structures and endure over the lifetime of individuals. This focus reflects Bourdieu's long-standing curiosity about why individuals' practices and tastes resemble those of people from similar circumstances and persist over time; he wants to explore "the internalized form of class condition and of the conditionings it entails" (2010: 95). Bourdieu did not argue that all members of a society had the same habitus; far from it. His discussion of mid-20th-century French society argues that different classes (and ethnic groups, by extrapolation) hold differing habituses and their correlating sets of dispositions (*ibid.*). Working-class people, *petit bourgeoisie*, elites... each group had a distinct habitus which might overlap in some domains, however differed substantially. Individuals grew up in a specific class stratum, ethnic group, and such; they acquired a set of dispositions which fit that category, and subsequently, they operated under the premises of the resulting habitus (*ibid.*, 295). His framework was not solely one of reproduction; when economic context—the basis of "objective conditions" in Bourdieu's framework (*ibid.*)—transformed, so did the habitus. Even when Bourdieu initially used the concept to analyze French society in the late 1960s, he considered changing livelihoods which had prompted cultural innovations (*ibid.*, 358–359). Despite the possibility of change, however, his earlier analyses prioritized how upbringing and past cultural-economic forces underlie the options available to the participants, shaping their actions and perpetuating class inequality. The original concept highlighted how economic position and cultural patterns set the stage for the present (*ibid.*, 308–309; also 469).

Later formulations emphasized flexibility in the habitus, initially rooted in Bourdieu's discussion of the role played by "trajectory" on the realization or changes in dispositions; this idea allowed the possibility that current circumstances might pressure certain changes—upbringing establishes a habitus, but is only the start (2010, 105; Noble and Watkins 2003 apply this perspective). As Bourdieu's long-time collaborator Wacquant stated, a habitus "is enduring, but not static or eternal: dispositions... can be eroded, countered or even dismantled by exposure to novel external forces, as demonstrated by situations of migration and specialized training" (2016: 66). Based on social context, different facets of participants' habitus might be evoked or novel dispositions created. Rather than seeing the habitus and its dispositions as fixed, Wacquant argues that it is a "multilayered and dynamic set of schemata that records, stores, and prolongs the influence of the diverse environments successively traversed during one's existence" (*ibid.*).

This theoretical emphasis resonates deeply with an aim of understanding African city dwellers. When Wacquant writes about actors having a "primary habitus, acquired in early childhood through osmosis in the familial

microcosm and its extensions, and the secondary habitus, grafted later onto the latter by the specialized pedagogical labour of the school and other didactic institutions” (ibid., 68), he describes most urban Africans.

Contemporary Africans encounter and live in multiple cultural worlds because they move between rural, urban, educational, and cultural contexts. As they move, they acquire multiple schemata and dispositions between which they shift in their subsequent lives.

Wacquant’s formulation particularly applies to the Tanzanian professionals discussed in this chapter because they migrate between different regions of Tanzania and have spent substantial time in schools. For them, shifting between multiple sets of dispositions and deploying varied symbolic capital is second nature. Their habitus manifests through flexibility in cultural practices.

Another crucial element for our discussion is that Bourdieu’s theory goes beyond helping us describe the differences between sub-groups’ practices and therefore glimpse their generating habituses; his theory shows how those differences intersect with power relations between groups. This dimension leads to considering the various forms of capital. Elites’ *economic* capital (wealth and access to its sources) gives their children *cultural* capital, namely “linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture” (Bourdieu 1977: 494). Of course, non-elite groups have their own forms of cultural capital—knowing how to play stickball and cook the cheapest available meat were important practices for working-class New Yorkers in the 1920s.

However, each society grants greater legitimacy to a specific set of practices, tastes, and forms of conduct—*symbolic* capital; these publicly valued practices and tastes are often those associated with elite lifestyles or emphasized in schools (Bourdieu 2010: 319).

Through upbringing, elite-raised people had greater comfort with those valued cultural practices, and therefore privileged groups maintained their advantageous position over time (ibid., 312). The shared tastes and cultural capital of people in a privileged group gave them greater facility in interacting with other privileged people, and thus the ability to function in upper-echelon settings, making those settings and occupations inaccessible to people who acquired less prestigious habituses and dispositions due to their own upbringings. Moreover, powerful groups’ tastes and practices were designated as the standard for a society and when elites publicly enacted those practices, they both displayed their existing forms of capital and acquired symbolic capital, thereby reinforcing their dominance.

The concept of the field is useful for illuminating how individuals enact their pre-existing habitus (Bourdieu 2010: 107). For Bourdieu, social life occurs within fields (specific sociocultural domains in a society) and entails continual jockeying for position—attaining wealth and prestige through strategic use of the various forms of capital (ibid.). While classic analysis emphasizes that actors deploy economic, cultural, or social capital as they strive to obtain more, we can look at African case studies to see other forms of capital operating,

such as capitals rooted in geographical and ethnic zones. As Ncube and Siziba state in analyzing the cultural politics of ethnicity in Zimbabwean music,

individuals [are] endowed with differentiated combinations and volumes of political, social, cultural, economic and linguistic capital or 'habitus'... [The] fields are constituted by nodes of domination and subordination and hierarchise individuals on the basis of the value of their capitals. (2017: 829)

Their discussion reveals that in Zimbabwe's field of popular music, the symbolic capital of Shona ethnicity marginalizes others linguistically; it also places one city (Harare) at the nation's center and marks other cities as Other. While African societies might not have the established class structures, occupational rankings, and cultural hierarchies of the global North, these cities offer novel examples of residents operating within distinctive fields. For our case, Bourdieu's concepts illuminate how professional-class urban Tanzanians enact multiple dispositions through deploying various forms of capital within fields such as rituals and residences.

African cities are ideal places to see the contestations between various forms of capital and practices generated by multiple sets of dispositions because these cities are the central node through which globally circulating objects, practices, economic forces, and ideas flow into countries like Tanzania. Globalization powerfully influences urban Africans' habituses because it transforms the available objects, activities, and their symbolic meanings; therefore, the specific practices and tastes instilled through living in that environment—dispositions—must change. Moreover, city residents enact rural-generated dispositions, school-acquired dispositions, and novel tastes derived from global circulation. Through exposure to all these settings and clusters of practices, urbanites develop multiple, evolving sets of dispositions. As Bourdieu's concept of the field suggests, the enacting of various dispositions or new tastes is seldom harmonious and can produce intense conflict between groups over desired conduct. For example, in the early 1970s, Tanzanian authorities rejected certain Western-associated items such as mini-skirts as un-African and staked out a position within the field of national identity, deploying political capital to enlist youth league members to publicly embarrass urban women wearing those clothes (Whipper 1972). City streets and residents' conduct revealed new practices which resulted from shifting dispositions and an emergent habitus, as well as struggles in the field of national identity during globalization.

This article will use Bourdieu's conceptual framework to analyze two domains of contemporary African urban culture. These domains intertwine with globalization because the rapid, extensive cultural flows of circulating media, people, objects, and practices concentrate in urban areas. Especially in African cities, individuals and groups encounter those flows, adopt tastes and practices from many places, and thus acquire dispositions linked to

those systems. As a result, the current generation of parents and others preparing young people for adulthood in African cities are engaged in a distinctive socio-cultural process. Upbringing and education developed in them multiple sets of dispositions as well as the augmented capacity to shift between them based on their social context. They now are rearing young people who will affiliate with an even larger range of communities and cultural identities, each with its own set of practices and linked dispositions. These identities and communities include a kin group, an ethno-region, a social class, a city, the nation, and the wider globe. In the fields of contemporary African urban life, power-facilitating dispositions enable their holders to affiliate with multiple groups and to shift between cultural identities based on a finely tuned sense of the tastes and practices appropriate to a given context. These dispositions and the capacity to shift between multiple dispositions demonstrate the inherent flexibility of the habitus as well as how an urban environment augments that flexibility.

Background on Tanzania and Dar es Salaam in the Post-Colonial Era

Some consideration of the material and political contexts in which Tanzanian parents have raised young people is in order. Tanzania is a poor country; according to the World Bank, while the gross domestic product per capita has risen substantially since 1994, it still is under US\$1,000 a year.³ The country does not have huge or well-exploited mineral reserves, though small-scale miners extract gold, diamonds, and other stones, including tanzanite, a gemstone popular in the United States. Major cash crops are coffee grown in highland areas, cashews in the south, and cotton in the north. Until the early 1970s, sisal also earned foreign exchange. While Tanzania's rain-fed agriculture is subject to drought, the large quantities of arable land and often adequate rainfall usually keep the population minimally fed with maize, rice, millet, cassava, beans, leafy greens, fruit, and plantains. Although no longer the mainstay of most Tanzanians, animal husbandry remains economically and culturally significant: families still speak of bridewealth in cattle, hosts mark special events by slaughtering a chicken or goat, and pastoralist Maasai in the north rely heavily on herds of cattle and goats.

Tanzania became independent in 1962 and embarked on a classic modernization approach to economic growth. After disappointing results, the first president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, proposed a sharp change of course in 1967. He advocated blending particular socialist ideas with "African" cultural practices to create a locally suited source of economic development and national culture. Nyerere named his indigenized version of socialism "Ujamaa," after the Swahili word for "family." In his vision, the citizens would interact with each other and with the state in ways analogous to traditional kin relations or neighbors, working together toward the

common goal of universal prosperity—all were included and none exploited. According to Nyerere, all ethnic groups in Tanzania shared certain values and practices which guided members in how to view and treat one's biological kin or neighbors (elements of a habitus). It therefore would be easy to take those basic attitudes and expand them to include all citizens and the nation-state. He argued Tanzania had minimal class differences, so ujamaa's policies only needed to prevent the growth of class differences or an elite class.

Contrary to *ujamaa* ideology which placed rurality at the center of national identity, however, Tanzania's cities grew substantially after independence. By the early liberalization period, when this chapter's analysis begins, a scholar found that.

Tanzania is one of the African countries with a high rate of urban population growth from 9.2% to 12% per year. . . The second national population census of 1957 recorded a total population of 8,788,500, of which 364,100, or 4.1%, were urban dwellers... The most recent census of 1988 recorded a total population of 22,485,625, of which 4,043,684 lived in urban areas [almost 18%, figure added].

(Lugalla 1995: 20)

The urbanization trend has continued, and by 2017, 33% of Tanzanians lived in cities (Statista).⁴ The growth has centered on Dar es Salaam. Extrapolating from the 1988 census, Lugalla estimated Dar es Salaam's population to be 2,474,260 in 1993, out of an estimated Tanzanian urban population of 6,919,599; Dar alone therefore had 35% of Tanzania's urban population (*ibid.*, 21). The city's dominance has only continued and estimates in 2019 place the city's population at 4.3 million people.⁵

Dar es Salaam is the epitome of city-ness for Tanzanians, having been the country's main urban center for over 100 years. With rapid growth since independence in 1962, Dar es Salaam holds the symbolic importance of a metropolis in its nation, remaining the center of political and economic activity despite the more centrally located city of Dodoma being declared the capital in 1973. For over 40 years after that declaration, government agencies continued to build new headquarters in both cities and most workers considered Dar es Salaam to be their primary residence, establishing their houses and business ventures in that city rather than Dodoma. In a departure from this long-running practice, President Magufuli declared in 2016 that every state office and its employees must move to Dodoma permanently rather than migrating there for the few months of the year when Parliament met there. A major scramble resulted, and a flurry of construction to build new offices and homes began in 2017 as rents in more desirable parts of the city spiked.⁶ Yet Dar es Salaam, not the relatively small, dusty city of Dodoma, remains the center of economic enterprise in Tanzania as well as the heart of cultural improvisation. Global influences, local popular culture, and people from every part of the country concentrate in Tanzania's

metropolis, making it the prime location where multifaceted sets of dispositions would flourish.

Tanzanian Urban Professionals and Globalization: New Grist for the Bourdieuan Mill

A conversation about Tanzanian cities and urbanites necessarily leads to the world beyond the nation, indeed the continent. Globalization has influenced past changes, present conditions, and potential trajectories of the life-ways of peoples everywhere, profoundly shaping all aspects of life and identity. This force has been at play for over 500 years (Wallerstein 1976; Wolf 1982), taking different forms depending on the specific location and historical era. It constitutes one major element in urban professionals' lives, for Tanzania's cities and professional class has grown alongside it.

Tanzania's encounters with European-centered globalization have expanded since the late 1800s, as did her cities. The territory in East Africa which became Tanzania was a German colony from 1884 to the end of WWI; it then came under British control until independence in 1962. Both Germany and Britain strongly encouraged the people in the colony to grow crops for sale on an international market (cotton, coffee, tea, and sisal for making rope). The colonial powers build cities to export those crops and administer the territory, and Africans migrated to the new cities for work paid in money which they could use to buy imported goods such as bicycles, radios, and European-style clothing.

These new objects and cultural practices transformed the fields of Tanganyikans' social relations, inserting new symbols of wealth, cultural power, and livelihoods. Central for the people in this chapter, colonial officials and missionaries built a few schools starting in 1910, and a few children from elite families as well as Christian converts attended them. This particular globally circulating institution (formal education) has expanded enormously and defines urban professionals' identities and social worlds. Practices, goods, and ideas from global domains have influenced their tastes, dispositions, and habitus for many decades by now.

While items and ideas have always moved, the pace of that movement is uniquely intense in contemporary globalization (Appadurai 1996). Since independence in 1962, Tanzanians' relationship with the wider globe has evolved. From the 1960s through the 1980s, the Tanzanian government developed closer relationships with "non-aligned" socialist countries such as Cuba, Norway, and Denmark, both sending and receiving more people between those countries. In the cultural domain, state policies emphasized affinity for Tanzanian-ness rather than "foreign" practices or goods. Since the late 1980s, however, as the state adopted World Bank structural adjustment programs, political and economic changes created an emphasis on "capitalist" entrepreneurship and global openness. Cultural ramifications involved fewer restrictions on the press and mass media, and urbanites

obtained much greater access to globally circulating popular culture forms, practices, ideas, and commodities. This change encouraged the development of new tastes and profoundly influenced the Tanzanian professionals who started working and raising families in the 1990s. In response to these new practices, economic systems, information-technology-mediated connections, and cosmopolitan sensibilities,⁷ 1990s city dwellers created new economic activities, media, goods, ways of raising children, technology, and symbols (Lewinson 2003, 2006; Owens 2010). The effects of these changes rippled into professional-class urban dispositions and habitus ultimately. When a young man in Arusha decorated his barbershop with images of American hip-hop artists (Weiss 2009) or a customer asked her tailor to sew a dress like the picture in a magazine, their actions evoked meanings from a world beyond Tanzania and reinforced an emerging globalized disposition. For the adults raising young people in African cities such as Dar es Salaam, these globally derived objects and practices have helped to develop new tastes and dispositions operating in tandem with prior dispositions linked to kinship, social class, ethnic group, and faith communities in everyday life as well as special ritual moments. Ultimately, globally distributed items contributed to the growth of multiple dispositions within a flexible habitus.

Case Study of a Flexible Habitus and Multiple Dispositions in Urban Neighborhoods and Households

Our first exercise in Bourdieuan analysis starts with the intersection of social class, spatial arrangements in the city, household economic activities, and householders' habituses. This focus on the home resonates with Bourdieu's own analysis of Algerian homes and later of French domestic practices. Dar es Salaam's spatial structure follows classic colonial British urban planning, with a central administrative and business area flanked by an elite ("low density") residential zone near the shore and medium- or high- density residential zones inland for poorer people. A racial-class hierarchy designated "low density" areas for Europeans, "medium" for wealthier Africans or Asians, and "high" for poor Africans—called *Uswahilini* (Lugalla 1995: 14). The post-independence government wiped out racially based exclusion in housing or employment, transforming the racial hierarchy into a purely class-based designation. The once-European low density Oysterbay and Masaki became the domain of African elites and ex-patriate consultants or embassy workers.

In *Uswahilini* during the daytime hours of hot sun,⁸ women spread woven mats under trees or in the shadows cast by overhanging tin roofs; here they prepared food, tended children, rested, knitted doilies, and chatted. Cooking, laundering clothes, and washing dishes took place in more private back yards, also the setting for latrines.

Women often set off sometime during the day to fetch water from a pipe-stand, buy a day's worth of cornmeal flour, rice, meat, sardines or meat, greens, oil, and seasonings at a small grocery store or the set of stalls which

comprised the local market. *Uswahilini* was never silent: somewhere, a baby always was crying, younger children were playing, radios played the latest hits from Congo or the United States, the drum theme of Radio Dar es Salaam marked the top of the hour, women talked quietly or teased each other. At noon or in the late afternoon, men became more visible, returning from their jobs or business ventures. They sat with visitors inside, rested on the verandahs, or joined other men at the local bars which dotted larger roads. No matter the hour, *Uswahilini* pulsed with activity.

In nearly every way, the neatly laid-out “low density” neighborhoods contrasted with the seemingly haphazard hustle-bustle of *Uswahilini*. Even the occasionally used gloss term for these more elite areas—*Uzunguni* or “the European areas”—grew from the racially based colonial designations which contrasted high density “Native people” residential zones with low-density areas for colonial officials’ homes. Since independence, Africans have predominated in the once whites-only neighborhoods of Oysterbay, as well as newer suburbs such as Sinza, Mikocheni, Masaki, and Mbezi Beach. The elite character has remained, however, since only high-placed officials in state enterprises, government officials, and the owners of successful businesses could afford to build the large private houses or use them as a perquisite of their position. These homes sat well back from the paved roads, surrounded by walls with announcements that a security company was watching over them. As an additional theft deterrent, homeowners often lined the wall tops with broken glass or spikes. Elite houses had a fortress-like guarded quality, contrasting with the relatively open homes of *Uswahilini*.

At first blush, the elite areas of *Uzunguni* appear wholly First-World suburban, as remote from ruralness and activities as possible. This appearance is deceptive, however. Garden plots and banana plants are commonplace, the first indication that farming co-exists literally next to the elite homes of high-ranked administrators. These gardens are not the only touch of “rurality;” going down the streets, pedestrians might see a goat feeding next to the fence of a large house; in a grand house of an executive, the mother (herself a salaried worker) might spend late afternoon milking the cows which supplemented their income. Residents of Oysterbay were actually more likely than their *Uswahilini* counterparts to keep chickens, cattle, or other livestock—the quarters in *Uswahilini* were too cramped to permit these relatively lucrative enterprises, while the elite homes in *Uzunguni* had enough space. In the heart of these neighborhoods associated with a globally inclined wealthy class, markers of city and rurality, urbane sophistication and “tradition” co-existed and were actively sought.

Using Bourdieu’s framework, while this practice seems incongruous to American suburbanites, it enacts the logic of the habitus with multiple dispositions well. The dispositions of the habitus which generate practices such as keeping chickens rest on the “objective conditions” encountered while growing up, namely the forms of livelihood which children experienced.⁹ Especially during my initial research in the 1990s, many

householders in Oysterbay grew up with farm work as an integral part of daily life. Since *ujamaa* socialism equated agriculture with true Tanzanian-ness, urban professionals “naturally” took advantage of any opportunity to farm. Even more crucially, Bourdieuan analysis highlights that the objective conditions of this class’ members enabled them to participate in a relatively high-end form of production. Their salaries and positions provided the economic capital (money and other material resources) for domestic food production—resources such as access to enough land for gardens or livestock, money to purchase the animals or plants, and cash to pay laborers to tend to them. The livestock and food grown added to the household nutrition or served as another source of income through sale. In the field of class culture, urban professionals used their economic capital and cultural capital (knowledge of practices and tastes) to attain a dominant position.

These professionals’ rural upbringing instilled in them the dispositions to see agricultural activities (especially animal husbandry) as sources of wealth; the symbolic meanings of cattle, goats, and crops still resonated for them, despite decades of urban residence. In this case, urban African professionals’ practices responded to objective conditions as well as pre-existing symbolic codes, re-enacting the activities of their childhood.

Following classic Bourdieuan analysis, we could read this previous example through the theoretical framework of upbringing as cultural reproduction. Other aspects of African urban life, however, suggest that it results from the ability to shift between dispositions. For example, residents of Oysterbay are not the only urbanites to engage in part-time farming; many professionals purchase plots of land in the distant suburbs so that they can farm. These peri-urban plots also became the site for houses intended to provide income through rental and ultimately homes for the professionals upon retirement. Suburban plots granted cultural and economic capital in the field of class livelihoods. At the same time, professionals also attached symbolic capital to globally derived practices such as education, office jobs, imported goods, and homes decorated similar to those of the United States or Europe (cf. Owens 2016). They valued these particular, varied forms of capital as a result of their multiple dispositions; the capacity to shift dispositions guided their rearing of young people, as the parents ensured that the children attended good schools, spent time with class-appropriate companions, headed toward professional-class occupations—and learned to hoe a field as well as wash clothes. Ultimately, the parental generation enacted a highly flexible habitus which entailed shifting between multiple sets of dispositions: one set rooted in globally derived practices, another in fluency with practices specific to Dar es Salaam, and a third based on rural-ethnic home cultural models. A specific context evoked certain dispositions with the correlating appropriate tastes and practices; sometimes the same object—a plot of land outside the city—might reflect practices rooted in different dispositions and generate alternately economic, cultural,

and symbolic forms of capital. By analyzing urban professionals' residences through Bourdieu's framework, we see contemporary African city people's capacity for enacting multiple dispositions and engaging multiple fields with varied forms of capital.

A Second Case Study of Multiple Dispositions at Play: Wedding Celebrations

The previous example touched briefly on intergenerational relations and the life cycle; this factor underlies how individuals acquire dispositions and changes which emerge in their practices. The life cycle plays a crucial role in this process, as individuals move through various stages.

People act in a field that moulds them, biographical events being constituted according to placement and displacement within social spaces. Yet, individuals belong to diverse fields at the same time. The prevalence of varied belongings in contemporary life is particularly salient.

(Silva 2016: 171)

By highlighting the concept of the field as well as how habituses emerge and change over time, Silva focuses on the life course and its dynamic influence on individuals as they acquire familiarity with novel social contexts, practices, and thereby dispositions (*ibid.*, 170). She also brings in the field, defined as “the space of possibilities limiting the operation of the habitus” (*ibid.*, 168), putting focus on the wider circumstances in which individuals operate. Those circumstances include the historical era, Tanzania's economic structures, and pre-existing social-cultural values, within which professional-class urbanites strive for success. Yet it also is within these externally generated contexts that individuals encounter new practices, acquire new tastes and the accompanying dispositions, and in the case of urban professionals, find the value of shifting between dispositions. These changes can ultimately transform the fields, forms of capital, and individuals, and living in a city like Dar es Salaam, with its diverse dynamic cultural scene and influences from multiple sources, epitomizes this process. Intergenerational connections thus involve raising young people in a high-stakes process in which the older generation seeks to navigate the fields as they exist now as well as the directions in which they are emerging.

In this second case study of disposition-shifting within a flexible habitus, we consider professional-class life event celebrations, specifically the activities around weddings in Dar es Salaam. These events provide invaluable insight into African city life, as all rituals “manifest in their performance varying possibilities for the constitution and ordering of experience, as well as for the reflection on and communication of experience” (Kapferer 1986: 191). In professional-class weddings, as participants prepared and enacted the ritual, they created some of their society's key moments. These events

particularly embody elders' youth-rearing intentions because in Tanzania, older kin—not the bride or groom—primarily plan and pay for wedding celebrations. Weddings were a key field in which urban professionals deployed various forms of capital to display wealth, revitalize social networks, and garner prestige. These events reflected distinct sets of dispositions, those of “traditional” rural-ethnic identities, of “modern” urbanity, and of global sophistication. I put “traditional” in quotation marks to emphasize that professionals enacted an envisioned model of past practices, not how people necessarily behaved in the past. Similarly, “modern” refers to professional urbanites' sense that certain practices and objects embodied current trends. The third element, global sophistication, enacted practices portrayed in circulating media, images, and stories.

Urban Tanzanians became familiar with practices circulating from the global North through media images and friends' accounts from their travels; their direct experiences with those practices came from others' life event celebrations, which inspired them as they planned their own events. Through wedding rituals, professional-class urban elders engaged in practices rooted in multiple dispositions and sought to instill those practices in younger generations as well as obtain symbolic capital. They acted from a flexible habitus and implicitly modeled the capacity to shift between dispositions.

Enacting Multiple Dispositions: Rural-Ethnicity in Professional-Class Wedding Celebrations

An ethnic-rural set of dispositions often appeared in post-1990 urban professional life events. Some portions of a wedding ritual had no ethnic dimensions because it was a standard religious rite, however others (e.g. receptions) often included practices reflecting a rural-ethnic habitus. For example, even though receptions prioritized class-based sophistication and comfort with globally distributed practices and goods, the organizers often integrated elements of home region or ethnic cultures along the way. For example, *ngoma* (traditional dances specific to each of Tanzania's 120 ethnic groups) were performed at least once at every reception, and by 2003, some elaborate events included a hired troupe of performers who danced several times, joined by members of the audience. Food also was a crucial part of celebrations and had ritual elements. In the mid-1990s, it was fashionable to use a whole roasted goat for the cake, and this “goat cake” (as it was called in Kiswahili) was used for the ritual feeding of the couple, their attendants, and in-laws. The goat cake evoked customary gifts of livestock from the groom's family to the bride's kin (bridewealth) as well as rural forms of wealth and hospitality. Though the practice of giving goats as bridewealth and using them at wedding feasts resonated particularly strongly with Chagga people, professional-class urbanites from other regions also adopted the goat cake for a time. While the practice

had disappeared by 2003, this rural-ethnic-plus-urbane symbol epitomized how professional-class Tanzanians enacted rural-ethnic dispositions and modeled them for the young people in life event rituals within the field of a certain era.

Linguistic practices at urban rituals sometimes evoked rural-ethnic dispositions. While the main language at wedding events was Kiswahili (reflecting a local urban disposition), the MC (Master of Ceremony, borrowed from American galas yet evoked an *msbenga*, the traditional go-between in rural areas) often threw in phrases of the host group's ethnic language, as well as key English phrases. Those linguistic touches always brought laughter and showed the variety of dispositions shaping professional-class urbanites' events. Kiswahili was the *lingua franca*, Tanzanians' shared cultural terrain, and the presumed norm for communication in multi-ethnic contexts like Dar es Salaam. The use of ethnic languages and of English were additional touches asserting two forms of their organizers' cultural capital: fluency in their rural-ethnic practices as well as in a globally sophisticated repertoire. Indeed, using multiple languages evoked an image of the city and nation as made from people of many different backgrounds. Through the event, the planners created a ritual space intermingling the practices and tastes of rural-ethnic home areas, everyday urban life, and globally derived trends. They garnered symbolic capital by enacting practices rooted in a flexible habitus, and through these rites of passage, impressed the importance of disposition-fluidity on the participating youth.

Central to these rituals and the dispositions underlying them were activities related to food.¹⁰ The foods served, their preparation, and their distribution tapped into rural-ethnic, local urban, and globally derived dispositions. For example, during the final planning meeting for Elia's wedding in 1994, his older female organizers insisted to the male leaders that they must serve some chicken (a food connoting wealth and special occasions in the rural habitus). On the day of the wedding, Elia's female kin gathered at the reception hall for the labor-intensive food preparation; several women were busy that morning reducing the fowls to frying-size pieces. Others peeled and cut potatoes, pounded garlic and ginger into a paste, cut up large hunks of meat, and fried the chunks of beef and potato in oil with the spices for *pilau*. An urban celebration was incomplete without *pilau*, a food with its roots in South Asian cuisine and born from the millennium of circulation around the Indian Ocean; this food evoked the dispositions for living in local cities along with global connectedness. Finally, communal preparation of the foods enacted the village-derived pattern of women working together to prepare food for an event. Practices rooted in the multiple dispositions of urban professionals took center stage, as well as the dynamics of a field which the sponsors sought to obtain prestige—gain symbolic capital—by creating an event which was both appropriate (“matched” social norms) and innovative (displaying the ability to play with available cultural resources). These rituals drew on

economic, social, and cultural capital to generate symbolic capital for the participants.

Globally derived food practices also had a prominent place at receptions, even in the small details. For example, Elia's kinswomen readied the foods for distribution at his wedding reception by wrapping several potatoes and pieces of meat in foil, storing the packets in large plastic buckets so servers could hand them out quickly during the party. While the participants had not experienced industrial fast food directly, these individual portions resembled the newspaper-wrapped foods of Dar es Salaam's street-vendors as well as the images of fast food working their way around the world during that time.

Practices associated with an urban habitus as well as globally circulating images made their way into professional-class events. As a whole, food practices at life event celebrations included rural "traditions," global-sophisticate practices, and local urban customs, thereby reflecting multiple dispositions. Tapping into all their forms of capital combined the power of symbols rooted in village, city, and global cultural codes.

The physical décor of party settings also drew on tastes of varied dispositions. At any event, as the groom's kinswomen and hired caterers decorated the wedding reception site, they blended rural-ethnic practices with globally derived symbols and urban dispositions. For Marystella's sendoff, a group of women hung streamers (globally linked items) and *kangas* (a quintessential East African coastal women's garment which simultaneously evoked urbanity and ethnic-rural "tradition") on the walls. They also prepared three special tables: one for the couple and their attendants, one for the groom's close kin, and one for the bride's close kin. Ornamented with sheets and glitter, these "High Tables" joined rural sensibilities with global tastes. By decorating the tables with bottled beer, sodas, and European distilled beverages, organizers evoked both the ethnic-rural homebrews used to seal marriages and the globally circulated factory-bottled beverage. As well, organizers set up two blocks of chairs in rows, facing the couple's High Table, echoing a rural practice in which the guests of the groom and of the bride sat separately. Through their activities in decorating the hall, adult organizers reinforced rural-ethnic customs and local urban sensibilities along with objects linked to the wider world. The results would impress the social systems and symbolic meanings of shifting dispositions on the participants' consciousnesses. Professional-class urbanites had acquired multiple dispositions over the course of their lives and considered it fitting to highlight elements from them all in the field of rituals as a way of displaying their economic, social, and cultural capitals.

During the wedding reception, the older generation sought to teach "traditional" (rural-ethnic) notions of age and gender hierarchy, ideas generated by the dispositions of their childhood-instilled habitus. Female elders received deference and might speak on the part of the parents if there was no close male kinsman, however most often older men gave the speeches, reinforcing an image of elder male authority. Younger men might help serve

the beverages, however younger kinswomen predominated in this vital hospitality role. As well, MCs often called on both the bride's and groom's kinswomen to show their enthusiasm by cheering and dancing, going along with a gendered model in which women "livened up a celebration" (words said by a man reflecting on weddings in general). Their energy was central to the gift-giving phase of the reception which they began by dancing up to the front of the hall as a group to present their gifts to the couple. Their presents always related to the domestic realm: cooking spoons, dishes, baskets, pots, or a pedal-driven sewing machine quietly testifying to professionals' reliance on earnings from side businesses to supplement the always-inadequate monthly salary from office jobs. This typically feminine activity, along with the other aspects of a reception, reflected dispositions rooted in local urban practices, rural-ethnicity, and global sophistication. Gender and age notions underlay the organization of events as well as many of the symbolic actions. Acting with a flexible habitus shown in the ability to shift between sets of dispositions, the middle-aged organizers of young people's weddings sought to obtain symbolic capital in the field of life event celebrations as well as to implicitly train youths in being urban professionals. Ultimately, Bourdieu's conceptual framework illuminates the underlying dynamics of Tanzanian urban professionals' practices and suggests that contemporary urbanism requires shifting between multiple sets of dispositions to evaluate and generate varying practices depending on the situation. As well, the events highlight participants' uses of cultural, social, and economic capitals to garner subsequent symbolic and social capital.

Engendering Urbanism: Women at the Center of Multiple Dispositions

Along with emphasizing class, urbanity, and ethnicity in wedding celebrations, professional-class residents of Dar es Salaam enacted and transmitted gendered habituses, notably femininity. Everyday discourse framed women as transmitters of ethnic-rural practices,¹¹ and therefore in Bourdieuan analysis, instillers of an ethnic-rural disposition. Residents of Dar es Salaam often said that in mixed ethnic marriages, kinship rules might place the children in the father's group, however in practice, they "followed" the mother. If they learned an ethnic language, it would be hers, and their tastes in food would be those of her group rather than of their father's group. Not surprisingly, therefore, the woman-centered wedding events ("kitchen parties" and "send-offs," described below) highlighted rural-ethnic customs. Women were seen as more "traditional," more tied to home rural areas, and not infrequently, sendoffs would often occur in the bride's home village. Those events reflected the symbolic linkage made between women, "tradition," and therefore ethnicity. Yet middle-aged women also enacted the practices symbolizing local urbanity and global culture, with the body as a crucial site for navigating between these sets of tastes. At events, women's

elegant outfits and styled hair drew on current high fashion as seen in international films and magazines. As they danced around the hall, performing for the audience and cameras, women displayed the sponsoring clan's wealth and globally linked sophistication. Urban women simultaneously engaged in practices shaped by ethnic-rural, urban, and globally derived dispositions through performances displaying economic, cultural, and symbolic capital.

Specific rituals in the urban wedding enacted the flexibility of an urban professional gendered habitus through practices and through actions intended to "teach" certain practices. The send-off, a party where the bride's kin and friends formally said goodbye to her, exemplified this process.¹² These events followed a generic formula in which older kin brought in the bride, accepted the groom's marriage proposal, transferred her to the groom symbolically, and then asked to keep her until the wedding. Each event, however, was unique. Some events minimized ethnicity. At Lila's sendoff in 1994, for example, the only visible rural-ethnic practices occurred when the groom handed money to the bride's mother and later the *mshenga* directed the bride's brother to transfer her to the groom by joining their hands. Otherwise, the event centered on symbols of local urbanity and global sophistication, such as a brass band, satiny outfits, foods from various regions, and public gift-giving. Individual families placed varying degrees of importance on rural-ethnic practices, some prioritizing symbolic capital from displays of urban and global-associated economic and cultural capital at sendoffs and minimizing that from enacting the cultural capital of ethnic identity.

Most sendoffs, however, featured many practices reflecting a rural-ethnic set of dispositions. The *ngoma* dances mentioned in the wedding receptions were ubiquitous at sendoffs. By 2009, every DJ came prepared with the archetypal *ngoma* for varied groups, highlighting the range of home regions represented in the couple's backgrounds and the audience; the celebration also included a period of calling on groups of attendees to perform the dances.¹³ Another common rural-ethnic practice was joking tests of the groom or his kin. For example, at Esther's sendoff, the family required the groom to pick her out from a group of women covered with blankets and cloths; when he erred (partly because an aunt made a hand gesture under her blanket to trick him into thinking she was his fiancée), the hosts gleefully fined him for picking "someone's wife" instead of Esther. At Nyakato's sendoff, the bride's aunts wore "traditional" garb over their elegant Western-style dresses, and when the *mshenga* and groom's representatives entered, they knelt before the bride's kin making ritual speeches as the men slowly considered and eventually accepted their offers of customary goods and beverages. In the 1990s, an emphasis on ethnic customs at sendoffs set them apart from other phases in the wedding process, as well as other urban life events, showing a gendered facet to older urban professionals' rural dispositions within their flexible habitus.

Shifting between multiple dispositions was highlighted in a new wedding ritual which developed by 2003. This innovation in the field of life event rituals is a prime example of flexibility in the habitus. The “kitchen party,” similar to those in Lusaka (Hansen 1997), resembled a North American bridal shower in that the future bride’s female relatives, co-workers, and friends celebrated the upcoming nuptials and gave her household goods in a humor-filled setting.¹⁴ Other practices, however, differed greatly. Tanzanian kitchen parties were quite elaborate, with a Mistress of Ceremony, DJ, High Table, videotaping, and dozens of participants; these practices evoked a globally rooted set of dispositions. The event also strongly evoked rural-ethnic traditions. The bride and her attendant often wore dresses sewn from *kanga* and organizers used *kanga* to decorate the front stage. At a sendoff in *Uswahilini*, my friend Sara (from the host’s ethnic group) decided at the last minute to dress like older women in their home region, and throughout the event, she was referred to as their grandmother and asked to contribute the wisdom of “custom.” At other events, the sponsors hired both the MC and another woman who played the role of *somo* (the ritual teacher at rural initiations who instructed young women about how to be an adult and wife); men were told to stay out of earshot of the often-sexually-explicit banter. Kitchen parties manifested dispositions rooted in global circulation as well as rural ethnicity, with cultural and economic capitals put on display and the organizers garnering the symbolic capital of their multiple competencies.

In a powerful evocation of rural-ethnic initiations, kitchen parties featured direct instruction of the young urban women. Similar to an American shower, part of the kitchen party ritual involved the audience members sharing their life experiences with the bride-to-be. At the Tanzanian events, however, much of the sharing occurred in structured public speeches rather than informal small group conversations. As well, at kitchen parties, the speakers directly instructed the future bride on how to behave. At smaller sendoffs, audience members, sometimes selected on the spot by the Mistress of Ceremony or responding to an open invitation for anyone to share some advice, played a similar role as teachers to the future bride. Sometimes the advice was exaggerated or rested on sometimes fictitious life experiences. For example, at the above-mentioned kitchen party, Sara’s sister, who had borne a son with a wealthy Arab man, delivered an impromptu speech about the virtues which had enabled her to live peaceably with “the Arab” for more than ten years; Sara later told me that their relationship actually ended in the boy’s infancy.¹⁵ Kitchen parties filled a gap in the local urban life-event cycle, replacing rural coming-of-age rituals which would have provided a space for creating proper adult females through direct instruction, but had not transferred to the city.

Through kitchen parties, urban professional-class women drew on dispositions rooted in global circulation while also enacting rural-ethnic dispositions so as to teach them to younger professional-class women. While competitive display of economic capital was less apparent at kitchen parties

than at sendoffs or weddings, organizers tapped cultural, social, and symbolic capitals plentifully. Ultimately, they used life event rituals to instill the disposition-shifting of gendered habituses rooted in both ethnic identities and urbanity into professional-class young women.

As Tanzania liberalized in early 1990s and continued into the 2000s, celebrations associated with weddings served as a field in which urban professionals enacted tastes rooted in varied domains. Within these rituals, organizers created a cultural space bridging rural-ethnic “traditions,” local urban sensibilities, and global sophistication, demonstrating their cultural competencies, economic capital, and social connections.

They participated in the field of life event rituals seeking to display and augment their symbolic capital in multiple cultural domains. The practices developed by older urban professionals for the ritual phases of weddings (kitchen party, send-off, wedding, and reception) reflected the ability to shift between multiple sets of dispositions, capitalizing on their comfort with tastes linked to varying domains and ultimately intended to teach the next generation how to be.

Acting from, Acting to Create: Multiple Dispositions, Professional-Class Culture, and Re-Seeing Contemporary Urbanism Through Bourdieu

In sum, the previous section has demonstrated that disposition-shifting underlay the flexible habitus which manifested in urban professionals’ varied wedding practices. At these significant moments in the life cycle, the older generation acted from the multiple sets of dispositions they had acquired over their lives, engaged the field of rituals to deploy and display their various forms of capital, and sought to instill those dispositions in young people. The first case study, while less tied to the performative contestations of symbolic capital and social fields, showed the salience of economic, social, and cultural capitals for understanding urban life, along with the existence of multiple dispositions and individuals’ abilities to shift between them. Moreover, it is Bourdieu’s framework which points us toward analyzing domains of everyday life, such as practices in the home and the city’s spatial layout. Using his concepts to explore activities in domestic spaces and economic livelihoods enables us to illuminate how professional-class urbanites enact elements of their ethnic-rural upbringing, local urban culture, as well as globally oriented dispositions. They thus enacted a set of dispositions and acquired new ones.

As a whole, these case studies show the potential insights of using Bourdieu’s concepts to generate an analysis of African city life. While his framework has been underutilized in the sub-Saharan African context, by employing this lens, we see the flexibility of the habitus concept and indeed the habitus itself. As demonstrated through analyzing the practices of urban residents in Dar es Salaam, we can productively view cities as settings

in which multiple sets of dispositions flourish. The professional-class city dwellers discussed in this chapter demonstrate the possibility, indeed the necessity, that urban people acquire new sets of dispositions, layer them on top of earlier ones in dialog with life experiences, and shift between them. As we consider how one group of Africans enact practices and tastes learned from growing up in rural areas, attending schools, living in cities, and participating in global flows, we develop a useful model for understanding the lives of contemporary urbanites in other parts of the world. The case studies explored in this chapter illustrate the rich possibilities of using Bourdieu to analyze contemporary urban Africa and the world beyond it.

Notes

- 1 While rural residence and belonging to a specific ethnic group are not the same thing, I use this term to highlight that with regard to the focus of this chapter, ethnic cultural practices are considered to concentrate in the rural areas where a specific ethnic group have lived historically and a substantial portion of the population use that language in everyday domestic life. Tanzanian villages often have residents of varied backgrounds; however, ethnic-associated practices and languages continue to be used in many areas.
- 2 Since “childrearing” carries the connotation of children, however the process of preparing people for adulthood extends well beyond childhood into the stage called “emerging adulthood” currently, I prefer to think of the process as youth-rearing, namely the efforts of parents, guardians, and other members of an older generation to prepare young people for adult status in their society
- 3 World Bank 2017 website, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=TZ>, accessed June 17, 2019.
- 4 Source Statista website <https://www.statista.com/statistics/455940/urbanization-in-tanzania/>, accessed on June 17, 2019.
- 5 World Population Review website, accessed June 14, 2019. <http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/dar-es-salaam-population/>.
- 6 Personal observations and conversations with a few residents of Dodoma in summer 2017.
- 7 Ulf Hannerz’s model of cosmopolitanism is particularly useful in that it shows how ordinary Africans might partake in cultural practices which originate far from their physical location (1994). Uimonen 2020 provides a valuable reminder that we need to conceive of cosmopolitanism as potentially egalitarian rather than as an elite-centered lifestyle with an implicit Eurocentric racial bias.
- 8 Descriptions in this section derive from observations during visits to residents’ homes in the 1990s.
- 9 Editor Deborah Pellow pointed out that keeping animals for home use or sale is commonplace in West African cities, a familiar, useful practice which seemed eminently logical to city dwellers of all classes.
- 10 Foodways can be readily analyzed through Bourdieu’s framework. The practices described in this paragraph were shared with other life event celebrations, not just weddings.
- 11 This equation of women with “tradition” (ethnic-ruralness) occurred at the level of national identity as well. In the 1960s, visiting foreign dignitaries were received by groups of women with “traditional” foods and wearing elegant clothing. Among others, historians Audrey Whipper (1972) and Andrew Ivaska

(2011) have analyzed campaigns waged to ensure women dressed “properly,” namely in styles considered to be “African.”

- 12 This ritual assumes that a bride joins her husband’s kin group upon marriage (pat
- 13 This practice acquired a new use at one send-off I attended which started hours late: the DJ tried to entertain the waiting guests by calling the names of various ethnic groups and having each group’s members perform their characteristic *ngoma*. The diversion worked for a while.
- 14 I have no direct information about the origins of kitchen parties, specifically whether they were inspired by North American models. A ritual of the same name shows up in Malawi in the 1980s (Kamlongera 1986/7) and in Lusaka during the 1990s (Hansen 1997), indicating that the idea had been in the cultural air of south- eastern Africa for a while.
- 15 Ten years later (2013), it turned out that the father had continued to support the child financially and had paid for his schooling, however the romantic relationship with the mother had ended shortly after the child’s birth.

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Part III

Urban Spaces



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7 South Sudan, Politics of Liberation and Contest over Juba

Jok Madut Jok

Introduction

Much of the rapid urbanization that has taken place in black Africa following decolonization in the 1960s has, in essence, been a chaotic process, at least based on its seemingly haphazard and accelerated pace. The physical layout of most towns, their appearance, the increasingly shrinking public spaces in towns' neighborhoods and the poor quality of public goods and services are all common characteristics that are shared by most African urban centers, all born of the often unclear or the absence of or sometimes flagrant disregard for the policies that were supposed to guide this process. Many people who have studied this phenomenon in the past have posited that urbanization in most of Africa South of the Sahara was fueled by diminishing opportunities in the rural areas and the urban bias that concentrated the services, job opportunities and public amenities in the towns, making these towns become more attractive to rural poor, people impoverished by a mix of loss of land, climate change and lack of infrastructure.¹ But more recent perspectives on this development have suggested that African urbanization has been for the most part propelled by political events of the last 60 years, beginning with anti-colonial movements and including post-colonial dictatorial governance, civil wars and urban policies that were more politically motivated than socially conscious and people-centered programs.²

The political economy and the economics of urbanization have previously taken precedence as the more relevant ways of explaining the logic of African urban growth.³ But perhaps it has more to do with pure politics of competition for power and the sense of elite entitlement, especially what is increasingly called liberators' syndrome.⁴ Others have indicated that despite this seemingly chaotic and disorganized growth of urban centers, sometimes even appearing unworkable in terms of ethnic relations, the growth of a new class system, mistrust in state-citizen relations and the town's carrying capacity in terms of public goods and services, they all coexist in what looks disorderly in appearance, as if to blow up into mayhem any minute, but maintaining its own internal logic that allows life to

progress, sometimes precariously, but surly sustained by systems of social organizing, kin relations and ethos of sharing.⁵

Research conducted in many poor neighborhoods and slums from Johannesburg's Alexandra to Nairobi's Kibera to Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps of Khartoum, shows that urban migrants are often looking for survival opportunities, new and perhaps government-sponsored safety nets, security and access to public goods and services.⁶ They are often creative, survivalists, dedicated workers and have the same hopes and aspirations as anyone else, to cultivate a more promising future for themselves and their families. That their influx and settlement tend to be chaotic is no justification for the way the states have treated them, as unwanted people who only become a burden on the town.⁷ Where they have been seen as a burden, a problem to solve, rather than an asset, they have found themselves at odds with the state and with other citizens.⁸ But where they have been involved in the planning and execution of programs in response to their arrival such as in deciding the locations of schools, police station, clinic, open spaces for recreation and road network and routes for public transit, there has been much success, measured by reduction in urban land disputes, reduction in crime and more civic engagement that becomes the linchpin for ethnic coexistence and a measure of trust in the state as a partner in the quest for safety.⁹

There are many common factors that have influenced rapid urbanization in the developing world. In Africa, the leading factor in this trend has been the biases in development programs and service delivery projects that favor the urban centers, where political elites sell some of these goods and services, directly or indirectly, for access to public office. Another factor relates to civil wars that have displaced millions of people from rural areas into shanty towns and IDP camps on the outskirts of big cities like Khartoum, Njemena, Bujumbura and Addis Ababa. While these Internally Displaced Persons are considered temporary residents, who are expected to return to the original rural areas once the conjunctural events that displaced them are resolved, end up being permanent residents and stay longer, even when the wars end and stability returns to their rural home areas. They live on the margins of the city for so many years, decades in certain places, that they often become an integral part of the city's population, if only uncomfortable for city authorities and national leaders. Expecting them to return "home" on mass is pure denialism. The authorities may sometimes allocate land for the settlement, but in most cases, this is not done so orderly and the result is that cities swell in population size without comparable level of services to accommodate all.

The factors also include the historical moments in which some countries find themselves such that the countries where the majority of the people are living in rural areas get shocked when rural-urban migration begins suddenly. These countries experience rapid spikes in urbanization in one swoop when major events such as natural disasters or wars occur, as opposed to the gradual urbanization that has happened in other areas where

the onset of urbanization started long ago and has maintained a slower but steady pace. The patterns of this type of slow rural-urban migration is a lot easier to observe and study and its drivers, its dips and spikes, are better chronicled. The more people living in rural areas of a given country the more rapid the urbanization process becomes once it starts. Whatever the factors may be and however diverse the countries may be, there are some commonalities between all of African countries that allows for generalizations and theorizing.

Khartoum, Sudan's capital, for example, was notorious throughout the 1990s, having a penchant for periodic uprooting and relocation of IDPs further and further away from the center, mostly into the edges of desert where there were no services or a road access of any kind, often compelling the international NGOs and the UN to follow the IDPs with basic provisions like water pumps, clinics and feeding centers. The authorities in Khartoum had developed a practice of using the IDP relocations as a means to getting the international community to pay for the city's basic services that are essentially responsibilities of the state. The pattern was that the authorities would allow IDPs to stay in a location for a year or two, during which the humanitarian community would inject these services into these locations, making them more desirable real estate, and then once the area has improved in terms of services, the IDPs were forced out, leaving their locations for the government to parcel out the land to paying citizens.

How these events are managed in coordination between governments, NGOs, UN, donor countries and the affected people themselves is the challenge that faces the world today, in regard to the problems of serving people on the margins of the crowded African towns. Juba, capital of South Sudan, is also in company of many other towns around these issues (Figure 7.1). So far, programs that have responded to these dynamics have not prevented exclusion of so many people from state services, the violence that accompanies this chaotic urbanization. State authorities tend to think of urban migrants only as people that need to be helped, controlled, given ideas and resources, not as partners in efforts aimed at their welfare. But when these ideas, resources and control measures fail, often the result is violence, including that which is meted out by the state itself in the name of law and order.

Without any attempt to romanticize life in the African town, it is important to underscore the mutual coexistence of chaos and order, of wealth and misery, between the political will among certain public officials to serve the town's population with honesty and a ghastly corruption among others. The result is that Africa's urban space remains a work in progress, partly due to the fact that urbanization in Africa is still relatively new, with more than half of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa having 75% of their citizens still living in the countryside, with the percentage rates being higher because of that demographic reality, and partly due to the catastrophic events that cause urbanization to happen at a daunting speed and without prior planning.¹⁰

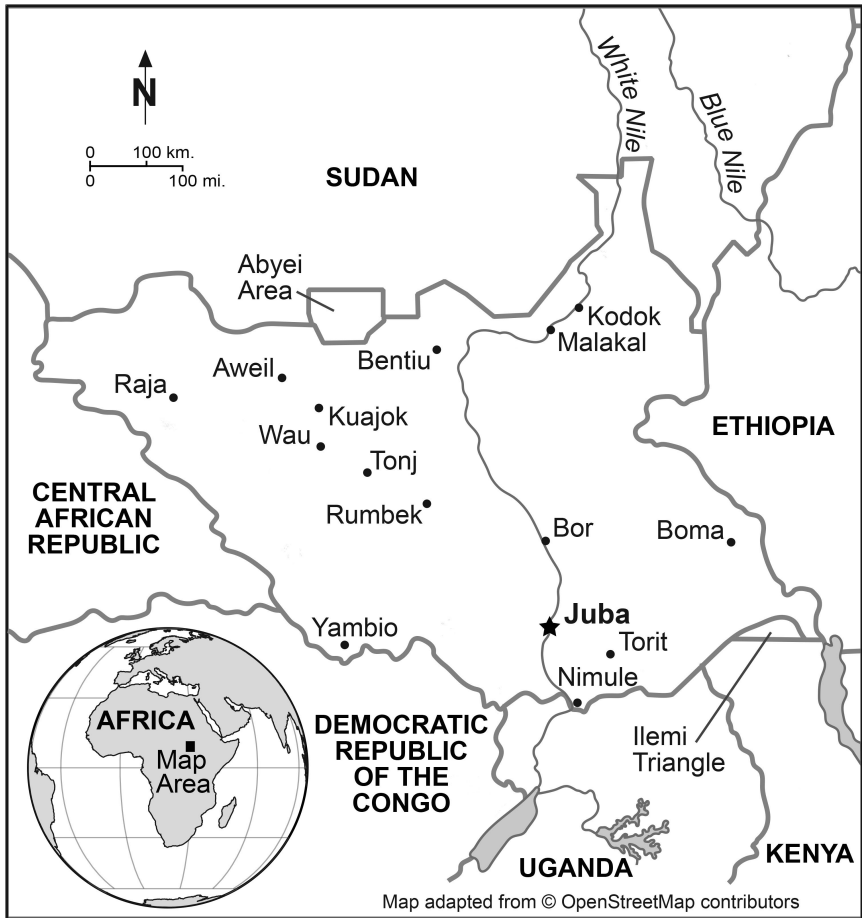


Figure 7.1 Map of South Sudan. Credit: Joe Stoll.

Juba is a good example of this type of urban formations in Africa and has parallels with other African towns (Figure 7.2). Many towns in Africa, especially the capital cities, have a lot in common with each other, especially in their histories as deformities of the colonial pasts, the colonial attempts to engineer the social order as a way to undercut any anti-colonial protest. In their sights, flavors and smells, African towns can be typically African in their similarities, all having an order that defies what is otherwise seemingly chaotic spatial layout, in their multi-ethnic composition, the influence of the countries' protracted liberation struggles or their visible economic inequities that were born of these struggles, just to list a few.¹¹ The case of Juba and Khartoum presented below will show the nexus between political history, liberation wars, elite entitlement and the use of urban spaces



Figure 7.2 Aerial photograph showing the urban sprawl of Juba. Credits: Jok Madut Jok.

in Africa's post-colony. It is safe to say that African towns share so much because the common causes of urbanization, the speed of urban expansion, the subsequent competition for space, the spatial layout of towns and the government responses to the pressures on the town's carrying capacity in terms of services.¹²

African towns can also be very similar to one another in terms of their physical appearance, with unpaved urban roads, which are also littered with garbage, and which, when it rains, turn into little dirty, greasy, grey, green and insect-infested rivers due to lack of drainage systems. This is particularly the case with the informal settlements that crop up quite quickly and all around in the wake of the events, political or otherwise, mentioned above. They also share both the concentration of public goods and services within them and the subsequent reality of being population magnets, causing a steady flow of people from rural areas into these rapidly growing behemoths of poorly planned and unwieldy, hard to govern urban concentration of people who arrive carrying such diverse systems of social organizing but find themselves having to come to terms with the country's quest for national unity and unified national identity based on citizenship and not on ethnic backgrounds.

This chapter is about Juba, South Sudan's capital, about the forces that have converged in Juba, the huge number of people, poverty, lack of infrastructure, lackluster land use policies, stiff competition over residential

plots and ethnic discord, all of which have caused quite a lot of acrimony between all sectors of its population. Despite being the capital city of the world's newest country, newer and with promise to learn from the experience of other towns in East Africa that could prevent Juba from falling into the same traps as Kampala or Nairobi, Juba has quickly found itself beset by problems of state failure to guide the process of spatial distribution and sharing. Despite its unique history, or perhaps because of it, Juba still shares a lot in common with its African counterparts, especially the pervasive corrupt practices in land grabbing by elite and subversion of the laws and regulations governing zoning plans.

The chapter will chronicle the political history that gave birth to South Sudan, allowing Juba to grow with deformities of its expansion under duress, what with its abrupt declaration as the capital soon after liberation war ended, the challenges presented by the convergence of people from various parts, competition over land, jobs, market space and ethnicized rivalries over political office. Using a grievance approach, i.e. the fact that majority of Juba's inhabitants are constantly complaining about the state and the leaders who run it, for having failed to bring regulation, order and guidance to the process of urban growth and for fraudulently grabbing land for themselves, citing their entitlement as liberators, this chapter attempts to tease out some of these liberation era practices that have now come to create troubles with regard to the governing of urban spaces.

Inhabitants of Juba, most of whom are uncertain about the fate of the plot of land on which they live, whether or not they truly own it, are very aggrieved by the failure of municipal authorities to make the town comfortable in terms of services and safety and in their unwillingness or inability to enforce the rules of land acquisition, land use and disposal. The chapter describes the most common urban dynamics, with a view to showing how urban problems of Juba's magnitude have been addressed by other urban centers in Africa, how the South Sudanese leaders at all levels of government could have benefited from the advantage of running a new country and the hindsight from the experience of the rest of the continent. How have the residents of Juba reacted to the shattering of their expectations of state services following independence? With widespread disappointment among South Sudanese in the way the "liberators" have handled the post- independence expectations, the chapter concludes with a caricature of how the capital of South Sudan became not only the origin of the whole country's woes but also the microcosm of all the challenges that faced the new state, from corruption to violence, despair, ethnic feuding and national disunity. Problems that Juba faces are essentially problems of failure of political and administrative leadership to reflect on the whole country's recent history, especially the South Sudanese grievances that got them to support the decades long struggle to be free from Sudan. That some of the practices in the process of running South Sudan are exact copies of the practices in Sudan, which South Sudan protested against, is a classic African political failure to live up to the promises of freedom, service and

people-centered programming that were supposed to accompany major political transitions such as decolonization and split up of countries.

Juba, the Liberators' Entitlement and Stunted National Cohesion

Juba is also similar to such other East African capitals like Kampala, Nairobi and Addis Ababa, in that they all have ever growing segments of population living on the margins, including the youth bulge and high rates of unemployment among young people. Their most visible physical features are street hawkers, motor cycle transports, end of the day long lines at the bus parks in city centers and large crowds of young men congregating on street corners, under the trees or milling about in the crowded markets trying to eek a living out of anything they can lay their hands on, all happening in an unjust system where young people try to start businesses without access to credit of any kind. In Juba, while the large swath of unemployed men sit idly, reliant on their few employed kinsmen and on political patronage for their meals, for housing, for schools and medical care, the women of Juba are busy selling anything they can find in market places, from used cloths to daily produce to handcrafts, all looking and acting like the female worker bees that feed and protect the hive. Doing anything to survive under these circumstances is commendable, a sign of industriousness among urban youth, but the people of Juba talk of being a people without the protection of the state they had always yearned for and did so much toward South Sudan's struggle to secede from Sudan. They express a great deal of disappointment, some of which fed into the civil war that broke out in 2013, and which, if not carefully managed in the future, will continue to be a source of future political unrest, urban crime and potential for political mobilization by any disgruntled politico-military elite seeking power.

Like many of these towns, Juba is also home to many woefully young female sex workers, with ghastly stories of exploitation being told about them, all made possible by poverty, by the workings of urban life that allows some people to fall through the cracks in the social order and by shifts in this social order that South Sudanese say had always placed children and women at the center of social organizing but have now experienced a decline. Juba is also home to increasing number of people with disabilities, street children, sexual minorities and dwellers of graveyards, the hidden people, so to speak, people who, when visible, are only ignominiously so, with the country's leadership hardly seeing them or only seeing them as an eye soar for the country, a problem that needs addressing by eliminating them or wishing them into invisibility.

Municipal authorities in Juba and other towns as well as national leaders in the country, just as is the case in many other countries in East Africa, have responded to this situation in varied ways, with some seeing the huge number of young people as an asset in terms of workforce and have invested

in programs that attempt to create opportunities for them, while others have had a tendency to see the youth as a problem needing a solution from the point of view of controlling them, law enforcement, urban crime and suppressing any potential for political unrest. In other words, the tendency is for the leaders to see the politically and economically marginalized people as the problem and not part of the solution. That these issues, whether people on the margins are the problem or the failure to address their grievances is the problem, feed into and off of each other is lost on many leaders, especially South Sudanese leaders, who lose the chance to see this space as the platform for nation-building, to imbue the young people with a sense of collective belonging to the nation and helping them graduate from ethnic citizenship as the only recipe for political stability. Young people who were interviewed for this piece of research pointed out almost unanimously that it is failure to invest in the welfare of these marginalized segments of society that strengthens citizenship in the tribe and pride in ethnic loyalty, as tribe becomes the obvious fallback position when lives are at stake and when the state cannot be counted on for human security. While everyone agrees that ethnic cultural identities are important as foundations of sense of self, it is a folly to lose sight of the reality that stronger ethnic citizenship, which is being promoted by failure of state to protect citizens, will prove deadly for the country's national cohesion. For example, the intense competition over urban spaces in Juba may be a local affair in one city, but has shown itself as a microcosm of what is unfolding all over the country, revealing a failure of nation-building projects and will most likely become the death knell for the country's unity and stability.

The Colonial Order That Made Juba and Khartoum

Despite these similarities, however, Juba is unique in some significant ways. One of the characteristics that set Juba apart is the fact that it is the capital city of a country born of a different type of decolonialization effort, as the type of colonialism that it confronted differed significantly from what the rest of the continent had to come to terms with. First of all, the structure of British colonial system in Sudan basically meant two countries in one, north and south, at least for a while (1914–1946) by virtue of the British “Southern Policy,” especially in terms of development services.¹³ The south was at the receiving end of the contradictory colonial policy of keeping it as part of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan but investing nearly nothing in that region such that when the decolonization wave swept through Africa in the 1950s and 1960s Southern Sudan wanted nothing to do with the empire nor with the would be post-colonial Sudan.

When Sudan gained independence from Britain in 1956, therefore, the British essentially handed the then Southern Sudan over to Northern Sudan in a rush to relinquish empire in a bid to maintain territorial and financial interests in Egypt, the Suez Canal affair and others. The British essentially

left Southern Sudan to sort itself out from the mess that the empire had created for it. There may have been a flicker of concern about the fate of Southern Sudan among British colonial officers who served in that region, some of whom made memorable pleas to ensure the protection of Southern Sudan against Northern Sudan before the British departed and registered their disagreement with the way Britain treated Southern Sudan, but the whole British Empire could not be bothered by local crises that the empire had caused.

The empire haphazardly allowed the Sudan to become independent, freeing itself from the constraints of holding on to less important parts of its reaches, and regardless of what the consequences may be for the margins of the empire that suffered the colonial hegemonic policies of bias in favor of the capital city, the margins were now ready to be compromised for much more grant schemes by imperial powers beyond colonialism.¹⁴

Whitehall was now in a new quest to create a different form of global dominance and Southern Sudan lost value in the imperial calculus, and had suddenly become a burden on the empire, considered an unimportant minutiae in the grand scheme of things, despite the pleas by Southern Sudanese that the British Empire had a responsibility to sort out its mess on the ground before retreating. Clearly, there was no such imperial concern and the result was that Southern Sudanese, through no fault of their own, had to sort out the future of their territory, to remain in unity with Sudan, despite the evident identity, cultural and historical differences that were going to make it difficult for Sudan to stay as one country as imagined by the colonial power, or to seek a separate country.¹⁵

The result of this last-minute imperial juggling act was that Sudan became independent but Southern Sudan did not, as the latter transitioned from British colonialism to a kind of Arab colonialism under Northern Sudanese control, a recipe for endless instability. That was the basic making of what would become more than half a century of conflict between Southern and Northern Sudan, which culminated in the breakup of Africa's largest country in 2011, creating two Sudans, the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan, out of this history of violent acrimony, setting them both on separate but linked political, social and economic trajectories.¹⁶ It is this history that became the basis for South Sudan's organization of urban spaces, which Juba is the classic example of.

This is to say that the growth of urban spaces in South Sudan has been greatly influenced, if not determined, by the conflict with Sudan's Arab and Islamist regimes, much of which saw the main towns of South Sudan, Juba, Wau, Malakal, Torit, etc., become Sudan Armed Forces garrison towns, where the army attempted many forms of population engineering to ease their control, just as the British colonial powers had done. Those displaced by the impact of war in the rural areas flocked to the urban centers and the Sudan Armed Forces, suspicious of any South Sudanese coming into the towns, seeing some of them as spies or covert agents of subversion,

forced them to settle in specific places, where they formed a buffer zone against any attacks by the Southern insurgent forces. The ghosts of that attempted population and social engineering remain hovering over these towns to this day, manifesting themselves in mass graves, drinking water wells that had to be condemned after the discovery that the Sudanese army had used them to dump bodies of people they secretly killed at night inside the neighborhoods.

There are stories of sexual violence and mass rapes by soldiers, the number of people suffering from mental illness due to the traumatic violence they went through and the remains of physical destruction, with these towns continuing to struggle to rebuild some of their parts and expand into new areas in order to smooth away the ghosts of liberation wars. Above all, the slums that became town's neighborhoods when the war ended are now a major challenge to city councils, urban developers who struggle to figure out land ownership, land use or disposal, in a climate lacking clear regulations, and healthcare workers who now have to address public health problems related to urban congestion, sanitation, hygiene, lack of clean drinking water, absence of sewerage system, unregulated garbage disposal and lack of landfills.

The whole country, viewed from the vantage point of these urban centers, look like a giant construction site, emerging from deadly liberation wars, but now almost choked by dust during the dry season and knee-deep mud in the rainy season, piles of debris, single use plastic bags and plastic water and soft drink bottles strewn everywhere throughout the town and clogging every stream or washed into the Nile. Many citizens in some of these towns describe this situation as a consequence of the leaders' failure to live up to their liberation ethos of a people-centered campaign of change.

Juba is also different from other African capitals in the sense that, unlike other African capital cities which were built in colonial times to become seats of national governments, accepted as such and were sustained when colonialism ended, Juba's identity as the capital of South Sudan is still contested. This contest has morphed from a debate over its geographical centrality to the country, to its cultural and historical significance, to competition between various administrative units having jurisdiction over the city and to pure ethnic rivalries and accusations by the indigenous people, the Bari, that the country's majority ethnic groups, Jieng and Nuer, have had too much dominance in the city, fraudulently taking too much land with impunity, the pretext by these land grabbing elite being that Juba is a national capital and every citizen is entitled to seek residence and acquire land within the city territory. This has led to some indigenous communities suggesting that perhaps the capital city should move somewhere else, if the excuse by the land grabbers is their assumed entitlement to it by virtue of most parts of Juba town being seen as part of the capital city territory.

As home to the national government, the biggest national university, the army headquarters, the main river port on the Nile, the northernmost end

of the country's only highway connecting it to an international border in Uganda and the location of the only bridge over the White Nile anywhere in the whole of South Sudan, Juba has been a convergence point for all South Sudan's ethnic groups, for most trades, including the migrant labor from East Africa that came to take advantage of the oil economy, the booming construction, food supply and humanitarian efforts. This mix of people and the advantages they bring have caused the indigenous Bari community to be wary about their own fate in the city. It is this mix, the urban spatial politics, the economic promise, the lack of legislation on land acquisition and the corruption that has seen Central Equatoria State and the municipal officials get rich quick from the sales of land while serving only those who pay and excluding those who do not, which has made Juba unable to properly plan and to grow in an orderly manner, making it only a constantly contested space, a place where citizens only complain about political failures, a microcosm for what has gone entirely off rail with the evolution of South Sudan from a sub-national status in Sudan to being a hard-won independent state that held all the aspirations of the citizens.

In the absence of clear regulation, this contest has led to significant wrangles over who has the authority to allocate land, between the Bari community, the Juba city council, the county of Juba, the state of Jubek and the national governments, each of which is engaged in land sales and undercutting each other. The immediate result of this contest is the uncertainty among individual inhabitants about how to acquire land for housing, whether one should invest in developing a unit of land in their possession or wait until there is a clear land policy that potentially gives individual land owners a sense of confidence that their plots are indeed safely their own forever, or whatever such a policy/legislation would say about ownership, leasehold etc. The risk of building on a piece of land with no certainty of ownership is very grave indeed, as fights have broken out over housing plots, unlawful demolitions and loss of money invested in construction on pieces of land whose ownership is undocumented or documented poorly through corruption or documented multiple times through bribery of staff at the land office. It is not uncommon at all to run into fights, sometimes involving exchange of gunfire between army generals or prominent politicians trying to use their public office status to bulldoze their way into land ownership and ordinary citizens who have legitimate claim to pieces of land. The result is that there are many congested neighborhoods while there are empty residential plots that were acquired but were not developed because of the uncertainty about ownership and because of lack of services like roads, water points, police stations, markets, schools, medical facilities and recreational spaces.¹⁷

This delayed infrastructural development has also caused serious delay in establishment of symbols of nationhood, institutions such as the national memorials centers, charting out a history of the liberation trail so as to enable the citizens to relate to their national history, a shared liberation

history in which everyone can see himself/herself depicted. Other institutions such as the national archives, museums, cultural centers and theaters, which have been planned but not implemented, partly due to this uncertainty about the national capital, and would have helped the citizens of the young state to quickly develop a sense of collective belonging to a unified nation-state. As the situation stands in Juba, there are no clear ways for citizens to see themselves represented in the country's body politics in a manner that a capital city should normally bring people together around national symbols that encompass a sense of collectivity. The constant fights over residential plots, between the Bari and the non-Bari, the question of which lands the nation can use to build these institutions, the issue of diminishing open spaces in Juba for both recreation and public celebrations has really overshadowed the sense of pride that many South Sudanese had attached to Juba and the country as a whole at the beginning of independence. It is a vicious cycle, where lack of investment in the symbols of unity allows disunity to take roots and this disunity makes it difficult for citizens to engage with each other around what is collectively important for them, such as pride in the nation and exercising civic duties, all of which could ratchet down the level of ethnic hostilities. This has not been helped by the overtures that the national government of South Sudan might move its headquarters to a location that is at the geographic center of the country called Ramciel, both as a way to ease the tensions in Juba and to have a new start at a place where there can be real planning and a new blue print for national unity. Talk of a move has played into the delay to develop Juba, such that foreign diplomatic missions, corporations and multilateral organizations are not investing in long term facilities, possibly out of fear that they would be compelled to abandon them in the event that the seat of the national government is moved from Juba.

Furthermore, and as stated above, urbanization in South Sudan has also been a function of war-induced internal displacement of millions of South Sudanese and flight of millions more into refugee camps in the neighboring countries.¹⁸ When the war ended and South Sudan separated, the natural and most immediate aspiration for all these internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, majority of whom had been rural inhabitants before their lives were torn apart by war, was to return "home," where homes this time were all the major towns of their new country, not the original rural homelands they had fled from. How could anyone expect them to return to their rural origins after having spent more than two decades as IDPs on the outskirts of Sudan's major towns, in the north and in the south? It is within this mass return from refuge that most of South Sudan's contemporary problems of rapid urbanization are rooted. It is in this messy urbanization and irregular spatial order of towns that questions of land ownership, entitlement to it by birth, ethnic identity, the role of government in regulating land use, problems with delivery of basic services, the use of political and related economic muscle to acquire plots of land in Juba, or how to direct urban water, electricity and paved roads, have manifested themselves in a

most divisive manner that it has aggrieved, disappointed and outraged the citizens. It is these issues and contest around them that have put the desired national unity at stake, and most especially because of the self-serving behavior of the “liberators.”¹⁹ “They have forgotten what it was that they gave up so much of their youthful lives for...To have a country that they can then put on fire?, asked one interviewee. What does a true liberator really sacrifice their life for, to have a country they can then destroy through this believe that they had made this country possible, and that it has to work for them, or else it has to be demolished, asked one commentator we interviewed for this project, if this is what our liberator would have wished for?”

Residents of Juba, now numbering approximately 1.2 million, have no access to electricity, running water and security, mostly unemployed and living by sharing within what remains by way of communal safety nets, with some surviving through patronage of the corrupt public officials.²⁰ It is common to find the houses of some of the cabinet ministers and other senior officials housing tens of relatives, soldiers, students and people from rural areas seeking medical care in the big towns, all relying on this person for all of these demands and in exchange for their support of that patronage system.²¹

One of the puzzling things about Juba is that, despite its outward chaotic mix of residential, public offices, markets, industrial activity and informal settlements, all mixing like a hodgepodge, everyone seems accounted for in the end, through kin-based organizational system. It is this mismatch that keeps crime and urban violence relatively low, despite the amalgam of issues, unemployment, poor housing, concentration of youth and political marginalization that have made other cities across Africa very dangerous places to live.

Although disease outbreaks have curiously become fewer and far in-between, thanks to increased individual and household awareness about basic hygiene rules and because of overall improvement in healthcare services, there remain the occasional cholera outbreaks, the endemic typhoid and malaria, which are threats to life in view of the environmental contamination that has become a constant in some of the city’s excluded margins, the informal settlements that have the least water run offs in the rainy season. One resident described life in Juba, the fact that crime, disease and malnutrition have not caused mass death, yet, as “surviving by the grace of God, where man’s actions could have killed us all.”

This pressure and its threats to explode any time was to be expected, as South Sudan had been one of the most war-devastated regions of the world since World War II, when the region waged a taxing liberation war against the government of Sudan. One of the most manifest results of that war was an entire generation of South Sudanese who had no access to education, and they flocked to Juba in quest for educational opportunities when the war ended. Juba is now home to a large number of youth beyond the school age who are still trying to enroll in high school, in hope that they can still attend university as an avenue to social mobility in the long run. Another result was youth disappointment with the non-accrual of peace dividends in the

form of employment, and nowhere was presumed to have more opportunities than Juba. Women had been in charge of their households throughout the war, and now, they saw Juba as the market for their business dreams. War widows, orphans and disabled combatants counted on the central government to look after them on account that they had paid the ultimate price to make the birth of their country possible. Moving to Juba was the surest way to be closer to that central government in order to demand these services in close range. Refugees who had spent decades in Uganda and Kenya and in Sudan as IDPs, suddenly rendered refugees in the wake of independence, could not wait to return “home” with a euphoria only commensurate with the momentous occasion of South Sudan’s independence, and Juba was the most obvious destination as the refugee camps emptied.

All these groups were not attracted to Juba by economic aspirations alone; they also had a sense of collective citizenship and where better to celebrate that sense with fellow citizens from a multitude of ethnic nationalities than in the national capital? It was where their liberators would be stationed. It was where basic services, from obtaining a birth certificate to applying for a passport to registering a new business, were all to be accessed. Juba was also home to the country’s biggest referral hospital, the oldest national university and access to international flights, for those planning to leave the country. That any of them would be made to question the suitability of Juba as the capital city of their nation.

Unfortunately, Juba was developing in a different direction from what the citizens expected. The liberators went on a shopping spree and the dusty town was quickly awash with shiny fuel guzzling motor vehicles for a city that had not a single paved road at the start, ordered from Japan at prices where each of these cars was worth what it would cost to build a secondary school. The whole city looked like a giant construction site, where most of the construction companies and their workers were foreign. This began to sow the seeds of xenophobia among the youth who increasingly felt upstaged by East African youth from Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda. Major businesses favored foreign workers, citing both the lack of skilled local workforce and a host of complicated cultural attitudes to work and work ethics possessed by local youth. The petrodollars were soon siphoned off to foreign bank accounts, both by these foreign companies and their local elite facilitators, and the new euphoric citizenry soon became a disappointed citizenry and the feeling of collective belonging gave way to ethnic-based competition, nepotism in employment and government contracts, and corruption became the major driver of economic disparities that, in turn, became the driver for conflict in Juba and beyond.

Conclusion: Juba and the Politics of Urbanization

The abrupt growth of the city of Juba has made the contest over space very highly divisive and the capital of South Sudan no longer hold the

promise of becoming the rallying point for the nation's identity. The mix of ethnic-based grievances over land, the absence of basic services and infrastructure, even as the elite live large, and lack of prospects for improvement have all become the most visible threats to Juba's stability and that of the whole country. Many South Sudanese say that this gloomy outlook is underpinned by the failure of the new country's politico-military class to properly imagine the country beyond liberating it. Once the goal of liberation was achieved, there were no clear policies aimed at a transition to nation-statehood.

Since 2005, Juba has experienced a complex web of issues that emanate from prolonged civil war, displacement, economic decline, competition for resources along ethnic lines and increased rates of violence, both political and criminal. At the time of the country's independence in 2011, the city had a population of 300,000 inhabitants. It is now home to 1.2 million people, most of them returnees from Khartoum, capital of the rump state of Sudan from which South Sudan broke away, some displaced by the more recent civil war and others attracted to the city by markets, money, jobs in the army and civil service. They came from all corners of the country, both a good thing for the cohesion of the country and a potential timed bomb, should the pressures for equity in land use, in service delivery, safety, justice, civic rights and democratic space find no peaceful outlet of expression.

Majority of these new urbanites find themselves without skills for city life. They find themselves living in congested areas, makeshift housing, without basic services and no access to steady employment. There was/is no public transit to enable them to go seek jobs outside the slums, no health care of any of kind, no garbage collection, no running water. The most ubiquitous characteristic of these populations is the high ratio of young people, below the age of 30, many of them have little investment in themselves so that they have a future to hope for, to live for. As a result of the above, they are basically excluded from any gains the country might be making in terms of economic growth, peace dividends in the case of post-war countries, or employment opportunities in emerging economies. They become a burden on the conscience of the nation but not really part of the nation. And due to that sense of alienation and exclusion, the areas they live in tend to have high rate of violence, crime and disease – this is not to suggest that poverty and deprivation automatically breed violence. But it is important to note that young people in these neighborhoods are often treated with aggression, violence and discrimination by state institutions. Police brutality is common there, courts are often quick to condemn them as they may not have legal defense when they are accused of crime. In a sense this big chunk of urban population in the developing world is pitted against the state and the only recourse that these young people have is violent hit back at the state, rows with police, riots against rising cost of living and easy to gravitate toward mass protests against the politicians.

All of these manifests itself in the form of many layers of violence – state violence against them, reproduction of violence within the neighborhoods and within the families: alcohol, domestic violence and sporadic outbursts of violence against the state. This begins to enter a vicious cycle – more congestion leads to violence, including the violence of economic exclusion, more violence leads to flight of employment opportunities and this, in turn, leads to more desperation, resulting in political instability that goes beyond the neighborhood, the city as a whole and the country at large. Perhaps even across a region South Sudanese have an obsession to debate *ad infinitum* whether land acquisition and ownership should be done through a legislation that spells out who owns it, between state, city, community or individuals who live on the land. This endless debate, one that looks entirely unwinnable one way or the other, has made for rather dysfunctional housing options in the big towns like Juba. The uncertainty about land ownership, combined with corrupt practices that municipal officials use to line their pockets, has stifled growth of cities, opened the doors to speculation about land values and prices can be quite high, making it hard for workers to live near their jobs, and this, in turn, creating gaping inequalities and widened class divisions. This uncertainty about how one acquires a residential plot of land, how to obtain a title deed to it and the fear that there might be more than one title deeds out there, all have produced an inefficient use of land, unfair system of land distribution and has promoted lack of public faith in the ability of the state as an even-handed dispenser of justice that the constitution say it should be.²²

Notes

- 1 For example, neo-classical economic theory emphasizes economic reasons. See Teye, Joseph and Mariama Awumbila, “Factors of Migration and Urbanization in Africa.” Centre for Migration Studies University of Ghana, 2018.
- 2 Saghir, Jamal, “Urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa: Meeting Challenges by Bridging Stakeholders.” Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018.
- 3 Barofsky, Jeremy, Eyerusalem Siba and Johnathan Grabinsky, 2018, “Can Rapid Urbanization in Africa Reduce Poverty? Causes, Opportunities, and Policy Recommendations.” Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2018.
- 4 Muortat, Mawan, “South Sudan and the Chronic Failure of a Ruling Elite.” African Arguments, June 9, 2015. See also Tarnjeet K. Kang, “Global Report on Internal Displacement: Urbanization as a Result of Displacement, a Case Study of Bentiu, South Sudan.” Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2019.
- 5 Gutkind, Peter C. W. “African Urban Family Life: Comment on and Analysis of Some Rural-Urban Differences.” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* Vol. 3, Cahier 10 (1962), pp. 149–217.
- 6 Yadav, Kapil, Srinivasapura V. Nikhil and Chandrakant S. Pandav, “Urbanization and Health Challenges: Need to Fast Track Launch of the National Urban Health Mission.” *Indian Journal of Community Medicine* Vol. 36, No. 1 (2011).

- 7 Anku, Amaka and Tochi Eni-Kalu, "Africa's Slums Aren't Harbingers of Anarchy – They're Engines of Democracy: The Upside of Rapid Urbanization." *Foreign Affairs* December 16, 2019.
- 8 World Economic Forum, "Migration and Its Impact on Cities." October 2017.
- 9 UNESCO, "Defending the 'Right to the City': How Cities Include Migrants and Refugees in and through Education." Global Education Monitoring Report Team. Paris: UNESCO, 2019.
- 10 African countries keep building new cities to meet rapid urbanization even if people won't live in them.
- 11 Grant, Richard and Daniel Thompson, "The Development Complex, Rural Economy and Urban-Spatial and Economic Development in Juba, South Sudan," *Local Economy* Vol. 28, No. 2 (2013), pp. 218–230.
- 12 The frequent references to Khartoum here are simply for comparative purposes; Juba is the focus here. The link between the two is related to the politics of liberation, Khartoum as the abuser and Juba as the object of resistance.
- 13 Mayo, David Nailo N. "The British Southern Policy in Sudan: An Inquiry into the Closed District Ordinances (1914–1946)" *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2–3 (1994) (New Series), pp. 165–185.
- 14 Daly, Martin, and Oystein H. Rolandsen, "A History of South Sudan: From Slavery to Independence." Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- 15 Jok, Madut Jok, "War and Slavery in Sudan." Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.
- 16 See Johnson, Douglas, "South Sudan: A Short History of a Long War." Zed Books, 2015.
- 17 Grant, Richard and Daniel Thompson, "The Development Complex, Rural Economy and Urban-Spatial and Economic Development in Juba, South Sudan," *Local Economy* Vol. 28, No. 2 (2013), pp. 218–230.
- 18 One irony about internal displacement during the north-south war was the flight of South Sudanese to Khartoum and other northern towns, moving into the lion's den so to speak. Some estimates give four million IDPs from South Sudan in the north. Khartoum was still the capital of the whole country so it is understandable that rural war-affected would wish to seek refuge there. But due to the prejudices that were at the root of the war to begin with, Southern IDPs in the north suffered immensely.
- 19 Martin, Ellen and Irina Mosel, "City Limits: Urbanization and Vulnerability in Sudan, the Case of Juba." Humanitarian Policy Group, January 2011.
- 20 Wight, Patrick, "South Sudan and the Four Dimensions of Power-Sharing: Political, Territorial, Military, and Economic." *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* Vol. 7, No. 2 (Fall 2017), pp. 1–35.
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8 Manantali, Mali

Urbanization in and Around a Small Town in the West African Savanna¹

Dolores Koenig

We leave Bamako, Mali's capital, for Manantali, the site of a major hydroelectric dam. Once out of the city, the car turns due west toward Kita, a railroad town about 200 km away. High tension wires parallel the road paved only in 1999, and on the other side is the Bamako-Dakar railroad, built during colonial times. We see no trains because the road has displaced the rail traffic. After Kita, we take another new road, toward Kenieba, a town near the border between Mali and Senegal. Only 50 km from Kita, we reach the village of Tambaga and turn right onto RN (National Road) 22, mostly unpaved. Small streams, dry except during heavy rains, have sometimes been paved over or lined with rocks to facilitate crossing. The last 100 km, over the hills that surround the Manantali reservoir, take several hours (Figure 8.1). Once we hit the sign for the "débarcadère," where trucks load fish from the lake, Manantali is near, and the road is paved. After a gentle descent, then some steep switchbacks, we are in front of the dam, the power plant, and the town of Manantali.

A small village in 1980, Manantali is now the site of the dam built by the *Organisation pour la mise en valeur du fleuve Sénégal* (OMVS, Senegal River Basin Authority), an international river basin organization comprised of Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, and Guinea. Since construction of the dam in the 1980s and 1990s and the activation of the power plant in 2001, Manantali has become a small town.

At the dam, the main road turns right, away from the power plant and the offices at the dam. Manantali is a long and thin town, confined by the river on the left and an escarpment on the right. The first buildings are offices, a development organization on the left and the gendarmerie on the right. Soon, a residential area appears on the left; this is the *Cité des Ouvriers* (Worker Quarters), built for laborers during construction. Densely populated then, fewer live there now, with families occupying several adjacent buildings. The area has a health clinic, schools, and religious buildings as well. Continuing on, after passing newer houses on both sides of the road, we arrive at the town's commercial center, with large stores and smaller kiosks, an open-air food market, some private offices, and areas for vehicle



Figure 8.1 Manantali and Its Environs. Credit: Maya S. Kearney, using ArcGIS Online and DIVA-GIS.

repairers and artisans. After this area are more houses and schools; vendors line the road at intervals. The northern extent of the town is marked by the *Cité des Cadres* (Administrator Housing), originally built to house OMVS administration and construction managers. Some of the houses are now empty, but other buildings house dam personnel and school directors. The small commercial area is busy as it houses a clinic and pharmacy open to all, the town's only bank, some kiosks, and a small supermarket with middle-class necessities. A few buildings appear after the *Cité des Cadres*, but the town soon ends at a checkpoint with a gendarme. The road continues northwest, passing many resettlement villages and eventually arriving at the town of Mahina, a rail center.

What has kept the town of Manantali alive and thriving since its construction boom? The people who built the dam have gone, and only a small labor force is needed to run the dam and power plant. But the town has endured. This chapter analyzes Manantali, Mali in light of existing literature

on small towns in Africa. It considers the impetus for Manantali's growth, the construction of the dam as part of OMVS development plans, and its effects on the area. It then turns to the economic and political characteristics of Manantali in 2016.

Small Towns in Africa

Much of the focus on urbanism in Africa has been on its largest cities, where rapid population growth has generated significant pressure on urban resources. In response, some African countries have begun to pursue policies to encourage the growth of secondary urban centers (UN Habitat 2014: 6). Yet, independent of policy concerns, secondary cities grew and developed. In 2000, it was estimated that more than 2/3 of Africa's urban population lived in cities with fewer than 500,000 residents, most of them in commercial and administrative cities with 5,000-100,000 inhabitants (Hilgers 2012: 29). Scholars have studied these cities and towns for some time; Hilgers (2012: 30) dated the interest in small cities and towns to at least the 1940s, when scholars from the University of Manchester and the Rhodes-Livingston Institute carried out fieldwork in southern Africa. Since then, social scientists have shown continuing interest in small urban areas, the forces for their growth, their relationships with hinterlands, and the characteristics of urban life.²

Recent studies of small towns in Africa have noted their varied trajectories (e.g., Bertrand and Dubresson 1997; Titus and Hinderink 1998). Hinderink and Titus (1998: 6) proposed two basic models: growth centers, oriented around industrial production, and rural service centers, focused on trade, administration, and services. The latter appear to have been more common in Africa. Rural service centers develop in relationship to rural hinterlands as well as to larger urban centers. The rural-urban links can stimulate growth in both town and hinterland (Steel et al. 2019; Titus 1998). For example, agricultural transformations may support rural growth when farmers cultivate new crops for international or national markets (Büscher and Mathys 2019; Steel et al. 2019). Farmers spend increased incomes on goods and services in towns; also important for growth are new town enterprises, such as those that process agricultural products for local consumption (e.g., factories that turn palm oil into soap and detergents) (Steel et al. 2019). Growth can be stimulated by a strong market and transport infrastructure that links towns to rural areas and larger cities (Karg et al. 2019). However, small towns rarely stimulate the growth of a hinterland through trickle-down effects (Titus 1998: 222). More commonly, changes in the structure and characteristics of small towns follow hinterland developments; rural service centers develop when there is a marketed rural surplus (Titus 1998: 224).

However, some small towns do become growth centers. Usually the stimulus is something other than industry, the model for growth proposed

by Hinderink and Titus (1998). Political changes may encourage development, as when frontier sites on international borders become sites of urbanization. The small border crossing of Oshikango, Namibia, grew in the mid-1990s after Namibian independence and the resolution of Angolan conflicts. In 2009, the population included 43,000 people in five settlements, and the built surface had increased 50-fold since 1996 (Dobler 2009: 117). Good roads between South Africa and Angola facilitated passage. By 2005, the town had boomed, with warehouses, car dealers, fruit and grocery businesses, Chinese wholesale shops, and supporting activities, such as bars, motels and guesthouses, and sex workers (Dobler 2009). Sometimes, administrative changes spur growth. In the early 2000s, the Ethiopian state under Zenawi embarked on an effort to transform Ethiopia into an urban industrial economy. Of key interest was the development of district capitals.³ New infrastructure such as more and better roads, electrification, increasing cellular telephone coverage, health centers, and schools served to enhance their new role. New recruitment of government employees brought middle-class consumers (Baker 2019). Another political stimulus for urban growth is conflict; urban areas grow, because displaced people believe that they are better protected there than in rural areas (Büscher and Mathys 2019).

Resource development also can serve as a stimulus to urban growth. Perhaps best studied are mines, which can create local boomtowns and affect national urban systems. In general, artisanal mining, more labor intensive, stimulates more development near mineral finds than does large-scale capital-intensive mining. The latter uses less labor and often builds its own worker housing and stores (Bryceson and MacKinnon 2012). Some of the conflict boomtowns in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo studied by Büscher and Mathys (2019) were also mining towns, areas for artisanal exploitation of coltan and cassiterite. Mining and support services in food, lodging, and leisure offered work to locals, displaced people, and migrants. Towns on roads to larger cities became important market centers, but even towns without decent roads or mobile phone reception urbanized (Büscher and Mathys 2019). When mineral deposits are depleted or become too expensive to exploit, these towns may go bust. Some become ghost towns, although others on main roads or with good infrastructure may survive as urban service centers (Bryceson and MacKinnon 2012: 529).

Other kinds of infrastructure or industrial development can also create boomtowns. One classic example is cities of the industrial revolution. Manchester, England grew from 25,000 inhabitants in 1772 to 367,332 in 1851; residents created a new form of city government to deal with urban growth (Marshall 1940). Although Africa has fewer industrial towns, dam construction has been common. As at Manantali, population booms during construction, but workers leave when construction is complete. Still, some retain their urban character. Akosombo Township in Ghana was planned by an internationally known urbanist to become a pole of growth,

including industry after dam construction (Meischer 2012). Although that vision never materialized, Akosombo Township has become a tourist attraction and an attractive town. In Mali, a hydroelectric dam was put into operation in 1982 on the Sankarani, a tributary of the Niger, some 140 km south of Bamako, Mali's capital. Kangare, the town at the dam, has become a place for weekend getaways and small conferences. Little has been written about the urban centers at dam sites (cf. Meischer 2012), perhaps because there has been much more concern about outcomes among those forced to resettle by these dams.

Created by the intervention of dam construction, a new town grew at Manantali. Although potentially a boom-and-bust phenomenon, the town has endured and is now almost 40 years old; it continues to grow and change. Like some mining towns, Manantali has transformed into an urban service center, despite the lack of a transformed agricultural hinterland.

The data upon which this chapter is based were collected primarily in 2016–2018 as part of a research project funded by the US National Science Foundation (BCS-1560543) to understand changes in the lives of villagers resettled from the reservoir area of the dam in the mid-1980s. Data were collected by a team of six social scientists, Koenig plus five researchers from Mali's *Institut des Sciences Humaines* (ISH). The formal study of Manantali town concerned primarily the ways in which villagers interacted with the urban area. However, the team gained much informal information about the town, in part because we stayed in rental housing there and used its services and stores. The senior personnel in the study had worked intermittently in Manantali since the mid-1980s and had watched the town change.

Manantali before the Resettlement

Until about 1980, Manantali was a small village in the Bafing river valley, sited not far from the river. Like other villages in the area, the inhabitants were Malinke speakers who identified as Bafingois (people of the Bafing). According to oral tradition, the Bafingois were the descendants of Famoussa Lagaré Tarawele who arrived in the area in the second half of the 18th century (Samaké et al. 1986; Sow 2020). The Malinke gradually occupied the area and conquered the autochthonous populations there. More people moved to this hilly area to escape 19th-century Islamic wars. In the late 1800s, the French took control of the region and established a colonial administration. The major activity of the French colonial government in the Bafing appears to have been tax collection, which residents resisted passively, refusing to pay. Peanut cultivation arrived in the Bafing soon after the French introduced the crop to villages along the railroad to the north in the late 1800s. However, there were no good roads into the Bafing, and the area saw no significant development efforts.

The Bafingois organized themselves in reference to their connections to Famoussa Lagaré. Residents lived in nucleated villages in extended family

households. Villages were ranked by lineage background of the founder; those founded by descendants of Famoussa Lagaré were ranked more highly than those founded by conquered autochthones or later immigrants. Within villages, the lineage of the village founder provided the chief, who ideally was the most senior man. Oral historians (*griots*) kept track of the ancestors, although specific versions of history were disputed. Although these hierarchies were important in political disputes, they did not have much effect on daily life or livelihoods, where virtually every household made its living from dryland farming. Moreover, despite the different migration streams, people all considered themselves Bafingois, with similar production and social organization. Patrilineally organized and usually polygamous, the typical household included a male head, his wives, grown sons, their wives and children. Ideally, it also included younger brothers, their wives, grown sons, and children.

The Bafing was sparsely populated, with an estimated 5/km² in the 1970s (Groupement Manantali 1978: 1). Individual villages were small but numerous; at the time of resettlement, the reservoir area had 44 villages and smaller agricultural hamlets, with a total estimated population of 8850. The mean size of the villages in 1983 was 295 persons (USAID 1984). There were also a few villages outside the reservoir area, including Manantali. The basic economic activity of rural households was agriculture.

Each village had its own land; some was allocated to individual families for their farms, while uncultivated bush was used for grazing and foraging. Farmland was regenerated through bush fallowing, so farmers often moved fields. Village residents cleared new lands as needed. The farming system was organized around multiple collective fields managed by the household head; all members of the household were expected to do some work on these fields. Sorghum, millet, and maize provided the base of the diet, and peanuts were grown for consumption and sale. Married women also had their own fields, on which they grew peanuts, some grains, and vegetables. As is common in West Africa, there was no common household budget. Rather the household head was expected to provide basic food grains and meet certain expenses, while women were expected to provide ingredients for the complementary sauce. Households also had cattle, sheep, goats, and chickens; herd animals were closely guarded only during the agricultural season so they would stay out of the fields. Otherwise, they roamed without much surveillance.

At independence in 1960, the Bafing area was integrated into the Malian administration. Mali as a whole is divided into regions, ten as of 2016. Western Mali is the First Region; Kayes is its capital. Each region was, in turn, divided into cercles (now prefectures); Kayes has seven prefectures. The prefecture of Bafoulabe includes the Manantali area. Historically, the cercles were divided into arrondissements (now sous-prefectures); Bamafele arrondissement, sited in the village of the same name, included Manantali. Created in 1962 and coterminous with the Bafing, the arrondissement head was named by the central government. The arrondissement collected

taxes and offered minimal services: a poorly staffed clinic, three elementary schools with primary grades, and a veterinary post. A few educated Bafingois found employment in cities, especially Bamako, which had an active association of Bafing residents. At least one resident was a high-ranking civil servant; others were schoolteachers or government employees.

The most important institution in the zone before resettlement was the rural development agency, the *Opération de Développement Intégré des Productions Arachidière et Céréalière* (ODIPAC, Operation for the Integrated Development of Peanut and Cereal Production). It extended improved peanut varieties for production as a cash crop. Funded by the French and the World Bank, farmers received agricultural inputs, equipment, seeds, and fertilizer for peanuts on credit. The organization also bought the peanuts at stable, if low, prices. During the peanut-buying season, itinerant traders came to the zone to sell consumer goods, but otherwise there were no regular markets. A hilly area with no all-season roads, the Bafing remained quite isolated from the national economy, until the OMVS decided that this was an ideal place to build a dam.

The OMVS and Dam Construction

The idea of developing the Senegal river began during the colonial period, in the 1920s. Three tributaries of the Senegal (Faleme, Bafing, Bakoye) arise in Guinea, flow through Mali, and combine to create the Senegal, the boundary between Senegal and Mauritania. The government of French West Africa, which included the four territories, created the Union Hydro-électrique Africaine in 1927 to carry out research and design projects to develop the Senegal basin through navigation, irrigation, and power production. The first projects were proposed in 1953, but they were rejected as too costly (Godana 1985). Guinea became independent in 1958 and the other countries in 1960, but the new countries still wanted to develop the Senegal. In July 1963, the four states created a new international committee to replace the colonial organization and internationalize the Senegal river (Godana 1985). However, the organization lacked funding and faced political disagreements between the member states and did not implement its plans.

A successor organization, the OMVS, was created in March 1972, by the heads of state of Mali, Senegal, and Mauritania.⁴ It had the same goals: develop the Senegal basin through electricity, irrigation, and navigation. This international public organization is headquartered in Dakar, Senegal's capital. Its employees are international civil servants, the Conference of Heads of State and Government (of the member states) its governing body (Godana 1985). The OMVS was able to procure funding for two dams. Diama, a salt-retention barrage, was built at the Senegal's mouth to prevent sea incursion. Upstream, on the Bafing, a high dam would regularize the river's flow for more stable irrigation and generate electricity.

The site for the OMVS high dam was chosen according to technical criteria; near the small village of Manantali was an area with cliffs over 500 m high where a dam could be sited. The rocky, hilly terrain continued upstream and to the south, creating a long slender lake. The village of Manantali, some 125 people in seven households, sat just downstream of the dam site.

To enable the OMVS to carry out its work, the Government of Mali ceded to the organization a large parcel of land. This included not only the dam and office site, but also the entire town of Manantali. Mali's land law at that time gave the state ownership of all land as well as the right to take land needed for public purposes. It is not clear if compensation was given to people living in the village of Manantali.

Construction was carried out by an organization contracted by the OMVS. The OMVS required several competitors to create a new enterprise for the job, *Entreprise de Construction du Barrage de Manantali* (ECBM, Enterprise for Construction of the Manantali Dam). Alongside the ECBM worked the *Groupement Manantali*, the consulting engineers. Subcontractors were hired for particular jobs. The major enterprises were German, Belgian, and Italian; Canadian firms were also involved. The Manantali office of the OMVS, staffed by civil servants and contract personnel from the member states, provided oversight for dam construction.

The first task in 1980 was to build an access road to the dam site. This road, approximately 90 km long, led northwest from Manantali to the rail station at Mahina, on the line from Dakar to Kayes, then Bamako (Figure 8.1). Construction materials came to Dakar by sea, were sent by train to Mahina, and trucked to the dam. An airstrip was also built in the village of Bangassi, so that personnel and some goods could be flown from Dakar and Bamako. Because the airstrip was international, immigration agents were posted there.

The second task was to provide housing. The first personnel were housed in temporary quarters, but permanent offices and housing for workers, supervisors, and administrators were soon built. Manantali was laid out as a planned company town. Offices were built adjacent to the dam site. The *Cité des Ouvriers* was built about 1.5 km downstream from the dam site, with circular concrete houses. About 3 km further away was the *Cité des Cadres* for managers and administrators. It had cement block houses for families and studios to house temporary personnel. In between the two residential areas, the company set up a small market (Figure 8.2).⁵

Construction also brought basic utilities to Manantali. To keep personnel healthy, the ECBM installed a piped water system that covered the entire town. It included two lines; a treated line provided potable water and a second untreated one could be used for gardens and washing. The ECBM also installed a small hydro-turbine upon beginning work. This turbine provided electricity to Manantali years before the principal power plant

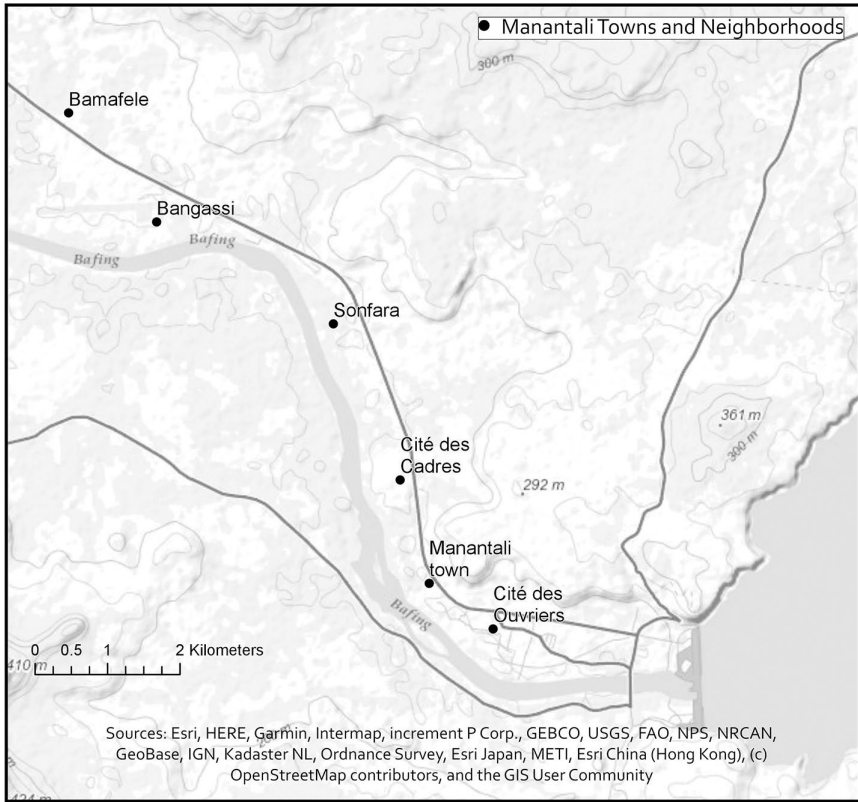


Figure 8.2 Manantali Town. Credit: Maya S. Kearney, using ArcGIS Online and DIVA-GIS.

was built. In addition to electricity for homes and businesses, there were streetlights along the main road and in the market area.

OMVS engineers, administrators, and professional support staff lived in the *Cité des Cadres* as did ECBM and associated permanent and temporary personnel. The number of residents was never very large, but they and their families formed a well-educated and relatively affluent core for Manantali. They used urban services such as a small supermarket, a state primary school through grade 9, pharmacy and health services, and a telephone line. At the height of construction, the *Cité des Cadres* had a restaurant, swimming pool, and bowling alley.

Construction workers were hired from the OMVS member states, in theory according to nationality quotas. Nevertheless, there was a preponderance of Malians; in 1985, OMVS staff said that the ECBM had 800 Malian workers, 75 Senegalese, and 120 Mauritanians. Malian skilled workers

came from throughout the country, drawn by high wages. Few Bafing residents had previous construction experience; however, an estimated 350 of them worked on the dam in the early 1980s (USAID 1984: Annex 7.8:8). Official workers were provided housing in the *Cité des Ouvriers*. However, the workers hired by the numerous subcontractors did not always reflect nationality quotas, nor did they receive employee benefits. It is impossible to know their numbers. Moreover, they were not provided housing, so they had to find private accommodation in Manantali or the neighboring village of Sonfara. The presence of many laborers spurred the growth of services, including foods, goods, and leisure activities. It is difficult to know how many people were in Manantali during construction. However, data used to plan decentralization (see below) show that the population in the area that became Bamafele commune rose from 4,744 in 1976 to 6,394 (35% higher) in 1987, the final year of significant dam construction (DGCT 2017).

During the peak of dam construction, new services were supplied by the OMVS/ECBM and the Malian government. The dam built primary and middle schools in the *Cité des Ouvriers*, a clinic, and a pharmacy. The Malian state extended the telecommunications network, provided security through police and the gendarmerie, and set up an office of the national bank (*Banque de Développement du Mali*).

Manantali remained relatively isolated. The road north to Mahina was new and unpaved, and there was no passable road east toward Kita, the main market and rail town on the way to Bamako. The distance from other towns plus the workers' needs for goods and services contributed to the growth in Manantali in the 1980s.

A few other projects contributed some expatriates and local workers. Germans financed a project to clear trees from the reservoir area and process them into lumber and charcoal for sale. More personnel were involved with the *Projet pour la Réinstallation des Populations de Manantali* (PRM, Manantali Resettlement Project) funded by the US Agency for International Development. The purpose of this project was to create new villages, re-house, and provide farmland for the 44 villages and hamlets relocated from the reservoir.

Some 88% of resettlers chose to move to new villages downstream from the new dam. The Malian government negotiated with the few villages in the downstream area to cede lands to the new resettlement villages. A large area was given to the project by the village of Bangassi, the site of the airstrip. The PRM worked to settle the resettlement villages as integral units. Despite attempts to provide the new villages with enough farmland to cultivate as they had before resettlement, population growth and policy changes meant agriculture was less productive than it had been before. By 2016, the average household produced only 50% of its grain needs.⁶

One resettlement village was Bamafele, the site of the Bafing arrondissement and its offices. The arrondissement kept its role after resettlement,

and the PRM rebuilt its administrative offices, maternity and health center, and public school in new Bamafele. It also built housing for the civil servant staff.

After Construction

With the completion of the main structures in about 1987, the size of the labor force decreased substantially, even though the dam was not finalized until the early 1990s. The construction of the power plant was delayed until 1998 when the OMVS finally procured funding. Although these activities required labor, fewer were needed than earlier. Studies of the Manantali market done by ISH in the late 1980s provide an indication of the loss of customers. In the mid-1980, the market had 357 structures and varied merchandise. By 1988, 48 stores had closed and 39 were in ruins. By 1989, there were only 49 stores, and tailors and butchers had disappeared from the market (Diarra et al. 1995: 15). Although Manantali market opened daily, market dynamism was more evident in weekly markets along the road to Mahina. Villagers sold agricultural produce and artisanal products to other locals or to intermediaries from larger cities. They bought consumer goods from merchants. On Thursday and Friday, there were markets in resettlement villages, with Saturday and Sunday markets in areas just north in neighboring jurisdictions (Diarra et al. 1995).

Koenig and ISH colleagues returned to Manantali in 1993–1994 to study the resettlement villages. Koenig also made a day trip to the area in 1999 and a very short research trip in 2004. Each time, we stayed, ate, and used the market in Manantali. The market remained an ongoing concern, even if fewer people lived in the town. The local water system continued to work; electricity was stable, although it still came from the small turbine. Finally, Mali got electricity from the new power plant in 2001, although it was not officially inaugurated until 2003.

The OMVS handed implementation of its new infrastructure (Diama dam, Senegal river navigation, and Manantali) to three new internal management entities. SOGEM (*Société de Gestion de l'Énergie de Manantali*, Manantali Energy Management), the unit for Manantali, contracted with ESKOM, a South African Energy Company, to run the dam for 15 years. Only a small number of professionals were required to run the highly computerized power plant. Some skilled and semi-skilled people were hired to maintain buildings and other installations; the infrastructure also had a few maintenance personnel and security guards. Significant new construction appears to have been carried out by contractors. The small number of South Africans that came to Manantali replaced earlier residents in the *Cité des Cadres*.

During this time, the road network connecting Manantali to the rest of the country was improved when the German development bank, KFW, built a road east from Manantali to the village of Tambaga. Construction began in 1994 and took several years. The goal was to reach the road that

led to Kita, and then to Bamako. However, when the Manantali-Tambaga road was finished, these other roads were yet to come. Only in 1999 was the road between Kita and Bamako paved. The road from Kita to Kenieba was finished in 2012. Meanwhile, the original Manantali-Mahina road provided the main connection to the rest of the country.

The new lake provided many different species of fish. It attracted migrants from central Mali, particularly the Bozo and Somono, Mali's professional fishing ethnicities. As the lake filled in the late 1980s, more and more came, often setting up fishing camps around the lake. It is estimated that by the 1990s, the lake was producing 1300 tons of fish annually. In 1996, fishermen earned an estimated 400 million FCFA (US\$ 695,650 in 2016–2018) from the catch (Ficatier and Niasse 2008: 45).⁷ The town became (and remains) a center for Mali's fish trade, sending fish east and west. Fishermen said that because the lake was deep, there was much less variability in production than at Selingue. The development of fishing stimulated Manantali's emergence as an urban service center. Not only were fish marketed through Manantali, but fisherfolk used its markets to get fishing gear and consumer goods.

Changing politics also stimulated economic growth at Manantali. In March 1991, President Moussa Traoré, in power since 1968, was overthrown in a coup. One year later, democratic elections were held, and President Alpha Oumar Konaré was elected. He implemented a plan to decentralize local government, democratize local decision making, and put responsibility for development into local hands. To this end, the existing arrondissements with appointed heads were replaced by communes with elected councils and mayors.⁸ The arrondissement of Bamafele was divided into two communes. Locals decided which villages would come together to create which communes. There was no question among locals that Bamafele would be one of the two new communes; Manantali is part of this commune. There was, however, substantial debate over the second commune seat. Eventually Diokeli, north of Bamafele and the site of the first and biggest weekly market was chosen.

New programs were undertaken by the government, and NGOs took on roles in funding and implementation. By the mid-1990s, projects created village banks, community gardens, and sister-city relationships. The government built and developed health centers. Since the 1990s, the government of Mali made concerted efforts to increase literacy, proposing a school for every village. Until then, the level of schooling had been quite low. Elders in the 2016–2018 study, who would have been in their 30s–40s in the 1990s, illustrate the earlier trends. Almost one-third (32% of 134) male heads of households and 62% (61 of 99) older women had no schooling. Another 48% of men and 29% of women had done some primary school or attended literacy programs in local languages offered by rural development programs. To complement government action, ESKOM refurbished some of the housing in the *Cité des Cadres* for the teacher's quarter.

Many of these initiatives were relatively small-scale, but they all required personnel. New professionals (NGO and health personnel, teachers, technical assistants to the new commune) came to the area. Some of them settled in Manantali, leading to the construction of new housing. At the same time, some of the specifically urban institutions, especially those geared to expatriates, disappeared. The bowling alley and the swimming pool in the *Cité des Cadres* were no longer used; the café also closed, although restaurants geared to African clientele opened in the Manantali market. The police force, an urban institution, was disbanded, and the gendarmerie became the main security force.

Manantali in 2016–2018

By this time, Manantali town had an estimated 9,000–10,000 residents, according to officials of Bamafele commune. Housing and offices now occupy the length of the road from the dam to the *Cité des Cadres*. Despite post-construction reverses, Manantali appears to have strengthened its role as an urban service center. Among the factors that offer continuity to the town are the infrastructure and the maintenance of a professional class, now in diverse activities.

The dam and power plant remain central institutions, even though they directly employ only a small number of people. Once ESKOM's contract had ended, the goal was to involve the member states in management. A new contract was given to SEMAF (*Société d'Exploitation de Manantali et Felou*), an independent affiliate of SOGEM. SEMAF personnel live in the *Cité des Cadres*. Since 2001, concerns about international terrorism have increased, and since 2012, Mali has faced increasing civil unrest. Even though most of the problems have occurred in central and northern Mali, the level of security around the dam has increased. This led to a proliferation of security guards, most of whom are contract personnel hired through specialized firms.

The road network connecting Manantali to the rest of the country has continued to improve. The road from Manantali to Mahina was paved just prior to the 2016 study. The road from Manantali to Tambaga, still not paved, is relatively regularly maintained. The improvements increase the facility of moving between Manantali and other centers. There is regular daily bus transport from Manantali northwest to Mahina and east to Bamako. Many people also have their own transport. Although there are few private cars, 98 of 137 (71.5%) households in the study sample had one or more motorcycles, a total of 222. Ambulance service is offered to regional hospitals and coordinated by local health centers.

Communication has also improved with the arrival of cellular technologies. Both major companies, Malitel and Orange, have installed towers along major roads. Cell service from both companies is good in Manantali and in villages near the Mahina road. Connections are spottier along the Tambaga road but are possible in the larger villages.

Economy in 2016–2018

As an urban service center, Mali has diverse establishments that provide goods and services. The goods are provided in many venues at varying scales, including large stores, an open-air market, and vendors selling from the roads. As a commercial center, Manantali provides goods to consumers from the villages as well as town inhabitants. Most of the goods sold come from Mali's major cities, especially Bamako, although many are produced globally. Chinese imports are common.

Some of the largest stores are owned by Malians who came during dam construction. For example, the largest store in Manantali is owned by a man from a fishing ethnic group who arrived when the dam was under construction. He began by selling fishing equipment to co-ethnics; he also sold fish in Kayes and Bamako. Over time he built a store, and now has three stores, five buses, and eight houses. He has become the principal local supplier to SEMAF as well. Although other stores are much smaller, many are also owned by immigrants who thought that Manantali offered them opportunity.

Some families had several businesses. The one public fuel depot⁹ in Manantali sells gasoline, primarily to motorcycles, and diesel for trucks, buses, and four-wheel drive vehicles. During most of the 2016–2018 study, the diesel pump was broken, so diesel was sold in 20-liter jerrycan units. Next to the fuel depot, the depot proprietor's wife had a small store, which sold food and necessities. In front of the store were small displays of fruits and vegetables that a consumer might purchase while at one of the other businesses.

Some vendors produced what they sold. For example, a blacksmith made plows, multipurpose tool frames, carts, peanut threshers, and small tools in a workshop on the main road. Born in Kita, he believed that Manantali offered possibilities. He arrived in 1999, well after dam construction. He married a woman from Kita who grew up in Manantali and expected to remain for the rest of his life. With other artisans (e.g., solderers, mechanics), he was part of an association organized to improve chances for getting project funding, should a government agency or NGO need supplies or work. However, his clientele were predominantly villagers who needed new agricultural equipment. He bought scrap iron from Bamako, using a regular intermediary to fill his orders; he usually bought at least 500,000 FCFA (US\$ 870) at a time.

There were also many smaller sellers. The open-air market was open daily and had about 400 places. Most vendors were women, from Manantali and nearby villages. There was a small fee to sell from a table in the main area; the funds generated were paid to the commune. Although the market had no water source, the commune recently built two latrines. Officers of the organization of market women said that much of the produce sold in the market came from Kita or even Bamako, which raised costs to consumers. They thought that programs to help local women increase their

garden production would serve two goals: better lives for producers and a decrease in consumer prices.

Open-air vendors were not confined to the market. For example, barely 1 km from Manantali's market, fuel vendors, selling small quantities, appeared along the road. One young vendor, originally from Gao, in Mali's northeast, came to Manantali, where an "uncle"¹⁰ lived, to look for work. A skilled laborer in metalwork and masonry, he got work paving the road from Manantali to Mahina soon after he arrived in 2015. This job ended in 2016. He turned to motorcycle fuel sales; he would buy a 20-l jerrycan and re-sell in bottles of ½ and 1 l. He could not estimate how much he earned, but the profit from a single jerry can was only about US\$ 1–2. He was constantly on the lookout for a better job and any time work appeared, he stopped selling. In the interim, he also choreographed dances. As he said, "a man must not sit still."

Near the fuel seller, across from a public elementary and middle school, a young woman sold sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs at school recess. She estimated her daily earnings at about 1,000 FCFA (US\$ 1.74). She had finished middle school but failed the exam that would allow her to enter high school. Tired of studies, she began her business rather than return to school. In the meantime, she lived with her family in Manantali, where she was born and grew up. Her father had come from Kita to work on the dam, and he remained after construction. When he died, the family stayed.

Manantali continued to serve as a bulking center for fish from the lake. By 2016, fish sales were well organized through wholesalers, mostly from the fishing ethnic groups, who set prices and arranged transport. Representatives of Manantali's wholesale fish market estimated that 4–5 metric tons left the market weekly, with up to 10 tons during the rainy season. Truckers brought fish to the major markets, Mahina and Kayes to the northwest, and Kita and Bamako to the east. Some small buyers from Kita purchased directly from fish camps on the east side of the lake, but fishermen were generally required by their organization to sell through the wholesale market. Small fishermen complained that the prices offered were too low and tried to sell privately to local buyers. At the same time, Manantali residents complained that, even though they were next to the lake, fish was expensive because wholesalers earned more if they sold to the cities. In fact, the interview with the market vendor officers veered into a long complaint about the high price of fish. "We don't eat fish here," one said flatly, because it is too costly.

Consumers for goods sold in Manantali included its inhabitants, people from neighboring villages, and people passing through for short periods (like our research team). Local consumers included a base of middle-class consumers: professionals at the dam and power plant, government employees, owners of stores and service companies, teachers. They also included the many less affluent residents of the town. People came from the villages, especially for major purchases, such as a new plow or cart. Some village

store owners also bought supplies in Manantali. One young village store owner said that he initially bought stock in Bamako. But he once lost his entire investment when the truck bringing goods had an accident, destroying the cargo. Since then, he bought his stock in Manantali; even though it cost a bit more, it was simple and surer.

Manantali also provided services. There were bus stations for the buses that carry people, baggage, and packages to Mahina and Bamako. Health services included the free walk-in clinic still subsidized by SOGEM. There is a pharmacy next store, so people can pay for prescriptions directly. The bank still was there and, like all Malian banks, sent and received money transfers through Western Union. The town's bar and nightclub also have managed to remain in business. Service businesses such as tailors and repairers of all kinds (vehicles, tires, electronic gear including cell phones) have sites in the market area.

Newer services include labor contractors, schools, and local radio stations. Much of the work in town, particularly residential and commercial construction is intermittent. Labor contractors serve as intermediaries between those who need labor and those who desire work, provide materials and organize labor. To be successful, they need extensive connections potential employers and laborers. They also need funds to finance projects.

One of the biggest contractors was born in a resettled village before the resettlement. He had become a large-scale political and economic operator who moved between Manantali and Bamako and was reputed to have major investments in both places. His local business, started in 2004, specialized in furnishing temporary personnel. Most commonly, he supplied skilled workers for work such as the upkeep of the power plant generators. He also owned a small hotel in Manantali. He showed his success by investing in local development projects, such as a large community garden near the Manantali market. He was a well-known personality in the town.

In contrast, younger, less experienced contractors struggled to make their businesses work. One young contractor grew up in Manantali; his father had worked as a cook for ECBM personnel in the 1980s. After primary school in Manantali, he continued elsewhere but maintained his links with the Germans. After school, he worked on several German-funded projects in southern Mali. After Mali's 2012 coup, the Germans closed most of their projects, and he returned to Manantali and set up as an independent contractor. He still knew a lot of people there, including dam managers. He has mostly contracted for small projects, such as installing meters for the electric company, or medium-sized ones, such as providing materials and labor to renovate housing in the *Cité des Cadres*. He has submitted proposals for bigger contracts, which require formal written bids and substantial documentation, but believed that organizations from larger cities had an edge. One main problem was obtaining financing. Getting bank financing was a long and convoluted process, often requiring a trip to Bamako. Thus, he often relied on credit from local merchants to get construction materials.¹¹

Despite the challenges, he believed that the potential for success was greater here than if he tried to start a business in Bamako. In Manantali, he knew people and had connections.

A major service offered in Manantali is education. Both villagers and town residents have come to believe that education is necessary to make a good living. Government policy to increase primary schools encouraged the building of new schools. As of 2018, Bamafele commune had 21 primary and middle schools, four community primary schools, three private professional schools, two private high schools, three medersas (Islamic schools), two private primary schools, and one private middle school. Although many of these are in villages, Manantali town has the most schools. It has more middle schools, the only high schools, and the only private schools. The town now has three public schools, each of which has both primary and middle schools. The private schools include a kindergarten/primary/middle school with high tuition. Sited quite close to the *Cité des Cadres*, it served only those who earned enough to pay its fees.

The two private high schools were the only ones in the area. Each offered standard academic training, which prepared a student to pass the Baccalaureat examination and go on to university. Each high school also had a professional-vocational secondary school on the same campus; they offered training to students that finished middle school but did not qualify for academic programs. One high school opened in 2010 after its professional school opened in 2009. The other high school opened in 2011 and its professional center in 2014. The one professional school about which we had information offered programs in accounting, electrical engineering, and construction design. Accounting was the most popular course, enrolling more than twice the number of students as the other tracks combined.

Unlike the private primary schools, these secondary schools received and depended upon state subsidies. Once a student passed the middle-school exam, the student was registered for a specific school by the Malian government. In general, students from the Manantali area were registered at the closest government school, in Bafoulabe, 90 km away. Parents could however transfer the registration to Manantali's academic high school or a professional training center. Once the transfer was approved, the government would pay the tuition (about US\$ 180–200/year) directly to the school.¹² This tuition was not affordable for many families. The subsidy made attending these schools feasible, and children from Manantali and nearby villages could live at home and commute. Meanwhile the school had a reliable income stream.

Another important service was Manantali's two radio stations. One, Radio Bafing, with its offices in the *Cité des Cadres*, was created in 1994, with assistance from a German program to purchase initial equipment and a license. The radio had a range of 80 km, but, according to an interview in January 2018, it had not done much beside retransmit Radio France International since the initial manager retired in 2015. Some of the equipment

had disappeared. Nonetheless, the manager said that he would keep the station running if he could find funding; supposedly SEMAF was interested in keeping the radio going. One year later, in January 2019, the station was on the air. It had instituted a system of payments for announcements. A group could also pay to have a reporter attend an event, which our research team did when it presented research results to the community. Soon after, a 1-h program was broadcast.

The other radio station, based on the grounds of the private elementary school, was created in 2008 and appeared to have a slightly wider range. The station had links to Evangelical Protestants; the major announcer was the Protestant pastor, assisted by some of his students. The station carried religious programs in French for a part of the day, but also broadcast local announcements. They aired death notices and public service programs on health, agriculture, and road circulation. They had a reporter in the mining zones with many Manantali migrants, who provided information about conditions there. Overall the station broadcast in six languages: Malinke, Khassonke, Bambara, Bozo, English, and French. They claimed to receive no outside funding. They survived because they had few expenditures, and the owner subsidized the station from other income. Nevertheless, they wanted to install more powerful equipment.

The goods and service provided in Manantali not only linked Manantali to the many villages in its hinterland, but they also provided work for many people. Manantali has welcomed migrants from around the country, but most importantly from the First Region, the areas around Kita and Kayes. Fisherfolk from central Mali came to exploit the new lake and have taken up new occupations. More recently, some migrants have come from central and northern Mali to escape civil unrest. The variety of work allowed people to gain a degree of economic independence.

Relationships with the Hinterland

The same good infrastructure, roads, communication, transport, that helped Manantali grow also affected the hinterland. Although most farmers had problems producing adequate grain crops and the area no longer has an organization like ODIPAC that supported farm investment, some people sold crops. Some men began to grow and sell sweet potatoes, fruits, and vegetables. Women generally sold some peanuts; a few also grew substantial amounts of vegetables. Households also earned from non-agricultural activities carried out in villages, at Manantali, or elsewhere. They received remittances from family members working out of the area. Many villagers had consumption needs and money to spend in rural periodic markets.

The better infrastructure has strengthened these markets. In recent years, there has been a consolidation to fewer, but bigger and more diverse, markets. Because the numbers and kinds of goods available in weekly markets has increased, rural residents no longer need to go to Manantali for larger

purchases. For example, a farmer can buy plows and other agricultural equipment, seeds, herbicides and fertilizers in Diokeli market. There is also an active livestock market there. Repairers, such as motorcycle or bicycle mechanics, go to Diokeli to serve customers.

As Manantali has grown, the small stores and vendors found there at the height of dam construction have not returned. Rather, there are more larger stores (see above) that sell everything from canned food and cosmetics to construction materials. Other vendors sell mostly in the rural weekly markets, but they have a base or store their goods in Manantali. One vendor of bicycle and motorcycle parts had a small store in Manantali but sales there were slow. His principal income came from three weekly markets, on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Others continued to use Manantali as a bulking center. For example, one peanut buyer, originally from a neighboring commune, but an inhabitant of Manantali for about 18 years, bought in three weekly markets. He moved the stock to Manantali, where he then sent it to Kayes. Others sent produce to Mahina or Kita.

Trucks, buses, and moto-tricycles provided transport from Manantali to the different weekly markets. If during dam construction, buying and selling were concentrated within Manantali, they now have spread throughout the entire area. Manantali no longer serves villagers on a regular basis, but it is an important node in the entire market system that links villages through Manantali to the national economy and global commerce.

Manantali as a Political and Administrative Center

Manantali has a peculiar political status. Like many small towns in Mali, Manantali remains part of a rural commune, rather than having the status of an urban commune with its own municipal government, city council, and mayor. In fact, many of Mali's towns are not urban communes. In 2009, there were only 24 urban communes in Mali. These included the capital, Bamako, and eight capitals in Mali's regions. Only 13 of the 42 prefectures were urban communes; ten other towns have become urban communes (Ouane and Soumaoro 2012). The prefecture of Bafoulabe, with the towns of Bafoulabe, Mahina, and Manantali, had no urban communes and was considered entirely rural. This was so despite the fact that Mali defined an agglomeration as urban if it had more than 5,000 inhabitants (Ouane and Soumaoro 2012: 18).

Therefore, Manantali is still considered a "village" within the rural commune of Bamafele equal to the other villages in the commune. Locals find it completely logical that the seat of the commune is Bamafele, given that it has long been the area's administrative center. However, the population of Manantali dwarfed the size of the other villages in the commune. In 2009, Mali's last census,¹³ Bamafele commune had a population of 16,080. Manantali's population was 6,682, 42% of its population (Bureau Central du Recensement 2013: 12). The rest of the population was divided among 22 villages. According to the communal council, by 2017, the commune had

reached about 21,000 individuals. Manantali, with an estimated 9–10,000 individuals, provided slightly less than half of the commune’s population. In many places, the largest town is typically the site of the commune, but not here.

The composition of Bamafele’s communal council (17 members) reflected the diversity that includes the town. For many reasons, it was important that the mayor be Bafingois. The mayor in 2016–2018 was from a resettlement village (Badioke) but worked in Manantali as a contractor to the dam. The former mayor, an ordinary council member by 2018, was also from a resettlement village (Kenieba-Bafing). He lived in Manantali, where he worked as a security guard at the dam. In 2018, the first deputy mayor was from the village of Bamafele. The second deputy mayor lived in Manantali after retiring from a job at the dam; he was an immigrant from Gao, in Mali’s northeast. The third deputy mayor, the wife of Bamafele’s middle-school director, lived there, but was originally from Mahina.

The presence of the dam does limit what the commune could do. Notably, because SOGEM owns the land upon which Manantali has grown, the commune of Bamafele does not have the right to create and sell land parcels and deeds, an important tool of municipal finance. Nor does it receive income like Selingue does. Since decentralization, the Malian power company, owner of that dam, paid the municipality on which the installation was sited a tax calculated on the value of the power company’s installation (Skinner et al. 2014). Because SOGEM is an international public organization, it has received an exoneration from this tax. Bamafele does get taxes from smaller businesses in Manantali and, as noted, vendors in Manantali market. It also collects typical taxes from its villages. These sources do not necessarily allow the commune government to do everything it wants.

Although Bamafele houses the seat of the commune and the sous-prefecture, it had only some government offices. In addition to the sous-prefet, an agricultural officer, meant to encourage cotton cultivation, was based there. Bamafele had a primary and middle school, with many local students. It also had an active primary health center, well used by people from the surrounding villages, although some people went to the clinic in Manantali.

Other government offices were located in Manantali, including the headquarters of the forestry department, general agricultural extension agents, and the gendarmerie brigade. The local rural development agency (*L’Agence de Développement Rural de la Vallée du Fleuve Sénégal*, ADRS) was based in Manantali. The government took over the PRM buildings to house other agents and offices; ADRS, for example, moved into the former PRM offices, and its personnel lived in the former PRM residences. Private organizations, such as the Federation of Credit Unions, also had offices in Manantali.

Although there has been no formal plan for Manantali beyond the initial layout during construction, there is now much middle-class housing in the city. People have access to stable electricity and relatively clean water,¹⁴

in many ways better infrastructure than they would have in Bamako. Government and private sector employees add to the base of middle-class consumers.

The commune of Bamafele, its administrative neighborhood, and Manantali have all grown in light of the interdependence between Manantali and its rural villages. This has led to growing links among the areas and an urbanization of Bamafele and the two villages between it and Manantali: Sonfara and Bangassi (Figure 8.2).

Creeping Urbanization

The odd political structure of the commune has been one factor in the urbanization of these three villages. Another is their short distance to Manantali. Bamafele is the farthest away, perhaps 15 km; Sonfara and Bangassi are even closer. It is possible to commute by motorcycle or even bicycle. Although these villages retained typical village layouts and architecture, residents participated more in non-agricultural activities, especially wage work.

Sonfara first grew during dam construction; people who came to Manantali to work but did not qualify for housing in the *Cité des Ouvriers* often rented lodging there. The ISH research team stayed there when they carried out research in the 1980s. One member of the 2016–2018 ISH team had lodged in Sonfara when he attended middle school in Bamafele. In 2018, the same family provided lodging to students who attended Manantali high schools or professional training. Some people were building new housing there rather than in Manantali, making Sonfara a kind of bedroom community.

Bangassi expressed more resentment about dam construction and resettlement. First, the OMVS requisitioned land for the airstrip. Although the airstrip had not been used for some years, it was still maintained by SEMAF, in case of future need. People still complained about the disruption caused by the small planes taking off and landing over their houses. Second, some of its land was given to the resettlement villages in the early 1980s. Although this transaction was presented as a negotiated settlement, Bangassi elders in 2016 maintained that the land was expropriated, because, in reality, they could not have refused their government's request.

However, Bangassi also benefited from these links. One of the first large irrigated gardens in the area was sited there; many women grew vegetables and sold them in Manantali. Residents of Bangassi also had access to a large irrigated perimeter just across the river. One interviewee produced a large quantity of sweet potatoes, which he sold to buyers who came from areas on the road to Mahina.

These villages have become more urbanized in the sense that their residents rely less on agriculture and more on non-agricultural activities. The entire resettlement area close to the dam on the right bank of the Bafing river (six villages, including some a bit farther up the road) had the highest

rate of paid wage labor of all the resettlement zones in the recent study. People carried out many different activities, including school teaching, security guards, telephone repair, motorcycle mechanics, baking, masonry, and installation of electrical connections, among others.

These villages were also more urbanized in that they had more diverse populations. Sonfara, as noted, has become a bedroom community for Manantali. Bangassi had fewer outsiders, but the recent study showed more female-headed households than other rural villages. The proximity to Manantali gave women income-earning opportunities not found further away. Bamafele is a twin-village – the indigenous part on one side of the road, the administrative center on the other. There is much back-and-forth between the two areas and interaction between the different neighborhoods.

Political sophistication was particularly evident at Bamafele. For example, one household in the study sample was headed by an older, sick man, who lived in the compound of a more successful, slightly younger relative. The latter relative worked for the dam and said he should have been allocated housing in Manantali, but he was temporarily living in his village. In the meantime, he had built three cement block houses for the family and connected them to the electric grid. The village of Bamafele was also able to procure a contract to clear the brush around the Bangassi airstrip. This employed Bamafele youth, but elders from Bangassi thought that their youth should get this work. This example illustrates the political force that Bamafele elders have developed, presumably because of their close contact with Manantali and the commune center. The women of Bamafele are just as active as the men. When the team presented its report to village representatives, only Bamafele sent a woman as one of their representatives. She participated fully in the discussions.

The possibility that Manantali would become a separate urban commune with its own municipal government would likely be resisted by both the Bamafele commune and SOGEM. The commune would lose half its population as well as some of its privileged links to the dam and the power plant. The new urban commune would likely find itself in conflict with SOGEM over control of the town's land and its future.

Conclusion

After its construction boom was over, Manantali was able to establish itself as an urban service center. In large part, this was due to the road infrastructure that connects the town to major urban areas; links between villages and town also benefit from the roads among resettlement villages built by the PRM. As in Akosombo (Meischer 2012), the water, electricity, and telecommunications infrastructure make this a pleasant place to live. In Bamako, interruptions of electricity and water are very common, because the provision of infrastructure cannot keep up with population

growth. In contrast, Manantali's services are quite stable. The government has improved road infrastructure and maintenance.

The continued presence of the power plant and its personnel has provided a small core of professionals that creates a demand for goods and services. This demand has led to new housing construction and consumer markets. Officials and personnel from other organizations (e.g., health personnel, credit union employees, teachers, and school directors) have settled in Manantali, increasing its middle-class population. The perceptions of work and opportunity have supported immigration from nearby rural areas as well from farther away, particularly areas of ongoing civil unrest.

Manantali's market area has responded to the changing urban character of the town as well as the growing importance of rural weekly markets. During 1980s dam construction, many small stores and vendors responded to the needs of laborers, but African and European managers had goods shipped in from Bamako and Dakar. Now, the array of products is greater, including more and different consumer products, but also construction materials. Sales are both retail and wholesale; many village store owners stock supplies from Manantali. Vendors in weekly markets may store goods in Manantali. There are larger, but fewer stores, although the open-air food market still has many small-scale vendors.

Manantali shows that the transformation of field agriculture is not the only way to create a productive rural hinterland. Manantali's most productive hinterland is the lake, which provides fish to national and even international markets and depends upon intermediaries in the town to move fish through commercial networks.

The end of construction at Manantali did not lead to a bust, although it led to some stagnant years. The dam and its infrastructure were complemented by changes in Malian policies over the years that have created opportunities for urban centers throughout the country. Growing small towns respond to the particularities of their own urban hinterlands and their specific connections to national and international markets.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank the editors of the volume for their suggestions to improve my original piece. I am also deeply appreciative of the work my Malian colleagues did on this project, our data collection trips, and extended discussions in the field. This topic was outside the scope of our formal project, but our joint work made it possible. I am responsible for the argument and interpretations presented here.
- 2 Hilgers (2012) offers an in-depth overview of anthropological work through the early 2000s.
- 3 Elsewhere, new large cities, such as the Nigerian capital of Abuja, have been intentionally created. The focus of this chapter is smaller towns.
- 4 Guinea has since rejoined the organization.
- 5 This design is similar to that of Akosombo Township (Meischer 2012).

- 6 The reasons for this development are beyond the scope of this chapter. For more information, see Koenig and Diarra (1998).
- 7 The exchange rate of Mali's currency, the CFA franc (FCFA), varied from 524 to 630 FCFA to the US dollar in the study period, 2016–2018. I have used 575 as an average exchange rate, including here.
- 8 The arrondissements (now sous-prefectures) continue to exist but have new functions. The heads, still named by the central government, provide technical assistance and oversight to the underfunded communal governments.
- 9 SEMAF has its own fuel depot, strictly for its own use.
- 10 These relatives are often relatively distant.
- 11 They, in turn, complained about unpaid debts from small contractors.
- 12 This occurs throughout the country and seems to be a way for the government to compensate for its inability to build and staff sufficient high schools.
- 13 Mali had scheduled another census for 2019, and data were collected in the western and southern parts of the country, including the Kayes region. However, in the northeast and central areas with intense civil conflict, data collection was deferred until 2020, then delayed again. Results are not yet available.
- 14 Manantali's water supply is still treated, although we were told that the level of chemicals had decreased.

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9 Place-Making, Regulatory Politics, and the Roots of Informality in Colonial Accra

Jennifer Hart

At a meeting of the Accra Town Council on January 8, 1940, councilors engaged in a long discussion about an unauthorized corn mill that had been erected at the house of Mr. K. Armah Kwantreng. The Medical Officer of Health – a British colonial officer – “expressed the opinion that the corn-mill in question was situated in the corner of a very dirty compound which was full of shacks and old lorry parts and other filth and was therefore injurious to health”.¹ The conversation that followed reflected fissures within the town’s governing body, as the “African Unofficial Members objected to the opinion expressed by the Medical Officer of Health that corn-mills in general were a nuisance”.² The debate over Mr. Kwantreng’s corn mill exemplifies in many ways the influence of prevailing public health rhetoric on the processes of town management and planning in colonial cities like Accra. As John Parker notes, “‘sanitation’ and ‘order’ became linked by an emerging imperial ideology in which the new concern with tropical medicine contained a variety of encoded messages about wider social control”.³ As the “envisaged urban showcase of expatriate enterprise and ordered modernity”, colonial officials sought to shape the built environment of the city and the practices of its residents through new forms of spatial organization and regulation, using sanitation as an excuse to “rid the town of activities deemed unsuitable for the seat of imperial power”.⁴ These strategies had their roots in the earliest years of British colonial governance in Accra, motivating the construction of new markets and slaughterhouses and the implementation of new regulatory standards that sought to ensure the cleanliness and order of the new colonial capital. By the 1930s and 1940s, Town Council actions had become increasingly intrusive, as the Medical Officer of Health and other councilors used the fear of disease to motivate regular sanitation inspections within compounds and homes of African residents and mobilized the regulatory powers of the Accra Town Council to demolish undesirable structures.

In objecting to the Medical Officer of Health’s comments, African Councilors highlighted the double-standards present in Town Council regulations – if the corn mill was a nuisance because of the noise it generated, why was the noisy Accra Ice Company not also classified as a nuisance? But,

in detailing the fluctuations in both African practice and colonial regulation, African Town Councilors also provide an important window into contestations over an unfolding process of informalization. This process was far from straightforward. As William Bissell notes, even at the height of colonial regulatory power, British efforts to control African practices and remake city space were marred by inefficiency, incompetence, and incompleteness. This was certainly evidenced in Accra. Residents protested the poor condition of roads and the lack of street lights in the growing city and African Councilors agitated for education that would inform residents of new sanitation standards, while the Town Council struggled to attract patrons and generate revenue through investments they did make in new markets and bus routes. Changing regulatory standards, insufficient funds, and limited authority guaranteed that everyone – residents, elected officials, and colonial appointees alike – remained frustrated as they sought to navigate the uncertain parameters of acceptable urban living.

Even in the midst of colonial incompetence, however, I argue that colonial regulation represented a violence of categorization, which had significant consequences for African urban residents.⁵ In particular, I argue that debates over things like corn mills and distilleries represent early incarnations of a process of information – not in name, but in practice – through which both European and African members of the Town Council sought to redefine the boundaries of legality, legitimacy, and morality in the city. This process was inspired by the desire to protect and promote “expatriate enterprise” and “ordered modernity”, as Parker notes. Regulations privileged expatriate capital and sought to marginalize African practices that challenged European expectations of city life. As the Town Council took on increasing responsibility for the development and maintenance of infrastructure in the growing city, categorization and regulation also became important means of generating revenue for the operation of the city. The regulation of African urban life, in other words, became embedded in both the logics and finances of governance.

In discussing the process of informalization, scholars of the contemporary city seek to understand the ways that urban citizens adapt to changing economic systems in order to “access opportunities and, at the same time, maintain social coherence”.⁶ This structuralist approach highlights the processes of social, economic, and cultural construction that generate the “reserve army of urban unemployed and underemployed” and shape their economic activities.⁷ Keith Hart and the many scholars that followed him employed “informal economy” as an analytic that helpfully captured the labor and practices that operated outside or on the margins of the wage economy and, thus, “escape enumeration by surveys”.⁸ Much of the work on informal economic activities in Africa and elsewhere expands on this notion, tracing the origins of economic activities like market trading and exploring their significance as a means of both survival and accumulation in the context of persistent precarity and economic uncertainty.⁹

In this chapter I invoke the concept of “informal economy” not as an analytical tool but as the subject of study itself. Informalization is a *historical* process, with roots in modernist rhetoric about the urban poor. In particular, the process of informalization, I argue, was a byproduct of what Alan Mayne calls “slum deceits”.¹⁰ Mayne argues that 19th- and early 20th-century social reformers and politicians adopted words like *slum* to “describe diverse social conditions in terms that were comprehensible to the new ruling culture”.¹¹ Slum, he argues, was central to an emerging discursive and political strategy, which used stereotypes of urban poverty to shift blame for structural inequalities on the most vulnerable local communities – “characterized...as what the dominant culture regards as being the deficient ‘Other’, or ‘the other half of society’” – while justifying interventions that privileged the capitalist class and further entrenched the structural disadvantages of poor communities.¹² While colonial officials and Town Council members did not use the term “informal economy” itself, their actions and policies shaped a process through which African practices were increasingly marginalized within the institutions and systems of social, economic, and political power. Instead, they used terms like “illegitimate”, “illegal”, “unsuitable”, “nuisance”, “pirate”, “filthy”, and “unsanitary” to justify policy interventions that reshaped the parameters of urban life in Accra.

These terms – and the policies and interventions they inspired – were certainly central to the way that British planners and policymakers understood the politics of space in the metropole. Urban reform in British cities targeted low-income neighborhoods and vulnerable communities in public health and social welfare campaigns that highlighted the contradictory dangers and desires of city life.¹³ However, the rhetoric around spatial order and social reform took particular form in colonies, informed by persistent theories of racism and the demands of industrial capitalism. As Bissell argues, in order to understand these processes, we must engage the realities and legacies of colonial governance, “treating the colonial state as an arena for ethnographic inquiry in its own right [...] by regarding colonial rule itself as a form of cultural practice and process”.¹⁴ Bissell notes that “by focusing on the inchoate nature of colonial rule, we can begin to rethink the state as an unfolding practice or process of becoming”.¹⁵ In tracing the history of informalization in Accra, I argue that we clarify the historic roots of “informality” as a category of governance that reshaped and re-legislated the categories of belonging in cities like Accra and limited political imaginations about economic possibility in African cities more broadly. This process was far from straight forward, and it is critical that we not take for granted or overstate the power and effectiveness of colonial Accra’s political institutions. The emerging political and economic structures of the colonial capital were shaped and contested by British colonial officials, Town Councilors, and a diverse array of urban residents in ways that highlighted the weakness of the colonial state, the economic power of urban residents, and the persistence of indigenous economic and spatial cultures. Ongoing contestation

over the parameters of regulation, however, does not negate the violence of categorization inherent in this process. On the contrary, it evidences the emergence of a political system that marginalized African practices and created economies of extraversion through the politics of space.¹⁶ This chapter explores the history of this process through debates around the development of a new spatial order, the redefinition of economic opportunity, the commodification of space, and the mobilization of racialized class politics over the first several decades of the 20th century. These debates – and this period – represent the consolidation of the regulatory power of the Town Council and the broader social, economic, and legal structures that would shape the experiences of Accra residents long after the end of colonial rule.

Natural Disaster, Urban Crisis, and Spatial Order

The vague language of “nuisance” invoked in the corn-mill debate by the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) reflected the uncertainty and ambiguity of colonial urban policy in Accra in the early 20th century. In the case of Mr. Kwantreng, the MOH and other European members of the Town Council cited a number of issues related to public health and sanitation – the mill was located in a residential compound, and the compound itself was “full of shacks and old lorry parts and other filth and was therefore injurious to health”.¹⁷ In their protests, African Councilors did not debate the sanitation question. Mark Addy suggested, for example, that the shacks might be removed to conform with sanitary regulations. T. Jones Nelson and Solomon Odamtten likewise suggested that the owner of the corn-mill could relocate it to another site if given sufficient time (i.e. 6 months). In supporting various means to redress the situation, African Councilors tacitly embraced Town Council President E. Norton Jones’s call to “rely on the advice of the Medical Officer of Health in matters of public health”.¹⁸

African representatives, however, did complain about what they saw as a lack of recognition of the social and cultural practices of urban residents. Councilors described the complex history of ownership and use rights associated with this particular corn-mill and, in the process, spoke to a broader culture of space among Ga residents. While African land tenure has often been described as “communal” – in which chiefs hold land in trust for communities and individuals petitions for the right to use land – the practices of ownership and spatial order here might more appropriately be defined as social. Mr. Kwantreng, it turns out, did not own the corn-mill, but he did own the compound where the corn-mill was located. Rather, Councilor Odamtten noted that the mill had been owned by Mrs. J.S. Bruce Vanderpuye, who willed it to a Mr. Teymani. Teymani himself had apparently consulted the MOH before he installed the mill inside Mr. Kwantreng’s compound. At the time of the complaint the mill was being used by Mr. A.W. Simons, who was a pensioner. In fining Mr. Kwantreng and ordering that the corn-mill be taken down, European Town Councilors and

the regulations they enforced flattened African socio-spatial relationships in ways that ignored the complex social and economic dynamics of the city. In labeling corn-mills a “nuisance” the MOH also seemed to condemn the foodways of Accra residents. As J. Kitson Mills noted, “corn-mills generally catered for the staple food of the people of Accra (Kenkey) and much inconvenience would be caused if the corn-mills were removed”.¹⁹ These mills provided maize for household food production, but they also served as important revenue sources for community members. Women produced and sold kenkey in markets, providing critical supplementary income for families.²⁰ Pensioners like Mr. Simons, who had access to corn mills, relied on that income to supplement insufficient pensions and provide for a wide range of dependents.²¹

The debate over corn-mills, then, reflected a complex urban politics in Accra. In many ways, the debates of the 1940s had their roots in early town planning practices that linked urban sanitation, spatial order, and social control. The 1878 Towns, Police, and Public Health Ordinance asserted colonial jurisdiction over and articulated British desire to enforce cleanliness and sanitation by controlling the use of space in the town.²² However, residents of the more densely settled Ga quarters resisted more significant urban reform. Natural disasters, like an 1894 fire in Kinka, provided openings for administrative action. The zeal with which colonial administrators seized the destruction wrought by the fire as an opportunity to create a new lay-out for the city inspired widespread rumors that the fire was intentionally set by the British to force Ga cooperation and clear out the city.²³ Real change, however, happened not through fire but through disease. The region’s first outbreak of plague in Accra in 1908 inspired new forms of collaboration between British administrators and Ga political leaders, as a temporary evacuation order led to the resettlement of some residents on the outskirts of the town. The suburbs – Korle Gonno, Adabraka, Korle Woko (Riponsville), Kaneshie, Sabon Zongo – that emerged in the aftermath of the plague outbreak represented a new phase of government-directed expansion of the city’s boundaries, which attracted some of Accra’s more elite residents.²⁴ The government also established “The Ridge” as a segregated European settlement. However, even after additional disease outbreaks (e.g. yellow fever in 1911), British officials were unable to alter the old Ga quarters of Kinka, Nleshi, and Osu in any systematic way. Instead, suburban development seemed to spur increasing class segregation in the city, with the city’s poorer residents located in the congested neighborhoods of the old town.²⁵

The more effective forms of regulation addressed widespread social and economic practices in the city. Debates over corn-mills, then, were part of much broader conversations about the boundaries between commercial and residential, public and private. Words like “nuisance” were invoked by Councilors to describe African practices that blurred these perceived boundaries of colonial order, and Town Council members focused much of their legislative effort on regulations directly addressing these practices.

The compound house (*agbonaa*) in many ways exemplified a perceived social and spatial disorder that both British colonial administrators and elite African representatives alike sought to address. In 1908 a committee that included African members Thomas Hutton Mills and A.B. Quartey-Papafio, recommended the abolition of the *agbonaa* as part of a broader move to address congestion in the old town quarters.²⁶ Unable to achieve control over the existing built environment in Accra, Town Council members attempted to reshape spatial practice through the regulation of social and economic practice. The public health concerns of the 1910s and 1920s emboldened Councilors and other colonial officials to actively police private spaces. The Medical Officer of Health's staff conducted regular sanitary inspections in search of mosquito larvae.²⁷ But, as Mr. Kwantreng's case shows, issues of sanitation often spilled over into other spheres, as the MOH and Town Council members used sanitation concerns to justify intervention in the organization and functioning of the compound, buoyed by increasingly comprehensive building regulations that laid out guidelines for building and maintaining structures in the city and empowered the Town Council to demolish any offending structures in the name of "public safety" and "good order".²⁸

By the mid-1930s, the Town Council had passed a number of new rules and procedures that regulated a wide range of African socioeconomic practices, from curing fish, selling palm wine, and slaughtering livestock to building practices and tenancy agreements. Many of these regulations were aimed at removing commercial activities from residential zones. The Town Council built new slaughterhouses and markets in order to concentrate and more effectively control activities that were seen to be directly connected to concerns about public health.

However, as the debate about the corn-mill demonstrates, some of these practices were built into the patterns and practices of daily life, not easily separated out from the social concerns of the household. Councilors were perplexed as to how and whether to regulate the sale of palm wine, for example, which was clearly alcoholic and thus potentially subject to liquor ordinances, but which was also sold in the streets and open markets rather than established shops. Councilors in 1930 agreed that palm wine should remain under the regulatory authority of the chiefs, but their debates highlighted that the boundaries of legitimate oversight and authority over African practices were clearly shifting.

The earthquake that devastated large parts of Accra in 1939 seemed to exacerbate contention over these issues. At a December meeting, the Council passed a motion "that the authority of the Council be given to the Medical Officer of Health to remove certain corrugated iron temporary shacks used as corn-mills, palm wine shops and business purposes as per list submitted by him".²⁹ The MOH again objected to the sanitary conditions of the shacks. "Speaking from a sanitary standpoint", he argued,

the existence of the unauthorized corrugated iron shacks should now be discouraged because they were unsuitable for the purposes for which they had been erected. Besides, they harboured rats and flies and were in most cases very dirty. Dirt carried disease which at times may become epidemic.³⁰

From the perspective of the British members of the Town Council, the temporary structures were an understandable development in the aftermath of the earthquake, but their existence also set a dangerous precedent that had the potential to undermine the Council's efforts and authority. J. Kitson Mills and Solomon Odamtten objected to the action and intent behind the motion and foresaw a different sort of precedent embedded in the Council's proposed direct action against African communities. As Kitson Mills noted, "If the Council took advantage of the earthquake and ordered the removal of the shacks it seemed to him other buildings would soon be attacked".³¹ This move represented a lack of consideration for the suffering of Accra residents in the aftermath of the earthquake and the broader financial depression that had crippled the Colony for at least a decade. But it also highlighted once again the lack of consideration for African socioeconomic practices. The very activities and spaces that British Councilors considered a threat to the public health and safety of the city's residents were central to the lives of those residents. Far from a "nuisance", the activities that took place in these corrugated iron structures were central to the livelihoods and daily lives of many urban residents. Owners of corn-mills were essential to producing kenkey, and palm-wine sellers "earned an honest livelihood" out of those "shacks". Destroying them would entail significant hardship in a way that would cut to the heart of the social and economic life of Accra's population. "The sympathy of the Council", Odamtten argued, "should go in favour of the people of the Municipality".³²

At the heart of this contestation was a critical double-standard. Councilor Odamtten pointed this out directly in relation to the debates about corn-mills. "Those who lived near the Union Trading Company's Workshop, like Dr. J.H. Murrell", he argued, "had not urged the removal of the Union Trading Company's machinery as a nuisance. Likewise it was unfortunate to molest those who have erected corn-mills to cater for the needs of the people". Odamtten's words echoed complaints that would be reiterated in the debates about Mr. Kwantreng's corn-mill a month later. African-directed occupation and adaptation of public space was subject to public health scrutiny in part because it seemed to defy (or at least operate outside of) colonial visions of authority and order. Like African lorry drivers who were labeled "pirates" because they traveled on public roads and operated passenger services to supplement the municipal bus system, corn-mills and distilleries were a "nuisance" not because their activity was objectionable in itself but because they represented the persistence of Africans operating outside of the imagined order.³³ When African Councilors complained about the

conditions surrounding markets in order to improve the conditions of food sellers or explain the unpopularity of spaces set aside by the Town Council for market activity, questions of sanitation seemed remarkably less urgent. “If the women sellers would protect their foodstuffs as required by the by-laws, there would be nothing to complain of”, the Council concluded.³⁴

These attacks on the livelihood of workers raised questions about the priorities of the Town Council at the same moment when its power was being consolidated and extended in new ways. In demolishing essential means of livelihood for urban residents, the Town Council drew attention to broader concerns about African wages and the limitations placed on African earning potential and advancements through racialized policies of imperial governance. Such issues had come to a head in 1936 when the Town Clerk – one of the highest-ranking and best paid positions available to Africans in the city – was convicted of embezzling Council funds and removed from office. The Council President, within the purview of his authority, appointed a new Town Clerk – a European, Mr. Duncan Mac-Dougall, who had previously been employed by the Basel Mission Society. The outrage that followed highlighted frustration over opportunity, representation, and authority in the growing city, split (at least in this case) clearly along racial lines.³⁵

Expatriate Enterprise, Ordered Modernity, and the Politics of Urban Development

These contestations over spatial order and urban reform were shaped by the presence and power of competing notions of what was “legitimate”. Over the course of four decades, Council members used their authority to enshrine their particular visions for the city in law – “illegitimate” became “illegal” and “illicit”.³⁶ Reinforced through regulations and systems of licensing and permitting, Council legislation, priorities, and preferences had real consequences for African residents. Demolished buildings, property seizure, fines, and jail time deeply affected individuals and families – a consequence reflected in the regular petitions from residents appealing for consideration in response to infractions.³⁸ Much to the frustration of Councilors, however, legal codes were not wholly effective means of enacting social change. Town Council regulations marked the boundaries of acceptable behavior in emerging colonial urban society, but the exercise of regulatory power was unable to effectively change existing behaviors and practices – at least not with the immediacy that Councilors desired. Councilors expressed persistent frustration, confusion, and sometimes indignation over African behaviors that failed to conform to the new spatial order. Councilors complained that market women who protested fees or refused to operate in new public markets, for example, simply did not understand the purpose of new municipal structures. African councilors, in particular, advocated for greater public education around issues of sanitation, public health, and public safety, arguing that if sanitation officers or building

inspectors would put more effort into explaining the rationale behind new regulations, urban residents might more readily comply.³⁹

The more immediately consequential Town Council interventions were connected to the provision of public services and the control over new public space. Particularly in markets and lorry parks, Councilors leveraged access to resources in order to change behavior and enforce regulations. By 1936, the Town Council had opened five markets around the city and employed eight market clerks who maintained order in the market, managed space, and collected fees.³⁷ In setting aside public land for markets and building sheds for sellers, the Town Council expanded its influence and control over the provision of public services and more clearly defined the boundaries of “appropriate” public action. Creating specially designated spaces for commercial activity, in other words, allowed officials to justify more rigorous policy of activities that occurred outside of the boundaries of those commercial zones. Hawkers, petty traders, and food sellers were required to pay licenses and fees to operate in the city, and their activities were generally confined to public markets. Lorry drivers were subject to similar regulations, including licenses and fees to use public lorry parks located primarily near major public markets. When lorry drivers began parking along roadsides and picking up passengers, the Town Council called on the city police force to crack down on offenders. By 1936, the totality of licenses and taxes constituted nearly one-third of the Town Council’s total revenue. Expenditure on lorry parks, by contrast, accounted for only three-one thousandth of the Council’s budget.

This form of regulatory oversight was an extension of the broader commodification of land in Accra over the course of the early 20th century. The Town Councils Ordinance of 1894, which established the Accra Town Council, empowered Councilors to collect rates on properties in the municipality in order to generate revenue to fund city services, maintenance, and infrastructural development.³⁸ The accurate collection of rates required annual assessments of the city’s built structures, including homes and businesses. This assessment provided the basis for Town Council revenue, but it also created functional maps of city resources, which Councilors used to inform policies and development plans, including, of course, the policies that encouraged the construction of more “high-quality” buildings that would simultaneously contribute to the “ordered modernity” of the town and draw increased rates on property. The assessment and rate system also redefined the relationship between space, the built environment, and value through the framework of money and the possibilities for wealth generation. The expansion of town boundaries to incorporate new areas like Labadi was directly tied to the presence of a good number of “rateable properties”, which marked these districts as part of the “modern” city.

For colonial officials, the commodification of space created new opportunities to generate revenue from public space. The Town Council rented out kiosks at bus stations to companies like The Anglo-African Aerated Waters, Ltd., to sell iced mineral waters, snacks, and cigarettes.³⁹ They

signed exclusive leases for advertising space on buses and bus shelters with private companies like West African Publicity Limited.⁴⁰ And throughout the 1930s, the Town Council built new shops within markets, which they leased to a number of expatriate (largely European and Syrian) companies on a yearly basis.⁴¹ The construction of these new shops perhaps best exemplified the motivations that underlay the Town Council's plans for Accra's development. Even as the Town Council claimed that they were unable to lower market fees due to the financial distress of the depression, they built new stores in the Selwyn Market to lease out "on very favourable terms". As demand increased in 1932, the Council demolished petty traders' stalls in order to construct additional shops that would generate revenue and provide space for expatriate enterprise at the center of the city's busiest commercial districts.⁴² Roads, too, were commercialized and commodified spaces, which the Council rigorously policed. In particular, the Town Council sought to protect the Municipal Bus Service (and thus the Council revenues generated by the Municipal Bus System) by restricting competition from African lorry owners and strictly defining their sphere of legitimate operation.⁴³

This process of commoditization and regulation created clear categories of economic activity, which privileged expatriate enterprise and marked a significant shift from earlier models of integrated African-European commerce. Up through the end of the 19th century, commercial operations in Accra required the cooperation of African merchants and traders who obtained goods from European firms on credit.⁴⁴ As the profit margins diminished around the 1890s, European firms asserted control over coastal trade directly. Town Council development priorities echoed this shift away from cooperation and integration toward a system of spatial and regulatory governance that privileged expatriate enterprise in the name of creating "ordered modernity" and funding the further development of the city. This seemingly limited scope of effective action had enormous consequences in defining new expectations of legitimacy and legality in the colonial city – a form of definitional violence in which African practices were increasingly judged as lying outside of "legitimate frameworks".⁴⁵ In doing so, they consolidated a particular form of colonial capitalism, situated at the intersection of expatriate enterprise and ordered modernity, enshrined in law and backed by the regulatory, policing, and enforcement power of the state. In licensing and regulating daily life through the strategic control and investment in public space, the Town Council effectively marginalized Africans as "other" or aberrant within colonial society and created systems that structurally disenfranchised Africans within the political and economic frameworks of the colonial state.

Urban Constituencies and the Diffusion of Colonial Authority

The expanding regulatory authority of the Town Council generated spirited opposition from those who found themselves operating outside of colonial

spatial visions. Many of those protests were directed through African councilors, who had been elected by ratepayers to represent the interests of residents in the city's various districts. The regulation of corn-mills and distilleries also generated a debate that seemed to fall along easily assumed racial lines as African Councilors urged European officers to exercise restraint in dealing with African residents like Mr. Kwantreng and Mr. Simons and to extend consideration to the people of Accra more broadly. These racialized political divides were inscribed in the very language of the Council itself, which labeled European appointed representatives as "Official Members" and elected African representatives as "Unofficial Members".⁴⁶ While these labels reflected the individual's role in relation to the official structures of colonial governance, it also mapped closely onto increasingly segregated spatial politics.

African Councilors often spoke out against Town Council policies, bringing forward complaints from ratepaying constituents and voting as a united opposition block against new forms of regulation and enforcement, which, they argued, were short-sighted, culturally insensitive, or unduly harsh. In doing so, outspoken Councilors like J. Kitson Mills and Kojo Thompson highlighted the persistent gap between the city Councilors imagined and the city people actually used – a gap that echoed the seemingly contradictory responsibilities of the Town Council as an institution of both social engineering and representative governance. However, these same Councilors just as frequently used their connections with and understandings of African social and economic conditions to suggest alterations to Council policy in ways that reinforced and expanded the influence of colonial spatial and infrastructural authority. Accra residents recognized the conflicting interests of African Councilors and were sometimes skeptical of the new infrastructural interventions that they endorsed. Upset at the opening of the new Selwyn Market by the Town Council in 1923, a crowd of angry market women marched to the seat of the British colonial government at Christianborg Castle to "protest their forced removal from the old Salaga Market".⁴⁷ This protest was far more than a fight over market locations. Rather, it represented a much broader discontent over the political visions of African elites like Thomas Hutton Mills and John Glover Addo. Accra residents questioned the degree to which these elites actually represented the interests of the broader population when the policies they proposed or endorsed entailed greater taxation on some of the city's most vulnerable residents, like hawkers.⁴⁸

By the 1930s, large-scale active resistance seemed to have died down, but African residents regularly used public space to register their discontent with Council policies. The willful destruction of property was often explained by African and European Councilors alike as a misunderstanding. When young men destroyed trees shrubs that had been newly planted by the Department of Agriculture using Council funds, the President of the Town Council appealed to African Councilors and chiefs to help intervene and stop the practice.⁴⁹ However, when the young men of Labadi destroyed oil lamps in frustration

over the Council's failure to provide the town with electric lighting in 1936, Councilors had to grapple with a much more direct critique of their policies and the difficult balance between infrastructural promise and limited resources in the growing town.⁵⁰ Particularly as new communities were incorporated into the municipal boundaries, demands for infrastructure increased rapidly. Incorporation meant that the Town Council collected rates in communities like Labadi. In exchange, urban residents expected voting rights and infrastructural development that reflected community priorities.⁵¹

The broader debates around infrastructure, regulation, and spatial planning suggest that the actions of Accra residents defied easy categorization. In their petitions and representations to the Town Council, Accra residents made claims to infrastructure and space based on their position as rate-payers. African Councilors and Accra residents alike strategically mobilized colonial discourse about public safety and public health in their claims for basic infrastructure. The interests of British officials and diverse African residents seemed to particularly intersect over issues of waste disposal in the city. In responding to epidemic disease in the early decades of the 20th century, public health officials targeted waste as a critical byproduct of congestion and a source of contamination and disease. British officials explored the idea of a comprehensive drainage system for Accra as early as 1912. This system would provide piped water and sewer services to city residents, but it would also provide for the construction of public drains that would prevent flooding and road damage during the long rainy season.⁵² Better drainage would improve multiple factors related to disease and public safety – removing human waste, eliminating breeding grounds for mosquitoes – and improve the general condition of life in Accra. The scheme was ultimately put on hold due to lack of funds in the context of the world wars and ensuing depression. British officials revisited the idea of a sewage system for Accra in the late-1920s – this time motivated by the smells emanating from the Korle Lagoon, which had become a major site of waste disposal in the growing city.⁵³

British interest in sewage was driven by the same broader public health and sanitation concerns that had informed urban housing segregation policies in the early 20th century. In Accra, those policies grew out of the recommendations of Dr. W.J. Simpson, a public health expert from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and were specifically targeted at addressing the plague epidemic in Accra in 1908. However, in placing concerns about sanitation at the center of urban planning conversations and in empowering the Sanitation and Medical Departments to intervene more directly in the built environment of the city, colonial and municipal leadership in Accra drew on a much broader conversation about sanitation that justified the expansion of colonial authority and intervention throughout the British empire.⁵⁴

If, as colonial officials regularly complained, Accra residents and African political leadership were generally resistant to substantive redevelopment of the town through decongestion measures, African residents embraced the utility of

infrastructure like public latrines. The MOH noted that there was a shortage of latrines in the most populous areas of Accra like James Town and Asere. In some areas, one latrine served as many as 67 people.⁵⁵ By the 1930s, residents of city districts like Korle Gono and Adabraka petitioned the Accra Town Council to expand the number of public latrines in the city.⁵⁶ The latrines themselves, however, caused additional problems, and African Councilors de Graft Johnson and Kitson Mills complained about the stench of the latrines and urged the MOH to make the areas around the latrines more sanitary.⁵⁷

Infrastructural services like electric lighting and public latrines were the “built forms around which publics thicken”.⁵⁸ In the colonial context, that form of public investment posed both an opportunity and a threat within the frameworks of an institution like Accra. Residents who demanded access to the infrastructure of “ordered modernity” represented, in the minds of British and African officials alike, the success of colonial social engineering. However, these infrastructural demands also placed new pressure on organizations like the Town Council to shape more responsive urban development plans. Infrastructures might be, as Anand argues, “the material articulations of imagination, ideology, and social life”, but they are also embedded within highly contested structures of power and authority.⁵⁹ Latrines were an excellent example. Not only did the demand for sanitation infrastructure place financial and political pressures on the Town Council, but the spatial and social politics related to the siting of latrines – where they were located, how they were maintained – presented new kinds of challenges. British officials welcomed African embrace of sewage and sanitation systems in Accra; Town Councilors appealed to the Governor’s office for additional funding to erect public latrines and sewers in the city throughout the 1930s. But as material infrastructure expanded, these objects, services, and spaces generated new forms of public critique, which directly or indirectly challenged the vision and authority of the Council.

These tensions were most obvious in debates over the organization and regulation of space for African economic activities. As a trading town, markets and streets played a particularly important role in local economies, facilitating mobility and exchange among the city’s diverse residents. They were, in other words, simultaneously economic and social spaces. In the eyes of British and African Councilors alike, setting aside distinct public spaces for markets and establishing formal public transport like the Municipal Bus System was an extension of the infrastructural work of ordered modernity that latrines and electric lights represented. However, Town Councilors noted that many of the newly constructed markets, for example, sat unused months after they were open. As early as 1931, traders in Selwyn Market petitioned the Town Council to reduce market fees. African councilors like the Hon. Dr. Nanka- Bruce made arguments in economic, rather than social or cultural terms. The general depression, they argued, had lowered rents around the city and the city’s markets should respond accordingly if they wished to attract traders who could afford to rent the

stalls.⁶⁰ The ongoing depression in the city also undermined the profitability of the Municipal Bus Service. When new routes failed to generate sufficient revenue, Kojo Thompson, Kitson Mills, and other African Councilors proposed new fare schemes that lowered the cost of the bus system and undermined the competition from “pirate” lorries.⁶¹ These debates, however, did not raise questions about the desirability of these new infrastructural forms – Did African traders even *want* these markets? Was there a demand for a municipal bus service? African Councilors, it seems, had bought into the logics of colonial spatial planning even if urban residents had not.

As Parker notes, the existence of a dynamic, multi-layered urban politics in Accra was not an invention or byproduct of this period of modernist town planning. Early colonial officials struggled to negotiate the complex dynamics and varied constituencies of the Ga town, led by both the *mantsemei* or chiefs of the city and an elite class of African merchants and intellectuals. These economically and politically powerful groups often overlapped but just as often disagreed on the direction of the town and the interests of its residents. Their debates took place within a broader urban scene, in which market women, fishermen, farmers, and priests all sought to define the interests of an Accra “public” and make claims on the resources of the town.⁶² Expanding colonial authority, then, did not *create* urban politics in Accra, but it did reshape some of the parameters of the debate. This emerging public discourse around infrastructure – shaped in response to infrastructural development highlighted the various constituencies active in the politics of Accra as a colonial city. The particular forms of representative government, embodied in the Town Council and reinforced through systems of taxation that dictated the terms of political participation, amplified the voices and interests of the city’s wealthiest residents. Political power and priorities, in other words, were often shaped by an individual’s relationship to the structures of colonial capitalism. Even as the colonial government passed reforms to increase African representation on the Town Council, Accra residents continued to raise questions about which public and whose interests were represented in and served by the Council. The regulatory and infrastructural politics of the emerging socio-spatial order in Accra made it clear that not everyone was included in future visions for the city – or, at least, access to the resources and infrastructures of a “modern” Accra would not be evenly distributed.

Conclusion

This politics of exclusion and marginalization – enshrined in law and backed by the financial and policing power of the state – marked the beginning of a process of informalization. But, as Accra residents’ petitions make clear, this process was not the product of a lack of engagement with the infrastructures, technologies, and economies of modern city life or the regulatory politics of the municipal and colonial state. Rather, in applying the regulatory power of the state to de-legitimize African spatial and economic practices, Town

Council members – British and African alike – sought to protect the interests of expatriate enterprise and realize imperial visions of ordered modernity. By tracing the ways in which the Town Council sought to use laws and regulations to redefine corn mills and distilleries as illegal and illegitimate, we see the process of informalization unfold. Informality, in other words, is not a naturalized economic phenomenon but rather a byproduct of ongoing spatial, regulatory, and economic politics, which have their roots in the colonial period.

As the history of urban development in Accra suggests, informalization was less about incorporating Africans into global capitalism than it was about supporting expatriate visions of economic, social, and spatial order. While some urban residents managed to find opportunities within the new order, many others found themselves increasingly marginalized in social, economic, and political terms within the new regulatory regime – a structurally precarious position, inscribed into the frameworks of global capitalism, the economics of governance, and the politics of space in cities like Accra. Their experiences simultaneously reflected the specificity of Accra and its integration into a global economic order through the networks of imperial power and the structures of colonial governance.

In the context of contemporary debates about urban development, these historical perspectives are critical to the development of new and more just policies and regulatory frameworks. As Mayne argues for the term “slum”, the reproduction of these terms in academic discourse risks reproducing or reinforcing the social disadvantages and structural inequalities that they describe.⁶³ While Mayne sees potential in “informal economy” as an alternative analytic through which to understand the lived experiences of the urban poor, “informal economy”, too – like “slum” – has a history. It was *produced* as a category of social, economic, and legal marginalization, generated through the unfolding processes of colonization and the expansion of global capitalism. Tracing the histories of these practices is essential to understanding their contemporary instantiations in an academic sense or to imagining alternative political and economic futures that do not merely incorporate these practices into profoundly unjust structures but rather use them as inspiration for a completely new framework altogether.

Notes

- 1 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/8 1941 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council, January 8, 1940.
- 2 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/8 1941 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council, January 8, 1940.
- 3 John Parker, *Making the Town*, 99–100.
- 4 Parker, 99–100.
- 5 See, for example, Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon*.
- 6 Simone, “Straddling the Divides” (abstract). See also, for example, Meagher, “Crisis, Informalization and the Urban Informal Sector”, 259.
- 7 Hart, “Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana”, 61.
- 8 Hart, “Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana”, 68.

- 9 Examples of such studies in Ghana include, for example: Clark, *Onions Are My Husband*; Robertson, *Sharing the Same Bowl*; Pellow and Chazan, *Coping with Uncertainty*.
- 10 Mayne, *Slums*, 8.
- 11 Mayne, *Slums*, 16.
- 12 Mayne, *Slums*, 9–11.
- 13 See, for example, Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*; Ferguson, “Inventing the Modern City”; Stubenrauch, *The Evangelical Age*; Fyfe, *By Accident or Design*.
- 14 Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power in Zanzibar*, 71.
- 15 Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power in Zanzibar*, 73.
- 16 Bayart, “Africa in the World”.
- 17 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/8 1941 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council, January 8, 1940.
- 18 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/8 1941 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council, January 8, 1940.
- 19 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/8 1941 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council, January 8, 1940.
- 20 Robertson, *Sharing the Same Bowl*.
- 21 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/8 1941 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council, January 8, 1940.
- 22 Parker, *Making the Town*, 100.
- 23 TNA: PRO CO 99/8 1893-1894 Gold Coast Gazette; Parker, *Making the Town*, 199–201.
- 24 Sabon Zongo was an exception to this rule, generally. As Parker notes, the administration sought to designate Adabraka as a new Muslim township, but the Hausa leader Muhammad Baako had already made his own arrangements with Kojo Ababio for Alata land near Lartebiokorshi on which to resettle his followers. It was, then, a Hausa settlement under the authority of the Alata mantse, rather than a new colonial settlement (Parker, *Making the Town*, 199–201).
- 25 Parker, *Making the Town*, 199–201.
- 26 Parker, *Making the Town*, 199–201.
- 27 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/3 1932-36 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council.; Parker, *Making the Town*, 199–201.
- 28 See, for example, GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/3 1932-36 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council.
- 29 “Motion by the Medical Officer of Health”, Minutes of the General Monthly Meeting, December 11, 1939. GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/7 1938-1940 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council.
- 30 “Motion by the Medical Officer of Health”, Minutes of the General Monthly Meeting, December 11, 1939. GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/7 1938-1940 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council.
- 31 “Motion by the Medical Officer of Health”, Minutes of the General Monthly Meeting, December 11, 1939. GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/7 1938-1940 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council.
- 32 “Motion by the Medical Officer of Health”, Minutes of the General Monthly Meeting, December 11, 1939. GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/7 1938-1940 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council.
- 33 See Hart, “Of Pirate Drivers and Honking Horns”.
- 34 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/1 1930-31 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council
- 35 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/3 1932-36 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council
- 36 As Keith Hart’s foundational article notes, these categories often overlap in the “informal economy”, broadly construed. See also, Hart, “‘One Man, No Chop””.

- 37 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/3 1932-36 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council; GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/5 1933-35 minutes of meeting of the Accra Town Council; GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/1 1930-31 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council.
- 38 Parker, *Making the Town*, 141–142.
- 39 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/1 1930-31 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council, December 8, 1930.
- 40 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/1 1930-31 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council.
- 41 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/1 1930-31 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council; GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/3 1932-36 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council; GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/5 1933-35 minutes of meeting of the Accra Town Council.
- 42 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/3 1932-36 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council.
- 43 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/3 1932-36 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council; GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/5 1933-35 minutes of meeting of the Accra Town Council.
- 44 Parker, *Making the Town*, 118–119; Bianca Murillo, *Market Encounters*; Asante, “Nested Patriotism
- 45 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/1 1930-31, Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council.
- 46 As Parker notes, early incarnations of the Town Council did include an occasional African “Official Member”, appointed by the Colonial Governor. By the 1920s, however, this practice ceased altogether.
- 47 Parker, *Making the Town*, 222.
- 48 Parker, *Making the Town*, 223; PRO CO 96/656.
- 49 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/3 1932-36 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council; GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/5 1933-35 minutes of meeting of the Accra Town Council.
- 50 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/3 1932-36 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council, GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/6 1936-38 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council.
- 51 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/1 1930-31 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council.
- 52 Gold Coast Sessional Paper III, “Report on Accra Drainage Scheme, Gold Coast”, 1916-1917, TNA: PRO CO 96/387/1 1929 Sewerage Scheme for Accra.
- 53 TNA: PRO CO 96/387/1 1929 Sewerage Scheme for Accra.
- 54 Mayne, *Slums*, 145.
- 55 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/5 1933-35 minutes of meeting of the Accra Town Council.
- 56 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/5 1933-35 minutes of meeting of the Accra Town Council.
- 57 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/5 1933-35 minutes of meeting of the Accra Town Council.
- 58 de Boeck, “Infrastructure”; Harvey and Knox, *Road*, 5.
- 59 Anand, “Pressure”.
- 60 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/1 1930-31 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council.
- 61 GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/1 1930-31 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council; GH PRAAD CSO 20/1/3 1932-36 Minutes of Meetings, Accra Town Council.
- 62 Parker, *Making the Town*.
- 63 Mayne, *Slums*, 12.

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10 Beings of Concrete and Steel

Spatializing Opportunity in Colonial and Postcolonial South Africa

William John Suk

Schubart Park was constructed in the 1970s to accommodate low-income whites in Tshwane (previously Pretoria). The facility was luxurious by North American standards for public housing, boasting an on-site doctor and dentist, convenience store, green grocer, meeting halls, subterranean parking and subsidized daycare. Four high-modern residential towers with 813 units opened onto a recreational courtyard with swimming pools, tennis courts and ball fields. The flats were tiny compared to the expansive dwellings and manicured private gardens white South Africans ordinarily aspired to. Nevertheless, they were well-appointed and bathed with natural light pouring through floor-to-ceiling windows which permitted expansive views of the nation's bustling capital and the distant Magaliesberg foothills.

White poverty undermined the premise of biological superiority upon which the entire edifice of white power rested. The Apartheid regime accordingly sought to systematically uplift poor whites while debasing indigenous livelihoods. Schubart Park (Figure 10.1) fit into a suite of social services specifically available to qualified whites (Bhorat 1995). This racist social welfare system sought to cushion the lifestyle of people who were supposedly innately superior, but who failed to afford life within the regime's humming and prosperous administrative metropolis.

Schubart Park's concrete and steel towers soared over Pretoria's inner core which contained expansive government facilities and the corporate headquarters where residents worked as clerks and secretaries, bureaucrats, policemen and soldiers—essential workers who performed day-to-day administrative and military activities needed to perpetuate racial domination. In recognition, the state provided subsidized luxury—a whites-only enclave where working-class families could enjoy the trappings of stability and affluence—where children who represented both the history and future of the Afrikaner nation could play arcade games and soak in aquamarine swimming pools while their black counterparts languished in hunger.

“Shubies,” as residents affectionately nicknamed the complex, quickly became a desirable address to certain segments of the white population. In addition to economical rent and close proximity to employment Schubies boasted a vibrant social life centered around sports facilities, small



Figure 10.1 Schubart Park Pool in the 1980s with one of the four tower blocks in the background. This full-page photograph appeared in a coffee table propaganda book published by the Department for Community Development.

local businesses and public recreational spaces. It was the first phase of an ambitious redevelopment plan for Pretoria's central core (Figure 10.2): an ultra-high-density, securitized settlement for upwards of 30,000 people. This white-supremacist, Corbusian utopia would ensure a high standard of living for even the poorest Europeans—both those who were already settled in Africa, as well as settlers whom the regime hoped to entice from abroad.

This high-urban manifestation of white supremacy died with the collapse of Apartheid in the 1990s. The new state quickly retargeted social welfare algorithms to assist the neediest of all, rather than the neediest of an elite ruling class. Meanwhile, upwardly mobile black Africans were eager to taste riches produced by a social order which until recently held them as slaves. As freedom ripened, young professionals moved with their families into the forbidden core while affording Europeans fled to the suburbs. With its newly destabilized population, Schubart Park was one of the most accessible European preserves.

However, the withdrawal of government support caused the facility to quickly deteriorate. An accumulation of managerial indifference and deferred maintenance revealed the inherent fragility of the urban Anthropocene and transformed an exemplar of Corbusian architecture into an exceptionally inconvenient abode. By 2010, when I came to know Schubart Park as a researcher (Figure 10.3) most of the young black professionals had moved on, to be replaced by increasingly marginalized populations. The swimming pool was filled with noxious sludge and few shops remained operational. However, even as state power receded, a new entrepreneurial class of pirate landlords began extracting rent from surging numbers of new residents. In the eyes of many Tshwane inhabitants, including senior government officials, Schubart Park had become “synonymous with crime and grime” and “unfit for human habitation” (Mbanjwa 2008). Yet in actuality, *thousands* of humans still lived there, including many youngsters who survived far worse terrors than urban decay in pursuit of South Africa’s fabled riches.

Interestingly, Schubart Park preserved aspects of exclusivity for these new residents who were deeply attached to the facility and the communities they created within her embrace. They enjoyed spectacular views and natural lighting—unthinkable affordances in other informal settlements. Furthermore, proximity to downtown represented major cost and time savings on transportation. Schubart Park’s location and architecture were originally deployed to build solidarity and align interests among Apartheid’s poor whites. Forty years later, the centrality and centripetal design continued to facilitate community formation—but within the very populations it was originally intended to disenfranchise.

The fact that opportunity is spatialized lay at the core of Apartheid planning. By carefully siting, planning and constructing places—as well as by selecting and policing who could live and move between them—the regime’s *meesterbeplanners* spatialized economic and relational opportunity so that wealth, power and community would accrue to whites while other populations were destabilized. It is widely acknowledged that racist geographies continue to shape life in the New South Africa, long after white supremacy’s political demise (Brand 2014; Lemanski 2004; Samara 2010). Leafy, low-density suburban security villas established during Apartheid’s waning years are still predominantly white enclaves while the plantation economy remains entrenched across large swaths of the countryside. Meanwhile, most black South Africans continue living in the very same high-density urban and rural “locations” where they were confined during minority rule. Tragically—*but often by design*—the socio-geographic inequities that human beings etch onto our planet’s surface can be far more resilient than the regimes whose cement trucks, policemen and bankers were originally dispatched to fracture the landscape.

Yet social geographies also adapt in response to changing social norms and prejudices (Pellow 1988). Even as geographic racism infects new territory, marginalized groups can simultaneously appropriate places of

privilege. Schubart Park provides one opportunity to examine these reconstructions. During nearly four decades, half a dozen scholars interviewed residents living in the complex while hundreds of newspaper articles chronicled her ascendance and demise. These accounts, alongside archival research and new conversations with former residents shows that Schubart was imbued by her creators with certain essential qualities that she unwaveringly deployed toward making life just a little bit brighter for her troubled children.

The Erection of Racist Geographies

Schubart Park was erected within the *Goedehoop* (Good Hope) neighborhood bordering Church Square which was thusly named for the Dutch Reformed house of worship constructed shortly after the city's establishment as a Voortrekker outpost in 1855 (Jordaan 1989; Swart 2011, 48). Dutch pioneers periodically congregated there to sell their produce, play sport, receive communion and exercise civic duties in their new nation carved out of freshly conquered interior areas (Theron and de Wit 2010). Many important buildings were subsequently constructed on the surrounding blocks, including the *Volksraad* (parliament), the Palace of Justice and offices for prominent corporate stakeholders in colonization like Old Mutual and Barclays banks. Thus, Pretoria prospered as a political and administrative center while nearby Johannesburg grew into a mining powerhouse.

With its central location in the capital city, Goedehoop could have been a prestigious neighborhood. However, a major liability to European sensibilities and property values lay just across the Apies river, on the opposite side of Goedehoop from Church Square. African laborers and traders began congregating there soon after European settlement, near the homestead of Ndebele Chief Maraba. Nearby, a German mission station was populated by descendants of Afrikaans-speaking African slaves who had been captured as children by the Voortrekkers during their wars of conquest (Friedman 1994, 32). Chinese, Indian, Malay and colored families also settled nearby (Clarke et al. 2008). Collectively these non-white neighborhoods in the city's northwest quadrant were known as *Marabastad*.

Marabastad was culturally and politically vibrant, with diverse people mingling, transacting and even residing in close proximity—if not on equal footings (Chiloane 1990). Asian-owned businesses sold goods for the African market while a booming entertainment scene featured various cinemas and clubs from which emerged the famous Marabi jazz (Mphahlele 2013 [1959]). Marabastad was also an important node for early anti-colonial activism, including a successful 1920s mobilization to secure Africans limited sidewalk rights undertaken by the ANC under president S M Makgatho (Chiloane 1990; Friedman 1994, 174; Lodge 1988). Both Makgatho and Marabastad were well-known to the young lawyer Mohandus Gandhi who was president of the Indian National Congress at the time and also lived

Map of Central Pretoria

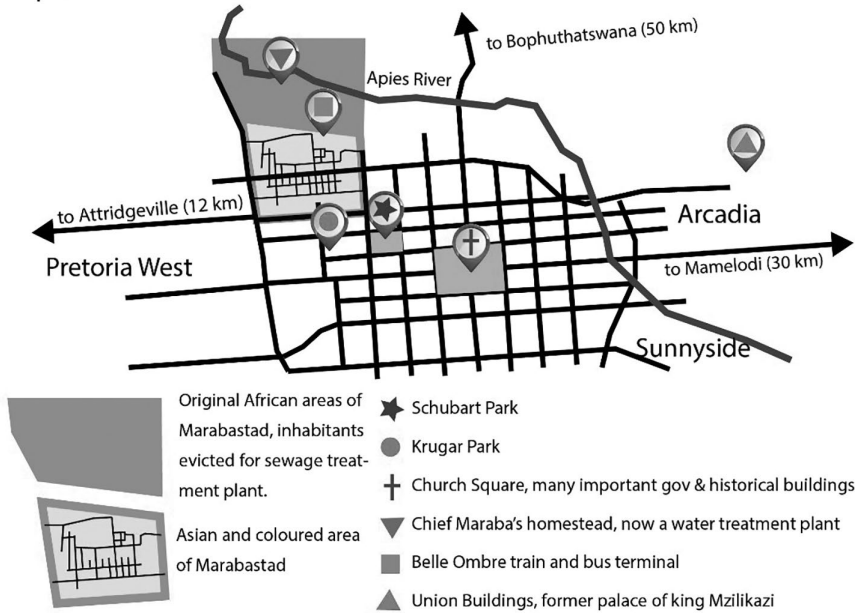


Figure 10.2 Map of Central Pretoria.

in Pretoria before returning to his native country and becoming a central figure in India’s liberation struggle (Clarke et al. 2008).

The evolution of Pretoria’s inner city reveals how early efforts to racialize space were initially characterized more by negligence than design. Coerced black labor was a pillar of the settler economy. Nevertheless, Europeans were reluctant to invest in housing and infrastructure for African workers. White supremacist myths depicted Africans as fundamentally “tribal” in nature, asserting that they would only temporarily reside in town before returning to rural areas in retirement. In actuality, industry’s cannibalistic appetite for black bodies trumped a competing desire to keep Africans at a distance. Thus, administrators initially took a hands-off approach, reluctantly allowing Marabastad to grow and flourish with the rest of the city.

Nevertheless, an increasing visibility of Africans in and around white areas led to attempts at “cleansing” the inner city. In 1910 Marabastad’s African area was slated for a sewage treatment plant (Friedman 1994, 136). Evictions began the following year but many residents refused relocation. Instead, they rented rooms in Marabastad’s Asian and colored areas or illegally constructed dwellings on nearby vacant land just beyond city limits. As Marabastad burgeoned, the area became an early target of Grand Apartheid which was the right wing’s more methodical form of segregation.

Promulgated especially by the National Party, Grand Apartheid sought to entrench white power by endowing it with *spatial momentum*, literally etching racism onto the landscape through civil engineering projects that were buttressed by tons of concrete, miles of razor wire and millions of forced removals. Grand Apartheid systematically partitioned economic opportunity, a concept that could be rather abstractly construed as the probability that a person will accrue financial capital. To be sure, a person's disposition toward wealth must be shaped by many factors beyond the scope of this discussion. Nevertheless, a central determinant of economic opportunity is access to emplaced natural resources including land and water, employment and accommodation, education, healthcare, physical safety and mobility. Grand Apartheid monopolized economic opportunity for Europeans. In rural areas, whites seized the richest mineral deposits and most fertile soils while establishing diminutive and largely barren "homelands" or "Bantustans" where they could dump uprooted African populations (Turshen 1986). Simultaneously, Europeans hoarded urban opportunity by clearing blacks and other "races" from deeply rooted communities like Marabastad.

Pretoria was at the vanguard of Grand Apartheid's socio-spatial engineering project due to its location at the epicenter of Afrikaner Nationalism. The city initiated industrial-scale removals even before the National Party clinched the 1948 elections. Evictions greatly picked up speed in the 1940s following completion of the Atteridgeville township some 15 kilometers west of the city center. By 1942, two thirds of residential dwellings in Marabastad were demolished, including not only African homes, but also the dwellings of Asians and coloreds who were reassigned to their own respective "group areas" even when they were allowed to continue operating their businesses. In 1943, the last remaining African residents were evicted in the wake of a bloody massacre of municipal workers who rose up in protest against dismal working and living conditions. In a brutal night of violence, a mob of police and civilian extremists went door to door destroying property, arbitrarily killing 17 Africans, and wounding 111 (Friedman 1990).

During the subsequent evictions, people who failed to prove their right to reside in the city were deported to the Bantustans. Meanwhile, those who could produce a paper trail substantiating that they were born or legally employed in Pretoria were relocated to Atteridgeville where they could be simultaneously out of sight but easily available for work. Monotonous rows of tiny concrete dwellings were touted as being a step-up from the destitute Bantustans because they were closer to urban employment, better serviced by public transportation, and had at least minimal water and electrical grids. In reality, both the urban and rural blacks areas were overpopulated and deficient in basic amenities and resources.

Grand Apartheid was premised on the belief that racial mixing inevitably resulted in conflict (Western 1997, 85). Interracial contact should accordingly occur within an asymmetrical power relationship with whites

in charge over subservient blacks. This so-called “friction theory” saturated the spatial logic of the colonial state. A more latent but no less important justification was the possibility that racial mixing would corrode the putative superiority of whites. This often-tacit belief is ascertainable in the “swart gevaar” paranoia that male domestic workers would rape their white mistresses, in the “sanitation syndrome” which argued that blacks were unhygienic and dangerous vectors for disease (Swanson 1977), as well as in the fear that exposure to African cultural practices and language could taint the putative purity of white society (Chiloane 1990, 58–60). Perhaps most disquieting was the possibility that counter-hegemonic understandings could emerge if racial groups mingled as they did in Marabastad.

Thus, segregation was not merely a way to spatialize and monopolize economic opportunity. Simultaneously, it worked to curtail *relational* opportunity—broadly, the propensity for people to interact and develop aligned interests and identities. Apartheid deliberately reduced relational opportunity between groups, both through material separation of residential areas and by criminalizing interracial communion. Deborah Posel compellingly argues that the core Apartheid doctrine which came to be known as “separate development” had a powerful, *material* effect on society. Defining and then siloing racial groups produced divergent “worlds of experience” which tricked people into perceiving racial stratification as intrinsic to very nature of reality (Posel 2001).

Grand Apartheid’s reorganization of the urban core severely disrupted both economic *and* relational opportunity. Established, thriving communities were scattered. African landowners became renters and expenditures of money and time on transportation drastically increased. The new townships were tens of kilometers from the core while the nearest Bantustan, Bophuthatswana, was 50 km away at its nearest point. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, throngs of desperately poor Africans gathered just inside, and by 1982 more than 100,000 people commuted into Pretoria daily by bus or by train, often departing before 4:00am and returning late at night (Olivier and Booysen 1983, 127).

Tshwane’s history was not unique. In urban centers throughout South Africa and the settler-colonial frontier worldwide, vibrant and diverse black communities were established near white frontier outposts. These include District 6 in Capetown and Sophiatown in Johannesburg, not to mention the Greenwood or “Black Wallstreet” District of Tulsa, Oklahoma in the United States. As settlements expended, outlying black neighborhoods came to occupy valuable central real estate, while a lack of investment in proper housing and infrastructure intensified environmental and social problems. With the ascendance of hyper-aggressive white nationalism in South Africa, Europeans rapidly and methodically executed industrial-scale removals and monumental civil engineering projects that physically manifested the doctrine of separate development as a pervasive *material and social reality*. Non-white populations were plucked up and displaced to

the outskirts—this time to places with more room available for expansion. Meanwhile, on the American frontier, Black Wallstreet was firebombed into oblivion by private aircraft (Simon et al. 2021). Worldwide, white supremacy’s radical reorganization of social, economic and material space on the colonial frontier served to entrench and exacerbate preexisting inequities, engraving racial difference and racist ideologies onto the very bedrock of the planet (Beliso-De Jesus and Pierre 2020).

The Conception of Schubart Park

By the 1960s, Marabastad was emptied of African *residents*, but not of African *users*. In fact, the neighborhood was more popular than ever for pass-through shopping and entertainment. It also remained a major transportation hub, with tens of thousands of workers alighting in the Belle Ombre station each morning before making their way into nearby white homes and offices (Brandt 2002; Olivier and Booysen 1983). Adjacent Goedehoop came to comprise light industrial facilities like warehouses and car garages, as well as run-down, low-rise apartments which likely housed a significant degree of racial mixing. According to the Department of Community Development, the entire area was “dilapidated” and in need of “urban renewal” (DCD 1972). Within the rubric of Apartheid planning, racial areas were supposed to be well separated by barriers and buffer zones with plenty of vacant space for unimpeded future expansion. The close proximity of Goedehoop to Marabastad, however, demonstrated the practical impossibility of rigid adherence to Apartheid’s ideological principles.

This Department for Community Development (DCD) was a key player in the consolidation of racist geographies. Its central mandate was to provide affordable housing for whites, Asians and coloreds. In pursuit of this directive, the DCD redeveloped African “slums” for whites and asians (i.e. Marabastad) while also pumping money into existing neighborhoods. Planners at this time viewed densification as a solution to the shortage of housing which afflicted all racial groups to some degree. High-density housing was already well-established in settler society. Mines, factories and other industries had long housed coerced African workers in dormitories, far from their families (Van Onselen 1976). However, this style of housing was unpalatable for whites who aspired to live amidst sprawling gardens. Furthermore, sociological research on public housing projects abroad like Pruitt-Igoe in the United States suggested that high-rise architecture easily leads to over-stimulation, a loss of privacy and other detriments to wellbeing.

Nevertheless, the DCD moved forward with ambitious inner city redevelopment plans. In Pretoria, 10 blocks in Goedehoop were targeted. A scale-model was unveiled in the DCD’s 1972 annual report. Each city block was a walled garden supporting one or more residential skyscrapers. Ten self-contained islands of urban parkland were purchased atop ground-level parking garages, thereby elevating these white supremacist utopias

high above the crosscutting streets below. A network of pedestrian flyovers linked these compounds to each other and to government complexes including the Central Police Station, the Department of Defense and the Human Science Resource Council Building. By providing accommodation for up to 30,000 people, this visionary redevelopment would mitigate the city's urgent need for affordable white housing while simultaneously functioning as a formidable bulwark against the ever-encroaching Marabastad and the omnipresent specter of retaliatory violence.

Schubart Park was the first phase of Goedehoop's redevelopment to break ground in 1973, with residents moving in scarcely four years later. Upon completion, the four imposing towers would have been prominent fixtures on the skyline for Africans alighting at Belle Ombre station each morning. Indeed, the complex would have been visible *throughout* the city, where until the 1960s zoning requirements prohibited residential units taller than 30 meters (Donaldson, Jurgens, and Bahr 2003, 11). In contrast to American "projects" which housed an oppressed and impoverished minority, Schubart Park was designed to accommodate the poorest of a tiny *elite*. Where Pruitt-Igoe and similar projects skimmed on materials, landscaping and shared amenities (Bristol 1991, 165; Comerio 2014), South Africa's iteration incorporated numerous luxury and community-centered features. As one person explained on a Facebook group created by early residents:

[I] Lived there since it started till 1982. Block A was a very neat, clean block as the caretaker was very strict. The grass was always green, the tennis courts well maintained and the swimming pool was always clean and supervised. The retail section was well equipped with what was required, a Doctor, milk shop, Spar, Video shop, Spar was the hangout as there were game machines in the back, lots of government employed people lived there.

(Facebook User 2016)

Flats were preferentially available to low-income but certifiably white families with children. Ninety percent spoke Afrikaans, more than half were born in rural areas, and a strong majority had a standard ten (high school) education or less (Schutte 1985, 27, 29). Three quarters earned below R12,000 (~US\$10,714) per year (Schutte 1985, 27, 28), which was less than a third of the white per-capita income (Van der Berg and Louw 2004, 11). Apartments were easily affordable to any white civil servant. In 1977, the monthly rental for a two-bedroom flat was R 198.25 (~\$177) including water and electricity. Further savings were realized from the central location, which greatly reduced transportation expenditures. Schubart Park's towers were a far cry from the mansions and private gardens enjoyed by many whites of the time, including the young Elon Musk who lived in Pretoria's leafy Waterkloof Ridge neighborhood in the 1980s and was destined to become the richest man in 2022. Nevertheless, Schubart Park's affordable rents, central location

and vibrant social life resulted in a waiting list that was five-years and 3,220 applicants long by 1982 (DCD 1980, 12; Schutte 1985, 15, 18–29). Buoyed by this breakout success, the DCD initiated the second phase of Goedehoop’s “renewal:” the adjacent Kruger Park tower which rocketed *thirty stories* above the city and contained more than 400 dwellings (DCD 1982, 22).

Schutte’s quantitative study of Schubart Park entitled “social interaction and place perspectives” revealed that residents had generally *positive* impressions of the facility. They greatly appreciated the low rents and central location. Many reported being socially invested in the community, making new friends, having cordial interactions with neighbors and occasionally dining in each other’s flats. Essentially, her research depicted what anthropologists describe as a *centripetal* place, one which pulls people into interaction with one another, thereby enhancing a sense of togetherness and shared purpose (Hall 1968). This was evident in the DCD’s own definition of *community development* as the “process whereby human needs are met in housing, community facilities, and all other amenities indispensable to a full and balanced family and community life (DCD 1977).” Schubart Park was designed from the outset to bring residents together.

Schutte’s glowing assessment was undoubtedly influenced by the state’s financial support for her research. Even so, her findings resonate with the online reminiscences of youths who lived there during the 1980s. Their experience growing up in Schubart Park was so profound that they managed to port Schubies onto social media as a way of reconnecting and reminiscing with long-lost friends. Now in their 30s and 40s, they warned me that my research could never convey the great depth of experience which emerged from coming of age there:

Don’t know if a your research project could handle the stories I have of my days with the mates, no money could ever teach me about life the way Schubies and real friends did!!!

(Facebook User 2016)

Some of their most evocative memories revolved around common areas—architectural features that programmed-in casual meetings and serendipitous encounters between neighbors. Of these, the swimming pool was the most famous:

HL: Decembers in the 80’s were the best at that swimming pool

EV: I learned to swim here at the age of 5...good times!

VS: I remember the nights we went skinny dipping and then D and M would switch on the lights so we could see him do a bomb splash. Then the poor caretakers would come while we already sat in the flats laughing at them.

EV: Oh yes! And we mustn’t forget about unscrewing the lights in the lifts and then riding from the ground floor to the 21st floor...he he he!

vs: @EV...I won't even ask!

ev: Do you think we were swapping recipes? Ha ha ha!

(Facebook User 2016)

Schubies provided access to opportunities at the nation's core and the semblance of a normal childhood within chaotic and turbulent times. She was the architectural culmination of a philosophical ideal: separate development materialized in concrete and steel. As Casey writes, "places gather" things, memories, and especially people (1996). Schools assemble children and teachers. Parks assemble pensioners (Low 2010), protestors (Bosco 2001) and lovers (L'Aoustet and Griffet 2004). Markets gather buyers and sellers who operate according to localized rules of negotiation and exchange that may be recorded, but are more often tacit derivations from millions of transactions (Richardson 1982). Schubart Park likewise gathered together the poorest, most marginalized white children of Apartheid, lifting them high above the nation's citadel as a gleaming testament of the regime's commitment to the least among God's predestined. "I miss all the friends and all the hugs and how we were the heart of the youth in Pretoria," remembered one Facebook user "and yes, the swimming, soccer, volley ball, cricket on P level and the make-out sessions on the stairs. I miss the people I can't track down. I miss everyone" (Facebook User 2016).

Coming of Age

Times were turbulent. The post-WWII boom was sputtering. Skilled labor was in short supply due to barriers for black advancement. European immigration dwindled as blatant white supremacy became globally unfashionable (Brown 1987). Decolonization isolated the Apartheid regime, while the civil rights movements led to sanctions and divestment. Within South Africa, vigorous protests increasingly diverted state resources toward suppressing dissent.

By the 1980s, widening cracks appeared in Apartheid's racist geographies. Housing in African areas was strained by growing families and rural-to-urban migration. Earning cash wages in the white economy was by now one of the only viable ways to survive, and wages were highest in cities. Seemingly overnight, large informal settlements appeared on the fringes, and eventually within the urban core (Sapire 1992). As Africans moved into the city, Europeans left. Inner-city white neighborhoods like Hillbrow in Johannesburg and Sunnyside in Pretoria had blossomed during the 1970s and 1980s, but with the approach of independence, whites began relocating *en masse* to fortified enclaves in the suburbs (Hart 1974; Mabin 2005).

Faced with rising vacancies, landlords leased inner-city apartments to non-whites, especially Indians and coloreds who could not find suitable accommodation in their own, overcrowded and far-flung group areas (Morris 1994). Initially, spatial subterfuge was met with brutal crackdowns, but

the weakening regime was largely powerless to prevent integration. Signaling its waning grasp on power the state moved toward tolerating and then legalizing some mixed-race areas (Simon 1989). The regime also accelerated initiatives to perpetuate white privilege into the forthcoming era of majority rule, largely through market-driven strategies. For example, the legalization of “sectional title” enabled whites to purchase individual units within apartment buildings or townhouse and “cluster” developments, putting wind into the sails of real estate speculation which made home owners tremendously rich (DCD 1981, i). Generous financing and homeownership incentive programs helped white renters transition into ownership. For example, the “Home Owner’s Saving Scheme” helped newly married, non-black couples buy their first home (DCD 1972, 3).

Du Toit’s ethnographic research conducted in Schubart Park during the 1990s describes a community in transition (1998). Approximately half of the residents were white. These holdouts had been most dependent on Apartheid’s welfare system and had few other options when this safety net vanished. The others were newcomers; upwardly mobile non-white families—especially employees of the integrating civil service. In 2010, I interviewed Happy, who along with her brothers were the first black children at Schubart Park. Happy’s father, a South African, had met and married her mother Emily in Zimbabwe while he was in exile. After returning to South Africa in 1992, the family was looking for a place to live. Happy attended one of the first integrated public elementary schools where she learned about Schubart Park:

There was no way we could afford living in normal flats. I had a friend in school, and I used to visit her at Schubart Park. I asked her how much she paid rent, and because we were extremely poor, I told my dad and said “why don’t you do your thing?” And because my dad was in exile and all of that, he did his magic, and he got us into Schubart Park. We lived on the 21st floor. It was beautiful! [The Apartheid government was] seriously taking care of their people. It was a small Afrikaans community that took care of its own. My brother and I had our [swimming] costumes on, just casually walking into the pool. It was painted with white, just white. And as we walked, they kind of like looked at us. So my little brother starts running to me and says: “this one boy called me a K*****.” So I said “show me.” And this boy is like an Afrikaans rugby player. I physically *attacked* him. Every single white person saw that, and that’s how I earned their respect.

(Happy 2013)

Children have a remarkable capacity for overcoming parents’ prejudices when presented the opportunity to connect on their own terms. Before long, Happy and her brothers became fast friends with a group of youths she described as “the lost generation” of the Afrikaans community:

“Schubart Park was intense. Beautiful people with beautiful minds, it was just that poverty had taken over. And obviously, with them being white, there was nothing left for them...

I was the first black kid who ever knocked at the door. They were hardcore racists. *Hardcore*, with all these tattoos. They would invite me in, but still have that rage against black people. But they wouldn't against me, I'm telling you! They would have an AWB [white power] meeting that I'd attend. A lot of them would sort of joke: “when are you and I going to get it together then?” But the guy is raw. He hates blacks, but now he's sort of in love with this black girl. He had to bring this girl home and say “dad, this is my girlfriend,” and his dad had to accept it because now he sees who I am as a person.

I grew up like that, being the first black everything. And those are the type of people we were hanging out with--myself and my brother. And none of them gave us a hard time. Obviously they used the word K***** a lot. But these guys didn't do anything to oppress me and my brother, we felt at home with them.

(Happy 2013)

Happy depicts the youth of Schubart Park as caught between the racism of generations and optimism for the new South Africa. Children who were taught to hate each other suddenly encountered opportunities to form meaningful friendships. Even romantic entanglements flourished as Schubart Park integrated, wreaking havoc on cherished taboos. The very same centripetal aspects which functioned during Apartheid to draw the white community inwards upon itself suddenly began to support an integrated identity and fleeting glimpses of renewal.

History, alas, can be cruel. Happy and her brothers arrived just as heroin began ripping through poor white communities (Leggett et al. 2002). Apartheid's fall brought economic sanctions to an end. After reengaging with the global economy, South Africa suddenly became a strategic transshipment hub for opioids. Its affluent white population was also a lucrative, untapped drug market in its own right.

Schubart Park's role in this tragedy was to furnish a safe base of operations to the white drug cartels which also unleashed this poison into their own communities. Happy recalls:

There were really dangerous names that were well known, that went to prisons and all of that. They formed a gang, the Original Punks for all of us who were sort of oppressed. It was a very unstable place for lost kids in those days, if you wanted to see raw, real punks you went into Schubart Park. We were typical “project scum,” to put it like that. But there was also good as well. We all made family in a gang. P-level was where we did our drugs and got high. I was popular on the party scene until I started using heroin. I became like a hobo—crazy,

homeless. I was melancholy! Who does that? Leaves their house to go to the streets? I did that for three years. My mother found my brother [dead of an overdose] at the Schubart Park toilets. It's true.

Now if you ask, a lot of them are either in the streets or in shelters or you just don't know what happened to them. You ask: "what happened to that one? What happened to that one?" The answer is: "Dead, drugs, dead, street." You know, it's a sad case.

(Happy 2013)

As much as Schubert Park brought people together—and this is accomplished spectacularly for nearly every single cohort of residents—it simultaneously presented opportunities for tragedy. Ironically, Happy and her brother succumbed to an opioid epidemic which was almost entirely confined to the white population. Beyond narcotics, vulnerable youths of all races were preyed upon by at least one notorious resident who kidnapped and sexually brutalized black children from the townships. More than one young adult flung themselves from upper-level apartments, disoriented and reeling after losing the backing of a regime which had guaranteed them a bright future regardless of their station (Facebook User 2016).

During the transition to independence, Schubart Park's management transferred from the Department of Community Development whose entire mission and sizeable budget was directed toward coddling non-blacks, to the Gauteng Housing Department, to the City of Tshwane, to various subcontracted property management firms. Subsidies were incrementally lifted and rents increased, leading low-income residents far into arrears. Successive management authorities failed to invest sufficiently in upkeep, causing the facility to tumble farther into disrepair (du Plessis 2013, 75; Runciman 2012, 208).

Gradually, the quality of life at Schubies fell far below the expectations of both the original whites *and* the upwardly mobile Africans who found the complex so appealing immediately following liberation. As these populations departed and the quality of amenities decreased, space became available for growing numbers of distressed people including the homeless and mentally ill, under-resourced college students, new arrivals from the rural hinterlands, and sojourners from neighboring countries like Zimbabwe and Mozambique as well as distant lands like Nigeria, Somalia, Bangladesh and the DRC (Brand 2014; de Villiers 2014; du Plessis 2013; Swart 2011; van Marle and de Villiers 2013). By the mid-2000s, only a handful of people from the pre-independence cohort remained at Schubart Park, along with a larger number of transition-era residents.

In 2008, The Housing Company Tshwane began serving eviction notices which revealed accounts that were in shambles (du Plessis 2013, 81–2).irate residents further argued that conditions had deteriorated so much that the very idea of paying any rent was absurd. Eventually, the city earmarked R200m to remodel the flats (Masemola 2008), giving residents several

months to vacate the complex so that the promised repairs could proceed (Mosimanyana 2008). This sparked massive protests, with residents doubling down that they would not leave until they received title deeds and interim housing (SAPA 2008).

On July 22, 2008 the city council moved decisively to evict tenants from 38 apartments, seemingly targeting members of the Residents Committee which was mobilizing a formidable legal battle and high-profile street demonstrations (Yeatman 2008). The eviction was contracted to Wozani, a shadowy security company run by former Apartheid security officials (Ramutsindela 2002; Salopek 2002). Photographer Daniel Born documented apocalyptic imagery of Wozani's notorious army storming into Schubart Park. African footsoldiers known as "Red Ants" were dressed head-to-toe in crimson riot gear, wielding crowbars and chasing residents with raised sjamboks under the oversight of white officers.

As Wozani advanced, resistors threw bricks and explosives (Yeatman 2008). A fifth-floor apartment went up in flames while rubber bullets and teargas flew. Another fire then engulfed the upper floors of neighboring Kruger Park. "The blaze reminded people of America's 9/11 incident," reported the *Pretoria News*, "with the tall building covered in black smoke and the police and South African Air Force helicopters swarming around it" (Otto 2008b). Several people were airlifted to safety, while others jumped to their deaths to escape the flames. Finally, South Africa's High Court intervened to halt the evictions at Schubart (Venter 2008). However, on grounds of public safety, the smoldering Kruger Park was successfully emptied and sealed, with alternative housing initially found for only 12 people out of a building with more than 400 units (Khumalo 2008).

After failed evictions, a water service disruption stuck the A block for nearly three weeks, forcing residents on upper floors—including Happy's mother Emily—to carry water up long flights of stairs whenever they needed to wash, cook or flush (du Plessis 2013, 52). Residents suspected that service was deliberately cut to make the complex uninhabitable and force them out. Water and electricity failed again in December, prompting new, furious protests in which 34 people (including three minors) were arrested on Christmas and held for several days (Otto 2008a; van Marle and de Villiers 2013).

A Final Effervescence

By the end of 2008, Apartheid's shining beacon was transfigured into an unsightly monument of continued poverty, inequity and crime in the new South Africa. The towers were festering thorns in the government's side, much like racial mixing in early Marabastad had troubled colonial administrators. Tshwane's denizens feared and avoided the complex in their everyday perambulations because countless news reports of muggings and hijackings in the vicinity. Law enforcement officers were loathe to enter

the complex while emergency personnel simply refused to provide services. “Even if you call the ambulance because you are about to give birth,” recounted Shambudzai during her third trimester, “they will tell you that you are mistaken, that nobody currently lives in Schubart!”

In reality, Schubies remained more populated than ever. Many flats housed ten or more adults, often accompanied by their children. I even saw janitorial closets in the parking garage converted into bedrooms. According to a senior Residents’ Committee member, the high occupancy rate was deliberate:

Our strategy was, even though people leave...we put others inside for our own benefit. We’re not gonna give them what they wanted, which is; when a unit is empty, they seal it off. And at the end of the day they’ll rush to court and claim that they’ve given people alternative accommodation, [which] they did not do.

(cited in du Plessis 2013, 85–86)

A large contingent of Zimbabwean refugees figured into this final cohort. These new arrivals were predominantly young adults whose parents and grandparents had been traveling to South Africa for generations (Suk 2017). In 2008, an escalation of political and economic turmoil forced them to pursue opportunity abroad (Pasura 2014). Lacking the funds and legal documents needed to enter South Africa legally, they traversed plantations, ranches and game parks on foot, braving dangers including wild animals, soldiers and robbers. Gradually, they worked their way south, earning a few dollars per day doing fieldwork on commercial farms. The lucky ones eventually made it to urban areas like Pretoria, but even in cities their precarious legal status undermined the value of their labor. Recognizing them as foreigners, people often cast them abusive slurs, accusing them of undercutting wages and stealing jobs rightfully belonging to “proper” South Africans.

Xenophobia occasionally erupted into violence which ignored shared histories of colonial oppression and centuries of trade and intermarriage between all peoples of the region. I came to know a group of women who moved into Schubart Park in the wake of one such uprising. They had settled in Atteridgeville after months of arduous travel from Zvishavane in Zimbabwe. Recall, Atteridgeville was the municipal township where Marabastad’s final black residents relocated in the 1940s following a night of lynchings sparked by protests over poor living and working conditions. Half a century later, on March 19, 2008, Atteridgeville’s elders awoke to terrifying sounds they must have recognized from their youth. An unruly mob sang freedom songs and fired pistols in the air. Moving from door to door, they examined people’s identification papers to identify unwanted people. This time, however, the perpetrators were not Apartheid’s goons looking for political activists, but black South Africans who summarily

evicted anyone identified as a foreigner by producing asylum papers or failing to speak dominant South African languages. One Zimbabwean woman, Farai, recalled how her housemate resisted. In retaliation the mob locked him inside his dwelling and set it ablaze. Farai recalled him screaming: “help me, I’m dying, I’m dying!” while he burned (2010).

Following the riot, dozens of now-homeless foreigners found temporary accommodation at an abandoned automobile garage in Marabastad. They camped there for several weeks with privacy supplied by partitions made of bedsheets and tires. Portable latrines quickly overflowed into a polluted stream where the women also did laundry and bathed. At the abject margins of society, they were vulnerable to every kind of predation. One was raped, giving birth to a baby she named “Xenophobia.” Later she reported being targeted by a European woman who offered to buy the child for 100,000 Rand and South African citizenship.

Serendipitously, the travel-weary sojourners arrived in Marabastad just as Schubart Park’s Residents Committee was looking to increase occupancy in the towers to resist eviction. It was an easy decision to move from the parking garage into sun-drenched flats complete with kitchens, private bedrooms and glorious vistas. For possibly the last time, a tired and weary Schubies began working her magic, conveying with her flickering strength certain special spatial advantages and opportunities.

Once again, the positioning at the nation’s bosom provided access to the urban core and a trickle of the wealth generated there. The Zimbabwean women started a hair and nail salon in the central business district which became popular with civil servants. Strolling to work through Church Square each morning was pleasant and efficient, not to mention economical. Living centrally obviated the need to pay for a cramped minibus seat and reduced exposure to xenophobia. Pirate landoards charged only about a third of the going rate for rent in nearby central neighborhoods like Sunnyside. Notwithstanding the terrible inconveniences of inhabiting a crumbling skyscraper, the refugees I interviewed were fiercely proud of their accommodation and the possessions they had managed to accumulate—belongings that would have been far more difficult to obtain if they lived in costlier accommodation. There was even an incipient sense of community supported in large part by the Residents Committee which had excellent public relations. In regular community meetings, the Committee gave legal updates on community developments and the battle against evictions. It clearly understood the unique needs of its refugee clientele and worked hard to satisfy them. For instance, I attended one meeting of about 200 residents where the Committee chairperson spoke passionately against xenophobia and highlighted recent complaints of sexual violence. He urged residents to continue reporting such incidents, as the Committee maintained a “task team” to deal with troublemakers.

Schubart Park thus acquired an inclusive flair. Walking through P-Level on a weekend, it was now possible to hear laughing groups of youngsters

smoking cannabis or playing pickup soccer. All the while, Zimbabweans openly and confidently joked around in their native Shona language which they dared not do in other parts of the city. News from home circulated easily as people were always coming and going. Chance encounters and unexpected drop-ins from friends and relatives were common. For more than a century, thousands of migrant workers, goods, minerals, machinery and money have moved between Zimbabwe and South Africa—one of the continent’s busiest international borders. By 2008, more than 1.2 million legal trips were made from Zimbabwe into South Africa in addition to countless undocumented crossings (Crush, Chikanda, and Tawodzera 2015). Schubart Park was just two blocks away from the Home Affairs office where foreigners would periodically queue in the thousands to attain or maintain their documents conveying them a tenuous legality. For a time, Schubies became a hub in this web of comings and goings. It was possible, there, to find someone who could ferry one’s belongings—or even one’s children—to just about any part of the subcontinent. In the days before WhatsApp, Schubart Park also provided networking opportunities with more established compatriots who could share knowledge about job opportunities, asylum papers or NGOs. Updates about police checkpoints and extortion rackets were also eagerly shared, as Zimbabweans were unable to get bank accounts and were forced to carry cash, resulting in their use by both police and criminals as “portable ATMs (Vigneswaran et al. 2010).”

With a final effervescence, Schubies once again became a calm harbor in a tempestuous world. The first cohort of residents reminisced on Facebook that “it was like a big happy family in the beginning when it was just built (Facebook User 2016).” Mai Domingo, a Zimbabwean woman belonging to the final cohort also deployed the kinship analogy:

Schubart was like home. We met a lot of people in Schubart, and we created this family, our family, even though we were not family. We were so many black people from different places in Zimbabwe, even from different places in Africa, but we met there and created one related family.

The expansive common spaces, the pickup sports games, the mixing and mingling that Schubart Park always engendered through her very architectural form—all these spatial opportunities were once again deployed in the service of Tshwane’s depreciated classes. Like a skillful teacher, Schubies gathered her pupils together in a spirit of collaboration. After holidays, with few clients, the women I interviewed pooled their meager income to prepare communal meals. When one of their daughters needed an eye operation, all her flat mates pitched in funds.

This is not to say that Schubart Park was perfect. From the very earliest days, the complex was a difficult place to come of age. Most children living there experienced extraordinarily complex life challenges. This was no



Figure 10.3 Resting in Schubart Park, 2010. Credit: William Suk.

less true for the final cohort. Poverty and desperation could be grinding. Trauma was pervasive. It was almost impossible to rid one's clothes of the clinging, sickening smell of raw sewage and burning rubbish which saturated the halls. Stigmatized residents were vulnerable in their daily perambulations about the city, in their tenuous legal status, in their finances, and in their exposure to crime and xenophobia.

Nor did Schubies ever provide complete safety from predation. Social problems that were already apparent during Apartheid persisted into the final years. And for all of its professed tolerance, the Committee was ruthless in extracting rent. Some residents attributed merciless beatings to the Committee's "task team" when people failed to pay, and in 2009 a man fell to his death from the fourteenth floor while attempting evasive maneuvers (Bateman 2009). Muggings were common in the damp penumbra of the corridors which were especially perilous for young women.

Even while acknowledging these dangers, the residents I interviewed were deeply attached to the complex and the relationships forged there. Unfortunately, the business ventures, the communal meals, the leisurely walks to the salon each morning through Church Square proved only as durable as the building which potentiated them. By the middle of 2011 service delivery again decompensated and residents reentered the streets. Amidst stormy protests on September 21, two flats in C Block caught fire and the entire complex evacuated. That evening, returning residents were kept outside, while others were trapped within, including children who cared for themselves and younger siblings while parents worked (Magome 2011). That night, and for many nights following, a multitude slept on the sidewalks.

Over several days, small groups retrieved belongings under police escort. Then they scattered. Some returned to Atteridgeville or Mamelodi; others to their countries of origin. New arrangements variously involved higher rents, less space, longer commutes and fewer amenities. Mai Domingo recounted:

[We] found accommodation in Sunnyside because it was a bit cheaper... the living conditions were very poor. Myself and Rebecca, since we had husbands, we were staying each couple in one room. [Six] other gals were also staying in one bedroom, but we were using one bathroom from first floor to third floor.

Eviction decimated refugees' precarious finances. Living in Schubart Park had provided surplus funds they used to care for loved ones back home. Now, higher rents and transportation costs put extreme pressures on families and caused many people to fall behind on important obligations:

[Leaving] Schubart Park disturbed a lot of lives. We were all relaxed, we didn't know this thing of paying rent, paying [utility bills]. So now you end up fighting with your man.

There is no money. The money that you were sending to your kids, it's now the money you were supposed to pay rent, to pay electricity. The little that I would get from the salon, and what Baba Domingo was getting from work in the store was fine with us. And we don't send money to kids only, like myself, I will have to send money to my parents, and to Baba Domingo's father as well.

Some residents turned in desperation to endeavors which caused pain to themselves and others:

You know we were not paying [much] rent in Schubart Park, so moving away also made people do some things to earn a living, like prostitution, drugs, stealing... Do you still remember Tsitsi? We were working together, but all of a sudden she just left everything. She said "the money is not enough, I've decided to do this shoplifting thing. The rent is so expensive." Now she is in and out of prison. The daughter is now staying with the elder sister. They are no longer together with the child's father. It makes me cry sometimes. I don't know how I survived.

As with the evictions from Marabastad half a century earlier, local communities could not withstand extraction from the architecture which contained them:

The way we were taken out, that's why I always say *Zvinorwadza Schubart* [Schubart is painful]. Some of us never had the chance to say

goodbye. We don't know where some people went. There are very few friends from Schubart Park that are here now, and we hardly talk. We are far away from each other. Maybe three or four are still close to me. The rest, I don't know.

Resting in Power

Inspired by Kenneth Burke, Rhodesian anthropologist Hilda Kuper showed that some places are so charged with significance that they influence the course of events unfolding within them (1972). Contemporary theorists follow this thread further, circularly but quite correctly pointing out that places shape the people who create the places which shape them (Rodman 1992).

Indeed, when examined closely and longitudinally, places can seem more akin to *life forms* than to inanimate things. When human beings make places, we breathe souls into concrete and steel.

Through engineering, design and location, we equip architectural creatures with traits and characteristics determining how they will interact with the human ecosystem for generations after we release them into the wild.

At least, this seems true of Schubart Park. The building itself was a key influencer in the lives of the young adults who came of age within her walls. Her physical configuration encouraged them to form collective identities, however troubled and fractious: the airy brightness of the flats, the amenities, the high density living, the way that the complex was set above the streets and the rest of the city. It did not take long for the life histories of individual residents to become intertwined. This centripetal force was so strong that during the transition years, children groomed to be racists laughed and lingered on courtyard benches with the children of liberation fighters.

Even after becoming “synonymous with crime and grime” Schubies' last cohort still found enough security and camaraderie within her enfeebled embrace to forge families, collaborative businesses, and a safe haven from xenophobia. Places are sessile beings. Rooted at the nation's very heart, Schubart Park functioned as a stepping stone for inhabitants born with a dearth of opportunities.

Like all living creatures, places must feed to grow and survive. Humans devote much of our productive energies to maintaining places and our positions within them. Modern buildings like Schubart Park consume enormous amounts of energy and natural resources during their construction. Consumption continues unabated after the cranes and cement trucks depart. Water flows in, month after month, along with electricity and now data. Waste is discharged. Heat is dissipated. An endless queue of broken doorknobs and dripping faucets demands constant intervention. When we are unable to nourish our places, the pull of entropy quickly becomes apparent, especially in high-density buildings with complex moving parts.

As government withdrew subsidies for whites, upkeep at Schubart Park faltered and the complex deteriorated. Places can be extraordinarily long-lived, but like all creatures they do eventually die.

We could even say that places, like biological organisms, *reproduce*. This can be seen in how privilege self-perpetuates through successive spatial iterations. South Africa's contemporary suburban security villages derive from midcentury inner-city fortresses like Schubert Park, which in turn can be traced to the *laager formation* which was a key tactic on the early colonial frontier. After the British seized Dutch maritime outposts, the Voortrekkers ventured deep into Africa's interior. Novelist Rider Haggard once sensationally recounted how the trekkers used a *laager formation* in a battle with Mzilikazi who was the major power in Tshwane at the time of white settlement. The pioneers deployed their wagons as war machines, using their mighty hardwood platforms to create nested barricades. At the very center they sequestered the most vulnerable and valuable women and children who were the seeds of the new nation. Schubart Park was a high modern, state-sponsored *laager formation*—an architecture of exclusion which has now been *privatized* in South Africa technologically sophisticated security enclaves complete with restricted access points, four-meter perimeter walls, night vision cameras and seismic sensors.

Across Southern Africa, and indeed the world, cities must wrestle with the tremendous momentum of inequitable geographies.. The glimmer of hope in Schubart Park's saga is that places *can be* transformed and reimaged. The Apartheid state expended enormous resources to inscribe a racist ideology onto the land's physical geography. However, in the end, one of the central strongholds was seized and appropriated by the very same people it was originally designed to exclude. Apartheid planners understood one very important fact: humans gradually acquiesce to the structures which contain us. What they failed to realize is that our structures also create openings for change.

Epilogue

Today, Schubart Park stands vacant, largely stripped of recoverable metal by scavengers who still occasionally slip into the buildings to ply their hazardous trade. In 2012 the Constitutional Court ruled the evictions were illegal (Venter 2012), paving the way for former residents to return after the facility is restored to proper working condition. By 2013, 457 of 847 registered residents were approved and 193 had already received accommodation. The remainder were still being "vetted" for eligibility (Preez 2013; SAPA 2013). These numbers, however do not account for the majority of Schubart Park's final cohort who, as refugees, did not qualify for assistance.

Interestingly however, when examined longitudinally, the Zvishavane refugees I interviewed had as much of a claim on Pretoria as South African

citizens. They were of mixed Ndebele-Shona heritage because their home town of Zvishavane had come under Mzilikazi's sphere of influence when he was chased out of Pretoria by the Voortrekkers and established the Ndebele kingdom in Zimbabwe. For example, one woman had a grandfather who was born and raised in Atteridgeville and another woman's family still owns the spear used by an ancestor who fought in Mzilikazi's army. In the Setswana language, the word *Tshwane* means "we are the same." When viewed historically, for many refugees, arriving in Pretoria is actually a sort of homecoming.

A final ironic twist involves Happy's mother Emily. Recall that hers was the first black family allowed into Schubart Park by the collapsing Apartheid regime. Emily—a Zimbabwean by birth and South African by marriage—thus paved the way for racial integration, suffering tremendously in the process. Her early years were marked by racial tensions, and she subsequently lost a son to the heroin epidemic which was almost entirely limited to white communities. By the time Schubart park was illegally vacated in 2011, Emily would have been one of the most senior residents. Despite this, she has still not received compensation. Happy Explained:

My father left South Africa, ANC, to fight for this country. We were literally in exile. I mean, [my family] started this whole thing. Black people lived in Schubart Park because we started it. Until today [my mother] is not given a house because my dad is late, he's passed away. Obviously they are going to look at my mother's ID and see "Zimbabwean born," not knowing the whole story line. She was there from 1992 until 2011 when it all closed down. They have given everyone else houses [except for her] because my mom is not South African.

(Happy 2013)

Now, at least, the whole story line is written down.

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11 On “Worlding” Urban Ethnography

Conceptualizing Scalar Reconfigurations in an Ethiopian Frontier City

*Daniel K. Thompson, Jemal Yusuf Mahamed
and Kader Mohamoud*

Introduction

“It is only by triangulating both depth and surface dimensions of contemporary urbanism that we can hope to get a purchase on what is actually going on,” write Simone and Pieterse (2017, xii–xiii). Among urban paradoxes they highlight are that dichotomies including local-global and North-South “are simultaneously intensifying and waning, becoming more sharply drawn as they are also being folded into each other.” Africa’s urbanites are no strangers to contradictory processes that Simone (2004, 2) elsewhere terms “scalar recomposition” and others have analyzed in terms of people’s aspirational “worlding” or “world-making” projects (Ong 2011). People work to continuously relocate themselves in space, to rearrange territories, and to renegotiate social arrangements as they construct and connect multiple spaces of operation—from neighborhoods to transnational circuits—in order to create opportunity and meaning.

Anthropologists have often approached such complex efforts through thick description of surprising juxtapositions between local and global found in Africa’s cities and their meaning for daily life. Urban geographers and some sociologists, meanwhile, have focused on spatialized social networks and the distribution of power between cities, states, and global assemblages. At the juncture of these approaches, a conceptual and methodological challenge emerges: to bring into view, on one hand, the spatial breadth and specificity of urbanites’ connections across a landscape usually conceptualized in terms of pregiven scalar concepts (local, urban, national, global)—and on the other, to address the shifting meanings of these spatial categories themselves as they shape daily life’s milieus. How do we understand, for instance, globalization(s) in African cities when “the global” is circumscribed by racialized inequalities, restrictions on mobility, and limited modalities of trans-spatial connection for those without the power and money to make the rules that govern connections?

We approach this issue by dialectically addressing anthropological and geographical notions of scale. Analyzing productive tensions between social relatedness and geographical proximity brings into view a “globalized” but unique and specific relational world emerging in an Ethiopian regional city: Jigjiga, the capital of Ethiopia’s Somali Regional State (SRS). Jigjiga is situated in a geopolitical borderland and is itself an emerging “frontier” for transnational mobilities and investments by the Somali diaspora. Our study conceptualizes the links between two processes of respatializing social, economic, and political relationships. The first is the shifting regional position of Jigjiga as a state capital in Ethiopia’s federal power structure. The Ethiopian government began introducing a system of ethnicity-based federalism in 1991; however, increased fiscal and security-related decentralization have unfolded only since 2010.

This “new federalism” affected a “global” dynamic of respatialization: as diaspora Somalis perceived new opportunities for belonging (and business) in Ethiopia, a steady flow of diaspora remittances gave way to increasing return migration and investment. We analyze how businesspeople (diaspora investors and Ethiopian nationals) living at the juncture of these two processes conceptualize, forge, and materialize relationships across space in ways that have reorganized (a) Jigjiga’s relative political and economic positioning as manifest in trade and social networks; and (b) what Gupta and Ferguson (1997, 6) call “processes and practices of place making”—specifically, how people conceptualize and differentiate elements of locality, regionality, and globality in their relationships and economic practices. Conceptualizing qualitative and systematic elements of Jigjiga’s trans-spatial linkages required drawing on mixed methods, which we pursued through interdisciplinary collaboration (coming from our respective backgrounds in anthropology, geography, and sociology) with a commitment to ethnography.

Jigjiga’s international connections are sometimes surprising for its inhabitants and for researchers. Between 2015 and 2018, one of the authors unexpectedly encountered neighbors from a previous residence in Johannesburg, South Africa. While walking through the market, one of us had an elderly woman selling vegetables from a rug on the street ask whether he knew her cousin in Atlanta—who happened to be a friend and frequent contact there. Such connections offer entertaining anecdotes about globalization, but there are risks in treating them either as anomalous (as was historically the case) or as typical (as is often the case today).¹ The globality of “ordinary” African cities like Jigjiga provides evidence for theoretical development that contests the overweighting of “global cities” and global North-based urban theory (Parnell and Robinson 2012; Roy 2009). However, a burgeoning literature conceptualizing urban sites outside Europe and North America as centers of the world and global hubs (Bestor 2004; Carrier 2016)—despite its welcome contribution to rethinking global urbanism—does not always systematize analysis of (or offer methodological advancement to understanding)

the nature of connections articulating in cities. Beyond the issue of types of connection (e.g. tourist travel, kinship relations, “just business”), there are questions about how durable such connections are, what sorts of rights and responsibilities they entail, how much power people in different spaces exercise over these connections and any material distributions that may result from them. These aspects can be more important than the simple existence of connections in determining life chances for urban residents. We suggest that urban ethnography’s contributions to urban-theoretical advancement—and specifically scale questions (Brenner 2019)—are enhanced by explicit attention to the spatial extent of various types of (dis)connection shaping urban Africa, the social scope or purview of these relationships, and the forms of opportunity and power that such connections create or foreclose as they shape shifting patterns of territoriality, economic investment, and political-economic rights.

The second section describes the productive tensions between anthropological and geographical theories of scale that shaped our questions and approach. The third section offers an overview of transformations affecting Jigjiga’s market and political positionality. The fourth section discusses our approach to dialectical ethnography informed by quantitative and geographic indices of the “worlds” converging in Jigjiga’s marketplace. The fifth section explores how border practices and their transgression shaped the position of Jigjiga and some of its constituents in hierarchies of trans-territorial circulation subject to various forms of control. The final section offers concluding reflections.

Scaling and Worlding

“Scale” tends to be used in loosely distinct ways by geographers and anthropologists, giving rise to productive tensions between multiple meanings of an often-used but less-often theorized term. Some of the present geographical debate about scale can be traced to Waldo Tobler, who wrote in a 1970 article on Detroit’s urban growth that everything is related to everything else, “but near things are more related than distant things” (Tobler 1970, 236). This so-called “first law of geography” and its principle of distance reflect an understanding of scale in human geography as a nested hierarchy of spatial levels from local-national-regional to global. Rather than taking geographic scale as a given, however, human geographers and spatially attuned anthropologists have, especially since the 1990s, analyzed how spatial frames such as locality, region, and the global are socially constructed in contexts of power (Delaney and Leitner 1997; Marston 2000; Massey 1993; Thompson 2017a). Among geographers, the 1990s saw an explosion of interest in scale and rescaling, especially as literature on “world cities” and “global cities” began to challenge the idea that localities are necessarily subservient to the power of states within whose boundaries they lie (Friedmann 1986; Sassen 1991). Spatialized analytic language—for

instance, describing cities as “below” states or regions—invites productive critical reflection on how researchers and their interlocutors deploy scalar concepts (Ferguson and Gupta 2002).

Critical thinking on urbanism from the early 20th century onwards, and sociological and anthropological theory more generally, tended to draw on a different conception of scale, focused more on qualities of social organization than on space. For decades before Tobler’s so-called laws, urbanists had described the combination of spatial nearness and social distance characteristic of (Western) urbanism. Prominent among these were Georg Simmel and Louis Wirth, whose writings on the depersonalizing and individualistic dynamics of urban culture are essential reading in urban studies curricula (Simmel 2002; Wirth 1938). They employed terminologies that gradually cohered in anthropological typologies of so-called “small scale” and “large scale” societies (Barth 1978; Berreman 1978) (see Table 11.1). Yet by the 1970s some anthropologists observed that it remained to be assessed whether “the various characteristics we have lumped together as ‘scale’ do in fact... vary concomitantly” (Barnes 1978, 13).

Spatial and social conceptualizations of scale overlap to some extent: people’s relative isolation and communalism may correspond to dense, geographically proximate relationships. Yet ostensibly “folk” societies characterized by kinship networks and informal sanctions may also span large geographical distances. The tensions between geographical and anthropological-sociological ideas about scale invite critical analysis on

Table 11.1 Contrasting terminologies classically used to distinguish “small-scale” and “large-scale” ideal societal types, summarized from Figure 11.1 in Berreman (1978, 46–48)

<i>“Small-scale” societies</i>	<i>“Large-scale” societies</i>
Folk	Urban
Realization	Alienation
Personal, primary	Impersonal, secondary
Tradition-directed	Other-directed
Group	Grid
Isolated	Vast networks
Homogeneous	Heterogeneous
Equalitarian	Stratified
Communalistic	Individualistic
Culture	Sub-cultures, contra-cultures
Family and kin	Status and territory
Rigidity	Mobility
Informal controls and sanctions	Formal (bureaucratic)controls and sanctions

ever-changing configurations of social relations in space. Recognizing the ambiguities of the term “scale,” some scholars reject it altogether as a concept that obfuscates more than it reveals. While acknowledging that many scholars use the term uncritically and sometimes without definition, the aspects of socio-geographical relations tied together in concepts of scale seem to us to reflect many people’s lived experiences of the world in terms of spatially differentiated hierarchies of nearness and groupness. Applied to people’s life-worlds, conceptualizing relatively distinct geographical areas “seemingly cannot be avoided,” especially since many of a researcher’s interlocutors will “also think about the world [and experience it] in terms of regional divisions at various scales” (Agnew 2013, 7) (though “various scales” seems a poor analytic descriptor).

Facing the evident social traction of such notions that might be glossed as “scale,” other scholars have shifted away from explicit use of “scale” and focused on processes of “scaling” and “rescaling” that create provisionally stabilized, relational (hierarchical) spatial units in which social action more or less coheres (Brenner 2011). A point on which many critics do agree is the utility of focusing on *processes* of sociospatial transformation. Yet describing “scaling” and “rescaling”—or, in Simone’s terms, “scalar recomposition”—risks mobilizing a verb (or the adjective scalar) without a referent noun. What is it that scaling and rescaling are (re)making or recomposing?

Intersections and disjunctures between geographers’ spatial conceptions of scale and anthropologists’ social definition of the term can be addressed dialectically by considering diverse potential arrangements and meanings of spatial and social proximity amidst people’s daily ways of being in the world. Theorists foregrounding “worlding” processes have, like many others, at times mobilized less than critical uses of the term scale, but nevertheless offer productive avenues forward to considering concatenations of the (socially and geographically) “far,” “near,” and things in between. Worlding, writes Ong (2011, 12), “identifies ambitious practices that creatively imagine and shape alternative social visions and configurations—that is, ‘worlds’—than what already exist in a given context.” While Ong continues by suggesting that “[w]orlding projects remap relationships at power at different scales and localities,” we can leave aside explicit use of the notion of scale for the moment, and focus instead on inductively conceptualizing spatial distributions of relationships, shared identity, and social action.

Following an inductive approach, we focus on Jigjigans’ conceptualizations of their life-worlds and the relationship of these worlds to space. We trace how relationships across relatively closer or farther-flung spaces converge in people’s urban lives and shape their efforts to realize mobility and livelihoods.

Jigjiga: A Borderlands City

Amidst intensifying international circulations of trade, return migration and investment, our Jigjigan interlocutors were especially concerned with

the degree to which transnational connections create opportunities for business and mobility. People sought to develop combinations of personal and impersonal connections to businesspeople and officials in the “right” positions. Each change in relationships, distribution channels, and policy environments stimulates further change in urban society. This brings us to locating Jigjiga in a world—not just geographic space, but a spatialized system of relationships, understandings, and expectations that people inhabit and over which they have some (however limited) power. Many historically sedimented aspects of Jigjiga’s society are intimately tied to its position in the eastern Ethiopian borderlands. It lies 70 km west of the international boundary with the self-declared Somaliland Republic, and about 30–40 km east of an ethnic borderland area that today is the intranational boundary between Ethiopia’s Somali Region and Oromia Regional States (Figure 11.1).

An international and interethnic crossroads since its permanent settlement in the 1890s, Jigjiga’s history is marked by competing modes of economic governance and struggles to control trans-border connections. By the late 19th century, Somali migration patterns combined with its geographical position connecting Ethiopia to the British-dominated Indian Ocean economy to link the town into intensifying monetary and trade circulations (Thompson 2020). Ethiopian authorities worked with British interests to encourage the settlement of Arab and Indian merchants in the early 1900s, but with the decline of the British Empire mid-century, it was Somalis who controlled the town’s trade. Somali cultural-economic (*dhaqan-dhaqaale*) practices were throughout the 20th century in tension with Ethiopian modes of economic governance. As Ethiopian administration in the eastern borderlands intensified in the 1950s–1960s, Somali merchants worked to avoid what they perceived as excessive Ethiopian taxation. This made the town a market frontier between Ethiopian administration and “contraband” (*kontarabaan*) trade (a generic term for untaxed goods). Economic tensions stretched beyond trade, as well. Somali populations recognized a mix of communal and private property holdings and could be characterized as a society with egalitarian tendencies, in which some unequal distribution of resources was legitimate, but resource distribution was always subject to claims by kinfolk to a share. Thus even under the Derg (1974–1991) and subsequent Federal governments (1991–present), Jigjigans largely operated with non-state property institutions and “informal” markets legitimated by clan elders and community leaders (Jemal Yusuf Mahamed 2014). Such practices are not limited to Somalis; the trade city hosts a diverse range of Ethiopian groups who establish belonging and ownership in the urban economy through a variety of kinship-related and market practices.

In sum, for much of its history, Jigjiga was not clearly subordinate to Ethiopian economic governance. Government policy tended to be less determinant of economic opportunity and everyday forms of wealth creation than were social connections, including those that linked Jigjigans to

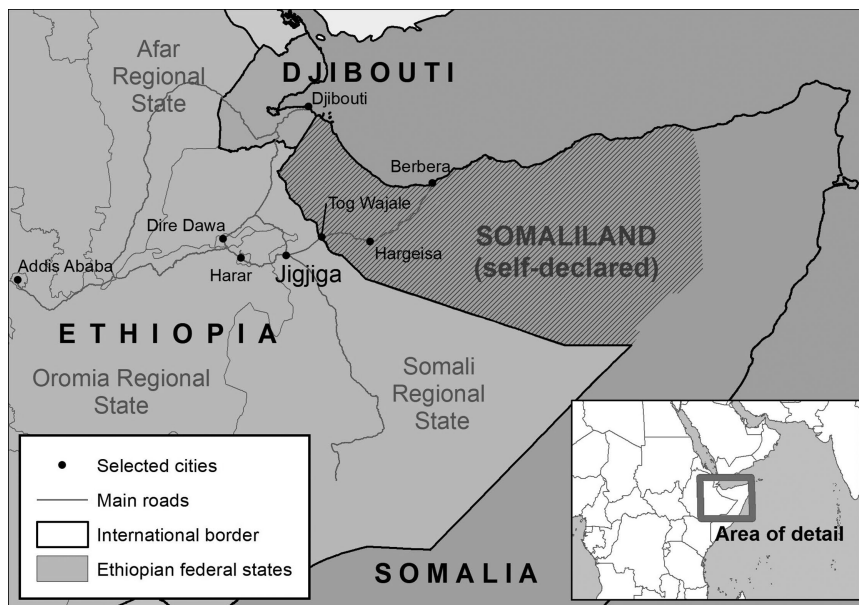


Figure 11.1 Regional Map Showing Jigjiga, Nearby Cities, and Main Connecting Roads (in red). [Boundaries Shown are Approximate and Do Not Imply Endorsement.]

neighboring Somalia and to Somalis living and working outside the Horn (before the 1980s, largely in the Persian Gulf oil states). As has been the case in neighboring “stateless” Somalia (Lindley 2010; Hassan and Chalmers 2008), diaspora remittances played a major role in sustaining families and sometimes providing some seed funding for Jigjigan businesses.

Diaspora Somalis’ remittances, as well as moral and logistical support, also sustained Somali Region’s largest rebel group, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), which was established in the 1980s to push for the secession of the marginalized Somali-inhabited borderlands from Ethiopia. Nearly continuous insurgency from the 1970s until the 2000s drove hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian-origin Somalis abroad, where many constituted themselves as a politically and economically engaged diaspora or *qurba-joog*. Through their remittances and their support for the ONLF, *qurba-joogs* working from beyond the boundaries of Ethiopian sovereignty were key players in the borderlands political economy.

In this context, Ethiopia’s introduction of multinational federalism (often called ethnic federalism) in the 1990s created a new conjuncture of challenges and opportunities for urbanites. For one, the 1990s saw an intensification of secessionist rebellion accompanied by intense securitization of the area (which intensified amidst the subsequent global War on Terror). By

2012, however, the SRS administration had virtually neutralized the ONLF threat through a combination of brutal counterinsurgency and increased financing for regional development that many Somalis heralded as a new manifestation of federalism (many also decried the post-2010 regime’s violence against the ONLF and civilians). This “new federalism” that began in 2010 coincided with two international transformations. First, communications technology such as Viber and WhatsApp enabled more direct communication with relatives who had fled abroad during earlier decades of conflict. Second, the 2008–2009 global financial crisis overlapped with new government incentives in Ethiopia to foreground opportunities for diaspora Somalis. Some began to shift their savings from Western banks into material Ethiopian investments like businesses and houses built for eventual retirement. This stimulated an influx of return migration and diaspora investment (mainly from North America and Western Europe).

The result for Jigjiga today is that the processes of migration that spatially extended people’s social relationships across much of the world during the 1970s–1990s have new relevance and new impacts on urban society. Somalis living in North America, Europe or Australia commonly come to visit or invest, often bringing with them different notions about private property’s exclusivity and the relevance of legal title (see Lindley 2010). Whereas previously many had sent remittances and only been (perhaps intermittently) accessible via electronic communication, face-to-face relations bring new tangibility to transnational relationships. At the same time, for Ethiopian nationals, migration abroad is much harder than it used to be. To compound this fact, new regional government policies (part of new strategies related to Ethiopian federal governance) focused on regulating mobility and trade across the nearby Somaliland border, constraining opportunity for “locals.” The spatial extent and meaning or content of kinship and ethnic relations—and their potential to translate into market opportunities and patterns of redistribution and family mobility—were changing. Our analysis here focuses mainly on the changing opportunities for ethnic Somalis, but the shifts also affected other ethnic groups in Jigjiga.

Relational Networks and Imagined Worlds

The task of our analysis was understanding how the relational fields created by new forms of federal governance and the post-2010 influx of return migration and diaspora investment intersected to shape opportunity in Jigjiga. Clearly, federal governance strategies targeted to attracting diaspora investment were creating new transnational dynamics; but how did Jigjigans’ positionality and conceptualization of kinship, religion, ethnicity, and nationality shape their understandings of Jigjiga’s relationships with the “outside world”? To answer such questions, we began our ethnographic interviews among businesspeople with two surveys. One elicited businesspeople’s social and business contacts within and outside Ethiopia, intended

to elucidate the geography of their relational connections. Another elicited businesspeople's place-preferences for living and doing business in the world, intended to bring into view their conceptual geographies of opportunity. We focused on mid- and upper-level businesspeople—both diaspora Somalis (*qurba-joogs*) and “nationals” (*wadani*)—who were likely to have some foreign connections and might be seen as gatekeepers, in a sense, of Jigjiga's connections.

Informants were classified as diaspora or national businesspeople based on their legal nationality, though people generally recognized that the wide variety of diaspora nationalities did not all grant equal mobility or “good” international connections. Due to turbulent relations between diaspora political activists and Somali Region's government in 2017–2018, people were often reluctant to name and discuss their international social networks. Results from explicit social network and place-preference questionnaires presented here are tentative due to the small sample size (21 of 55 businesspeople interviewed completed social network questionnaires), but are suggestive and substantiated by observation and other data sources such as SRS government data on diaspora returnees' places of residence.

Social Fields of Jigjigans

According to both diaspora and nationals' accounts, new manifestations of federalism since 2010 increased Jigjiga's centrality as a hub of “return migration” for a far-flung Somali diaspora. As a key part of regional state-building strategies, SRS president 'Abdi Moḥamoud 'Umar and his advisors had regularly traveled abroad since 2010 to invite Ethiopian-origin diaspora Somalis to invest and build up the country. Numerous diaspora returnees reported a positive response to this outreach: “What really changed [my mind] is the president of this region, who came over there and enlightened us that things are different,” reported Faisal,² a middle-aged Ohioan, of 'Abdi's outreach visit to Minneapolis around 2010. In Faisal's words, the president told diaspora Somalis “We Somalis took things—our administration—on our own hands. It's here, and it's our land. It needs you... this is your country.”³ Faisal and other Somali citizens of countries abroad sold businesses and pooled assets gathered during decades spent abroad to invest in SRS. Across Jigjiga, new businesses signaled global North connections: Toronto Restaurant, London Café, Oslo Pharmacy. Diaspora investors and visitors were not all originally from Jigjiga. Many, like Faisal, had never even visited Jigjiga more than once or twice before deciding to pour their savings into urban investments in the city.

Ethiopian nationals in Jigjiga frequently reported that post-2010 diaspora return changed their understandings of the world. Through social media, new face-to-face contacts with diaspora relatives, and observations of returnees' lifestyles, they now knew more about life abroad, and spoke with some familiarity of social and racial relations in places like Minneapolis and

Stockholm. At the same time, we consistently heard observations among nationals that relatively few among the massive Ethiopian-origin Somali population who had fled abroad as refugees during the 1970s–1990s were making meaningful connections to Jigjiga. “This issue of diaspora is not as it was supposed to be,” argued Shafi, a well-connected national businessman. “In other parts of Ethiopia, we see the diaspora coming back, investing, coming up with new ideas; bringing manufacturing—you know, factories; constructing hotels and everything.”⁴ “Many of them are coming here, observing what’s going on,” Shafi continued. “[But only] some of them are doing something.” In the views of many, Ethiopian federalism seemed to be creating a new “world” of relationships by differentiating Ethiopian-Somalis from the broader Somali diaspora and reorienting circuits of Somali transnational capital and mobility toward SRS. Jigjiga was evidently increasingly important in this world, but its nascent place was precarious and incomplete.

We sought to discern some of the characteristics of this emerging world and its possibilities by bringing into view some of the demography of the Ethiopian-Somali diaspora and the materialization of this diasporic relationship in specific social and business connections to Jigjiga. Ethiopian-origin Somalis in diaspora are rarely mentioned, let alone discussed in depth, in the large Somali diaspora literature (Somalis from Somalia/Somaliland, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti living abroad are often glossed together simply as Somalis). Yet exploratory census and survey data analysis suggests that 20% or more of Somalis in North America trace their ancestry (nationality by birth, among first-generation immigrants) to Ethiopia or Kenya rather than Somalia (Thompson 2017b, 13–14). Comparing North American census data with 2015 data on returnees from the SRS Diaspora Bureau suggested a tentative list of cities likely to be connected to Jigjiga (and SRS more generally) through social connections, remittance flows, and return migration. At the top of the list in North America were Minneapolis, Seattle, San Diego, Columbus, Edmonton, Ottawa, and the D.C. Metro area. We met returnees from all these sites during fieldwork in Jigjiga.

To assess the spatial extent and density of connections between Jigjigans and the sites of Ethiopian-Somali diaspora, we asked businesspeople we interviewed to list their five most important social contacts and business contacts within Ethiopia and outside Ethiopia, generating a list of up to 20 contacts. (The framing of this question introduces a scalar assumption. Future research might compare such geographically specified network elicitation with network elicitation that do not specify geographic parameters.) We then visualized Jigjiga at the center of social and business relations connecting the city to countries abroad (Figure 11.2) and to specific cities abroad (Figure 11.3) (where these were named; many interviewees did not name specific cities). What emerges is a view of Jigjigan society connected largely by kinship-oriented relationships to an array of cities, mainly in refugee-receiving countries of the global North, but also in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere in Africa.

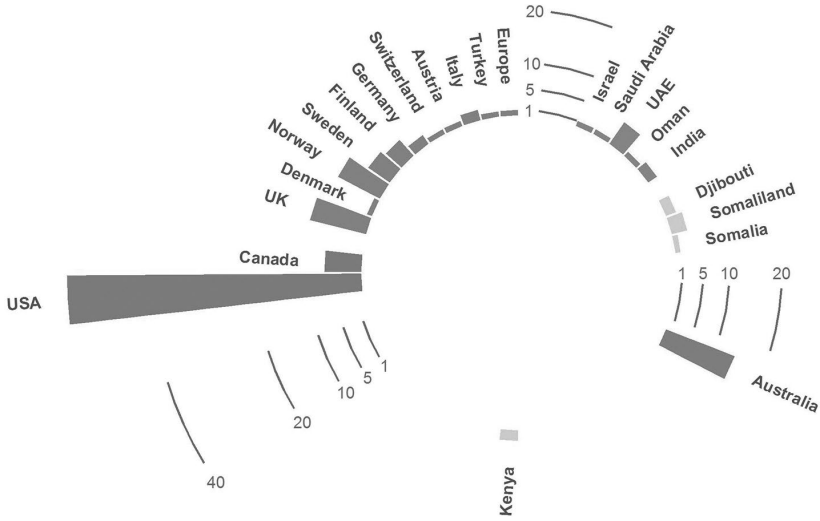


Figure 11.2 Total Number of International Social and Business Contacts Listed by Informants in Jigjiga (n=21) by contacts' Named Country of Residence.

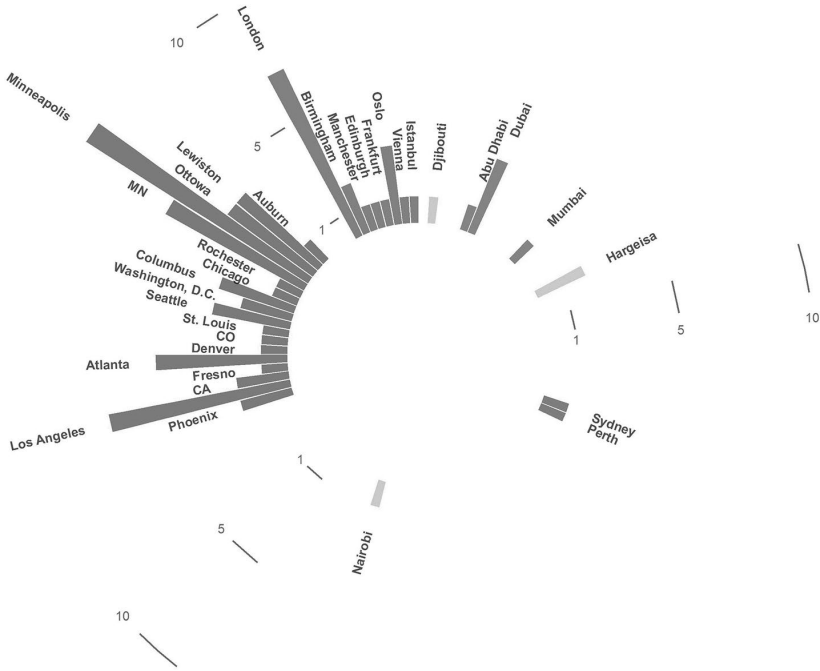


Figure 11.3 Total Number of International Social and Business Contacts Listed by Informants in Jigjiga (n=21) by Contacts' Named City or State of Residence.

The image of these spatially extensive connections remains incomplete without a consideration of the scope or purview of these relationships. Jigjiga’s globalization does not (yet) involve foreign corporate investment; connections are mainly what analysts describe as “informal” or “low-end” globalization (Mathews 2017; Zack 2015). Characteristically, people’s “social” and “business” fields overlapped significantly—many businesspeople cooperated in their enterprise with at least one or two relatives or friends. Nevertheless, the distinction between the two field was salient to our informants: although social contacts were sometimes called upon to send money in time of need, people differentiated social interests (kinship, mutual encouragement, conversation) from business connections (sometimes joint investment, but also temporary transactions and brokering). Transnational relationships did not directly translate into economic opportunity, nor did people always expect them to. “Outside of Ethiopia? I don’t have closer family, but people I know—there are friends, and also family,” Yakob, a national businessman, explained. Yakob expects no business support from anyone beyond Ethiopia, but friendship and information exchange with his contacts in Denver and Vienna are their own benefits: “Yeah, we always talk to each other.”⁵ We observed in the social network elicitation that diaspora and national businesspeople named similar number of social contacts abroad, mainly in North America and Europe, but their business networks looked very different.

Diaspora investors often named relatively few Ethiopian nationals as business contacts, and most of these were concentrated in SRS. National businesspeople named fewer international business contacts, but many had larger networks in Ethiopia, especially links to Addis Ababa.

Viewed through the lens of personal social relationships, Jigjiga is intimately connected through kinship links, remittance flows, and—increasingly since 2010—investment involving Somalis living in cities of the global North. Yet the viewpoints of diaspora returnees and nationals foreground loosely distinct spatial hierarchies within which Jigjiga is embedded. For Ethiopian nationals, diaspora links are important socially and sometimes economically, but their livelihood strategies tend to be more oriented toward creating trade relations within Ethiopia and across the Ethiopia-Somaliland border. Having lived in the region while diaspora Somalis were abroad, and for the most part speaking fluent Amharic (and often some Oromo as well), they work to position Jigjiga as an Ethiopian city and often compare opportunities there to business prospects in Hargeisa (Somaliland), or in Addis Ababa or Dire Dawa. Somali diaspora returnees tend to envision Jigjiga less in relation to Ethiopia and more in terms of its relationship to other sites of heavy Somali presence, from Minneapolis to Mogadishu. “I’d say 80 percent of the people [i.e. diasporas] investing in Ethiopia right now had some sort of investment in Kenya beforehand,” suggests Warsame, a diaspora investor from Australia. Like many Somali diaspora investors, he speaks little Amharic, has virtually no direct contact

with businesspeople elsewhere in Ethiopia, and rarely travels beyond Somali Region unless it is to go to Kenya or Australia. By both encouraging local business investment and drawing diaspora investors to Jigjiga, post-2010 strategies of governance in SRS simultaneously rendered Jigjiga a more central node in eastern Ethiopian trade and political relations and linked it contingently (and far from centrally) to diaspora financial and migration circuits.

Conceptual Worlds of Opportunity

How did social and business networks relate to the conceptual worlds Jigjigans inhabited? In order to discern broader understandings of the world and Jigjiga’s place in it, we also conducted a separate listing activity as part of interviews: a rank-list of where in the world people would like to live, if they could live anywhere they liked, and where they would like to do business, if they could do business anywhere they liked. The results position the Horn of Africa at the intersection of overlapping “life” and “business” worlds of different scopes and containing distinct opportunities. The map of living preferences is dominated by the global North, colored yellow

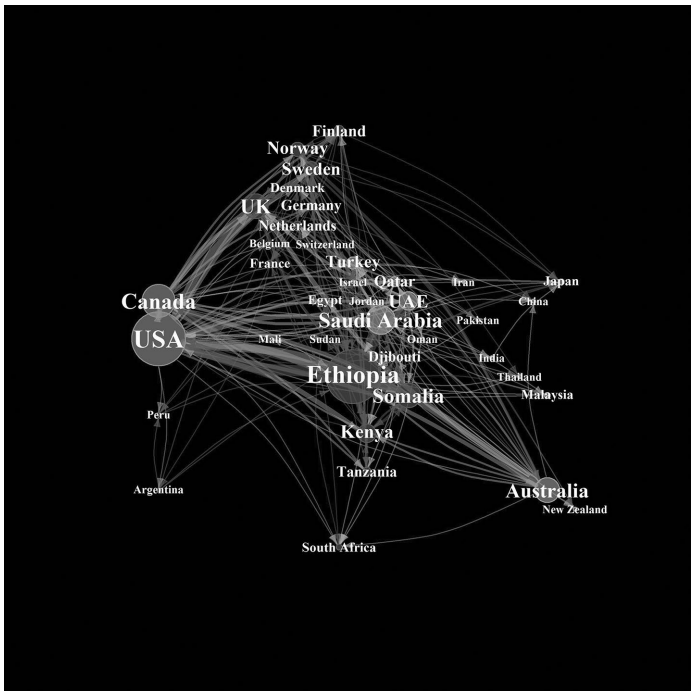


Figure 11.4 Network Visualization of (a) Living and (b) Business Place-Preferences among Mid-level Business People in Jigjiga.

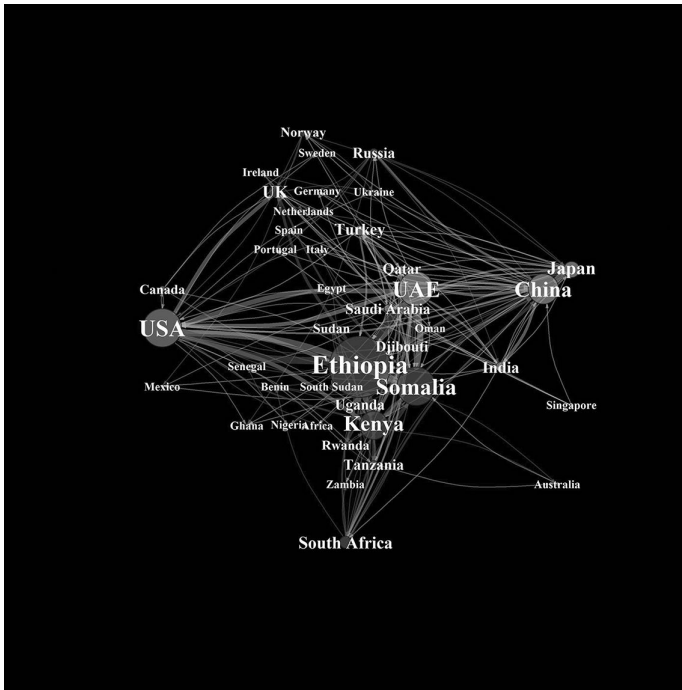


Figure 11.4 (Continued).

Note: Node size represents the number of times the country was mentioned in 39 surveys. Each network edge represents investors' expressed preference for the country at the edge origin over the country at the edge destination, with the edge colored by the country at which it originates and thicker nodes denoting a higher number of expressed preferences. The predominance of yellow edges in living place-preferences reflects businesspeople's expressed preference for living in the global North. The predominance of blue and red edges in business place-preferences reflects businesspeople's preferences for doing business in Asia and Africa over the global North (except for the USA).

in Figure 11.4a and corresponding strongly with people's social contacts. Other conceptual geographies less correlated to social networks also come to the fore. Several interviewees named the holy city Makkah as a preferred living location. The world of economic opportunity that emerged from the second rank-list looks quite different from either imaginaries of “good-life” locations or people's existing social networks. Countries of the global North other than the USA shrank into the background as African and Asian locations rose to prominence in Jigjigans' ranked imaginaries of business opportunity (Figure 11.4b).

Two factors came to the fore in explaining people's perceptions of business opportunity in these areas. First, locales such as the UAE, China, India, and African countries were reachable for Ethiopian nationals: some had been there to purchase goods and bring them to Ethiopia.

However, people rarely named personal contacts in India or China. Instead, traders could identify Somali brokers from whom they might purchase supplies via WhatsApp or who could connect them with factory owners. For example, a diaspora investor with a European passport had traveled to China and used Somali brokers and WhatsApp to connect with shoe factory owners. His business profit came from the controlled markets in Ethiopia, where his political connections had yielded an exclusive import-export license. The absence of “social” connections in Asia reflected an understanding that most Asian countries were not places to belong, but rather locales of transactionality in which most of the resulting business opportunity was created through connections back “home” in Africa (see Mathews 2017). Second, the relative accessibility of these locales is paralleled by the prevalence of Asian-manufactured consumer goods such as textiles and electronics in supplying Jigjiga’s markets. As with elsewhere in Africa, relatively cheap Asian-manufactured goods enable Jigjiga’s urbanites to afford conveniences that would be far too costly if purchased from other manufacturing locales.

People’s understandings of global economic geography differentiated business opportunities into three categories that reflected (and perhaps reinforced) Jigjiga’s economic positionality. Several interviewees explained that business opportunity should be differentiated into “work,” “business,” and “investment”—each of which evoked a different global landscape. People expressed a preference to *work* in the global North in order to save some money, because wages there are perceived to be good. Once money is saved, there are opportunities for establishing *business* links to India, China, or Thailand through Somali brokers. Finally, people commonly expressed a desire to *invest* in Ethiopia in more material ways. In part this points to historically sedimented and racialized domains of mobility that Somalis inhabit. In Shafi’s words, “I’m an African man. So I would never say I’ll invest in Europe or America, because I don’t have that capital.”⁶ The perceived paucity of business opportunity in the global North reflected Jigjigans’ growing perception that Somalis were by and large at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder there. We discerned a corresponding feeling that many (though not all) diaspora returnees were “losers” who were unsuccessful abroad and merely posed as investors to get benefits and good treatment in Ethiopia, or to utilize their foreign passports to get government contracts. At the same time, the mobility afforded by non-African passports created opportunities to do business in Asia and import goods to Africa, which might yield profits that could eventually be invested in Africa.

These observations return the focus to people’s relative power to control the extent and scope of connections and resulting circulations that generate opportunity. Asian goods constitute one form of material circulation that mediates people’s understandings of the world and Jigjiga’s place in it. Goods in Jigjiga largely come from those business places with which Jigjigans have little direct or enduring contact. But a significant portion

of the capital with which such goods are purchased come from the social connections in Europe, North America, and Australia. In this transnational economy, diaspora Somalis held advantages over nationals in their relative capacity to obtain visas for travel to Asia and source goods for import to Ethiopia. Ethiopian nationals, however, tended to have more extensive networks in Ethiopia and were frequently connected to types of trade and relationships that diaspora Somalis had less access to (partly due to diaspora Somalis' relative dearth of connection to non-Somali Ethiopians). In this context, the SRS administration worked to implement new modes of economic governance that would create avenues for exercising power especially over Asian trade connections and diaspora investments in Jigjiga. This transformed the borderlands urban political economy's spatial dynamics.

Territory, Circulations, and the Production of Spatial Hierarchies

As intensifying diaspora engagement and investments changed the extent and scope of Jigjigans' connections, discussions of opportunity and power almost always pointed to the management of Jigjiga's trade connections across territorial borders around the city. This is where people's aspirational efforts to construct transnational relations involving business, kinship, and political engagement in Jigjiga were regulated and territorialized as officials granted certain people and things access. Borders, we suggest, were key sites at which people struggled to materialize intangible relationships and rights to mobility into trade goods and money that would enable their livelihoods in Jigjiga. Thus they were key sites at which people worked to construct Jigjiga's hierarchical position—in terms of its politicians' and businesspeople's relative power—within overlapping worlds. The management of so-called contraband trade that supplied the market and the management of diaspora connections emerged as two of the most important elements of economic power that were shaping people's opportunities. We will comment briefly on each of these and suggest how they constitute space: they shape what Brenner (2011, 33) conceptualizes as “mosaics” of superimposed spatial hierarchies.

Most of the manufactured goods sold in Jigjiga's retail markets are made in Asia, but despite increasing direct connections of Jigjiga's import-export business to Asian factories, a majority of goods appear to come through indirect channels—most prominently, “contraband” smuggling from Somaliland. In order to understand the geography of the city's supply, we conducted a survey of over 250 urban businesses, which included questions about origin locations of goods as well as where operators physically sourced their goods. Of 661 materials for which shopkeepers reported origins, well over 200 originated in eastern and southern Asia: 105 in China, 85 in India, 24 in Japan, 22 in Thailand. Of 70 respondents who reported

the physical location at which they obtained their supply, a plurality (29, or 41%) reported trading with Tog Wajale, on the Somaliland border 45 minutes east of Jigjiga by road. According to our survey and observation, a significant proportion—probably the vast majority—of consumer goods in Jigjiga’s market come through small-scale “contraband” trade into the city. “Almost all of my supply is contraband,” admits a diaspora returnee from the UK who owns a supermarket in central Jigjiga.⁷ He doesn’t risk bringing it himself, but relies mainly on women who ply the bus route between Jigjiga and Tog Wajale daily.

Methodologically, understanding practically how trade flow connect Jigjiga to the “outside” world meant moving beyond Jigjiga as a spatial object and research site with *a priori* boundaries. Jigjiga’s market is supplied by circulations that are differentiated through the management of territorial borders surrounding the city. Our participant-observation and interviews with import-exporters pointed to cross-border trade with Somaliland as the most potent site of making and unmaking opportunities for businesspeople’s self-realization and wealth creation in Jigjiga, which hinges largely on mobility to, from, and across the border. By following self-styled “contraband” traders moving between the border and Jigjiga, we can compare the ways in which territorial enforcement establishes opportunities and power formations in the realm of contraband trade to the ways in which it creates conditions for diaspora investment in the region, two intersecting spatialized circuits of power.

Control Over Border Trade

The half of Tog Wajale that lies in Somaliland is a vibrant free market, and while the border is demarcated, Ethiopians can freely cross into Somaliland without passport or visa to purchase materials tax-free. Thousands of small-scale traders ply the route from Jigjiga to Tog Wajale by bus and minibus daily. We regularly rode these buses and discussed trade, mobility, and opportunity with self-styled “contraband” traders. Most of these contrabandists—we estimated 70% based on several bus passenger tallies—were women who daily rode to Tog Wajale and returned to Jigjiga carrying a few small bags of goods (small amounts of untaxed goods were tolerated at Ethiopian checkpoints).

The prevalence of women in today’s contraband trade points to struggles between the SRS government and national businesspeople to control the making of opportunity in Jigjiga and the surrounding border area. The government has been partially successful in clamping down on men’s mobility, sometimes arresting male contraband traders either for smuggling or for accusations of affiliation with Somalian “terrorist” organizations. However, the administration has more difficulty clamping down on women’s trade without provoking a severe backlash for targeting and marginalizing women (to arrest a woman is widely understood as less culturally

appropriate as well as a more direct threat to the well-being of her family). Women had long played a prominent role in Ethiopia-Somalia trade, as attested to by female traders describing the pre-1991 period. “Ethiopia alone had farms... and there, just past Harorays [east of Jigjiga], Somalian people didn’t used to pass there,” says Hodon, a 50-year-old woman who used to ply the border trade. “Those from here—Ethiopia—went [across the border to Somalia], if they were Somali. They were connected [to Somalia].” Hodon described how she used to collect butter and agricultural products, load them on camels, and go to the Somaliland border. There she would exchange *chat*, tomatoes, potatoes, and other produce for “artificial” goods that “women brought from Mogadishu.”⁸ Her trade was enabled by her Somali ethnicity and Ethiopian territorial identity. Jigjigan traders’ mobility and capacity to mediate between the Somali coast and highland Ethiopia historically gave them significant control over regional economic circuits and enabled them to keep these flows beyond the realm of state intervention.

In Hodon’s case, it was personal circumstances rather than intensified government controls that halted her trade. Yet the perception of other women regarding today’s intensified border protections is revealing: some are “scared” to go through checkpoints, to be harassed by Ethiopian customs officials and regional police.⁹ The full dynamics of transformation in this regard are beyond the scope of this chapter. Suffice it to say that a suite of government strategies brought border trade under heightened surveillance and by 2016 successfully channeled much of the larger-scale contraband trade (i.e. more than what a single person could carry) through Ethiopian customs offices. Growing demand for consumer goods and the unwillingness of border agents to stop small-scale contraband (small-scale untaxed trade is legal for communities near the border, but this does not prevent border agents from arbitrarily stopping traders) meant that Ethiopian nationals—predominantly Jigjigan women—continued to dominate small-scale contraband. Informal credit plays a key role in connecting Jigjiga and Tog Wajale:

if you have a store or other business in Jigjiga and you build trust with traders in Wajale, they can give you as much [of a] commodity as you want on loan, and once you sell it in Jigjiga you pay them back,

says Amina, a woman who runs a small retail business in Jigjiga’s central business district.¹⁰

Contraband-trading women frequently complained about the reduction of opportunities associated with tightened border enforcement after 2015. In popular understanding, the reduction in mobility and heightened government control over cross-border flows reduced profits among most traders while enabling government-connected elites to make immense fortunes. This was part of a broader extension of regional government control into trade and social networks linking Jigjiga to sites abroad.

Rescaling the Urban-Regional Economy and Government Power

Heightened restrictions on border trade enabled the SRS administration to grant a limited number of exclusive trade licenses to government-connected elites and diaspora returnees. This border regulation is one reason why Ethiopia rose to the fore in some diaspora Somalis' understandings of the global business landscape: the opportunity for contracts and trade licenses gave diaspora Somalis the potential opportunity to make quick profits, even as the mobility of Ethiopian nationals was increasingly restricted (this appears as part of a broader shift amidst the War on Terror toward border securitization and restricting the mobility of Africans). "I've made a ton of money... Everything you bring, you can sell," reports a diaspora returnee who managed to obtain a lucrative import-export license, and who also had connections with factories in India and China.¹¹ Others who managed to obtain such licenses or broker relations with wealthy Ethiopians echoed the sentiment.

The new relationship between diaspora investors and SRS officials was one factor attracting diaspora investment to Jigjiga and thus respatializing the urban economy by intensifying diaspora links—and, largely via diaspora businesspeople, trade links with east Asia. However, the urban-borderlands economy became the crux of another dynamic of respatialization: the extension of regional government power beyond Ethiopia's territorial borders into diasporic networks. As noted above, diaspora Somalis were famous in Ethiopia for supporting rebel groups including the ONLF. It is no coincidence, we suggest, that diaspora-backed rebel groups seemed to dissipate just as diaspora investors flocked into Somali Region in the immediate wake of violent insurgency. Alongside new enactments of territorial borders, the SRS administration exercised power through diaspora networks not only to attract diaspora investment, but also to pressure diaspora investors. One current investor reported that he attended an SRS outreach meeting in Dubai because his relatives in Ethiopia were threatened with imprisonment if he did not attend. Human Rights Watch has documented how the arrest and imprisonment of relatives in Ethiopia has been used to discipline diaspora Somalis' political protests against Regional President 'Abdi Moḥamoud's authoritarian regime (Human Rights Watch 2016). What we observed firsthand is that once diaspora investors put money into urban investments in Jigjiga, these investments were frequently used as leverage to discipline their political views and enforce their loyalty to the SRS administration even when the owners were physically abroad. In 2017, a diaspora-owned hotel was confiscated by the regional administration, which also reportedly threatened to shut down other diaspora businesses when their owners expressed political dissent. This capacity of the regional government to directly discipline diaspora Somalis beyond Ethiopia's territorial borders constitutes a dramatic extension of the regional government's exercise of authority.

New enactments of spatial governance around Jigjiga simultaneously reshaped the urban economy and diaspora investors' relationship with SRS.

In addition to strict licensing control of Somaliland border trade, district markets in Ethiopia were demarcated and assigned exclusive trade licenses that effectively gave the licensees a monopoly on importing certain goods to specific regional cities. By 2017, buildings in Jigjiga were being constructed by numerous businesspeople (including several prominent businesswomen) whose profits came from these lucrative licenses to distribute goods such as foodstuffs in specific regional zones. Rumors abounded that the regional government pushed wealthy traders and investors to build houses and buildings in Jigjiga as a means of keeping tabs on these potentially threatening elites. The urban built environment became, in local perceptions, a crucial site for regional officials' efforts to exercise deterritorialized modes of governance.

From one standpoint, then, the flow of diaspora capital into Jigjiga subordinates Jigjiga's markets to foreign Somalis' interests and enables diaspora investors' self-realization rather than that of nationals whose mobility and capacity to carry out border trade has been increasingly restricted. When these shifting social and business relations are viewed in the context of federalism and new territorializations of rule, however, it appears that struggles and temporary collaborations among SRS officials, diaspora investors, and national businesspeople have expanded the spatial extent and diversified the scope of Jigjiga's political and economic relationships, but in ways that render power relations contingent and multi-directional. Here, to some extent, as connections to the global North and East intensify, Jigjigan government elites have found (sometimes violent) ways to respatialize the exercise of their authority under Ethiopian federalism, using the concentration of bodies and property in the city to project force well beyond their territorial control.

By late 2018, such efforts to “govern” the diaspora backfired. Amidst a dramatic shakeup of Ethiopia's politics, diaspora investors who had been dispossessed of their property or whose relatives had been jailed by the SRS regime protested against the administration. President 'Abdi was arrested in August 2018. Somalis in Jigjiga and in diaspora called for the depoliticization of trade licensing and the reopening of border trade for small-scale traders. It appears that diaspora investment in the region, and the new face-to-face relationships with family members and friends that attend it, have created new, contingent convergence of interests among national and diaspora urban businesspeople and property holders in developing Jigjiga's markets. At the same time, the increasing presence of diaspora investors appears, according to our observations, to be creating new patterns of economic segregation within Jigjiga. This aspect of urban respatialization deserves exploration elsewhere.

Toward a Dialectical Ethnography of Scale

The analysis above presents an abbreviated view of research shifting dialectically between conceptual worlds and their material realization, and between enumerating the extent of specified social and trade relations and

ethnographically assessing the scope of such relations, and everyday experiences of how such relations translate (or not) into opportunity and power for various stakeholders. Combining these methods enabled us to direct ethnographic inquiry more meaningfully toward people's self-positionings and attempts at self-realization in a broadly shared conceptual and relational geography as these articulated in an eastern Ethiopian city. A fuller explication of scalar reconfigurations in Jigjiga might continue by connecting these dynamics of worlding, trade, and border regulation to the emerging geography of wealth and (im)mobility in Jigjiga's built environment. What we have attempted to demonstrate here is that the concentration of social relations, wealth, and political functions in Jigjiga (constitutive of Jigjiga's urbanism) form part (though not necessarily "the center") of a complex and circumscribed world in which multiple overlapping and cross-cutting domains of power intersect. Markets, governance, religion, and cultural-kinship relations are contingently connected through people's "ensemble work" (Simone 2019), though some domains are more systemically ingrained and historically embedded than others. Jigjiga's "worlds" have global-systemic elements, but centrality and peripherality in the complex webs of power articulating in the city are contingent and depend partly on perspective and on people's capacity to produce values in diverse ways (cf. Simone 2004, 3).

While there remains much more work to do on various dimensions of Jigjiga's urbanism within this broad conceptualization of some forces shaping city-dwellers' positionality, we see such an approach as offering three contributions to theory and methodology in urban anthropology and urban studies more generally.

First, critiques of "contextualist" approaches to cities that focus on "thick description" while "analytically black-boxing" geopolitical and geoeconomic dimensions of urbanization (Brenner 2013, 92) can be addressed to some extent through mixed-methods approaches to urban ethnography. Strategically combining surveys tracing the extent of relationships with participant-observation and ethnographic interviews reveals how geopolitical influences structure kinship and trade relationships as they impinge on eastern African urban economies. The hyper-securitization of regional borders and its impact on people's capacity to realize aspirations would be poorly understood without carefully documented participant-observation of border trade and mobility. We have suggested that geopolitical borders moderate the specific impacts of global regional divisions as they shape African cities: the border is a site especially where relationships between Jigjiga and sites of Asian manufacturing are made and unmade. This observation invites comparative analysis of how geopolitical borders and mobilities across them specifically shape other borderlands African cities.

Second, we began this study in Jigjiga, but explicitly sought not to draw a-priori boundaries around the city as our research object. Instead, we considered how people utilize space to make connections to "elsewhere" and to carry out their everyday activities of trade and social reproduction within

but also beyond the city’s concentrated built environment. In this respect, observation, interviews, and survey research all pointed to the importance of Tog Wajale as a gateway to Jigjiga that played a major role in shaping trade flows and opportunities in the city. Borders and checkpoints along the route are not “context” for Jigjiga’s connections, but sites intimately related to Jigjiga’s urban market and livelihoods.

Third, in moving beyond “the city” or “the urban” as an object of analysis and examining broader fields of connection, we have oriented our discussion around observations of “local” understandings of Jigjiga’s spatial situatedness in Somali Region, Ethiopia, and a conceptual world of opportunity beyond the Horn of Africa. It is partly from these “local” understandings that the importance of scalar concepts reemerges. People understood themselves to be living within worlds that were changing in extent and relational scope, with results for opportunities and new forms of power exercised within and beyond territorial domains to which they had access in everyday life. And people were working to construct these domains, to weld these facets of “scale” together in ways that would position them to make their own space for self-realization. Though many do want a degree of access to mobility and resources currently contained by national (and subnational) borders, they do not necessarily want unmitigated access to the world if it means “the world” also has access to “their” space. SRS officials’ efforts to regulate licensing reveal people’s efforts not only to construct connections, but to limit and obstruct certain forms of connection in order to exercise power beyond Ethiopia’s territorial borders. The resultant influx of diaspora return and investment, along with people’s ongoing efforts to construct meaningful political engagement in Ethiopia’s federal system, has initiated what may be seen as ongoing popular politics of scale-making as people work to concatenate social and geographical proximities in novel ways.

Acknowledgment

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Notes

- 1 The tension between these two treatments of globalized Somalis has a history: Britons “exploring” the early-20th-century Horn of Africa expressed surprise at Somalis’ long-distance connections and mobility. Many depicted global mobility and networks as both anomalous to the “nature” of supposedly backwards Africans and as typical of nomadic Somalis, who were said to travel widely but inevitably return to the Horn (e.g. Jardine 1923, 22–23).
- 2 All names in text are pseudonyms.
- 3 Interview, 11/17/2017.

- 4 Interview, 12/4/2017
- 5 Interview, 12/3/2017.
- 6 Interview, 5/31/2018.
- 7 Field notes, 10/16/2019.
- 8 Interview, 6/25/2018.
- 9 Interview notes, 6/30/2018.
- 10 Field notes, 11/15/2019.
- 11 Interview, 4/6/2018.

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Part IV

**Urban Infrastructure and
Mobility**



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12 The Infrastructure of Submarine Urbanism

Zanzibar in a Black and Blue World

Garth Myers

Introduction

In June 2016, I was standing with a dozen or so US-based college students and a few colleagues on a street-corner in Xiaobei, the Guangzhou district sometimes called ‘Chocolate City’ because of the significant presence of African traders in its wholesale shops and alleys (Castillo 2014). With my colleague, Xiangming Chen, I was conversing with a Nigerian businessman who told us he had come to Guangzhou to source molds for making plastic bottles for a water-bottling factory he sought to start in Lagos. We asked him what impressions he had of Guangzhou, of China, and of Chinese investors and goods in Africa. He thought for a few seconds, and then said, ‘there is good China and bad China. Many African countries get bad China and the west gets good China’. Whether good or bad, though, he concluded, the reality is that ‘the whole world is made in China’.

This chapter begins from the premise of this ‘made’ world, and more specifically the urban world produced by the networks and interconnections in China’s ‘go west/go global’ strategy and ‘Belt and Road’ initiative (Chen 2018) in urban Africa, with a case study of Zanzibar, Tanzania. I concentrate foremost on infrastructure. Airports, seaports, railroads, highways, oil and gas pipelines, drainage networks, mining facilities, agri-business farm-factories, new cities, neighborhoods or housing developments, manufacturing factories, stadiums, and other infrastructure projects of Chinese origin comprise the overwhelming majority of investments from China in Africa. These Chinese infrastructure investments are increasingly significant in the global South and even in the global North (Huang 2018). What the Nigerian water-bottling manufacturer told us in Xiaobei in 2016 is not as much of an exaggeration as one might think – if not the *whole* world, a large proportion of the 21st-century urban world is *made* in China, or originating from China, or controlled by China. Yet analyses that take these flows and networks as abstractions also miss the human dynamics that are essential to the making of this new urban world. Southern urban theory has turned attention to what Simone (2007) terms people-as-infrastructure. Books and articles about infrastructure in Africa and the global South for a

decade or more now literally have argued for seeing infrastructure as vital, lively, or alive, including human and nonhuman agency (Simone 2019). Infrastructure clearly means more than a first glance might suggest.

Here, I use the example of Chinese urban infrastructure projects in Zanzibar to assess both the physical and metaphysical – visible and invisible – impacts in the contemporary era. I take inspiration in my title and thesis from the Martinican writer, Edouard Glissant (1989: 67), who argued for the ‘submarine roots’ of connectivity across the black world and the global South (see also Dash 1995: 147). Glissant (1989: 67) was speaking to the historical ties through the slave trade and colonialism – hence my reference to ‘black and blue’, to symbolize the bruised histories connected through submarine roots; but his conceptualization of the transversal linkages ‘extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches’ opens possibilities for rethinking those linkages as infrastructural. Infrastructure at the simplest level still concerns the ‘development of different types of technical and organizational networks’ (Gandy 2014: 2). In urban areas, infrastructure is thus immediately understood to relate to networks for public transportation, railroads, roads, water, sewage, or electricity, the technologies that provide the ‘fabric’ or spatial logic of urbanism. Beyond this, though, global South and Africanist urban scholarship on infrastructure in anthropology, geography, and other fields is confronted with the reality of many infrastructural failures alongside the invisible infrastructures. This latter phrase connects not simply to the modern global North urban ideal of infrastructure networks that are underground or underwater (i.e. literally submarine, such as Zanzibar’s undersea electricity supply cables that come from the African mainland) but also to those organizational networks one may not see – as in social or political infrastructure that one must train one’s eyes to see, in a metaphorical sense, in a city (Simone 2015, 2019). I argue that the Zanzibar case highlights both the tangible (and potentially positive) impacts of contemporary Chinese infrastructure investments and hidden dynamics that often seem to replay colonial narratives of urban infrastructure in Africa.

Intersections of Infrastructure, Colonialism, and Urbanization

When global North economists and economic geographers look at the processes of globalization and their impacts on urbanization and urbanism, the majority of scholars argue in one shape or form for a networked global urban hierarchy of interconnected urban areas (Sassen 1991; Castells 1996). For example, the Globalization-and-World-Cities approach has developed a broad and rich understanding of the interconnections between urban areas fostered by globalization (Derudder et al. 2012; Taylor 2012). Many other scholars have sought to come to grips with what Glissant (2010) might have called the infrastructure of ‘Relation’ between the world of cities (Angel 2012; Spencer 2015). These works certainly explain aspects of what ties

cities together, but they remain approaches built from global North conceptualizations. When we look at the world of cities from below – from Glissant’s (1989) notion of submarine and subterranean interconnections – it forces us to look at infrastructure differently. This is both literal (in examining flows and links that are South-South, such as China-to-Africa, and/or outside of the economic fixations of global North research, such as drainage ditches, museums or stadiums) and figurative (in thinking beyond scientific abstractions).

Although analysis of urban infrastructures has been a mainstay of urban studies from the field’s beginnings as well as of the more recent research on urban globalization, arguably the revitalization of critical approaches to infrastructure in the 21st century owes a significant debt to Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin’s (2001) *Splintering urbanism*. Their empirical case studies were richly global and tied to their innovative central argument about fragmentation.

Globalization’s increasingly networked urban society was simultaneously splintering; successful roll-outs of connections accompanied disconnections. In their words, ‘a parallel set of processes are under way within which infrastructure networks are being “unbundled” in ways that help sustain the fragmentation of the social and material fabric of cities’ (Graham and Marvin 2001: 33). They highlighted the means through which colonialism and neocolonialism warped the development of urban infrastructure for much of the world, weaving examples from Asia, Africa, and Latin America into the overall argument. Finally, they noted the relationality of urban place-making as a dynamic and multi-faceted process, in a manner which resonated with many scholars of the urban global South, and urban Africa particularly.

Still, Graham and Marvin’s work can be seen to have underplayed global South distinctions from the global North in terms of infrastructure ideals, while overplaying the ties between ‘unified, integrated infrastructure’ and a ‘cohesive social fabric’ (Pieterse and Hyman 2014; Fox and Goodfellow 2016: 159). Global South and Africa-focused scholarship on the life of urban infrastructure has brought us closer still to the literal and figurative map of what connects cities, internally and with one another, and without universalizing assumptions. Many important studies in this regard have centered on cities in India (McFarlane 2011; Chattopadhyay 2012; Anand 2017). One key commonality to this work is seeing infrastructures as ‘things and also the relation between things’ (Larkin 2013: 329). And in post-colonial cities in Sub-Saharan Africa, as in India, one must recognize that infrastructures were originally produced not to extend the *thing* called citizenship broadly, but ‘to discriminate between those who were deserving of membership in the colonial city and those for whom the promises of liberal citizenship were deferred or denied’ (Anand 2017: 14).

In such contexts of politicized distributions of infrastructures, for many ordinary urban residents the only options reside in everyday ‘relational

infrastructures’ or ‘infrastructures of relationality’ (Simone 2015: 18). In this mode, Simone (2015: 18) contends that relations are ‘the tools through which political imaginations and claims are exerted’. Confronted with disappointment and exclusion, urban residents in the global South work toward the ‘incremental accretion of capacity and possibility’ in ‘unscripted’ reformulations of infrastructure (Simone 2015: 28). Although Simone was writing about Jakarta in this particular piece, it is highly relevant to urban Africa. In much of Sub-Saharan Africa, though, colonialism’s urban investments in infrastructure barely compare to those in colonial cities like Jakarta or Mumbai.

Water, electricity, solid waste management, roads, subways, rails, public transport, health care, schools, airports, land registration, political organizations – it really doesn’t matter which way we think of infrastructure: where it was developed at all in colonial urban Africa, it served the interests of an incredibly small population of colonial administrators, white settlers, or elites.

Zanzibar is typical in this regard, as discussed below.

Infrastructure investments in the postcolonial cities of Africa thus became, in Rosalind Fredericks’s (2018: 14) words, ‘key sites of performative government practice as well as claim making by elite and disenfranchised citizens alike’ as contestation developed over how and where to expend infrastructures in the aftermath of colonialism. Her study of solid waste management in Dakar seeks to ‘recuperate a vital politics of material infrastructures’ by showing ‘how material geographies of trash matter to how government and citizenship are practiced’ (Fredericks 2018: 16). People engage with fragmenting infrastructural systems as a constantly changing ‘bricolage’ in a ‘landscape of disrepair and pollution’ to ‘salvage’ alternative infrastructures that are ‘vitaly alive with bodies, communities, materials, and ritual practices’ (Fredericks 2018: 18, 149) in Senegal’s lively albeit hotly contested democracy (see also Acey 2019; Degani 2018; Oteng-Ababio and Grant 2018).

The context of colonial disinvestment and inequality, with the ensuing ‘landscape of disrepair and pollution’ (Fredericks 2018: 18) and continuation of a regime of disinvestment in infrastructures after independence, produced African forms of the ‘splintered network infrastructures’ identified by Graham and Marvin (2001; see also Pieterse 2008). Even as many cities in the region are now being further integrated into global circuits of capital, already-unequal access and rights to the city’s physical and political infrastructure open into vast chasms of injustice and arenas for elite accumulation (Carolini 2018; Goodfellow 2017; Power and Kirshner 2018; Murphy and Carmody 2019). Although of course each urbanism in the region produces its own singularities, what seems to be emerging might be conceived of collectively as ‘heterogeneous infrastructure configurations’, as Lawhon et al. (2018: 729) find for Kampala, where the urban majority still confront ‘conditions of precarity’ despite massive investments in urban

infrastructure. Pieterse and Hyman (2014: 196) have documented the endurance of infrastructural deficits in Africa, in paved road density, mobile density, overall road density, internet density, fixed line density, improved water improved sanitation, or power generation capacity. Zanzibar again fits with these findings, as I show below.

China's rise on the continent marked an essential trend in this era of corporate takeovers of infrastructures, techno-managerial project-based infrastructure investment, the rise of a consumer perspective on infrastructure provision and the spatial decentralization of 'polynucleated urban regions' in Africa (Pieterse 2008: 24–30). Failures, splinters, and bricolage provide an opening for appreciating the substantive, material difference that Chinese urban infrastructure investments have attempted to make on the continent in the 21st century – even where that material difference is exacerbating colonial-era splintered urban infrastructures in new ways (Carolini 2018).

Chinese Infrastructure Investment and Urbanization in Africa

For urban Africans and scholars of urban Africa, unquestionably, the dominant theme of the 21st century on the continent is the swift rise of China's significance (Johnston 2018). A traveler notices this immediately because she or he may be arriving to a new, Chinese-built airport and then traveling to a hotel or other arrival destination by a Chinese-built light rail or on a new Chinese-built highway. Shopping trips or cultural events (a soccer match, a theater performance) bring further evidence, at Chinese-built shopping malls, stadiums, or concert halls. Chinese restaurants or Chinese food stores are becoming as commonplace in 21st-century urban Africa as they are in the urban US or Europe.

These first impressions can be misleading, though. While outward foreign direct investment flows from China into the African continent grew from just under a half billion in 2003 to more than 32 billion by 2014, only 6.2% of China's global FDI flows are to Africa (He and Zhu 2018: 110). An overwhelming majority of those flows are still toward a few sectors of a few countries' economies – oil, gas, mining, or natural resources. Almost 80% of China's imports from Africa were mineral products, while heavy machinery mainly for those industries made up 29% of China's exports to the continent as of 2010. As He and Zhu (2018: 109) point out, however, there is a growing 'complexity and diversity' to the rest of the investment, on both ends. There is a degree to which one cannot speak of a single 'Chinese' relationship with or impact on urban Africa, as these 'vary greatly across the continent' (Bräutigam and Xiaoyang 2011; Monson, Xiaoyang and Shaonan 2017: 150). In the paragraphs that follow, I therefore suggest some general themes for studies of Chinese impacts on African urban development while acknowledging the variation, complexity, and diversity.

Chen (2018: 36) calls attention to the scale and connectivity of ‘China’s infrastructure-led approach to globalization’: it is evident that China ‘stepped up to the front’ in globalization as nationalist and protectionist agendas led many global North powers to retreat from it. This is abundantly clear in China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), initiated in 2013. The BRI’s US\$1 trillion in development plans, centered around infrastructure for trade, will eventually involve 60 countries and 65% of the world’s population (Chen 2018: 44). The rest of Asia is clearly the largest priority region for China, while Sub-Saharan Africa lies in Zone 4, the marginal ‘western end’ of the map of BRI planning (Chen 2018). Nonetheless, even by 2014, seven African countries exported more than 25% of their exports to China, and 11 African countries received more than US\$100 million each in Foreign Direct Investment from China (Johnston 2018).

Given the depth and importance of China to so many countries now, Chinese investments in African urban development – infrastructure and housing, especially – are still somewhat understudied despite massive scholarly interest in China’s roles in African development generally (Monson, Xiaoyang and Shaonan 2017). China’s impacts and interactions at Africa’s urban scale are transforming its forms and fabrics. More than half of the US\$60 billion in loans from China to African countries in 2015 targeted infrastructure, most of it either urban or meant to connect different urban areas (Johnston 2018).

Within urban areas, too, Chinese investments are transformative. One major spatial consequence of the trend of demographic growth without corresponding economic growth that has been a prominent feature in Sub-Saharan Africa is that the substantial physical expansion of the urban footprint, typically on the peri-urban edges of cities, occurs in a manner devoid of substantial formal planning. This phenomenon of peri-urban informality connects with the China-Africa narrative in two ways. First, the increasing Chinese residency in cities in Africa is tangible in the built environment, housing markets, and urban culture, and the changes resonate outward to the peri-urban areas of the continent (Myers 2016). The speculative residential construction at the economic high end led by this Chinese investment drives up the price of urban real estate further beyond the reach of ordinary residents, driving more people to marginal informal settlements, where densifying construction then further displaces people (Myers 2015, 2016, 2020).

Chinese investment in seemingly more affordable housing in African cities, or in infrastructure projects with considerable training and employment payoffs locally, might make a substantial difference on the continent. But the projects are often ‘ill-conceived’ (He and Zhu 2018: 126) and disconnected from local ideas for urban planning and development – even where Chinese firms coordinate with local government and local planners, they seldom take their cues for projects from local understanding. At best, projects may make a dent in the overall infrastructure problems; at worst, they

may further exacerbate inequalities and splinters that have ‘submarine’ colonial roots. Moreover, Africa’s infrastructure shortfalls are so substantial, still, that even massive Chinese investments in filling the gaps would not suffice (Kararach 2017).

Given the centuries of history in which infrastructure development financed and driven by outside interests has been shaped for extraction and ‘transmission to the master nations’, where roads, railroads, ports, and airports were designed without regard to internal connectivity or backward linkages, it is hardly surprising to see the suspicions which greet Chinese infrastructure projects around the continent in the 21st century that frequently rely on Chinese financing, firms, and laborers to build infrastructure to facilitate exports to China (Ncube, Lufumpa and Kararach 2017: 648).

Lastly, it is important to be cautious about making claims that are too vast regarding Chinese impacts. In 2011, the African Development Bank (AfDB) launched a new urban development strategy on the continent that rested on three pillars: (1) infrastructure delivery and maintenance; (2) urban governance; and (3) private sector development. While much of this effort is geared toward garnering and mobilizing domestic resources to ‘make’ urban Africa, the reality is that AfDB’s partners in the financing of its urban development strategy are the World Bank, United Nations-Habitat, and development agencies from the US (the Millennium Challenge Corporation), the UK (FCDO – Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office), Sweden (SIDA), and Germany (Lufumpa, Mubila and Yepes 2017: 503–504). Claims of China ‘making’ urban Africa’s infrastructure without the dominant Western powers ultimately seem to fall short. To examine this and other arguments about urban infrastructure in Africa involving China (as discussed above) in greater empirical detail, in the next segment I focus on China in Zanzibar – a city in which the overall roster of urban development partners compares with the roster across the region, with some variations (China, of course, but also Germany, Finland, South Korea, the US, Oman, the World Bank, the United Nations, and a few domestic and international private sector actors).

Chinese Infrastructure and People-as-Infrastructure in Zanzibar

Zanzibar is a semi-autonomous polity within the United Republic of Tanzania, comprised of a small archipelago a few dozen miles offshore of the Tanzanian mainland, with a population of roughly 1.5 million. The urban area also known as Zanzibar serves as the capital, with an estimated metropolitan population of just over 700,000 as of 2020. This number combines Zanzibar Urban District, with a bit more than 200,000 people (including the small ‘Stone Town’ historic district, now home to less than 10,000), and the rapidly urbanizing West A and West B districts with a

half-million residents (Myers 2020). The urban area's population is now 14 times the size it was (less than 50,000) at independence in 1963. This rapid pace of urbanization – together with a sprawling geographical footprint (since most residential development consists of small single-family homes) and growing transportation needs – provides for astronomical increases in Zanzibar's urban infrastructure shortfalls (Figure 12.1).

The Zanzibar archipelago (with its main islands of Unguja, where the city of Zanzibar is located, and Pemba) has played a major role in the Western Indian Ocean region in trade, urbanization and politics for 2,000 years. The city itself is much younger, having been a minor fishing settlement until 1690, when the Omani Empire established control and built an administrative capital and port in Stone Town around wealth generated through the long-distance caravan trade in slaves, spices and ivory (Sheriff 1987). Zanzibar was among the largest and most significant urban areas in East Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the capital city of the Omani Sultanate of Zanzibar until it became a British Protectorate in 1890. British indirect rule from 1890 to 1963 coincided with the stagnation of urban population growth, political significance and economic power. At the same time, the colonial regime attempted to codify and solidify a racialized map of the urban area, separating an Arab-Indian-European Stone Town from the African and Swahili-dominated 'Native Location' known as Ng'ambo. Ng'ambo literally translates as the 'Other Side', because it lay on the opposite bank of a tidal inlet the colonial regime gradually filled to make a road/boundary between the sides. Stone Town was well provided with physical infrastructure (electricity, streetlights, water, and sewerage) before Ng'ambo had any – the urban majority on the 'Other Side' of town was severely deprived of these urban services into the early 1960s (Bissell 2011; Fair 2001). Scarcely a month after independence in December 1963, the Omani Sultanate was overthrown in a ramshackle, chaotic and violent rebellion that is called the Zanzibar Revolution of January 1964. The headquarters of the revolutionaries, ironically, formed in the colonial-era Raha Leo Ng'ambo Civic Centre, which the British had built for the 'Native Location' – a symbolic manifestation of the real inequalities in the urban area and the polity that provided some of the justification for the revolt (Myers 2003 and 2014). More than 10,000 alleged supporters of the Sultanate fled into exile, while another 10,000 were killed – with many of their bodies piled for a time in the Civic Centre's courtyard. When the revolutionaries struggled to stanch this flow of political violence, their leader, Abeid Amani Karume, signed Articles of Union with the leader of Tanganyika, Julius Nyerere, in April 1964, to form Tanzania.

The People's Republic of China was the first government to recognize the short-lived People's Republic of Zanzibar (as it was named from January until April in 1964), and the Chinese socio-technical infrastructural presence in Zanzibar has been and remains the most proportionally significant among all Tanzania's urban areas. The contemporary history of Chinese



Figure 12.1 Map of the Zanzibar Urban Area. Source: Myers (2016).

relations with Tanzania is substantial, including China's role in constructing Tazara, the Tanzania-Zambia Railway, in the 1960s and 1970s (Monson 2009). The 21st century has brought an evidently unparalleled increase in Chinese investment in Tanzania, most obviously in its cities. On some level, the Chinese relationship with Tanzania, on the mainland, stalled a bit in the regime of President John Magufuli (2015–2021). But in Zanzibar, no similar stall is evident.

While other socialist regimes (especially the German Democratic Republic) played more visible roles in the early revolutionary era's attempts to redress colonialism's racialized map of infrastructural inequalities between Stone Town and Ng'ambo, Chinese urban influences grew after Karume's death in 1972. Most notably, a team of Chinese planners produced the 1982 Zanzibar Master Plan, the most comprehensive plan the city has ever had. It resulted in layouts for more than 50 urban and suburban areas in the West districts, a new vision and map for governmental operations, a new radio and telecommunications center (Figure 12.2), improved electricity, road, transport, water, and drainage networks, and renewed efforts to manage land urbanization. As most of the plan's creators were engineers, it is unsurprising that the plan contained extensive maps and diagrams for all of the proposed infrastructure – roads, drainage, electricity, facilities, and more. The Chinese followed through with some direct programs to implement the plan into the late 1990s (Myers 1998). Chinese interests in Zanzibar have been represented through a large and active consulate since the revolution; closer to the present, urban investment has picked up in intensity, even beyond the 30-year window for implementing the 1982 plan. In the 2010s, Chinese contractors rebuilt the national stadium,

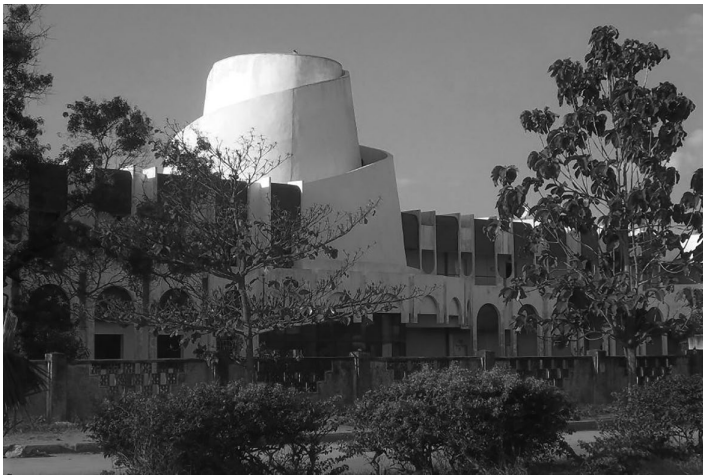


Figure 12.2 Chinese-Built Radio Zanzibar Building, Raha Leo, Zanzibar, 1949.
Source: Myers (2014).



Figure 12.3 Artistic Rendering of the plan for Kwahani New Town. Screen Shot from Presidential Motorcade Departing Ceremony, October 14, 2020. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bL5YwTjAkMY>.

Amani Stadium, into a sparkling showcase, and did the same for the secondary Mao Zedong Stadium. A series of other contracts followed.

In 2018, a Chinese State-owned enterprise was awarded the contract for redeveloping the city's Kwahani neighborhood (discussed further below). The plan entailed demolition of the entire existing area and its replacement with an orderly set of apartments (Figure 12.3). The Zanzibar Social Security Fund (ZSSF) allocated a plot to a Chinese company directly in the middle of the frequently proposed city center of the 1945, 1968, 1982 and 2015 Master Plans for Zanzibar, in the Raha Leo quarter of the revolutionary-era Michenzani apartment complex, for development of a massive new shopping mall next to the colonial-era Civic Centre (Figure 12.4).

Other donors and investors have a major presence, too. The World Bank has provided funding for several different infrastructure initiatives in the city that might seem at first outside the sweep of Chinese influence. The first is a massive program to build and rehabilitate stormwater drainage systems throughout the city, the Zanzibar Urban Services Project (ZUSP). ZUSP came after decades of waterlogged Ng'ambo and West District communities living with putrid standing water as breeding grounds for malarial mosquitoes and cholera. ZUSP's three phases were projected to cost a combined 193 million US dollars. The main project entailed constructing



Figure 12.4 Shopping Mall under Construction at Raha Leo with Michenzani Apartments in the Background, January 2019. Source: Myers (2020).

a 20.3-kilometer drainage network, including a 10-kilometer long underground drainage channel to carry water from several lakes and ponds around which dozens of homes have been inundated each year in the rainy season. ZUSP also has had numerous smaller projects – rebuilding the sea wall at Forodhani in Stone Town, providing street lights (again mainly in Stone Town), and creating a new landfill for the city, 20 kilometers to the east. The World Bank also backed the Zanzibar Mapping Initiative, which put drones and high technology to work for ‘supporting evidence-based and innovative solutions to better plan, mitigate, and prepare for natural disasters’, including the widespread flooding ZUSP aims to alleviate (Mbuya 2018).

A third (partially) World Bank-funded scheme involves a combination of initiatives begun through partnerships of the Zanzibar government’s Department of Urban and Rural Planning (DoURP) with the Netherlands government, the City of Amsterdam, and the Netherlands-based African Architecture Matters (AAM) organization, to create a Green Corridor through the center of Ng’ambo, as part of producing *Ng’ambo Tuitakayo* [The Other Side That We Want]. The result would be a new city center, through interlocking small-scale, incremental, and ideally participatory local area planning (LAP) initiatives. The Green Corridor project within the Ng’ambo Tuitakayo LAP was awarded to a South Korean firm, with the

intention of significant avenue tree-planting along the main roads through the center of Ng'ambo. The Ng'ambo Tuitakayo initiative overall, though, witnessed a gap between the more participatory and democratic objectives of DoURP and AAM, and the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar's consistently top-down, authoritarian tactics. The same may be said of the progressive Finland-led projects for geospatial data infrastructure development for urban planning and land management in Zanzibar over the last 30 years (Myers 2008, 2010, 2011).

Each scheme above identified as 'new' or residing seemingly outside of Chinese influence is thoroughly in keeping with the PRC's 1982 Master Plan: completely re-engineered and comprehensive drainage, the provision of green space, and the relocation of the city center activities to the Raha Leo/Michenzani high point of the older areas of Ng'ambo. Even the spatial data infrastructure schemes are reformulations of the land management systems conceived in the 1982 Chinese Master Plan. And the largest program, by far, is the World Bank's ZUSP drainage scheme – the contract for which belongs to China Railway Jianchang Engineering Company (CRJE).

None of these projects entered the urban landscape without controversy. I have witnessed and participated in three decades of debate between government units ambitious for development and those eager to protect the fragile insular environment of Zanzibar, amid contentious relations between these government units and a restive and deeply politically divided public. The debates also parallel debates between those wedded to a top-down vision of governance with strong roots in Chinese and East European communist planning, those seeking to build a neoliberal Zanzibar, and those with populist-participatory ambitions for planning. Within the effected communities, a similar continuum of perspectives exists. In 2019, one of ZUSP's technical consultants suggested that the three main problems of implementing their drainage scheme were: (1) socio-political issues of compensation for houses demolished in the drainage network's construction; (2) 'cultural intransigence', where people continued to throw trash into open drains or moved back into areas that had been drained once the project made that possible (despite it still being illegal); and (3) 'poverty, because, let's face it, this is a poor country'. Some 40 homes had to be demolished by early 2019, and people were paid compensation; 'to do the project properly, we might have demolished 300, but we can't do things the way Mussolini did'. ZUSP's engineers and CRJE's managers instead remapped the drainage systems to minimize demolitions by burrowing the drains under roads as much as possible – and only one lane of road, to minimize the road reconstruction costs. Otherwise, as one engineer said in 2019, 'the road building costs would be larger than the drainage system costs' because they would have been reconstructing entire roadbeds and doubling road congestion given full closures to the roads rather than leaving single lanes for traffic. As a result of various accommodations, however, another engineer said, 'this was supposed to be a one and a half-year project; they now say it is to be three,

but it won't be done in four'. (All quotations above are anonymous.) Even so, the ZUSP project was farther along than the Green Corridor, the new town center project, or the scheme to reconstruct Kwahani, i.e. projects within the Ng'ambo Tuitakayo plan.

The Ng'ambo Tuitakayo plan is formally the government's New City Centre Local Area Plan, one of ten local area plans the Zanzibar government developed for towns on Unguja, as part of DoURP's National Spatial Development Strategy. Its goal was to 'harness the positive transformative power of urbanisation in Zanzibar' (DoURP 2016: 6). The plan focuses only on the four quadrants of Ng'ambo defined by the intersection of the 'Michenzani' roads – a physical pattern that Zanzibari historian Abdul Sheriff refers to as 'the crucifixion of Ng'ambo' for its cross-like shape and destructive legacy (DoURP and AAM 2019). This is the most comprehensive, careful and engaged plan for Ng'ambo in history, with eight action plans, each of which is multi-faceted. Were it to be developed and implemented with popular participation along the lines the plan's authors envisioned, it would mark a substantial improvement to the infrastructure of everyday life in Ng'ambo. It is the first plan in the city's history to see Ng'ambo's 'existing morphology of the urban fabric' as 'representing an important part of the largest Swahili City in the world in the late 19th and early 20th century' (DoURP 2016: 96; Myers 1993 and 2003). It was created with the histories and impacts of the more than 57,000 residents of the 15 urban locations [*shehia*] in the plan area in mind. On paper, it is a map and guide to decolonizing planning. Yet every individual proposal within the plan is just that – a proposal. Each proposal segment within the plan ends with a list of possible stakeholders, and each of those lists includes unnamed 'private investors'.

The clash of the plan's ambitions with the realities of implementation is evident in several key zones. For instance, the plan sensitively reminded the reader that Ng'ambo's Raha Leo Civic Centre was 'a public space in the first place' and proposed to 'return it to the citizen' (while awkwardly setting aside its bloody revolutionary history). The idea was to re-make the area as a cultural zone based on history, radio, theater and cinema. It would be adjacent to a new Zanzibar CBD Metro Central Station and shopping mall. Six years in, the only element implemented is the shopping mall, with a Chinese contractor, and it was not built where the plan envisioned, but in the planned public greenery and market area in front of one of the Michenzani apartment blocks.

The Kwahani redevelopment is actually outside of the City Center Plan, even if the government tries to rhetorically incorporate it: Kwahani lies east of the official planning area (the 'crucified Ng'ambo') for that program. DoURP planners seemed ambivalent about the Kwahani plan, and recognized some of the valuable history of the neighborhood, by including a few vignettes from elderly residents in their planning document for Phase I of the redevelopment.

Kwahani began as an early 20th-century Ng'ambo area, on the land of Kelbali Khan – hence the place-name, which is Swahili for '(the land) of Khan'. In the 1930s, Khan allocated small plots in long straight lines for hut construction around what the British used, until 1939, as Polo Grounds, which Zanzibaris called the Field of Horses (Myers 1993). Kwahani has always been subject to regular flooding in the monsoon season, with the old Polo Grounds becoming a swamp. As a low-lying area at some distance from the colonial city center, Kwahani became a low-income, working-class African area, and eventually its residents were strongly allied to the revolutionary Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), and the Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM, Revolutionary Party) after the 1977 unification of ASP with the mainland's Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) to form Tanzania's ruling party).

Perhaps given this history, it was a puzzle within DoURP as to what produced the Kwahani redevelopment program, since it emerged outside of the various planning initiatives discussed above. The only document thus far available for the plan is very limited in its details, which boil down to these three bullet points:

- 'The Government of Zanzibar is now planning to redevelop the Kwahani area by rebuilding new apartment houses; enhance services; improve infrastructure; improve
- green areas and restructure the accessibility.
- The redevelopment will be realised in four phases...
- The redevelopment of Kwahani is part of the Government's plan to re-build the New City Center of Zanzibar Town'

(DoURP 2018: 7)

This last claim is geographically at odds with the City Center Plan and the private views of most DoURP planners. The departments of Urban and Rural Planning, Lands, and Surveys & Mapping had been oriented around the Ng'ambo Tuitakayo, Green Corridor, and ZUSP programs. The first two of these projects clearly demarcated the 'new city center' of Zanzibar to be the four 'quadrants' of the 'crucified' Ng'ambo area, and Kwahani lies to the east beyond that (DoURP 2015). CRJE, which earned the tender from the ZSSF to build the Raha Leo Shopping Mall, and the Hainan International construction company that built the new Ministry of Lands, Housing and Construction building in Maisara (i.e. both projects within the boundaries for the new city center) were the subjects of rumors around who was proposing what for Kwahani in January 2019. By November 2019, the Kwahani project's particulars had not been made public, but the project first phase had begun with the demolition of houses along the southern edge's main road and construction of apartments. The new English-language newspaper in the city launched its first issue that month with the banner headline, 'Kwahani new city takes off'. The government produced a

series of YouTube videos that responded defensively to widespread criticism of the project.

Most planners and residents accepted that the new buildings seemed well-built, but still out of the planning boundary, and out of character for the cityscape.

Many other Chinese remakings of Zanzibar were also far from complete as of 2019. Others may never be complete. The city's physical infrastructure would be remade in many respects once these projects would reach completion. The 'fabric of space', as Gandy (2014) called it, would be a Chinese fabric woven under and through the city, with patches of Germany, Korea, Tanzania or Oman. From port to airport, from a drainage network underground to the radio waves from the Chinese-built radio station, from the play grounds and soccer grounds to the rifles in the military parade grounds, most of Zanzibar could be claimed as 'made' in China. And yet, as has been seen for more than 170 years in Zanzibar town, the real fabric of space is made by Zanzibaris, in relations with one another. When Zanzibaris throw trash in an open trench or attempt to rebuild in a flood zone once a proper drainage system is in place, at some level they are consciously tearing at that foreign fabric.

But it isn't only in these contrarian, negative ways that we see the people-as-infrastructure reorganize the infrastructure. The Ng'ambo Tuitakayo and Green Corridor projects can serve as pertinent examples. The Kikwajuni 'quadrant' of the new Town Center, including the *shehia* [wards/locations] of Kikwajuni Juu, Kikwajuni Bondeni, Kisiwandui, and Kisimamajongoo, has been utterly transformed from within in the last 30 years. Ng'ambo Tuitakayo envisions surgical removal of some of its single-story homes and their replacement with northern European-style, small-scale modular apartment buildings (similar to the Kwahani apartments), and the Green Corridor envisions replanting the treescape of its edges and roadways. Ordinary residents of Kikwajuni, meanwhile, often reliant on relatives living abroad invested on their own in building three-, four- and five-story buildings, often apartment buildings, based on their own plans (Figure 12.5). The *Ng'ambo atlas* produced and published by the DoURP and AAM (2019) team documented 23 multi-story Swahili houses, 19 of what the researchers called 'Swahili 2020' (modernist Swahili) houses, and 13 apartment buildings (other than the socialist-era Michenzani and Kikwajuni apartment buildings) by 2018 in the Kikwajuni quadrant, for a total of 55 privately developed or self-constructed residential buildings with greater verticality; 12 more such buildings were under construction. My 1992 dissertation fieldwork mapping of the same quadrant found 32 buildings that would have fit the atlas's categories, meaning an absolute increase of 23 – i.e. a 75% increase in multi-story residential structures in 25 years. Residents have planted shrubs and trees on their own plots – date palm, pomegranate, lime, rose, and jasmine comprise small green corridors all over these *mitaa* (neighborhoods). What the planners produced, one



Figure 12.5 New Multi-Story Apartments, Kikwajuni, Zanzibar, January 2017.
Source: Garth Myers.

Kikwajuni resident noted, was ‘Ng’ambo *waitakayo* [the Ng’ambo they (the planners) want]’, whereas the Ng’ambo that the residents want would be plain as day to anyone walking its alleys. It would be a neighborhood where the socio-cultural and physical-technical infrastructures co-produced one another in lively, vivid responses to state- and outsider-driven agendas. And this co-production process is linked with Zanzibari communities around the world. Even in 1992, one-fourth of inner Ng’ambo households had access to funds sent from relatives in Europe, North America and Asia, and they invested these funds, overwhelmingly, in the upgrading of homes and domestic surroundings (Myers 1993, 1994).

Conclusion

I began this chapter probing the veracity of a statement from a Nigerian businessman whom colleagues and I met there in 2016: is ‘the whole world... made in China’? It is undeniable that the rise of Chinese investments in urban infrastructures is impacting most of the world. While in percentage, volume, value or proportion it is evident that other regions of

the world are dominant domains for these investments, China still has been more palpably impactful in urban Africa. Chinese infrastructure projects have come in the wake of very rapid urbanization in much of the region over the last four or five decades amid a dire *lack* of functioning physical infrastructure.

Zanzibar is a useful case study for this contemporary Chinese investment wave, particularly given its extensive history of Chinese investment in infrastructure and planning. The case thus represents a possible example for looking at the world of cities ‘from below’, in a South-South linkage. That Zanzibar literally gets its entire electrical supply from a submarine (undersea) cable from mainland Tanzania, and that its society has such a lively engagement with a parallel spirit world give me reasons to suggest an examination of ‘Southern’ urban theory’s thematic emphasis on ‘people-as-infrastructure’ or infrastructure as metaphysical is warranted for Zanzibar. The infrastructural turn in urban studies moves the conversation beyond seeing just physical infrastructure: if infrastructures are what make cities, then African urbanism requires one to rethink them as more-than-material. It is necessary to highlight the human dimensions, and the people who put infrastructures in place, maintain, or sabotage them.

Infrastructure and politics are inseparable. If a Glissantian poetics of relationality suggests, as Simone would have it, that relations like those creating infrastructures are the ‘tools through which political imaginations and claims are exerted’, then Zanzibar again presents an example, in more ways than I can explore in this brief chapter. The splintered networked infrastructures of colonial Zanzibar have not been displaced with more than five decades of investments, including these substantial Chinese projects. Zanzibar still has massive infrastructural deficits, primarily in Ng’ambo and in what one might think of as the new Ng’ambo, on the ‘Other Side’ of the boundary of Urban District in peri-urban West A and B districts, where paved-road density, water, sanitation and electricity supply are woefully inadequate (Myers 2020). Indeed, the overwhelming weight of investment has gone into showcase projects (the mall, new government ministerial buildings, a museum of the revolution (Figure 12.6), and the two stadiums) and infrastructure to enhance the elite-dominated tourism industry (improving tourist-oriented parks in Stone Town) (Keshodkar 2013; Fouéré 2017). Even the drainage network, while nominally beneficial to the communities around the flood zones being drained, also removes eyesores along the main road out of the city to the East Coast beaches of Unguja Island, the mainstay zone of the tourist economy (Myers 2020).

It is important to avoid over-emphasizing the Chinese role, in Zanzibar as in much of urban Sub-Saharan Africa. There are elements of neocolonialism to the Chinese work in Zanzibar, at the very least in not really doing much to overcome the splinters and bruises colonialism left behind in its infrastructure. At the same time, it would be misleading to blame the Chinese for the ongoing displacement of Stone Town and inner-Ng’ambo residents



Figure 12.6 Revolution Memorial Museum, Zanzibar, January 2019. Source: Garth Myers.

forced by gentrification into peri-urban areas. This pattern of housing market dynamics – which one sees in, say, Lusaka, Dakar, or Nairobi, where Chinese real estate investments and settlements have much more tangible impacts – exists in Zanzibar, but with very little to speak of that connects it directly or indirectly with Chinese investment or settlement. The fact that Chinese projects like the rebuilding of Kwahani are ill-conceived and out of step with local planners does not mean that they will be carried out to completion: after all, DoURP planners estimate privately that the implementation rate for the 1982 Chinese master plan ended up at about 15%! This new era of significant South-South transfers of infrastructural richness, led by China, may be remaking urban Africa. But surely, the infrastructures of connection and disconnection across the continent increasingly owe their physical being to the other BRICS countries alongside China, and to the World Bank, Turkey, Korea, Japan and the traditional development partners of the OECD. Chinese firms, whether state-owned enterprises or other entities, often enter into complex partnerships with some of these other players. China's infrastructure investments in Zanzibar show this, for instance in the combination of CRJE with Korean, Dutch, World Bank, and Zanzibari planners in implementing ZUSP and Ng'ambo Tuitakayo. One

sees a deeper history and breadth of concerns in Zanzibar, perhaps, in comparison to many cities in Africa, but also complicated partnering – with many other agencies and countries entering in and around China’s purview.

Ultimately, when we ask if Zanzibar is indeed being ‘made’ in China, it seems that the city is made, as it has been for several centuries, more by the everyday place-making of ordinary residents, on top of or countering a ‘fabric’ intended to be shaped by Chinese designs and engineering. For most of the two West Districts, that fabric seems to be comprised of the sorts of ‘catchment zones for the urban poor... industrial land... ruined leisure zones, waste dumps’ and ‘the leftovers of city life’ that Simone (2019: 128) saw as the emergent landscape for peripheral urban politics across the global South. There, and in Ng’ambo, one sees vestiges in microcosm of what Simone (2019: 23) meant by the ‘improvised lives’ in the ‘uninhabitable’ infrastructure-deprived districts of the urban majorities in cities of Africa. Yet, alongside and underneath the prevailing dominant order, which in the Zanzibar case has had a strong Chinese influence for more than a half-century, it is ordinary poor and working people, marginalized in the power structure, consigned to shadow worlds, improvising with makeshift tools, knitting the fabric.

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13 Temporalities of Absence

Infrastructural Politics and Time in Cape Town's Informal Settlements

Angela D. Storey

Buyiswa and I were both the picture of surprise when we bumped into each other in the hallway of a Cape Town advocacy group one winter day in 2019.¹ I had not seen Buyiswa for five years and we quickly shared stories from our lives. Catching up to that winter day, we spoke of our shared horror at the recent deployment of the South African army to Cape Flats communities, a response to the rising murder rate and gun-related violence in the city. An engaging young amaXhosa activist with broad experience in social movements and non-governmental organizations, Buyiswa shook her head in frustration, long braids punctuating the movement. She told me that her young child was scared to leave their home that morning for fear of the army trucks.

I asked after changes to the informal settlement in which she lived and she said things were largely the same: there was still much violence in the area—something she could not see solved by the army presence—and they still struggled with sorely inadequate sanitation facilities and absent formal housing. A new informal settlement had been growing on a previously open wetland area near to her community. Without any city services provided to the new site, there had been conflict between the two sets of residents over scant infrastructure. With multiple households already sharing the city-provided chemical toilets, and entire streets utilizing a single water standpipe, the community had long struggled to secure expanded infrastructural connections from the city. Despite promises of development, including faded municipal billboards on the site advertising elusive upgrading plans, the area remained one in which everyday life was punctuated by the struggles of marginal access. Buyiswa said many of her neighbors in the older informal settlement were upset, believing that the city had stopped working on development plans for their site on account of the newly constructed area. But these are completely different places, I countered, and the city should consider their development in distinct ways. Buyiswa grimaced and replied that the city thinks of them all as the same.

Despite the five years that had passed, Buyiswa's struggles and frustrations with regard to infrastructure remained largely unchanged. For Buyiswa, as for many other residents of Cape Town's expansive informal

settlements, conflict over inadequate basic infrastructure and vexation with opaque development plans frame much of everyday life. Significant daily household labor, as well as broader socio-political labor, goes into attempts to fill in for absences in formal infrastructural access from the city. Precarity remains the daily standard in Buyiswa's community and many others in Cape Town, defining the built environment and the everyday praxis of making do within this uncertain, peripheral space. Cape Town's informal spaces feel caught in a form of stasis marked by sharing limited toilets, fixing burst city taps, and weathering endless delays in the development of housing and basic services. What is missing—in terms of full, formal access to infrastructure—is as potent and tangible as that which is present. These critical absences of infrastructure prompt significant labor by residents, including both material labor to forge informal connections and political labor to campaign for the delivery of promised development. As scholars have explored the power of waiting for development as a way to enroll subjects in new relations of governance (Hetherington 2014; Oldfield and Greyling 2015), expectation, delays, and anticipation do indeed define much of daily life in Khayelitsha. This is, however, also a waiting filled with material and political work, and experienced in myriad ways by residents. It is a kind of laborious waiting that, I argue, can be understood by thinking about absence.

This chapter considers the precarious nature of everyday life in urban South Africa through a discussion of the temporality of infrastructural absence. Drawing from a decade of ethnographic research with residents of informal settlements in the Khayelitsha area of Cape Town, South Africa, I consider what it means to live within temporary spaces and inadequate infrastructures that have seemingly become permanent. Anthropological work highlights the profound orientation toward the future often embedded within the infrastructural promise (Larkin 2013; Appel, Anand, and Gupta 2018). For long-term residents of informal settlements this promise has eroded precipitously, as decades of waiting for formalization have left everyday life feeling like an endless present transition. The “permanent temporariness” (Yifchatel 2009; McFarlane 2012) that typifies long-term informal areas uncomfortably mashes together readings of space and time. Such crises of the temporary (Mbembe 2016) defy the modern imaginary of development's steady march and the post-apartheid promise of universal material opportunity (Oldfield and Greyling 2015). Exclusions from developmental time become grounds on which to reproduce and recraft the exclusions and violences of post-coloniality within everyday life and its many representations (Fabian 1983; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Abu El-Haj 2001).

Building upon this foundation, I examine how residents in one of Khayelitsha's informal settlements articulate and frame their exclusion from infrastructural development through the evocation of informality as a place trapped by time and defined by absence. Here time is clothed in the

materiality of infrastructure, understood viscerally through the absence of sufficient, dignified, and formal access to water, sanitation, and electricity systems. By highlighting foreclosed futures, endless waiting, and empty promises, discussions of infrastructure at the city's edge link time and material into a politics of absence. With ethnographic vignettes drawn from the experiences of residents in a single informal settlement, I examine how long-term infrastructural absence is experienced and evoked in two ways—through naming informality as non-place and in the spectral alterity of development timelines not taken.

Presenting absence as a defining framework through which to understand long-term informality is inspired by Simone's work to identify for African cities a set of concepts that serve as "heuristic entry points...to help make sense of what otherwise appear simply as disparate and irrational dimensions of urban life" (Simone 2004: 13). This approach puts to the fore the provisionality of many African urban areas, and yet highlights the ways in which residents craft lives from the fragments of often marginal sites. As Simone frames the spectral as one such entry point, I explore how absence leaves traces within the everyday and provides a way to name how residents of long-term informal sites evoke the work required within the permanent provisionality of their lives. For residents deeply involved in political activism for infrastructural expansion, the poignancy of broken promises and lost campaigns leaves the landscape of informality littered with the ghosts of development plans that did not come to pass. I explore these experiences as creating specters of development that haunt the space of informality, just as the violences of colonial and apartheid pasts haunt Cape Town's displaced and destroyed neighborhoods (Zembylas, Bozalek, and Motala 2020). For other residents, the material absence of formal, full infrastructural access impacts not only their day-to-day lives, but also recrafts the space of informality as a whole, framing it as a region beyond the affective modes of place felt and understood to come with development. In discussing these modes of "non-place," to use language from Augé mirroring that of residents' own statements (1995), I work from scholarship that explores informality as a "gray space" (Yiftachel 2009), constantly in situated processes of making and unmaking. In drawing together these two evocations of time and space from within the same informal settlement, I posit that absence is itself a political and affective register—deeply felt in the discourse and everyday life of residents within long-term informal settlements.

The data presented in this chapter is the result of 22 months of fieldwork conducted in Cape Town between 2010 and 2019. Ethnographic material was collected through semi-structured interviews with more than 150 residents of informal settlements and activists working on infrastructure-focused campaigns; infrastructural walk-throughs of informal settlements with residents; and participant observation in community spaces and homes, as well as at marches, protests, meetings, and other events related to the work of communities to improve access to basic services, and spent in

the offices of social movements, non-governmental organizations, development groups, and community-based organizations located in Khayelitsha. The data in this chapter focuses on the experiences of residents in one particular informal settlement, with whom I conducted 34 interviews in 2013–2014 regarding household and community access to basic infrastructure, participation in various modes of politicized organizing, and perspectives on citizenship. This data is framed by on-going interviews with resident-activists and many additional fieldwork visits to the community over the years preceding and following this period.

Background: Khayelitsha and the Informal City

Cape Town and other South African urban spaces are deeply fractured (Bank 2011), strewn with tightly bounded spaces of affluence set alongside those of poverty. Popular images of Cape Town juxtapose the high-rise office buildings of the Central Business District and luxurious homes of affluent neighborhoods with the expansive informal settlements and pitted roads of peripheral spaces. Such contrasts are seen vividly in the stark photographs of Cape Town featured in a 2019 TIME cover story on South Africa's status as the most unequal country in the world (Baker 2019), or in the visual imagery of African anarchist hip-hop collective Soundz of the South, highlighting the marginalization experienced by many of the city's black residents (SOS 2018). These deep disparities are the result of entrenched socio-economic inequality and the persistence of radically uneven development within the post-apartheid era (Beall, Crankshaw, and Parnell 2002; Murray 2008). Unequal access to formal housing remains a hallmark of this stark inequity. Despite decades of government-funded house-building programs, the backlog for housing in Cape Town is estimated at more than 60 years given recent rates of construction (Maregele 2017). Indeed, the wait for housing and for development has become a defining marker of the citizen-state relationship for many South Africans in the post-apartheid era (Oldfield and Greyling 2015). Socio-economic inequality as made material in access to formal housing is, however, starkly racialized in Cape Town: nearly half of the city's black households, but only 1% of the city's white households, live within informal dwellings (City of Cape Town 2017). Such distinctions map onto deep inequalities in access to housing, infrastructure, and development between geographic areas of the city.

African urbanism has long been understood by scholars through the lens of informality (Pieterse and Parnell 2014). Beyond naming the precarity experienced in cities across the continent, informality has been framed as a way to express the complex lived experiences in spaces defined by the long shadows of colonialism's extraction and violence, the economic destruction of structural adjustment policies, and the shifting frameworks of post-colonial governance and capitalist globalization. Academic attention to informal urban spaces in the 1970s highlighted the conditions of life

and modes of internal organization in urban slums or squatter settlements (Little 1970; Ross 1973). Academic work in subsequent decades traced the impact of international development policies and practices on the continent's informal spaces, especially in the context of mass evictions often framed by projects seeking to improve the "cleanliness," modern situation, or good governance of cities (Berrisford & Kihato 2006; Potts 2007). In South Africa, ethnographic research on urban informality holds early foundations in the work of multiple scholars, including Hellman's 1930s thesis work in Rooiyard, a small informal site in Johannesburg (Hellman 1948; Celarent 2012); the extensive and controversial work by the Mayers on rural-urban dynamics of Xhosa residents in and around East London within the "Xhosa in Town" trilogy (Mayer with Mayer 1971; Bank 2011); and the critical scholarship in Cape Town's Langa township conducted by Mafeje and Wilson (Wilson and Mafeje 1963). Much subsequent, multi-disciplinary and/or community-grounded scholarship in South Africa has explored everyday life and political activism within informal and marginal spaces, including in processes of upgrading and resettlement (cf. Huchzermeyer and Karam 2006; Besteman 2008; Ross 2010; Symphony Way Pavement Dwellers 2011; Makhulu 2015). Although informality is increasingly seen by scholars and planners as a critical mode of urbanization and socio-economic organization (Simone 2004; Roy 2009), it remains a focus in South Africa of removal, rejection, and invisibility in both policy and the popular imagination.

Located in the urban periphery of Cape Town, Khayelitsha exemplifies the striking residential segregation persistent in the city post-apartheid. The area was planned in the 1980s to house black workers outside the apartheid city (Cook 1992) and the population of the suburb remains predominantly black—98.6% of the suburb's residents identified as Black African as of the last census (City of Cape Town 2013), despite black residents accounting for only 42.6% of the city's overall population (City of Cape Town 2017). Officially, Khayelitsha is home to approximately 400,000 people, with half of the area's households living in informal dwellings, either within informal settlements or within the backyards of formal houses (City of Cape Town 2013). Some, however, have suggested that the actual population may be one or two million, many occupying the suburb's growing informal spaces (Brunn and Wilson 2013). Informal settlements in Khayelitsha may consist of only a few dozen largely self-built shacks of plywood, tin, and composite building material, or they may stretch to include several thousand such structures, with sites becoming increasingly dense as they age. Khayelitsha is today a patchwork of formal neighborhoods, informal settlements, and complex arrangements that bring formality and informality into intimate puzzles that defy this assumed dichotomy (McFarlane and Weibel 2012).

Khayelitsha is set at a distant edge of Cape Town, a drive of 30 minutes along the N2 highway from the city's Central Business District. While the city is associated with the vertical geography of Table Mountain and the

crooked finger of land leading to the Cape of Good Hope, Khayelitsha is set within the Cape Flats, a mostly level expanse of rocks and sand stretching inland from the shores of False Bay. If you fly into Cape Town International Airport, many planes circle over the peripheral suburbs and out over False Bay, taking their low landing run over the patchwork neighborhoods of Khayelitsha. From the sky, Khayelitsha is probably indistinguishable to most on the descending flights—another area of the city defined by geographic and economic marginality, appearing from above as neighborhoods of densely set shacks or homogenous, government-built houses, many with shacks in their backyards.

Zanele and the Elusive Promise of Infrastructure

One informal settlement in Khayelitsha, which I here call Zanele, had been present on the same site for more than 20 years when I first visited in 2010. At that time, Zanele had one of the least formal, least city-provided assemblages of basic service infrastructure in the area, and the residents of its many hundreds of dwellings were forced to rely largely upon tenuous informal connections to gain access to water, electricity, and sanitation services. Walking through the site's narrow byways, one constantly encountered the physical traces of the area's complex webs of infrastructural access. In one turn of the area's sandy paths a resident dug a pit in which to dump wastewater from laundry or from a bucket used as a toilet during the night—necessary in the absence of drains and of toilet provision. Nearby, a group collaboratively labored to string wires along roof edges, connecting their shacks to the legal electricity boxes of formal houses several dozen meters away, where occupants illegally sell extended connections to those denied legal links. During coffee in a resident's living room, neighbors streamed by to check for news on a broken water tap or to contribute funds to fix these city-owned infrastructures. No matter the time of day or the season, every visit to Zanele included significant time and visible labor by residents to fill in for missing formal infrastructure and active discussions of the impacts—and persistence—of infrastructural exclusions.

Zanele is set within a series of nearly contiguous informal settlements, clearly demarcated from other sites in the knowledge of residents and neighbors but appearing to outsiders as visually consistent with surrounding areas. In an approach by car or shared taxi, Zanele's densely set tin shacks stream by on one side of the road, interrupted by small businesses housed in extensions to shacks or shipping containers along the road, and another informal area stretches against the opposite sidewalk. While similar from this vantage point, the lives of residents in these two neighboring areas is significantly different: although only a two-lane road sits between them, the opposite site has some shared full-flush toilets built by the city, and most residents have legal electricity connections. While residents of both areas are engaged in significant work to expand access to services, or to be

relocated to sites suitable for the construction of formal housing, the daily experiences of informality between these two sites are framed by these significant variations in access to formal infrastructures.

Zanele and the dozens of other informal settlements in Khayelitsha are marked by widespread deficits in access to basic services, particularly infrastructures for water, sanitation, and electricity. With municipalities responsible for the delivery of basic services, the City of Cape Town remains the focus of critique and frustration from informal settlement residents, civil society actors, and social movements working for full and dignified service access (SJC 2013; Thompson 2014). The post-apartheid delivery of services has been shaped by the city's neoliberal policies and attendant practices, seen in the shift to service provision within informal settlements largely through private contracts and the commodification of public goods (Miraftab 2004; Jaglin 2008; von Schnitzler 2016). As with many other cities, such shifts in provision have caused profoundly uneven access and the demise of a modern, progressive ideology of infrastructural provision, outcomes characteristic of the "splintering urbanism" resulting from the unbundling of public services (Graham and Marvin 2001). Such changes have dramatically shaped everyday life within Khayelitsha's informal settlements, as services for a single informal settlement may be provided under multiple city contracts with various companies, making accountability for provision convoluted, at best (Storey 2014). This is especially the case for sanitation, with the last decade punctuated by profound frustration, anger, and political protest over the inconsistent, insufficient, undignified, and long-term provision of temporary toilets to informal settlement residents across the city via such contracts (Robins 2014; McFarlane and Silver 2017). Although it is the obligation of municipalities to provide basic services to informal settlements in South Africa, the provision of infrastructure varies tremendously between, and even within, informal settlements within the same area, let alone across the city and country. While property ownership and suitability of land for construction broadly frame where development can be attempted on a site, it is challenging to locate a consistent rationale underlying the modes of access that do exist.

The lack of reasonable or predictable explanations for the absences of infrastructure characterized the broadly inconsistent, incomplete, and often contradictory information that residents received about the possibilities for development. In these varied modes of infrastructural limbo, residents met basic needs through a constellation of connections that often include both formal and informal, legal and illegal, permanent and temporary, and shared and private forms—as well as forms that readily blur these binaries. Everyday infrastructural access, however, remains defined largely by the absence of formal, full, and consistent connections.

Despite the seemingly endless promises of politicians (Storey 2020) and the billboards announcing development plans, such as the faded ones in

Buyiswa's community, the infrastructural world of Zanele and many other informal settlements in Khayelitsha remains paused, defined by a temporariness that appears permanent.

In South Africa, the promise of democratic inclusion is one poignantly understood as extending from political participation to include the material markers of citizenship seen in housing, full services, education, and employment (Dawson 2010; James 2013; Oldfield and Greyling 2015; von Schnitzler 2016). Infrastructure becomes a critical way through which relationships with the state are mediated and understood within the everyday (Dubbeld 2017). The power of infrastructural promise is often evoked in narratives of waiting, whether seen as welcomed or as punitive. Hetherington succinctly presents infrastructure's "potent political form," offering an avenue for marginal communities to enroll themselves as citizens and connect to a distant state center through the powers of aspiration and access to material improvements (2014: 197). Waiting can be a critical piece of this process, as the time lapses of development become experiences of enrollment and promise. Auyero, in work with informal settlement residents in Argentina, examines the power and symbolic violence of inescapable waiting within the bureaucracy of the state, as residents navigate the multiple actors, processes, and potentialities of change that result in a kind of endless suspension (Auyero and Swistun 2009; Auyero 2012). Such bureaucratic experiences of waiting "provide critical insight into the everyday sociospatial constitution of power—not despite but because of their banality" (Secor 2007: 42; see also Gupta 2012). Indeed, it is the banality of your name on a housing list—or your community on a list for expanded water taps, electricity connections, or full flush toilet facilities—that makes up much of the infrastructural interactions between citizens and the state in South Africa (Oldfield and Greyling 2015; Dubbeld 2017). Such overlapping of state power, marginality, and time is what Larkin frames—borrowing from Kundera—as the "unbearable modernity of infrastructure" (2013: 332).

At the city's periphery, infrastructure's elusive promise seems inescapable. Zanele's denied electricity connections were purportedly the result of its siting under high-voltage lines—lines that brought electricity not to Zanele, but to the city's core and its more affluent suburbs. The urban position of this and other informal sites presents a uniquely painful form of absence, one marked by the constant reminders of their own bypass. The imagined, steady march of progress that modernity's ideal embodies is made physical in infrastructure. For Zanele, this promise marches not only past them but also through. Infrastructure, as Hetherington notes, "divides the built landscape into temporal priorities to be slotted into a promising narrative of progress" (2014: 196). This is a narrative that relies upon the presence of communities desiring and awaiting access to the modern lives marked by such development (Larkin 2008). This waiting and desiring, however, is neither static nor compliant.

“That Place is No Place”

Makhulu Funeka had lived in Zanele for three years when I interviewed her in February 2014. An older amaXhosa woman, she stayed in a shack belonging to one of her daughters, who by that time had lived in this squatted site for more than 15 years. Funeka came to Zanele in order to help care for her grandchildren after her husband’s death. One of her grandchildren had died several years before as well, in an accident involving a fallen electricity pole, and the child’s mother—another of Funeka’s daughters—died not long after. Funeka told me that her daughter died of a broken heart.

At nearly 70 years of age, Makhulu Funeka was not happy to relocate to this informal urban site from a rural area in the Eastern Cape Province where she had better access to services, including her own water tap. In Zanele she had to share a tap with dozens of other households, utilize electricity illegally extended from a neighbor’s connection, and pay to use a flush toilet located in a formal house that was a ten-minute walk away. Her daughter’s shack—which she shared—was located next to one of the area’s few water taps, at the edge of a busy road. Although the location provided ready access to water, it also meant proximity to people washing laundry, emptying buckets of wastewater, and dumping trash at the nearby site of a then-removed city dumpster. That late summer day in 2014 we walked through the narrow, winding walkways between Zanele’s shacks to stand in Funeka’s doorway, watching women fill buckets for water storage and men throw refuse to the edge of the street. Emptied laundry suds and water from the dripping tap filled a wide area, reaching nearly to the family’s shack before sinking into the sand. Funeka shook her head in frustration, gesturing at the common scene.

It was clear that Funeka did not like Zanele but stayed because her family needed her assistance—as she needed their support—and she had close friends in her nearest neighbors. In an interview at a neighbor’s home, I asked Funeka how she would describe Zanele to someone who had never been here before. She said:

Don’t even go there, that place is no place. That place is not a place to stay, we are staying there because we have no other place. There are skollies (gangsters) after dark, your washing will be stolen, you get robbed if you go anywhere. There is no space; all is close together, like a maze... Here, even the sand is dirty.

The precarity of life within informality is expressed by Funeka in her concern over the constant and shifting dangers, the dense packing together of shacks and lives, and the hyperbolic dirtiness of even the ground itself. As we continued the interview, Funeka wove a narrative of impermanence, one marked by bodily risk, absent development, and a feeling of utter exclusion from the city.

In interviews with other residents of Zanele, I asked each person to describe where they lived to someone who had never been there before. While responses varied, a series of common statements emerged. Many were negative: this place is dirty, this place is not right, this is not a good place to live, this place is dangerous. Some responses were positive: this place is alright, we have a good community spirit, it is better than others. Many, though, spoke about their communities in the way Funeka spoke about Zanele: as places that were *not*. Residents often overtly framed informal spaces as sites absent the positive, spatialized affect associated with ideas of place built through time (Jones and Evans 2012; Bennett 2014). This gloss of wronged or absent place often flowed into a discussion of waiting for infrastructure, frustration around absent service delivery, and feelings of stagnation. For Funeka, her anger at Zanele was one bookended by the violences of informality and the absence of change, made material by the stolen laundry, the dirty sand, and the pooled water of the dripping tap at her door.

In Zanele, the cadence of “no place” narratives contains many elements of the dejection of those who have seen possibilities and promises come and go, as well as the frustration of those who have been involved in as-yet largely unsuccessful struggles for development. As another resident told me in early 2014, discussing the complexity of change and hope for working to make Zanele ever-more livable:

(This place) is alright, but at the same time not alright. There’s no clean place here. If people (here) can be united something beautiful can be done. But things aren’t working well now, things are planned but then don’t happen.

The “things” planned are simultaneously infrastructural and political, both the collective processes of agitating for improved access and the arrival of the material improvements that are intended as the result of such actions. Such entwined experiences bring individuals and communities into uneven and uncomfortable alignments with distant processes of governance, in their vagaries crafting processes through which marginal political subjects are produced (Auyero 2012). Zanele becomes, in the narratives of these residents, a site defined by the temporariness and potentialities of informality, but marked deeply by a sense of placelessness that draw together feelings of exclusion, exhaustion, and frustration. These narratives mark waiting—and, indeed, time itself—as something that is deeply understood in the context of the material spaces of informality. This is not only a process of waiting, but it is also a reworking of space and of affect.

The language used by Funeka and other residents in Zanele mirrors that used by Augé to posit how modernity crafts sites removed from time. Spanning from a sleek but uniform international airport to the desolate and unvarying refugee camp, Augé argues for a category of place that is

defined by the absence of affect and unmoored from the changes of time. In considering the position of places that are not within the anthropologies of a divided modernity, Augé writes: “Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten” (Augé 1995: 79). Here, sites with memory and history, sites deemed relationally meaningful, are tied to those devoid of such signifiers; they are written into and around each other upon the same landscape. In the post-apartheid transition, the promise of immanent access was written not only across the intangible sites of citizenship but also across the very tangible sites of cities, houses, and infrastructures. The post-apartheid era was imagined to be one in which redistribution encompassed not only abstract rights but also the concrete, material world of housing, employment, education, and infrastructure (James 2013; von Schnitzler 2016). Those promised sites, then, themselves became a plausible future, one upon which the everyday lives and places of informal settlements, like Zanele, have been constructed.

For non-places, “everything proceeds as if space had been trapped by time” (Augé 1995: 104). In this way, the modernizing promise is a myth of not merely national origins. Indeed, in Zanele, time sticks fast around the edges of incomplete, informal, and illegal infrastructures. Space and time are linked, intimately and violently, within the marginal. Time here traps the space of informality, always set in relation to that which is or could be present. The placeless-ness of Zanele is made evident in residents’ knowledge and experience of Cape Town’s many infrastructurally dense neighborhoods, the result of deeply material inequalities that map starkly onto race and geography. As residents in Zanele move within the city, the context of their own absence becomes even more pronounced.

Thinking about absence requires us to travel not only through informal spaces but also through their spectral alterities and the times trapping them. In Zanele, the time of absence stretches to encompass decades, even generations. As a resident told me in late 2013, describing the community:

It is a wrong place, it is not a place to live. We are only staying here because we have no other options. People have been promising that we will move “next year, next year” since I came in 1997. (Now) it is different from apartheid because we are allowed to live in the city. No other differences.

For such long-term residents, the unchanging landscape of infrastructure spells a stasis that is more than material.

Forging Spectral Futures

The temporality of Zanele’s infrastructural assemblage was not crafted solely by experiences of waiting for development, but also by the long-term

and highly organized political agitation of residents seeking such improvements. In July 2019 I sat in a café in Khayelitsha talking with Tata Aviwe, an older amaXhosa resident of Zanele and a former community leader. When we arrived, the large space was empty except for a waiter who ushered us vaguely toward the open tables. The decorations in the café were the same as ever: orange print table clothes, an array of vases on windowsills, and couches set in the corner. The café was located in one of few areas in Khayelitsha created with the hope of tourism's arrival, and the complex had lived through many private and public economic plans in recent years, from traditional crafts to touring bikes to entrepreneurial start-ups. These relatively unsuccessful plans meant that the café was reliably quiet, used by local residents for business meetings over coffee or cool drinks.

While we were at the café that day other people slowly arrived, filling the space with conversations overlapping in isiXhosa and English: men in business attire at a far table spoke quietly, two older women sat behind us looking over spreadsheets on a laptop, and a middle-aged man in business casual greeted Aviwe heartily upon entering. He was an activist with whom Aviwe previously struggled for infrastructural expansion across the city's shack communities, and they spoke animatedly for a few minutes before parting. Prompted by this unexpected encounter, Aviwe began narrating to my research colleague Minah and me the history of Zanele's local activism, re-telling stories we had often heard before, but rarely in sequence.

I had first met Aviwe and many fellow resident-activists in 2010, when Zanele was in the center of several local struggles. Although informal settlements in South Africa are often assumed to be spaces devoid of internal order, Zanele and all other informal settlements in which I have spent time in Khayelitsha are densely organized and highly politicized spaces, filled with not only the dynamics of political parties, but also often with branches of social movements, community-based groups, and non-governmental organizations. Indeed, the struggles of informal settlements residents across South Africa have defined much of the country's post-apartheid urban politics, spanning from actions of spectacular protest to the laborious work of the politically mundane (Robins 2014; McFarlane and Silver 2017). Such movements working for expanded access to basic services, housing, and other promised public goods balance between poles of engagement with and opposition to government policies and processes (Oldfield and Stokke 2007), encompassing a wide range of tactics and political ideologies (Desai 2002; Ballard, Habib, and Valodia 2006). Significant scholarship with, and, critically, knowledge production within, the well-known South African shackdweller's movement Abahlali baseMjondolo has contributed to an international platform for struggles for housing, services, and political position emerging from informality (Gibson 2008; Patel 2008; Pithouse 2008; Zikode 2008a, 2008b). In Cape Town, movements like the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign and advocacy organizations like the Social Justice Coalition—among many others—ground their work within the particularities of informal spaces in the city and the experience and work of

informal residents to make change (van Heusden and Pointer 2006; Oldfield and Stokke 2007; Thompson and Nleya 2010; Storey 2014). Zanele, as with many of Khayelitsha's informal settlements, was home to robust internal political organization and linked to a number of local, city-wide, and national movement coalitions between 2010 and 2019. Although the structure changed with time, Zanele remained an intensely political and deeply organized space, and many of the residents engaged in consistent politicized work and readily identified as activists.

At the café in 2019 Aviwe reminisced about the potential futures—now past—held in those moments of action and the camaraderie of struggle. Sometime around 2010 Zanele's activism caught the attention and worry of the mayor, who was the focus of residents' efforts to be relocated to a site upon which formal houses might be built. The inability to build formal houses on their current site meant that any improvements in infrastructure were themselves temporary and incomplete, as the goal of formal houses and full infrastructure for all residents upon the current site was an impossibility—or so said the city. When the mayor gave a hoped-for relocation site to another use around 2011, Aviwe claims to have said to him: “if you see fire in Khayelitsha, you must know that you put the light there because you have always empty promises.”

In the 2019 retelling of this encounter, Aviwe placed a heavy emphasis on the word “always,” drawing it out and nodding, his chin skirting the collar of a thick khaki jacket, buttoned up high in the winter's cold. Although his emphasis was on the vacancy of the mayor's words, the statement was not one of frustration but of challenge: the flame of struggle stayed lit because the city refused to act, to right the wrongs of layered histories of dispossession, from settler colonialism through apartheid and the vacancy of a democracy without redistribution. Aviwe was telling the mayor that a new future would be written, either through flames or through the city's acquiescence to just action, to the fulfillment of promises made to lift all residents up to a dignified material life founded in full housing, water, electricity, and sanitation provision.

Back in the café, eight years after his challenge to the mayor, Aviwe sighed in frustration at both the absence of material progress in these interceding years and its result of internal upheaval within his community. There were still almost no services on their current site, little news of possible relocation, and, it felt to him, less coherence of the community at that moment around shared goals or hope for change. He added, speaking of the interceding years and the frustration of a seemingly immovable municipal government: “What do we have? Nothing. Just promises, promises, promises.” Aviwe drank more coffee and then returned to his narration, wary of inaction but still intermittently hopeful of renewed action in Zanele and of potential paths forward to political and material change.

For Aviwe, the possibilities of struggle's success were always ahead—they were the imagined worlds written around the everyday labor required

to fulfill service needs, and the political acts of individuals and of the collective. To read through fieldnotes from many conversations with Aviwe over the past decade is to travel constantly through layers of time: not only the time depth of our archived conversations, but also to the many discussions of past struggles, the multiple imaginings of potential futures, and the disappointments as these futures passed by, unrealized. Zanele's material state almost miraculously remained the same throughout these conversations, while its imagined and possible states flexed with the moment in which each future was being told. Promises for change were punctuated with small wins for the community based on their activism and organizing that suggested further change was just ahead. When Aviwe and neighbors were working with a non-governmental organization on a project to map the community and prioritize development plans, it seemed that Zanele would change slowly, populated by pieces of new infrastructure that could improve life on the site, as the group helped find a site for relocation. Another year, when a local politician brought temporary jobs for residents to clean up the area, attention from the officials seemed to suggest the chance of economic uplift and political alliances that may also result in infrastructural change. In other moments, promises of relocation prompted imaginings of new places that would replace Zanele's narrow, sandy paths with brick homes and concrete roads. For Aviwe, these layered times and their potential futures are written across a landscape alternately populated or depopulated, built up or removed, improved or in decay. Zanele itself remains trapped within these elusive re-tellings, these spectral other Zaneles that might have been. It remains the shadow—the non-place—of these fictive places, the inert reality to each escaped and potent alternative.

Material and political worlds entwine deeply in Zanele; the stagnation of infrastructural progress is intimately linked to feelings of marginalization from an urban polity in which power and material resources remain largely focused on central spaces. As Yiftachel argues, urban informality is an in-between state which holds possibilities of multiple ends—those of destruction and that of formalization alike (2009). For Aviwe, his versions of Zanele have shown both ends playing out in myriad scenarios, and the possibilities of their local organizing and the endless promises of what might still be haunt the site. The temporariness of Zanele's infrastructural every day is punctuated by frustration at waiting, worry at maintaining tenuous access, and the elusive promise of development's eventual arrival.

As Aviwe told these layered histories of action and of possibility, Zanele itself became a site haunted by its alters—by what could have been. As with sites in Cape Town deeply marked by colonial and apartheid violence, such as the destruction and clearance of District Six (Zembylas, Bozalek, and Motala 2020), Zanele has a spectral side: the many paths of development, of change, of progress not taken. For long-term residents like Aviwe, and especially for those engaged in years of political mobilizations, Zanele is simultaneously how it appears today and how it might have been if political

winds had favored the community. These alters for Zanele are not visible to all; they are clear to Aviwe and to his neighbors, and to peers who have struggled alongside them, while remaining invisible and inaccessible to others. For those who have been central to Zanele's iterations of local organizing, possible development scenarios, and ultimately empty political promises, the landscape of the informal settlement is dual: they know and can see the material changes that did not occur, that were lost when politicians or city staff or development groups did not follow through on plans for improvements. For Aviwe, he remembered viscerally the frustration of the mayor giving land to another community in 2011, and could see in his retelling not only the political labor that had gone into the possibility but also the path not taken for Zanele—the development that was given to another community.

These ghosts are the tracing of a possible future that wrote itself in the gaze of Aviwe and other resident-activists: potential futures that glimpsed into focus, only to dissipate. As imagined places shape how we see what is before us in the African metropolis (De Boeck and Plissart 2004), the hyper-local gaze of the resident-activist creates an image of Zanele that holds not only the present but also the imprints of developmental futures that did not come to pass. Aviwe sees a version of Zanele—this spectral, local “elsewhere” (ibid: 24)—that is invisible with the eyes of an outsider. Simone posits the spectral as a potential in-road for naming complex meetings of provisionality and connectivity that define African cities (Simone 2004). As he writes,

Urban landscapes come to refract various layers of sedimentation—of past uses and organization—as well as to embody a range of possible meanings and actions falling outside the shifting levels of specification brought to bear on these landscapes by the prevailing and, in Africa, often fragmentary apparatuses of control.

(ibid: 14)

The need for openness to new opportunities—like Aviwe's activism and constant adaptation of struggle and possible change—sits in contrast to the stagnation of Zanele seen in the sedimentation of uses, meanings, and processes that have accumulated in the material space of informal infrastructures.

As with the variable visibility of the specters of District Six—invisible in its destruction, but made visible through the labor of activists, scholars, and the displaced community to remember and to mark such memory (Zembylas, Bozalek, and Motala 2020)—the infrastructural violences (Rodgers and O'Neill 2012) of Zanele wrought through exclusion are made visible as Aviwe tells the stories of their work for improvements and for resettlement. These are the multiple times of Zanele, temporal paths that haunt a material world.

Conclusion: A Politics of Absence

What does it mean when the futures embedded within the infrastructural promise cease to hold resonance for urban residents? As anthropologists increasingly turn our attention toward time as a focus for analysis, we are prompted to consider the naturalization of certain times and temporal registers (Bear 2014), as well as the possibility for time's multiplicity (Abu-Shams & González-Vásquez 2014).

The ungrounded nature of waiting characteristic of informal urban spaces is what Yiftachel deems a "grey space," set between the categories of legalization or formalization and that of destruction (2009). This is a space not only of limbo but also of potentiality, moderated by the power of planning and the pressures of capital. Mains pushes us to examine the social implications of decay in the perception of a steady developmental time in Ethiopia, and the correlate of hope's loss (Mains 2012) within the "chronic uncertainty of temporariness" (Mains 2019: 182). For Funeka, Aviwe, and Zanele's several thousand other residents, the now of infrastructure is indeterminate, their position in the developmental timeline intermittently evasive and multiple. Such uncertainty is expressed as frustration, exasperation, or anger that fuels political action and, at times, prompts retreat and resentment.

In this complexity of infrastructural hope and mobilization, the possibility of development becomes something neither tangible nor completely eliminated. Rather, it becomes a separate site entirely, a coalescing of the specters of Aviwe's stories of possible change, and intricately related to Zanele's absences through its own completeness. The other Zaneles—the places that *might* have been—are always in contrast to the one that is, the inconsistent and incomplete place that is the focus of Funeka's frustrated statement to an imagined other: "don't ever go there, that place is no place."

As scholars explore the complex interaction of materials, sociality, and politics embodied within infrastructure, such assemblages become ways of reckoning with time itself as malleable and multiple. Infrastructural projects do not necessarily exist in a linear timeline in which construction is a tightly bound and telos-laden state, but instead can sit in temporal phases of suspension that visually and symbolically border on ruination. Here, the process of becoming is upset, crafting "ruins not of the past, but of the future" (Gupta 2018: 69). To become ruins of the future, infrastructure must hold in its narrative grasp a powerful lede—one that heads a story of change, hope, possibility, and becoming that can defy even the evidence of one's eyes. Indeed, the promise seen in infrastructural futures relies upon an understanding of time's steady progress that buys into the myth of development's meritocracy (Ferguson 1999), one that Aviwe and other residents of urban South African peripheries can readily name.

Infrastructure is powerful in its presence and its absence, shaping through both of these spacio-temporal frameworks the navigation of manifold subjectivities, desires, and engagements. As the modernizing power of the

infrastructural promise shows its ability to control and temper time itself (Appel, Anand, and Gupta 2018: 17), residents of Zanele and other informal sites experience these times of possibility, uncertainty, and unease from their particular urban position at the city's geographic and socio-political edge. As urban spaces across Africa grapple with the tenors of persistent informality and uncertainty that span economic and political fields, "long-term political imaginations of the future seem to be engulfed by a continuous present" (Goldstone and Obarrio 2016: 13). What emerges in Zanele from these temporal ploys is a politics that names absence not only as a time or a place, but as a category of experience marked as much by their own actions seeking development as by the processes of governance that they seek to shift.

What might a politics of absence tell us? This is not only a story of docility or state power, or, equally, of the statements of agency written on the streets, in courtrooms, or in social movements. Exclusion and waiting forge an absence within Zanele that is not empty but is haunted by potential developmental futures that have not come to pass. These specters are ones created in the interaction of marginalized subjects and the governance processes that deny their right not only for development but also for successful political action. Absence is here a register through which residents evoke the complexity of uncertainty, the temporality of navigating their capacities for action and for persistence within the city's margins, and the expectation that they must utilize their own time and labor to seek connections that were promised decades ago. The apparent obligation of the community to do the work to make informal connections and to agitate for the fulfillment of political promises *is* a politics of absence. This politics is named as readily in Funeka's statement about the dirtiness of the sand as in the specters of untaken developmental paths in Aviwe's retelling. These are ways to name the work, the energy, the frustration, and the constant agitation for possibility that are required of life within informality's gray spaces.

For cities across the continent, development frames a set of material technologies and political practices of governance held together, tenuously, across time and scale. As construction posits a futurity that sits uneasily alongside the temporariness of its inevitably in-process states (Mains 2019), absence frames a past-present that must be navigated by residents who are themselves constantly in processes of making, imagining, and interpreting the city (Simone 2004). Ethnography offers an avenue for revealing the spectral within the city—the provisional altars of a here-and-now that hold resonance for residents as failed futures written on a continuous present, paradoxically highlighting the possibilities of agency and collective action as well as the frustrations of developmental stasis. Absence sets a difficult meeting point between Appadurai's "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai 2004) and the urban temporality embodied within long-term informal spaces (Yiftachel 2009). It offers an entry point for seeing the provisionality of African urban sites in a register crafted by resident's socio-political and imaginative labor.

The overarching temporariness conceptualized by thinking multiple African futures (Goldstone and Obarrio 2016) is populated as much by labor and action as it is by stasis and stagnation.

Note

- 1 Both individuals and named informal settlements have been provided with pseudonyms.

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14 “Seeing like a City” – Sorting ‘Wire Spaghetti’ in Zanzibar Stone Town

Rose Marie Beck

Introduction

One morning in Zanzibar Stone Town,¹ I stepped out of the house. Squinting at the sun, bundles of electrical wires, assorted cables and water pipes attached to houses a little above eye height throughout the old Kasbah city of Zanzibar drew my gaze. On an impulse, I started following the electrical wires. Then I followed the water pipes. And telephone cables. Satellite dish cables. CCTV cables. Loose ends were dangling. Grey, black, white, blue, red. Plastic, rubber, aluminium, steel, insulation. Ropes, strings, trees, dowels, zip-ties, clamps, nails. Projections on a wall, mural crowns, lampposts, shop signs, downpipes. Connectors, adaptors, couplings, splits. Utility hole covers, rusty piping, transformers, fuses, locks. Brittle, damaged walls, low hanging lines, ducts, crumbling corners.

Corners present spectacular wire spaghetti, as some people are said to call them. Wires-cables-pipes, I argue, invite us to follow their logic, collect items attached to them, trace their lines of flight. So many lines of flight from one single, individual corner, each leading into new lines of flight! Following cables makes us change perspective as we go along. Sorted and entangled, they create coherence for their very rhizomatic being. Yet there is no one story in the received sense, no narrative or discourse. Instead, I let myself drift along with the cables and continuously explore how our colloquy makes me produce phenomena made up of heterogeneous entities. This article, then, is literally held together by ‘wire spaghetti’ (Figure 14.1).

Experimenting with cables, this article responds to recent claims about the complexity of the city inclusive of non-human beings (Amin & Thrift 2017). I ask what an ethnography that tries to account for this kind of complexity of the city can do that an ethnography that focussed on people and communities, or the interrelationship of social and physical space (Pellow 2002) could not? More-than-human anthropology oftentimes looks at how ‘nature’ coproduces the urban (Franklin 2017). But cables are artefacts of human making: what do we gain by looking at them appearing to have a life of their own? Is it possible to do ethnography with things only? What



Figure 14.1 ‘Wire spaghetti’, a Tourist Attraction in Hurumzi, Stone Town Zanzibar (30 July 2018).

does such a change of perspective tell us about urban anthropology, about Zanzibar in particular and the city in general? Can I experience myself as becoming-with the cables (Haraway), collecting items and being collected in a decentred selving² in conjunction with the city and also write about it, as I suggest in the intro to this text? It would mean unlearning how to be an autonomous self, this influential and prolific figure of modernity, and become the connected self that we already are instead.

While in Zanzibar, I let cables take the lead, I followed them through the city, describing in detail their materialities, the ambiance of the city that impressed itself on me, the decisions I took in following them around. This is all about rubber, aluminium, fuses, dust and crumbly walls. What does it mean to serve with a rusty, dysfunctional colonial leftover street lamp? Becoming is immanent to the very being of cables-wires-pipes, tying and holding together Stone Town Zanzibar, whether they function or whether they have fallen into disuse. As I found, cables often had “neither a beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination ... A line of becoming has only a middle” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 293, cited from Coleman and Ringrose 2013: 9). Cables are “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988), that can be followed, that lead the way. They allow me to take the proposition “follow the object” seriously and put it to practice, and while doing so, I naively take for granted that these cables-wires-pipes are specific for Zanzibar. After all, *this* corner with its specific assemblage of cables is singular, even in Zanzibar; its existence is independent from me as ethnographer.

Then I start talking to people about the cables that I followed: to Rajah, the carpenter, who privately provides water to his neighbourhood; to Marko, the shopkeeper, and who carefully balances his needs for electricity and his means to prepay his meter. I look at Zanzibar through the lens of cables, wires and pipes and the Zanzibari way of making connections that over time came to stand for “congealed social relation” (van Laak 2018). In particular I admire a small backyard in which a leaking pipe waters a lush garden. It has come into existence not because of intentional action by people, but for their lack of action. The garden thus results from non-intentional action by a pipe.

In the process of writing, cables made me turn to the words that stand in for them: the “real”, material cables are not present here, only words that are instrumental in sharing this research with an academic community. I am quite worried: how can I hold together the cables and their local, urban, Zanzibari meanings, or prevent the very cables, wires, pipes to be reduced to signs and symbols that develop into a sprawl of metaphors, thus prematurely acclaiming heterogeneity, connection and connectivity before I have had the opportunity to explore what the cables, pipes and wires actually do? I show how the substitution of material cables and their disappearance behind words and pictures are a human centred way of accounting for the cityness of the city that in a hegemonial gesture tends to relegate non-human actors, especially those that are, like cables, ultimately human made artefacts, to the margins of creating coherence in and of the city. Instead, I suggest reflecting on cables-as-words and what it could mean to consider a trans-entity pidgin as an idiom to converse with the city.

Methodologically, I take defamiliarisation so familiar in ethnography as a starting point, but I suggest to add nescience and wonder as a way of making relations with cables. A wonder that renders visible the hidden-in-plain-sight world as it goes on going.³ Maybe we can start with naïveté, this methodological fiction of a “naïve researcher”, who attempts to take nothing for granted and make as little assumptions about the matter at hand as possible, or its likely interpretations or users (Law 2002: 12). Turning such experimenting and naïveté into a methodological stance is not new in anthropology, but to me it is a historical responsibility that highlights my positionality as “white” “western” scholar and prevents this very perspective from becoming invisible and, concomitantly, produces hegemonic results.

As a research ethics letting the cables take the lead requires that I renounce the authoritative voice of the anthropologist-scholar to follow and observe with what/whom they associate and how they allow me to serve in colloquy. Yet I am deeply implied in this work. My roles as a follower of cables and as anthropologist writing this article clash. I understand that for this article to be accepted for publication, I need to ascertain the authority of my voice as academic through legitimation gestures that consist, among others, in the theoretical and conceptual background laid out here, the time spent in the field and my familiarity with it, my academic biography and position, and my ability to present my argument linguistically. At this point

in the article, the reader might not be convinced: after all, I (emphasis) write this article. I (emphasis) had to make decisions: at junctions, I had to decide which cables to follow, when to leave them to understand what people do with the cables, and how to write about them. In writing about cables, about Zanzibar, about the city, I (emphasis) produce the very phenomena I describe. This is commonplace. The difference is that I am (trying to) let cables *take the lead* in the production of urban phenomena: complexity and heterogeneity. But I have to rely on communicating with human beings to make myself understood to my chosen audience (the reader of this volume on urban anthropology). I turn to that problem in the section about words and objects, where I describe the hegemonial relationship between words and objects, that makes the objects disappear since a trans-entity pidgin (Amin & Thrift 2017: 80) is nowhere in sight. For a start, I intend to trouble a naïvely representational reading that runs the risk of confounding my narrative with my account of cables-wires-pipes becoming with Zanzibar Stone Town.

Urban Theory

In light of globally pervasive urbanisation and, in its wake, the felt upheaval of socio-political organisation of human life, scholars have challenged urban theory to account more adequately for the cityness of cities, i.e. “the possibility that there are kinds of urbanity that do not fit with this very large body of urbanism developed in the West” (Sassen 2005: 1). In the past 40 years, the Northern provenance of urban theory that has tended to cast Southern cities as deficient, fragmented, incoherent, elusive, unknowable or unattainable (critically: Guyer 2011; Robinson 2006; Werthmann 2014) has steadily been eroded by empirical anthropological and sociological research foregrounding everyday practices of urbanites in the global South (e.g., De Boeck and Plissart 2004; Myers 2003; Pellow 2002; Simone 2004a, 2004b, 2010). Yet how reconcile that at a conceptual level the city appears as in/coherent and un/knowable, while in everyday practices of urbanites this does not seem to be worth much consideration?

In the wake of postcolonial debate, in particular, what goes by the name of “theory from the South” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2010; Connell 2007), the Southern city has become a source for a heuristic in a critical theorisation of the urban perceived to be dominated by the Northern city (Hentschel 2014; Mabin 2014; Mbembe and Nuttall 2004; Myers 2014; Nuttall and Mbembe 2008; Pieterse 2010). Raising questions of coherence and modes of its production from the South was also expected to address problems of conceptual depth and theoretical reach of decentred urban theory. Ethnographic approaches to the urban have broadened our perspective on the city contributing a list of attributes such as ethnic, divided, gendered, contested, deindustrialised, informational, modernist, postmodern, fortress, sacred, traditional, global, mega- and world cities

(Low 1999a; Robinson 2006; Sassen 1991). Indeed, in conjunction with alternative concepts and vocabularies from increasingly transdisciplinary research, a consensus in urban studies has emerged that cities in Africa are but examples of cities in general (Low 1999b; Myers 2011; Pieterse 2013; Robinson 2006). However, the turn towards Southern cities while having started to ask questions about its knowability, theorization of “the urban” in a broader sense is still underway (Beauregard 2012). One of the problems attached to doing (urban) theory might be the diversity and instability of categories and practices of categorisation themselves that imply such attributes like purism, boundary making, incomplete generalisation and reductionism (*ibid.*: 476, Macamo 2016). To set Northern against Southern Theory builds on assumptions of difference that are tempting yet reproduce a dichotomous mode of theorising that has long been exposed (e.g., Horkheimer and Adorno [1987] 2002).

I suggest experimenting with a third possibility that has been prepared by the two previous ones and their critique. It entails a characterisation of the city – its cityness – featuring “incompleteness, complexity, and the possibility of making” (Sassen 2013: 209), emphasising multiplicities, complexities and heterogeneities.⁴ In this view, questions of how one can know the city, and of what holds the city together, become more pressing. Current shifts in the social sciences draw attention to constantly emerging phenomena through the relationality of their components, “ongoing becomings” (Haraway), assemblages as “temporary groupings of relations” (Deleuze and Guattari) that, taken seriously in their excess, are understood in their singularities, thus defying (received) categorisation or conceptualisation. In that view, the unknowability and incoherence of cities either is part of the cityness of cities, or it is a problem of categorial thought that has resulted in incomplete or insufficient abstraction and generalisation (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 92). These ideas are not new in urban theory. They predominantly grasp the contingent, situated, unstable, emergent, processual, indeterminate nature of cities (McCann, Roy and Ward 2013; Ong and Collier 2005), they allow “for some sort of provisional unity across difference” (Anderson and McFarlane 2011: 125). What moves into focus with posthumanist theorisation is to account for relationality, materiality, agency, mobility, performativity and imagination; in short: to account for how the city is ongoing in its becomings. The notion of Anthropocene summarises well this shift in the social sciences: in the Anthropocene, human occupation has reshaped the earth to the degree that one can recognise it as a separate geological epoch, and cities are its prime expression (Amin and Thrift 2017). The massive biophysical change has sparked the realisation about the fundamental entanglement of humans, matters, knowledge, shattering received categories of enlightened Western thinking that have brought forth the state, government, science, the citizen, the autonomous self in a world seemingly neatly separated into nature and culture (Latour 1993). In this view, cities are “extraordinarily complex entities – a mangle of machines, infrastructures, humans, non-humans, institutions, networks, metabolisms, matter and nature – where the coming

together is itself constitutive of urbanity and its radiated effects” (Amin and Thrift 2017: 9). To pursue this line of thought requires not only deconstructing Northern notions of the urban but also reconsidering Northern ways of knowledge production about the urban (Lanz 2015).⁵ At stake are imaginaries of the human and non-human condition and the practices that bring them into being. It requires, among others, a fundamental decentring of the human being whose selving is essentially implicated in its conjunction with human and non-human entities. What emerges is an imaginary of the city as space

producing a new ‘us’ peopled by all manner of selves, only some of which are human ... The goal is to produce a trans-entity pidgin which provides just enough communication to induce a productive level of discomfort which can lead on to new trans-entity-forms and patterns ...

(Amin and Thrift 2017: 80)

Much of recent anthropological research on African (and other Southern) cities cited above foreshadow this turn. But Amin and Thrift more radically challenge us to think about how cities think:

... not in the same way as human beings, to be sure – but in any case, it is hardly likely that human modes of thought cover all of the possibilities of thinking. More likely, these cities manifest a form of noncorrelationist thought, thought that is [...] nonreflexive, chiefly nonconscious, nonphenomenological

(ibid.: 82)

Yet how to account for that is an open question, especially in light of ongoing debates in anthropology about the place of African and Non-African voices and perspectives. While I am aware that the appeal to the notion of the Anthropocene may, once again, impose a ‘Western’ perspective on the phenomenon, I lay my cards on the table to acknowledge a potential inability, owing to who I am, to see beyond my positionality. I make the bold assumption, however, that trying to find ways of speaking intelligibly about the urban is the best way to meet the critiques hailing from the South by engaging them in a conversation about what our different gazes can perceive. I find attractive to imagine a more-than-human perspective that could overcome the dichotomies of a Northern or a Southern one.

Cables, Wires, Pipes

If we accept non-human social actors to be part of the city, then they are *alters* and take part in the constitution of *selves*. Getting out of the house after a difficult night typical for field research (Beatty 2011) on that clear day in Zanzibar I chose to selve through matter, seeking coherence of self with the coherence of cables in Zanzibar Stone Town: just next to the entrance

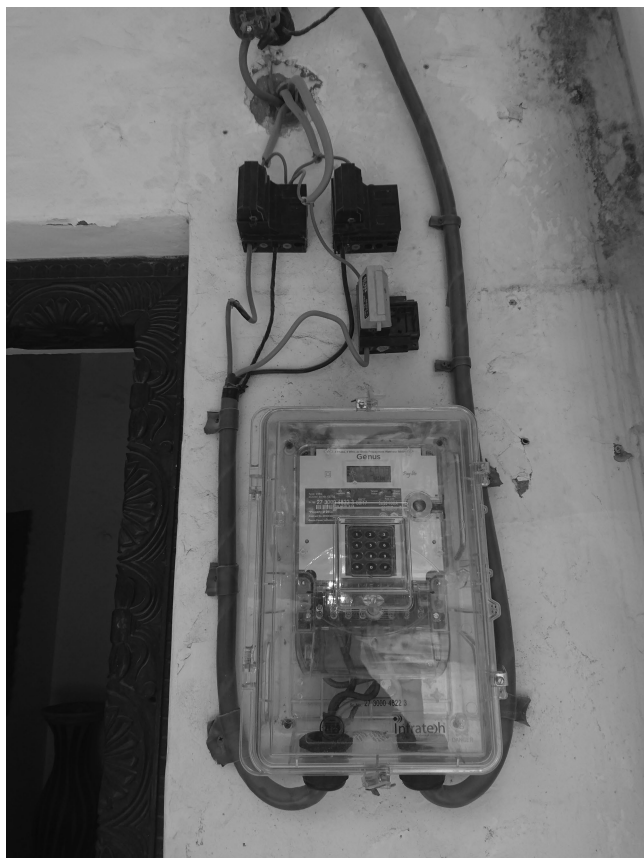


Figure 14.2 Outside the House (Vuga, 28 July 2018).

the morning sun shines on white, grey, brownish and black, fat and skinny cables, a meter with a blue tag behind a plastic encasing, connectors, voltage transformers, switches, earthes, screws. I take one step back and see that this electrical conglomerate is protected under a porch canopy under which one of the fat cables wiggles through (Figure 14.2).

I have to stretch to look for where it goes, holding the mobile high above my head: on top, it untidily joins with other cables that mainly move in from the left along the guest house's front, cross a downpipe and the corner of the house next door. I take a closer look: there is an old lamp with a rusty mesh net, the bulb is missing. Below are some roundish black disks that encircle some of the electrical cables: induction obstructers (Figure 14.3).

Next door, a little above eye height, are more cables, they disappear downwards in or sprout upwards from two big grey switch boxes, take a turn to the right where they join with other cables that run together in thin braids from the left, twist into a tightly clamped fat cable-rope. Just

above I notice black water hoses, a bundle of maybe four, five hosepipes stapled together by zip-ties. Encouraged I walk on, following these cable-hose-bundles that are neatly separated, clamped together, running along the suture between the ground floor and first storey.

Then I get stuck. A corner. The cables have to cross a street, and they cross from everywhere. A CCTV-camera looks away from me. A street lamp with a lampshade made of a piece of corrugated iron looks down on this corner. It cannot be ancient, and the iron sheet looks shiny yet, further below an open distribution box. Mingy flat little grey cables that dangle in between, telephone cables gone into disuse since the advent of the mobile; of landlines that never worked correctly in Zanzibar anyway – or maybe this one did. An older man asks me what I am doing and laughs at me. Finally, I decided to take the corner to the left. There is one of that tightly clamped twisted cable-ropes, it holds the promise to take me to where it confluences into a larger one and an even larger one, and ultimately to the power transformer (sub)station.



Figure 14.3 Next Door (Vuga, 28 July 2018).



Figure 14.4 Cables and Plants – A Symbiotic Relationship (Vuga, 28 July 2018).

I meet new wonders. The cables-pipes, attracted to each other, grow together into a fat bundle at the crown of a backyard wall. The electrical main-line disappears under its weight. Many black pipes in bundles that grow fatter by the day. They were adding junctions, getting very heavy and pulling off the walls the clamps that fasten them. Here, on the crown of this wall grows a tree into which the pipes are hung. They live in symbiosis with each other: pipes grow around the tree, and the tree grows around the pipes (Figure 14.4). One day I pass, and the leaves have been chopped off, they lie there on the ground, leaving the wall bare and miserable against the cloudy sky. A year later, I pass by again, and now the crown has been mended, rough stones and mortar making visible the maintenance that goes into their upkeep.

I leave the pipes: they provide work for Rajah, a carpenter from around the corner with a lucrative business in providing water to almost 200 households, and growing. He works together with an artisan skilled in drilling wells, tending to the needs of pipes, water and customers. A little salty the water is, he says. Therefore, they think of putting in a filter at their well, somewhere in the gorge between the houses. In the evening, I call my brother. He is a water engineer. In July 2018, he was in Lebanon with a water infrastructure project. He said there must be a freshwater lens below, but once it has been perforated and has become salty, it will never recover. My landlord points me to one of the hotels nearby. They buy their water in big tanks directly from ZAWA, the Zanzibar Water Authority, who brings it from Zanzibar's hinterland. There, at the hotels' backdoor some of the women who are customers of Rajah whose water is too salty, go and buy water for cooking. Or they purchase it bottled in the shops, for example, Uhai, a brand of Bakhresa group, one of the largest industrial conglomerates in the region owned by the Zanzibari tycoon Said

Salim Bakhresa. I could follow this lead now, which would take me into the economy of Zanzibar. But I decide to stay with cables.

I walk on, this time with a student from Leipzig whom I accidentally met on the previous day at Zanzibar’s harbour. He is much taller than me, and he is also a boy and perhaps, indeed, knows more about electricity than I? This is a telephone box, maybe. But what is this? A worn, certainly dysfunctional distributor box? It looks ancient. We should ask someone. It is hot and humid – the walls smell of mould and must and delicious food. The Zanzibari electrician I know has no time for me. I let it go.

Corners presented impossible decisions to take. Which is the most likely candidate that would lead to the next more prominent junction? Five cables that become four fastened to the wall with a cable lug, but that’s where we came from. We decide to go on, to postpone the ultimate goal to reach one of the four electric power transformation substations from the colonial era that mark the margins of Stone Town: one at the Old Fort Square, one close to the entrance to Vuga Street (the one closest to where we were “doing cables”), one at the market at Darajani, and one somewhere in Malindi. They are easy to recognise. “Danger” is written on them in four languages, English, Swahili, Arabic and Gujarati. Others are not so easy to find. I talk again to the electrician who connects me to ZECO, Zanzibar Electrical Company. Here I receive a full map of Zanzibar’s electrification. Now I go looking for the substations. They are surprisingly easy to find. But, again, these are not beginnings; they are middles, connected to the more extensive electricity network of Zanzibar Island that is connected to Tanzania mainland. Then we systematically follow cables, starting from the fat twisted ones, taking the junctions the cables take, into small alleys that open up to places. Cables do hold together the city: one intersection takes us crookedly through these lanes, ending in a white plastered house. We return and take the next junction, only to end up at the greenhouse next to the white one. And from there, more cables lead us back to other fat cables in another more extensive street. Systematically and endlessly. What is an ending here: is it the moment when the cable sneaks into a wall or window? Where it comes out from the substation, the water catchment, the water tank? What does it mean, in the case of cables, that “A line of becoming only has a middle” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 293)?

Sometimes I got stuck, confused, wondering. Moments when I ended up in a blind alley, although I believed to be in a fat artery. Turning again and finding myself in a mangle of cords, wires, lines, tubes. Apprehending things for which I don’t have words. Then moving along with the flow of strings of infrastructure, neatly ordered into two rows, one for water, one for electricity. Neat arrangements, carefully, even lovingly fastened to walls, making spaces, creating lines of flight, scenic alleys, grand roads. I found cables serving as garbage containers, flag poles or tourist attractions. A water pipe strung on a temporary support pole on a ruined house about to be torn down. Lines dangling, uncared for, long-forgotten loose ends. CCTV

cameras in lonely back alleys. Sophisticated arrangements of plastic or metal tubes, cleats, couplings, clamps, weaving in and out of windows, never sure whether they climb up or crawl down. Pleasant combinations of cables, clips and loops. Cables stockpiling in coils for future usage. A red fibre-glass cable in plain sight from the entrance to Hurumzi across the Old Fort to Forodhani Park Hotel. Cables layawaying silently through the government district on an early Friday evening. Down at Makeleleni the five-star hotels bashfully hide their needs from the gaze of modernity.

I met with impressive, wild assemblages. In Hurumzi (a section of Stone Town) there is a spot that has become a tourist attraction for the spectacular tangle of wires-pipes-cables (Figure 14.1). Yet much work goes into their upkeep. They bear the signs of human tinkering, lacings and layers of cables, but also of neglect. Tiny cables dangle, leading nowhere, leftovers from earlier times. The fat twisted electrical cable was always there first, providing the anchor on which other cables mounted. The main cable fastens to the house with a large metal stabilising clamp, and other cables attach with zip-ties, ropes, strings or laces. Cables attach to cables. Some are painted over, and others splattered with paint. Cables growing on, out of and into houses. These houses bear the marks of the history of infrastructure in Zanzibar, the signs of the failure of the Zanzibari government to quench the thirst of Stone Town's ever-growing tourism sector with its hotels, hostels and AirB'n'Bs. Older photographs reaching back to the colonial days of the 1950s demonstrate that the electrical cables start sprouting in the 1990s, and it is only since the mid-2000s that they burst into sprawling overgrowths.⁶ This can be matched with the increasing dilapidation of Zanzibar's electrical and water provision as a consequence of budget cuts under Structural Adaptation and neo-liberal development projects. In a more theoretical voice, the electrical wiring has been provided by the state with its goals of order, categorisation, and efficient management in the service of generating state income (Scott 1998), and the water piping by the heterogeneous, unruly city in flux (Amin and Thrift 2017). With the weakening of the Zanzibari government, the city took the upper hand. The limits of the city's capacity are becoming more and more explicit with the cable-wire-pipe-bundles growing so heavy that the maintenance-and-ordering work done so far by the inhabitants on their accounts no longer prevent these bundles from ripping holes into walls, cables dangling dangerously low between the houses, risking passers-by to be caught in their webs.

To follow cables as a way of doing ethnography systematically draws attention to how social life in urban settings has become artefactual. The ambiance of the city, the play of cool shadows and bright light, its smells and sounds have presented themselves poignantly. To follow cables foregrounds a network of infrastructures of water, electricity, security, business and leisure, and how infrastructure holds together the city. Cables-wires-pipes make different kinds of difference: for walls, for people, for entrepreneurs,

for tourists, for the economy, for the government. Although I rigorously had set out to be led by cables through the city, once I introduced the idea of following them to their origin, I was confronted with the necessity and impossibility of decision making.

Nationalist Electricity

I have taken pipes and cables as a middle, a line of flight, for asking questions: about water, electricity, mobile and internet providers, security operations in Zanzibar Stone Town. I took a taxi to the Zanzibar Water Authority, several times, and walked across town to an internet provider. I talked to people about how they organise and manage their water and electricity everyday (Figure 14.5).

Since Zanzibar has introduced pre-paid meters after 2010, Marko, a shop owner told me, electricity is quite reliable. In all of Tanzania, including Zanzibar, one has to buy electricity in the form of a voucher. The lowest amount is 5,000 TSh (about 2,5 €), and it goes up as far as you want. A coupon of 10,000 TSh lasts him a month for light, a simple fan and a radio that plays in the background. His shop is open from 8:00 in the morning to 5:30 in the afternoon. At home, he pays around 50,000 TSh, because there is a fridge (which eats most electricity), an iron, a stove, a blender. No, TV does not cost much electricity (see also Winter 2008).

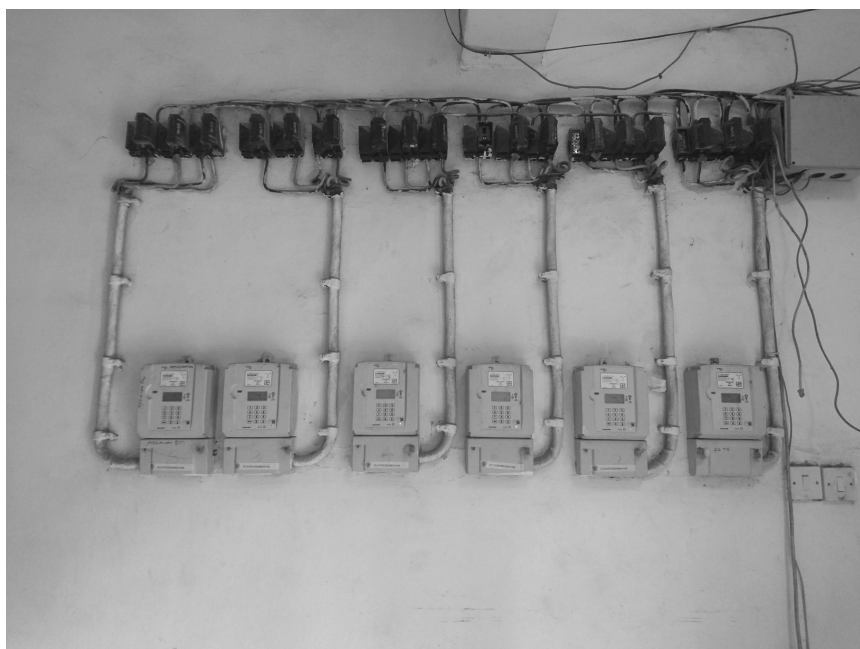


Figure 14.5 Electricity Meters (6 August 2018, Hurumzi).

Such meters are considered neo-liberal (Ferguson 2007) because the government withdraws from tasks formerly considered public duty: now people have to pay beforehand and on their account – if you don't have enough money you are supposed to just sit in the dark. The meter is unrelenting – you can't negotiate with a machine as you could before in person with a clerk. It is a socio-technical arrangement that aims at changing and changes consumer practices (Breckenridge 2014 on biometrics). For South Africa, Antina von Schnitzler analyses how its introduction led to resistance and politicisation of users-customers and a new definition of citizenship (von Schnitzler 2016). In this view, Africa is framed as the experimenting field for new technologies (e.g., Boeckler and Berndt 2017; Rottenburg 2009) that transforms citizens into consumers, and necessarily so as part of capitalist expansion, a form of *Landnahme* (Rosa, Dörre and Lessenich 2017). People are thus turned into capitalist animate things (Mbembe 2017), and the technologies tested in this way are then brought back to Europe (Comaroff and Comaroff 2010). That is what Mbembe (2017) means when he says, “the world turns black”.

But in Zanzibar, Marko and his two companions explained, this new technology has strengthened their government. Everybody has to use the meters, and they do so according to their means. They can buy a few units for small amounts and see where it takes them. Some rented houses with many parties join up and collect money to purchase units. (I wonder how that works.) And now, it does not make a difference anymore whether you are poor or rich, you have to buy and pay. Full stop. There are no paying bills at the end of a month any longer – no negotiating with the Zeco officers⁷ at the counter where you formerly went and paid your bill. Before, people would pile up debts with Zeco and Zeco got into trouble. Zeco incurred huge debts with Tanzania from whom Zanzibar is entirely dependent concerning electricity. And then Zanzibar went all dark, because of all this debt.⁸ The new technology strengthens the Zanzibari government. Now it is much better. It makes us all equal.⁹ In contradiction to von Schnitzler, for example, this is a story about how technology produces development and its promises: equality and citizenship in a highly politicised field between Tanzania Mainland and the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar. The introduction of meters is an attempt by semi-autonomous Zanzibar to control its dependency vis-à-vis Tanzania. In Zanzibar, then, these meters are part of nationalist pride.¹⁰

Looking at various kinds of infrastructure such as water, electricity or internet in Zanzibar Stone Town, a new line of flight emerges: technology is appropriated by actors close to the resource and distributed to neighbours, family and friends: technicians, clerks, artisans and business people that can invest particular kinds of knowledge and often financial means to become the nodes and points of passage, building and rebuilding patron-client relationships in place long before the advent of discourses and internationally funded development projects in the name of private-public management and good governance. I could now follow this line of flight of the shift towards technology and how its promises of neutrality and

removal from the political world establish a connection to the promises of development and a better future. I will just point in this direction. In the cracks between life, technology and governance, between what is, what could be and what is politically and economically possible, nobody ever really sits in the dark, and nobody eats cold food. Because life-in-which-we-trust keeps the upper hand compared to technology-in-which-we-are-supposed-to-trust (Macamo and Neubert 2014).

Zanzibar’s Second Nature

Behind a gate: a lush green garden, big fleshy leaves, the sound of water dripping. A quiet corner in Vuga, Zanzibar Stone Town. How long has the water been leaking? The earth is dark and red. Rajah, the carpenter, points it out to me on our way to a well that he wants to show me (Figure 14.6). The black plastic hose has a leak, quite a big one, from which water spills. I find it unlikely that the pipe has not been mended because it waters such a beautiful plant, a dreamy spot of imaginaries of well-kept wilderness? I make a short videoclip with my mobile phone’s camera and send it per WhatsApp to my partner. “So negligence has borne a small paradise?” he quips. A surprise in the harsh environment of Zanzibar Stone Town’s water business. And a colleague replies: “A true example where neither nature



Figure 14.6 Self-Acting Capability of Anthropocenic Infrastructure: A Small Paradise (Vuga, 3 August 2018).

(rain) nor the human being intervene any more. Infrastructure as an independent actor, indeed!”¹¹ Walking in Stone Town, I start to notice leaks. They are everywhere, leaving their signatures on stones, walls, roofs. This one must have been here for a long time. The rock on which the water drips is green and corroded. Sandy comes back from her research stay in Zanzibar and tells us of a leak under which a plant yields tomatoes. But indeed someone planted it there? Impossible, it grows on the projection of a wall where the cables-wires-pipes are fastened. Tomatoes are a staple vegetable, and its seeds are everywhere. Maybe this plant grew on account of pipe dripping, of a little sand and dust on the sill, of a bird dropping. We don’t, and we can’t know. It doesn’t matter right now, but it could: in an ethnography of water provision in Zanzibar we could go and enquire about these leaks and their owners, whose pipes are leaking and who failed to repair them, why this is so, how much water gets spilled, and what the people think about this. It is quite foreseeable where this leads us: to an account of failing infrastructure due to mismanagement or disinterest of the government, of unhappy but enduring citizen of Zanzibar. Connecting to cables thus corrects my potentially (‘western’) stereotypical gaze, at least as long as it is not normalised, but questions normalisation.

Anthropocenic research on the city is closely connected to the sociology and history of technology. “Infrastructures are matter that enables the movement of other matter” (Larkin 2013: 329), they are “life’s arteries” (“Lebensadern”) “congealed social relations” (“geronnene Sozialbeziehungen”, van Laak 2018), they are the condition for mobility, connectivity and circulation of people, things and knowledge (Renn and Hyman 2012). The promise of infrastructure is to increase the efficiency of everyday lives and thus enable the human being to release energies and set his mind on other things. Infrastructures constitute a highly politicised field and are the object of ongoing negotiations about governance, resources and what citizenship means (von Schnitzler 2008). Thus they are indispensable for the way we work and live, pronouncedly in agglomerations of “built things, knowledge things, or people things” (Larkin 2013: 329): the city.

More than that, the city and its infrastructure have become characteristic for the Anthropocene’s “second nature”, “a set of artificial networks with no real endpoint or finish line through which and which we pass and are passed” (Amin and Thrift 2017: 46f.). Infrastructure no longer only means that we have delegated some everyday tasks to technology so they can disappear from our minds, just function and not bother us. To trust human activity to technology means trusting agency, and we should not be surprised to find that this agency yields new phenomena. The very idea of infrastructure intrinsically comprises the decentring of the human being. It encourages us to reconsider our becoming as actor-networked beyond the confinements of the modern, autonomous self (Latour 1993). Considering the heterogeneous networks the human being is made up of, he can perhaps better be understood a case of “whole being smaller than its parts” (Latour et al. 2012), that

is, a phenomenon that comes into being at the and because of the intersection of other phenomena¹² – built things, knowledge things, people things. I am because I can collect items from heterogeneous sources (other items) and stabilise this collection into a temporary self: “Humans differ because they are often themselves equipped with many instruments to gather, compile, represent or even calculate the ‘whole’ in which, by some accounts, they reside” (Latour et al. 2012: 602).

Accepting leaks as phenomena of their own right with an agency of their own is compelling because it turns the lack of agency of people (i.e. not mending pipes) into non-intentional agency that yields new phenomena as results of longtime dripping: slippery stones, tomatoes, a tiny beautiful garden in a dusty Zanzibari backyard. This delightful surprise that questions received categories is one of the gratifications of a shifted perspective that also allows us a more critical perspective on the exclusivity of human agency.

Cables and Words

The fiction of “naïve researcher” was bolstered by my lack of vocabulary for the special words I did not know in German, neither in English nor Swahili: thimbles, cable lugs, distributor clamps, induction inhibitors. It made clear that in “following the objects”, as sociotechnical research (ANT and STS) advises, I followed singularities, individual cables or hoses and pipes and how they are connected to a particular house, with particular clamps or zip-ties. The process of finding words, literally, for the singularities I met on walls, was a process of naming and conceptually taking possession of them.¹³ In this case, where my colloquy was as much with things as with people, the question of language in field research (Borchgrevink 2003; Owusu 1978) poses itself in a new, radical, way. Owusu rightly points out the relevance of conceptual grasp of the language of one’s interlocutors (ibid.). If language as conceptual tool is the most important means for disclosing and grasping of the world, what then is the language of my more-than-human interlocutors?

As starting point, I suggest to abstain in principled ways from generalisation and abstraction. This is by no means trivial, since abstraction is built into how we think about and use language. In the history of European ideas it has been central that man take power over the world by naming it. It is a matching of words and entities, with the words naming things and taking power over them. And then the entities acquire the ability to disappear. Power thus lies not only in naming, but in the capability to make that-which-has-been-named disappear. This process has been naturalised, yet it rests on the particular, deeply cultural but all-encompassing mechanism that is widely known as representation,¹⁴ itself foundational for modernity’s linguistic promises, and connected to the way we believe language functions, specifically in academia (Bauman and Briggs 2004; Beck 2018;

Errington 2007). The mechanism consists of, first, the coupling of a singularity, an individual entity, with a word. Semiotics describes this foundational process largely as arbitrary and has thus removed it from analysis.¹⁵ It also means to subscribe a singularity into a class or category of items that can all be coupled with the same word: clamp, thimble. Second, the word is foregrounded and its ties to the singularity are loosened, qualified and hierarchised. It means that we assign generalisations and abstractions to the relationship between singularity and word. Then, singularity and word are decoupled, the singularity disappears. Once, so the traditional account, a word has been liberated from the entity but not from its qualifications, it can be reassigned to a new singularity. Importantly, part of the mechanism is the belief that the words come first and we then match them on to the entities we wish to describe (cf. Berger and Luckmann 1966); this is the process of taking power of things through naming them. From whatever direction we enter into this process, the disappearance – materially or categorially – of the singular entity is always at its core, is determinative for the hegemonial order of knowledge.

In fact, these three semiotic processes of power (naming, abstraction and disappearance) prohibit me to bring to this account the material cables. Surely Amin and Thrift do not have in mind this kind of disappearance of non-human entities through words and language when they call for “new generalities, abstractions and categories which allow different points of reference to be incarnated” (2017: 80). If we don’t want to lose the singularity, the individual cable-pipe, then we have to reconceptualise this relationship of representation. Instead of prematurely accepting the representational hegemonial relationship and shutting down abstraction by diversifying semiotic relationships (e.g., understanding cables as metaphors for connecting or holding things together), the role of material entities as much as words needs to be made relevant to urban theory. The colloquy of human and more-than-human entities and their presencing in and across assemblages relies on making relations (not meaning). This is how I understand Amin and Thrift’s (2017) idea of a trans-entity pidgin (2017: 80) that results from the dysfunction of received categories under the weight of the Anthropocene and its theoretical radiances (ibid.).

The ability of words to de- and recouple with singularities in new contexts and assemblages renders words highly mobile. The decoupling is neither arbitrary nor total but rests on generalisations and abstractions through which words can be re-matched and recoupled with new singularities. This incomplete decoupling of singularity and word as its representational double empowers a tremendous, essential mobility and circulation of words – non-human entities themselves – that have the ability to enlist in innumerable assemblages, pick up and incorporate the entities they are coupled with there, move out of the assemblage only to be stored in society’s archives and called upon when needed. If we recognise words as non-human entities that have the ability to enlist in assemblages just like any other

entity, then we can unpack representation as a relationship of power in the service of hegemonial orders of knowledge, of naming, classifying, and rendering invisible. We could unstick ourselves from these confinements by recasting words as part of a rhizome, enrolled into the assemblage of, in this case, Zanzibar and its complexities. Then the relevance of which language one chooses to do research in and which one I use to write here, changes, because Swahili words are enlisted in an assemblage in different ways than English words.

This rhizome exists only because of the human being who has invented this relationship of power over the world. He is the only one with the ability to produce it and draw on it. The ability to appropriate the agency of its items and masquerading them as his/her own, is characteristic for the human being (Latour et al. 2012: 603). Indeed, this ability is what allows me in the first place to give this account: to enrol items from this gigantic rhizome ‘language’ into the assemblage that makes up cables-as-article.¹⁶ A trans-human entity pidgin would have to renounce this very power of representation and find novel ways of accounting for significant relationships between human and non-human entities.

The mobility of words and the powerful processes that make them mobile are conditional for the worlding, the rendering global, of any kind of phenomena, whether cables or cities (McCann, Roy and Ward 2013). In a posthumanist, nonrepresentational idiom we may start to think of words of being like cables: non-human entities enlisted side by side in assemblages which we can account for without necessarily having to make disappear any of them. The representational move of sliding the word in front of the entity that materially disappears and is understood to be merely imagined or remembered, stored in our brains, is deeply engrained in our thought. In this light, what I have written can easily been misunderstood as a representation. After all, the cables themselves, in their materiality, are not here? Contrary to this I argue that every word written in this text is part of the becoming of the assemblage of cables-wires-pipes I selded with, starting out in Zanzibar Stone Town, as is the reader of this text. Only because words allow for the temporal and spatial mobility of phenomena, a suspension of the becoming of an assemblage, we should not assume that the cables have disappeared under the burden of representation.

Conclusion

In this article, I have experimented with how to think and write with cables as instances of how the city sees and thinks. The cables have led me through the ambience of Zanzibar, into debates about electricity, citizenship and nationalism, the privatisation of water provision, and how one can understand a little garden in a quiet corner as Anthropocene’s second nature. I have drawn attention to how we conceptually and theoretically rely on the hegemonial gesture of letting the entities we speak and write about

disappear; that this representational mode is at the heart of theory building. Each exploration is incomplete, sometimes even sketchy, certainly unfinished, ending with new questions that allow a glimpse at (more) complexities and possibilities of making. More than enough lines of flight for future research. With this account, I contribute to the ever becoming assemblage of and about Zanzibar and the cityness of cities.

Taken as an account of Zanzibar, it is the one that cables and me following them have made me account for. It is incomplete, yes, but so is an account of any other topic that we commonly think relevant for understanding Zanzibar – history, transport, tourism, architecture, governance, space- and place-making, and so forth. Such received ways of writing about a city conceal the underlying theoretical and conceptual choices made before even starting into ethnography. In comparison, my account indeed has a strange kind of incompleteness that ensues from following cables and the lines of flight that they create. This is also its strength.

The way they produce coherence is characteristic for Zanzibar. They circumscribe the Zanzibari socio-spatial formation as characterised by an exponential growth and diversification of cables-pipes-wires since the 1990s that can be traced back to the socio-economic opening of formerly socialist Tanzania, the development of Zanzibar as a tourist destination, and the loss of control of the government over growth in Zanzibar in general. The introduction of electricity meters is interpreted to contribute to equality among citizens of Zanzibar and a nationalist control over the tensions between Zanzibari and Tanzanian governments. Water provision, on the other hand, has almost entirely become the realm of private, unregulated and oftentimes illegal entrepreneurship that makes mural crowns and projections crumble under the weight of bundles of water pipes. Overuse has additionally saltified the sweetwater lens below the city of Zanzibar. All in all the weakness of the government coupled with the aggressively expanding private water business produces a destructive trend.

Cables make connections, yes. But in Zanzibar, they excel with their coherence producing capacity. First, a careful ethnography of cables, wires, pipes, second, a rigorous research ethics of following cables as research objects and looking at Zanzibar through the lens of cables, but, third, especially my stubborn refusal to let them disappear behind the hegemonial representational relationship – a prerequisite for metaphorical sprawl – has demonstrated the power of routinised categorial assumptions that lead to incomplete and insufficient abstraction and generalisation. 'Theory from the South' and 'Theory from the North' can profit from the defamiliarisation of more-than-human anthropology. Putting posthumanist, Northern and Southern perspectives into conversation pluralises the sources for better generalised and abstracted accounts of cities and urban theory. Posthumanist accounts foreground the flexible, fluid, open and relations of human (the researcher) with non-human actors and concomitantly with actors in general (Brunotti 2021; Ludwig 2021). Theorisation then rests less on

comparison, but on the “cultivation of an art of relation-making” (Stengers 2018: 146) that vests the ethnographer with a capacity that can travel and acquire explanatory power in other situations and contexts.

Two days before I left Zanzibar, somebody mended the hose in the petite jungle around the corner. Now there was a leak in the hose above. Paradise keeps thriving.

Notes

- 1 Research for this article was conducted in Zanzibar, July, August and November 2018, and February 2020, in the context of the research project “Doing the city. Socio-spatial navigation in urban Africa”, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) 2017–2020 under the research permit of the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar of 28.06.2018 and Residence Permit Class C, no. RPC 2005101 (valid until 14.08.2020). I acknowledge my gratitude to Katja Werthmann, Dmitri van den Bersselaar, Irene Brunotti, Manuela Kirberg, Lara Krause, Susann Ludwig, Elísio Macamo, James Merron, Hanna Nieber, and Thomas Schellhardt who accompany me on this intellectual journey. All photos have been taken by myself in July/August 2018 and February 2020 in Zanzibar Stone Town, Tanzania.
- 2 In the sense of the ongoing becoming of self (Haraway). In social theory (e.g. Berger and Luckmann 1966), the self comes into existence in communion with the *alter* in a culturally and socially disposed process of selving and altering. Beyond literature from psychology the term ‘selving’ is little used, see, for example, Thibault (2019). In light of posthumanist thought it is a difficult term. Here I use it quite naively.
- 3 To make such invisibility visible is a whole intellectual programme that I trace back to Goffman, Garfinkel, Sacks, and later Law, Callon and Latour.
- 4 This literature is far too extensive to enumerate here. Points of reference for my own academic practices are/were Gilles Deleuze (with Felix Guattari 1988), Donna Haraway (2016), Bruno Latour (1993, 2005), John Law (2002, Bijker & Law 1992), Karen Barad (2004), and Nigel Thrift (2008).
- 5 And, as I want to argue, about language (see below).
- 6 Photographs of R.T. Oza and Son’s at Capital Art Studio from the 1950s to 2019 (14 Feb 2020, Zanzibar).
- 7 Zanzibar Electricity Corporation.
- 8 This is not entirely true. In 2010 an unprecedented power outage due to poor maintenance of and lack of substitute for the only submarine power connection between Zanzibar and Tanzania – Zanzibar being fully reliant on Tanzania’s supply – lasted more than three months (cf. Ilskog 2011).
- 9 Of course this is an unfinished piece. There are other stories that still speak in the discourse of corrupt and, mostly, incompetent officers and authorities.
- 10 On national pride see, for example, Askew (2002), Fair (2001).
- 11 Thomas Schellhardt, Susann Ludwig.
- 12 They use the notion of monad, drawing on Tarde’s Monadology and testing it with data taken from the academic profile of an imaginary professor, Hervé C. They argue that they can make a list of webpages on which his name appears that thus make him discernible and individualise him as a person. Only that a webpage comprises other names or characteristics as well: imagine he appears on the page of the Paris School of Management, that holds many other names, and can be considered a monad of its own right. However, Hervé C.’s name also appears on the website of a soccer club, an alumni website, a family ancestry

- page, etc. (these are my examples), all of whose list of names are larger than the list that characterises Hervé C. See Latour et al. (2012).
- 13 Naming as social practice has been able to reinvent itself from its colonial image in the past 20 years, and has received attention in a highly specialised field of sociological/sociolinguistic and literary studies, foregrounding the – changing – social role of names and naming especially in postcolonial contexts. For a broad overview on person naming see Nyambi, Mangena and Pfukwa (eds.) (2016), Olatunji et al. (2015), for the politics of urban street naming see Rose-Redwood, Alderman and Azaryahu (eds.) (2017). Especially the latter address the nexus of hegemony and naming. I acknowledge their work, yet I am interested in naming as a specific form of representational relationship that I question as such.
 - 14 Too much has been written about representation to be meaningfully included here.
 - 15 If one understands arbitrariness as unstructured, unpatterned, i.e. outside the range of what is of interest to the social sciences, as Peirce and de Saussure have theorised.
 - 16 It is an example of what it means that the whole (the rhizome ‘language’) is larger than its parts (the words in this article) (Latour et al. 2012).

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15 Modernity and the Art of Motorcycle Management

Auto/Mobility in Nigeria's Planned Capital

Rudolf P. Gaudio

In June 2006 a Nigerian nongovernmental organization hosted a conference on philanthropy and civil society in Abuja, the country's capital. The conference was held at the official residence of the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and was attended by dozens of politicians, corporate executives, scholars, and religious leaders from all parts of the country. At one point in the proceedings, the then minister, Nasir El Rufai, arrived to welcome the participants and offered to answer questions. Ignoring the organizers' pleas that they stick to the topic of philanthropy, many attendees insisted on discussing more practical issues. Abuja is a young city—its core districts were built in the 1980s and it was inaugurated as Nigeria's federal capital in 1991—but by 2006 its infrastructure was already severely strained. Conference participants peppered Minister El-Rufai with complaints and questions about the FCT's erratic supply of water and electricity, the unlicensed construction of houses and commercial buildings, and the territorial government's policy of bulldozing them. One businesswoman, an executive for a multinational oil company, asked about *okada*, the motorcycle-taxis that many Abuja residents relied on to move about the city. *Okada* are dangerous, the businesswoman complained. What did the minister plan to do about them?

"Ban them," Mr. El-Rufai answered, adding that his ministry was planning to purchase a sizable number of high-capacity buses to make up for the loss of the *okada*'s services.

But what about the *okada* riders themselves, someone else asked. What will they do for work?

"We are not communists," the minister replied. The *okada* riders would have to find real jobs. There were construction sites all over Abuja that needed workers, he noted, but too many young men didn't want to work. They'd rather just do *okada*.

Minister El-Rufai stuck to his word. On October 1, 2006, he announced a ban on commercial motorcycles in Abuja's central districts. The official justification was that *okada* riders drove recklessly, caused accidents, and used their motorcycles to commit crimes. Support for the ban was widespread among Abuja's wealthier residents, many of whom not only owned

their own cars but hired private chauffeurs. For the city's less privileged majority, however, the ban created hardships. The number of "El-Rufai buses," as the double-axle buses added to the municipal fleet came to be called, was nowhere near enough to meet the needs of Abuja's commuters. Increased demand for other forms of public transport led to higher prices, longer wait times, and more journeys on foot. But the ban remained in place, and Abuja residents did what Nigerians are known to do, with both pride and resignation: they "managed."

Debates about okada reflect the contradictions generated by the Nigerian state's ostensible commitment to the capitalist free market and its simultaneous impulse to regulate citizens' everyday activities according to imagined global standards of modern urban life. The philanthropy conference highlighted those contradictions. The conference organizers, who had invited me to assist at the registration desk and observe the proceedings, sought to encourage the practice of philanthropy for two reasons. Mindful of Nigeria's postcolonial history of ethno-regional conflict and military coups, they saw local philanthropic initiatives as a way to promote the development of Nigerian civil society and the stability of civilian democracy. Additionally, they saw philanthropy as a way Nigerian elites could help the country stand on its own rather than rely on foreign governments and NGOs to fund development projects. Although some attendees had high-level government positions, and notwithstanding the venue, the conference program did not address the role of the state in social and economic development. For many attendees, however, the organizers' goals could not be discussed separately from the infrastructural systems that facilitated or impeded their day-to-day activities, including their participation in the conference itself. The Minister himself acknowledged as much when he joked that the lights might go out during his talk. (They didn't, but even if they had, the grounds staff were undoubtedly prepared to switch on a generator.)

The Minister's joke was arguably successful in part because it was self-deprecatory, seemingly impugning the government of which he was a part. Mr. El-Rufai could afford such jocular humility because electricity distribution was mostly under the purview of other federal ministries. By contrast, the FCT's transportation sector was part of his portfolio, and on that issue he was serious: okada had no place in the nation's capital, and riding a motorcycle-taxi was not real work. His comments about okada were consistent with other public statements he reportedly made to the effect that Abuja was "not for poor people"; he was later compelled to qualify that to say the city was "not for idlers" (Murray 2007). The slippage in his discourse between poverty and laziness is typical of neoliberal ideology, which justifies social inequality as reflecting individual differences of talent and diligence, while supporting macroeconomic policies that favor the owners of wealth and private corporations. The minister's commitment to such policies was evident in his declaration that "we are not communists." Yet the okada ban contradicted capitalist principles insofar as most okada

drivers were free-lance entrepreneurs. Such inconsistency was not unique to El-Rufai, but reflects pervasive ideological contradictions regarding the role of the postcolonial state in fostering social and economic development. Transportation infrastructure is a key site of such contradictions, for it (1) makes it possible for the economy to function, in part by helping people get to work¹; (2) is a site of employment in itself; and (3) serves as a symbol of “modern” urban planning and technological development (Melly 2013; Harvey and Knox 2015; Rizzo 2017; Agbiboa 2018; Mains 2019). All three aspects—technical, economic, and symbolic—require competent policy-making and implementation, but it is the symbolism, or what Brian Larkin (2013) calls the “poetics” of infrastructure, that arguably generates the most controversy; and in the case of okada, it is at odds with the other two.

After a brief historical overview, this chapter examines representations of okada in mass media and everyday discourse, and juxtaposes these with okada riders’ own reflections on their work and public image. My analysis of these discourses supports certain claims.

First, although okada are often disparaged by elite and aspiring Nigerians, the motorcycles and their riders perform a necessary labor. Okada thus constitute a vital part of Abuja’s urban infrastructure (Fredericks 2018; Mains 2019). Second, the ban on okada does not just reflect Nigerian leaders’ positive aspirations for a safe, efficient city. It also, and more decidedly, indexes a negative impulse to repress those features of contemporary urban life that are seen as antithetical to a “modern” lifestyle, for which the prototypes come from the Eurowestern world and, more recently, from the wealthiest cities of Asia. Such aspirations and impulses are not uncommon among postcolonial African elites, who struggle to live down racialized stereotypes of Africa and Africans as essentially primitive and unsuited to a modern way of life (Enwezor 2010; Mbembe 2017; Pierre 2018). Finally, many working-class Nigerians are subject to similar postcolonial aspirations, but they tend to manage them differently. In particular, many okada riders and their supporters argue that the goal of making Abuja a “world-class” city would best be served by policies that focus less on repression and more on the positive functions of government: improving the public transport system and the overall economy to make it more responsive to the needs of the people whose labor keeps Abuja going.

Auto/Mobility and the Nigerian Suburbs

Architectural historian Nnamdi Elleh (2001) has described Abuja as the “single most ambitious urban design project of the twentieth century.” The project was launched in 1976 when the then head of state, General Murtala Mohammed, announced the Nigerian government’s decision to construct a new capital city in the geographic heart of the country. Nicknamed the “Giant of Africa,” the most populous country on the continent had gained independence from Great Britain in 1960 and was soon torn apart by coups

d'état and civil war. After crushing the Igbo-led breakaway republic of Biafra in 1970, the federal government reasserted control over that region's oil reserves and joined the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) the next year. In the decade that followed, Nigeria's military rulers and much of its political, economic, and cultural elite sought to use its newly exploited petro-wealth to enrich themselves and to cement the country's status as the preeminent "pan-African nation" (Apter 2005). Abuja is the brainchild of that oil boom era. The old capital, Lagos, located in the southwest and dominated by Yoruba speakers, had long been derided as dirty and overcrowded—a national embarrassment. By contrast, Abuja's central location and magnificent infrastructure were meant to rally the nation's myriad ethnicities and project an image of African modernity that all Nigerians, and all Black people, could be proud of.

Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory is enormous—greater in area than the US state of Delaware—and encompasses numerous towns and rural areas. Abuja, strictly speaking, is the largest of many urban centers within the FCT's borders, but in practice the two place-names are often used interchangeably. For example, automobile license plates say "Abuja—Centre of Unity" and make no mention of the FCT. Much like Brasília, the planned capital of Brazil that inspired Abuja's earliest promoters, Abuja was designed primarily for private car owners (Holston 1989). The city's master plan, produced by a consortium of US American planning firms, features a typically modernist separation of residential, commercial, and institutional zones, and a few satellite towns, all connected by multilane highways (FCDA 1979).

Provisions for a public bus system were included in the plan, but were only nominally implemented when the core urban districts were built in the 1980s. After the seat of government was officially transferred in 1991, Abuja's population soared, overwhelming the planned infrastructure, and fueling a massive informal economy that the state—under civilian rule since 1999—has struggled to regulate. Chronic shortages of affordable housing, exacerbated by government-sponsored demolitions, have forced hundreds of thousands of migrants to settle in far-flung suburbs, some of them located outside the FCT's borders in neighboring states, where basic infrastructural amenities are often lacking. It is for that reason that the word *suburb* in Nigerian English (like *banlieue* in French) is nearly synonymous with *slum*. For residents and visitors who do not own a motor vehicle, Abuja's sprawling layout and unreliable public transport make moving around complicated, unpredictable, and costly in terms of time, money, effort, and personal dignity.

The transportation problems facing Abuja's working- and middle-class residents are not just technical; they are also cultural, insofar as they are engendered by ideological contradictions with respect to *automobility*. This concept was first employed by scholars to critique the primacy of the privately owned automobile in urban transportation systems in the global

North (Rajan 1996; Featherstone 2004). For most of the 20th century, cars were seen to afford the kind of autonomy, flexibility, and security that were deemed necessary for individuals to compete successfully in a capitalist economy as both producer and consumer. Policies privileging automobile ownership and use were promoted despite the numerous problems they caused, including traffic, pollution, and energy supply crises. Turning their attention to the global South, scholars examined how ideologies of automobility were variably manifest in colonial and postcolonial societies, where cars came to symbolize the glamour and perils of modernity and class striving (Edensor 2004; Hart 2016; Green-Simms 2017; Hansen 2017). Automobility—literally “self-mobility”—is thus not just about automobiles. As explained by Lindsey Green-Simms (2017) and Jennifer Hart (2016), the term calls attention to the political-economic and cultural-ideological factors that impinge on any means by which humans move their bodies from place to place, including walking. Following Hart, I use “auto/mobility” to signal this broader meaning, where the orthographic slash problematizes the liberal-capitalist conflation of self and private property, and highlights the possibility of alternative configurations of social subjectivity, space, and technologies of mobility.

Although owning a car is normative among Abuja’s elite and aspiring classes, that goal is elusive for most of the capital region’s population of over three million (Macrotrends 2020). The carless majority comprises laborers, traders, and freelancers, most of whom work in the so-called informal economy; low-level civil servants and private-sector employees; students; and women who do the unpaid domestic work expected of wives and mothers. For most of these residents, legal public transport is hard to come by. Licensed taxicabs, painted green, are numerous in the city proper, but single rides (“drops”) are expensive. Some green taxis offer affordable ride-share service (known as “along”), but their availability is limited. Three-wheeled motorcycle-taxis known as *keke-NAPEP* (the name combines the Yoruba/Hausa word for bicycle with the acronym for a government program) provide individual and shared rides at reasonable rates, but they are only permitted to operate within certain residential districts (cf. Sopranzetti 2014; Mains 2019). “El-Rufai buses,” also called long buses or SURE-P buses (named after another government program), are similarly inexpensive and traverse long distances, but they are restricted in number and the companies that run them have been repeatedly accused of mismanagement and corruption (Otaru 2019). Until 2013, commercial minibuses known as *araba* filled an important gap for suburban commuters, but they were banned from Abuja’s central districts on the ostensible grounds that they (like *okada*) are dangerous, polluting, and unsightly (Adeniyi 2016). Shortly afterwards, the multinational ride-hailing firm Uber gained permission to operate in Abuja, but its services—like that of its competitor, Taxify—are prohibitive for most residents, not least because they require the use of smartphones and costly data plans.

To move about Abuja and its environs, therefore, many residents are forced to “manage”—a Nigerian Pidgin term that means “make do” or “get by,” often with a connotation of creative invention (cf. Pine 2012)—by relying on extralegal modes of public transport. A typical suburban commuter will take a (probably legal) okada or three-wheeled keke-napep from her home to the nearest highway. From there, if she is lucky, she will catch a (legal) long bus to travel into the city, but she is more likely to find an unlicensed along taxi. Once inside the city, she will probably take another along taxi (licensed or unlicensed) to reach her final destination. (In the late 2010s, such a one-way trip would likely cost a total of 300–400 naira. The official minimum wage for formal-sector employees was 300,000 naira, or about US\$85.) At both ends of her journey, our commuter will be discouraged from walking for all the but the shortest distances by weather conditions (hot and dusty during the dry season, humid and muddy during the rainy season); by a lack of sidewalks, especially in the central business district; and by social norms that regard walking as low-class and undignified. Bicycling for practical purposes is even more stigmatized and would be dangerous over long distances; the few bicycles I ever saw in Abuja were ridden by people wearing athletic gear in its most upscale neighborhoods.

In addition to providing a practical service, each mode of transit affords a kind of embodied sociality that generates ambivalent affective responses. Traveling by araba or along, for example, facilitates social interactions that can be informative, entertaining, or even titillating, but with passengers packed in to maximize profits, the close physical intimacy can feel uncomfortable and unsafe. Okada afford the most spectacular contradictions. As a cheap, efficient means to move over roads that are poorly maintained or choked with traffic, commercial motorcycles offer a kind of unfettered “moto-mobility” that is otherwise inaccessible to most urban residents (Pincher and Reimer 2012; Hansen 2017). They are also associated with danger and lawlessness. Nigeria has high rates of motor vehicle accidents of all kinds, but okada riders are often singled out for special condemnation, accused not only of reckless driving, but also of facilitating crime and terrorism. These concerns reached a crescendo in the 2000s and early 2010s, leading numerous state governments and the FCT to ban okada in urban centers. In that same period, a small number of elite Nigerians embraced a commodified motorcycle subculture influenced by biker aesthetics from North America and the UK. Though mainly identified with cosmopolitan lifestyle consumerism, Nigeria’s biker enthusiasts have made occasional gestures of solidarity with okada. The contradictory values assigned to okada can be seen as emblematic of Abuja’s larger contradictions as a city designed to showcase Nigerian unity and African modernity, but where the definitions of those concepts, and the infrastructural efforts required to make them concrete, are subject to constant debate.

(Mis)Representing Okada

Commercial motorcycles have many names in Nigeria—*acaba*, *kabu-kabu*, and *going* in the north; *inaga*, *akauke*, and *alalok* in the southeast—but *okada* is the most widespread term, an ironic reference to Okada Air, a now-defunct airline company founded in the early 1980s. The okada industry burgeoned in that decade, when a drop in global oil prices caused the Nigerian economy to contract. Pervasive governmental and corporate corruption exacerbated the situation, precipitating an economic decline that lasted for decades and has never been reversed. As automobiles became increasingly expensive to purchase and service, the market grew for imports of used motorcycles from Europe and new inexpensive models from China. In some jurisdictions, politicians gave away motorcycles as a way of cultivating patronage networks. Because maintaining a motorcycle is expensive, okada ownership was not feasible for everyone; wealthier individuals purchased fleets of motorcycles that they, in turn, hired out to okada riders who paid a commission (Egwu 2004; Mahlstein 2009; Agbibo 2018). Commercial motorcycling thus became a practical occupational choice for young men who would otherwise be unemployed. The riders' negative reputation also dates to this period, as they became associated with rising crime rates and the overall fear and anxiety that accompanied the oil bust.

Colloquially known as “machines” or “bikes,” motorcycles and their riders joined the masses of migrants who flocked to Abuja in the 1990s. After Nigeria's military ceded power to an elected civilian government in 1999, the state liberalized the economy and encouraged joint private-public enterprises that would stimulate growth and burnish the country's image on the world stage. With oil prices rising at the turn of the millennium, Nigeria successfully bid to host the All Africa Games, a continental version of the Olympics, in Abuja in October 2003. To prepare the new capital for its global debut, contracts were issued for the construction of a sports complex featuring a National Stadium and a Games Village to house athletes. These projects were designed to showcase Abuja as a model of modern organization and infrastructure, and to live down the notorious reputation of Lagos and other Nigerian cities for disorder and insecurity (Omezi 2014). To that end, a proposal was made to ban motorcycle-taxis. With that threat in mind, one federal official admonished okada riders “to organise yourselves in a way that will project well the image of our country” (“Charly Boy Zooms” 2002). The stadium and housing complex were built on schedule, but no ban was implemented, due in part to motorcycle riders' protests. Anti-okada sentiment persisted, however, and the ban was eventually enacted by Nasir El-Rufai, who took office as the FCT Minister a few months before the All Africa Games commenced.

The ban on okada was one of numerous policies that Minister El-Rufai implemented during his four-year term in the name of “restoring” Abuja's master plan; others included the demolition of unlicensed buildings

and the prosecution of street vendors. The ostensible motivation for these policies was practical—efficiency, safety, health, rule of law—but class-based aesthetic judgments were never far from the surface. In early 2006 an Abuja newspaper published an editorial defending El-Rufai. The writer acknowledged that “the crusade to restore the Abuja master-plan has left many Abuja residents homeless and jobless,” but insisted “the truth is that Abuja is already looking better for it” (Abalaja 2006). Similar comments were voiced at the philanthropy conference I attended later that year, where many, but not all, attendees supported El-Rufai’s efforts to “clean up” Abuja (cf. De Boeck 2011).

In mid-2009 I returned to Abuja to embark on a year-long period of fieldwork and made a point of getting to know okada riders, who by then could only be found in the satellite towns and suburbs. My residence then was in the city proper, so I often did a reverse commute, traveling out to the suburbs during the day and returning home as nightfall approached. One evening after work, I joined some friends at a beer garden in one of the city’s up-and-coming areas. (Abuja’s sprawling layout is conducive to beer gardens and other businesses that require open space.) The establishment was frequented mainly by Nigerians with postsecondary educations and office jobs, as well as African and Western expatriates of similar class standing. My friends introduced me to Emeka, a young university graduate from southeastern Nigeria who had recently relocated to Abuja to find work. After an initial exchange of pleasantries, Emeka asked me how I had spent my day. He was surprised to hear that I had been hanging out with okada riders in Kubwa, the FCT’s largest satellite town.

“What are you doing with okada riders?!” he asked. “Did they give you any attention?”

Emeka’s surprise was not dampened when I explained that my interest in okada had to do with my research, and that I had known my contacts for several months.

“You’re a bold guy, going to meet the okada riders. They’re less civilized, and violent. Imagine you having the courage to meet them!”

Emeka’s response was not unique. Elite and aspiring Nigerians frequently expressed a similar mix of surprise, admiration, and concern when they found out I was spending time with okada riders. It was largely from these exchanges that I learned about okada’s reputation: they’re drunkards; they smoke marijuana and take other drugs; they are in cahoots with armed robbers and kidnappers; if one of them gets into an accident with an automobile, his fellow okada riders will gang up on the motorist, beat him and steal his money. These stories might have been based on actual events, but they painted a distorted picture of the okada industry, which transported millions of Nigerians every day without incident. The stories thus said more about the people who circulated them than they did about okada riders themselves.

Emeka is a case in point. Though I never got to know him well, most of the university students and young graduates whom I met in Abuja came

from what could be called aspiring or “uncomfortably middle-class” backgrounds. By that I mean their parents (especially fathers) were urbanites with secondary or postsecondary educations who typically worked as civil servants, educators, private-sector professionals, or small-scale entrepreneurs. Credentials notwithstanding, they struggled to pay their children’s tuition and living expenses, and their children struggled to find gainful employment after they graduated. For such young people—and often for their parents—okada were an ordinary necessity. It is thus highly probable that Emeka had taken okada on numerous occasions in his hometown, at university, or when traveling. His comments about okada should thus be seen as acts of identity, or what Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall (2005) call “tactics of intersubjectivity.” By distancing himself from okada and aligning himself with me—a white, middle-aged foreigner who he expected to share his understanding of the descriptor “civilized”—Emeka performed the ideological speech acts of *distinction* and *adequation*, respectively, thus indexing the social status he aspired to rather than narrating his actual experiences with okada riders.

Media representations of okada skew negative, as well. Journalistic accounts abound of violent motorcycle gangs that kidnap and pillage (Aliyu 2020; Orjinmo 2020), mete out vigilante justice (Sobowale 2020), and commit acts of terrorism (Walker 2011). Less widely reported are the exploitative working conditions endured by okada riders or the violence waged against them by police and other state agents, who harass and beat them over ostensible infractions of licensing and road-safety violations, impound their motorcycles, and force them to pay bribes (Agbiboa 2018; News Agency of Nigeria 2020). Such imbalanced coverage reflects and reinforces popular antipathy toward motorcycle-taxis, especially among educated urbanites, some of whom rely on okada while also disparaging them.

Okada Riders’ Perspectives

The negative portrayals of okada that predominate in everyday conversation and popular media are at odds with what I observed in the satellite towns and suburbs of the FCT, where I took okada on a regular basis and got to know a number of okada riders personally. The riders with whom I have had the most enduring association are based in Nyingo, a (pseudonymous) town situated near a main highway north of Abuja city that hosts an important regional market. In the 2010s a few commercial streets were paved, but most residences were built on dirt roads. Long buses, araba minibuses, and along taxis collected and dropped off passengers by a junction on the highway, while okada served as the main mode of public transport within the town, or between Nyingo and nearby communities. In the late 2010s three-wheeled keke-napep were introduced and became an attractive alternative for women, children, and passengers with large bundles, though they are slower than okada and less able to navigate unpaved roads (Mains

2019). In the neighborhood of Nyingo that I frequented, most residents and workers—including okada riders—were Muslim, Hausa-speaking migrants from northern Nigeria. The riders I met were men, mostly in their twenties, thirties or forties, and the ones I got to know best were officers of the local chapter of the Motorcycle Transport Union of Nigeria (MTUN). Their union positions, for which they were paid, required them to stay put for a few hours every day, usually in the morning, so they could sell the permits that individual riders were obliged to purchase daily in order to carry passengers legally. In 2009–2010 the officers had no post of their own, so they usually hung out on benches next to a tea-seller's stand, chatting with the seller and his customers while keeping an eye on the street for riders who had not purchased a permit, and whatever else might pass by. The union officers also stood ready to help out in case of accidents or to settle conflicts that might arise between riders and passengers, the police, or the general public, or among riders themselves.

In this section I discuss the perspectives voiced by two okada riders, Malam Halifa and Malam Umar, during interviews in 2010. I had met both men the previous year and spent time with them and their colleagues regularly over that year and during subsequent stays in the FCT in 2012, 2014, and 2017. My research assistant, Malam Yusuf Garba, usually accompanied me. Umar, Halifa, and Yusuf are all native speakers of Hausa; I speak and understand it comfortably. Yusuf is also fluent in English and Nigerian Pidgin, while Umar and Halifa speak only a smattering of those languages. The interviews, like all our conversations, took place primarily in Hausa, with occasional codeswitches into Pidgin or English. Yusuf and I jointly interviewed each man separately, taking turns to ask him about life in Abuja generally and okada in particular.

Malam Umar grew up in a village in Zamfara, a poor, largely rural state near Nigeria's northern border. With only a primary school education and limited job prospects, he migrated to Abuja in 1992, just a few months after it became the federal capital. Working-class people could afford to live in the central city in those years, so he found lodging with other Hausa men and got jobs mostly in construction. Work in that industry was plentiful but it was hard and paid little to unskilled laborers like him. Riding okada, by contrast, appeared to offer the possibility of less grueling work, better wages, and the chance to be his own boss. Umar saved enough of his earnings to buy a used motorcycle and started riding okada. The work was steady and allowed him to amass the resources he needed to prepare for marriage. By 1999 Abuja's core districts had been substantially developed and competition for housing had intensified. Rising rents forced him to move to Nyingo, though he continued to ride okada in Abuja city where fares were more abundant. When I met him ten years later, Umar was secretary of the Nyingo chapter of the okada union, and lived with his wife and children in a smaller suburban town a few kilometers away.

Malam Halifa grew up in Zaria, a historically important Hausa city located about 250 kilometers north of Abuja. He attended junior secondary school for a while but his parents did not have the money to continue paying the fees, so in his early teens he went to work for a bakery as a roving vendor of bread. He also learned to ride a motorcycle and earned extra money riding okada (known locally as *acaba*) on a rented machine. Troubles in the household that he described as “tribalism” (*kabilanci*)—referring to conflict between his father’s multiple wives and their respective children—compelled him to leave home. He moved to the FCT in 1995 and found lodging with acquaintances in a northern suburb, where he supported himself by taking odd jobs in the market and as a farm laborer. He eventually resumed riding okada as well, and earned enough money to marry and buy his own motorcycle. When I met him in 2009, he lived with his wife in another northern suburb and served as treasurer of the Nyingo chapter of the okada union. In addition to riding okada, during the rainy season he farmed a small plot of land located in a rural area to the south; the only way to get there was by a 30-minute motorcycle ride.

The landowner was a member of the Gbagyi ethnic group (the largest indigenous community in the FCT) who let Halifa work it in exchange for a small share of the harvest. Though he had not finished secondary school, Halifa had a keen intellect and often asked me questions to expand his knowledge about the English language, US politics, and other topics. His fellow okada riders respected his ability to adjudicate conflicts in a way that was calm, principled, and dignified. When the chairman of the union chapter died a few years later, Halifa was elected to replace him. Umar was elected vice-chairman.

Though they worked closely together, Halifa and Umar expressed different opinions about their shared occupation and how they were affected by government policies. Like most riders I spoke to, Halifa was proud of okada riders’ infrastructural contributions—“We are the ones who help Nigeria with 60–70% of its transportation”—but he was not enthusiastic about the job and claimed he only did it for lack of a better alternative. For Umar, however, it was a positive choice. “I’m thankful to God that I have it,” Umar said, because it allowed him to support himself independently. He had stuck with it even after the okada ban was implemented in 2006. Since he could no longer look for passengers in Abuja city, he was compelled to work in the suburbs and satellite towns, where fares were lower and competition was stiff. A number of his peers gave up riding okada, but Umar found a niche in Nyingo, where he had been living for several years and had acquaintances in the local okada union chapter. Umar’s appreciation of okada as an occupation was thus tempered by the hardships caused by the ban. “You can’t feel good about that,” he said, “because if you do, the same thing could happen to you some day.”

Halifa’s take on the ban was contrarian. “As for the ban on okada in Abuja city,” he proclaimed, “I hope Allah brings it all the way here [to

Nyingo], and even to the state [i.e., the entire FCT]!” To support this provocative assertion, he acknowledged that some riders behaved irresponsibly by disobeying traffic laws or mixing oil and gasoline improperly, causing air pollution. I knew those were the kind of issues that he and his fellow union officers sought to address, but during the interview Halifa took on the role of a social critic. He spoke derisively of Abuja’s aspirational status as an “African capital” (he used the English phrase) and cited okada riders’ misdeeds as evidence of the city’s lack of development. Halifa’s harsh assessment of his fellow riders recalled the disparaging accusations made by former Minister El-Rufai. But Halifa did not share the Minister’s neoliberal convictions. In Halifa’s vision of a “developed” city, the role of government was not just to punish irresponsible behaviors; it was also to provide jobs. “The government should put us to work,” he declared. “Because we, most of us, they do the work [of okada] because they don’t have a job.” His ostensible support of the okada ban was thus contingent on governmental efforts to develop the economy to the benefit of all its citizens.

By referring to okada riders alternately as “we” and “they,” and by voicing both pride and criticism about their activities, Halifa indexed his ambivalent identification with okada as an occupation. Those mixed feelings did not prevent him from persevering in the job and eventually attaining a position of responsibility among his fellow riders. His role as union chapter chairman has also required him to engage in negotiations with Nyingo community leaders and state agents, earning their respect. By contrast, Umar waxed enthusiastic about riding okada, but his relations with his fellow riders were not always smooth. In the late 2010s disagreements over how to distribute the union chapter’s revenues led him to distance himself from Halifa and other officials. Umar spent less time at the spot where they gathered every morning, and more time riding his motorcycle or at home. Umar’s and Halifa’s experiences illustrate the tensions and possibilities generated by okada riders’ pursuit of economic autonomy, on one hand, and the need for collective organization and advocacy, on the other. The former makes the occupation of okada appealing, while the latter has enabled okada riders to weather the vagaries of the job and to resist repressive government policies and unfair business arrangements, with occasional, modest success (Mahlstein 2009; Ezeh 2016; Agbibo 2018; News Agency of Nigeria 2020).

Appropriating Okada: For Whose Benefit?

Although okada riders face widespread opprobrium, they do have some advocates, including journalists and academics who have documented their struggles for fair treatment and compensation—many of whom I have cited in this chapter—as well as elite motorcycle enthusiasts. Their most controversial supporter is Charly Boy (officially: Charles Chukwuemeka Oputa), a singer who achieved notoriety in the 1980s and 1990s for his outlandish

appearance—a kind of punk-rock version of the gender-bending British singer Boy George—which set the stage for a successful career in television; he hosted a number of talk shows, and served as a judge on *Nigerian Idol*. The son of a former Nigerian Supreme Court justice with a degree in communications from a US American college, Charly Boy’s popular appeal stems in part from the flamboyant way he rebelled against his privileged background. In fact, his career comprises an ambiguous mix of rebellion and institutional respectability. As a celebrity activist, he has repeatedly challenged governmental corruption and injustice, but he has also been accused of cooperating profitably, and even illicitly, with the state and corporate sectors (Nnadozie 2002; Bakare 2019). American biker aesthetics are an important part of what Charly Boy proudly calls his “brand.” He is frequently photographed astride a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, sporting black leather attire (Adoyi 2012). He has also been an outspoken supporter of Nigeria’s motorcycle-taxi operators.

In the early 2000s, as efforts to ban okada gathered strength in Nigeria’s largest cities, Charly Boy came out to protest the proposed bans and called on the relevant governments to support the riders and their passengers (Ogbu 2001). In 2002, a few months before the All Africa Games, he organized a rally in Abuja where he stood before thousands of okada riders to defend their right to work. Speaking in a mix of English and Nigerian Pidgin, he whipped the crowd up with music and cheerful shouts, then exhorted them to stave off the threat of a ban by obeying traffic laws. “We must put our house in order,” he declared, “and when we do that *no government go fit ban okada. I stand behind una say the life of okada people must to better*” (“no government will be able to ban okada. I stand behind you all [in affirming] that the life of okada people must get better”) (“Charly Boy Zooms” 2002). Through his use of Pidgin and the pronoun “we,” Charly Boy indexed solidarity with his working-class audience. At the same time, his law-abiding advice echoed that of government officials who put the onus of responsibility on okada riders to keep Abuja’s streets safe and respectable.

Motorcycles represent Charly Boy’s solidarity with ordinary people as well as his membership in a global elite. Whereas he rides an expensive American “power bike,” most okada riders use smaller, cheaper Chinese motorcycles that Nigerians call “regular bikes.” In public media he is often referred to as “Area Fada,” a Pidgin moniker roughly equivalent to American English “Father of the Hood,” signifying his self-appointed role as protector of okada riders and other poor urban Nigerian young men who proudly call themselves “area boys.” Charly Boy is not an “area” resident himself, however; his home in an upscale Abuja housing estate is well-known for its eccentric decor and his fleet of fancy cars. Among the riders I spoke to, Charly Boy’s reputation was mixed. Some appreciated his advocacy on their behalf, while others questioned his consistency

and effectiveness. A few went further in their criticism and accused him of championing the okada cause in order to bolster the value of his brand.

A more straightforward example of the commodified appropriation of okada's image appeared on Highsnobiety.com, an English-language website based in Germany that claims to document "youth culture through the prism of style." Billing itself as "where brands meet culture," the site reports fashion trends and advertises items for sale and delivery to the USA, Canada, most of Europe, Tunisia, and a handful of countries in East and Southeast Asia. Most of its trendspotting comes from Europe and North America, but other locations are occasionally covered. A 2018 blogpost entitled "Nigeria's Okada Bikers Could Be the Freshest People on Earth" features six photographs of young men posing on motorcycles in working-class neighborhoods of Lagos. The accompanying text by Alexander-Julian Gibbson, a freelance writer who self-identifies as Nigerian-American, acknowledges the okada riders' reputation as "rough and rowdy biker boys" and the efforts Nigerian governments have made to restrict them, but Gibbson explains that commercial motorcycling is simply a "no-fuss way to make a living" for poor young urban men. He also describes the toll the job takes on riders' eyes, which are subject to dirt and debris for many hours every day. This calls attention to the blogpost's stylistic focus: the riders' sunglasses, which "protect their peepers with pure *steez*" (italics in original; *steez* is an African American hip hop term meaning "effortless style"). There are no captions identifying the designers of the "extravagant" and "lavish" eyewear depicted in the photographs, nor does the text explain where the riders obtained them. It is reasonable to assume, however, that they paid far less than the prices listed elsewhere on the Highsnobiety site, where sunglasses start at over US\$100 per pair—more than most Nigerians, including okada riders, earn in a month (Houeland 2018).

In the same period that okada have been banned in Abuja, Lagos, and other cities, a small subculture has emerged of Nigerians who ride motorcycles for sport. Using sleek "adventure bikes" from Europe or Japan, a few of these bikers—mostly men, but including at least one woman (GhanaWeb TV 2019)—have ridden internationally, garnering publicity and corporate sponsorship. The most prominent is Toyin Adebola, also known as the "Black Rider," who has led teams of Nigerian bikers that claim to be "the first Africans" to ride on motorcycles to various global destinations (Emelike 2014; Haycon TV 2019b). Such appeals to racial and national pride have been commercially profitable, but Adebola claims more lofty motivations, calling himself a "self-appointed ambassador of my country" and emphasizing his philanthropic activities (Haycon TV 2019a). One Black Rider video depicts an encounter between Adebola and a young boy in a Nigerian village whose parents could not afford his school fees because they lacked 500 naira (equivalent to less than US\$1.50). After the boy explains his predicament to the camera, a hand—presumably Adebola's—reaches

out with a 1000-naira note, which the boy accepts with a bashful smile. The exchange is followed by intertitles informing us that “Nigeria has the highest number of out of school children in the world” because of “economic barriers, socio-cultural norms, and insurgency.” Adebola’s voice can then be heard intoning, “Let us make policy changes that would help these people” (Haycon TV 2019a). The contents of those policies, like the problems they are meant to address, are not specified.

Publicity about the Black Rider makes no explicit references to *okada*, but Adebola alludes to them when he narrates his earliest exposure to motorcycles as a child in the northern Nigerian city of Kano.

I was born in Kano and riding motorcycles in Kano is like drinking water or eating food to most young men that grew up there. It’s been there for generations, you see grandfathers and fathers and sons and grandsons who all have ridden. So I was born into a community where everybody rode bicycles and motorcycles as a means of commuting from point A to point B. Long distances for that matter. You know so it was something that came natural.

(Haycon TV 2019a)

By portraying motorcycles (and bicycles) as a kind of cultural tradition in Kano, Adebola indexes popular stereotypes of northern Nigeria—the only region that is overwhelmingly Muslim—as poorer and less developed than the rest of the country because of “sociocultural norms” that discourage young people from getting a “modern,” secular education. Such stereotypes are especially potent for the educated, urban, southern Nigerian audiences targeted by Haycon TV, an internet entertainment company based in Lagos. Those audiences and Adebola are undoubtedly aware of communities in and around Lagos where motorcycles have long been used, but acknowledging that fact would require addressing issues of socioeconomic inequality and transportation infrastructure. For it is poverty, and a desire for economic autonomy, that leads young men throughout Nigeria to take up commercial motorcycling as an occupation, and it is a lack of alternative modes of public transport that compels millions of Nigerians to rely on *okada* to get from point A to point B. These problems demand systemic policy measures—not just philanthropic charity—but they are easily overlooked when *okada* are regarded in aesthetic terms, whether as icons of working-class male cultural authenticity, or as a troublesome blight on the urban landscape.

Conclusion

Policies that privilege private automobiles at the expense of comprehensive public transportation systems inevitably lead to traffic jams, contradicting capitalist ideologies of automobility that equate private property with freedom of movement. Such contradictions are especially acute in Lagos,

Nigeria's and Africa's largest metropolis. Straddling numerous islands and a broad expanse of mainland, the city is notorious for its traffic "go-slows," which have persisted despite the introduction of a bus rapid transit system in 2008. Motorcycles are uniquely equipped to navigate the congested roadways, but in 2012 the Lagos state government banned okada from the central city. Motorcycles with larger engines were exempt from the ban, creating a loophole that various entrepreneurs sought to exploit (Mátùlúkò 2017). LifeBank, for example, a healthcare technology startup founded in 2016 by a Nigerian-American businesswoman, employs motorcycles to carry blood for transfusions to Lagos hospitals (Google 2020). Two other tech startups, Gokada and MAX, until recently allowed Lagosians to request an okada ride using a web browser or smartphone app. Their founders—three Nigerians and one Bangladeshi-American—were educated in the USA but were inspired by the success of motorcycle ride-hailing services in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and other southeast Asian countries (Masuku 2019; Saleh 2019). Despite the Lagos government's stated commitment to encouraging local entrepreneurship and international investment, in early 2020 it implemented a near-total ban on the use of commercial motorcycles (and tricycles) to transport passengers, effectively wiping out the okada industry (Salaudeen 2020). Gokada now offers parcel delivery service instead.

Abuja was designed to be the opposite of Lagos. Its sprawling layout, diffuse population, and wide roads were meant to forestall the congestion and chaos that make moving around Lagos so costly and time-consuming. Indeed, the lack of traffic in the FCT's early years supposedly made automobile ownership tempting even for people who did not know how to drive; rumors circulated about political "big men" who gave cars to their mistresses, who were blamed for causing accidents and go-slows. As the population burgeoned, however, the contradictions of automobility inexorably resurfaced, causing headaches for transportation planners and ordinary commuters. New multilane highways have alleviated some congestion, but traffic problems persist (Kwen 2020).

Agbiboa (2018) argues that anti-okada policies in Lagos have been motivated by the state government's desire to project an image of Nigeria's former capital not just as the country's commercial center, but as a "world-class" city. Similar desires animate transport policies in Abuja. In the same period that the FCT government banned motorcycle-taxis and minibuses, it was also developing a state-of-the-art light rail system that, according to the current FCT minister, puts Abuja on track to become "among the best 20 cities in the world" (Otaru 2019). After long delays and an outlay of over US\$800 million, financed mostly by Chinese loans, the first phase of the Abuja Rail Mass Transit was inaugurated in 2018. So far the system consists of one line connecting the central business district and the international airport, with one stop in between; other stations and rail lines are planned but have been delayed (Kwen 2020). Though officially heralded as a boon to suburban commuters, the light rail's route and ticket price

(500 or 1000 naira, depending on distance) make it useful mainly to air travelers. In both Abuja and Lagos, therefore, efforts to construct a “world-class” transportation system have entailed excluding and inconveniencing a large proportion of the workers whose mobility is necessary to keep the city functioning.

The descriptor “world-class” entails comparative judgments about the city in question in relation to other cities that have supposedly attained that exalted status. Such comparisons are not just geographical, but also temporal, since “world-class” cities are imagined to be those that are most “developed” and “modern,” ostensibly in terms of physical infrastructure and technology, though social and cultural factors are always in the mix. Thus, opposition to okada in Abuja is justified not just as an infrastructural necessity, but also for symbolic reasons. Urban planning policies that exacerbate social inequalities in the name of modernity are not unique to Nigeria, of course. They have been well described elsewhere in Africa (e.g., Larkin 2008; De Boeck 2011; Miescher 2012; Melly 2013; Mains 2019) and are an intrinsic feature of modern urban planning per se. The very notion of “modernity” relies on temporal, geographical, cultural, and racial hierarchies and exclusions (Latour 1993), which persist even when the concept is pluralized to allow for “alternative modernities” (Ferguson 2006). As noted by Nigerian art historian Okwui Enwezor, such alternatives are never valued equally, and Africa—particularly sub-Saharan Africa, the part of the continent racialized as Black—is almost always positioned in global perspective as the “nethermost part of modernity” (Enwezor 2010: 614; see also Pierre 2018).

Achille Mbembe (2001, 2017), Jemima Pierre (2012), and Mahmood Mamdani (2012) have described how racial and cultural hierarchies engendered by the trans-Atlantic slave trade and European colonialism continue to hold sway in postcolonial Africa, structuring and informing governance, daily life, and African people’s subjectivities. The repression of okada in Abuja and elsewhere in Nigeria is one manifestation of these dynamics. Although anti-okada policies may not be framed in racial terms, the “poetics” of those policies (Larkin 2013)—the language and imagery used to justify them—index a marked desire on the part of many elite and aspiring Nigerians to emulate the lifestyles associated with the world’s most “developed” cities. Most of those cities are in the Eurowestern world, which Nigerians popularly refer to as “oyinbo country,” where the Pidgin term *oyinbo* means both “white person” and “Westerner.” Additionally, certain Asian cities, especially the wealthy city-states of Dubai and Singapore, are increasingly cited by educated Nigerians as worthy models of development. None of those cities permits motorcycle-taxis. By contrast, two- and three-wheeled motorcycle-taxis are a popular, legal mode of public transport in other Asian cities. Those cities’ examples inspired the entrepreneurs who founded the ride-hailing start-ups Gokada and MAX in Lagos, as well as journalists like Abubakar Idris (2020), who sought to convince the Lagos state government to follow “the Asian example” by regulating okada instead

of banning them outright. That such arguments failed to gain traction suggests that a decisive majority of Lagos officials do not see middle-income Asian cities like Jakarta or Dhaka as models worth emulating, no matter how comparable their urban planning problems might be. Also ignored are the experiences of other African cities, such as Kigali, Rwanda (Masuku 2019) or Hawassa, Ethiopia (Mains 2019), where motorcycle-taxis have been subject to similarly fluctuating regimes of regulation and prohibition.

The invocation of a middle-income Asian or African example has even less likelihood of success in Abuja, whose leaders and promoters have long aspired for it be seen, as one early FCT minister put it, as one of the “best planned Capital Cities in the world... and a pride of the black man wherever he may be” (cited in Morah 1990: 205). Such competitive ambitions—to outshine other African capitals and be counted in the rarified circle of the world’s “best”—hinder the adoption of policies that respond to the mundane realities of Abuja’s residents. Yet it is those residents, including okada riders, whose creative and physical labors built the city and keep it moving. To say that their efforts deserve to be recognized and supported is not to advocate government handouts, charity, or empty aestheticizing praise. Nor is it to call for the government to get out of the way so okada’s entrepreneurial energies can thrive in the so-called free market. Many okada riders would happily do other work for a decent wage, and their passengers would be pleased to have safer, more comfortable and reliable transportation options. Making that possible will require committing resources to urban planning and governance that serves the entire capital region, not just the upscale urban center, with an equal commitment to ensuring that those resources are not squandered or stolen. An infrastructural system that promotes auto/mobility for the many rather than automobiles (or light rail) for the privileged few would make Abuja a real “centre of unity” and a source of pride for anyone who lives in, comes from, or identifies with Nigeria.

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Figure 15.1 Okada Not Allowed in Market Zuba, 2012. Credit: Rudolf Gaudio.



Figure 15.2 Okada on Road Kubwa, 2009. Credit: Rudolf Gaudio.

Note

- 1 Transportation infrastructure also facilitates the movement of goods, animals, and equipment. This chapter focuses on human passenger transportation, though passengers often carry goods, animals, and equipment with them.

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Part V

Power of Urban Belongingness



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16 We Were Running and Running

Rural-Urban Imaginaries and Strategic Mobility during the Liberian Civil War

Mary H. Moran

The contrast between city and countryside has been a key organizing concept for analysts of the violent conflicts that engulfed the Guinea Coast (also known as Mano River) region of West Africa in the late 1990s and early years of the 21st century. Attempting to explain why small countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone erupted into long-standing internal wars, in which hundreds of thousands of people were killed or displaced, anthropologists and other scholars drew on binary tropes of African tradition and modernity located, respectively, in rural and urban areas. For example, one important debate concerned how the rural or urban origins of the combatants influenced the course and ferocity of the wars. Some authors believed most of the young fighters were drawn from the urban “lumpen” population of “unemployed and unemployable youths, mostly male, who live by their wits or who have one foot in what is generally referred to as the informal or underground economy” (Abdullah 1998: 207; see also Hoffman 2011: 165). Others asserted that the fighters were rural innocents dazzled by the prospect of looting high status commodities and achieving a new lifestyle in cities: “Many of the young country boys and girls who joined up to take part in the battle of Monrovia had never been to the city before” (Ellis 2007: 115, see also 287–288). Some argued that the origins of the conflicts lay with urban intellectuals seeking to draw on the “ideological purity” of authentic, rural values (Richards 1996: 61), while others saw the dispossessed rural populations as finally realizing their victimization and striking back against state power (Abdullah 2006). Such characterizations have grounded explanations for the particular character of the violence in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and established the idea that cities and their inhabitants, as representatives of state authority, were targeted for “punishment” by rebel forces (Ellis 2007: 112). At the same time, attacks on rural communities and the intervention of international peacekeepers and humanitarian organizations into major cities drove refugees streaming toward urban areas in search of protection. Montserado County in Liberia, which contains the national capital of Monrovia, more than doubled in

population between 1984 and 2008 as displaced people from all over Liberia and refugees from neighboring countries sought shelter (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs 2008: 6). It is undeniable that the character of and perceptions about cities and countryside alike were fundamentally changed by the war and by people's experience of violence in both rural and urban settings.

This volume asks us to consider the social formations that constitute the definition of a city, town, or urban space, and yet these definitions will almost always take the rural as their unspoken opposite. How then to avoid familiar binaries? Many scholars of the Guinea Coast wars warned against the dangers of reifying a static rural/urban dichotomy even as their body of evidence, consisting primarily of interviews with active and ex-combatants, lends itself to a view of urban spaces as either military prizes to be won and enjoyed, or hated sites of corrupt power to be "cleansed" through violent revolution (see Richards 1996; Utas 2003). Richards, writing about the war in Sierra Leone, notes that the rebel front there "engaged in a complex and dangerous political game of brutalizing the villages in order to terrorize the city, through involving some of the city's own fears of the barbarity lurking in the bush" (1996: 85). Utas comments that the global styles of modernity embraced by African youth "are not only an urban mode, but in reality carry influences deep into the bush or rainforest" (2003: 34), while for Hoffman;

Although it is frequently described as a 'bush war,' the Mano River conflict could be said to have both made the city and been made by it – a logical extension of the way the city works as much as a disruption of it.

(2011: 166)

Contrasting these imaginaries of city and "bush" and linking them to explanations for the outbreak of violent conflict remains a central organizing device in narratives about the war, both implicitly and explicitly, even as analysts try to avoid monolithic or essentializing arguments.

This chapter seeks to complicate the conversation around the relationship between rural and urban spaces during wartime by drawing on the experiences of an often invisible population of war-affected people; young men who did *not* participate in violence. The evidence comes from qualitative interviews conducted during the summer of 2006 with 83 men, ranging in age from teenagers to those in their late sixties, in three geographical locations within Liberia: the capital city of Monrovia (40 interviews), the southeastern region of Cape Palmas (16 interviews), where I had conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the 1980s, and the port city of Buchanan (27 interviews), about 60 miles south of Monrovia. The Monrovia sample was drawn from a diverse range of men including students at the University of Liberia, participants in a youth training program sponsored by the YMCA,

members of the Muslim Youth Congress interviewed at two mosques in the city, drivers and security guards working for NGOs and the European Union mission to Liberia, and one member of the national legislature. In addition, I participated as an informal advisor to graduate students in the International Studies/Peace and Conflict Studies Program at the University of Liberia who were designing and carrying out a survey to measure the effectiveness of the United Nations disarmament and reintegration program serving ex-combatants in Monrovia. These interviews were supplemented by others conducted on short trips to Liberia in 2008 and 2009. All of my interview respondents had been displaced multiple times during the course of the war and had spent over a decade, in their words, “running and running” in search of refuge from harm, forced recruitment, and severe shortages of food and other necessities. For these non-combatants, cities and their products did not represent the much-desired goal of armed struggle, either as seats of state power or as the source of riches to be looted. In the war-time narratives of non-combatant men, both city and countryside alternated as refuges or danger zones, places to flee *to* and to flee *from*, depending on the circumstances. The warscapes (Nordstrom 1997, 2004) described by these men include *both* rural and urban sites, each with their own hazards and possibilities. In keeping with the fluid characterization of people, objects, and bodies of knowledge along axes of value framed as *kwi* or “civilized” and “country” or “native,” I argue that these men were driven less by unitary notions of urban and rural and more by constellations of contingent factors including self-identity, personal networks, and almost paradoxically, hopes for a peaceful future. Beyond momentary personal survival, these men tried to plan their movements across space in a way that might serve to maximize their post-war opportunities and aspirations. In contrast with the definitions of external observers, their understanding of what constitutes “rural” or “urban” does not seem grounded in population density or style of architecture. Widespread dichotomies of “bush” and “town,” which predate the modern Liberian state, were invoked in some interviews, fundamentally grounded in the presence or absence of human social life. People are understood to live “naturally” with others in “towns” (that might be categorized as “villages” in the familiar Western tropes of rural Africa), but the *absence* of people defines other spaces as “bush;” areas where other-than-human actors and intentionalities operate. For many of my respondents, a constant mobility, or “running and running,” was the best survival strategy during the war years. Their accounts do not seem to emphasize an inherent difference between city and countryside, but rather focus on how each kind of location contained people, objects, and possibilities that could be characterized as *kwi* or “native.” In some instances, they turned to what might be considered “traditional” authorities such as lineage elders for protection, while in other instances, they sought the security provided by external forces such as the United Nations or the Economic Community of West African States. These protected spaces could

occur in both rural and urban locations during the course of the war, but in no instance was the “bush” seen as site of refuge. On the contrary, some of the most harrowing tales told by my informants were of isolation and terror in uninhabited tracts of forest or on lonely beaches, devoid of human presence.

Settler Colonialism on the Guinea Coast: “Civilized” and Country

The neighboring countries of Liberia and Sierra Leone both owe their existence to the contradictions arising from the long centuries of the Atlantic slave trade. In 1787, abolitionist pressures in Britain along with concerns about growing numbers of free “Black Poor” led to the founding of the city of Freetown, Sierra Leone as an experiment in resettling former slaves on the African continent. In the newly independent United States, the American Colonization Society (ACS) was founded in 1816 as an activist organization dedicated to the project of removing “free people of color” to the land of their ancestors. Members of the all-white organization included a strange mix of southern planters who felt that free Blacks posed an existential threat to the institution of slavery and northern clergy concerned with the moral implications of bondage. All were convinced, however, that a multiracial democracy in which former slaves could hold the status of full citizens was impossible and that the only solution lay in resettling free Blacks and manumitted people elsewhere (Holsoe and Herman 1988: 3). A few African Americans were relocated to the British colony of Freetown before the establishment in 1822 of the first ACS settlement a few hundred miles south at Cape Mesurado. The settlement was named Monrovia, after the American President James Monroe. Unlike its British counterpart, the American colony on the West African coast was not sanctioned or supported by the United States government and remained the private enterprise of a voluntary “benevolent” society until the settlers declared independence in 1847. After the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in 1808, the US Navy used Monrovia as a drop-off point for so-called “re-captured Africans;” those taken off impounded slave ships before they ever crossed the Atlantic. Over time, descendants of these people would come to be absorbed into the American settler population, since they had no linguistic or other ties with the indigenous Africans of Cape Mesurado. From the initial landing point and capital at Monrovia, small settlements of African Americans were established along the coast for a distance of some 300 miles and in the near interior along some major rivers (Holsoe and Herman 1988).

The colonization scheme was reviled by most abolitionists and Black American activists as a strategy to entrench rather than dismantle chattel slavery, and never attracted a large number of willing settlers. Between 1822 and 1904, the total number of known immigrants is only 23,000,

including the unwilling “re-captives” taken from illegal slave ships (Liebenow 1987: 19; see also Frankel 1964: 6). A small number of the earliest settlers were free born and literate, often the children of slave owners, and desired a chance to build a new life in a place where they could enjoy full citizenship. Others were manumitted only on condition that they immigrate to Liberia. Within the territorial boundaries of the country they would claim were at least 16 autonomous ethno-linguistic groups, some quite hostile to the settlers’ commitment to disrupting the slave trade. The settlers and those identifying as their descendants have never made up more than 3% or 4% of the national population, although they have constituted the political and economic elite of Liberia throughout the history of the modern state.

The white founders of the ACS had envisioned Monrovia as a settlement of peasant agriculturalists, and granted each family a plot of land for a house in the town along with a five acre tract on the outskirts for farming. The colonists however, were more interested in trading with indigenous people to the interior and the European ports along the coast; Monrovia became a commercial center and for a time, had a thriving ship-building industry (Frankel 1964: 11, 17). Competition from European steam ship lines and other sources of tropical products like coffee and sugar, however, led to severe economic depressions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, exacerbated by the defeat of Germany, which had been a major trading partner, in World War I. By the beginning of World War II, Monrovia had a population of only 12,000 and no electricity, paved streets or piped water. Other coastal settler towns like Buchanan and Harper remained small and distant from national events. The Firestone rubber company, which had established a large plantation about 50 miles inland from the city in the 1920s, had a seasonal workforce as large as half the population of the national capital (Frankel 1964: 27). During World War II the United States, recognizing the need for a the strategic location of the West African coast for supply lines, developed both an airfield and a deep water port at Monrovia and the post-war period saw rapid economic growth fuelled by exports of rubber and iron ore from newly developed mines in the far north. Merran Frankel, an urban anthropologist who did field research in Monrovia in 1958–1959, described the city as “not really a town in the generally accepted sense of the word, but a conglomeration of settlements and communities which participate in varying degrees in a common social and economic structure” (1964: 33). The title of her book, *Tribe and Class in Monrovia*, signals what she saw as the key elements of self-identity and association shaping 20th-century Liberians. Only 11% of her sample of residents had been born in the vicinity; the rest were recent migrants to the city. The original colonial settlement which had occupied the high promontory above the harbor was surrounded by new neighborhoods, many built precariously on low-lying swamp land. The photographs Frankel includes of these new neighborhoods are indistinguishable from iconic images of

traditional African “villages,” with wattle and daub houses topped with conical thatched roofs (see Frankel 1964, plates IVa and IVb).

On my first trip to Liberia for my dissertation research in 1982, the drive from Robertsfield Airport to Monrovia, a distance of some 37 miles, reminded me of the numerous ethnographic films I had seen about “rural Africa.” The road was paved in some places, worn down to laterite clay in others, and lined with a few scattered homesteads reminiscent of Frankel’s photographs from the 1950s. At times, I wondered if there was a “city” at the end of the journey at all. During my first few weeks in the country, I developed my own personal map of Monrovia as I extended my visa at the old Immigration and Naturalization office on Broad Street, the commercial center of town, and arranged for research clearance from the University of Liberia, located close to the impressive Executive Mansion and other major public buildings on Capitol Hill. On subsequent visits over the next 18 months, I became familiar with the shopping opportunities at the Water-side Market and the guesthouses, hostels, and beaches frequented by Peace Core Volunteers, missionaries, and other graduate student researchers in the suburb of Sinkor. Monrovia in those years felt very much like a small town, in which residents were connected by dense webs of contact and exchange. It became common to recognize the bank teller I had conducted business with in the morning sitting at the same small restaurant I chose for lunch and I often had chance run-ins with university acquaintances on the streets. Harper, the southeastern regional city close to the border with Ivory Coast where my fieldwork was based, was a miniature version of Monrovia; 19th-century colonial style buildings dominated the high promontory of Cape Palmas while the more recent residential neighborhoods and commercial areas spread out along the Atlantic beach (Moran 1990). Like their counterparts in Monrovia, older Harper landmarks such as the Masonic temple had been looted and damaged during the military coup of 1980 and now lay abandoned and empty (see Moran 2006: 53–73). Coastal towns like Monrovia and Harper, sites of American settlement, contrasted visually with interior cities like Kakata or Gbanga or the mining towns of Sanniquillie and Yekepa, which tended to have few multistory buildings and far less visible infrastructure.

Although the electrical grid and piped water system of Harper had not, by 1982, been operating on a daily basis for years, the light poles and public fountains still stood in mute evidence that such services had once existed.

My return to Liberia in 2006 after an absence of 22 years came shortly after the inauguration of the post-conflict government elected in 2005, which brought the first female head of state on the African continent, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, to power. Knowing that Monrovia had been the scene of viscous fighting as recently as 2003, and that sections of the city had been subject to rocket attacks from air, land, and sea, I was expecting to see major devastation. While there was certainly evidence of fighting in the form of bullet holes in walls and roofless ruins, I also saw clearly that the city had

expanded dramatically. The 37 miles from the airport to the outskirts of Monrovia proper were now thickly settled, and the formerly distant suburb of Paynesville had become a major population center in its own right. Most of the housing was in the category of “informal” or squatter settlements, populated by internally displaced people seeking refuge during the war, but on subsequent visits in 2008 and 2009, I saw much new construction of elaborate homes for the post-war government elite. The Red Light market in Paynesville, which had once been a small “crossroads” gathering point, had grown to become the largest retailing area in Liberia. To the north, the old suburbs of New Kru Town, studied by Frankel in in the mid-20th century, had likewise exploded in population. Such growth has been slower in other coastal cities like Buchanan and Harper, locations that were seen as vulnerable and dangerous during the war years. By 2006, there were an estimated one million people living in Monrovia, reduced from a high of one and a half million during the height of the war, but still much more than its aging and damaged infrastructure can support (Hoffman 2017: 11).

Categories of Meaning: People, Places, Things

Liberian families, communities, and imaginaries have long been structured by concepts derived from the county’s unusual colonial history and early independence, described above. The small settler minority took over a century to extend political authority beyond their coastal and riverine enclaves and to exert control over the indigenous majority. The decline in new immigrants from the United States after the civil war and the absence of a color bar between colonists and indigenous people allowed for intermarriage, adoption, and “wardship” as mechanisms of upward mobility into the national elite. The state, always lacking in revenue, largely delegated education to American and European missionaries, who built schools and “mission towns” beyond Monrovia. In these, indigenous people gained the identity of “civilized natives” or *kwi* without giving up their membership in patrilineal descent groups and named localities (Brown 1982; Moran 1990; Tonkin 1981). Some people of indigenous background became fully incorporated into settler families through adoption, fosterage, and the practice of informal polygyny, leading to junior lineages within elite urban households. A distinction was made between these families, often known as “Congo,” a reference to the non-Liberian Africans who arrived as re-captives from the slave trade, and “civilized natives” who were literate and employed in the cash economy but who also identified as Kru, Grebo, Vai, or one of the other recognized Liberian “tribes.” Clothing, housekeeping practices, bodies of specialized knowledge, occupational statuses, and leisure activities were all classified as civilized or native, regardless of where they appeared or were enacted (Moran 1990). Physical presence in an urban area did not confer civilized status, just as living in a remote rural village did not make one native (Frankel 1964; Brown 1982). Rather, individuals performed or

asserted civilized status and a complex negotiation of community gossip and recognition confirmed or rejected their claim. At the same time, several generations of residence in cities like Monrovia did not erase identification with rural origins. Numerous friends in Monrovia in the early 1980s asserted that they were “from” small communities in the interior, even though they had never actually been there and did not speak the local language. In theory, patrilineal descent would entitle them to claim rights to a house plot and farmland, as well as to protection from harm if they chose to exercise these privileges. During the war, self-identification with ethnic categories factored strongly into individual’s decisions about where and when to seek refuge, as ethnicity became “weaponized” by multiple armed groups.

Any individuals’ claim to being civilized or native has a temporal dimension, and depends on access to resources and the evaluations of others. In my first ethnographic project in Liberia, I focused on Grebo women in the southeast, some of whom had fallen into the category of “used to be civilized” due to insecure attachments to the cash economy and other changes in their family’s economic fortunes (Moran 1990). Young people of either gender are vulnerable to changes in their status since a moderate level of formal education is one of the criteria for civilized status. The contingent nature of the process of becoming civilized was recognized by Frankel in her work with migrants to Monrovia in the mid-20th century, and her analysis is worth quoting at length:

In fact ‘civilized’ and ‘un-civilized’ or ‘tribal,’ as the terms are used in Liberia, are not distinct and mutually exclusive statuses, but two ends of a continuum which ...is really an embryonic social class structure. The most important component of ‘civilization’ is education, but while to an outsider the question immediately arises of how much education a man (sic) needs in order to be regarded as civilized, to the Monrovia it does not occur in quite these terms, since ‘civilized’ has a much wider connotation than ‘educated.’ ...The question then becomes one of how much education a man needs to get a job sufficiently well-paid for him to lead a ‘civilized’ life”.

(1964: 67–68)

Although Frankel identifies the civilized/native continuum with *class* as an economic category, I have argued elsewhere that this social hierarchy conforms more closely to Weber’s concept of “status honor,” a group or community defined by prestige rather than relationship to productive resources (Weber 1946: 186–188; Moran 1990). What is important to emphasize from Frankel’s analysis, however, is the detachment of these concepts from cities or rural areas as physical places.

Defining the “Urban” in Liberia

In the analysis below, I argue that the external classifications like “rural” and “urban,” as these have been applied to combatants and non-combatants in the Guinea Coast conflicts, obscure or misrepresent the lived experience of the people who lived through this period.

Analysts like Ellis (2007) and Richards (1996) have used these seemingly self-evident categories in explaining the violence enacted on civilians in multiple locations by their fellow citizens, and the “greed and grievance” arguments of multiple scholars depend on assuming a deep divide between the dispossessed and exploited and national elites, a distinction that too easily elides with a rural/urban imaginary (Collier and Hoeffler 2000). Certainly Liberia, like other products of settler colonialism, was and remains a deeply divided and highly unequal society, but was this rift perceived to be contained by standard definitions of cities and countryside? As we have seen from the above, Liberian “urbanity,” at least in demographic terms, is both historically recent and smaller in scale than in many other West African countries. The Guinea Coast has long been known as a region of very low human densities, with no pre-colonial-era cities or major population centers known from the archeological record. The two pre-war censuses of the 20th century, in 1962 and 1974, recorded national populations of 1,016,000 and 1,503,300 respectively (Republic of Liberia 1984). A projection in 1984 saw the number rise above two million, and the last (2008) official enumeration figure is 3,489,072 (Republic of Liberia, 2009). The current estimate, based on growth projections, is something over five million people in 2020 (CIA World Factbook on line). Well into the 20th century, this relatively small population was widely distributed across the landscape. Monrovia, as we have seen, grew slowly over the years, containing less than 200,000 people in the 1970s, a time when the second largest “city” was the iron mining town of Yekepa and the third in terms of density was the Firestone rubber plantation, although the population there was dispersed in multiple “camps” throughout the forest. Today, almost 75% of the national population is concentrated in the “big six” counties around Monrovia and north to the Guinea border; the five southeastern counties, historically lightly populated, have remained so (Government of Liberia 2008: 6).

If most Liberians in the pre-war period were not used to living in high density areas, they still often had at least some experience of life beyond isolated villages in the rainforest. In the 18th and 19th centuries, many young men participated in the contract labor trade along the West African coast and spent time in British and French colonial cities like Lagos, Accra, and Dakar (Brooks 1972; Martin 1982). Areas of resource extraction within Liberia, such as the iron mining regions to the north and the Firestone rubber plantations, drew several generations of young people attracted by the prospect of freeing themselves from obligations to others (Bledsoe 1980)

through earning and controlling their own money. Anyone seeking formal education beyond the most rudimentary elementary level had to move to a coastal or regional center, since educational institutions were not widely distributed. As mentioned above, in the early 1980s, young people who had been born and brought up in Monrovia were encouraged to think of themselves as “from” the rural hometowns of their parents, and many were sent to visit these places on breaks from school to maintain the connection. The school vacation period of several months has historically seen a mass movement of Liberian families “visiting” relatives in the cities and resource extraction zones as well as students returning “home” to rural locations.

As Piot has noted, West Africa as a whole has deep histories of migration, mobility, and trade; moving across ecological zones and searching for new economic opportunities has been a constant in constructing livelihoods and identities (1999, 2019). Young men in this part of the world expected to travel and experience new places as a route to adulthood, and by the late 20th century, many young women held this expectation also. Rigid categories of “rural” and “urban” people, with little contact or experience of each other, I argue, provide a more useful schema for social scientists than a description of how people actually thought about their experiences.

The Mano River Wars

The conflict that engulfed an entire region of West Africa beginning in the 1990s included the nations of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ivory Coast and included the intervention of broader coalitions of forces from the Economic Community of West African States, led by Nigeria, the United Nations which mounted the largest international peace-keeping operation in its history, and multitudes of non-governmental humanitarian organizations. The specific local histories of each nation conditioned the duration and character of conflict in particular places, but porous borders, the presence of valuable resources, and a deep sense of exclusion by significant portions of the population created the basic conditions for violent assaults on the post-colonial state. Liberia and Sierra Leone were both declared “failed states” at various times over periods of 15 years, and both were the site of extensive United Nations peace-keeping and disarmament missions. In Liberia, a military coup in 1980 led to a decade of misrule by Samuel K. Doe, who stayed in power thanks to his status as a Cold War ally of the United States during the Reagan administration. By the end of the decade, resistance to Doe was widespread among Liberians and one former member of his government, Charles Taylor, organized a small rebel force with backing from Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi. Invading the country from the north in December of 1989, by the summer of 1990 Taylors’ fighters had reached the capital city of Monrovia, picking up large numbers of new recruits along the way but also spawning new breakaway factions with their own ambitious leaders. Taylor was prevented from capturing Monrovia by

the intervention of a military force from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), leading to a stalemate for the next six years. From his base in the central Liberian city of Gbanga, Taylor supported a similar insurgency in Sierra Leone, leading to ECOWAS and United Nations intervention in that country. Hastily organized elections in 1997 gave Taylor the legitimacy of elected office, but disaffected factions and former allies mobilized from Guinea and Ivory Coast, leading to a second phase of the war from 1999 to 2003, when he was finally forced into exile and ultimately prosecuted and found guilty of war crimes by a United Nations Special Court.

It is estimated that between 250,000 and 270,000 Liberians lost their lives to direct violence during this period, with many others dying from preventable causes due to lack of food, medicine and sanitation. Approximately 850,000 people sought refuge in neighboring countries, although these were also involved in conflict, and 500,000 were internally displaced (Jaye 2009: 5). Over the course of 14 years, an entire generation of Liberians grew up never knowing when and where the “war would find them.” Large numbers of people, both men and women, voluntarily joined the fighting for a variety of reasons; the United Nations reported that over 101,000 ex-combatants went through the DDRR (Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration) process by its completion in October of 2004 (UN doc. s/2007/479). Others were forcibly recruited, as fighters, laborers, or sexual slaves. The conflict touched all parts of the country, although at different times. The participants in my project told stories of constant mobility, often alternating between rural and urban locations in their search for safety, survival, and reunion with family members. As they moved from place to place, they brought with them the aspirations and bodies of knowledge acquired in their pre-war lives, and tried to turn these to their advantage in each new context. For those with incomplete educations and aspirations for permanent “civilized status,” temporary lulls in fighting or brief periods of peace brought hopes of resuming schooling or seeking a job in more populated areas. When cities came under attack, my respondents activated indigenous identities tied to rural locations, hoping the moral imperatives of shared kinship would ensure them a welcome and some degree of protection.

The Interviews

The men who I interviewed had experienced a diverse range of lifestyles and residential locations before, during, and after the war. Some had grown up in the relatively isolated counties of the southeast, and were living in Monrovia as university or high school students when the fighting broke out. Some had already achieved professional status as health care workers or accountants, while still others were more marginally attached to the cash economy. The initial rumblings of war, which began with Taylor’s

incursion into the north in late 1989, took months to impact the capital city. The rebellion against the regime of President Samuel K. Doe built on ethno-linguistic animosities that had been deliberately and strategically manipulated over the previous decade. Monrovia residents from the southeastern counties who shared linguistic affinities with the embattled president were targeted by the approaching rebels and many fled the city in fear of being associated with the falling regime. Ellis argues that the invading fighters were especially hard on those of their own ethnic groups who might have “collaborated” with Doe, and that some had scores to settle with members of their own communities who were living in the city (2007: 117).

The first waves of fighters which attacked Monrovia in July of 1990 was dominated by young men and women from rural Nimba county who demonstrated a very ambiguous attitude toward the city and its wealth. While they castigated their fellow country people for living in the city and being seduced by its soft ways, and while they punished mercilessly those they considered to be corrupt, at the same time the fighters were anxious to gorge themselves with plunder.

(2007: 287)

Armed groups set up “checkpoints” along major roads leading out of Monrovia, which quickly became massacre sites. Some of the men I interviewed avoided the roads by walking south along the Atlantic beach, hiding in the brush by day and walking along the shore at night, attempting to reach communities where they had kinship or other connections. Ellis notes that many Western journalists interpreted the behavior of the rebels as a “revolt against modernity;” the destruction of infrastructure and of educated people as an explosion of historic rage and resentment against cities and all they represent (2007: 122; see also Utas 2003: 42–44). Again, the fighters are characterized as drawn “from the category of already marginalized and highly dissatisfied young urbanites and semi-urbanites” (Utas 2003: 250). Yet, their leader, Charles Taylor, was a former government official with an American college degree, as were many of his associates and the leaders of the other rebel factions that were quick to emerge. Rural grievance and envy of urbanites cannot fully explain who was voluntarily recruited to the armed factions, since my respondents cited examples of their urban school friends who eagerly joined the fighting for the promise of loot. Rather, interviewees who made the choice to deliberately avoid recruitment framed their years of formal education and urban residence as investments that could be jeopardized by participation in violence and anti-social behavior. All reported that they did not want to “spoil their names” and the careers they had been working toward and hoped for in the future. Once they made the decision to try and stay out of the fighting however, for many the city became a hostile and dangerous place, and they were forced to leave.

To illustrate, I provide the example of one family of brothers, who were in their late teens and early twenties, and thus at the prime age for military recruitment, at the start of the war in 1990. One brother, 19 years old at the time, had just graduated from high school in the rural southeast, and had won a coveted scholarship to the University of Liberia when the first rumors of war began to circulate. In spite of the uncertainty, he traveled by road to Monrovia (an arduous two-day drive over unpaved roads) and was only a few months into his studies when the city became threatened by what had become two rebel forces. He was living with an uncle in Monrovia, but as killings began of people speaking southeastern languages similar to that of the embattled president, he was encouraged to try to return home where his extended family could offer protection. Fearful of the dreaded checkpoints on the vehicle roads, he walked alone on the beach for a week to reach the port city of Buchanan, a distance of 59 miles from Monrovia, arriving there barefoot and exhausted. He remained there a few months, trying to get word to his family farther south, but as West African troops from the ECOWAS mission joined the fighting, the coast was being bombed and strafed by Nigerian jets. His father was able to bribe a commander in one of the rebel units to pick him up in a small speed boat and bring him through the bombardment home to Harper, close to the international border with Ivory Coast.

From there, the whole family was displaced multiple times to refugee camps on the Ivorian side of the frontier, where this young man and his brothers were under constant threat of forcible recruitment into either rebel factions or the Ivorian military. Like many of my informants, any young man of military age was assumed to be a “rebel” of some kind, and although the camps were run by the United Nations, the surrounding Ivorian communities were suspicious and hostile, fearing that “Liberians bring war.” The family registered as refugees who had fled their country of citizenship, becoming eligible for monthly distributions of food, but lived most of the time on the Liberian side of the border, trying to protect their house from looting and to keep the young men safe from forced recruitment. An older brother was killed in the forest on a return trip from Ivory Coast to pick up the monthly food ration for the entire household. For five years, this family and many others lived a life of “running and running” within a small, lightly populated and “rural” area, their choices defined by categorical identities (like “registered refugee”) imposed from outside.

By 1996, the young man who had escaped from Monrovia and another of his brothers, who had been a student at a regional technical college in the southeast, were frustrated by the years of “running and running” and desperate to resume their interrupted educations. Peace negotiations between the rebel factions and ECOWAS were underway and so they decided to travel back to Monrovia to try and rebuild their lives. Shortly after their arrival, in April of 1996, horrific fighting broke out in the heart of the city, as rebel leaders who had been allowed to encamp their troops on the

peripheries began to compete for power. Trapped in a small apartment surrounded by violence, looting, and explosions, and afraid to venture out for food due to the threat of forced recruitment, they somehow survived the assault. In the period of relative calm which followed the 1997 election of Charles Taylor, a leading warlord, they both managed to get Associate's degrees from a junior college in Monrovia and began a small business. Taylor was soon under pressure from new armed factions however, and the second phase of the Liberian civil war (1999–2003) began, with one of the new armed movements centered on the Harper region. With Monrovia becoming dangerous yet again, the brothers decided to leave, although their homeland in the southeast was now the epicenter of a new rebellion. The death of their oldest brother made them decide, for the good of the family, to split up; one returned to Harper despite the danger, feeling that at least he would be among friends and kinsmen, and that he would be able to help his aging parents. He hoped that the protection he could expect from belonging to a "known" family there would shelter him from being forced to join the fighting.

The other decided to try his luck in Buchanan, where President Charles Taylor was systematically stripping the once-busy port facility and selling it off as scrap metal to support his hold on power. Taylor had also granted the region around Buchanan to a Dutch logging concession, the Oriental Timber Company (OTC) and given the company free rein to "recruit" involuntary labor. As my informant put it, "We were the slaves of OTC." Forced into manual labor cutting trees, he fell back on his "country" upbringing for the skills and strength needed to survive. Although closely identified with a civilized family and aspiring to a professional career, he found himself living a life more in keeping with "native" subsistence farmers. While living in Buchanan, he was forced to flee into the "bush" multiple times as Taylor's forces were worn down by other armed groups, also looking for lucrative resources and pools of forced labor to exploit.

As the story of this family demonstrates, men who were fleeing violence and attempting to avoid military recruitment found only temporary refuge in both rural and urban locations. The safety they sought in small towns and villages was often short-lived. Attacks on rural communities and urban neighborhoods alike came from rebels seeking food, loot, and young men and women for involuntary recruitment, but also from well-equipped international troops ostensibly there as "peace-keepers." Wherever they found themselves, these men tried to activate kin and peer networks that they could depend on for protection, and when separated from their actual families, they clustered together in "fictive" families and households, similar to those formed by students sharing rooms and food during peace time. "When the shooting starts, you want to be with many many people to run away with" one informant told me. Numerous interviews described the fear of being forced to flee alone, into unfamiliar territory. For some young men who had grown up entirely in Monrovia, their time in

the “bush” was almost as terrifying as the approaching fighters. Many who tried to find their way while avoiding the deadly checkpoints along the main roads found themselves lost in dense vegetation. Uncertain about what forest plants might be edible, and afraid to signal their location by lighting a fire, several informants described nearly poisoning themselves by eating uncooked cassava dug from rural plots, or consuming leaves and grass for survival. Although Western observers tend to use the term “bush” interchangeably with “rural” and to draw a contrast between “bush” and “city,” my informant’s description of the “bush” emphasized the *absence* of human settlement. No right-thinking person, in their accounts, would deliberately spend time in “the bush,” although it was a space that sometimes had to be traversed to find safety in a village or town. In general, interviewees (and participants in my pre-war research as well) tended to use the English word “town” to describe *all* concentrations of human beings, from Monrovia to small rural communities. In contrast, the term “village” was reserved for farming homesteads in the deep forest occupied seasonally by a single family. This usage is common in at least one of Liberia’s indigenous languages, Grebo (Innes 1967).

Many of my informants, like the brothers described above, also had to leave Liberia for some time, going to United Nations refugee camps in Guinea, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, and as far away as Ghana. The more permanent of these refugee camps became “cities” in their own right, with markets, shops, and services for sale as well as schools and churches. The presence of NGOs and international agencies in these camps created job opportunities for a few men with education and training, a chance to use their “civilized” skills and make connections for further employment. But for most, the camps were neither safe nor professionally advantageous. They were still vulnerable to forced recruiting, and as war dragged on, a sense of lost time became almost overwhelming.

Conclusion

Desperate to escape, all of my informants told stories of “running and running” during the war, trying to stay ahead of the shifting lines of battle. Some never left the vicinity of Monrovia, although almost all had spent some time in areas they considered “bush,” while others had moved across multiple international borders. Their commitments were not to urban or rural life, in the abstract, but to “civilized” institutions and ideals like education, rational thought, and interestingly, a strong sense of national identity. In explaining their decision not to join the fighting, many cited their belief that Liberian citizens should not kill and harm each other.

“Running and running,” or mobility itself, became a key feature of the wartime experience, even if it meant running from place to place within the official boundaries of the city of Monrovia.

Hoffman (2011) has discussed the “logics of assembly and dispersal” which characterized the lives of active combatants during the war in his analysis of how global markets create the demand for certain kinds of labor (including the labor of violence). The urban “barracks” he studied in Freetown and Monrovia existed to facilitate the “just-in-time” movement of young male bodies across multiple economic activities, from warfare to diamond mining, and he argues that “the rapid call-up of laborer-warriors is written into the very logic of life in the city” (2011: 173). The movements of male *non-combatants* represent the other side of this “demographic fluidity,” which Hoffman sees as working to dissolve previous distinctions of class and social status “between students as citizens in-the-making on the one hand, and lumpen manual laborers on the other hand, working largely outside the purview and protection of the state” (2011: 188). Shifting the point of view to non-combatants reminds us that some Liberians remained deeply committed to those pre-war institutional identities, and their mobility during the war reflects both their commitments and their desires to ultimately achieve a place within such hierarchies.

The last wave of urban fighting in Monrovia in the early 2000s caught many who had returned from elsewhere in the hopes of getting their lives back on track. A number of my informants reported giving up their dreams to complete high school or university degrees, feeling that the years of disruption had left them “too old to sit in a class room.” Some found work as security guards, drivers or cooks with the numerous NGOs that flocked to Monrovia during the transitional period before the 2005 election and in the subsequent years of the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf administration. They found themselves competing for work with the many demobilized ex-combatants, who were aided by vouchers for vocational training and school tuition unavailable to those who had not taken up arms. Hoffman has described the lives of ex-combatants living in the ruined buildings of post-war Monrovia (2017, see also Hardgrove 2017), but for non-combatants, these same spaces are the sites of repeated encounters that make it impossible to forget their lost possibilities. My informants described numerous instances in which they recognized former fighters who had killed their relatives, looted their belongings, and physically abused them during the war; both city and countryside hold possibilities for reconciliation, but also for bitterness and recrimination. Utas has argued that the fighters who went back to rural areas and were accepted as penitent by traditional elders had more positive experiences of post-war reintegration than those who stayed in the cities, who were more likely to be drawn into crime and fall into the urban and peri-urban underclass (2003: 231–240; see also Hardgrove 2017). The ability to reclaim a respectable family name, which can be used to stake claims to both resources and social support, may be harder in the more anonymous context of urban neighborhoods. My informants, who chose to stay out of the fighting for fear of a “spoiled reputation” that might injure their future career chances, were clear that they wished to maintain

relationships with family members and potential sponsors; to be seen as “serious” and respectable (see also Bolton 2020) All of my interviewees report satisfaction with their choice to avoid the stigma of “ex-combatant,” even if their other aspirations have not been realized. They contrast their future prospects favorably against those of the ex-combatants, as well as the personal sense of having a clear conscience. “When I walk down the street, I am free. No one can say to me, ‘you took my properties, you raped my family woman.’ I am just free.” For these men, the long years of war may have robbed them of the futures they dreamed of, but not of their sense of moral worth.

Ultimately, their identification with the “civilized” ideal seems to have been an important variable in choices they made, about whether or not to join the fighting, and for how they sought refuge through the regional war-scape once they had made this choice. Yet, even for those born and raised in Monrovia, the ability to claim protection from “home” communities of kin, even if only tangentially related, was key in their decision-making when forced to leave the city. The willingness of rural kin to take them in, protect, and in some cases hide young relatives were central to many of my informant’s narratives. In a war in which ethnically identified factions were pitted against each other, and in which people were killed for speaking the “wrong” language at a checkpoint, their moral connection to the “village” or rural home became a key resource for survival. Those who could not physically retreat to such rural homelands, or who found themselves stranded in areas where they had no affiliation relied on friendship groups, sharing food, and living in peer groups in displacement camps and small towns. Despite the trauma and disappointment, many kept their hope in a peaceful future alive. It was this hope which motivated them to travel back and forth from city to countryside, looking for ways to rebuild their lives. Several who had experienced the terrors of urban bombardment had decided to settle down in more rural locations or small regional centers, no longer wishing to pursue careers that required living in Monrovia, building small businesses and accepting work even if it is arguably “beneath” their level of education. As one informant said of his decision to remain in Harper in the post-conflict period, “Everything I could get in Monrovia I can get here in my home.”

The accounts of these men diverge from scholarly binaries of rural and urban spaces, people, and interests in that for them the war was everywhere, although at different moments. Their sense of self and the range of options they perceived were not bound by a unitary identity attached to place, but rather to ideals that transcend physical location. While it is understandable that warlords and ex-combatants understood their efforts to be focused on cities as military objectives, there is no reason for social scientists to assume this kind of thinking resonates with ordinary citizens. Incorporating the war-time experiences of non-combatant men expands our understanding of how cities and rural areas take on new meanings during times of violence

and raises questions about the explanatory frameworks that have been used to understand the origins of conflict. These meanings also condition the choices and opportunities available to citizens in the post-conflict moment. With one fifth of the Liberian population currently living in Monrovia, those who survived the war vary in their desire and ability to construct satisfying urban livelihoods. Their satisfaction with the choice to refrain from fighting, however, is consistent no matter where they traveled during the war, or where they have chosen to reside at its conclusion.

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17 Precarious Citizenship

Who Gets to Claim Urbanity in Ghana

Saida Hodžić

Encounter One

The thunderous storm catches us unaware on a red rocky road in Bongo, near Ghana's border with Burkina Faso. Agnes, a Filipina South-South volunteer in charge of a basket-weaving project, Constance, a sociologist at the University of Development Studies and at the time my research assistant, and I, an ethnographer studying Ghanaian NGOs and their advocacy against domestic violence and female genital cutting¹ rush to a nearby compound, get off from our bikes, and are welcomed to take shelter until the storm passes.

The young family we encounter were in the midst of farm work when the storm came, and are happy to take a break and make our acquaintance. After exchanging greetings, the man drops his hoe, goes to his room, and brings out a picture of himself from the time when he lived in Kumasi.² In it, he wears a pressed black suit and a tie, and has a black book in his hand. He does not say much about the photograph and gives no explanation about the book but I presume that it is a Bible and that he was photographed on his way to church. That he shows us the picture by way of an introduction is telling. A picture tells a story, a narrative of a migrant's life (see also Bowles 2017). He wants us to know is that he too, had once been urban and polished. The contrast to his current, weathered, self is striking, and I have to look hard to recognize a semblance. To say that he once lived in Kumasi and wore a suit and carried a book in his hand means that there is more to him than is apparent today, that we cannot, should not think him a mere villager. I am familiar with the gesture. I recall my father and other Bosnian refugees who introduced themselves by retelling a detail from their past, lost lives that were urban and worldly, and so many women domestic workers who were wounded when employers showed them how to turn on electricity or asked if they knew how to operate a washing machine. The hierarchy of human value that places the urban/cosmopolitan above the rural/undeveloped is deeply felt by people whose geographies are cast outside modernity proper.³ I grew up in a country where urbanity conferred value, and where one had to shore it up, carrying its proofs like a passport. Before

the end of socialism in former Yugoslavia, before war, nationalism and the primacy of ethno-religious classifications and identifications, one was either a valued citizen or a devalued villager. Modernity was mapped onto urbanity, relegating villagers as belonging to a different time-place altogether, to a different moral order. They were *uncultured* (read: uncivilized).

Ghanaian urbanity has also been shaped by the hegemonic narrative that associates urbanization with modernity and development, and rurality with their lack. The narrative's epistemic violence devalues northern Ghanaians living in villages as "yesterday's people." Judged as backwards and said to have *too much* culture (read: anachronistic, useless tradition), they are citizens, minus.

The narrative that bifurcates the primitive and the civilized, the traditional and the modern, the rural and the urban, dates to colonial civilizationalism; as Thomas writes, "To speak of the rural and the urban, and tradition and modernity, is to refer to sedimented deposits of modernist narratives of development and progress that colonialism bequeathed to much of the postcolonial world" (2002: 367). The ideological imprint of modernity onto Ghanaian urbanity was entrenched by socialist industrial and infrastructural modernization. In Northern Ghana specifically, it was the socialist, independent state that invested in the region, including its urbanization and industrialization, assuming the tall task of redressing the violence of immediately preceding colonial dispossession, forced labor regimes, and the brutal afterlife of the slave trade.⁴

Encounter Two

I sit at a white plastic table in a village bar, drinking Malta and chatting with the owner. The bar is located away from the houses, but right at the intersection of two roads crisscrossing the district. It's a quiet day and the owner, curious about me, asks me questions and tells me how she opened the bar with the money she earned working in Kumasi. An older, disheveled man, approaches us and begins shouting, in English: "My father worked with the white men, he is the one who built the churches in Accra. He built the biggest buildings and the churches. He was a famous builder." Introducing himself to me, he demands recognition as a son of a man who contributed to the country's national modernity and whose contributions to state building projects are erased. By speaking formal English, he also signals that he has been educated, a rarity for a man from Bongo of his age, made possible by having lived in southern Ghana with his father. The bar owner responds to his anger with soothing words but sends him away. As he leaves, he shouts again: "My father is the one who built the big churches in Accra!"

He is dismissed as old and lost, his shouting interpreted as a sign of madness, but he has to shout to be heard, as speaking alone does not match the force of the discourse that continues to devalue him. The elderly man

demands the recognition that was denied to his father and to other northern Ghanaians who built the symbols of Ghana's development and national modernity – the buildings, the railway, the roads – and who are largely erased from history.

Although unusually forceful, the elderly man is not alone in asserting his cosmopolitanism to me, leading with it. As a white-skinned person, I am a living embodiment of the hegemonic modernization narrative that casts him as backward and denies him a historical recognition. For this man, as for a number of Ghanaians I got to know, encountering “a white” means confronting the violence of the modernization narrative's implicit judgment. I am its face. They know that the ascription of backwardness to rural locality is an effect of racial classifications that privileges Whiteness. They would agree with Pierre's statement that, “development thrives on the construction of a notion of fundamental African racial difference (and white Western normativity) while rendering the unequal institutional and material relations of resource extraction, among other things, through terms that sediment cultural narratives of this presumed African inferiority” (Pierre 2020: 87).

* * *

Since the advent of British colonial rule, northern Ghanaians have been the country's largest internal diaspora of migrant workers at the same time as they have been misrecognized as rural and isolated. The cost of this misrecognition is high, as are the stakes of this misclassification. This chapter examines how northern Ghanaians continue to be denied urbanity, showing how development projects materially and discursively regulate, police, and deny access to urbanity and citizenship. My sites of analysis are state projects that deny urbanity to northern Ghanaian informal laborers in southern cities, and development projects that deny urbanity to rural northern Ghanaians.

The encounters described above illustrate the central tension I analyze here: how Ghanaians reckon with and struggle over their claims to urbanity and modernity to redefine belonging and citizenship in the context of national and global social hierarchies. The two vignettes help us see that urbanity is not only a mode of inhabiting the space of the city, but a mode of inhabiting the self and claiming a space for the self in the nation and the world at large. When I discuss access to urbanity, I understand it as nexus of subjectivity, moral value, worthy personhood, and worldliness that is seen as a prerequisite for the recognition of rights and entitlements.

I conceptualize urbanity and rurality not as properties of physical space, but as discursive constructs; they are state and development categories that are claimed, ascribed, and contested. Much is at stake in these claims and ascriptions. Urban, cosmopolitan styles are associated with the dominant model of citizenship (Guano 2004; Mills 2001).

Conversely, state and development projects exclude all those whose claims on urbanity are tenuous those who live in rural areas and migrate to southern Ghanaian informal settlements; these seen as backward, dangerous, or foreign. At stake in Ghanaian denials of urbanity is more than a claim on modernity, it is citizenship, belonging, humanity, and associated access to entitlements and resources. Public and NGO discourses shore up the status and citizenship of those deemed properly urban while denying them to those ascribed rural backwardness or unruly, dangerous urbanity.

Reckoning with Modernist Rural-Urban Dualisms

Modernist rural-urban dualism has a strong hold on popular imagination. In dominant progress narratives, the rural and the urban are diametrically opposed, and each is defined by space, time, worldliness, and value. Urbanity is nearly synonymous with the city, the future, cosmopolitanism, and higher status, and rurality with the village, the past, isolation, and lesser status. State and development projects classify people as *either* rural or urban and administer them accordingly, mapping out different trajectories for them, opening, foreclosing, and prescribing pathways and ways of being. They rarely recognize the lived mobility of people such as the two men described above whose itineraries are not linear.

Anthropologists and other social scientists have excavated the ideological underpinnings of this dualism and refuted the premises and conclusions of the underlying development and modernization narrative, yet have also inadvertently reinscribed it by mapping urbanity onto space and exceptionalizing it.

Anthropologists have refuted the myth of rural-urban dualism by theorizing rural-urban connectivity and showing that rurality and urbanity are not diametrically opposed, but co-constituted: they form a complex socio-spatial formation. As Leeds argued long ago, dualism “obfuscates what are, in fact, much more complex structures” (Leeds 1994: 73 quoted in Mills 2001: 178). Some describe this structure as *interdigitation*, showing that the rural and the urban are connected and interdependent (Berry and Isenhour 2019). A *single social formation* is another name for describing the formation that encompasses the city, the countryside, and the people who move between and inhabit them (Mills 2001). The rural is never separate from the urban. As Mills writes, “places and people considered rural are intimately framed by social and material relations that are components of urban structures of power and authority” (Mills 2001: 177). Conversely, the urban entails the rural within (De Boeck 2011: 269).

Migrant workers’ aspirations and strategies of survival recreate and revitalize the dynamic rural-urban connective tissue (Pellow 2011; Piot 1999; Smith 2004). Migrants renew and rearticulate their positioning and relationships particularly in times of need; during economic downturns,

households split across cities and provinces for purposes of survival (Kantor 2018); migrants reestablish home ties as an investment strategy (Tilghman 2019) or leverage their position as “lowly” sanitation workers in new recycling economies (Nguyen 2016).

The dualism is also refuted in theorizations of urbanity and rurality as affective styles and performances that do not map onto originary identities, but are claimed by people from across the social spectrum (Ferguson 1999). As Ferguson writes, “localism” is not a rural, but an urban style “that signifies a micropolitical economic attachment to rural allies” (110). Inserting further class analysis here, we might add that it is easier for the wealthy to claim localism than it is for the poor to claim urbanism.

In addition to refuting the myth of the rural-urban dualism, anthropologists have also shown how and why it persists. The materiality of rural-urban cross-linkages is as real as it is disavowed. The structural unity of city and countryside is misrecognized by representations of “fundamentally opposing places and identities” (Mills 2001: 181). State and popular discourses disclaim the rural-urban structural interdigitation and the complexity of people’s attachments and subjectivities. As Ferguson writes, “the narrative of an emerging urban modernity set against the dark background of a static rural tradition is a myth, but to say this is not to be done with the matter. On the contrary, myths are socially and cosmologically productive; in this sense, they require to be analyzed, and not just refuted” (1999: 85). The myth of the rural-urban distinction continues to reproduce violent social hierarchies.

Disavowals are the scattered debris of colonial dualisms and the hegemonic modernization narrative, put to use to refuse belonging and citizenship. Disavowals legitimize denying the right to the city to the country’s others. In Buenos Aires, nationalist discourses draw on rural-urban dualism to posit “a white, middle class, and modern ‘normalcy’ as the only legitimate modality for spatial and cultural citizenship” (Guano 2004). In Ghana, the globally entangled social hierarchies means that northern Ghanaian migrant laborers are refused belonging and placed within the sphere of illegality (Afenah 2012).

The Regional Context: Misrecognized Rural Urbanity and the Afterlives of Migration

Denials of urbanity do not take place in a social vacuum, but reinforce existing geopolitical and social divides. The modernizing discourse displaces backwardness onto Africa, onto northern Ghana, onto rurality, onto women, onto urban marginality. It thus reinforces social hierarchies that subsume Africa to the West, northern Ghana to the South, Black to white, women to men, rural to the urban, slum dweller to a legitimate city resident.

Public and development discourses tend to cast Northern Ghana as remote, isolated, backwards, unruly, and disorderly. They thus fashion Ghana as modern and civilized by displacing the non-modern onto Northerners (Holsey 2008). To assert its modernity and exceptionality within Africa, Ghana casts out the North and maps the primitive onto it. As Bayo Holsey found when studying the aftermath of slavery in the coastal cities of Elmina and Cape Coast, “following European discourses ... coastal residents attribute the North’s impenetrability to an imagined hostility of its inhabitants toward civilization” (2008: 94), a hostility that is seen as embodied in female genital cutting and the erstwhile northern rejection of Christianity. Female genital cutting (FGM), is mapped onto northern Ghana and northern Ghanaians, where it was historically most practiced, but has been used since colonialism as a literal measure of modernity (Hodgson 2017: 98).

The urbanity and cosmopolitanism of northern Ghana and northern Ghanaians are largely unrecognized. Development projects disavow the region’s unique cosmopolitan character: it may look rural but entails the urban within, and is northern but entails the southern within. The spread out savannah that characterizes the Bongo district and much of Northern Ghana may appear rural at first sight, but here, the northern rural entails the urban and the southern within. For, in addition to the northern towns that have grown into dense urban centers in recent decades, the people who inhabit this region are itinerant migrants who are the country’s largest internal diaspora. Although NGOs and the government portray them as rural, subsistence farmers, people who reside in rural NG only appear as villagers in a static snapshot. Their life histories are so dynamic and complex that many are only temporarily rural and are always connected to the urban.

Histories of migration live on in the composition of their households. Many had made homes throughout the country, in villages and cities of the South as well as their homesteads. As across the border in north-central Togo (Piot 1999), the makeup of households here is so shaped by migration that most households are simultaneously northern and southern (see also Pellow 2015). People residing in the rural Bongo district are some of the most cosmopolitan of Ghanaians, at home in various parts of the country. They are bilingual or speak multiple languages – their first languages Gurene, the Hausa they learned in migrant settlements and “zongos” of southern Ghana, the Twi that is native to Kumasi and Accra, or, for those who “worked with the white men,” as they say, or were formally educated, English. They give their children English and Akan names. Those who can afford them delight in the southern staple *kenkey*, fermented corn cakes wrapped and steamed in corn husks, that returned migrants sell at the Bongo market.

Take my host family, which is effectively spread between two places at any time. If you visited their compound in rural Bongo at the time I lived with them, you would have met three adults who are primarily farmers,

with one additional brother who is employed in town and largely lives there, and one woman learning to become a seamstress, and several children and grandchildren who are in school. You might notice that the little children's parents are not there – they live and work in Kumasi. And you would eventually learn that, like others in their village, the adults had spent much of their youth in southern Ghanaian cities. Afua was born and raised in a coastal city and first encountered Bongo at 14, when misfortune befell her family and she was left orphaned. Her husband grew up in Kumasi where his parents sent him to work, but his senior brother, defying them, paid for his schooling and set him on a path of education and formal employment that were denied to most people from Bongo in his generation. The senior brother and his wife have returned to Bongo, where they take care of their grandchildren whose parents are in Kumasi.

Other women and men in the village told me about lives spent in southern Ghana, or sporadic, seasonal journeys south. I never specifically asked about these histories, but they surfaced in conversations and interviews. They worked on farms or washed dishes, and were situated at the margins of the informal economy; the very term informal economy was coined in reference to migrants from this region (Hart 1973).

Labor migration to southern Ghana has its antecedents in the capture of peoples during slavery and in the colonial conscription of forced labor. It has long been argued that imperial and colonial powers produced the idea of traditional Africa in order to define themselves as modern. Yet colonialism also partitioned the spaces within the colonies, producing inequality through indirect rule and, in Ghana, the exploitation of the North as a labor reserve. Labor migrants from rural northern Ghana were forced and called upon to work. Assigned to the underclass, few were afforded social mobility.

There is now more migration south than ever and its character has changed. Northern Ghanaian migrants are not usually referred to as such, but are in effect refugees of climate change, structural adjustment, and neoliberal dispossession. World Bank's economic liberalization policies such as the removal of government subsidies for agriculture coupled with tariff cuts, as well as land grabbing (Nyantakyi-Frimpong and Bezner Kerr 2017), have exacerbated scarcity and regional inequality, turning migration into one of few viable strategies for survival.

In recent decades the gendered composition of migrant bodies has shifted, as has the public perception of them. Men were recruited as laborers during colonialism, northern families were hesitantly welcomed after World War II, and girls were sent to work as domestic workers in households of relatives, but more girls and women now migrate independently (Cassiman 2010), often out of sheer desperation. For those girls whose families cannot afford the school fees, migration is a rite of passage into adulthood. "She ran away to earn money for her school fees," I often heard parents saying about their teenage daughters, many of whom never returned. Migration

is also a practice of self-actualization for many young men and women (Hawkins 2002; Lobnibe 2010).

Labor migration is as constitutive of Ghana as it is denied, exceptionalized, and increasingly devalued. In contrast to the past, Northern Ghanaian laborers in southern Ghana are unwanted by the state. They are symbolically evicted from the polity and denied full national belonging. They are marked by terms of nonbelonging: criminal, Muslim, immigrant, and slave. They nonetheless continue to provide vital services – whereas their ancestors helped build the colonial and socialist infrastructure of southern cities (the railroads, roads, and modern buildings), today, northern laborers *are* the infrastructure. They work as hawkers and porters, their bodies making up infrastructures that the city does not provide (see Mains and Kinfu 2017; Simone 2004). Although they provide a vital infrastructure, they are denied the right to the city.

Refusing the Right to the City: The Unsettling Mobility of Girls Who Won't Stay Put

Young women's migration and northern Ghanaian migration more broadly sutures the country but also reveals the contours of what Zheng calls "rural-urban apartheid" (2003). Modernist discourses valorize regulated, designed, controlled urbanity, urbanity populated by the right kinds of people who stay in bounds. The Ghanaian state maps urban civilizational cosmopolitanism onto people residing in cities who inhabit the regulated, proper formal settlements and gated communities while relegating backwardness onto people residing in slums and in villages. These categorizations both remake and erase so much of what makes contemporary social life in Ghana.

The Ghanaian state threatens those Northern Ghanaians and others who live and work in "improperly developed," unregulated neighborhoods with demolition and erasure. The state is known for demolishing markets and settlements and leveling them. Heightened during the military dictatorship, demolitions have continued in neoliberal Ghana in the name of privatization and urban renewal (Asante 2020). The state legitimizes these practices with discursive representations of the urban poor as unruly and dangerous (Afenah 2012), and is aided by the media that sanitizes state violence and underscores the illegality of informal settlements.

Northern Ghanaian migrants stand out among those who are displaced, dispossessed, and denied the right to the city. Among the growing class of impoverished northern Ghanaians who inhabit southern cities, most live in the informal settlements, at times in the shadows of gated communities. As Afenah writes, over 70% of people who live in the Old Fadama settlement, popularly known as Sodom and Gomorrah, are northern Ghanaians. The settlement has been slated for demolition, fought by neighborhood groups and activist lawyers. The neighborhood is also home to hazardous E-waste from the global North and Ghana itself.

Informal settlements such as Old Fadama and the people who live in them are seen as an unwelcome scourge. But nothing compares to the public anxiety about the youthful bodies of girls who live there. In recent decades, the figure of the *kayaye*, a young northern girl who migrates to work as a porter (head load carrier) or a hawker on the streets and markets of Accra and other southern cities, has become a fulcrum of moral anxieties. Public discourses and state projects cast the *kayaye* as a national problem, symbols of social decay, impropriety, and disorder and deny them the right to the city, mobility, and livelihood.

Their gender, youth, and precarity make them vulnerable to rape and assault (Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf 2008), but their vulnerability is misrecognized as a source of threat. Although vitally needed, they are treated as unwelcome quasi citizens, as people unauthorized to live and work in the city. Denied legitimacy and belonging, they are seen as people out of place.

The porter's own narratives foreground their industriousness, sociality, and skills (Bowles 2017) in contrast to the largely masculinist public discourses that diagnose Ghana as suffering from a loss of morality and the decay of social order, and displace these concerns onto young women migrants. Consequently, there is much talk about teenage pregnancies, street hawking, loose girls, and fallen women. Regional migration born of duress is discussed as a moral social problem, rather than an effect of ongoing economic and political marginalization or what Brivio calls the "continuities between Ghana's slave past and this contemporary form of exploitation ... the structural dynamics underpinning labor mobility from north to south and the social bias against *kayaye* and other northern migrants in the south" (2016).

Citizenship Denied: The Violence of Development "Sensitization"

In Northern Ghana itself, NGO and development projects deny citizenship to people residing in villages by breathing life into the rural-urban dualism. Reproducing rural-urban dualism as a historical given is a major discursive task in development work. Although the notion of isolated, remote, stuck-in-tradition villagers is not grounded in historical realities, ascriptions of backwardness are necessary for the construction of problems that development can address.

Post-millennial, neoliberal development projects feature a particularly pernicious form of these ascriptions. Whereas the earlier ideology of teleological progress toward modernization entailed a promise of postcolonial parity in the name of overcoming the ostensible lag in developmental time, the aspiration of parity has been abandoned. Development no longer promises parity or equality to those conceived of being "behind" (Ferguson 2006).

In northern Ghana, NGOs and development workers construct notions of rural pathology not as a problem to be overcome in the name of a better future, but as a sedimented and intractable residue of the past. The rural is pathologized as backwards and immovable, stuck in time and place. Whereas the future tense has been abandoned, the construct of developmental time itself persists in rural-urban dualisms that are continually rearticulated and reinvested. The goal is not to train the foot soldiers of modernity to help others “catch up,” to erect “development stairways” (Ferguson 2006: 189). Rather, it is to mark the boundaries of urbanity and rurality that rearticulates modernity as a wall, a firm barrier between deserving citizens and undeserving subjects.

Dominant paradigms for regional development understand northern Ghana, and the villages in particular, as ruled by harmful traditions. Following long-standing colonial discourses, development projects attribute scarcity, climate change, and other historically and politically produced socio-economic and environmental problems to ostensible culturally inherent pathologies. Their solution is “sensitize” villagers by educating them about the harmfulness of their traditions. To “sensitize” villagers means to make them more cognizant of the pathology of their traditions and thereby less ignorant.

Sensitization becomes the work of regional NGOs which cast themselves as experts on local, ostensibly backward traditions. These NGOs play the game of development whose rules they did not choose and have no control over. It is far more feasible to receive funding for sensitization workshops than for other projects. Constrained by donor preferences for conducting workshops, NGOs seize on the opportunities to secure their own standing in a precarious economy.

NGO sensitization workshops tell those residing in northern Ghanaian villages that they are backward and that they need to reorient their thoughts, feelings, practices. NGOs offer them few material resources and instead ask to accept the ascription of backwardness to their social positioning and to develop themselves by transforming their traditions.

Development projects thus add insult to injury. Rather than “lifting villagers out of poverty,” which they purport to do, they legitimize the exacerbated social inequality, keeping people in their assigned, devalued place. Consider these examples:

The problem: catastrophic flooding in wake of Burkina Faso’s opening of the Volta river dams.

The solution: rebuild some houses, but focus on sensitizing people about human rights in disaster situations.

The problem: low literacy (largely due to lack of schools and lack of school teachers).

The solution: provide incentives such as school feeding programs, but focus on sensitizing villagers about the rights of the girl-child and the patriarchal traditions that keep girls away from school.

The problem: high infant and maternal mortality (largely due to scarcity malnutrition, and lack of health care).

The solution: educate people about cultural food taboos blamed for causing malnutrition and about patriarchal traditions blamed for causing reproductive harm such as female genital cutting and early marriage.

Whether development projects are specifically framed as gender-focused or not, NGOs and development workers rely on the discourse of patriarchy as a gendered cultural pathology to frame staunch anti-modernity as the cause and manifestation of the region's problems. As a result, development work is concerned with constructing taxonomies of rural, gendered pathologies. Development workers spend a great deal of time discussing in intricate detail how the villagers are marked by "culture" – bad, pathological culture and calcified tradition that causes women's impoverishment and bodily suffering. They talk about this to each other, in offices and at workshops, and they talk about it to the villagers themselves, during "field visits."

These framings are so ill-conceived that it is too easy to turn NGOs into caricatures. However, regional NGOs are not the original authors of this discourse; that they misconstrue the local as rural and pathological is also an imperial residue. Since colonialism, dominant political discourses have cast culture as "inherently oppressive to women," and rural, illiterate African women have been primitivized – meaning, perceived as most vulnerable to patriarchy (Hodgson 2017: 4). The terminology for adjudicating gendered modernity has changed from the British colonial efforts to protect "coloured women in the Crown colonies" (Hodžić 2017: 20) to the contemporary UN Sustainable Development goals of achieving gender equality and empowerment of girls and women, but gender continues to be understood as measuring stick of civilization, progress, and development (see also Manuh 2007). Concerns about gender, however, are not necessarily salutary to girls and women who are the subjects of these projects, as we see both from the treatment of the *kayaye* and the women in northern villages.

Women subjected to development discourses in the Bongo district refuse the NGOs' stigmatizing categories. They do not say, "we are undeveloped villagers," "we are ignorant," "we have not seen the light," or "we are traditional." They refer instead to specific causes of suffering: food shortages, blood shortages, and joblessness. They decry the lack of employment opportunities in the region which leaves them with few options to earn cash by petty trading and basket weaving. They associate living in the city with greater opportunities to earn money, attain higher status, and secure a more viable future for their children that includes education, which they value and desire as a necessary though insufficient pathway to formal employment.

They would agree that being in the village they are isolated – not from modernity, but from material and infrastructural benefits of city life, from electricity, running water, and transportation that would lessen demands

on their labor and ease the burden their bodies are asked to bear, to schools and jobs that would afford them sustenance and a more hopeful future. Living in the village means that they are treated as minimal citizens who are mobilized to vote but then forgotten and left out of material benefits of citizenship (Hodžić, 2017). Speaking to politicians whom they as exploitative, they ask: “Are we not Ghanaian?” and demand to receive what they are owed.

Due to their histories of labor migration and entanglement with the South, returned migrants living in the northern Ghanaian countryside are often more urban and cosmopolitan than city-dwelling NGO workers and civil servants. Development workers’ urbanity and cosmopolitanism are often less lived precisely because their families did not migrate for survival. Whether for reasons of luck, parental (often mother’s insistence), or relative class privilege, many development workers attained education and did so locally, in the region. And it is education that enabled them to obtain employment in the formal sector, working as government administrators, educators, nurses, police, or NGO workers. They make claims on urbanity, modernity, and cosmopolitanism not on the basis of lived experience but on their distance from the villagers.

The goal of this comparison is not to extoll cosmopolitanism, not least because doing so reinforces the modernist value system, but also because northern Ghanaian cosmopolitanism is precarious and has been predicated on exploitative labor conditions. The labor migrants’ cosmopolitanism is born out of strategies of survival in a world that insists on keeping them in place, even as they move. Rather, my point is to suggest that what gives people a greater degree of cosmopolitan urbanity may not be lived experience, but their ability to insert themselves into the development narrative not as abject humanitarian subjects but as educated gatekeepers of modernity.

Securing Belonging, at a Price: Making Urban Citizens

Development workers must secure their social standing because they are not fundamentally different from rural/migrants; indeed, they share social and material worlds, link them materially to the city, and mediate between them (Sharma 2008: 113). Many development workers were born in villages and have family ties there. However, they learn to disassociate themselves from these shared worlds and construct themselves as temporally, morally, and civilizationally ahead of them. As development experts charged with transforming the social landscape of the region and empowering its women, northern NGO workers and civil servants embody a particularly vexed subject position. They derive their authority from knowing villagers intimately, but being distinct from them. This means that they have to have a sufficient rural background, but must demonstrate and perform urban disposition, sensibility, and practices.

They do so at NGO workshops that take place in towns but are *about* people understood as rural. Development workers are seen as modernizing subjects whose work is to learn, rehearse, and promote notions about the regional “harmful traditional practices” that are understood as obstacles to development, modernity, health, and prosperity. The urban modernity and the social standing of development workers depend on the continued construction of villagers as people ruled by abject traditions. Development workers are reestablished as urban/modern by displacing the isolated/backward onto those residing in villages.

Consider the following scene. Representatives of an Accra-based NGO called Ghana Association for Women’s Welfare (GAWW) have arrived in Tamale to hold a two-day workshop called “FGM Education for Nurses.” Tamale, the capital of the Northern region, is the largest city in northern Ghana, and the nurses, largely bereft of professional opportunities, have donned on their best clothes and arrived from the far corners of region. All 25 of them are women, and nearly all hail from northern Ghana, though not necessarily from the regions where they are posted. The workshop is conducted in English, which is Ghana’s official language, and the language largely associated with the state, development, and the media (while there are over 70 languages that are widely spoken in Ghana, most literate Ghanaians read and write primarily in English).

The workshop opens with a government-employed community development officer gives a lecture on modernity and tradition. He equates the urban with the modern, the developed, the contemporary and opposes it to the temporally lagging, traditional, barbaric, and backwards rural. Echoing dominant depictions of Ghana as a country with a “cultural background,” as the Minister of Women and Children’s Affairs put it, he tells the nurses that Ghana is “a society with culture,” by which he means a society held back by tradition. In this understanding, countries like Ghana have culture/tradition and Western countries do not; they have modernity instead. And, the narrative goes, it is precisely culture that inhibits development.

“Culture is still very active, still predominant in our society,” he begins. “We must look at practices that are negative to development,” in particular “in rural areas that are primitive and underdeveloped.” In rural areas, he continues people do “simple, simple things” whereas “urban areas are more complex.” Nonetheless, in Ghana, both urban and rural populations hold onto culture (read tradition) more than they should, he says. Culture, for him, is like a quiet volcano: active even when it appears dormant, always brewing and spewing toxic fumes, ready to erupt at any time.

The development officer distrusts the nurses’ modernity and administers a “modernity test” which he interprets as confirming that the nurses are incompletely modern. In doing so, he reanimates a long practice of objectifying and adjudicating African modernity. The distrust toward the modernity of Africans and the evaluation of African modernity as incomplete is rooted in colonial racism and classificatory rationalism. Today, many “properly”

urban – meaning, educated, and formally employed – Ghanaians distrust their compatriot’s modernity. If you scratch beneath the surface, I was often told, you will find that modernity is only skin deep, that, “no Ghanaian ever dies a natural death,” meaning that Ghanaians attribute death to supernatural forces and are therefore not entirely rational. For the development officer, the nurses’ incomplete modernity is a symptom of Ghana’s downfall – in his view, the country cannot develop when even educated urbanites hold onto tradition. He sees the rural as forever lurking beneath the urban, the traditionalist beneath the modern.

The exam is not salutary for the nurses. By highlighting the incompleteness of their distance from “tradition,” the test introduces doubt and insecurity into the nurses’ self-conception as modern, urban subjects, revealing that their social standing is far from secure.

At this particular workshop, nurses will be trained to see themselves as knowledgeable of rural traditions but free from their grasp. As Pigg puts it, the authority of health workers “rests on knowing villagers without aligning themselves closely with them” (1997: 276). They need to display intimate knowledge of the practices discussed, but should not recognize themselves in them.

“What are some of the harmful traditional practices in our area?” Mrs. Mahama, the GAWW leader, asks nurses to begin the discussion. By naming traditions “in our area,” nurses are placed in proximity to the practices discussed. As the nurses begin to volunteer answers – teenage pregnancies, forced feeding, tribal marks – Mrs. Mahama writes them on a large flip chart, inviting further reflection about the harmful effects of each (prostitution, broken homes, malnutrition, school dropouts, difficult labor, infections, malnutrition, retarded growth, tetanus, anemia, septicemia/sepsis, keloids, etc.).

Each item on the chart occasions clarification and illustration: “Some even go to a soothsayer,” one nurse offers, introducing *some* as a word for referring to rural women, those not present at the workshop. Because the subjects she refers to consult soothsayers and engage in divination, they are marked as non-Christian and non-Muslim. “Some force-feed with maggot water,” another nurse adds. The speakers locate the practices at some distance from themselves: it is not *we* who are subjected to tradition but *they* – the uneducated northern populations who trust in ancestral spirits. The naming and specification of harms builds collectivity for the nurses, forging a common ground among them and in opposition to the people they are meant to care for and whose ostensible proximity to nature and use of animals for purposes of divination marks them as liminally human.

For Mrs. Mahama, rural traditions are not only harmful but criminal. “There was a case two years ago in the Upper West where an old lady did the [tribal] marks. She cut too deep on the baby’s stomach and all the intestines fell out. The child got infected and died, even though they took it to the hospital.” “So then the baby died, the people stop,” one nurse

replies provocatively, and the other participants take the bait, responding: “They say the baby didn’t come to stay.” “They won’t stop.” “It’s a sign of royalty.” Many of the assembled nurses have visible tribal marks on their cheeks, but the nurses are not supposed to recognize themselves as subjects of the discussion. The formal emphasis on *them* – the rural subjects who with traditional practices – helps produce the urban distinction. When someone mentions widowhood rites, one nurse shouts, “I ran away from the rites!” Her exclamation is met with silence.

The workshop is not a place for reckoning with one’s actual past, but for crafting one’s distance from it. GAWW wanted to establish the nurses as knowledgeable about harmful traditions but not subject to them. The nurse’s identification as a subject of a ritual disrupts the collective performance. Even though she explains that she was subjected to widowhood rites against her will, and that she has since escaped from them by finding Jesus, her words are met with silence. Her connection to tradition is too uncomfortable. By including herself as its subject, she has violated the central feature of the exercise: it is not supposed to be about an experience shared by *us* but about the rural *them* and *their* harmful traditions. The nurses should understand themselves as modern subjects who oppose harmful traditions and are not in their grip, those who remedy suffering, not embody it. Everybody present is supposed to affirm the official narrative of distance from the rural, and the nurse’s self-identification as the subject of tradition puts into question everyone else’s status.

Development workers who seemingly benefit from the fortification of their own status as modern, urban subjects, cannot take this status for granted. Nurses, other civil servants, and NGO workers mediate between those living in villages and the development, health, and humanitarian industries. As such, they embody an ambivalent and precarious position. They have to continually perform their distinction from the villagers to secure their own subjectivity, citizenship, and income. What does it mean to be in the city, but never fully of it, always at risk of being exposed as traditional/backward?

For cut women who are the ostensible beneficiary of this project, the effect is even more damaging. GAWW never meant to enhance the nurses’ clinical practice; not a single session was devoted to actual health care for cut women. Instead, GAWW taught the nurses that cut women were abject, unreasonable, and cruel – both dehumanizing and inhumane.

Nurses were to feel disgust toward cut women and to see them as threats to their own daughter. In effect, GAWW taught the nurses to substitute a caring disposition toward cut women with a concern for their children and the surveillance of their bodies. The upshot is that cut women are to be talked about, worried about, surveilled, researched, and legislated against but not cared for. Because everyone’s status is insecure in the postcolony, the historically and economically marginalized women bear the brunt with their bodies and lives.

Conceptualizing Urbanity *from* the Rural

What anthropological understandings help us refuse rural/urban dualisms? In conclusion, I argue that conceptualizing urbanity from the rural helps us from inadvertently reinscribing this dualism. Rather than exceptionalizing the city or deploying a distinctly localist gaze, theorizing urbanity from the rural means never letting go of mutual constitutions that span social worlds.

Despite theoretical innovations that decouple urbanity and rurality from space and that show the complexity of the interwoven rural-urban social formation, the terms “urban” and “rural” are habitually reified. In anthropology, these terms are often used as if their referents were self-evidently “out there,” thus inadvertently reinscribing dominant dualism and its associated meanings and valences. Used as spatial adjectives that denote geographic space and locality (“urban Congo,” “rural markets”), they statically define particular kinds of people in reference to space (“rural women,” “urban youth” – often in this precise constellation; men, in contrast, are often unmarked and written about as “people,” thus linguistically assigned the status of the universal subjects). These categories are handy, efficient. Getting around them requires new, provisional vocabularies: people residing in rural NG; rural/migrants; returned migrants living in the northern Ghanaian countryside.

Another way anthropologists reinscribe rural-urban dualism is by inadvertently exceptionalizing the city. Urbanity may be singled out, exceptionalized, and valorized even in scholarship that takes a critical distance from hegemonic notions of urbanized development and modernity. Understood as a distinct modern formation that generates new and unique kinds of subjects, socialities, and milieus, urbanity is extolled for its flaunting of rules, bending of styles and genres, generating creative modes of living. It is said that urbanity specifically gives birth to bricolage and experimentation, flexibility, and improvisation. Listen to De Boeck:

Kinois seem to be very good at ... being flexible, at opening up to this “unexpected,” that often reveals itself outside the known pathways that constitute urban life as most in the Global North know it. Urban residents of cityscapes such as Kinshasa are highly skilled at discovering itineraries beyond the obvious, and at exploiting more invisible paths and possibilities that lay hidden in the folds of urban domains and experiences. Often, these city dwellers have trained themselves to successfully tap into this imbroglio, and to exploit to the full the possibilities these juxtapositions offer. They are constantly busy to design new ways to escape from the economic impositions and excesses that urban life imposes on them. They often know where to look and what to look for to generate feasibility within what is seemingly unfeasible (2011: 272).

What De Boeck writes about the Kinshasa dwellers equally applies to women and men who live at the geographic and geopolitical, rural margins of the Ghanaian state, where people ingeniously mobilize to generate something from seemingly nothing. How do we account for such experimentation without exceptionalizing the city as unique and inscribing it with a radical difference that sets it apart? Our, that is scholarly, descriptions and definitions of urbanity are also discursive constructs with material consequences.

In the Bongo district, men and women also invent amidst disenfranchisement, and generate feasibility from within the unfeasible. While for many, that includes splitting households across the country, both leaving and staying are strategies of survival, of repurposing the scraps of the present with an eye on generating future.

Notably, while NGO and development projects are indeed stigmatizing and have lost credibility, northern Ghanaians remain interested in the potential to harness NGOs' connections to far-flung social worlds. They are less interested in specific NGO projects; instead, they are eager to foster relationships with people who orbit around the NGOs and who are seen as conduits to other relationships, resources, and networks. Visitors and guests NGOs bring in become means for generating a future, for tapping into to make staying in the village feasible.

The impetus to single out the city is understandable given the dominance of the romanticizing, orientalist, localist analytical *gaze* that pervades understandings of African villages, and often, Africa itself. I too had initially planned to conduct most of my research in Accra, as doing so, I believed, would have allowed me greater distance from the localist gaze. But what I found conducting research across the country and the Upper East region's urban and rural areas is that one does not have to be in the city to study the meanings of urbanity and to refuse the localist gaze.

Here, I challenge the localist and exceptionalizing gazes by conceptualizing urbanity *from* within the rural. That includes decentering the city as the location of the cosmopolitan, the lively, the experimental. Conceptualizing urbanity from the rural also requires delinking it from space. The slippage between urbanity and its overlapping meanings of modernity, higher status and moral value means that urbanity becomes a litmus test for citizenship. To claim urbanity is to make a claim on citizenship. When rural/migrants do so, they reclaim value as subjects who deserve recognition as laborers and citizens outside of the narrow confines of humanitarianism.

They describe their life histories and claim urbanity, seeking recognition outside the dominant, stigmatizing development frameworks. They do not position themselves as suffering subjects who represent bare humanity. Rather than placing themselves within the humanitarian NGO discourse about pathologized, debased bodies of women who are abject and only liminally human, they place themselves in geopolitical histories of mobility and labor expropriation that can be traced to the afterlives of slavery and colonialism.

They position themselves as laborers who have built Ghana and contributed to the national economy, infrastructure, and nation-building itself, as citizens who are owed rights and entitlements. They point to their participation in the national labor force, polity, and modernity-building projects to demand their recognition as Ghana's cosmopolitan citizens. And when they foster social relations to generate new futures, they do so on the basis of non-humanitarian understandings of temporarily shared social worlds and the infinite responsibilities generated by lives touching each other.

Notes

- 1 In Ghana, I conducted one and a half years of ethnographic fieldwork with domestic, Ghanaian NGOs and their various constituencies in Bolgatanga, Bongo, and Accra between 2002 and 2009, and continued to analyze Ghanaian media, NGO, and government policies and political discourses through 2016.
- 2 When northern Ghanaians talk about "Kumasi," they may mean the country's second-largest urban metropolis, or southern Ghana more broadly.
- 3 The global North often reserves modernity for itself. Non-Western modernity is often seen as incomplete, not entirely coeval, at best alternative or vernacular. Even African cities, writes Scheld, "are not viewed as modern social forms" (Scheld 2003).
- 4 By drawing attention to socialism as a transnational phenomenon, I do not intend to signal sameness of the associated social and political formations in the former Yugoslavia and Ghana. Rather, I gesture toward geopolitical, historical convergences that are often overlooked and shared sensibilities that are poorly understood. Seeing the attachment to development and progress only as a colonial imposition overlooks the socialist lives of development ideology and projects. Equally importantly, transnational socialist connections made in the name of development and education were formative of people and places across the Non-Aligned world, where they are also erased from history and written out of the present.

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18 Religious Relevance Interests

Pentecostalism and Super-Diversity in Gaborone, Botswana¹

Rijk van Dijk

Introduction

In the anthropological study of religious phenomena in African urban spaces much emphasis is currently placed on the concept of (super-) diversity (see Burchardt 2016, 2018; Wilhelm-Solomon et al. 2016, see also Garbin & Strhan 2017). Consequently, through this concept attention is drawn to what Vertovec (2007) has termed the experience of urban spaces (such as London) in which people are exposed to, and required to negotiate, an unprecedented variety of identities, origins, classes, interests, and religious expressions, involving:

replace this quote by the following:

[...] differential immigration statuses and their concomitant entitlements and restrictions of rights, divergent labour market experiences, discrete gender and age profiles, patterns of spatial distribution, and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents. [...] The interplay of these factors is what is meant here, in summary fashion, by the notion of ‘super-diversity’.

(Vertovec 2007: 1025)

Being the product of increasing scales of migration of people (see Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011) and of a mobility of ideas, objects, and images (see Van de Kamp (2016) on what she terms religious circulation), this super-diversity exceeds the varieties of subject positions previously studied under the rubric of ‘multiculturalism’ (Vertovec 2007: 1050). In present-day global cities, it manifests as a fundamentally different experience of how these varieties of identities and mobilities are expressed and represented in urban domains (Meissner and Vertovec 2015).

In terms of the social composition and spatial expression of these wide-ranging subject-positions, this attention to super-diversity has also resulted in a greater interest in the manner in which religion has become an explicit part of this process. While as Burchardt and Becci (2016) and Becci, et al. (2017) argue, most scholars use the term religious diversity to describe the migration-driven,

often urban, representation of various forms of religion, they emphasize the concept of religious super-diversity and define this process as:

[...] a more encompassing and complex cultural formation involving variables and dynamics such as religious innovation [...] that are not directly related to migration. [...] religious super-diversity is intended to capture the ways in which different kinds of religious differences are articulated in urban space.

(Becci, Burchardt and Giorda 2017: 74–75)

In so doing, these authors look in particular at how both religious communities and religious and ritual practices become emplaced in urban spaces, in built environments, and other visible material expressions that have become superabundant in cities both in the West and in other parts of the world. While this interest is partly driven by a notion that the development of large cities cannot simply be seen as fostering secularization – as especially in Africa the significance of religious and ritual expressions in public cultures remains strong (see Meyer 2004, 2012; Englund 2011) – it potentially leads to a different understanding of the meaning of secularity, also in the African context (see, e.g. Hinfelaar 2011; Meyer 2012; Burchardt et al. 2015; see also Becci et al. 2017). Wilhelm-Solomon et al. (2016: 10) therefore note the occurrence of a ‘religious turn’ in urban studies that sees a new momentum in the study of how a great diversity of religious expressions, identities and organizations relate to urban space and spatial processes (see Gomez and Van Herck 2012; Burchardt and Becci 2016; Garnett and Harris 2013).

Yet, while this concept of religious super-diversity calls attention to the level of variety and creativity that marks religious identities and practices in modern cities, this chapter aims to debate some of the limitations that this religious ‘diversity-turn’ may harbour in capturing realities on the ground (on this notion of the diversity turn see Burchardt and Höhne 2015: 4, 5). While this diversity is evidenced by the emergence of a veritable religious market (cf. Finke and Stark 1988), also in African cities (see for instance Wuaku 2012), the question remains whether an urban anthropology is equally capable of exploring the social-structural implications of this diversity in everyday situations where religious alliance is often highly significant to people’s pursuit of support and security.² While religious diversity may be extensive, expectations regarding possible forms of social support offered by a plenitude of religious groups, leaders, and communities may, paradoxically, remain quite uniform (Bompani 2010; Öhlmann et al. 2016).

In a situation of religious (super-)diversity in African contexts, I argue that religious groups can offer specific answers to the question of their relevance to urbanites’ pursuit of support; moreover, this notion of religious relevance to people’s everyday circumstances becomes a significant marker in a context of diversity. I will argue, however, that super-diversity is an integral element of the various forms of support that I see religious groups

offering to individuals and communities, thereby making this diversity instrumental to how notions of religious relevance are produced in these circles (a subsequent section will elaborate specifically on the issue of Pentecostalism and social support).

This chapter addresses and explores several aspects of how churches in urban Botswana engage in a quest for religious relevance by investing effort and resources in a wide diversity of social support activities in addition to, and congruent with, their spiritually oriented practices. Investigating how Pentecostal churches in Botswana's capital, Gaborone, have become increasingly interested in providing a wide variety of social support initiatives to their members and the community at large, this contribution aims to demonstrate how such initiatives signal a particular quest for making the faith socially relevant in highly diverse ways; it should be emphasized that in these Pentecostal circles the spiritual and the material are seen as being deeply interconnected. This quest requires an understanding of the double-levelled nature of the religious diversity that I address. Firstly, it is important to understand that, as a specific and charismatic brand of Christianity, Pentecostalism has often emerged amidst a variety of other religious expressions, especially in the African urban situation (Kalu 2008; Meyer 2004). In this sense, this notion of diversity comes close to the above-mentioned authors' understandings of religious (super-) diversity as reflecting and describing the multitude of religious expressions and organizations that mark many (African) cities. Apart from historical African religious traditions, often represented in such practices as traditional healing, there was an early introduction of missionary Christianity in southern Africa, including Botswana, dating from the time of the arrival of David Livingstone (Amanze 1998; Nkomazana 1998). Missionary Christianity developed in a myriad of forms and denominations, including the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist traditions. Over time, and especially since the early 20th century, local variations of Christianity emerged – commonly known as African Independent and prophet-healing churches – that, in many cases, arrived in what is present-day Botswana from South Africa (Amanze 1998). These Africanized forms of Christianity were and are marked by the fact that they integrate elements of Christianity with local and historic healing traditions (see Meyer 2004). In addition to this development, forms of Pentecostalism also arrived, originally founded by Afro-American communities in the US but, over time, also developing specific forms in Africa (Kalu 2008). Early missionary forms of Pentecostalism were introduced in the region by, e.g. the Zion Christian Church (Cabrita 2018). The currently popular form of charismatic Pentecostalism developed since the 1970s and 1980s, marked by a level of uniformity in how its beliefs in the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the charismata of healing, ecstasy, glossolalia and so forth are expressed (Kalu 2008; Meyer 2004; Nkomazana 1998). Experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit is thereby considered to be vital to receiving healing, success, prosperity,

and religious authority, and, as such, proselytes a spiritual re-birth (often termed becoming ‘born-again’ [Marshall 2009; Meyer 1998; Van Klinken 2012]) as the most significant identity-marker for confirmed followers of the faith (see various contributions to Lindhardt 2015). Hence, at this level, this domain of Pentecostalism is positioned in a much wider and highly diverse field of other religious expressions, traditions, and denominations.

Yet, at a second level we must understand that while the domain of Pentecostalism and its many churches and ministries appears to be marked by a surprising level of similarity and uniformity in its ideology, identity, and religious practices, which e.g., explains why it is so easy to engage in “church-hopping” from one Pentecostal church to another, a practice known as “butinage” (see Gez et al. 2017), Pentecostal churches and ministries strive to set themselves apart and seek ways to distinguish themselves from like-minded others. Hence, amidst a super-diversity of all sorts of religious communities and expressions, Pentecostal churches appear increasingly interested in devoting many activities to what Gordon and Hancock (2005) and De Witte (2011a) pointedly call the “branding of charisma” as a means of distinction (for Botswana, see e.g., Faimau 2017). This is commonly related to the variety of religious, spiritual, and inspirational practices they offer to members and clients in such African contexts; yet, they have also become remarkably focussed on building and developing their specific take on relevance in diverse ways (this pursuit of religious and social relevance is not unique to African Pentecostalism; it has also been recorded for urban Pentecostal churches elsewhere; e.g. for Brazil Boechat et al. 2019). This production of distinction (Burchardt 2020) and diversity on the basis of what can be called *religious relevance interests*, I suggest, can be observed in how they offer and embrace a diversity within a variety of social support activities in what I have come across in Botswana in three key domains: charity; counselling; and capacity-building.

This chapter argues that the Pentecostal churches’ capitalizing on the social importance of such activities is primarily driven by a particular concern to establish “relevance” to their audiences. Secondly, like many other African places, Botswana, and Gaborone in particular, has witnessed a veritable explosion of a range of Pentecostal churches that seem to express and present a striking uniformity of its specific religious identity (Nkoma-zana 2014; Togarasei 2016; Van Dijk and Molenaar 2019). It is a religious landscape nonetheless in which, as I will argue for Botswana, a large variety of social support initiatives has become significant, and should equally be the focus of an urban anthropology that explores religious diversity. Thirdly, this diversity allows churches and their leadership to select and foster ideas and interests about what this relevance should be about. This is not necessarily or exclusively informed by their position in a religious market, as some social support initiatives may have little influence in terms of improving that position.

Investing in Relevance

In their article “The im-materiality of urban religion: towards an ethnography of urban religious aspirations”, Burchardt and Westendorp (2018) critique the kind of analysis that emphasizes material spatialisations of religion. This interpretation, they believe, asserts too-singular an approach to studying urban religion by exploring how the latter has become inscribed in the material elements of buildings, icons, clothing, and other artefacts, leaving a territorial imprint on urban space. They argue that:

[...] in urban studies cities are chiefly construed as material assemblages, scholars of urban religion often take up such definitions and understand urban religion to mean material expressions of it. This is how the research field has come to focus, to a great extent, on places of worship, material religious symbols and objects. However, it seems that in doing so it has sometimes taken the presence of material objects as the starting point, rather than the practices that produce them.

(Burchardt and Westendorp 2018: 164)

Instead, they believe that the im-materialities of urban life should be emphasized more in order to understand how and why religious diversities materialize and what this means for the way in which various religions inscribe their presence in the city (Burchardt and Westendorp 2018: 162). As a result, they critically engage with the notion of ‘iconic religion’ as a sign of the tangible presence of religion, as defined by Knott et al. in their 2016 Special Issue:

[...] that a focus on the tangible presence of religion in urban spaces is a fruitful starting point to understand the dynamics of religious diversity. Our notion of iconic religion is situated against this backdrop.

(Knott, Krech & Meyer 2016: 128)

Burchardt and Westendorp turn to the idea of “urban aspirations”, based on the work of Van der Veer (2015), as key to understanding how the being, belonging, and experiencing of urban spaces also occurs through ideational and immaterial notions of value, motivation, and inspiration that are future-oriented and thus may be expressed, for instance, in economic choices and interests (Burchardt and Westendorp 2018: 166).

While I applaud this turn towards the consideration of ideational elements in how religious diversity in cities becomes visible and tangible, I am nevertheless concerned that the forms of social support that are offered by, in this case, Pentecostal churches, may also show how ideational elements translate into material representations that are highly relevant in urban contexts. Surely, there is validity in the argument that exclusively focussing on the investments made by religious communities in terms of buildings, icons, and other materialities in order to make an imprint on urban spaces

might be a too one-sided perspective, and that this must be conjoined with an understanding of how ideas, ambitions, and emotions also influence religion's imprint on urban life (see also James 2019). In addition, and building on Burchardt & Westendorp's views, I argue that a certain focus is also required on additional material aspects of this imprint. While material religious manifestations in urban domains in the form of buildings, architecture, and other tangible, iconic objects remain important to understanding how diverse religious communities and identities are represented in urban milieus, other forms of materiality (such as offering material support) are equally significant in understanding this imprint.

The point I aim to make is that such imprints also take place via simultaneously ideational and material investments that leave their traces in urban spaces. The urban religious groups that I study in Gaborone, Botswana, appear concerned with how they can invest in making their message relevant to the community. Indeed, much effort is devoted to demonstrating in material form and expression the investments they make in pursuing an agenda of 'relevance'. This is reflected, in part, by offering members material support that may improve their situation. This kind of relevance is as much ideational and ideological as it is material, as well as being part of the church's ambitions (see also James 2019) insofar as it may help to profile these religious groups. While in view of the competitive religious market in the city of Gaborone, many other manifestations of religion can be found (i.e. a plethora of larger or smaller church buildings, tents that are erected for evangelizing activities, posters and banners in public spaces announcing specific religious events, advertisements that offer the services of pastors, prophets, healers), it is also clear that this profiling is not only market-driven, but can relate to how Pentecostal churches and leaders perceive of salvation (Van Dijk 2012, see also Burchardt 2011, 2020), of becoming born again, and how an interest in relevance can be formulated in that regard.

In line with the first notion of what relevance may mean, investing time, energy, and resources in relevance is often seen as helping to build the (public) image of the church. It may support its public representation and cater to a growing critique that sees especially Pentecostal churches as attracting audiences due to 'money' (many authors point at this recurrent perception in African contexts, see e.g. Maxwell 1998; Lindhardt 2014; Benyah 2018, 2020; Lauterbach 2019). This critical imagery can be reinforced by journalistic reports that accuse pastors and other church leaders of self-enrichment (see for a telling example of such journalistic representation, see Van Wyk [2020] on the case of the Malawian prophet Bushiri in South Africa, whose followers are also active in Botswana). The quest for "relevance" in this sense also caters to this criticism by presenting an alternative image in which the offering of material support is seen as a useful investment in changing and countering such depictions (Okyerefo 2011).

In the Pentecostal domain, the pursuit of making the church relevant to ordinary people's lives can be related to the much-explored ideas of prosperity and how God's benevolence can become visible in success and status

(see Attanasi 2012; Gifford 2004; Heuser 2015; Ijaola 2018; Meyer 2007; on the significance of the so-called “prosperity-gospel” in Africa). Here, the idea, particularly strong in the context of the Pentecostal churches, is that if a church can accumulate and provide a lot of support, and thus can demonstrate its relevance to people in ever growing numbers, the church can demonstrate to be a selected and preferential recipient of God’s spiritual providence (Frahm-Arp 2018). It provides a clear sign of the benevolent spirituality of the church that radiates to all potential members (see also Benyah 2020; Burgess 2020). Pursuing relevance is therefore ideologically reframed as an inspirational evangelistic effort that reaches out to people, touches their heart and soul (the haptic dimensions of this kind of relevance should not be underestimated, see De Witte 2011b) and may draw people to a particular church. The Holy Spirit is seen as the entity that may place people on the road to success and a future destiny, as some churches may call it, and forms of charity, counselling, and capacity-building of members can thus be placed in the perspective of the spiritual dimensions of inspiration, which transforms, and result from investments in gifts, time, and advice; Haynes (2014) defines this as the affordances in Pentecostalism that are believed to produce greater outcomes in terms of success, benevolence, and a better future.

The pursuit of relevance also means emphasizing and sharing notions of the relevance of investments, i.e. implying (as Burgess [2020] also demonstrates for Pentecostalism in Nigeria), the development and presentation of clear ideas about how religion can help people understand how investments can directly influence one’s own success and prosperity. Based on my explorations in Gaborone, I have already pointed out (Van Dijk 2010a, 2012) how some Pentecostal churches excel in making their members ‘business-minded’. In such contexts, Pentecostal leaders equate Pentecostal inspiration with seeking business opportunities and emphasize engagement with entrepreneurial skills and opportunities also as a remedy to poverty (Burgess 2020; Ijaola 2018; Ojo 2015; Burgess 2020). Investing in relevance here means investing in time, energy, resources, and networks that create viable opportunities for establishing a business in which the church becomes an important driver. As I have shown (Van Dijk 2010a, 2012), this development should not be understood in economic terms exclusively; this is as much about *personal* growth as it is about *economic* growth, as a whole set of skills, capacities, and communications are involved in living up to this expectation.

Hence, there is a multi-layeredness in the notion of religious relevance from the perspective of the Pentecostal churches as they engage in various forms of social support. On the one hand, it creates a level of public attention and recognition, which may enhance church’s presence in a highly diverse religious urban domain, potentially attracting members. On the other hand, the ideational aspect of the church making its mark on the urban milieu by emphasizing God’s benevolence through its social support initiatives, aimed at the spiritual upliftment of individuals and communities, is equally important in understanding this form of urban religion.

Discussing the nature and significance of religious relevance through the wide variety of social support interests developed by Pentecostal churches may lead to an approach and interpretation that emphasizes the significance of the concept of social capital (for the African context, see e.g., Burchardt 2020; Swart 2006, 2011). This also applies to the notions of ‘religious capital’ that derive from exploring social capital and that continue to see religion as a resource and a way to better place individuals and organizations in socio-political and economic structures (see Schilderman (2011) for an elaborate discussion of religious capital). Yet, in view of the multi-dimensional religious relevance that Pentecostalism seeks through a variety of support activities it remains a question if this pursuit of relevance indeed leads to better placement in all cases. Firstly, it is simply not the case that creating relations with a faith community automatically translates into a religious provisioning of social support to individuals and communities, and thus to improving their situation. While in this context the concept of social capital has been critiqued (Thelen et al. 2009; Van Dijk 2010a; see also Fine 2002), the term may also obstruct our understanding of why and how this provisioning of highly diverse social support activities is purposefully embraced in view of specific relevance interests. This diversity is particularly significant in view of the question of what churches and their leadership perceive and select as social support activities in and through which their ideas of relevance are served also on an ideological and spiritual basis, even if these activities may have certain detrimental effects, e.g. jeopardizing a person’s relations with the wider family (see also Thelen et al. 2009: 6). Despite what notions of social or religious capital may suggest, there is no obvious answer here. This is the point that this chapter seeks to highlight, namely, in addition to noting how these churches and their leaders may strengthen their position in an urban, competitive religious market, it highlights the super-diverse notions of social support as a field of options through which churches and their leadership can demonstrate their specific perceptions of what the “content” of relevance to their people should be, especially so in a specific urban context. Hence, by acknowledging these diverse interests in relevance that a super-diversity of support activities can serve, aspects of both spirituality and materiality can be seen as belonging to how the churches present themselves to the public.

The following section highlights the diversity of the social support activities that foster relevance in Pentecostal ideology and practice with particular attention to the differences this reveals in the highly diverse religious landscape of the city.

Studying Urban Religious Forms of Social Support: The Case of Pentecostalism in Gaborone

As a first step in charting the wide-ranging forms of social support offered by the Pentecostal churches as a manifestation of their presence in urban

domains, we must acknowledge the perplexity that exists in recent scholarship on precisely this point. Scholars such as Miller and Yamamori (2007), Freeman (2012), Heslam (2015), Benyah (2018, 2020), and Kakwata (2017) describe the development of what some have called ‘progressive Pentecostalism’ (see especially Miller & Yamamori 2007: 39; Miller 2009), i.e. the rise of Pentecostal religious formations (churches, faith-based organizations, support groups) that engage with issues of development, investment, and capitalism in striking new ways. Many of these authors note a shift in much of the Pentecostal engagement with socio-economic matters in recent years, especially in Africa, where Pentecostal churches have become much more involved in these matters of support. While the critical debate, as highlighted by Burgess (2020: 3, 60), on whether or not Pentecostalism – especially in terms of its prosperity gospel – must be viewed as a response to particular economic developments (Gifford 2004), or whether it contributes to such development (Burgess 2020; Freeman 2012), some authors see an increase in economic modelling of Pentecostal religious practices that favour certain classes (Attanasi 2012; James 2019; Kalu 2010, see also Clarke 2015). Yet, as the above-mentioned authors indicate, contrary to the perception of Pentecostalism as being primarily engaged with an individual-centred ideology focussed on economic status, a broad range of innovative social outreach programmes is being recorded among Pentecostal churches worldwide (including Africa). This diversity is considered astonishing (Miller and Yamamori 2007) and Heslam writes:

Research into the social outreach of indigenous religious organizations in developing countries is still in its infancy and it struggles to keep up with the spawning initiatives in this field.

(Heslam 2015: 59)

Miller and Yamamori (2007) emphasize the array of programmes characterizing global Pentecostalism’s social engagement, pointing at the variety of what they call being social ministries in:

[...] feeding, clothing, and sheltering people; drug rehabilitation programs; HIV/AIDS prevention and medical care; microenterprise loans job training; visiting people in prison, as well as providing support systems for their families; family reunification, including divorce intervention and bridging programs between teenagers and their parents; pregnancy counseling; ministries to prostitutes; medical and dental services; services to the elderly, the handicapped, and single parents; educational programs for children; [...] residential programs for street children and orphans; and counteracting racial prejudice and other forms of discrimination. Some churches that we studied had only one or two of these social programs, while others had a nearly comprehensive menu of them.

(Miller and Yamamori 2007: 42)

Presenting a case study on the development in Ghana concerning the commodification of the gospel, Benyah aims to provide a balanced account of this debate, arguing that while there are “deleterious implications” in the rise of the prosperity gospel (Benyah 2018: 137), i.e. it may disenfranchise poorer classes there are countervailing processes that become clear in a range of social initiatives:

The Pentecostal churches, through their ingenuity and innovativeness, have provided social amenities such as schools (kindergarten up to University), hospitals or clinics, opened up businesses, dug water boreholes aimed at addressing societal challenges and also, complemented government effort in providing such services.

(Benyah 2018: 135)

The point of all of this, without being necessarily celebratory, is, if we are to provide an ethnography of religious diversity in African urban contexts by looking at this wide range of social support activities, we are forced to acknowledge that this ethnography will be justifiably partial and haphazard. While, on the one hand, Pentecostalism appears to manifest itself in highly uniform ways where this concerns notions of spirituality, uniformity is, at the same time, offset by great diversity in the way Pentecostalism intervenes in and addresses the daily affairs of people. Authors such as those mentioned above therefore often list the many initiatives that are taken but do not seem to consider the apparent super-diversity of all of this in their analysis. Hence the point of departure for this chapter is that while many Pentecostal interventions and outreach activities may be ideologically the same, they are diverse in their social practices, and this diversity can be seen to acquire special meaning. Providing for an ethnography of these social support initiatives necessarily requires an acknowledgement that while there is a religious-moral uniformity to this starting point it needs to engage with studying a super-diversity of these practices in diverse domains of social life at the same time.

The specific urban context of this is that the city offers the Pentecostal churches that I met in Gaborone many opportunities to develop a super-diversity, a tapestry of social support initiatives – some of which are rather city-specific – while they were also eager to emphasize their outreach to rural places. It is not that Pentecostal churches are not present outside the city; they are (see Faimau 2017), although they are usually smaller in number and their congregations smaller in size. The point, however, is that, in advertising their social support activities, the urban-based churches were often eager to demonstrate their capacity to reach out to deprived members and followers in the countryside by e.g. providing shelter and money for education. I have never come across the reverse (rural-based churches reaching out to urban situations).

Botswana’s capital, Gaborone, is a fast-growing, economically booming city and integral to the country’s success as “Africa’s miracle” (see on

Botswana's economic growth, Good 2008; Samatar 1999). As Ritsema (2008) has documented, "Gaborone is growing like a baby", transforming from a dusty village in pre-independence years into a well-developed, middle- and upper-middle class city of around 260,000 inhabitants in less than four decades (Statistics Botswana 2016). Sebege and Gwebu show that, already by 2001, 26 percent of Botswana's population was living in the greater-Gaborone area (Sebege and Gwebu 2013: 197). As the location of Botswana's first and largest university, as the seat of the country's Parliament and a range of government-related institutions, as well as home to an important business district, the city became one of the country's vital economic motors (Sebege and Gwebu 2013). Gaborone is marked by new, stylish shopping malls that serve the consumer appetites of a growing middle class (see also Durham 2019).

Despite this prosperity, the rapid growth of the city has also led to significant inequalities, with poverty and destitution becoming more pronounced, as Acquah et al. (2016) have demonstrated for certain parts of the city (see also Durham 2020; Livingston 2009 on the remarkable aspects of these inequalities in an otherwise affluent society). The middle classes mostly live in large and spread-out living areas of which many are known as "Extensions" and "Blocks", where churches can also easily establish themselves. In addition, Gaborone has an extensive industrial area where many of its businesses are located but where, interestingly, there are also a large number of Pentecostal churches (see Krause 2008) for an analysis of this preponderance of Pentecostal churches precisely in such industrial areas in other parts of the world).

While mainline, missionary-based churches, such as the Roman Catholic, the Anglican or the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) are often found in the somewhat older and pre-independence parts of the city, the introduction of Pentecostalism coincided to a large extent with the growth of Gaborone and its concomitant economic boom (see also Nkomazana 2014). Without going into depth about the precise historic developments of Pentecostalism as a whole in Botswana and the differences that exist between the Pentecostal, the mainline and the so-called African Independent Churches (which are all represented in various parts of Gaborone) it can be noted that the expansion of Gaborone in terms of its 'extensions' also provided the newer Pentecostal churches the space to settle. Indeed, they also followed the development of entrepreneurship in Gaborone, insofar church leaders combine leading a church with entrepreneurial activities, thereby tuning in to the rising levels of social mobility that the emerging and educated middle classes of the city began to demonstrate. As is the case elsewhere in Africa (see Burgess 2020), this new form of Pentecostalism associated itself strongly with these emergent urban middle classes to who, as adherents, it had much to offer in terms of success, status, and moral agenda's (Bochow 2020a: Van Dijk 2010a, 2010b, 2020b; Van Dijk and Molenaar 2019). This is the main reason why

many of the social support activities of the Pentecostal churches include an orientation towards inhabitants in these living areas and their issues.

As mentioned in the Introduction, we can cluster the Pentecostal support activities under the headings of charity, counselling, and capacity-building. For each of these categories, the ethnographic approach to activities and initiatives on the ground can capture the local understandings of how diversity marks such engagement.³

*Charity*⁴

The Pentecostal churches that I selected from those operating in Gaborone and some of its suburbs all engaged in a variety of charitable activities that were not only multivariate but were specifically geared towards a relational question of ‘upliftment’ of the individual.

Charitable activities may comprise larger bodies, such as certain NGOs or what the literature often terms FBOs (Faith-Based Organizations) (Bornstein 2005; Burchardt 2011, 2013; Freeman 2012).⁵ The churches that I worked with seemed to follow similar initiatives to those adopted by the larger and former mission-based churches, such as those initiatives that are particularly addressing the effects of the AIDS crisis that has affected Botswana (Bochow 2020b; Togarasei et al. 2011; see also Burchardt 2015 for a similar development in South Africa). Among these initiatives are those, e.g. relating to orphan care or the Botswana Christian Aids Intervention Programme (BOCAIP), also in relation to the Evangelical Fellowship of Botswana (EFB), in which many Pentecostal churches take part (Nkomazana 2014; Van Dijk and Molenaar 2019).

While, undoubtedly, this is an important element of demonstrating the super-diversity of charitable initiatives, what I would like to draw attention to here is an ongoing stream of initiatives (as distinct from FBO-type of development projects) aimed at meeting the immediate needs of members of their congregations or members of the community in which the church is established. Similar to what has been noted in the literature discussed above, this entire field of smaller or larger initiatives concerns support such as building a house for a destitute family, paying for a school fee, or assistance with job-seeking. In some instances, e.g. I noticed that food items were made available every Sunday after the church service and were handed out to those who had been identified as needy, whereas in other cases charitable activity was organized through the involvement of so-called ‘home-cells’ that function as satellite-fellowships of the churches in local townships of the city. On this basis, they bring members together and form an intricate network of people who are able to get to know each other on a more face-to-face level. These groups also generate support for individual members who might be in need of assistance. At other instances charitable activities by some of these churches related to very specific needs of targeted groups within their church or wider social community. These may include, for

instance, the distribution of sanitary pads to schools so that no girl has to miss school because they cannot afford to buy such products.

Regularly, specific committees have been appointed to deal with all such cases of material support and other needs. These committees are known under the name of “Welfare Committee” or the “Welfare Department”, and, as such, are fora through which ordinary members become drawn into the activities of such social engagement. These committees pro-actively identify cases of need among their circles, often organizing special collections of money to help individuals pay for school fees, medical bills, clothing and so on. Leaving aside the question of who exactly is included or excluded in these charitable activities (see Thelen et al. 2009: 7), the interesting point about these activities is that, at a neighbourhood level, the city experiences religious diversity, not just in terms of the presence of churches (congregations, church buildings and through church services) but especially through a plethora of social support initiatives.

Botswana has clearly developed an elaborate and intricate system of social work, including the training of social workers through a university-based Department of Social Work (Mupedziswa and Ntseane 2017 Ntseane and Solo 2007). I noticed that with the help of so-called ward-headmen, who represent a level of civic authority in neighbourhoods in the city, social work officers are responsible for identifying the needy and the destitute, and for providing these individuals with at least a minimum of social care. Yet, interestingly, there often seems very little direct, formal or intensive contact between social workers and these church-based circles of social support in the areas that I researched.⁶ The churches appear to operate often on their own basis, within their own profiling and exclusively in view of what their support initiatives would mean to them and their internal regimes of donation and charity. As Burchardt (2011) has also noted, there is a (discursive) divide between the missionary impetus of the more or less individualized and idiosyncratic charitable activities and the focus of social work activities and objectives in this domain. In other words, there was hardly any attempt on the part of these churches to structure their support beyond the level of the individual or community, and little interest in raising wider, socio-structural questions regarding the root causes of poverty and inequality, let alone drawing more structural and policy-oriented attention to the underlying causes of the cases these activities were aimed at (also see Van Dijk 2012).

The religious diversity that finds expression here in this plethora of seemingly ad hoc support activities is replicated in this highly individualized approach to each and every case that the churches and their committees deal with. Little is standardized in their approaches to cases, which are often handled on an “as-they-come” basis. Hence, even in the ultimate subtleties of how a case is brought forward and handled there is a constant confrontation with a diversity of cases which did not seem to lead to considerations of a more structural orientation. Even in cases such as distributing sanitary pads from church offices there is little discussion about whether it should

be structurally integrated, for instance into a policy that would focus on alleviating the difficulties teenage girls may face in completing secondary school education. While this reveals something of a “mismatch” between this kind of “atomistic” approach and established social work systems that feature more standardized and protocolized policies, the point rather is that at this level of offering social support the implied super-diversity is key.

This super-diversity is considered a crucial strength as churches and their welfare committees aim to signal a notion of relevance to each and every individual or community and that those in need are always in a position to appeal to the church, its leaders, and members to generate the resources through which help may be offered.

Counselling

Turning to the second category, counselling, we can see a similar pattern of a diversity of practices marred by a case-by-case approach.

In many countries in Africa, including Botswana (Moeti 2015; Van Dijk 2013, 2015, 2017, 2020a), Pentecostals are known for the counselling services they offer (see, among others, Burchardt 2009; Moyer et al. 2013; Nguyen 2009). The counselling offered by Pentecostal pastors and other prominent members of their churches often concentrates on marriage, family life, and domestic affairs (Bochow and Van Dijk 2012). More particularly, there is a strong focus on offering pre-marital counselling, which aims to prepare young couples for marriage, a ritual practice that, certainly in the Botswana context, is marked by – as I have shown in previous publications – many complexities arising from the need to serve and acknowledge different family relations and responsibilities, the observance of traditional marital arrangements, the high costs of weddings, and the peer pressure that exists in terms of the consumerist and competitive styling of the wedding (Van Dijk 2010b, 2013, 2017). In addition to this form of counselling, Pentecostal churches, their leaders, and prominent members also joined the provisioning of other forms of counselling, including e.g. AIDS-related pre- and post-testing and treatment counselling, marriage-enrichment counselling, and so forth (see also Togarasei et al. 2011 on comparing Pentecostal and other religious groups). In some cases, people prefer counselling provided by churches and their leaders instead of professional counselling, not least due to the costs that can be involved in professional counselling (church-based forms of counselling are usually free of charge).

The great diversity in forms of counselling is matched by a wide diversity in the range of topics being addressed. While not all churches attach equal importance to all forms of such counselling activities, some churches chose to appoint people as counsellors who also contribute to the wider societal relevance of counselling beyond the confines of the church. A recent development in Gaborone in this regard (launched in 2017) is the establishment of the Marriage Counsellors Association of Botswana⁷ (MCA)

in which Gaborone-based Pentecostal pastors participate of which some have taken a leading position in this organization. In fact, this association was established with the help and support of some of these Pentecostal circles interested in conveying their ideas concerning marriage, partner relations, sexuality, and domestic affairs to a wider audience. At the time of research, around 30 counsellors are offering their services to the public via this association. Members of the public, irrespective of their church affiliation (if any) are invited to present issues of their private lives to these counsellors and thus to seek advice on how to handle and/or solve them. To date, the association and the services offered seem predominantly focussed on the urban situation with little outreach to the areas outside Gaborone. While (pre-)marital arrangements constitute a large share of the issues dealt with by these counsellors, they can also deal with marital conflict, abuse, divorce, and destitution that requires the association's attention and for which counselling is seen as a panacea. Consequently, there has been interest in advising the Botswana government to implement a regulation that would make pre-marital counselling obligatory for any couple.

The association operates from the governmental offices of the Registrar of Marriages in Gaborone, demonstrating a new and close association with some particular Pentecostal interests with the formation of public policy. Generally, the Pentecostal churches' interest in making counselling central to their efforts to promote their views on personal and intimate relations particularly surfaced in the 1990s and 2000s, when the Botswana government called upon churches to support the fight against the spread of the HIV virus (Bochow 2020b; Togarasei et al. 2011; Van Dijk 2013; elsewhere see Burchardt 2009, 2011, 2013). While, in that sense, the range and diversity of Pentecostal practice expanded through the inclusion of such counselling services, it also broadened the scope of the topics and issues brought under Pentecostal purview.

We are witnessing here the same process of, on the one hand, an expanding diversity of practices, topics, and issues that the rubric of counselling seems to represent and address, and, on the other hand, the significance of the Pentecostal ideological interest and agenda. This is an interest for pursuing an agenda in which marriage and the nuclear family are seen as the model for intimate relationships in the country. This agenda is in opposition to a range of socio-cultural practices and forms of relationships in Botswana that include pre- and extra-marital relations, a strong influence of extended family and the power of elders in the family, and where wedding-arrangements have become very prolonged (Van Dijk 2010b, 2013, 2017). Hence the ideological agenda of protecting marriage from certain 'ills of society' can lead to a counselling practice incorporating many and diverse topics, policy interests, and health concerns.

The fact that counselling practice is, by definition, confidential contributes to the difficulty that organizations such as the M.C.A. are facing to develop the practice. This is because sharing (family-) issues and secrets

with an “outsider”, a counsellor, is at odds with widely shared notions of discretion and non-disclosure of intimate aspects of private lives (see Van Dijk 2013; Van Dijk and Setume 2022).

It can, therefore, be concluded that how urban religion situates itself in circumstances such as those in Gaborone, where also counselling in the area of marital relations is acquiring government support and a policy-driven status, is creating new ideas and domains of openness that are not available to this extent elsewhere in the country in more rural locations. While there is interest for a policy that would make such counselling available and perhaps even obligatory to anybody as a general policy, it is clear that this is above all an urban phenomenon and manifestation of this (religious) practice in the Botswana context. That is not to say that counselling does not exist beyond Gaborone; in the rural areas one may indeed be able to approach a church pastor for counselling on any private issue. Rather, I am indicating that religion in the urban situation of Gaborone is contributing to establish this form of counselling as a common public good – accessible to all who desire it – also by introducing a wider public to a notion of the general acceptability of the idea that one can share personal marital issues with a stranger (the appointed counsellor) irrespective of, and independent from, church affiliation. In other words, this is a development of diversity of trust that specifically belongs to an urban domain in which this has been rendered available.

Capacity Building

The third and last section, social support initiatives concerns the Pentecostal capacity-building activities, which again seem to demonstrate a particular urban dimension and quality.

As indicated earlier, Botswana’s economic success is legendary; its economic growth rates were among the highest in the world for many years (Livingston 2009: 653). As the economy and its success were largely driven by diamond mining and exploration there has been a need to diversify the economy and the labour market (Good 2008). Private enterprise became one of the avenues for Botswana’s growing middle class and, as has been recorded for Botswana and elsewhere, urban Pentecostalism appears to associate itself with these emerging entrepreneurial classes and interests (Burgess 2020: 56; Ojo 2015; Van Dijk 2010a, 2012). This is not least because many Pentecostal leaders themselves can be regarded as successful religious entrepreneurs,⁸ and the selling of religious products (blessed water, handkerchiefs, oil, and ointments) is part and parcel of this expanding religious market (see especially the work of Faimau (2017) on this aspect of Pentecostalism in Botswana).

Of interest therefore to the question of a super-diversity of social support in and through Pentecostal initiatives is the extent to which this entrepreneurial mode of existence is fostered, promoted, encouraged, and

supported as a form of capacity building for Pentecostal members through their churches and by their leadership. In an earlier article (Van Dijk 2010a) I have already pointed to what I call “religious catapulting”, namely, the ideological emphasis on the need for people to see taking risks in insecure African market investment as a way of engaging, testing, and rendering visible God’s providence. In addition to this ideological stance, it is important to point out that there is a range of specific activities and interests that signal this interest in practical terms. Again, some churches are more active in defining their interests in relevance in this corner of social support activities. To give an example: at one of the Pentecostal churches located in Gaborone’s industrial area, I found a calendar of activities all centred on promoting its members’ business skills and opportunities. They include church-orchestrated business trips to cities in China under the guidance of the church pastor, whereby members are encouraged to spend their savings on consumer items which they would then import to Botswana and trade on the local market (Van Dijk 2020b). Goods include items such as leather shoes for men and women, clothes, building materials, or furniture. Here, the notion is that God will replenish bountifully and that such Holy Spirit-inspired trade activities will definitely bring substantial profit to the person who is prepared to become involved in business.

Thus, such churches aim to inculcate “business-mindedness” into their members’ perspectives on faith. Prayer (business) meetings are held during which successful pastors, businessmen, and -women are invited to share their knowledge and experience with the membership (Burgess 2020; Van Dijk 2012, see for a similar example also v.d. Kamp 2016: 176). Of course, such business-oriented activities may take place in similar Pentecostal settings outside Gaborone, but as the capital is the centre of much of the country’s business activity there is a noticeable level of keen interest in participating in these rather specific activities. In addition to such ‘training sessions’ in churches like the one I studied in Gaborone, there can be an explicit emphasis and schooling in planning and budgeting of one’s personal affairs. This can mean that the church runs a savings club (*motselo* in local parlance, see also Bompani 2010) where members collectively chip in or where a collective money-lending system may be developed. Such savings and credit groups may facilitate members joining such expensive activities as the aforementioned trip to China to buy products to sell on the local market. Obviously, knowledge about the latest fashion and consumer appetites is a must in order to be able to know what to buy and what to sell.

Hence, in this regard, we must acknowledge the fact that in a situation of a rising urban middle class with their own appetites and entrepreneurial interests, the diversity of social support activities is not solely based on an idea of “helping the poor and the destitute”, as much of the above-mentioned civic-engagement literature on Pentecostalism seems to stress. The diversity of social support in view of capacity-building initiatives demonstrates the fact that this diversity also increases because of changing class interests.

While Pentecostals do indeed offer charity as a means of addressing the needs of the underprivileged, as discussed above, leaders can also choose to emphasize the gift of entrepreneurial skills and capacities as a way of developing the economic potential of oneself or one's family (Van Dijk 2012; see also Ojo 2015). The interest in creating this kind of relevance does not and cannot include everyone as it may presume resources that not everybody has. So, interestingly, while the same church can foster an interest in the relevance of business initiatives, it may simultaneously distribute food items to the needy as mentioned earlier, thereby demonstrating that the diversity in social support options allows for a rather specific selection of initiatives. One could argue that this represents the complete embrace of a neoliberal model of development, but at the same time one should not misunderstand the religious-ideological notions that drive this emphasis on capacity-building and entrepreneurial skills in view of a selection of relevant interests. The church that I encountered where relevance was located much more in business capacity-building seemed to devote less explicit attention to counselling as a way of positioning itself in the lives of people or in Gaborone at large.

Pentecostal leaders can therefore argue their relevance not just in terms of the neoliberal individual, but rather as providing a diverse range of interests that pave the way to receiving God's benevolence in one's daily affairs while providing adherents also with various ways to become well-respected members of their community.

Conclusion: The Urban Diversity of Religious Relevance Interests

This chapter argues that, in order to comprehend the importance of current urban religiosity in certain African settings, an analysis of the production of religious relevance interests is crucial. Urban religious diversity thrives and, importantly, is driven by the ways in which Pentecostal groupings excel, in particular, in offering a diversity of social support initiatives. Taking the case of Gaborone, the booming capital of Botswana, this chapter explored how urban religious diversity is becoming visible not solely as a result of a plenitude of urban Pentecostal groups (as is well-known from current literature) but also due to the highly diverse nature of how they aim to create 'relevance'. While it can be argued that other churches in Gaborone also offer elements of social support – especially in the area of charitable initiatives – the point is that the Pentecostal churches seem to enlist super-diversity both as an instrument and as a field of options for a wide variety of possible activities and initiatives, and thus aim to reach further in providing for this new kind of diversity in view of positioning themselves in the urban domain. This they do effectively, in some cases also by ensuring that the media pick up on their activities and initiatives, which, as I noticed, yet again may result in critique and misgivings by others about these forms of 'showcasing' their support.

While social support, therefore, is never without contestation, an important line of argumentation followed in this chapter is that there is something inherently contradictory about this plenitude of support activities that the literature on “progressive Pentecostalism” has also picked up on. While there is great diversity, much of the Pentecostal imperatives that guide such activities of charity, counselling, and capacity-building seem to draw on rather singular and uniform ideological convictions. For instance, whereas counselling seems to deal with a range of socio-cultural matters (of marital arrangements, ethnically informed ideas about marital, family, kinship relations, etc.), the underlying message of counselling seems rather singular in what it aims to achieve, namely, its social imagination of family and marital relations, and how, irrespective of cultural difference and diversity, the message applies to all.

It is therefore safe to conclude that, in the Pentecostal domain, the production of religious relevance maybe a platform of utter diversity in social support practices while it is of utter uniformity in view of the ideological messages that it harbours. The debate on urban religious diversity can be further developed by arguing that, beyond a dichotomy of positing diversity versus uniformity (which this chapter aspires to avoid), a third dimension is at play: in this case, the dimension of a range of religious relevance interests and how it is produced in diverse ways as a field of options in the churches’ social relations. Reasoned from the perspective of how religious relevance is produced by, in this case, Pentecostal groupings, informs us as to how diversity and uniformity are related in an urban environment in surprising ways.

Notes

- 1 A draft version of this chapter was presented in the Sociology Departmental Seminar Series, University of Botswana, Gaborone (February 2019). I am grateful to the convenors and participants of this panel as well as to the editors of this collection for their comments on earlier versions of this piece. A special word of gratitude also to Prof. Marian Burchardt for his invaluable comments to the draft, and to my research-assistant Mr. T. Shanduka for his contributions to the data-collection on which this piece is based.
- 2 I am not arguing that there is a direct and unilateral link between religion and social security, as has been debated in some literature already, see Thelen et al. (2009). The obvious point being that in many domains religion can easily and equally be a context of social insecurity, see De Bruijn and Van Dijk (2009).
- 3 The following is based on several stints of fieldwork that took place in 2018 and 2019, involving the interaction with a range of Pentecostal churches in Gaborone. Permission to carry out research was granted by the Botswana Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs.
- 4 I am aware of the debates concerning the conceptual and partly anthropological understanding of the terms charity, philanthropy, and humanitarian initiative, their analytical differences and confluences, and how these may work in practice (Benthall 2017; Bornstein 2009; Burchardt 2013b; Mati 2017). Within the scope of this chapter, however, I will maintain the term charity, also because of its often, but not exclusive Christian connotations.

- 5 Some authors have addressed the – at times complicated – question of what exactly an FBO is and how to define a religious agency in this manner (see Leurs 2012; Tomalin et al. 2019). This is beyond the scope of this chapter.
- 6 The relationship between social work with religion, religious identity, and practice has been noted to be difficult, if not impossible to bridge, also in contexts other than Botswana (see Knitter 2010; Mabvurira 2018).
- 7 I thank its leadership and the staff of the office of the Registrar of Marriages in Gaborone for introducing me to this counselling service.
- 8 See for an overview on notions of religious entrepreneurship elsewhere in Africa, Gomez-Perez and Jourde (2020).

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19 Property, Mobility, and Belonging in an African Metropolis

Matthew Nesvet

What can urban scholars learn from a country's borderlands about boundaries and belonging in the city? In the past decade, border studies has reassessed what a border is, where a border is, and how "border thinking" can illuminate human mobility. Meanwhile, cities themselves house large numbers of foreign-born residents who carry their journeys across national boundaries with them, "thinking with" these cross-border journeys about the boundaries they find once they arrive in their new urban homes. Particularly among informal workers in the neoliberal city, fenced property lines are often theorized to facilitate livelihoods, mobility, and survival. This chapter considers whether insights from both African urban migrants and the extant ethnographic literature on the experiences of people crossing national borders can help anthropologists understand movements into and within an African megalopolis. It aims to answer whether ideas about belonging, exclusion, and transgression in the nation-state and the practices that underlie these can inform understandings of property, belonging, and boundaries in the city.

The chapter takes up this question in and around Johannesburg, one of Africa's largest metropolis' and a major driver of both South Africa's and the continent's economy. Here, internal migrants, migrants from elsewhere in southern Africa, and those from as far afield as Somalia, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom come to join family and old neighbors and make a life and living in the economic center of South Africa, which was, until recently, Africa's largest national economy. As they settle in greater Johannesburg, immigrants, including those coming from other South African provinces, often contend with xenophobia, hostility, and both state- and extra-state violence. Many also travel back and forth between South Africa and their home countries, which attunes them to practices enabling safe passage and the border regimes that filter them and constrain their journeys. Once back in the city, the lessons learned on these journeys crossing through South Africa's borderlands are neither lost nor left at the border. Experiencing life as legally precarious urban residents whose immigration status and livelihoods place them at risk of detention and expulsion also informs urban migrants' understandings of how urban boundaries operate much more like

a nation-state's border than some might conceive, and how urban migrants' right to dwell in South Africa can only become a meaningful right in relation to urban property and mobility in the city.

Several key interlocuters I came to know while undertaking fieldwork among informal migrant gold miners in South Africa invited me to think with them about how immigrant rights and the "right to the city" are bound up with one another. A migrant informal gold miner from Zimbabwe whose life and labor in South Africa is shaped by his fleeting access to the privately owned site of an abandoned gold mine's surface tailings. Migrants and in one case a native-born South African whose livelihoods mining underground gold and ability to belong in urban South Africa are organized around their relations with urban property. And . . . hundreds of migrants I interviewed individually and in small groups over the course of fieldwork in the mid-2010s helped me—and can help readers of this chapter—learn about and from migrants in the post-apartheid South African city. Like anthropologists, those I worked with and among forged insider-outsider understandings of urban processes while bringing insights from the experience and study of cross-border migration to bear on urban land and private property boundaries in the city.

South Africa's Liminal Anthropologists

South Africa is the most unequal country in the world (World Bank Research Group 2020), partly stemming from mass land expropriations and limits on Black African mobility and property rights imposed in the colonial and apartheid eras. South African law gives property owners strong legal protections, locking in the white English- and Afrikaner-origin majority's land grabs from times past, as part of the constitutional compromise that allowed the Black African majority to claim political rights, ending apartheid, while leaving ill-gotten English- and Afrikaner-origin white wealth intact.

Land theft looms large in the South African popular imagination, and the post-apartheid city is a fruitful place to explore how the border-crossing experiences and imaginaries of urban migrants can inform knowledge of urban land use and occupancy in relation to different notions of belonging amidst precariousness and impermanence. For many urban migrants, securing access to urban and peri-urban land can, when successful, give meaning to their aspirations for their cross-border journeys. While at other times, failing to find a way to access land and property in the city can upend efforts to secure a meaningful right to belong in South Africa, though immigration rights discourses and the organizations in South Africa that focus on migrant rights rarely consider how rights to and in the city impact migrants' substantive rights to dwell in the country. The post-apartheid city is also a fruitful place to explore how migrants in the South African city draw rural cross-border villages into relation to Johannesburg and its

surrounding communities, laboring from below to transform certain rural areas in other countries into the post-apartheid city's rural hinterlands, making both Johannesburg and ostensibly distant villages—interior city and faraway towns—into a space best made visible using the concept of the borderland (Cronin 1992).

This chapter focuses on one group of urban and peri-urban migrants, artisanal (sometimes called “informal”) gold miners, who climb into old, often “abandoned and dilapidated,” as the government calls them, gold mines dug beneath urban ruins, construction sites, and industrial areas in and around greater Johannesburg. Searching for subterranean gold ore, the majority of urban diggers I spoke with were undocumented immigrants facing exploitation in the wage economy and threats of harassment and violence from police and their neighbors in informal (shack) settlements and crowded township homes, garages, and inner-city apartments where many live, driving them underground in search of less frustrating and precarious, although rarely safer, livelihoods (Nesvet 2020).

These urban migrants have particular insight into how, in the city, as discussed in the next section of this chapter, urban property boundaries are porous, and at times allow artisanal gold diggers and others to cross onto private lands and generate profit for the landowners while keeping the new occupants precarious and readily expellable. Like the nation-state that border studies scholars theorize and migrants cross back and forth between, where porous country borders filter migrants while allowing many to enter the country, rendering them both precarious and profitable, porous urban boundaries also filter marginalized land users, making them precarious, settling them into the city without allowing them to be settled, and all the while enriching urban landowners in the process.

The landless urban immigrants who I spoke to while carrying out ethnographic research in southern Africa also revealed that the discourse of immigrant rights present in both southern Africa and globally must include discussion of private land access in urban areas, not just the question of who can enter the country. As my interlocutors' stories of pursuing livelihoods in South Africa, which I discuss in the fourth section of this chapter, reveal, both private and public spaces in South Africa form parts of a continuous corridor to underground wealth that migrant miners follow from their home countries to greater Johannesburg. While immigrant rights advocates in South Africa and globally often focus on migrants' rights to enter the country and live free from the threat of state expulsion and the xenophobic violence that has been rife in the post-apartheid period, the right to dwell and make a living in South Africa can only be substantively realized if, like other public rights of way such as rivers or railroads, migrants can enter private land and move through privately controlled corridors to reach mines unimpeded.

Rather than privilege scenes of border-crossing as distinctive moments of freedom to enter and live in South Africa, my interlocutors insisted to

me that urban property boundaries, like the border fences they must make their way past, are parts of a continuous series of fences and nation state and private property boundaries they must pass through to enter the old mines and obtain the gold wealth they hope will secure their place in South Africa. Their vernacular understandings of urban mobility and land access led them to reject the liberal state's ideological division of private property from nation-state territory which has produced a mainstream immigrant rights discourse in South Africa and globally that separates the right to being inside a country from the right to enter and use private land once there. In doing so, they reveal that immigration politics in South Africa may have more to do with the "hijacked" (squatted) residential buildings, anti-gentrification movements, and calls for urban land reform than extant continent-wide discourses about migrant rights and immigration policy allow. Moreover, their understandings of how private property and state territory produce imbricated states of belonging and exclusion raise questions about organizations that advocate for immigrants without scrutinizing urban property, security practices, and anti-trespassing laws and the criminal codes that govern the taking of underground mineral wealth.

'Johannesburg is not my home, but I have no other [home]': Border Thinking about Urban Property

Gold was discovered in the Witwatersrand basin in the late 19th century, 20 years after diamonds made South Africa the British Empire's most famous extractive territory. Before rich seams of gold were discovered in South Africa, gold prospecting largely involved individual miners panning for gold flakes along riverbanks and streams, as occurred in the California and Klondike gold rushes. In South Africa, by contrast, much of the country's gold ore is buried deep underground. To access the rich deposits, South African mining companies sank subterranean shafts several kilometers down into the hard rock beneath today's Gauteng and Free State provinces.

Immense amounts of labor, equipment, and capital were brought to the Witwatersrand Basin to build these mines, the world's first large-scale underground mining operations. The labor force extracting gold and diamonds was organized along racial lines that the mining industry worked to systematize, classifying and assigning work to miners based on racial imagination and ethnic origin while monitoring workers' access to the mines also through intensive surveillance and classification of their bodies. South African mining houses thereby made racial classification and biometric access monitoring more efficient and totalizing, practices that they later transferred to apartheid governance writ large (Breckenridge 2016).

Within this extractive racial formation, or racial capitalism, the gold industry built, Black Africans, immigrants from Lesotho especially prominent among them, developed artisanal industries in townships and mineworker

hostels where migrant workers toiling at the mines lived. Beer brewing, gambling (the ‘numbers game’), and sex work were among the illicit industries that The Russians and other Basotho gangs operated; apartheid authorities tolerated these illegal industries so long as the violence that the gangs used to control their spheres of influence and enforce black market contracts remained within the sprawling Black townships such as Soweto that ringed Johannesburg and other apartheid cities; non-interference with white communities and industries adjacent to the townships and hostels was a condition of apartheid police not cracking down, one reason why township violence was tolerated during apartheid (until it turned political), leaving a difficult legacy that ‘born frees’—those born after 1994—inherited and that township and informal settlement residents continue to bear.

Meanwhile, more and more African land was seized to farm and mine, relegating Black Africans living within South Africa’s borders to precarious lives on the outskirts of cities and in temporary worker camps and rural Bantustans (apartheid “ethnic homelands”). Between land grabs by Voortrekkers escaping British Empire limits on expansion in the Cape Colony starting in 1836 and later land expropriations under apartheid, Black Africans in South Africa were dispossessed of an estimated 87% of the country’s arable land. Counting ethnic groups cut off from their lands when South Africa’s national borders were drawn, for example, the Basotho people who found themselves in Lesotho while large swaths of traditional Basotho land became South Africa’s (then- “Orange”) Free State province, even more Africans were deprived of land access than those who are reflected in the official numbers.

This legacy of Black land loss in southern Africa, coupled with precarious Black land use, persists in the post-apartheid period, where vast tracts of land remain in private hands, inaccessible to the Black African majority or requiring them to trespass onto private property or find other ways to redistribute private land and white wealth (both illegally and by seeking judicial relief and constitutional change).

Black land loss and precarious occupancy and land use also frame my interlocuters’ experiences seeking to belong in a state where private wealth—which they seek underground in the ruins of South Africa’s gold mining industry—is seen as key to some securing a place in society. In the stories of miners who traverse between surface and underground mine, their worlds—conceived in three dimensions as journeys both across a horizontal surface and back and forth in a world arranged vertically—reveal how state and landowners’ two-dimensional imaginaries of mobility and security are undone when movement is instead mapped in three dimensions and dwelling means not just being able to travel across public space on the broken up surface of the South African state, but having the capacity to travel up and down from surface to the rockface where veins of gold can be dug and back again.

At the end of apartheid, the racial wealth that South Africa's mining houses accumulated before and during apartheid became more "liquid"—the new constitutional enfranchisement of the country's Black majority allowed white wealth to flow through global financial circuits that had previously stymied apartheid companies' efforts to invest in projects abroad in response to anti-apartheid sanctions regimes and boycott movements. Mining firms' wealth, which combined Black mining labor (native-born South Africans and migrants from neighboring countries) and substrate mineral wealth from pilfered lands, began to shift to extractive projects in countries like Australia and China, where gold deposits were easier to reach and labor more pliant.

The massive outpouring of mining capital left thousands of mineworkers unemployed. Many continued to find their way to the old mines in search of gold. These include South Africans; migrants journeying to Free State and Gauteng aiming to dig gold; and migrants coming to South Africa to work as construction workers or day laborers, the latter, encountering exploitation in the legal labor market, turning to artisanal mining where many told me they believed there is less wage theft and abuse (in contrast to what experts commonly report about the ubiquity of trafficking and exploitation in South Africa's illegal gold mining industry).

The decline of industrial gold mining in South Africa and job losses in the thousands also left many mineshafts unused, from shafts in mines that remained partly active to those that formed underground mines that companies abandoned wholesale. By 2017, approximately 6,000 "derelict and abandoned" mines dotted South Africa, as the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) reported to a parliamentary committee that year (PMG 2017). These mines are dispersed around South Africa and include numerous gold mines in Gauteng Province, the country's industrial heartland, where the Johannesburg-Soweto-Pretoria metropolis sits, and the adjacent Free State Province.

Many of these mines form interconnected shaft systems; according to two persons I spoke to at the DMR, the government figure of 6,000 closed mines the department reported to the South African parliament demarcated each mine based on the historical partition of the country's substrate into zones of mineral rights; belowground, there are often no clear lines separating one mine from another, and sometimes different shafts that once formed part of a single named mine are not—and perhaps never were—connected. Using hand picks and small explosive charges, artisanal miners have also expanded shaft systems, and at one old mine I visited, even dug a new shaft from the surface downward.

In metropolitan Johannesburg, these mineshafts are simultaneously ruins of the industrial mining economy and active shafts where the artisanal miners who enter them often spend weeks or even months at a time underground extracting gold. The old mines I visited are heterogenous in

character, and their entrances are dispersed throughout urban and peri-urban Johannesburg. Some appear as simple holes in the ground, leading to vast networks of interconnected tunnels below. Many sit in the brush, behind warehouses and other industrial sites, or on fenced off parcels of land surrounded by mine dumps that are too toxic to build anything on and too expensive to be cleaned (though mining companies are obligated to do just that when closing a mine—elucidating which entity polluted a former mining area gives a different understanding of who are best named “illegal miners”). Several holes I visited in a peri-urban part of the city lay beside roads and rail tracks, and diggers would wait until cars or trains had passed to rope down into them. Others had been sealed with concrete or surrounded by rockfill to prevent diggers and others from entering; artisanal miners use small explosive charges that they purchase from industrial miners and workers involved in the supply chain that supplies explosives to the mining industry to break these seals.

Many of the mine entrances I observed diggers entering once served as airshafts to ventilate the mines below. Other entrances formed other parts of the mine. For example, one concrete mine entrance through which I descended into the mine below (alongside a group of diggers) appeared to be the abandoned housing of a vertical mine elevator from a time when the mine was still active as an industrial operation. The elevator car was no longer visible—likely removed when the shaft or perhaps the entire mine was decommissioned. But a large circular concrete building framed the hole, where rusting metal guide tracks followed the concrete shaft straight down to the ground. Atop the entrance, the diggers I were with had fixed a coil of rope and electric wire that we gripped onto as we repelled down the shaft. Every so often, a metal ledge would appear; to each of these ledges, further tangles of rope and cord had been affixed by diggers who came before. Hours later, we reached the bottom of the shaft, then made our way through a second long, horizontal shaft toward the rockface.

Though subterranean mineshafts are invisible from the surface, the entrances have several telltale signs. For one, there are often artisanal miners waiting to enter, or resting after returning to the surface. Around some mine entrances, diggers crush and refine the ore they have brought to the surface before taking it to nearby houses in neighborhoods, townships, and informal settlements where they further refine it. On roads leading to entrances, artisanal gold miners wearing muddy work clothes and gum boots and carrying picks, buckets, and other equipment make their way to the mine. Walking in the other direction, diggers can be seen carrying sacks of gold ore on their backs. Greater Johannesburg’s landscape is visually inflected with the signs of the city’s mining economy, in particular large mountains of tailings from old gold operations. Around these in particular, artisanal miners can be seen at work.

Once aboveground, artisanal gold miners work hard to disperse and disappear into the city; when they are near entrances, they are vulnerable to

police seeking bribes (occasionally arresting them for carrying gold and immigration violations) and gangs out to rob them of their ore. Though industrial mines often carry out the initial stages of refining atop the mine, artisanal diggers usually only crush ore with hammers or sometimes, if water sources are available, divert them down a hillside to sleuth the ore they bring to the surface. In certain mining areas that are more hidden from the road, some protected by scrubland, others tuck in between large mine dumps since these are closed to developers and avoided by nearby residents (often due to ground toxins related to the old gold mining operations). Here, artisanal diggers extract and crush gold ore from the ground, an activity that is far less risky than venturing into the mines.

This work requires the use of large metal canisters that once contained gas, which welders punch holes in and affix handles to so they can be used to refine ore. No matter how they extract the ore, mobility is key not just to moving it to market, but also to preventing the gold from getting taken by police, private security guards, or armed gold mining gangs. This often entails diggers walking long distances to the fenced off backyards of houses and shack dwellings where they—or the traders they sell to—machine refine the gold, placing rocks and mercury into the old canisters and churning them until the gold and mercury can be balled up, the mercury burned off, and the gold sold on. At two informal settlements I visited in peri-urban Johannesburg, numerous machines were placed in a line, each with several refiners working them. This factory-like scene could not be emplaced above an old mine, where the need to run away from the many armed state and non-state figures patrolling the entrances would make it impossible to get away without losing possession of the expensive and heavy refining machines.

In pursuit of gold, South Africa's artisanal gold miners, called Zama Zama's—"try, try" in Zulu, the name of an old lottery game where players, like miners, try their luck at striking it rich against difficult odds—are triple-criminalized. They are policed and prosecuted as: undocumented migrants; urban trespassers on private land where many of the mine entrances are found; and criminals unearthing gold ore that does not belong to them. Yet moving from surface to mine and back, having to pay close attention to police officers, private security guards, and the social and physical boundaries they patrol, Zama Zama's lives are imbricated with the terrain they operate on and the forms of belonging and non-belonging and mine and land entry and exclusion practices they must continuously navigate.

Belowground, Zama Zama's often encounter a very different world. In mineshafts several kilometers beneath the earth, amidst intense heat, humidity, and darkness, the political topographies that demarcate the national boundaries, private property lines, and forms of authority and belonging they must study at the South African surface lose power. Diggers, as I observed when accompanying them underground, often elect temporary leaders to manage subterranean life; cooperative labor replaces exclusive

territorial claims; and luck, fate, and spirits replace bosses as the determinants of life and wealth.

To be sure, life belowground is perilous. Those who brave the deeps enter terrifying spaces where untold dangers lurk. Flash floods; accidental falls down steep shafts; falling boulders; toxic gases and fires; and dust and the toxins it carries which take longer to reveal their effects claim many lives every year, as I witnessed over several years of fieldwork beginning in 2014. And the intense heat and humidity coupled with the unknown make underground work especially difficult. Still, subterranean life offers an escape from the divisions and violence that animate surface life, replacing the bribes and risk of detention and incarceration diggers face as they move through two dimensional South African territory with the challenges of moving through abandoned mineshafts. Subterranean life also gives diggers a way to put pieces of the hard rock they inhabit in their sacks and pockets and spirit it up and away. Surface wealth in the form of the companies migrants sell their labor time to and the real estate that many of South Africa's wealthy and middle-class residents accumulate are far more difficult for migrants to capture and carry away than gold ore.

As they descend into mines and then resurface, artisanal diggers encounter these two worlds and the liminal tunnels connecting them as both insiders and outsiders. In this way, Zama Zama's engage two worlds—mine and surface—simultaneously while they transit between them. They do the same as they move back and forth across the South African border, some walking days through snake-infested parkland to reach the South African side from Mozambique, others evading South African border guards and bandits along the Zimbabwean border, and still others sneaking across South Africa's border with Lesotho in the backs of lorries or bribing their way through.

Whether moving into South Africa or through it, migrants encounter fences and walls from the moment they walk, ride, or climb and crawl through fence openings into the country, to when they descend into the mines, whose networked shafts provide security from police and guards even as floods and fallen rock endanger miners and hinder movement. Many of these fences and walls, like the old mines whose ruins illustrate the movement of capital out of South Africa after many countries lifted apartheid-era restrictions on South African companies, coincided with the end of apartheid, in some cases replacing the restrictions on Black African mobility that apartheid laws mandated.

At times, artisanal gold producers enter and exit the mines and refine the gold they carry up in the same place. This is particularly true when landowners rent urban miners access to plots of land, or guards and sometimes police elicited bribes in exchange for access. In one swampy mining site I visited, where tailings from an abandoned industrial mining operation deposited large amounts of gold ore in the ground, a landholder went so far as to invest in a pumping scheme the artisanal miners built to remove water

from the site, enabling them to sift gold from mud beneath the flooded surface. Neither landowner nor miner knew one another when the miners first accessed the site through holes they cut in the fencing that surrounds it, and for a long while they did not meet, each fearing the others' capacity for violence. When they did meet, they learned that they could collaborate to make the unused land more profitable for both.

When speaking to both the miners at this site, which lay just beyond the formal boundaries of the city of Johannesburg, and the landowner themselves, I learned that both expected the dredging work to enable the landowner to eventually build an equipment lot on the site (they operated a business renting construction equipment adjacent to the flooded mining site). In the meantime, the landowner extracted rent from the gold miners and the diggers dredged the site with the landowners' help, increasing its profitability.

The exchange of land access for property improvement is not a widespread model of land occupancy in urban South Africa, where much city space is fenced off and unused. In fact, in a survey I carried out of new fence construction in a peri-urban area of the city where many gold miners were being displaced by industrial development, more than 90% of new fencing being installed surrounded unused land rather than occupied properties. This may be attributable to South Africa's post-apartheid courts protecting squatters from extrajudicial removal and the perceived difficulty of removing South African citizens from shack settlements they build without having formal title to the land they build them on. White urban property owners who I interviewed in particular pointed out to me the difficulty of removing squatters and the importance of guards and fences keeping them out.

But at several sites I visited, including the once-flooded mine tailings where the owner rented their land to artisanal gold diggers, their perceived double-criminality as undocumented migrants who entered the country illegally or overstayed their visas, and illegal gold miners (all three of these practices are enshrined in South African law and policed and prosecuted as criminal offenses) made them much more easily removable than citizens. So, too did the fact that they were building mining works on the land, not residing on it, as the courts seemed to take special interest in squatters who reside on land rather than work it for profit. And in places where landowners did not directly lease land access to gold miners, but turned a blind eye to their activities while allowing them to pay for land upkeep such as mending fences and guards' salaries while avoiding paying the costs of removing gold miners, their illegality meant that they could cross urban property boundaries without threatening land owners with the possibility of courts stopping them from removing miners when the time came to sell or develop a plot.

The experience of fleeting land occupancy, where miners could be removed at any moment and the bulk of their work and earnings went to

build an urban economy around rent, food, alcohol, loans and cash remittance services, sex and intimate relationships of many kinds, gaming, clothing, and telecommunications, structured miners' lives and sense of being both home and not home all at once. "Johannesburg is not my home, but I have no other home," one migrant digger working to remove water from the tailings site described above told me while we socialized at a nearby pool hall he and others working in the mud liked to frequent.

My interlocuters' sense of not being home in Johannesburg may have begun well before he reached urban South Africa. Coming from Zimbabwe, Patrick, as I will call him in this chapter, walked, rode, and bribed his way across the South African border all the way to Johannesburg's eastern suburbs. As border studies scholars have observed, nation-state borders are typically zones of state filtration and migrant infiltration, not hardened boundaries that keep migrants out en masse (Neilson and Mezzadra 2013).

As Patrick crossed into South Africa, he was neither allowed to take possession of the visa documents and legal status that might make his residence in the country secure nor stopped, confined, or expelled. He was, in short, allowed to make South Africa home while remaining precarious. "I don't miss my village," Patrick told me. But neither did he aspire to remain in South Africa forever. One day, authorities would catch him carrying illegally produced gold or his neighbors would turn on him, he told me. Then, he'll return "home" and, laughing, maybe even find it as exciting now as he finds the city he left it for many years ago.

Patrick's fleeting sense of belonging can be read in his experience of land occupancy and the landowners' similar sense that Patrick and those he worked with were the perfect tenants, who both generated profit from the land they rented and could be removed with few of the legal difficulties that white landowners encounter in post-apartheid courts and from politicians seeking to protect squatters' rights to remain in informal settlements that in many cases have existed for years and sometimes decades.

Like the South African border that Patrick once crossed to reach Johannesburg, landowners and municipal police both looked the other way and actively facilitated his entry to the closed surface of the old mine and, eventually, the dredging work he and the others carried out. At the same time, the landowners' title to the property and the fence that protected the landowners' claim to its occupancy allowed them the flexibility to profit from Patrick and his fellow gold miners' labor while preventing him from claiming the improved lot as his own.

This may be a helpful lesson for scholars and publics seeking to understand urban property and land pressure. While many urban activists and scholars focus on removal, a great deal of urban property boundaries are porous, filtering, and profiting from precarious urban land users rather than outright excluding them. Seeing Patrick and other legally precarious occupants of urban land as part of the urban economy, underwriting land ownership with their labor, may reveal a degree of agency and influence

that squatters can exert when property owners turn to them to subsidize land ownership. Patrick's story, and others' stories like his, also reveal that seeing urban boundaries as porous borders, much like Patrick and other migrants and border scholars understand South Africa's national border, rather than hardened spaces of private occupancy and exclusion, demonstrates the productivity of migrants' understandings and experiences of national boundaries in also conceiving urban property.

'What good is it to be in South Africa if you don't have any land?'

When reflecting on the 1960 Greensboro, North Carolina lunch counter sit-ins against American apartheid, Martin Luther King, Jr. asked, "what does it profit a man to be able to eat at an integrated lunch counter if he doesn't have enough money to buy a hamburger?" For Dr. King, the right to sit at a lunch counter—a "public accommodation" in the United States' legal language—is only meaningful if whoever sits can also eat. Giving people the *right* to participate in public life, to eat in public, or to vote, without the means to do so, meaning lunch money, or transport to the polls, threatens to undermine the separation of public and private, and politics and economy, that is central to the doxa and dogma of liberal states' rights discourses and equally central to how liberal states organize urban space into private and public land.

Recent scholars (e.g. Bowersox 2017; Foweraker and Landman 1997; Smith-Cannoy 2012; Simmons 2009) have built on the same tensions that Dr. King's comment about the lunch counter foreground to investigate how the "formal" and "substantive" aspects of liberal states' efforts to guarantee rights are related. When rights depend on—and can be limited by—events external to the laws that provide that right, a gap can arise between the formal promise of a right and the rights-bearer's ability to realize the promise. How far a state must go in closing that gap—that is, what "positive rights," in the language of South African constitutionalism, the state must supply—is a contested question in liberal politics the world over. Must governments simply assure that people are not stopped from voting, having lunch, owning land, or pursuing other opportunities for public participation and private flourishing? Or should governments drive carless people to the polls, buy food for those who lack lunch money, and give the urban landless access to land?

The more unequal a country is, and the more distance there is between groups with greater and lesser means to take advantage of their formal rights, the more pressing—and political—this question becomes. This is especially true for land rights where colonial rule and racial capitalism limited people's abilities to use land for residence and production. Indeed, liberalism's demarcation of rights and the means to realize them—opportunity and outcome, differently articulated—came under intense criticism when

European states that legislated or were otherwise complicit in land theft espoused rights discourses without seeming to meaningfully act on them. Muhammad Abduh, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, pointing out that grand statements on rights that many states at the time were expressing conflicted with the material realities they were imposing in Africa and Asia. “Egyptians... believed once in English liberalism and English sympathy,” Muhammad Abduh wrote. “[B]ut we believe no longer, for facts are stronger than words. Your liberalism we see plainly is only for yourselves, and your sympathy with us is that of the wolf for the lamb which he designs to eat” (quoted in Mishra 2008).

As Abduh expressed, liberalism’s contradictions went beyond the seeming hypocrisy of thinkers like John Stuart Mill, who justified European colonialism by citing its supposed advantages to barbaric people while simultaneously envisioning a world where the “raw material of the globe” could be owned in common (Mill 1873, part VII). For Abduh, as well as for Sun Yat-sen in China, liberalism’s “words”—the invitation to eat at a lunch counter, dwell freely in the state, or claim sovereignty over territory—were no match for its “actions,” which were designed to “eat” land and labor and deprive people of the ability to substantively enjoy the rights which liberals living in the European imperial metropolises between the two world wars promised colonial subjects.

For urban immigrants in South Africa, legal and political efforts to advocate on their behalf typically focus on the right to be free from the twin scourges of xenophobic violence and police arrest, confinement, and removal for immigration violations. From an Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) protest against xenophobic violence, to when a Nigerian diplomat speech to an academic audience in Johannesburg demanding that African National Congress (ANC) politicians condemn the anti-immigrant violence, to legal advocates and human rights researchers seeking to end mass arrests and investigate conditions at the country’s largest detention site for unauthorized immigrants, immigrant rights discourses in South Africa focus on the important work of freeing migrants from state incarceration and forced removal as well as ending anti-immigrant violence.

At the same time, immigration rights focusing on freeing migrants *from* the threat of state and extra-state violence do not foreground the rights that the migrant gold miners I spoke to sought in Johannesburg seek. For my interlocuters, the right to dwell in Johannesburg is imbricated with the right to access private property in the city, even as liberal understandings of rights figure urban property boundaries and territorial borders as distinct objects of law, governance, advocacy, and activism. Dwelling in a city where land, property, and livelihoods are entwined depends on the positive right to access privately owned land and, in the case of South Africa’s undocumented gold miners, the mines beneath.

For citizens, South Africa’s government and courts have created a framework of “positive rights” that include land reapportionment, with

government paying market rate prices to owners for any land taken (e.g. Grootboom 2000). And political groups and movements such as Black Land First (BLF) and the EFF, once the ANC Youth League, have challenged the ANC's use of the word 'freedom' and celebrations of the political rights the party mobilizes to describe the post-apartheid liberation it took a lead role in negotiating in the 1990s, insisting that the party's refusal to reapportion land whose colonial and apartheid-era expropriations left the country's territory and wealth in the hands of the descendants of white settlers condemns the Black majority to poverty. This is especially true in Johannesburg, where young urban South Africans comprise a strong block of support for the BLF and EFF and smaller movements that have emerged in urban South Africa.

But the pursuit of land access has largely left out immigrant rights advocates, who typically draw on international law rather than urban land movements to seek security for undocumented migrants (cf. Koopmans and Michalawski 2017). Meanwhile, as my interlocutors told me, access to private land in the city is as important as their ability to cross into South Africa from their home countries. For the undocumented immigrants I came to know, the right to dwell in South Africa was conditioned on their ability to cross into or through privately held urban land, not just on crossing the national border. For this reason, they conceptualized national borders and urban private land boundaries as parts of a continuous series of walls and fences that migrant gold miners must cross through to pursue livelihoods in South Africa, Dr. King calling out liberal democracies for their failures to bridge the gap between civil rights and the economic means to substantively take advantage of them helps frame migrant gold miners' understandings of the relationship between property and territory for readers familiar with the unfinished business of Dr. King's struggle, just as Dr. King's political theology framed the anti-apartheid struggle for both South Africans and United States publics (cf. Vinson 2018). His answer to my interlocutors' struggle to belong amidst the heavily fenced off environs of post-apartheid Johannesburg, if phrased as a rhetorical question, might have been: *What good is it to give an immigrant searching for work the right to cross a border and enter a country if they are not allowed to make a living once there?*

Following Dr. King and South Africa's migrant gold miners' analyses, the rights that South Africa's human rights and immigration rights activists seek to advance to help undocumented migrants cross the border and dwell in South African territory only becomes meaningful when migrants can also cross into and through private property once in the city. Consequently, though migration studies scholars and immigration activists and scholars studying carceral states often treat property crimes and unauthorized border crossing differently, sometimes making the point that immigration violations are not always criminal, in South Africa, trespassing on private property and crossing borders without authorization are treated as

continuous parts of a securitized landscape extending all the way from the national border to the mine. Moreover, the historical South African state, extending back to the apartheid period, long placed Black African mobility under the sign of criminality and under the control of security services. As such, artisanal gold miners who are subjected to movement controls as a result of both immigration and private property legal regimes are in a unique position to theorize their journey across border and private property boundary as a coherent path to livelihoods, showing that transgressing borders and private property boundaries are particular—often blurred—moments within migrant journeys from typically rural parts of southern Africa to urban South Africa. Their challenges along the way, particularly those related to their status as both unauthorized immigrants and criminal trespassers, demonstrates that having a meaningful right to be in a country's sovereign territory is caught up with the right to access and use land—in the case this chapter describes, closed mining areas—once there.

The rest of this section describes how, in a city where large groups of both migrants and the native-born urban poor cannot access private property—King's "hamburger"—the architecture of the liberal state and the seat it offers anyone who finds themselves at its table appears to many as a mirage. The liberal state does a poor job of policing conceptual boundaries between public life and space and private property, and gold miners easily unravel this; the mutual co-constitution of these two domains means that property boundaries and national borders are linked corridors that urban migrants must travel along to achieve the substantive right to dwell and remain in the African city. Without land access, the migrant gold miners whose lives and thinking inform this chapter would have little ability to remain in either Johannesburg or South Africa writ large. For many I spoke to, land access figured as large or larger than state or extra-state violence in their understandings of what might drive them to leave Johannesburg.

The end of apartheid coincided with what some anthropologists and political scientists describe as a global increase in walls and fences, a worldwide trend they say began in the 1970's (Brown 2010; Caldeira 1992). Scholars and journalists have documented how homes, offices, and even whole neighborhoods were walled off in the latter half of the 20th century and even more so continuing into the new millennium (Piven 2015). Fences also surround privately owned 'wastelands' that are zones of real estate speculation, like some of the mining areas I spent time in (Voyles 2015; Yeh 2013).

In South Africa, fencing residential areas, urban development districts, and industrial zones also helped divide post-apartheid society into insiders and criminalized outsiders. Such infrastructure enables private property parcels in the post-apartheid city to continue to restrict Black mobility, as apartheid pass laws had, without explicitly invoking race.

Passbook offenses were the most frequent reason for police arrests during apartheid (Legassick 1974). Fences and walls also inscribed post-apartheid

obsession with immigrant Africans, or “aliens, whose bodies become a means of distinguishing inside from outside” onto the post-apartheid urban surface, as the ANC state failed to fulfill the “promises of [post-apartheid] citizenship” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012).

In this landscape of boundaries fencing off both public territory and private property, the artisanal diggers moving from their homes in and, usually, outside the country to the old mines become ethnographers of the passages “in-between” (cf. Buzard 2005) surface and substrate shafts, observing their journeys as they take themselves and the gold ore they ferry through these liminal spaces. Moving up and down, diggers traverse a three-dimensional world where wealth and belonging are less a matter of where they find themselves than on where they are going. In this way, diggers’ ideas of wealth, space, and belonging differ from classic understandings of economic and political migration, which frame migrants’ movements from one country to another as a pursuit of livelihoods and rights that are more widely available in the receiving country than the sending country from where they came. For many of the artisanal gold miners I spoke to, as I document in the two stories below, migrant diggers understand South Africa’s urban surface to be a corridor to underground wealth, not a space where mere dwelling offers value. Like much of the current scholarship on “vertical geopolitics,” diggers, like the state and non-state authorities this literature describes, become powerful by gaining access to spaces above and below the surface, for example from the air and hilltops as some scholars have documented to tunnels and underground bunkers, as others describe (Elden 2013; Garrett and Klinke 2019). In this way, access to urban property where entrances to underground mines provide a way down are as important to migrant gold miners for the movements they allow as the right to dwell inside South African territory.

This view of the city as a corridor to underground mineral wealth and a place whose surface is divided by barriers that aim to inhibit movement and the wealth that accompanies urban mobility contrasts with popular understandings of immigrant rights, which see migrant activists and advocates focusing on civil rights and primarily contesting territorial and not also private property exclusion. The South Africa city is constitutionally woven as a public legal entity that fits around and in between private plots of urban land. Though Johannesburg and other mining cities and towns were founded in vertical relation to underground mineral deposits that were in many cases public diggings and often remain public property, post-apartheid governance focuses on governing the two dimensional surface. The right to urban mobility and immigrants’ right to be in South Africa seldom extends to either the right to access underground wealth or the right to pass through or use privately held urban land to make a living in an intensively walled off and privately held city.

Police and regulatory practices further enumerate the two-dimensional city. They limit its depth, for example, when police refuse to go into

subterranean mines, prevented from exercising authority underground by employment contracts and insurance rules. And they restrict the democratic possibilities for reordering urban space. Although courts have in some cases limited private landholders' abilities to remove urban squatters, and political parties and movements like the EFF and BLF movement have made the redistribution of land a democratic question in and beyond the city, post-apartheid constitutionalism has to date made redistributing urban land off limits to political processes, one reason why organizations and political leaders may think the right to the city and right to be in South Africa as separate questions.¹

Yet for undocumented migrants in South Africa, particularly the migrant gold diggers this section theorizes urban land with, the right to cross into South African territory is only meaningful if they can pursue livelihoods—which, for gold diggers, are conditioned on their accessing plots of land atop derelict and abandoned gold mines. On the mostly private parcels that contain South Africa's estimated 6,000 closed mines, diggers enter subterranean gold mineshafts through concrete and rock holes leading underground. At the surface, diggers sometimes also sift through tailings and process the gold ore they bring out of the mines. If migrant diggers could not reach underground mineshafts or surface tailing dumps through fence openings or absentee landowners' inattention, the right to be in South Africa without access to land or a chance to make a living would do them little good. When migrant diggers are fined or detained and deported for trespassing on urban property or unlawfully mining gold in at times intensively surveilled urban land, the advocacy work human rights organizations undertake to secure migrants' rights to dwell in South African territory—or at least the public, often less productive, portions of that territory—comes undone.

When they are stopped from trespassing onto privately owned land where closed gold mines once operated, migrant miners experience urban property boundaries and anti-trespassing laws as equivalent to denying them the right to belong in South Africa. For my interlocutors, juridical citizenship and the right to occupy space in South Africa, which many activists, lawyers, and political movements in the country advocate immigrants be given, is an incomplete form of belonging when unaccompanied by the right to access, cross through, and use urban land. This stands out in two stories. One story which follows illustrates that the South African border is unexceptional in the lives of urban migrants who are intent on making their livelihoods in cities where property boundaries may be more difficult to cross than the border and where, ultimately, their journey to South Africa becomes meaningful. The second story shows how “border thinking” is ubiquitous in the South African city among South African citizens who lack formal access to urban property and must transgress property boundaries much as they found ways to cross the nation-state's boundary.

The Everydayness of Crossing the South African Border

In 2016, I accompanied two artisanal gold miners on an overland journey to South Africa, tracing the first steps Zama Zama's take when they cross the border into South Africa heading to the mines. My two companions, David and Greg, were returning from Zimbabwe, where they are from. David and Greg live on the East Rand in the outskirts of Johannesburg and work the underground reef. Earlier that year, a firefight had broken out between artisanal gold miners and a private security group. Several diggers were killed; David and Greg helped bring one digger's body home to Zimbabwe for his family to bury. Knowing I was interested in "border jumping," David invited me to meet up with him and Greg in Zimbabwe and accompany them on their journey back to the East Rand. This was not the first time Greg and David had taken a digger home for burial. After spending a few weeks in their home village, the two would return to the mines in South Africa.

As Greg, David, and I approach the final few yards of Zimbabwean territory, we see a fence where sun scorched Zimbabwean soil turns effortlessly into northern Limpopo province. We have mostly been making our way by shared minibus, though we also travelled in part by foot. Today, we are walking. When we reach the border, we do not see any guards. Instead, we run into a border fence. The multi-part metal barrier is called 'kaftan,' 'nabob,' and the 'snake of fire,' this last name referencing the fence's winding shape and the lethal surges of electricity that rattled through it for almost a decade. In 1993, as negotiations to end apartheid advanced, the South African government unplugged the pyramidal center fence from the current that had sent thousands of electric volts rushing through it. Before this, the snake of fire had claimed many lives, causing nearly nine times as many fatalities every year as the infamous Berlin Wall.²

When we reach the fence, David suggests we take a photograph of ourselves crossing. I can record our crossing without showing us moving across the border unauthorized, I tell David, who laughs. "Mateo thinks an agent will find us to arrest for this," David tells Greg, who laughs. David then points out that I have come all this way to see this fence, when there are hundreds of fences in Johannesburg I also could have walked across.

Though my companions deemed my caution unnecessary, it was not without cause. Along the 268 kilometers of South African fencing that abuts the Zimbabwean territory, South African National Defense Force (SANDEF) soldiers patrol the border line, fanning out from 15 echo stations where they camp. These stations appear every 10 kilometers along the remote part of South Africa-Zimbabwe borderland we are crossing. And the soldiers' behavior can be unpredictable. Sometimes, they accept bribes. Other times, they detain migrants, confiscate their money and belongings, and transfer them to police or Home Ministry officials to deport or incarcerate.

David and Greg are unimpressed by the border fence, and by my interest in it. They contrast the unexceptional border fence, which for all intents and purposes appears to them as any other fence in a country rife with physical and legal barriers to Black mobility, with their perception of border crossing as a small part of a much larger number of unauthorized activities they participate in to move into and then through South Africa. Gesturing to the South African side of the border fence, Greg says, “*Everything* that side’s illegal, hey.” He shrugs to indicate he does not view the border as especially consequential or risk-inducing. Both transgressing physical barriers and risking being stopped by South African military and police are diggers’ constant companions when in South Africa. Today, like most days, no soldiers are in sight. We locate a place where someone has cut a hole in the fence, step through, and enter South Africa.

For David, Greg, and millions of others who came to South Africa in search of economic prosperity, their arrival is paradoxical. Without access to land or wealth, “bare” residence—and even “bare” political citizenship is an insufficient guarantee of the kind of life David and Greg dream of having (Agamben 2005). Here in post-apartheid South Africa, rights and economic security are determined by private wealth, not dwelling in South African territory, where many have few rights and even less economic security. To achieve their goals, Greg and David must access private land to enter the mines they live and produce gold in.

South Africa may be the goal, but their first steps in the country are of little consequence. Because the value of citizenship and the right to dwell in national territory is less important than land and private wealth amidst lack public entitlements, iconic scenes of border crossing are no longer—and for Black Africans, have never been, climactic moments guaranteeing civil or economic rights for either new arrivals or native-born citizens. David, Greg, and other diggers crossing the border know there are many more fences waiting for them ahead.

Just as passbooks once limited Black mobility, property titles now do. To belong in the country, Black Africans cannot just *be* in South Africa, or be from South Africa. You must also cross socio-legal boundaries to “thief a chance” in the country (Prentice 2015). The border fence is but one such boundary; private fences enclosing private property are another. Together, they constitute a continuous landscape of enclosure where Black South Africans, undocumented immigrants, and the figures of the illegal trespasser and outlaw gold miner struggle to traverse the boundaries of post-apartheid belonging. What most struck me about the almost mythic border crossing scene that we enacted was its everydayness; in contrast to all the talk publics make about border jumping, David and Greg neither ‘left’ Zimbabwe as outsiders nor ‘arrived in’ South Africa as insiders. Rather, their foreignness remained stuck to their bodies as we continued our journey to South Africa. And gold, not presence in South African territory, is what promised to give David and Greg the wealth they could use to properly belong in the country.

Slippages Between Trespassing on Private Property and Border Jumping

Once inside South Africa, David and Greg, like thousands of other artisanal gold miners, cross numerous private property boundaries to access the mine entrances they use go belowground. Many of my interlocuters pointed out to me the continuity of these boundaries with how the national border is imagined and enacted through infrastructure and land patrols (Amin 2014). For one, I saw several construction sites where developers, seeking to keep evicted miners off the property, erected guard towers that resembled those that dot many parts of the border. Second, police patrols often elicit information about Zama Zama's citizenship status when interdicting them as they come and go from closed mining areas in and around Johannesburg. Third, private property in urban and peri-urban South Africa is not always owned and used by those seeking to exclude others from access.

For many land owners, maintaining the appearance of exclusion was enough; sites yet to be developed could not have the visible presence of residents living on them or owners could have trouble evicting them later when buyers are found or construction is set to begin. These sites must have fencing and markings to demonstrate the land was not abandoned. At the same time, artisanal miners coming and going was not actively discouraged, and in fact many of the miners help supplement the wages of guards patrolling the sites with bribe money. Like border studies scholars and activists have observed of national borders, they do not so much exclude foreign others from entering national territory as perform the excluding and purifying work they are reputed to do (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013).

Urban property boundaries can also be seen as performing one function—exclusion—while, like national borders, allowing porous movement back and forth. In this section, I describe how two interlocuters—Nelson and Tongai—theorized national borders and property lines together, parodying the difference that South African law and officialdom and liberal theorists insist on between state territory and private property.

Ayanda is a native-born South African. A South African-owned mining house employed his father to go underground to drill gold from hard rock. Ayanda's father held the drill. The operation was located near Johannesburg, where Ayanda's father raised him and Ayanda's three siblings with the help of family members and several women Ayanda's father was involved with. Ayanda is the eldest child; when his father died after a period of ill health, when the family fell into debt, lenders called Ayanda. Though Ayanda believes that his father died as a result of many years spent breathing bad air underground, the mining house did little to help the family he left behind. Nor did the national, provincial, or municipal government. This South African-born son of a one-time waged miner could no longer afford to even top off his cell phone's air time.

Destitute, Ayanda would beg for food, beer, and lodging while his younger siblings stayed with family members more keen to take in a child than house Ayanda, who they thought to be a grown man. Seemingly out of options, Ayanda's onetime school friend came up with a plan: the two would dig gold from a defunct mineshaft near their childhood homes. "No one counts me out," Ayanda recounted of this period when he slept rough and endured grinding poverty.

Today, Ayanda continues to work as a gold digger, although his friend left artisanal work after an armed mining gang captured them in a shaft and forced them to extract gold underground for weeks without pay. Working alongside Basotho diggers from Lesotho, Ayanda prefers trying his luck underground than risking what he describes as near certain robbery by unscrupulous employers in the construction industry, who consistently refused to pay Ayanda the full wages they owed him.

One day, I accompany Ayanda to a closed gold mining site where a tunnel leads to the hard rock and gold below. We are planning to visit some diggers whom Ayanda knows, who have been working below us for a week. As we walk along a road to the mining area, Ayanda tells me here, drivers sometimes mistake him for a foreigner. Many South Africans believe all illicit diggers are foreign-born desperados, though I encountered several who like Ayanda were born and raised in South Africa. Drivers honk their horns and shout for Ayanda to go home, among other things. He tells me he has never replied he is already here.

To enter the underground mine, we walk across farmland an absentee white farmer owns. The farmer left the property in the early 2000s for the Western Cape, Ayanda tells me. Since the farmer left, his fields have lain fallow while, as Ayanda says, their speculative value rises.

Guards live in a guest cottage adjacent to a farmhouse. From the guards' vantage point on a ridge, they survey the fields below them, employing vertical power to patrol the landscape from the air. A chain link fence topped with barbed wire surrounds the fields. But the fence does little to exclude the diggers, it merely guides them to the guards, who collect his fees in exchange for granting them access to the site.

At the farm's fence line, we meet Tongai, who Ayanda knows and is at ease with. "He's the border guard," Tongai's friend, Nelson, says of Tongai. Neither Tongai nor Nelson are South African, and this is not a designated national border. "R100 only, home ministry special," Tongai says, holding out his hand for payment so we can pass onto the farm. "R400 less than it cost last week to arrive." By this, I learn that Tongai is referring to when he recently crossed the country's border with Zimbabwe, having overstayed the temporary visa he was issued the last time he was in South Africa. He paid R500 to the border guards to reenter South Africa, a practice common among diggers and other undocumented workers. "They spoke like I was brand new," Tongai complained of the R100 price increase since he last crossed the same checkpoint.

Tongai was not ‘brand new.’ He was a third-generation gold digger. Labor brokers brought his father and grandfather to work the apartheid gold mines, but with the hostel system gone and industrial gold mining in decline, artisanal miners and other informal workers now pay their own way.

Back at work in South Africa, Tongai is employed on a guarding team securing an “abandoned” farm that contains numerous access points to the mineshafts below. Here, fences and security guards filter access rather than exclude trespassers. Just as border studies scholars have described national borders, the farm’s fences sift, rather than stop, mobility (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). In this way, thinking urban property boundaries with national borders can elucidate similar processes at work across different boundary types, and reveals that scholars benefit from thinking about urban mobility in relation to cross-border movements. This also reveals that fences surrounding closed mines in South Africa serve as declarations of absentee ownership more than boundaries meant to exclude. The farmer whose land Tongai guards is rumored to live somewhere in the Western Cape, employing Tongai and others to protect his claim to the fallow land from those attempting to live on it, build on it, and claim it as theirs. Like the border guard Tongai paid to cross into South African, Tongai earns most of his money filtering unauthorized gold diggers across the farm’s fence-line as they make their way to the mine’s entrances.

Nelson and Tongai joking about guarding the closed mining zone’s “border” exposes a way of theorizing borders, fence-lines, and, through these, the imbricated character of state territory and private property. For Nelson and Tongai, national borders and property lines are not distinct legal features. Referring to the nation-state’s boundary, and to how property rights mediate movement and exclusion, any difference South African law and officialdom see between these two elicits Nelson and Tongai’s laughter.

The two speak of both South Africa’s external political border and property boundaries inside the country as parts of a continuous landscape of enclosure. The continuity of border guarding and border jumping with Tongai’s ‘guarding’ of the farm fence line reveals slippages between national territory and private property that challenge politics that demand land reform without citizenship rights, or alternately challenge politics that demand rights for border jumpers without addressing the internal boundaries they also must transgress to secure wealth and survive.

Nelson and Tongai’s joke framing Ayanda as a border jumper who seeks to cross the farm ‘border’ they are guarding also confronts discourses privileging iconic scenes of illicit border crossing when speaking of migrants’ rights, a myopic understanding of the landscape of barriers migrants and economically precarious citizens alike face as they move through urban and peri-urban Johannesburg and other spaces of urban enclosure. Nelson and Tongai call themselves ‘border guards’ when eliciting a bribe to allow Ayanda to enter the farmland. Their joke may be a way to address the public privileges Ayanda, a South African citizen, is thought to enjoy, comically

reversing who is a citizen and who is framed as interloper. I also read their joke as poking fun at South Africa's citizenship promise. Citizenship coupled with other forms of privilege may grant rights to some citizens that Nelson and Tongai are themselves denied as foreigners. But not universally so; Nelson and Tongai find humor in enacting a form of political rule over a South African citizen inside South African territory that indicates how forms of political and economic power and exclusion are entangled.

Conclusion

By experiencing and narrating Johannesburg's fenced urban landscape as both bearing a fundamental likeness to South Africa's national border and key to making migrant life in the South African city and the right to dwell in the country possible and meaningful, artisanal gold miners illuminate the centrality of urban land and property to understanding Black African immigrants' struggles to belong and make a living in South Africa. In doing so, they make the case that nation-state borders are "good things to think with" about land, property, and mobility in the African city. Unlike recent work on borders, few scholars of the urban have considered private property to be anything but an exclusive form of land occupancy. By attending to diggers' conceptions of urban boundaries, we can learn about how internal barriers and external borders are similarly experienced and governed, making both a theory of how public and private rights are imbricated and devising tactics to forge a path through these (de Certeau 2011). And by attending to how migrants conceive of belonging in the South African city and what it takes to make a life and a livelihood in a fenced place, we can expand our understanding of what is required for both native-born South Africans and immigrants in southern Africa to access land and livelihoods and belong in a walled-off, largely privatized African city.

Politically, the conceptual parity my informants made to join borders and property boundaries hints at the possibilities of transnational migrants and native-born urban squatters deprived of spatial and socioeconomic mobility collaborating in a politics that challenges land enclosure more broadly, which a resurgence of scholarly work on new urban enclosures may foreshadow (de Angelis 2007, 2010). Precarious foreign and native-born communities are sometimes seen as structurally antagonistic groups. And when scholars and politicians demarcate undocumented immigrants from "ordinary" criminals who trespass, mine gold illegally, or otherwise violate property owners' rights to exclude others from their land and wealth, they reproduce and strengthen these antagonisms. In doing so, as nation-states increasingly securitize their borderlands and mobilize police, militaries, and criminal codes to regulate migrant mobility, migration scholars and advocates aiming to ease the terror of undocumented life unwittingly divorce borders from wider landscapes of enclosure and separate criminalized immigrants from criminalized trespassers and private property transgressors.

Figuring a “good” undocumented immigrant and separating them from a “criminal” who violates landed property does not advance immigrant rights nor aids understanding of who and how urban residents are made alien to the cities they labor to make and call home.

Notes

- 1 As onetime South African Constitutional Court Justice Zak Yacoob told me in a conversation prior to fieldwork, the ANC never gave him or any other now-celebrated writer of the post-apartheid constitution the option of deliberating the proper distribution of private property. Protecting the rights of property owners to retain their rights to land and wealth was determined through the ANC’s negotiations with the apartheid government during the transition to democratic rule, and served as the basis for the apartheid government ceding power to the ANC once the Soviet Union had fallen and white property seemed like it could be protected through constitutionalism.
- 2 In 1993, South African border barriers caused 89 deaths in a three-year period ending August 1989, 47 less than the total number of fatalities linked to the Berlin Wall between 1961 and 1989. See: <http://chimurengachronic.co.za/three-men-a-fence-a-dead-body/>

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Part VI

Language and the City



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20 Text as City

Dakar's Linguistic Landscape

Fiona Mc Laughlin

Sociolinguistics has taken a visual and spatial turn of late with the development of a burgeoning sub-field known as linguistic landscape. This is a welcome move for both sociolinguists and urbanists because ultimately it allows for the possibility that language might yet become central to claims about the urban, something that has not yet happened. Space until quite recently has been undertheorized and taken as a given within the discipline of sociolinguistics, often subsumed rather flatly under the general notion of context or domain (on the street, at home, at school, etc.). Multiple developments in the field (e.g., Blommaert 2013; Pennycook and Otsuji 2015; Scollon and Scollon 2003; Wee and Goh 2020) have introduced new ways for sociolinguists to engage with space and, as a consequence, with other disciplines, especially in the form of what has come to be known as linguistic landscape, broadly construed as the symbolic construction of public space through writing (Ben Rafael et al. 2006). My aim in this chapter is to upend the now familiar metaphor of the city as text (Duncan 1990) by showing that texts, in their non-metaphorical sense, continually reorder urban spatiality and are thus a central and constitutive aspect of the city and of urban life. By reversing the proposition of city as text, the formulation of text as city refocuses our gaze not only on the literality of urban texts, the ways in which they are created out of language, or the ideas and imaginaries they reorder through language, but it provides a way of understanding how “city reading” (Henkin 1998) engenders an urban modernity through the creation of new urban practices.

Linguistic Landscapes

Across Africa, urban belonging and citizenship are routinely performed through recognizably urban ways of speaking such as Bamakokan (Canut 2009), Town Bemba (Spitulnik 1998), or Tsotsitaal (Hurst 2009), but language – as substance, or form, or even noise – has remained largely peripheral to urbanists' accounts of the city, despite its animating presence, captured here by De Boeck and Plissart:

[Kinshasa] is a city in which the spoken form regularly seems to dominate the built form. Often a weapon of the weak, [rumor] enters the scene from the margin and takes over the whole entity, pumping its words like blood through the veins and arteries of this giant urban body.

(De Boeck & Plissart 2004:50)

Linguistic landscape addresses a complementary materiality that differs from the embodied materiality of spoken language described by De Boeck and Plissart, namely writing and its appearance in the urban context. Without the insights of urban studies, and as pointed out by Blommaert (2013:120), Pennycook & Otsuji (2015:148–149), and Wee and Goh (2020:1–2), research in the field runs the risk of reducing the city to a mere surface, a superficial and even uninteresting background for the inscription of language. But at its best, linguistic landscape interrogates not only language, but the ways in which written language interacts with and structures urban space by recasting the urban surface as an “analytic location” (Nuttall 2008:92).

Originally coined by Landry and Bourhis (1997) who define it loosely as “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, place names, street names, commercial shop signs and public signs on government buildings,” the linguistic landscape was intended to be an index of ethnolinguistic vitality: the more a language appears in authorized space in the linguistic landscape, the more robust it allegedly is, thus it has been seen as an important if flawed tool for determining the degree to which a language is endangered, a particular preoccupation of linguistics in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This formulation does not always work, especially for Africa, a continent characterized by a high incidence of exographia, a situation in which the language that people read and write in is different from the one(s) they speak (Lüpke 2004). Such is the case in Dakar, where Wolof dominates as the spoken urban language but French plays a more conspicuous role in the written environment, yet each wields its own political and symbolic power. Since the first articulation of the term linguistic landscape, however, the scope of the field has moved toward a greater probing – through a linguistic lens that analyzes language within multimodal semiotic contexts – of the ways in which written language structures urban space, including unauthorized space where transgressive writing such as graffiti attests to the presence of a counterpublic.

Cities are the primary focus of research on linguistic landscape, because they constitute discursive centers and are characterized by a greater density of writing than the hinterland. The urban focus of the field has yielded seminal studies on cities such as Tokyo (Backhaus 2007) or urban districts such as Washington’s China Town (Lou 2016), and although most studies have been devoted to cities of the global north, there is a growing body of literature on African cities that includes, among others, studies of Cape Town

(Stroud and Mpendukana 2009), Dar es Salaam (Bwenge 2009), Addis Ababa (Woldemariam and Lanza 2012; Lanza and Woldemariam 2014), urban Gambia (Juffermans 2015), and the desert cities of northern Mali: Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu (Mc Laughlin 2015). The engagement with urban space that characterizes some of this work has put sociolinguistics in conversation with other disciplines such as anthropology and urban studies, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which writing structures urban space and engendering innovative ways of reading the city. In this chapter I explore the ways in which the written environment, in the form of signage and graffiti, reorders urban space in Dakar. In particular, I focus on the relationship of urban texts to the space in which they appear, and the spatial scales that they collectively construct.

Dakar's linguistic landscape, like that of other contemporary cities, is fluid and changing. It consists of a profusion of signs, advertising, and graffiti that are supported by the material infrastructure of various surfaces, including the built environment, moving vehicles, and the human body. Texts in the linguistic landscape appear and disappear over time. They are juxtaposed and layered, creating continuities and discontinuities in the urban narrative, but taken as a whole, they provide a way of (literally) reading the city as an urban text. Dakar's linguistic landscape is heteroglossic and multigraphic, drawing from diverse languages and scripts. French makes an appearance in the Arabic script, Arabic in the Latin script, and Wolof in Chinese characters, disrupting any notion of how a language *should* be written, and countering the one-to-one relationship between a language and a writing system that inhabits the Western imagination. French linguist Louis-Jean Calvet (1994:177–178) considers the seemingly indiscriminate use of the Latin and Arabic alphabets to write French, Wolof, and Arabic in Dakar as indicative of a society in transition from orality to literacy, where the relationship to the written is not yet fixed, and where there exists a great deal of fluidity between languages. The latter part of his proposition holds, as fluidity manifests itself in multiple ways in the linguistic landscape, but the one-way trajectory of progression from orality to literacy both undercuts the importance of the former and ignores the existence of citational networks within which the discourses of orality and literacy that make up Dakar's discursive world quote from each other, something that Quayson (2010, 2014) has shown for Accra. And when viewed against the backdrop of linguistic plurality, multigraphism or the use of multiple writing systems takes on many of the characteristics of multilingualism as an active and useful strategy for participating in social and political life in urban Africa (Mc Laughlin 2015).

An Urban Language World

In the Senegalese popular imagination Dakar is associated with an urban way of speaking that reflects Wolof's long cohabitation with French.

Speakers dip liberally into French as a source of vocabulary and as a means of “stylizing the self” (Foucault 2003:225; Nuttall 2008:93), and in so doing turn French into Wolof. Such fluidity may be characteristic of contemporary Wolof in general, but its association with Dakar¹ makes it the site of ideological contestation over questions of cosmopolitanism and urbanity versus rootlessness and inauthenticity so that the polarizing attributes of city life are refracted onto language. This urban way of speaking is often contrasted with a pristine, imagined Wolof, the very name of which instantiates the impossibility of its existence: *olof piir*, pure Wolof, where *piir* is a wolofized form of the French word for pure. The everyday urban way of speaking Wolof, by contrast, has no recognizable name, although it has been called many things (Dakar Wolof, *njaxas* ‘mixture,’ or *sunu olof* ‘our Wolof’²), yet it moves ahead almost unimpeded, a non-movement of sorts (Bayat 2010), attracting and gaining speakers, and in the process it has become the language of a nation (Cruise O’Brien 2008) and a formidable counterbalance to French, the sole official language.

French, the language of state education, dominates Dakar’s linguistic landscape. All official and most authorized signage is in French, as is much of the writing in unauthorized space. The complex norms of French orthography spill over further into writing in Wolof, because the shallower³ and more transparent official orthography for Wolof is rarely taught, so that aspects of a French regime of literacy become Wolof. French dominates as the language of education, but even in official settings such as the National Assembly, Wolof is spoken liberally.

Since it was founded in 1857, Dakar has always been a highly multilingual city where people have used Wolof as a lingua franca. Today the city counts among its populations many speakers of Pulaar, Sereer, Cape Verdean Creole, Joola, Bambara, Hassaniya, and Levantine Arabic, and dozens of other minority languages, speakers of which all use Wolof as a language of wider communication. The languages of such urban dwellers are often influenced by Wolof, and incremental changes in the lexicon and grammar distinguish their way of speaking from that of rural Senegalese. Minority Senegalese languages seldom appear in the linguistic landscape other than to highlight a business or product attributed to an ethnolinguistic group, such as the association of local milk products with Pulaar-speaking cattle herders. A striking exception is the sample of Pulaar political graffiti that appeared on a wall in Dakar’s downtown Plateau district in 2012 that read “WADE GASSI! MACKY ARI 2012!” [Wade is finished! Macky has come 2012!], referring to outgoing president, Abdoulaye Wade, who was replaced by Macky Sall, an ethnically Haalpulaar politician. Senegalese politics have never been aligned along ethnic divisions, but the exuberant iconicity of language in this case evoked an active Haalpulaar linguistic resistance to the hegemony of Wolof. In addition to creating a space for a minority language, the message also indexes a French regime of literacy through the use of French orthography in the word *gassi* (in Pulaar orthography it would be *gasi*), embedding it in a larger, more complex language world.

English has long been part of Dakar's language world, even if peripherally. Illicit trade of products such as sugar and cloth smuggled in from officially Anglophone Gambia introduced a lexicon associated with delinquency in the 20th century, but the greatest influence has come from popular culture, and especially music, primarily Jamaican reggae, American rock and roll, and hip-hop. As English reached a new status as the international lingua franca in the late 20th century, more and more Senegalese youth sought to study the language, in high school, at university, or through numerous English clubs organized throughout the city, a trend that has not abated. For all its cachet, English does not figure as prominently in the linguistic landscape as might be anticipated, even in corporate advertising where it occurs primarily in cell-phone advertisements. While Piller (2003:175) asserts that "English is the most frequently used language in advertising messages in non-English-speaking countries (besides the local language, of course)," neither of her two propositions – about English or about the local language – holds for Dakar. Notwithstanding, English has an important presence in hip-hop graffiti and appears in other political graffiti, examples of which include *We love Macky*, referring to president Macky Sall, and *Bayiko mou free* "Set him free," which appeared on many of Dakar's walls between 2013 and 2016. The latter example is in Wolof, written in the Latin alphabet with French orthography, but includes the English word *free*, and refers to the imprisonment of Karim Wade, son of former president Abdoulaye Wade, who was incarcerated in the Rebeuss prison for corruption by Sall's administration, sentenced to six years in jail, and then pardoned by presidential decree in 2016.

The relative newcomer to Dakar's language world is Chinese, which began arriving with a new wave of small-scale entrepreneurial migration in the late 1990s. By the mid-2000s the Chinese presence in the city had diversified from the engineers and manual laborers who worked on large Chinese government-sponsored building projects to include a modest merchant class whose collective businesses grew up along the Boulevard Général de Gaulle in a residential area known as Centenaire, a name now synonymous with the Chinese market. Bertoncello and Bredeloup (2009); Mc Laughlin (2018). In addition to Marché Centenaire, the Chinese presence in Dakar has increased with the inauguration of a Confucius Institute at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in 2012, and several important building projects, including the ambitious new Musée des Civilisations Noires which opened in December 2018.

Finally, and although only an elite few master it, classical Arabic is an important element in Dakar's language world. The call to prayer in this predominantly Muslim city punctuates the urban soundscape, as do the recitations emanating from the many Qur'anic schools, and the voices of mendicants who exchange blessings for alms at busy intersections throughout the city. Both spoken and written Arabic, thanks to the strong association of the language with religion, have an apotropaic function, warding

off evil through the utterance of certain formulas or the wearing of amulets that contain protective writing in Arabic.

Within this urban language world, texts that appear in public space constitute a complex nexus of choices that go beyond language to include, at a minimum, a writing system and an orthography. Sometimes these choices are calculated, but they always reflect the writer's literacy resources. The choice of a language, as in the Pulaar example cited above, can be an ideological move, but so can the choice of a writing system. For example, along with other reforms, Atatürk's 1929 replacement of the Arabic script by the Roman for writing Turkish constituted a decisive break with an Islamic Ottoman past and ushered in a vision of a new secular Turkish nation-state. Orthography, too, can be a site of ideology, as evidenced in Senegalese president Senghor's decrees on the writing of national languages issued during the 1970s. The decrees forbade the use of double letters, even though they mark a significant contrast with their single counterparts in many Senegalese languages (e.g. *dig* 'promise' vs. *digg* 'middle' in Wolof); orthography thus became for Senghor a way to police his political opponents and suppress their writing.⁴ Although the stakes involved in the choice of a language, writing system, or orthography are not always this high, the examples show that they are not neutral and always have some kind of meaning attached to them. This meaning is often contingent and fluid, and accrues in exponential fashion from the combinatory possibilities of these different elements: the Arabic script means one thing when used to write Arabic, but another when used to write French; Pulaar written in Roman script means something different from Pulaar written in Arabic script; and Wolof written in Chinese characters does not carry the same meaning as Wolof written in French orthography. These differences in meaning reflect processes of rescaling that come from the generation of local meanings and values as languages, scripts, and orthographies with different histories circulate through different locales. A case in point is an inscription commonly written on the side of Dakar's taxis, near the external mirrors, that reads "Car." From an orthographic perspective, this is an English word that names the vehicle, and inscribes the taxi – and its owner – within a global modernity where English is the *lingua franca*. From a local vantage point it represents the Wolof word *kaar*, which is used to ward off misfortune, a verbal protection against traffic accidents or other bad luck in this case. As a bivalent and layered expression it encompasses both meanings, and in so doing illustrates the circulation of language and symbolic meaning between the local and the global.

Sites of Necessity and Sites of Luxury

Among the numerous attempts to understand the ways in which the linguistic landscape reorders urban space, Stroud and Mpendukana's 2009 study of commercial signage in Khayelitsha, Cape Town's largest township, provides a useful point of departure. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) "tastes

of necessity” and “tastes of luxury,” Stroud and Mpendukana distinguish between what they call “sites of necessity” and “sites of luxury.” In the former, form is subordinated to function, while in the latter, style (form) is privileged. Within the township, signage for products and services that appears in sites of necessity makes use of local materials and technologies that are constrained by the local political economy (367), while signage that appears in economically advantaged sites of luxury is tied to high-tech modes of production and recur in different forms such as radio jingles or television advertisements across various media.

The different hierarchies of value apparent in these two settings are similarly reflected in the types of language that appear in the signage. In sites of luxury, Stroud and Mpendukana argue, language is subject to rescaling “in ways that configure the relationship between the present place...with other, imagined and represented, more distant spaces/places” (368) through the use of English and pan-African terms such as *waka-waka* ‘nonstop’ that do not reflect the local, while peripheral forms of English, along with local languages such as Isicamtho and Zulu, appear in signage located in sites of necessity.

The commercial signage that Stroud and Mpendukana analyze lends itself particularly well to the terminology of luxury and necessity, but because I explore more than commercial signage, my study of Dakar also builds on their insights regarding the configuration of the relationship between the space in which signage is situated to the space it represents. This can be a close and immediate relationship, seen here in locally anchored language in signage that reflects the here-and-now and which, like language that appears in sites of necessity, is often linked to survival strategies. It can also be an aspirational relationship, exemplified in this chapter by commercial advertising that appears in Dakar during the month of Ramadan and which offers a unique and luxurious imaginary of an Islamic elsewhere that combines religious imagery with consumer products. And as examples of religious graffiti discussed below illustrate, the rescaling may be so extreme that it disrupts the relationship between the present place and elsewhere.

Grounded Language

Written language that is grounded or anchored in place and refers to the here-and-now co-constructs the city in multiple ways. Local signage, for example, often marks the location of businesses, which must be registered in the official language, French. The example in Figure 20.1 depicts a hand-painted sign that both advertises and marks the site of a car radiator repair shop. Located at the corner of rue Dial Diop and rue Ambroise Mendy, the sign names its location.

The writing on the sign, which shows several characteristics of what Blommaert (2008) has called grassroots literacy,⁵ is multimodal in that it includes both text and an illustration of a mechanic holding a radiator, in



Figure 20.1 El Hadj Yansar Diagne's Radiator Repair Shop. Credit: Fiona Mc Laughlin.

order to target both those who can and cannot read French (Juffermans 2015:77). The image of a telephone receiver is a common icon to introduce a telephone number, but in this case, the phone number is missing, so there is no referent beyond the sign itself. The inscription iconically locates the establishment on a certain corner within the city, and this immediacy constructs the repair shop as a site of necessity. The materials used to fashion it are minimal, and both the writing and the picture of the mechanic are amateurish, demanding only material and technological resources such as paint and literacy that can be found with little effort in the local economy.

The second example (see Figure 20.2) comes from the wall of a shop in *Marché Centenaire*, Dakar's Chinese market. The wall text is a hand-made lexicon of immediate utility to the shopkeeper. It depicts, in Chinese, a number of sports-related items that are sold in the shop, with their translation into French or Wolof, written phonetically in Chinese characters. It serves as a quick reference for the Chinese merchant in his attempts to communicate with his urban Wolof-speaking customers, and as such can be viewed as an economic survival language for someone with few Wolof or French skills.

Many of the merchants in *Marché Centenaire* have created extensive hand-written dictionaries in order to facilitate communication with customers and Senegalese shop hands, but the emplacement of such writing on the shop wall makes it of more immediate use. It is not intended as a public message, but its appearance on an interior wall means that it is not hidden from the public either, although only a very few Dakarois, mostly other Chinese shopkeepers, would be able to interpret it. The private/public



Figure 20.2 An Interior Wall in Marché Centenaire. Credit: Tracy Liu.

Centenaire shop wall text, the likes of which can be found, *mutatis mutandis*, in other African cities,⁶ is striking in the way it brokers between Chinese, French, and Wolof to reflect language as a local practice (Pennycook 2010). The writing practices are the result of a confluence of global forces such as migration and colonization, but as an ensemble they are characteristic of only a single locale: Dakar's Marché Centenaire. The Centenaire wall, local product as it is, nonetheless indexes another reality for customers and passersby who may recognize the writing as Chinese without knowing what it means. It was not written for them, but may accidentally fall within their field of vision as they shop. This minimal recognition of a language, as Blommaert and Backus (2012:13) point out, can connect to a much larger knowledge of society, and in this case it situates Dakar as a cosmopolitan city within a global network characterized by migration and movement.

Dakar's Le Dantec hospital (Figure 20.3) provides a further self-referential illustration of locally anchored language. Next to the entrance gate to the hospital is a booth for visitors and patients to check in. On the wall of the booth, above the window, is a text in French that reads



Figure 20.3 The Reception at Hôpital Le Dantec. Credit: Fiona Mc Laughlin.

Pavillon d'accueil “Reception,” and below the French is another text in Wolof written in the Arabic script that reads *Ku yàkkamti fi la* “Whoever is in a hurry, here it is.”

The juxtaposition of these two texts over the check-in booth implies that they are different versions of the same message, and in a sense they are, both indicating where to check in, but they have been designed for two very different types of patients based on their differential literacy skills, and the expectations of what kind of person possesses what kind of literacy skills. The use of the Arabic alphabet for writing Wolof, a practice known as *wolofal*, is a concession to those who have not been educated in the formal school system and who therefore do not read or write the official language, French. Many such readers have nonetheless learned to write Wolof in the Arabic script as a consequence of their religious education in Qur’anic school where they learn to master the Arabic alphabet. Such readers and writers are often constructed in the popular imagination, despite evidence to the contrary, as rural and not very well educated, making them the antithesis of the urbane city-dweller, yet they are accommodated within the city’s reading public. The Wolof message conveys a certain urgency and is striking in its directness. And like the radiator repair sign, it is iconically anchored to place, this time deictically through the use of the word *fi* ‘here.’

These diverse examples all structure and configure urban space in related ways through their indexing of the local. The modest materials and technologies used in creating these signs reflect the local economy, and the texts reflect the various literacy resources and language competencies of their

authors and readers. The signs are a prelude to an event that will take place “here,” at the location of the sign, such as the sale of merchandise, delivery of a service, or admission to a hospital, and they work to facilitate the accomplishment of the event. They are grounded in the here-and-now of Dakar, as evidenced in the way they construct their various audiences, but they also tap into the histories and trajectories that make Dakar a complex and cosmopolitan city.

The Enchantment of Ramadan Advertising

Moving upwards from the grounded messages of necessity on the walls of Centenaire Market and Hôpital Le Dantec to the physically higher level of commercial billboards, a different aspect of the linguistic landscape comes into focus. Here, a few meters above the bustle of the streets, global capitalism is at work. Companies such as Air France, Samsung, LG, or Coca Cola, as well as a number of local companies, display their seductive advertisements as they attempt to transform Dakar’s citizens into consumers. Particularly notable is the transformation of the linguistic landscape that has taken place for at least a decade now with the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan. Ramadan is a time for fasting and reflection, but it is also a time of sociability and conviviality, when people invite others to their homes to break the fast, give gifts of money or dates, the traditional fast-breaking food, and renew contact with friends. The city of Dakar is visually transformed by the appearance on the city’s many billboards of advertisements for products that promise to enhance the kinds of sociability that citizens engage in during this period of spiritual renewal. The visually striking advertising employs a rich iconography of symbols and images alongside the creative use of multiple languages and scripts to create a singular esthetics of Ramadan in Dakar. The work of multinational corporations and local businesses, the billboards are instruments of capitalism, designed to enchant potential consumers and create new desires, and they contrast markedly with other types of religious discourse and imagery inscribed on the city’s streets, discussed in another section of this chapter. Through their advertising campaigns, corporate interests attempt to reconcile the consumerist desires of a growing urban middle class with the spiritual obligations of Ramadan. Items on offer include the types of foods used in the preparation of the *ndoggu* or fast-breaking, such as butter, milk, soft drinks, and bottled water, as well as cell phone offers that can be used for sending money to relatives or calling them at a discounted rate.

The esthetics of the advertisements are generally North African in orientation, and are based on a small set of symbolic designs. They often have a dark blue background that evokes the night – the time that these products will be used – and the iconography includes the moon, which symbolizes the lunar month of Ramadan, and perhaps a mosque, evoking prayer,

and often a Moroccan style teapot and tray with tea glasses that suggest the conviviality of the *ndoggu*. The text in Ramadan advertising is often multilingual with various orthographies (*Ramadan Karim* vs. *Ramadan Kareem*, ‘Generous Ramadan’ for example), and multiple scripts. Among the latter are the Latin script, the Arabic script, and an arabesque script that consists of Roman letters made to look like Arabic ones, thereby combining a wider comprehension of the message with the symbolic spiritual capital of the Arabic script.

The products advertised are for the most part not terribly expensive: butter, milk, bouillon cubes, soft drinks, bottled water, etc., but they are depicted within a context of luxury and ornamentation, reflecting a North African esthetic that appeals to many Senegalese. The décor and furnishings of middle-class interiors in upscale neighborhoods in Dakar are evidence of this tendency, but remain out of reach for most people. The Ramadan advertising campaigns are successful because they are an appeal to the consumer as Muslim, implying that the products they advertise will contribute to the making of a good Ramadan while simultaneously associating the products with the esthetics of an aspirational



Figure 20.4 Ramadan Billboard: Bridel Dairy Products. Credit: Fiona Mc Laughlin.

material life located elsewhere, but clearly within the Muslim world. The advertisement by the French dairy company, Bridel, seen in Figure 20.4, presents an appealing fast-breaking meal, consisting of dates, bread, and coffee, alongside two Bridel products, milk, and butter. They are set on an ornate tiled plane that could represent a table but also represents a vast landscape, while in the background we see the lit silhouette of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia mosque, with the moon above it in a sky where the sun has just set. The French words *Bon Ramadan* "(Have a) good Ramadan" appear at the top of the advertisement in an Arabic style font in Roman script, embellished with a diacritical dot to further evoke the Arabic alphabet, while the lower part of the advertisement claims in rhyme that *Avec Bridel, la vie est plus belle!* "With Bridel, life is more beautiful." Most passersby recognize the mosque as a mosque, but not necessarily as the famous Turkish mosque, thus it remains unlocalized and evokes a vague and beautiful Islamic elsewhere.

The billboard that advertises a local product, Crax corn chips, seen in Figure 20.5, contains a complex assemblage of diverse messages, scripts, and orthographies that appear together with various images. Drawing an imaginary diagonal line on the advertisement roughly from top left to bottom right, we see two distinct messages come into play. The sections on the top right of the advertisement are Ramadan-related. An Arabic phrase in Roman script and French orthography, *Ramadan Moubarak* 'Blessed Ramadan,' dominates the billboard, while underneath it is a formulaic Arabic script phrase that translates as "May this month bring blessings to you." A brass moon and lantern to the right of the Arabic inscription serve as visual reminders of the holy month and project the esthetics of an elsewhere, in a manner similar to the Bridel advertisement. The left side of the advertisement is given over to the product on offer, Crax brand corn chips. The dominant motif of the advertisement references the product and depicts a seated lion associated with the brand. Below are pictures of corn and of chips with a message in Wolof meaning "It's just [pure] corn." The Wolof orthography is a combination of the standardized Wolof and French orthographies. *Mböx* 'corn' is in Wolof orthography, but with the addition of a superfluous diaeresis (two dots) on top of the o. The diaeresis is used in Wolof orthography, but not in conjunction with the letter o. The word *késsé* 'only, just' on the other hand, is written in French orthography, evidenced by the double s and the pair of acute accents. These details constitute much more than linguistic minutiae; they are indicative of a regime of language in which French dominates and through which other languages circulate. The two words in the advertisement that could be construed as French are both loanwords: *Ramadan* from Arabic, and *chips* from English. There are no other French words, yet the billboard is very much oriented toward French, as the linguistic details illustrate. The heterographic way in which the Wolof phrase is written highlights the fact that literacy in that language is not taught but improvised, while



Figure 20.5 Ramadan Billboard: Crax Chips. Credit: Macodou Fall.

its presence in the advertisement reinforces its importance as the urban vernacular.

Sub-Texts

From a spatial point of view, these two Ramadan advertisements for Bridel dairy products and the local brand of Crax corn chips appear on billboards located above the pedestrians on Dakar's streets, but in each case there is another sign underneath them that opportunistically makes use of the material infrastructure provided by the posts that support the billboards. I call these signs sub-texts because they appear below the billboards, at eye level, but also because they are made with more modest, sub-par, materials and resources. The vertical trajectory iconically reveals what is out of reach or aspirational at a higher level, and what is within reach at eye level, reflecting the reality of most Dakarois. In the case of Crax corn chips, a simple handwritten sign on unfinished plywood neatly attached by wire to the billboard post advertises the services of the shop located next to it:

PHOTOCOPIE IMPRESSION REMPLISSAGE FORMULAIRE “Photocopying, printing, filling out forms.” The latter service points to the reality that not everyone can fill out forms because their literacy skills may not be adequate, or they may not be familiar with the “genre” of forms, a counterpoint to the profusion of scripts, orthographies, and languages that appear on the billboard.

Turning now to the Bridel billboard, which appears within a fanciful vintage blue metal frame, the simply reproduced black and white sub-text is an announcement of the Grand Magal de Ndakaarou, a Mouride religious pilgrimage and celebration that takes place in Dakar, rather than Touba, the headquarters of the Sufi order. The central image in the announcement is the iconic picture of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, founder of the Mourides, flanked by smaller portraits of other notable Mouride figures. The juxtaposition of the two signs contrasts a vision of a materially rich and distant Islamic world – brokered by a French dairy products company – with a local, accessible Islamic world characterized by devotion to a Sufi ascetic for whom, according to the popular accounts of miracles attributed to him, merely passing his hands over food sufficed to sustain him. The language of the sub-text could be construed as French, but the city of Dakar, although written partially in French orthography, appears in Wolof as Ndakaarou, emphasizing the local nature of this important event.

Beyond Urban Timespace: Religious Graffiti

In a study of oral and written language in a Cape Town cybercafé, Vigouroux (2009) understands the language practices she encounters there to have been produced by different timespace scales, including the here-and-now of the setting, and the longer and broader timespace of African migration to the city, among others. Thus far, I have discussed aspects of Dakar’s linguistic landscape that locate language within the timespace of the here-and-now in grounded language that indexes the local, and within an aspirational context that projects a future, Islamic elsewhere seen in the relationship between the potential consumer and Ramadan advertising. The third and final aspect of Dakar’s linguistic landscape to be discussed here is religious graffiti produced by individual Dakarois, which provides a different perspective on religion from the materially enhanced view portrayed in Ramadan advertising by corporations, and represents an extreme rescaling that goes beyond urban timespace.

Graffiti in Dakar is almost always religious or political, and the apotropaic function of Arabic is apparent throughout the city, especially on moving vehicles such as minibuses and taxis, as well as in boats along the shoreline. Driving and riding in motor vehicles can often be dangerous, given the decrepit state of a good number of cars and minibuses in circulation in the city, hence the calculation to paint protective words – including prayers or fragments of the Qur’an – on vehicles. Drivers are moreover

viewed as cultural heroes of a sort in West Africa (van der Geest 2009:266) and easily attract jealousies, thus the inscriptions also serve to protect them and their vehicles from malevolent forces. Arabic inscriptions appear in Arabic and Latin scripts, often contextualized within local imagery, such as the minaret of the mosque of Touba, that evokes the various Sufi *tariqas* (paths) to which the vast majority of Senegalese Muslims adhere.

The two urban texts that I focus on here come not from moving vehicles, but from the walls of Dakar, and both reference the Mouride Sufi *tariqa* through its esteemed founder Cheikh Amadou Bamba Mbacké (d. 1927), commonly known as Bamba. The subject of much popular cultural production (see, e.g. Mc Laughlin 1997; Roberts & Roberts 2003, 2007; etc.), Bamba is revered for his piety and asceticism, as well as for his historical resistance to French colonialism. His portrait, derived from a single extant photograph, often adorns the external walls of houses and other buildings around the country, and more recently, the images have been reduced to writing in the form of a political campaign by Sériñ Modou Kara, a politician and religious figure.

The photograph in Figure 20.6, taken in downtown Dakar, depicts the figure of Cheikh Amadou Bamba flanked by two Arabic inscriptions. The rightmost inscription is a common epithet for the saint, *Khadimu ar-Rasul* or Servant of the Prophet, while the one on the left is a phrase that occurs in several verses in the Qur'an, *Kun fayakun*, which translates as 'Be! and it is,' referring to God's unique powers of creation and, more popularly, to certain Qur'anic verses and prayers that help people attain what they



Figure 20.6 Religious Graffiti “Be and there is” and “Servant of the Prophet.”
Credit: Fiona Mc Laughlin.

wish for. Both Arabic texts, presumably written by the same person, show multiple characteristics of grassroots literacy, including the use of diacritics associated with the writing of West African languages in the Arabic script, indicating that the writer has only a basic knowledge of Arabic that comes from study at a Qur'anic school. Although locally anchored in the figure of Bamba, the message points beyond the local to a vision of exemplary Muslim behavior (any Muslim can aspire to be a Servant of the Prophet, Bamba merely serves as an exemplar) and to the greatness of God as the creator of the world. In light of these inscriptions, timespace is dissolved into a ubiquitous eternity.

The second example of graffiti that utilizes the figure of Cheikh Amadou Bamba is part of a highly visible political campaign by Sériñ Modou Kara, grandson of Bamba's younger brother. Founder of the Party of Truth for Development, Kara is a controversial figure who flirts with a vigilante-like approach to politics through his pronouncements and his way of dressing while maintaining his religious identity as a Sufi leader. Known to his followers as General Kara, he refers to his followers as his army. A fairly marginal figure in Senegalese politics, Kara nonetheless launched a noteworthy movement of sorts through simple slogans that appeal uncontroversially to all Mourides, and even to other Senegalese Muslims: *Bamba merci* "Thank you, Bamba" and *Bamba partout/Bamba fépp* "Bamba everywhere." As Cochrane (2016:9) recounts, at a religio-political rally in March of 2013, Kara allegedly issued a *fatwa* or recommendation (locally known as a *ndigal*) to his followers to spread these messages. Shortly thereafter they

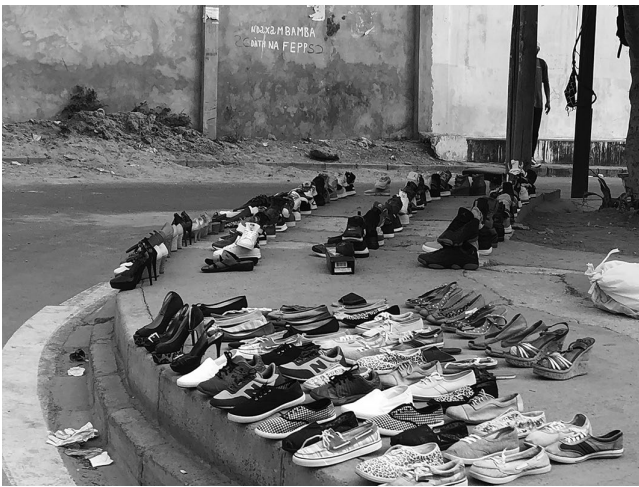


Figure 20.7 Religio-Political Graffiti: "Though Bamba's reach is everywhere."
Credit: Fiona Mc Laughlin.

started to appear as graffiti on walls and moving vehicles, and currently there are hundreds, if not thousands of such inscriptions all over Dakar and elsewhere in the country. The message is occasionally embellished verbally, but almost always appears as simple graffiti, as seen in the Wolof writing in Figure 20.7 which reads *Ndaxam Bamba dàth na fepp* “Though Bamba’s reach is everywhere.”

This example is written in a combination of Wolof and French orthographies on a wall at eye level near an underpass where an informal shoe market has sprung up, but unlike the iconic *wolofal* sign at Le Dantec hospital that points “here,” this graffiti, and many, many more examples like it, point *fepp* “everywhere,” rather than to a specific location. The message also points beyond itself through the use of the word *ndaxam* “however, though.” Although it appears as a self-contained discursive unit on the wall, it nonetheless evokes and even answers, prior discourses which, like Bamba, are everywhere.

Dakar’s Linguistic Landscape

Focusing on the written environment of a lively, bustling section of Accra’s Cantonment Road, dubbed Oxford Street by the city’s residents, Quayson (2010, 2014) develops an analysis of the meanings and modalities of slogans and mottoes that appear on mobile forms such as lorries, cars, *tro-tros*, and pushcarts, and in the slick advertising of multinational cell-phone companies that appears on the numerous billboards that punctuate the street. He argues that these seemingly disparate aspects of the linguistic landscape in fact work together to form a dialectical discourse that draws from repertoires of both orality and literacy and reproduces one of the central messages of the prosperity gospel promoted by Ghanaian evangelical churches: material benefits accrue to those who practice their faith well. But material prosperity as an external sign of faith, preached by Ghanaian mega-churches such as the Christian Action Faith Ministries and the International Central Gospel Church, does not translate easily into the religious landscape of Dakar which is dominated by a Sufi Islam that cherishes asceticism as an ideal. This is not to say that Senegalese Muslims are not interested in material wealth; they are, of course, as interested in it as anyone else, and readily use the name and image of Bamba and other religious figures to attract customers to various businesses. The Sufi ascetic who renounces worldly things is a powerful and cherished figure in the Senegalese popular imagination and can only be reconciled difficultly with a consumerist ethos, thus the affective pull of such advertising establishes an affective rapport between the business owner and the potential customer because of their shared reverence for a religious leader.

The profusion of texts in Dakar’s public space, including political and religious graffiti, slick corporate advertising, and modest signage in sites of necessity, makes for a rich linguistic field in which languages, scripts

and orthographies circulate, bringing with them a history of Islamization, colonization, and globalization. Taken as a whole, the heteroglossic nature of the linguistic landscape is symptomatic of a pluralistic and open society that accommodates and includes people with different literacy competencies, each of which is the result of a biography and an educational trajectory. The ubiquity of urban texts constructs Dakar as a city where public reading and writing has become embedded as an urban practice. In particular, the improvisational writing of Wolof, the urban lingua franca, in the Roman script, seen in both the Crax billboard and the underpass graffiti, constitutes an important experiment in vernacular writing. Peterson (2018) shows how vernacular literacy in Anglophone Africa early on ignited the political imagination of writers and intellectuals, yet in Senegal and other parts of francophone Africa there has been almost no education or teaching of literacy in African languages. *Wolofal*, or Wolof in the Arabic script, has a much longer history and has thus become more or less conventionalized, but Wolof in the Roman alphabet is always experimental and contingent and, ultimately, urban. Linguistic landscape has generally been much more about the linguistic than the landscape, but the linguistic, as I have attempted to illustrate in this chapter, allows us to read, in a most literal sense, a vast urban narrative.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

- 1 An urban way of speaking Wolof, a precursor of today's urban Wolof, actually emerged in late-18th- or early-19th-century Saint-Louis du Sénégal. For details, see Mc Laughlin (2008).
- 2 These are names that were offered spontaneously during my conversations with interlocutors in Dakar.
- 3 A shallow orthography is one where the correspondence between sound and symbol (letter) is transparent and regular in contradistinction to deep orthographies, such as that of English or French, where there is substantially less one-to-one correspondence. By way of example, the Wolof word for "thank-you" written in official orthography is *jërëjëf*, while in French orthography it is *dieuredieuf*.
- 4 For a lucid analysis of the ideological and political stakes of Senghor's decrees and the responses to them, see Chapter 4 in Warner (2019).
- 5 In Blommaert's definition, grassroots literacy comprises non-elite forms of writing that are performed by people who are not fully inserted into elite economies of information, language, and literacy. In Figure 20.1, the grassroots characteristics include a spelling 'error' (*tout* instead of *tous* 'all'), non-uniform letters

and spacing, and an estheticized text that includes pictures of a telephone and a mechanic carrying a radiator.

- 6 Such textual displays of Chinese have become increasingly familiar in urban Africa, even appearing as a motif in Ivoirian artist François-Xavier Gbré's installation, *Wo shi Feizhou/Je suis africain*, at the 2016 Dak'Art Biennale, a major international art exhibition held in Dakar.

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21 Writing the City in Niger

The Scriptural Economy of the *Fadas*

Adeline Masquelier

The urban space of the street is a place for talk, given over as much to the exchange of words and signs as it is to the exchange of things. A place where speech becomes writing. A place where speech can become “savage” and, by escaping rules and institutions, inscribe itself on walls.

Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*

“We thought ‘Nice Boys’ had a nice ring to it. Initially it took us a while to select our name. The members floated lots of different suggestions. But in the end, ‘Nice Boys’ seemed right. It was who we were.” Jamilou, a 20-year-old unemployed resident of Dogondoutchi, a provincial town in Niger, was reminiscing about how Nice Boys, the *fada* (tea-circle) he had founded with a handful of male friends, had acquired its name. In urban Niger where to be a *saurayi* (unmarried young man; plural: *samari*) is almost by definition to be un(der)employed, much of the waiting, hoping, and commiserating young men engage in is done at the *fadas*, youth groups that take over the streets at night. At the *fada*, young men grapple with the shortage of employment opportunities while drinking tea in the company of similarly disenfranchised peers. Once founded, a *fada* typically acquires a name that reveals something of its members’ ideals, ambitions, or pastimes. Finding a name that fits the *fada* is a matter of great concern for *fadantchés* (members of a *fada*). Names have intrinsic potency. They fix the identity of the person or thing they are attributed to, endowing it with substance and stability while also “activating” it. Jamilou and his friends understood that by naming their *fada*, they effectively brought it into existence. As “Nice Boys,” the group acquired a visibility in the neighborhood it previously lacked.

How young Nigerien men yearning to become “somebodies” affirm their presence in the city is what I explore in this chapter through a focus on the *fada* as a locus of self-narration. By considering the names and signs *fadantchés* inscribe on “their” walls as biographical fragments, I trace the ways in which some urban residents use the street, transforming their neighborhoods when they do not have the power to transform their world on a wider scale. More street art than tagging (though they can be that too), the

inscriptions saturating the urban landscape with inspirational messages enhance rather than violate public space while also making it inhabitable. As such, they are a critical means through which otherwise voiceless cohorts of socially adrift young men stake claims to the city—at least, parts of it. While *fadas* constitute private spaces where *fadantchés* can feel “at home,” they are also part of public space. Indeed the aim of wall inscriptions is to enhance the visibility of *fadas* and the fame of their members. As we shall see, young men’s practices of “quiet encroachment” (Bayat 2010: 56) ultimately make possible the emergence of new expressions of sociality and new performances of urban identity—what AbdouMaliq Simone (2010: 3) calls “cityness.” Beyond the question of how the street is inhabited by male youth, my focus on *fadas* as discursive objects is also an attempt to think about temporality. The names young men select for their *fadas* are often aspirational, intended to open up hoped-for futures by invoking prosperity and potency. Using the *fadas*’ inscriptions as an interpretive road map, this chapter considers how naming aims to both stabilize a form of street sociability and secure futurity in the face of narrowed horizons. It is based on ethnographic, archival, and photographic research conducted since 2004 in Dogondoutchi, a small town of heterogenous Hausa speakers close to the Nigerian border, and Niamey, a multi-ethnic, sprawling metropolis and the country’s center of gravity.

When I first met Jamilou, he was waiting for the return of the child he had sent off to buy tea and sugar from a nearby vendor (young children are often used as errand boys by older kin and neighbors). I was walking home, after visiting a friend. He had greeted me from the shelter where he was sitting and, after a bit of conversation, invited me to join him and his friends. I sat with the group for over an hour, relieved to escape momentarily the stifling midday sun. The *fada* stood in a treeless, potholed dirt alley on the edge of one of Dogondoutchi’s oldest neighborhoods. There was no sidewalk for pedestrians to steer clear of the occasional motorcar or donkey cart passing through, and during the rainy season, torrential rains turned the district into a mud bath. The multigenerational, earthen walled compounds lining the alley lacked electricity, and refuse filled the open sewers. Save for the rhythmic thumping of women’s mortars and pestles and an occasional child’s wail, few sounds punctured the quiet stillness of this stretch of street. It was a Saturday, and other members of Nice Boys, looking forward to an afternoon of card games punctuated by servings of tea, were trickling in. By the time the child returned with tea and sugar, Jamilou had lit the charcoal, rinsed the tea glasses, and filled the tea kettle with water.

While waiting for the content of the kettle—a tiny pot displaying the *fada*’s initials in large white letters—to boil, Jamilou described how his *fada* was born and how “Nice Boys” was the name its members eventually settled on. It captured the image the *fadantchés* wished to project by suggesting not only that they were decent, upright individuals, but also that they

were youth, free to experiment and have fun.¹ The use of English conveyed a certain urban “cool,” connoting flair, sophistication. It signaled that the young men had attended school where they had acquired rudiments of the language.² A few months later, the inscription NICE BOYS—in bright blue letters outlined in white—appeared on the wall at the foot of which *fadantchés* routinely gathered to chat and play backgammon.

Five years had passed. The *fada* had grown from five to twelve members who ranged in age from 21 to 25 years and lived in the same neighborhood. The majority had received some education, though few had graduated from high school. One young man was a plumber’s apprentice. Three worked as mechanics or electricians. A couple of them were still in school. The rest were unemployed. They met at the *fada* in the evening and at the weekend. On Saturdays the treasurer collected contributions (500 CFA francs per member) to pay for tea, sugar, charcoal and other expenses. The inscription on the *fadantchés*’ wall had started to fade and the paint was chipping, signaling that, while *fadas* operate as social magnets, drawing young men in and affording them some illusion of stability, they are nevertheless subject to the forces of weathering and decomposition.

The emergence of *fadas* in the 1990s is linked to several factors, including demographic growth, economic transformations, and ecological changes, that accelerated urban migration and youth unemployment. As a form of sociality that engages young men living in dense, spatialized concentrations of people, built form, and economic activity, the *fada* highlights how some subjects are made—and make themselves—in and through the social space of Nigerien towns and cities (Ruddick 1996). Today the *fada* is an integral part of the urban fabric. There are literally hundreds of *fadas* across Niamey, Niger’s capital, concentrated largely in lower-income residential neighborhoods. A single block may count six or seven *fadas* that claim the street as theirs. Aside from transforming the texture of the street, *fadas* recapitulate the recent evolution of Nigerien urban centers, reminding us that the city is a space of convergence for people, things, and ideas from around the country—and the larger world. By congregating at a given spot, literally actualizing their togetherness through the dense, inward-looking clusters their assembled bodies make, economically excluded young men—many of whom were born elsewhere—cultivate a sense of belonging. They convert segments of the street into intimate spaces—“dwellings” in the Heideggerian sense (Figure 21.1).³

The inscriptions they stamp on the walls (and the movable benches they often sit on) mark the actual spot where they assemble. By visibly anchoring the *fada* in the urban landscape, they stabilize what would otherwise be mere “human infrastructure” (Simone 2004).

The *fada* is a site of experimentation where young men forge expressions of masculinity through music, bodybuilding, and other modes of self-making (Masquelier 2019a).⁴ The bold, occasionally irreverent performances they engage in are possible because the *fada* is a social laboratory—a

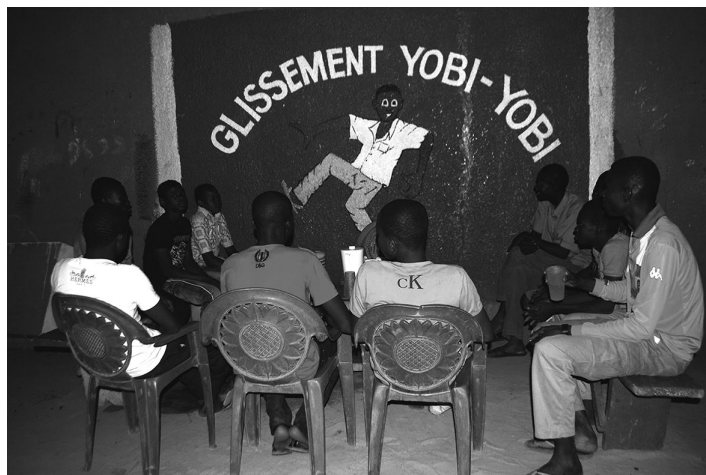


Figure 21.1 Fadantchés assembled at Yobi Yobi, the *fada* they named after a Coupé-Décalé song by Ivoirian musician Dj Consty. Credit: Adeline Masquelier.

place for bracketing the world of adults and testing how life might be lived without having to worry about consequences (Masquelier 2019b). As an instantiation of place-making, the *fada* is a reminder that efforts to define youth as a social category necessarily call for the control of spatiality (Massey 1998). To be sure, in a region where people spend much of their time outdoors, place-making takes on multiple forms (Pellow 2008; Schildkrout 1979). Though *fadas* borrow from and build on existing modes of being-in-the-street, they also speak to wider generational issues that transcend local practices of inhabiting space. In the face of boredom, unemployment, and poverty, youngsters across the continent and beyond are fashioning new structures of sociality. In Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, youth have joined tea-circles known as *grins* (Bondaz 2013; Dessertine 2020; Kieffer 2006), but the characteristics of age groups elsewhere in West Africa vary considerably (Langevang 2008; Lentz 1995; Vigh 2006). In Dakar, for instance, young men swap clothing with other members of their “support” groups to keep themselves looking fresh (Scheld 2007).

The recent focus on infrastructure, partly inspired by the work of urban theorist Henri Lefebvre, has contributed key insight into how space and informality in African cities must be interrogated if we are to understand the diverse and dispersed practices the urban poor, including youth, migrants, and minorities, engage in to make life viable. In their efforts to secure precarious livelihoods, residents in Dakar, Kinshasa and elsewhere continually transform their urban environment by erecting illegal shacks, recycling infrastructural fragments, disabling electricity meters, or branding

space through the use of graffiti (Chalfin 2014; Chance 2018; De Boeck & Plissart 2004). By charting the informal cartographies of belonging that emerge out of struggles over space, water, and other resources, scholars have shown that, to paraphrase Simone (2006), the cities that Africans make work on a number of levels. In the way they take over the streets while escaping institutional control, *fadas* are a striking instantiation of how people marginalized by the workings of capital claim their “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1968) through routine actions, bold improvisations, and chance encounters. By sitting in the street, laying down their utensils for tea preparation, and scribbling on walls, *fadantchés* appropriate public space and undermine spatial arrangements that naturalize structures of inequality.

Urban Sociality

At the core, the *fada* is a place of conversation where members seek relief from life’s burdens through verbal exchange, companionship, and the performance of daily routines, such as tea-drinking. In short, it is a meeting place. As a young man once flippantly put it, “no one has ever seen a *fada* with one single person.” This also means that the *fada* is a social practice in the sense that the gathering of people is what realizes the *fada* while giving *fadantchés* a sense of place.⁵ Far then from constituting inert containers for human activity, *fadas* are continually remade by the social interactions they enable. Paradoxically their capacity to produce an existential insidedness—a feeling of belonging—is what contributes to their enduring presence.

The first *fadas* were associated with the advent of democracy, the implementation of massive cuts in public services, the flexibilization of the labor market, and the concomitant precarization of livelihoods (Masquelier 2019b). While boycotting classes to pressure the government to introduce political reforms in 1990, university students in Niamey sat in the street and drank tea. Their informal discussion groups became known as *fadas*, a term that previously referred strictly to the chief’s or the emir’s court. This was a time of optimism. The emergence of spaces of public debate and the appointment of a democratically elected leader in 1991 elicited great hope among the citizenry, especially educated youths yearning to find their rightful place in society. Following the lifting of the curfew instituted under the previous regime (when military patrols policed Niamey’s streets at night and broke up gatherings), *fadas* cropped up as young men, many of them jobless, met in the street after dark to chat while sipping heavily sugared tea. In provincial towns, private radios emerged in the wake of media deregulation, fueling the creation of additional *fadas*. By mediating *fadantchés’* activities (airing greetings, interviews, and so on), these radios encouraged their participation in an amplified sociality while also contributing to the creation of “intimate publics” (Berlant 2008: viii).

Unfortunately, the democratic experiment did not spur economic development. Instead, young job seekers were sidelined by successive governments forced by debt and dependence on foreign aid to prioritize the requirements of the global economy over the needs of their citizens. Compelled by international lenders to adopt free market-style economic prescriptions and make drastic cuts to social programs, the state stopped acting as a job provider. Rather than hiring fresh graduates into the civil service, it implemented early retirements for civil servants and put stringent limits on future recruitment. Social programs, including education, were handed to a flexible, disposable labor force. Throughout Niger the quality of education declined, employment opportunities dwindled, and, following a currency devaluation and the elimination of subsidies, the cost of living rose.⁶

These stringent reforms (known as structural adjustment programs) were supposed to be temporary corrective measures, a bitter “policy medicine” (Clark 2005: 6) with short-term side effects. Unfortunately, the side effects—widespread unemployment, low-quality education, and so on—turned into a permanent condition. Today many Nigeriens lead precarious lives. Rapid population growth has compounded the challenges posed by poverty, unemployment, and inadequate government assistance.⁷ Every year roughly half a million new job seekers enter the labor market—a significant number in a country of 22 million people. Most of the recent graduates cannot enter the reformed public sector except as temporary, poorly paid workers, and they compete with older graduates searching for stable employment. Meanwhile the private sector continues to underperform, failing even to replace slashed government jobs.

Formal education no longer guarantees stable employment, but it has created aspirations, discouraging many youths with diplomas from accepting “lowly” employment.⁸ Some opt to remain jobless rather than engage in menial or poorly paid work. Others are forced into survivalist underemployment. All nevertheless wait for the “right” job to come along. Competition is fierce. Many youths believe the system is rigged against poor candidates, who cannot benefit from the patronage and nepotism favoring their wealthier, well-connected counterparts. Those with little or no education also struggle to find permanent employment; they swell the transport, trade, construction, and service sectors. The means of support they stitch up by hustling, peddling, and improvising are largely inadequate.

Lacking the resources to provide for dependents, un(der)employed *samari* delay marriage, parenthood, and the creation of households: a stable income is a sine qua non of marriage. In a society where one transitions to adulthood by acquiring dependents, young men who cannot marry are trapped in social immaturity⁹ (Masquelier 2020a). As infrastructures of anticipation, *fadas* help jobless *samari* “wait out the crisis” (Hage 2009: 97). At one level, they are vital outlets for young men in need of self-affirmation. At another level, they constitute critical nodal points, nurturing wider networks of mobility and exchange (Youngstedt 2013). Recurrent drought,

land shortages, environmental degradation, and other factors have accelerated the exodus of rural populations.

Granted, male migration to urban centers to stave off poverty in the countryside has a long history. Before the democratization, police raids targeted idle male youth in Niamey. Perceived as a security threat, young men were carted off to the countryside before the rainy season under the pretext they were needed for farming activities. Today young men who migrated to urban centers can join *fadas* and sit in the street with friends without fearing deportation. They travel home knowing they can rely on the *fada* upon their return. In Niamey, a city defined by migration and *brassage* (Alidou 2005), or ethnic mixing, *fadas* contribute in complex ways to the dense traffic of people, goods, and ideas at the heart of urban life.

Infrastructures of Anticipation

“Why the *fada*? Because sometimes at home there is nothing! At the *fada*, people feed you.¹⁰ They are your friends,” is how 23-year-old Ibrahim described the relevance of *fadas* in the lives of young urbanites. Ibrahim had received material assistance from fellow *fadantchés* when, after moving to Niamey in search of employment, he struggled. The *fada*, the young man implied, was a source of emotional sustenance for lonely migrants who felt engulfed by the vast, impersonal city. Ibrahim initially assumed that he would support his widowed mother and younger siblings and also save enough to marry. Life in the capital was costly, however, and what he earned, selling fruit at a busy intersection, only permitted him to send small remittances to his mother. He periodically returned to his natal village (loaded with gifts) to lend a hand on the family farm: “I pretend I’m doing well. It’s a question of honor, you know.” In reality, Ibrahim often owed money to friends and money lenders. At Bienvenue, the *fada* where he met his friends after hawking fruit all day, he found relief and reassurance. “At the *fada*, we talk. I share my frustrations and anxieties. The guys, they understand, they support me. We treat each other with respect, we also make fun of each other. It’s good,” Ibrahim told me. Structured around masculine expectations and concerns, Bienvenue offered Ibrahim and his friends something like permanence in the face of uncertainties.

The modes of sociality male African youth improvise to cope with economic exclusion have long been a focus of urban researchers. Didier Gondola (1999) documented how la SAPE (or Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes) became a refuge where young Congolese working in Europe forged new identities away from home and withstood the vagaries of migrant life. Though most held menial jobs, they spent lavishly on stylish clothes. They joined clubs named for elegant dressers and held soirées where guests paraded in fashionable, pricy attires.

Mamadou Diouf (1992) analyzed how Senegalese youth redefined the logics of sociability in public places through their massive refurbishing of

Dakar in the late 1980s. Armed with brooms and paintbrushes, they irrupted on the public scene to pick up garbage and beautify neighborhoods, rewriting the history of the city through their expressions of civic engagement. In his ethnography of popular culture in urban Tanzania, Brad Weiss (2009) explored how barber shops constitute crucial nexuses of male sociality for young men struggling to carve places of relevance in an unevenly globalized world. The persistence of these and other forms of urban sociality in structurally adjusted Africa makes clear that living in African cities depends on makeshift, multivalent support systems that offer compensation in the midst of poverty and precarity.

Like other disenfranchised youths elsewhere on the continent (Hansen 2005; Mains 2007), jobless *samari* (who spend most of their waking hours at the *fada*) describe time as a source of unease and anxiety that must be suppressed by creating forms of engagement with the world that make one “forget” time.¹¹ “The majority of *samari* in Niger have nothing to do. You get up in the morning *sans casser* [without having breakfast], you spend the whole day at the *fada*, and then you go home at night,” a *fadantché* told me. The *fada*, he implied, filled young men’s empty lives with companionship, conversation, and cheer. It was a means of managing boredom. An essential dimension of *fada* life, without which, *fadantchés* often insist, there would be no *fada*, is what I have called “teatime” (Masquelier 2013). During teatime, the restless wait for jobs and opportunities is converted into a principled modality of anticipation that is as congenial as it is rewarding for it invariably leads to multiple sipping of robustly flavored tea. More than a simple pastime, teatime reinserts participants in the flow of things, contributing to more encompassing efforts to orient those who are “stuck” toward some sort of future (Masquelier 2020b).¹²

Some *fadantchés* meet in the familial compound (to access electricity or enjoy the shade of a large tree) but most sit in the street. While they aim to carve a sense of intimacy in public space, they are also trying to escape the strictures of family life. By occupying the street through the creation of what Florence Boyer (2014: 12) calls “*salons temporaires*” (temporary lounges), *samari* help us see how streets, far from invariably functioning as “non-places” (Augé 1995) designed for the efficient circulation of goods and people, can be places for friends to socialize. Lefebvre argued that rather than privileging function over livability, profit over people, and security over sociality, the modern city should accommodate the needs, values, and aspirations of its residents. In sum, the street should be “more than just a place for movement and circulation” (2003 [1970]: 18). It must be a meeting place or “*topos*” (18). Without the street, Lefebvre (18) writes, “no other designated encounters are possible (cafés, theaters, halls). These places animate the street and are served by its animation, or they cease to exist. In the street, a form of spontaneous theater, I become spectacle and spectator, and sometimes an actor. The street is where movement takes place, the interaction without which urban life would not exist.” In what

follows, I draw on Lefebvre's vision of the street as a lived space—a forum animated by, and responsive to, the performances of actors and the spectacle they produce—to consider how *fadantchés* transform the urban fabric and give shape to their yet undetermined futures through the branding of space.

Branding Space

With names such as Delta Boys, Dragon Show, and Les Meilleurs (The Best Ones), *fadas* bring together young men who are fond of martial arts, hip-hop, or Reggae culture, share religious or political views, or simply enjoy hanging out together. They often function as peer-based support associations, helping members raise money to migrate, marry, or cover unexpected costs. Jobless young men who sit together for much of the night keep watch on their patch of street. Their *fadas* double up as informal systems of surveillance, further contributing to the myriad regulatory mechanisms that shape urban space while also undermining claims of young men's irrelevance. The make-up of *fadas* varies widely. Some count stably employed members. Others are largely composed of un(der)employed *samari*. Yet others join mostly secondary school or university students. While some *fadas* are fairly homogenous, most bring together young men with different ethnicities, levels of education, and so on. Diverse as their social profile may be, what many *fadantchés* share is an awareness of their economic vulnerability.¹³



Figure 21.2 Some young men enhance the intimate character of their *fada* by visibly marking its boundaries with bricks, tires, and other objects. Credit: Adeline Masquelier.

As instantiation of topos, *fadas* remain contingent projects, forever subject to the coming and going of people. To anchor their *fadas* in space, some *fadantchés* fence them off with bricks, tires, and more rarely, vegetation (Figure 21.2).

Members of Adalci (Justice) planted a small neenimm when they founded their *fada*. Tree planting is a civic act in Niger.¹⁴ For the Adalci membership, planting the neem was also a way of mooring the *fada*. Ten years later, the tree had grown enough to provide shade for those who assembled there. Elsewhere “found objects” (a large tree trunk, a weathered fence, an abandoned grate) mark the space of the *fada* in the absence of its members. These objects can serve as sitting devices. Though practices of recycling and *détournement* such as these are often critical to the politics and aesthetics of *fadas*,¹⁵ few *fadas* invest in permanent structures. Some fill “their” space with movable furniture: wooden benches, painted in the *fada*’s colors; an overturned table (street vendors’ stalls are meeting places for *fadas*). Like the portable infrastructure traders leave behind to demarcate their vending spaces, benches serve as stand-ins when the *fadantchés* are away.

In the absence of material infrastructure, it is more often than not the inscriptions painted on street walls that serve as substitutes for *fadantchés*. Consider Boukoki, a Niamey neighborhood which abuts the bustling central district filled with wide avenues and high rises and which *fadantchés* have renamed “Book City.” It counts both rows of opulent villas bordered by luxuriant vegetation and mazes of adobe-walled streets and pathways linking modest, crowded compounds. In the neighborhood’s humbler sections, the mud or cinderblock walls surrounding compounds, schools, and businesses are saturated with *fadas*’ inscriptions. Given how much time the average person spends outdoors, walking, praying,¹⁶ conducting business or exchanging greetings, these inscriptions are as much part of the sensorial environment local residents inhabit as the flashing lights directing traffic at large intersections, the glowing signs of restaurants and food marts, and the large billboards advertising the virtues of Nescafé or the convenience of Western Union.

By marking the actual spot where members assemble nightly, wall inscriptions emplace the *fada*.¹⁷ In some respects, they function like graffiti: both unsettle the normative codification of space. They divert space so it serves communicative functions it was not intended for. *Fadantchés*, like graffiti artists, imprint public spaces with their signature words and images. They brand space to make themselves known to the neighborhood. A characteristic of graffiti is illegibility. *Fada* inscriptions too can be cryptic—a coded form of communication between members of a particular subculture. In other respects, they differ from urban graffiti. Graffiti constitute a form of unsanctioned public art. It is through the brazen transgression of law and custom that graffiti artists acquire fame (Macdonald 2001). In contrast, *fada* inscriptions typically appear once *fadantchés* receive permission to use a wall to express themselves. Rather than taking clandestine ownership of

urban space, as graffiti artists do, *fadantchés* publicize their appropriation of the wall by sitting conspicuously against it on a quotidian basis. To highlight how *fada* inscriptions disturb the neat distinction between verbal and pictorial registers and to differentiate them from graffiti, I describe them as “image-texts.”

Not only do image-texts emplace the *fada*, endowing it with a public presence it would otherwise lack, but they are also “in place”: rather than defacing the walls, they give them a face. As such, they become part of a complex assemblage of signs, words, and meanings, transforming streets into texts that progressively blend in with their environment as they fade and peel. Not all image-texts have the same visual impact. Some seem “out of place” in the sense that they may be experienced by onlookers as disturbance, violation, offense—an unauthorized intervention into public space. Yet they too contribute to the vibrant scriptural economy of Niamey, Dogondoutchi, and other Nigerien towns. Massive or modest, prudent or provocative, *fada* inscriptions seek to domesticate walls, not disfigure them. They are, most *samari* would argue, a genuine, frequently exuberant form of artistic expression as well as a legitimate mode of urban beautification.

Ranging from childish, awkward scribbles to sophisticated verbal displays, image-texts advertise a particular vision of the city and of the place of youth in it. Some of them are easy to miss—a minor scrawl, half erased—and hard to decipher—a jumble of letters fighting for space or a palimpsestic amalgamation of messages layered over one another.¹⁸ Others



Figure 21.3 Some *fada* inscriptions are shaped by and resonate with the wall’s formal properties, such as the color of a shutter, creating a visually striking effect that interpellates passersby. Credit: Adeline Masquelier.

are impossible to overlook: their sharp, confident lettering and colorful imagery jumps into one's field of vision (Figure 21.3).

Like graffiti, *fada* inscriptions are part of the "liquid architecture" (Fredrick in Young 2014: 28) of urban spaces. While they materialize the *fada*, paradoxically, their own materiality is always threatened. Indeed the life span of image-texts is relatively short. They must endure the brunt of the weather, including relentless sunrays year-round and torrential rains from June to September. At times, they must also contend with the territorial ambitions of rival *fadas*. It is not unusual to find an old inscription (imperfectly) concealed under a new one. Such cover-up is less an invasion than it is part of a wider process of regeneration, however. More often than not, the former occupants have already left by the time a new *fada* takes over the space.

Fada inscriptions belong to a wider textual ecology that includes storefronts, traffic signs, and billboards.¹⁹ Yet they do not rivalize with other signage for space and visibility for they occupy an aesthetic niche of their own.²⁰ Driving through the more modest neighborhoods of Niamey, one is struck by the often messy, chaotic, and seemingly indiscriminate profusion of inscriptions that adorn street walls, enlivening urban space while also serving as territorial markings for *fadas*. Urban surfaces reveal *samari*'s constant battle for visibility. As previously noted, *fadas* advertise their existence to the neighborhood by inscribing their names in public space: Lion Star, Feux du Dragon (Fire of the Dragon), Le Pirate, Coeur du Cobra (Heart of the Cobra), Young Money, and so on. The louder (or larger) the lettering, the better. Some inscriptions rely heavily on the pictorial register to attract viewers' attention: stylized flowers, heart symbols, a lion's head, or a young man in full hip-hop gear. Other inscriptions are starker, consisting solely of words. The content of lettered messages is not always transparent. *Fadantchés* often encrypt cultural codes and foreign referents in *fada* names (some *fadas* are named after US rappers and Ivoirian musicians) to signify their membership in a subculture of *branchés* (plugged-in) individuals. They make frequent use of acronyms, such as RJG for "Rassemblement des Jeunes Garçons" (Gathering of Young Boys), thereby excluding those who are not "in the loop."

Fadantchés sometimes speak of wanting to be famous, that is, they long to earn recognition from rival *fadas*. As signatures or self-portraits, the image-texts etched on street walls transform blank surfaces into mediums of self-promotion. When cleverly designed and colorful, they can be an important tool for gaining the respect of other youths. Not all of them are bold, unique, and eye-catching, yet they serve as promotional devices. A young man once referred to his *fada*'s wall writing as the members' "*carte de visite*," the calling card the *fada* presented to the world. By providing basic information about an individual, business cards function as memory aids. They give the outside world a positive impression of the person they stand for and highlight their unique qualifications. Like business cards,

many image-texts designed for *fadas* feature a recognizable logo (a star, a dollar sign) that serves as a symbol of the *fada* and a mnemonic device. In the rarer instances when they include phone numbers or personal names, they operate as a literal *carte de visite*, transmitting contact information while publicizing the *fada*.

Numerous *fada* inscriptions feature large black lettering dancing against a white backdrop—or white words and symbols confidently displayed against a black or blue background. In neighborhoods where everything—including streets, buildings, and courtyards—is the shade of the earth, displays of clashing primary colors catch the public’s eye from a distance, helping promote the image *fadantchés* wish to project. When *fadantchés* add “*vive*” (hurray) before the *fada*’s name, inscriptions turn into congratulatory messages. More than signaling the *fadas*’ existence, the inscriptions “Vive Paradis des Jeunes” (Hurray for the Paradise of Youth) or “Vive Fada Love” (Hurray for Love Fada) also celebrate it. And by signaling that these *fadas* are worthy of celebrations, they challenge the forms of exclusion associated with being young and poor in urban Niger.

In the way they hail youth and redefine solidarity, the cheerful messages that speckle urban walls instantiate how citizenship emerges “from below” in contexts of chronic disenfranchisement. By drawing on the power of aesthetics to lift themselves out of invisibility, *fadantchés* remind us that, in an era when the project of an inclusive society of citizens is increasingly challenged, cities are vital arenas for the performance of alternative modes of belonging. With their concentration of diversity, novelty, and foreignness, cities make possible the emergence of “new kinds of citizenship, new sources of law, and new participation in the decisions that bind” (Holston and Appadurai 1996: 187–8).

Naming *Fadas*

Large or small, a *fada* is not fully recognized until it acquires a name. The day a *fada* is conferred a name is the day it is “born” to the neighborhood. Many *fadas* commemorate annually the naming event year. Some host loud, extravagant anniversary parties to which they invite members of neighboring *fadas*; the goal is to impress guests and spread the fame of the *fada*.²¹ Others keep the celebration low-key, especially if they have limited funds. Members of Galaxy arbitrarily picked August 20 as the *fada*’s founding day since no one remembered the actual date when the *fada* received its name. Galaxy’s first anniversary had come and gone. There had been little time to plan—besides, the membership was in flux. When I spoke with a member, the second anniversary was seven months away yet *fadantchés* were already planning a celebration that would stick indelibly in public memory.

For young men struggling to overcome marginalization, the act of bestowing a name on their *fada* is a critical mode of self-affirmation—a way of reminding others that they matter. The names they choose are often

self-aggrandizing—a reference to the success, wealth and popularity they enjoy or will soon enjoy: Super Roi (Super King), Master Boys, Dominateur (Domineering), or Étoile (Star). “We called our *fada* ‘Jeunes Stars’ [Young Stars] so people would know we are champions. We want them to say we’re better than anyone else,” explained Mamadou, one of Jeunes Stars’ oldest members. Mamadou had left school at 14 to travel to Ghana in search of wealth before settling back in Niamey a few years later. He was 17 when he joined the *fada*. Initially he and his friends picked the lion as their emblem. Lions are thought to be strong, brave, and fierce. Symbolizing prowess and audacity, they are the definition of potency.²² After producing an awkward sketch of a lion that looked more like a bear than a feline, they enlisted the services of a professional painter. The man, one of the members’ uncle, did not charge them for his work. The *fadantchés* wanted him to paint a lion on their wall, but he told them it would be too difficult. Since they were not paying him, the young men did not argue. They ended up with a star—a logical choice, given the name of their *fada*.

By calling *fadas* into existence, names are guarantors of relative stability. They help *fadantchés* weave a narrative of their *fada* and highlight its distinctive character.²³ At the same time, because *fadantchés* often borrow from a limited repertoire of signifiers, the names and symbols they select threaten to undermine the very uniqueness they strive for. “The star is our emblem, so we collect T-shirts and paraphernalia [such as baseball caps] with stars. Of course, we painted [the star] on our wall, our benches, our teapot,” Mamadou explained as if Jeunes Stars was the only *fada* using the star as its identifying logo. In a neighborhood saturated with astral symbols, the five-pointed red star at the center of Jeunes Stars’ wall inscription seemed derivative—an archetypical example of the image that surfaced in *fadantchés*’ minds when they thought of stars. Yet there was also something special about it. Sharply designed and subtly highlighted by a blue outline, it exemplified Derridaesque *différance*.

Jacques Derrida (1978) misspelled *différence* to stress that language is nothing but differences playing against one another in such a way that meaning emerges relationally. By deliberately replacing the “e” with an “a,” Derrida gestured to the verb *différer* (to differ *and* to defer) so he could argue that signs—and words—can never fully summon what they mean and must be defined instead through an endless chain of signifiers. I contend that rather than being stable, self-contained, and singular, the meaning of a *fada*’s name is often deferred. It can only be fully appreciated in terms of its resonance with other names and in the context of the wider scriptural economy of *fadas*. Jeunes Stars may not be as original a name as Mamadou suggested it was (Rassemblement des Jeunes Stars, Étoile, Quick Boys Star, Les Stars, Star Clen (sic), and Jeunes Star Boys were among the names I collected in the same neighborhood at one time). Yet its capacity to interpellate and amaze derived precisely from its popularity and power of resonance.

Fadas are platforms for the cultivation of competitive sociality. They thrive through the enactment of mutual, reiterated rivalries. Naming is one of the ways through which groups of *fadantchés* attempt to outdo one another and enhance their visibility in a landscape shaped by a culture of masculine waiting. Finding the right name for one's *fada* thus requires navigating deftly between familiarity and novelty, timelessness and trendiness, and emulation and inventiveness. A name should not be overused yet it must nevertheless summon recognition, otherwise it cannot acquire the kind of social capital from which *fadantchés* derive their own validation.

Consider the case of Master Boys whose members felt that the city was overrun with *fadas* with names that included "Master" or "Boys." They re-baptized themselves Les Mecks (sic) Show, which they felt was trendier than Master Boys (*mecs* is French argot for "guys"). "There are trends. When fashion changes, we change our name. This is our third name change," a member of Les Mecks Show recounted, suggesting that young men reproduce what they see out there yet also strive to remain current through their name selections. A group of young men from Dogondoutchi originally called themselves Zouc Machine to advertise their fondness for Zouk, a musical style from the French Antilles. A few years later, they changed their name to KCG, an acronym for Kullum Cin Gumi (Always Eating Good Food), before eventually renaming their *fada* Super Zouc. "We were trying to fit in. We tried different names, hoping to strike the right note," a 40-year-old man who once belonged to the now defunct *fada* recalled.

The names *fadantchés* select work in the double sense that they fit the *fada* (by suiting its personality) and they perform work. Put differently, they are simultaneously expressive and performative. They describe fittingly a certain reality while also actualizing that reality. For instance, by highlighting what a *fada*'s members have in common, they attract other youths who share similar interests: a fondness for *coupé-décalé* (a musical style from Côte d'Ivoire), a Christian identity, a desire to emigrate to the US. As a member of Cowboy put it, "For us, the name 'Cowboy' felt right. We liked cowboys; we followed their adventures. In fact, we were passionate about their way of life. All of us watched cowboy films. We tried to be like them." When selecting a name, some *fadantchés* draw inspiration from figures of heroic masculinity. Like the screen martial artist and the black US rapper, the cowboy embodies smarts, audacity, and virility, signaling that *fadas* are microcosms of social aspirations.

Fadantchés are aware of the power located in the capacity to name. Paradis des Jeunes (Youth Paradise), Secteur X, Amani (Faith), Les Gars Branchés (The Plugged-in Guys), Karate Boys, and Black Star\$ are examples of clever, evocative, yet also economical names. Whether they aim for levity or gravitas, praise or provocation, wisdom or obfuscation, *fada* names encapsulate a whole ethos in a laconic formula, suggesting that verbal dexterity is a crucial skill that young men like to deploy to set themselves apart

from the crowd. *Fadantchés* sometimes speak of how names function as “the definition” (*la définition*) of *fadas*, condensing in a word or two (or three) the essence of their age groups. “Jeunes Amis Sérieux is who we are. We don’t fight, we respect people. We are honest, we work hard. That’s the definition of our *fada*,” a young man explained, suggesting he understood the connection between name and identity. To prevent any conflation of their *fada* with “those guys who sit around all day,” some *fadantchés* select names connoting diligence or dynamism—Speed Boys, Samourai, Les Américain (sic). “We called our *fada* ‘Niya Ba Ta Ga Rago’ [The Lazy One Has No Goal] to let everyone know we work hard, we’re not lazy,” a young man said. The name made clear he and his friends were not parasites living off the sweat of laborious parents, as critics of the *fada* system often claimed.

After much soul-searching, a group of friends named their *fada* “Technique” because they had a large boombox that was set to Radio 24, a radio station from Niamey where two of the members worked. In fact, it was thanks to the radio that they had met. They gathered in the early evening at the entrance of the large compound housing the station, in one of Niamey’s newest neighborhoods populated by recent migrants as well as life-long residents pushed out of pricier central districts. On their darkly lit street block, further clouded by the fumes of women’s cooking fires, four other *fadas* gathered nightly so that the crackling sound of loud music escaping from boomboxes and the roar of motorcycle engines coming and going permeated the otherwise tranquil neighborhood (affordable motorcycles from China have revolutionized urban mobility in the increasingly congested city).

While reminding us that the history of *fadas* is intertwined with the emergence of private radio stations (Lund 2009; Masquelier 2019b), Technique also evokes the place of technology in young men’s gatherings. Before cell phones privatized *fadantchés*’ musical experiences, the portable radio was an essential component of *fada* sociality. As such, it figured prominently on wall inscriptions next to the iconic tea kettle. Not only was it a privileged vehicle for the dissemination of musical cultures, such as hip-hop, but by enabling young men to follow public debates about the nation, governance, and so forth, it contributed to the formation of *fadas* as political forums. When I first met members of Technique, the *fada* was barely six months old and counted 15 members. A friend of mine, a taxi driver, had recently joined it. After driving people all day across the city, he enjoyed “decompressing” at the *fada*. Two other members worked in road construction. The rest were unemployed or labored intermittently as *dockers* (loaders) in nearby markets. All spent (at least part of) their evenings at the *fada*, listening to music and playing cards. Though its name was not inscribed anywhere, Technique instantiates how the *fada* “exerts a force—not simply in the materials and energies it avails, but also the way it attracts people, draws them in, coalesces and expends their capacities” (Simone 2015: 375).

Naming the Future

Naming, Clifford Geertz (1973: 363) wrote, is a crucial dimension of converting “anybodies” into “somebodies.” Like the *nom de guerre* adopted by *fadantchés* to enhance their personal reputation, the name a *fada* receives marshals recognition. “You take a name when people don’t know you. Once you’re known, you don’t need a name,” Bashir, a 22-year-old member of Delta Boys, explained. More than a simple matter of assignation, naming a *fada* provides a vehicle of self-realization, putting the accent on young men’s accomplishments or future projects, Bashir implied. Like a stone gathers moss, names gather esteem, praise, history, even, glory. In fact, names are picked for their ability not only to *épater* (amaze) or *intimider* (overawe) but also to amass stories (and images) that swell the reputation of the *fada* and enhance the *fadantchés*’ chances of accessing resources.

In sum, *fada* names provide a frame for a future foretold. In a world of limited opportunity and circumscribed value, conjuring distant elsewhere through naming is an effort to position oneself toward the future. In the words of a young man,

We named our *fada* Kansas. We found the name in an atlas. We wanted to be named after a place in the US. It’s been almost seven years since we started. We were about ten at the beginning. All of us, except one, were unemployed. Now we are about forty. Aside from high school or university students, almost everyone has a job.

When I asked where they would like to go if they had a choice, almost everyone at Kansas said they would migrate to the US where, as a member put it, “by doing manual labor, like watering people’s gardens, I could make ten times what I can make here as a taximan.” Though they weren’t sure where Kansas was located, the name itself, weighty with visions of the good life, reveals how *fadas* constitute crucibles of hope where young men dispossessed of the predictable future can nurture their utopian yearnings. Looking at KANSAS plastered on the wall against which they sat was enough to bring them one step closer to the life they longed for—a life in which even manual laborers earned a decent income.

Names such as Las Vegas, Territoire des Milliardaires, Mexico, and Pacifik (sic) brackets City lifted from atlases, telenovelas, and other sources of global images signal that young Nigeriens live in “a culture of imaginary and exile” (Piot 2010: 3–4).²⁴ “Las Vegas is the city where you can earn a million dollars in a single day,” Adamou, a 20-year-old *fadantché* explained. The young man had no illusion that he would ever make it to Las Vegas. But he felt that places of wealth were “good to think with” in the sense that they gave you ambition. “We need jobs, of course. But we’re ready to work,” he said. “We demonstrate it every day through the projects we elaborate at the *fada*.” Besides encoding aspirational futures in legible

form, young men like Adamou remake the streets they inhabit “in the image of the topos they admire” (Weiss 2009: 75).

By rebranding their neighborhoods with foreign names, *fadantchés* contribute to the extensive cartography of youthful aspirations that is now an integral part of the urban fabric. Abdoulaye, a school leaver, explained what prompted him and his friends to name their *fada* after the US president’s residence:

We named our *fada* White Buildingue. The *fada* was created in 2008. The idea was to copy the American model, the place where Barak Obama, elected president of the USA, reigns. He is our idol. He is our buddy. I tell you, we were amazed to see *un black à la Maison Blanche* [a black man at the White House]. And it’s not just him. His wife is black, his children are black.

Names like White Buildingue or Las Vegas speak to the kind of futures *samari* aspire to. Like the young Ugandan musicians who, in their attempt to court fame and success, take evocative names that they hope will bring them closer to their desired future (Meinert and Schneidermann 2014), *samari* often chose names that condense their visions of the life they want to live one day. By relying on the magic of words to bring hope-for worlds into being, they are effectively “naming the future” (Meinert and Schneidermann 2014: 170). In the way it predicts a future that is closely aligned with the present, *naming* one’s *fada* after a famous hip-hop star or a sought-after destination is a form of temporal agency—a refusal to accept that the future may be foreclosed.

Writing the City

If as Lefebvre argued, space is the ultimate locus and medium of struggle, what practices of domain differentiation do the urban poor engage in to make life livable? How do youth carve out spaces of belonging in urban landscapes ill-adapted to their aspirations? By focusing on the makeshift combinations of space, objects, and practices that have emerged at the intersection of informality and precarity, scholars have productively explored how Africans are finding new ways to inhabit the city (Diouf and Fredericks 2014). Drawing on these and other contributions to the study of African cities, this chapter has analyzed urban spaces as discursive objects to document the strategies of inscription through which economically disenfranchised young men in Niger forge new identities and new imaginaries in the absence of predictable futures. At a time when the discourse of upward mobility routinely collides against the harsh realities of joblessness, *fadas* emerge as “places of the possible” (Lefebvre 1996: 156) where young men, haunted by a sense that they have been left behind, cultivate the art of waiting while developing practices of solidarity and belonging.²⁵

Fadas, I have argued, are forward-looking projects. While they procure stability in the face of the volatility of everyday life, they also serve as laboratories where *samari* can test out a range of possibilities while nurturing aspirations of the good life. At the *fada*, young men are encouraged to dream ambitiously, even chimerically, about the future. Many of them do so by selecting for their *fada* a name that condenses who (or where) they want to be in the future. “I want to go abroad,” Boubé, a member of Harlem Boys Clan, told me. “I’d like to see the ocean. The country I want to visit to is China. In China, they have girls that are very thin, very pretty. I’d like to marry a Chinese girl. I will be growing rice.” For Boubé, China personified the future: it was in China that he would farm, marry, and found a household. Like young men who select *fadas* names to convey fantasies that cannot find another language, Boubé’s vision of a Chinese future was contingent on the adoption of flexible strategies of survival, such as growing rice. It is by imagining the future that *fadantchés* test their self-definition against images of global success. They are well aware it might be wishful thinking. Yet most continue to hope and strive.

Examining how *samari* inhabit the city in this chapter has entailed a critical discussion of the branding of space. Scholars inspired by Michel de Certeau’s (1984) analysis of walking in the city as a form of pedestrian enunciation have considered how residents inscribe the city (Low 1999) and turn it into a “site of everyday practice” (Low 1996: 384). For Certeau, walking affirms, transgresses, or tries out the trajectories it “speaks.” Now, movement in the city need not be literal. In Niger it is through the types of movement—the forms of sociality—enacted by the *fada* that young men inscribe the city. By literally and figuratively writing the city, *fadas* enhance the legibility of the connections between larger social forces and the texture of the everyday. As infrastructures of paucity, they instantiate the ongoing labor of “‘stitching’ lacks and losses” (De Boeck 2015: 56) that urban living entails. They are a reminder that although “lack needs, [even] demands to be overcome,” it is also what drives collective desire and aspirations, and therefore what produces the very rhythm of the city (De Boeck 2015: 56).

Sketching the larger geography of intimacy *fadas* constitute helps us rethink the very idea of place in urban Niger. At one level, in their various stages of completion and decrepitude, the text-images adorning the walls against which *fadantchés* sit make plain that places are never still and the city itself is always a work in progress. At another level, by undermining a spatial logic designed to keep people moving across the urban landscape, young men’s tactical appropriation of the street alerts us to “places’ emancipatory possibilities” (Foucault 1991; Sen and Silverman 2014: 4). Armed with paintbrushes and imagination, *samari* narrate themselves through the names they stamp on the walls against which they sit. By inserting themselves in a “famescape,” they contribute yet another chapter to the history of their neighborhoods: for the narratives they weave by branding the streets with names, logos, and images are the very tissue that connect places and events in space.

Notes

- 1 Fun, which encompasses temporary, improvised, free-form practices, is seen by some analysts as the hallmark of young people (Bayat 2007).
- 2 In Niger, a francophone country, French remains the language of instruction in most schools, while English is taught as a foreign language, though some schools are starting to hold classes in vernacular languages.
- 3 Through his exploration of the constitutive relationship between people and their environment, Martin Heidegger (1977) has given us a basis for theorizing about placemaking and what it means to belong to a place.
- 4 The *fada* is a masculine space. In theory, young women are not excluded from the *fada* though in practice, very few *fadas* are gender-mixed. Because their mobility is monitored, young women avoid being seen at the *fada* in broad daylight.
- 5 Many *fadantchés* use terms such as “clan,” “rassemblement,” “solidarité,” and “family” as part of their *fada* names. By capturing the *fada*’s cohesiveness, such names remind us that places are not fixed entities stably demarcated from some “outside,” but emerge out of social interactions and movements (Massey 1994).
- 6 The post-Fordist narrative that frames analyses of current unemployment and precarity in the Global North cannot account for socioeconomic transformations in structurally adjusted Niger. Industry and manufacture have never had any significant role. The dramas of belonging and exclusion played out at *fadas* are scripted by a nostalgia for a brief period of post-independence prosperity and fueled by aspirations for government jobs seen as prestigious and profitable.
- 7 Niger is the youngest country on earth with 75% of its population under 25 years of age.
- 8 Craig Jeffrey (2010) notes how in India young men felt similarly entitled to salaried work because of the education they had received. Their qualifications should be sufficient, they claimed, to guarantee them a government job.
- 9 In this overwhelmingly Muslim society (over 95% of Nigeriens are Muslim), unmarried cohabitation is not an option and children born out of wedlock are a source of shame for families.
- 10 Aside from their literal meaning as nourishment, eating and feeding in Hausa refer to the social transactions people engage in.
- 11 When the future opens up as anticipated, Pierre Bourdieu (2000) writes, we hardly notice time. We only experience “what we call time when the quasi-automatic coincidence between expectations and chances” (208) is shattered.
- 12 For many elders, the sight of young men sitting around a bubbling teapot is emblematic of what is wrong with society. They take the idleness of youth as a symptom of laziness rather than systemic inequality.
- 13 When *fadantchés* settle into new jobs, migrate, or marry, they devote less time to the *fada*. In some cases, the *fada* disappears. Occasionally it is taken over by younger brothers.
- 14 Nigeriens celebrate Independence Day (August 3rd) every year by planting trees.
- 15 I draw here on Guy Debord’s (1995) notion of *détournement* as the appropriation of ideas, images and objects to suit different, often subversive ends. The concept of *fada* was “détourned” from its original function as elders’ council to respond to young disenfranchised men’s need to find solace in the company of peers. Just as the technique of *détournement* was developed in the 1960s to turn slogans and logos against the advertisers and the wider capitalist system, so the *fada* of youth subverted the status quo.

- 16 In this Muslim-majority country, places of worship are often humble praying grounds in the open air.
- 17 *Fadantchés* draw arrows on neighboring walls, leaving a walking trail for passersby to follow. These territorial markers extend the footprint of the *fada*, contributing to its visibility.
- 18 In a nation with low literacy rates, *fadas* are often recognized by passersby more for their colorful images than their verbal messages.
- 19 Only rarely do *fada* names show up on wooden signs and banners similar to those used by shop owners.
- 20 *Fada* inscriptions are occasionally overshadowed by vegetation or by painted warnings such as “*Défense d’uriner sur ce mur*” (It is forbidden to urinate on this wall) or “*Défense de pisser*” (It is forbidden to piss).
- 21 Nancy Munn (1986) showed how on Gawa a person is extended and dispersed via acts of hospitality. It is this sense of “fame” as a capacity to diffuse one’s spatiotemporal influence that *fadantchés* cultivate by holding commemorative parties.
- 22 *Zaki* (lion) is a popular honorific bestowed on political leaders. It is the nickname of Mamadou Issoufou, the former president of Niger.
- 23 “Our *fada* is Hunteen (sic) Clan. We also call it “Rassemblement des Guerriers,” a *saurayi* told me. “The member who picked the name was the original president of the *fada*. He found the name in a book. When he proposed Hunteen Clan, we all liked it and agreed this should be our name. Then he went to Libya to study. But we kept the name. This is how people know us.”
- 24 Many *fada* names are inspired by the culture of hip-hop (50 Cent, Money Kash, and so on), suggesting that young Nigerien men’s sense of place is often anchored in “the hood.”
- 25 Places of the possible are voids between the spaces produced through ideological persuasion and other means. They “contain the floating and dispersed elements of the possible, but not the power which could assemble them” (Lefebvre 1996: 256).

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22 Ohùn

Popular Linguistic Innovation among Yoruba Youths in Urban Cities

Augustine Agwuele

Introduction: Awọn Qmọ'ta (Street Guys)

Just as children are credited with the creation of language (Bickerton, 1984), youth and youthfulness are the harbingers, the enervating forces of linguistic styles and innovations. To them owes such coinages that captures social and cultural realities, reflect political circumstances, and disrupt established configurations and normative percepts. They are the linguistic movers and shakers (Eckert 1997: 52) who as disruptive elements are described as deviants. Yoruba language is rich with phrases tying youth and deviancy with the street (*igboro*). For instance, *qmọ'ta*, *qmọ igboro*, *qmọ ori-irin*, *qmọ garage*, and *qmọ oko*, etc. The lexical item *qmọ* refers to child/youth. To this root-word is attached different noun modifiers, the new derivation situates *qmọ* in the street with a specific form of deviancy. *Qmọ'ta*; “street guy”, which connotes a tout or hooligan. *Qmọ igboro*; “wild child”, i.e., a truant. *Qmọ oriirin*; “child walking the street”, i.e., a prostitute. *qmọ garage*; “guys of the motor-park”, i.e., thugs, and *qmọ¹ oko*; “farm/country child”, i.e., crude or rustic. In Yorubaland *qmọ* is the status reserved for young people until they get married and become parents, at which time, their status changes to *iya\bale ile*, “head of household”. And in place of *qmọ* + identifier, they become, “father or mother of X” (name of their first child). In the case of thugs, touts, and deviants of any kind, they are *qmọ+x* until they leave behind their street life and criminality and settle down into normative responsibilities of parenthood. *Qmọ* is also the generic phrase equivalent to English “guy”. Rarely, do we find equivalent adult phraseology except for *agba qmọ'ta*, “grown street guy”, i.e., old rascal. Youths, often, are non-conformists. In urban setup, void of emotional attachments, their activities, which subsume organized gangs, ruggedness, deviance, rebellion and constant subversion of those constants from previous generations, exert profound influence. They dominate music and fashion scenes and set such fascinating linguistic trends that permeate popular imagination and ceaselessly intrigue observers. Ohùn, as they term their speech, is a culture specific agentive slang or “stylect” (Hurst 2008) in use in urban Yoruba city-life by hustling youths. It is presented here

as an example of those urban glossae born of the interplay of different socio-economic and political realities into which “youths” are thrust across major African cities.

Based on the preceding nesting of the youth and youthfulness into street life and terrain and the connection of the youth with Ohùn, the focus in this chapter is to elucidate the creativity of Ohùn by unpacking its layered contents. The study of Ohùn joins existing works on African youth “language” as shown in §1b. To locate the social spaces that form the site of Ohùn within the urban milieu that houses and informs it, the uniqueness of Ibadan’s urbanity is described in §2 and the specific space synonymous with Ohùn users is described in §2b. Sample lexical items and phrases for the elucidation of Ohùn’s creativity are presented in §3a-§3g. The sample phrases are bolded to call them out as the objects of explication, the metadata, as well as the metalanguage. They are presented discursively in narrative prose to provide an interactive experience of their actual usage and to depict their context of use. Summary conclusion is in §4. Overall, I explore the stylistic expressions of Ohùn to (i) explain it profits from and implements existing Yoruba culture, (ii) demonstrates its socio-cultural and economic currency that marks users as hip, streetwise, and modern, (iii) illustrates its creativity, and (iv) describes some of its morpho-semantics features, especially its underlying socio-cultural sensory imageries, emotive force, and it’s performative gestures through which it gains its popular appeal. Ultimately, the chapter shows the import of urban creative language use for the study of Yoruba people and urban African Anthropology.

Urban African Youth Speech: Some Previous Work

The following review of literature, focusing on Africa, shows an established history of scholarship tying linguistic innovation with youth and youth cultures. Traveling through Abidjan, Nairobi, Yaounde, Kinshaha, Soweto, Johannesburg, Khatoum, Addis Ababa and many other commercial and political nerves of many African states, one would experience distinct lexical items and curious phraseologies stylistically delivered with theatrical gesticulation. Urban speech of these cities includes Nouchi, Sheng & Engsh, Campfranglais, Lingala ya Bayankee, Iscamtho, Tsotsitaal, and Yarada K’wank’wa respectively. Their designation as youth language, urban youth language, or urban vernacular (Brookes 2014; Kießling and Mous 2004; McLaughlin 2009) acknowledges the role of youths in their development and use. With respect to Africa, 45 percent of its population is between the ages of 15 and 19, its median age is 19.4,² as such, it is the continent with the largest number of young people. Africa, with 2,140 living languages,³ houses one third of the world’s languages. With so many languages, the mobile population, often young from different linguistic groups, is by necessity multilingual. Individuals can be expected to speak a mother tongue, a regional lingua-franca, and or the national language of education. Finally, 43

percent of Africa's population is found in the urban centers and it comprises of these young people most of whom are migrants to these cities in search of better education and economic opportunities. This combination assures a vibrant linguistic admixture that instigates the formation of "urban ways of speaking". These speech forms are ridden with ephemeral lexical items the comprehension of which requires steepness in urban lifestyle as will be shown for Ohùn.

Most studies of urban speech foreground an intersection of status, apprehension, and behavior of the users. In South Africa Tsotsitaal, e.g., combine fashion with attitude, confidence, and swag of Sophiatown and later, Soweto (Nixon 1994; Sharp 2015). Tsotsitaal would later become the language of urban workers and working-class culture (Coplan 2007; Hurst 2008). Tsotsi at first refers to those confident young men who were able to manipulate the South African "white" system using their ability to speak.

Nouchi, the vibrant speech of the urban, hip and streets of Abidjan with increasing appeal across different social institutions including school stemmed from ghettos of Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Nouchi, that is moustache, derived from Malinke's "nou", nose and "chi", hair, stands for that fearless, respected bad street guy that fears none (Sande 2015). This speech-form, preferred by 10–30 years old, come with the performance bluff of urban street life. The name subsumes the speaker and the language (Newell 2009).

Described as adolescent speech form and icon of resistant identity (Castells 1997). Camfanglais is spoken in major Cameroonian cities of Douala and Yaounde (Kießling 2005), it is a resistant device (Castells 1997) that stemmed from the need of those young people in plurilingual settings who have been alienated from Cameroon's wealth.

Sheng and Engsh have also been located within the urbanity of Nairobi. They are synonymous with youths who use them to create in-group solidarity. The speech-forms thrive within the multilingual set-up of the city and have been stigmatized as language of thugs and matatu⁴ operators (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997; Bosire 2006; Githiora 2002; Kießling and Mous 2004; Muaka, 2011). However, Sheng and Engsh have now transcended their disparaged onsets to become social and economic resources for banking and telephone services in Kenya and a staple of print and electronic media advertisements (Kariuki, Kanana and Kebeya 2015; Mutonya 2008) and of hip-hop across the region (Higgins 2007).

In Kinshasha and other major cities of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), are Indoubil and Lingala. According to Goyvaerts (1988) "Indoubil, does not pervade the whole population; it is limited to the (admittedly large) class of younger people as well as certain groups of adults, such as pickpockets, prostitutes, and hustlers" (232). Furthermore, it is seen as a secret language, the code of which is incomprehensible to none initiates. Etymologically, the name Indoubil consists of "indou", language, and "bil", "meaning a person who is not a stupid villager but a resourceful, clever town dweller". Those who qualify as "Bil" "dressed in a specific way, behaved as real snobs"... (ibid).

Hollington (2015) studied Yarada K’wank’wa (market language), a form of speech used by Ethiopian mostly youths in urban city of Addis Ababa who see themselves as outsiders. They consist mostly of “young people who spend most of their time on the streets and have different jobs or try to ‘hustle’ for money in various ways”. Mensah (2012) studied the speech of street in use by *Ágábá* Boys in the urban city of Calabar, Nigeria. For Mensa, this is an ingroup deviant and exotic code that is constructed to reinforce anti-establishment behaviors. It is identified with poor parentage, the unemployed, less educated, and those of lower class. It is within this intersectionality of status (youth) and performance (attitude, appearance, gesture) that the following discussion of the “stylect” *Ohùn* is presented. First, I will describe the urban milieu of Ibadan in which *Ohùn* is located and the present some *Ohùn* phrases to explicate its creativity and illustrate its cultural content.

Urban Ibadan: *Ile ole, ile oḡbón* (home of robbers, place of wisdom)

Studying youth, popular, or street linguistic pattern requires a reflection on the peculiarity of the social, political and cultural realities that inspire the speech-form and allow it to thrive. Following the collapse of the imperial kingdom of Oyo, Ibadan emerged as a war camp in 1829. Thereafter, it grew rapidly through a confluence of events. As a war camp, it attracted mercenaries, runaway “slaves”, pawns, and different characters from diverse places to make the city a composite of indigenes and non-indigenes with large youth-population. After it came under the British colonial territory in 1893 European commercial house was opened and in 1900 a railway terminus. These brought in Lebanese, Indians, and European wholesale merchants. In tow were African retailers and labor of various types, leading to a vibrant economy that caused the city to further rapid growth in terms of population, economic and political influence. As Nigeria marched toward self-rule, Ibadan emerged as the political capital of the western region and the *de facto* capital of Yoruba land. With increase in social amenities, the allure of Ibadan continues to grow even as the city became expansive and entrenched as the commercial hub of western Nigeria and the political nerve-center of Yoruba nation. Ibadan boasts the first 26 story building in West Africa. Called Cocoa House, in honor of Yoruba farmers, it emphasizes Ibadan as the main center for the collection of cocoa and palm kernel (Lloyd, Mabogunje, and Awe 1967). Ibadan houses the first stadium in the continent, Liberty Stadium (now, Obafemi Awolowo stadium) was opened in 1960. The first television station in the continent known as NTA (Nigeria Television Authority) also opened in Ibadan, so also the first university in Nigeria, the University of Ibadan and its medical college. In 1953, Ibadan (i.e., western region) championed free universal primary education in Nigeria. During the colonial and post-colonial times,



Figure 22.1 Challenge Roundabout—Southwestern Area of Ibadan-City.

Ibadan boasts of cinema houses, dancing halls, race and golf-courses with associated gambling. These affordances of colonialism and Westernization aided rapid urbanization, created conflicts with traditional norms, freeing the daring youths from village quiescence, and dislodged many of them to Ibadan. Many educated individuals flocked to Ibadan in search of employment and modern amenities. With urbanity and capitalism come inequity, joblessness as well as opportunities for the daring ones. Youth scenes ultimately evolved with youth culture and lifestyle that merge the traditional with the modern to fashion out a new mode of survival, a feature of which is Ohùn (Figure 22.1).

Quite buoyant in Ibadan are the north-west and south-west areas which adjoin the most accessible part of the metropolis, these areas include bus and train termini at Dùgbè, Ekotèdo, Okebola, Gbagi, and UI. Together they are the commercial nerve of the city and the epicenter of fashion and sports. Concentrated in them are thriving foreign merchants, trading companies, and factories. The not so competitive locals were driven into the informal sector often at the fringes, as hawkers, street traders, alaarucarriers of load, beggars, and unemployed (Olukoju 2003). These people at the fringes of the terminus became collectively and derogatively known as *omqota*, and these public spaces became renowned as havens for jaguda [pickpockets] and criminalities of all sorts. According to Fourchard (2005: 123), "... in the 1920s, criminal activities reported in Lagos and Ibadan are more often by youth groups known as Jaguda Boys". This characterization among others has earned Ibadan its moniker- home of robbers and place of

wisdom. Robbers because of its founding history, wisdom, because of how the city continues to reinvent itself and its inhabitants' ability creatively respond to the exigencies of the moment, outwits interlocutors, and through bravery make a living. A mark of this "can do" spirit is the use of *Ohùn*, the speech of the smart, daring, and ambitious youth.

Igboro: Urban Scene of Creativity

On vehicle tarmacs one finds very rugged individuals, bus-touts, the rebellious, homeless, and *agbero* (bus conductors) and pickpockets. Collectively, they are daring, extremely weary of establishment, lawless sometimes, often idling about at drink and food joints adjoining their motor-parks. There in *Igboro*, "streets", they dream up escapades, invent new ways to thwart authorities, and pilfer from unsuspecting commuters. Most tarmacs border poor residential areas with gangs and vigilantes, which afford extreme interactions with friends and foes alike. The indigenes and migrating youth all reside in them as well as along the commercial, academic, and sporting areas of the city. Out of this *igboro* milieu emerged a subcultural community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) and manner of speech that revolve around notoriety, delinquency, thuggery, deviancy, youthful escapades, sex, and alcohol to the consternation of the public and to the admiration of those who value their word-smithing as illustrated in the following section. *Igboro* is the locus of *Ohùn*; from there it spreads as a lifestyle among marginalized youths



Figure 22.2 Inner-City Ibadan.

and those who are convinced of its underlying social capital. Users are not limited to “thugs”; they include youths in general, especially those including, students, unemployed graduates, youthful at heart, those who seek street credibility and marginalized ones who grasp its functional value (Figure 22.2).

Creativity and Cultural Basis of Ohùn: Data Presentation

In this section, Ohùn is discursively presented, exemplified, and reflected in the context of usage. Rather than just making a list, presenting Ohùn in its performative situations would better identify the performers, show real life situation, reason for use and its efficacy. The contextual presentation also bears out its cultural fulcrum.

§3a. *Ohùn-retort*: Popularly known in Nigerian Pidgin English as “area guys” and in Yoruba as *awon omọ-igboro* (street guys), these key innovators of alternate use of language and lifestyle, are *awon omo to ti ja* (guys that have cut loose, i.e., wised up); *awon omọ to ya’ pa* (those torn completely; that is smart, separated from fools) *ti o k’qla⁵ s’ohùn* (not cicatrized in speech), and different from *awon òtè, àsè* (fools, ignoramuses). Often portrayed as smoking illegal substances and drinking local brews doubling as medicine and aphrodisiacs, they are involved in commercialized security schemes either at the garages\markets, neighborhoods, and sometimes on campuses where they exert payment in exchange for protection from physical and psychological violence and disruption of economic processes. In pursuit of which they use vividly expressive alternate codes modeled after traditional Yoruba orature of wise-cracking, didactic principles, and proverbs.

Ohùn (voice) “stylect” is predominantly made up of slang words infused with city audacity, streetwiseness, sass, adroitness in popular culture, and in-depth knowledge of the “top shot-callers” of the milieu and of current events. This performative interlocution combines nonverbal codes (different hairstyles, e.g., dreadlocks, colored hair, mohawk, cornrow, or bald-head with saggy pants, head bandana, and hand-towel hanging out of their back-pockets.) and verbal codes (stingingly vicious retort) artfully applied to subdue an adversary. Yoruba worldview accepts the reality of powerful words in the form of *àse* or vital life force. This force enervates the spoken words and makes them efficacious, calling into reality the proposition of an utterance. The general term for it due to *Ifa*-divination system-, which also contains medicine and herbs, is *ofo*. *Àse* so thoroughly pervades the life of Yoruba people that one of their most revered titles with a worldwide influence is “*Awise*”, the spokesman or leader of *Ifa* priests. *Awise* lexicologically means the one whose words betide and one whose covenants never fails. *Ohùn* is often uttered as if imbued with *àse*, thereby heightening fears associated with the user as possessing enchanting powers. *Ohùn* in its aesthetics should be read as a culture specific oral text that interconnects

with the larger socio-cultural contexts of occurrence. The efficacy of the sampled phrases and sentence lie in several factors: They are cloaked in long established Yoruba Orature combining the awe inducing invocation, as found in divination and incantations, with the praise appeal to inner *Ori*, the essence of a person, and personal praise- *oriki*. The mode of rendition involves the overlay of spiritual imageries on natural domains. Adroitness in the traditional use of *àse* words presents the individual as spiritually fortified and immune to temporal powers. The associated performance transforms the obvious into something extraordinary. The polythetic steps involves the exploitation of the natural fear of the population- that the physical has spiritual equivalent, and that there is a secret language that excites the spiritual into action, and by emulating the format and formulae for it. For this, boldness is fundamental.

§3b. *Packaging*: That is, boldness or bravado and the presentation of self in the most attractive, irresistible fashion in order to gain access or pass,⁶ is a behavioral and a linguistic index of *QmQ igboro*. Their motto is: ‘packaging ni aye gba’, life requires packaging. The ‘*runs-girls*’ or ‘*oloso*’⁷ package themselves adequately. When targeting the wealthy class, the run-girls project class and sophistication, and a mean street-demeanor when fending off touts. These personae are projected through braggadocios, bruteness, sleekness of speech, all in all, intimidation. Students at the university of Ibadan phrased this as ‘dazzling or bamboozling them’. You either intimidate them to submission with your verbal skill or with your brawn or thuggery, and where these are ineffective, then by being audacious enough to convey invincibility.

§3c. *Form of address and salutation*: Upon seeing their boss or higher ranked member or someone of riches and influence, *QmQ Igboro* offers deference and rightful propriety in line with existing Yoruba ethics of respect. They often do so by raising their hands, stomping their foot, and hailing, *twale* or *bwate* (respect). An informant explained that *twale* is offered to those immediately above one, but *bwate* is for the big bosses.

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>Bwate baba</i> | Salute, father |
| <i>Mo duro tan,</i> | I am standing upright |
| <i>Mi o yẹ gẹrẹ o.</i> | I am not crooked at all [Meaning, my loyalty is absolute]. |

Greeting a hood leader involves hailing him/her, rendering praise to the high up ranging from area commanders to the regional and national leaders, and to godfathers and shot-callers, who perhaps are no longer on the street, but remain influential. In the following example, a foot soldier is seen hailing his hood leader named Sobo:

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 2. <i>Sobo</i> | Sobo |
| <i>Gbogbo Mushin Federal</i> | Of all Mushin, Federal |
| <i>Gbogbo Oloosa</i> | All Oloosa |

<i>Eeyan Bqsun</i>	Bosun's person
<i>Eeyan Okanlawon</i>	Okanlawon's person
<i>Wa gba iyi</i>	You are honored
<i>Eeyan Banda</i>	Banda's person
<i>Ilanla Ejire, eeyan Ejire</i>	Great Ejire, Ejire's person
<i>Mo kawo mi meji soke</i>	I raise up my hands
<i>Mo ka'kan wale</i>	I fold one of them
<i>Mi o gara o</i>	I am not boastful
<i>Sobolina</i>	Sobolina
<i>Ori e fon ka sibe⁸</i>	Your head is splattered there
<i>O tutu loju, but to ba gbe sinu</i>	Gentle in appearance, but when ingested
<i>Kala kala</i>	Extremely hot

In response, Sobo, who is all smiles, says:

3. <i>Omo iya mi,</i>	My mothers' child
<i>National anthem yen o ti pe</i>	That national anthem is incomplete
<i>Ti o bai ti sope kini?</i>	If you have not mentioned who?
<i>Baba ti'wa, baba Lado</i>	Our father, Lado's father
<i>Eegun buruku, abii</i>	The wicked masquerade,
<i> tarpaulin lehin</i>	draped in tarpaulin
<i>Bili Aminu, Baba ni'yen</i>	Bili Aminu, that is our father
<i>Baba M.C. Oluomo</i>	The father of MC Oluomo
<i>Baba Koko Zaria</i>	Father of Koko in Zaria
<i>Pappy Kamoli</i>	Kamoli's father
<i>Baba Lagos state</i>	Father of the state of Lagos

This elaborate greeting is rooted in Yoruba practice of hailing a person of title, wealth, and honor by singing their praise and their predecessors'. Such a person boasts of a retinue of followers and hangers on whose identity rests on identification with the powerful person. Such clientelism and bigmanism require constant promotion in form of praise, Oriki. This is an elaborated form of eulogy involving artful use cognomens of a personality to connect the person to their forebearers, to equally great personalities as well as broadcast their benevolence and accomplishments. This traditional orature is replicated above. First Sobo, the local leader is praised and connected to different regional leaders. Sobo in deference to regional and area bosses, offered his own respect by recognizing those the foot-soldier did not mention, thereby showing the extent of his own influence. Offering respect along this hierarchical chain of command shows loyalty, deference, and requisite propriety and is an acknowledgment that one is under their protection. Involved in this rendition is keen and creative mind. In Line 10 of 2, the verb *gara* is glossed as boastful. However, the connotation is much deeper. The verb *ga* means to grow, expand, or flex. *Ara* is body.

Used together, it suggests physical expansion of one's ego, pride or even flexing of muscles. In this new imagistic creative use, the sentence conveys great humility and submission. In Line 13 of 1 above is another creative sentence, this time with extended meaning. Glossed as “your head is splattered all over the place”; this phrase is not an insult, contrarily, the leader is praised as brainy. Someone that nothing eludes. One who is so smart as to control different neighborhoods and businesses simultaneously. Because of his extensive influence, his brain is presumedly ‘scattered’ (spread-wide) like the tentacles of an octopus reaching and controlling everything effectively.

§3d. *Gbo’ju (Face)*: Politeness transcends the norms of etiquette to include the notion of face (Brown and Levinson 1987). In every culture, every adult member desires for their actions to not be impeded by others (positive face) while seeking cooperation and avoidance of imposition (negative face). In interactions, people pay attention to other people’s faces while protecting theirs. Face, *oju* is of great premium in Yoruba life, more so in the street. One’s credibility and survival depend on gaining respect and the cooperation of others. For an *omo-igboro* to be duped, cheated, or dissed (§3e.3) is to “lose face”. For instance, following a successful heist, the two ladies involved resorted to a desolate place to share the loot. The one who did the pilfering took out the content of the wallet and carelessly tosses the wallet. She counted some bills and handed it to the other, her accomplice, who had distracted the victim. They started walking away when the accomplice spins around and picks up the discarded wallet. The pilferer tries to dissuade her by urging that they leave the scene immediately. The accomplice insisted on going through the wallet properly, as this was the normal procedure. She then unveiled a wad of currency in the side-pocket of the wallet and realized that her colleague was trying to cheat her out of the loot. Thereupon she uttered the phrase:

1. *O de fe lo ma je oju aye ni*; You want to eat the face of the ‘earth’,

This figurative use of “face eating” akin the deed to cannibalizing ones’ reputation. Yoruba people are reverential to the “earth”. Presuming the earth to have face/eyes, they pray not to step on them, that is, to hurt the earth so that the earth wouldn’t devour them. The street guys call them themselves *omọ aye*; “earth’s child”, *omọ to wa ni igboro aye*, “the one on the street of the earth”. In the same way that the people cautiously avoid the wrath of the earth by not violating the reverence due it, *omọ aye* abhors it, when someone “steps on their face”; *te oju aye mo’le*, a deed which attracts immediate and severe retribution. A mortal threat to others within the street is to utter the phrase:

Ma baa oju e je (spoil your face) or *ma te oju e mo’le* (stump your face) or *ma je oju e* (eat your face). Part of not stepping on the earth’s sore spot is

knowing propriety, which includes acknowledging one's place and offering deference to those higher in the pecking order. Reporting a member of a rival gang, who has been hindering their robbery activities, to their leader, the complainant said: Were it not that you are the candle that give us light when there is power outage, he would have been long gone, but we cannot "eat your face" father.

2. *Ti kii ba ki sepe eyin je candle* Were it not that you are a candle to us
Ti ina baa lo, eyin la' ntan When there is electricity outage, you give us light.
A ti lo si He would have gone for it
Sugbon, a o le je oju yin baba But, we cannot eat your face, father

The metaphoric use of candle to describe the leader of the gang is an expression of respect, a recognition of the scalar and hierarchy in the hood. *Mo oju-* (know face), is to recognize the hierarchy, to show respect, and to be completely at the disposal of the leader. For instance, a rookie foot-soldier saw his hood leader downcast. He hailed the leader and inquired why. The leader said he was disrespected: *Qse⁹ yi mi*, "I am drenched in soap". The rookie responded:

3. *Ta lo nfi ori pa ekuro* Who dares to crack palm-kernel with their head
E si mi le, e si mi si igboro Release me, let me loose into the hood,
ki nlọ si na fun won To open fire on them

Fighting to defend the boss's honor and to redeem the face of a disgraced leader is expected of a trusted foot-soldier. However, in this case, the boss recognized that this is a rookie. He replied yet in *Ohùn*:

- Qmo ni writing ko ni ko mo iwe,* Good penmanship does not equate brilliance
O ni ingredient ko ni ko mo oḃe se Having ingredients is not ability to cook
Omo-odo gun to'yi ko ni ko mo iyan gun o That a pestle is long is not ability to pound yam
Ibi to nlọ yen, eru agba ni o. That place, that's adult's load (job for the seasoned)

The metaphorical retort of the boss implements traditional Yoruba didactic, and its principle of argumentation and disputation that exploits analogy. Yoruba traditional education involves the use of metaphorical riddles

to frame different images that task the student with resolving them to derive the message. This deductive process humorously parries penmanship as not equivalent to smartness, stocking up ingredients as not indicative of cooking skills, neither does the length of the pestle equate ability to pound yam. These analogies are used to imply that the soldier's zeal and devotion do not transform him from a rookie to a seasoned fighter able to confront his enemies. *Ohùn* implements Yoruba traditional method of education.

§3e. *Recognition*: Those who are very sharp, sleek, quick in thought, words, and action including girls who easily relieve guys of their valuables are called *omọ to sá prá-prá*. Perhaps derived from Nigerian pidgin English phrase, "o sharp proper": (S)he is properly sharp). The phonoaesthetic *sá prá-prá* or *sá pró-pró* suggest exceptional sparkle. It conveys, in vivid cultural imagery, the extent of this sharpness. Contributing to this sparkle is their ability to sleekly weave together popular culture and current events in rhymes and similes:

1. *Bi mo se wayi, ti mba sa si Miller mi*¹⁰: For me, when I hail my miller
ma wa duro bi Roger Miller: I will stand like Roger Miller
ma wa kọlu wọn bi caterpillar: Then I will overrun them like caterpillar

Using end-rhymes the speaker claims that after consuming the liquor, Miller, he stands strong like the famous Cameroonian footballer, Roger Miller, and analogous to Roger's dribbling skills, he overruns his antagonists, hitting them with the force of the heavy-duty construction vehicle, caterpillar.

Omọ to sá prá-prá can be brutal when dissing people, including rejecting unwanted romantic advances. Ability to use analogies pertaining to football, current, events, and celebrities to diss an interlocutor marks *Omọ-igboro* as hip. Rejecting a love interest, a man dissed a young woman saying:

2. *Mo wa ẹ, mi o ri ẹ;* [sarcastically] I look for you, I don't [exist] see you.
O dabi pencil 2d. You are like a 2d pencil,
Ti wọn ba gbẹ When it is sharpened
O mọ bo se ma nkan? You know how easily it breaks?
O mọ awọn ti o jọ sa? Do you know those you resemble?
Set awọn Sepp Blatter You belong to the era of Sepp
awọn Michel Platini; Blatter and Michel Platini].
Awọn ẹni ana, ta lo fe ri wọn? Those of yesterday, who cares to see them?

First, the young man body-shames the lady as skinny; then compares her to a 2d-lead pencil that breaks easily. He attacks her suggesting that she is

outdated as the soccer skills of Sepp Blatter and Michel Platini who played in the 1970s and 1980s. The term “set” is culturally meaningful. Yoruba nation operates gerontocracy. People of the same age, same school grade, same rank, etc., are said to belong to the same set. If one presumes themselves to outclass the other, then such a person puts down the other by telling them to go mingle with those of their set, i.e., equals. In this case, this man says he is not in the same league with the woman. Yoruba culture is creatively cloaked in sounds and rhythm using analogies that juxtaposes different imageries and popular cultures. A converse situation presents a man interested in a woman. The guy propositioning a girl is customarily expected to foot her bills, consequently, girls seize up a guy’s financial stance. He approached her with *Ohùn*, sweet-talking her.

Not having it, she replied:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>3. <i>Şe o ki now oju.</i>
 <i>Şe iwọ le gbẹ’ru temi ni?</i></p> <p><i>Bo şe nwo mi bayi,</i>
 <i>ọlọmọ meta ni’mi</i>
 <i>Container de ni mi,</i>
 <i>okada e o le gbe eru mi</i></p> | <p>Don’t you comprehend “face”?
 Are capable of bearing my
 responsibilities?
 As you see me,
 I have three children
 I am also a container, your okada
 cannot carry my container</p> |
|---|--|

The lady first appealed to *oju* “face” [3d], then basically calls him a pauper. She compares herself and her three children’s financial needs to a freight container and likens the man’s financial viability to a motorcycle, called *okada*, in Nigeria. The weight of a container, she implies, exceeds the carrying capacity of a motorcycle. Thusly dissed and dismissed, the man turned to her companion. The second lady also turned him down brutally:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>4. <i>Şe o ri emi to now yi,</i>
 <i>Powerbike ni mi, mo kọ’ja bajaj</i></p> <p><i>Gbese de tun ni mi,</i>
 <i>To ba kowo lemi, o o le saan tan,</i></p> | <p>Me, that you are looking at
 I am a power-bike, I am more
 than a bajaj
 I am also an endless pit of debt
 If you pile money on me, you will
 never offset it</p> |
|---|--|

In her retort, she compares herself to a power-bike which outranks a *bajaj* (tricycle), and by extension, an endless debt that he and his generations would never be able to offset. Tricycles used as taxis are called *bajaj* in Ethiopia. The ability to shop different imageries from different societies, make analogies and to comparisons define *omọ to şá prá-prá*. They draw from well-established Yoruba theatrical and poetic humor and parody often used to make political comments against rulers. With this skill, they ridicule their interlocutors, who in ignorance, would even laugh at the mocking words.

The use of this form of language is aesthetically pleasing to the people, it makes vivid their experiences through the juxtaposition of different genres. Users employ circumlocution in the manner of traditional Yoruba performative utterances, weaving together literary devices such as allegory, euphemism, ideophone, metaphor, paronomasia, rhetorical question, and simile to dazzle and overwhelm their antagonist, to secure their position, and create a path to leadership. Once, when a young upstart became rude, a loyal foot-soldier reported to his boss using syllabic rhyme and paronomasia:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 5. <i>Ma wo ọmọ ase ti o ja:</i> | Look at this idiot, not smartened up |
| <i>O wa lo ngbe l'aja,</i> | Residing in aja |
| <i>O lo mba awa taa ja ja,</i> | Tussling with those of us who already
broke loose |
| <i>A ma ja ẹ si kanga ni</i> | We will drop you into a well |

Ohùn maintains the grammatical structure of Yoruba, its lexifier language, and implements its argumentative strategies, symbolisms, and morphological manipulations. Prominent is a play on rhyming words and metaphorical expressions. For instance, *aja*, in the above Ohùn, depending on the tone, has different meanings. *Àjá* is the name of a town. To cut/break is *já*, to fight is *jà*, and to drop/plug something is *já*. Metaphorically, *jà*, to cut loose, is to smarten up. The Ohùn cited above describes the interlocutor as a novice, an upstart who resides in *aja*, contending with those of us that have 'cut loose', *ja*, however, he will 'dropped', *ja*, into a metaphorical well. The following Ohùn is from a female *ọmọ to sá prá-prá* taking on a male tout:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 6. <i>Iwo ọmọta</i> ¹¹ | You, tout |
| <i>Ti wọn bisi mota</i> | Born in Mota |
| <i>Ti o wa ngbe ni ojota</i> | Residing in Ojota |
| <i>O mọ pe o lọ'ta</i> | You don't know that you have enemies |

The play on word and syllabic rhyme is on *ọta*; *ọmọta* is street guy. *Mota* and *Ojota* are city names in Lagos. *Ọtá* is enemy. Essentially, the word *ọmọta* (street guy) contains *òtá* (enemy). The addressee is considered a fool for not realizing it. His foolishness is inevitable, after all, he was born in *Mota* and resides in *Ojota*. In this city's name *Ojota* are *ojó* (day) and 'ta' (to be peppery). As such, every day in the city will be extremely hot for him.

Awọn ọmọta to sá prá-prá regale each other with tales of their escapades, they engage in wise-cracking that foreground their streetwiseness, their sleekness, felicity in garnering attention and commanding obedience, and engaging in witty exchanges designed to outcompete others in order to achieve dominant positions. This type of verbal duel was carried to the USA by enslaved Africans and manifest in African American culture of the South known as playing the dozen (Abrahams 1962; Simmons 1963).

7. *Şe o mọ ẹ eniyan to ba mu* One who drinks Hennessy
Hennessy
Ti o le şe esin, And is without reproach
to ba mu Baron ko le ya aro If he drinks Baron, would not be
crippled

The rhyme of the above Ohùn pitches *Hennessy* (cognac) with ‘*esin*’ (shame; reproach); and *Baron* (rum) with ‘*aro*’, cripple. This Ohùn suggests supremacy. The creativity involves neologism and phono-aesthetic coinages whereby the sounding of a word is associated with its meaning to implement cultural understanding of seniority (status) and relationship expectations.

§3f. *Ambition*: Given the hierarchical setup in hood-life and garage setup, there is a constant jockeying for position and influence. In some cases, the top position is obtained through election, promotion or displacement, where the bravest person takes down the top guy. For instance, a previously subservient foot soldier with ambition became insolence. Surprised, the local leader said:

LEADER: “*Maa ẹ ki o mu omi sun*” I will make you drink water for dinner
SOLDIER: “*Ti mba mu omi*” If I should drink water
itọ ni nma fi tọ” I will mainly pee it out,
omikomi ti mo ba mu bayi, No matter the type of water
mo ma tọ wẹre-wẹre ni” I will piss out with ease.

Such an impertinence often comes with the courage of invincibility derived from spiritual fortification. A subordinate is ready to challenge the leadership after obtaining the backing of spiritualist who assures him/her that they are beyond earthly reach. “*Ọwọ aye ankan ko le tẹ ẹ*” (No mortal will overpower you). Very endemic in Lagos is the notion of *omọ onile* (The owners of the land—see footnote 1). These are street thugs who claim to be descendants of the original owners of different sections of Lagos. They organize themselves into groups extorting money from prospective buyers and users. Their excesses and greed know limited boundaries. For instance, upon successful purchase of a parcel of land, the buyer is forced to pay additional amount to them as their own share to assure that the dully purchased land is left to them. As soon as the buyer commences construction, they disrupt the construction, beating up all the workers until another sum is paid to them. The competition involved in becoming the leader of such a group is fierce and bloody. Every leader is on a constant watch-out to arrest any coup that can occur at any time. Individuals fortify themselves spiritually and are equipped to use *ase*, powerful words of incantations.

A long-time foot-soldier¹² declares to his bosses that he is now taking over their operations. With him are the other members who now hail him and pledge their allegiance to him. The bosses, mortified, did not believe

their eyes and ears. In dismay, one of the bosses, on seeing his trusted member with them, exclaims:

Mo kẹ'ran, Gbera, o wa laarin wọn: My goodness, Gbera, you too are with them?

Gbera responded:

*Gbera*¹³ *nikan ni, emi ni,*
emi ti mo ti gbe ra mi ki ẹ to gbe mi

Mo sọ'ra mi di Gbera TV

Mo wa lọ nte'le winner

to jẹ wipe Spain ni wọn wa,
ti wọn ngba La Liga,
O tun ma gba final
omọ see Ronaldo, o ẹ kini?
O duro deede

Yes, it is me Gbera
I have lifted myself before you
lift me.

I have turned myself into Gbera
TV.

I am now out there with the
winner

one who is in Spain
playing in La Liga.

He will also play in the finals,
guy, look at Ronaldo, his stance?
he's standing strong.

With this retort that draws from a play on the meaning of *Gbera* (lift your body), he claims that he has taken himself off from a loser and now has joined company with a winner. The winner, he claims, is a worthy champion like the Spanish team that won the European league championship. *Gbera* (gbe, lift, ara- body) declares that he has decamped to the new boss that is now taking over the hood. The complexity involved in any of the utterances requires a multiplex of knowledge to decipher, which includes the original sense of the name, the new TV station that goes by the same name, and familiarity with European league. Lacking this requisite knowledge, adults, or those to whom the interpretations are not readily available, declare them to be gibberish, a mere cacophony of sounds intended to deceive. However, for the knowledgeable a significant shift has occurred in the governance of the economic life of neighborhood gang (see footnote 1).

Semantic shift: Meaning making is a noticeable and significant component of the use of Ohùn. The lexical items adapted from its lexifier undergo semantic shift. Such semantic shifts obfuscate the connoted:

O ni oun fẹ ma la plate: He wants to be 'licking' plate [i.e., cunnilingus]
Ti oagba mic mu, a maa kọ'rin lọ ni. If she gets a hold of my mic,¹⁴ she will sing none-stop

There is a constant use of innuendos that veil the intended. Idiomatic expressions are shifted in their meanings sometimes as an oxymoron- whereby contradictory senses are juxtaposed. These are overlaid in ideophones the imageries of which arouse cultural emotions to make the connoted palpable.



Figure 22.3 Ibadan-A mixture of the traditional and modern.

Urban, Youth Speech Form: Discussion and Conclusion

To different life stages and circumstances are different socio-cultural linguistics devices. The group divergent speech form of Ohùn, synonymous with urban and hip youth, cues different senses in a captivating form. Putting down an interlocutor, an ọmọ-igboro said:

- *Ewo ni igara turkey ni iwaju lion?* What is the pride of a turkey before a lion?

This Ohùn likens the boastfulness of the interlocutor to a proud turkey strutting before the lion; in other words, the turkey willingly served itself as meal to the lion. This analogy was drawn to send a warning, and a message of caution based on homophony and phono-aesthetics. The name of the Governor of Lagos during the time of this data collection was *Ambode*, who was trending because of his politics. *Ambode*, when unpacked, is a Yoruba sentence that says: “we are going; we will return”. Ọmọ-igboro appropriate this meaning to caution a rookie intent on going into the den of a rival gang when he said:

<i>Ti o ba lo ndaşa Ambode</i>	Don't mimic the trending Ambode
Nitori, ti iwọ yi ba mbọ, o le de lailai.	Because if you go, you will never return

In the above Ohùn, the speaker states vividly that the rookie may “get there” but certainly will not return. The pun is in the noun- *Ambode* (c/f footnote 13). Through Ohùn, users convey their “can do” personality, create the image of invincibility, boldness, and readiness or pretense to violence.

All of which are part of the package. When cornered, they are quick to say “packaging ni o”. In other words, it is a “marketing” device intended to “sell” their brand. *Ọmọ ẹgboro* is adroit in code mixture, popular culture, and is skillful in punning and rhyming, using local and foreign items metaphorically (3f). More importantly, they artfully exploit traditional orature to veil their utterances and mystify their intent.

In the preceding discussion, it has been suggested that the growing urban youth population across colonial and post-colonial Africa, especially those who eke an existence as park stevedores and arrastre, have often been dimly viewed as loafers, petty thieves, and scams. Yet their linguistic capital remains extremely valuable, even when their persons is loathed. They effortlessly innovate arrays of slang words, implement convoluted word-play that juxtaposes praise and invocative elements of Yoruba temporal and spiritual angst, these they deliver performatively for effect. In addition, they exploit ideophones, sensory words, that dramatically evoke cultural emotions, and excite cultural perceptions.

Ohùn's discourse was shown to be rooted in traditional hermeneutics and style of exegesis and exposition of issues especially as informed by *ifa* (divination corpus) and *oriki* (praise poetry). Where leaders are hailed, they are hailed using personal epithet (§3c) in adherence to Yoruba tradition of deference and respect, which also culminates in face saving (§3d). Face, an essential component of the practice of politeness, ensures the perpetuation of the hierarchical setup of the nation. Top leaders are not only protected by subordinates, they actively promote the deeds of leaders to enhance their prestige and as a way of recognizing their personality (§3e). The very ambitious who upon being spiritually fortified often announce their readiness to topple leaders or entrench their position or overcome adversaries, would resort to *Ohùn* in the fashion of *ọrọ-ase*, efficacious-words (§3f). It has been shown that the speech form of the youth (status) comes with certain performance (attitude and appearance), and that *Ohùn* creatively adapt existing Yoruba traditional didactic principle, praise culture, theatrical and poetic humor to fashion out a speech style.

Manipulating traditional imageries and senses, using double entendre, rhyming, homophones, pithy analogy, and semantic shifts (§3g), they humorously parody social facts to ridicule, taunt, evade, and deceive. They caricature the rich to the delight of the populace, while appealing to their narcissism for their own sustenance. Yet, they are not all degenerates and undisciplined: in the mix are school leavers, unemployed graduates, migrants seeking better chances, young ladies, and political operatives. The dynamism of the eclectic youthful and vibrant population informs the social and drives the economic life of the city. Their casual swears connote as much as they denote. Their retorts are sharper and more painful than that of a cracking whip; their linguistic felicity is as artful as it is philosophical, they are daring in deeds as they are with their words, the popular imagination that they excite unveil more than keen observative minds artfully

processing the consequences of their political, economic, and social discontents. Their performances, often theatrical, create excitement, and spectacle to the relief of the commuters at the different ports. The revelry caused by cheap local brew, gambling, and distractive fights all create an ambience for the latest musical and fashion trends of the streets.

As an informal speech form, Ohùn is a generational, non-gendered urban slang. It is a transitory “stylect”, a situational, functional, attitudinal, and competitive device of the sleek, rugged, smart, and fast. For this reason, the discussion was offered based on natural data in their context of use in order to offer greater insights that showcase their social meaning, the dynamic process, and to foreground the involved stylization (Coupland 2007; Mendoza-Denton and Mischel 2007) which allows the traversing of virtual spaces and hence unhindered spread of social values and movements. Local productions are therefore no longer localized, rather, they permeate and find acceptance across spaces with relatable circumstances. Indeed, given the ‘fluid capacity [of youth culture] to cross borders, and a reluctance to adhere to the geopolitical givens of the present’ (Alim 2009: 106), there is global interaction and construction on diverse observations borne of experiences not unique to any locality.

Notes

- 1 Aside from meaning child, or child of, it also means indigene. For instance, the popular phrase **omo onile**; popular rendered in English as “son or daughter of the soil” connotes the owner of the land, as well as an indigene; a person who, like land, cannot be uprooted from a locale.
- 2 <https://population.un.org/wpp/> (accessed, November, 2019)
- 3 Eberhard, David M., Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). 2019. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Twenty-second edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>.
- 4 Buses privately operated as a means of public transportation
- 5 The practice of facial cicatrization or scarification once popular among the Yoruba is largely out of fashion. Relics of it are in the country, where the people are considered rustic. Being simple, coarse, and unsophisticated in the voice-speech is to be cicatrized in speech, which an **omo-igboro** is not, because wised up (**ja**), they possess wise mouth.
- 6 Adoption of features-linguistics or behavior of a group in order to be considered a member of that group.
- 7 **Runs’ girl\ Oloso**, these are young girls, sometimes students or jobless graduates, who work temporarily as male escorts and practice economic dating.
- 8 According to the Ibadan informant, this phrase rather than its obvious denotation of someone whose head is shattered by a bullet, actually came from a singer, it means that the one being praised has his\her hand in every pie and is equally successful in all.
- 9 A consultant explained **ose**, ‘soap’. He gave the example, **bobo yen olose ni, ose gbe leti e**. ‘That guy is a soap guy. Soap has dried up behind his ears’. That is, the guy in questioned has spent so much time in the bathroom, the soap’s lather has caked up behind his ears. In other words, s\he is an idiot.
- 10 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfjwQcW9gvE>:

- 11 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7omoYfomBGU>: Iya Oja Latest Yoruba Movie 2019
- 12 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qN18oT_eXM (Accessed Nov, 13, 2019).
- 13 Gbera comes from the verb ‘gbe’ to lift and the noun, ‘ara’, body. It means to lift or move your own body. In the above sentence, he is playing on the meaning of the components of his name. Essentially, saying that he has chosen to determine his own fate before others do so for him.
- 14 Mic is an innuendo for penis. To sing with it is to suck it.

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Part VII

Conclusion



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23 Afterword

Economies of Availability: Substrates of Urbanization Processes in Africa

AbdouMaliq Simone

In some respects this volume is the culmination of a years of cumulative scholarship on urban Africa, some directly present here, others lurking in the background as ghosts and ancestors. As Mamadou Diouf frequently reminds us, the entire notion of urbanization was itself largely a specter across African landscapes, concept and process that had little traction for many, and even when empirically instantiated was something refused or to be refused on the part of inhabitants otherwise captured in an imposed form having little relevance to their character.

Metaphors of capture have long been dominant as a way of experiencing and representing African realities in general—histories of wholesale capture significantly depopulating entire regions; the capture of land and existent polity through imperial ventures and colonial apparatuses, the capture of modes of social organization through foreign inscriptions of identity, the capture of anti-colonial struggles and nationalistic aspirations by predatory regimes and extraversion, the capture of public capacity by structural adjustment and interminable indebtedness, and the capture of souls through all-demanding religions. The list could go on. Urban life was conceived by many as itself a mode of capture, holding large numbers in place in a permanent state of relative destitution and incessant jockeying for the rudiments of survival. Even today, urban horizons are characterized by a seemingly eternal and unassimilable youth bulge.

For so long, assessments of the viability and efficacy of urbanization in Africa were characterized by the absence of enabling conditions and structures—the lack of industrialization, regulatory frameworks, productive investments, and human resource capacity. How could there be such enormous growths in rates of urbanization without the requisite economic platforms to provide adequate levels of work and infrastructural provisioning. And while all of the manifold deficits are at one level true, and that rates of enduring impoverishment are seeming intractable, what had been long neglected are those dimensions of urbanization itself that are fundamentally exceeding of any form of capture. Here, urbanization became amplified as its own self-reflexive process, i.e. urbanization produces urbanization, that the albeit limited viability of cities was the capacity of

those that came to live within them to produce livelihoods through tending to the process of urbanization itself, that people required things in order to survive and that through an incessant re-arranging of settlement, provisioning practices, marketing, distributing, consuming, attending, caring, and making inhabitants inevitably became some kind of actual or potential resource for everyone else. Inhabitants, differentially situated across variegated commercial networks, genealogies, engagements with land and territory, were to be conduits of complementary actions to other networks, genealogies and so forth. Repair became as or even more important than production, repurposing existent materials became just as important as producing new ones, and the brokenness of things and social and physical infrastructures could suggest unanticipated course of action and further new arrangements.

What planning, formatting, and official governing could not do, a continuous recombination of synergies, antagonisms, opportunisms and empathies would manage to pry open new possibilities and dispositions from a limited base of concrete materials. In the long history of urban inhabitation across Africa, it is impossible through the various methods of keeping count that were applied to discern how many fell by the wayside, just how impractical many makeshift arrangements actually turned out to be. The point is not to abstract African urbanisms out as some kind of specific process but rather to emphasize the extent to which urbanization everywhere entails the production of the urban as its own product and that much of this process tends to be obscured by the focus on operations and political technologies such as accumulation, agglomeration, territorial ordering, enumeration, or sectorization. While these instruments certainly have played a dominant role in the production and ordering of urban space, there has always been another physics at work through which unsettled bodies and materials, instead of immediately or eventually adhering to the formatting of disciplinary regimens precipitated and were shaped by many lateral arrangements constituting both temporary and enduring milieu that metabolized, sensed, associated, and expressed things in ways that could not be easily codified or administered.

Consider the amount of energy and resources expended by all of those attempts to enclose, define, consolidate and territorialize. Borders, definitions, and zones are not natural objects, but require sustained effort to maintain, to separate off. Just witness the amount of technical capacity and financial resources involved in sequestering upscale urban populations within secure gated communities. Enclosures and zones are not only instruments to individuate space, and to institutionalize notions of citizenship based on the development of property—where freedom is intertwined with the capacity to exercise force over one's possessions—but also to elaborate an economy of availability. Who is available to whom, and in what way, becomes the defining question informing mechanisms of affecting and being affected, of the reciprocal forces exerted through social and material exchange.

The common instruments of designating “white” and “black” territories of colonial cities, or popular versus modern quarters, are instruments for regulating the availability of bodies and their influences, as well as fluidities. Not only do the impositions of checkpoints, security gates, criteria of eligibility, surveillance cameras, and official and implicit rules of entry require voluminous amounts of labor and money, but the rendering of spaces to gradated availability also accelerates a process of entropy and atrophy, where the declension of knowledge about manifold others simply reiterates a self-fulfilling prophecy where even more additional security measures are required.

So consider situation where the energies, costs and debilitations associated with consolidation and enclosure are foregone, or simply not possible. Here, extensive circulations and availability of persons and practices generate new constellations of activity and resource creation, even in spite of limited external inputs. African urbanities have seemed to long rely upon this extensive availability as a generative, urbanizing force. Such availability is far from, however, being unproblematic. The generosity of availability is also thoroughly entwined with the implicit demands of multiple and contradictory requests, loyalties, responsibilities, and sometimes dizzying turns of events. It is difficult within a field of extensive circulations, expressions of experiences and demands, to make clear priorities as to particular courses of action, to always know what it is important to pay attention, or to work out a sense of proportion as to what kinds of events and actors are exerting specific forces over one’s life. As an inverse of atrophy, the risk here is simply overstimulation and the inability to discern and predict. This is why this generative condition of urbanization has often produced frenzied efforts at territorializing things, making loud pronouncements of who and what belongs or not, and of rendering everything as some kind of spoils—of war, of political antagonisms. Additionally, the visible edifices of stratification, of territories well specified, of institutions with their clearly demarcated sectors, roles and responsibilities, become an essential façade for the more ephemeral, cross-cutting swirls of complicity, negotiation and apportionment that transpire behind the scenes.

So while African cities have long made all of the “right moves” in terms of subsidiarity, transparent governances, and strong institutions, these moves have seldom done simply the work conventionally prescribed to them. They also have to work hard to keep in the background the needed availability of different kinds of actors and processes to each other, enabling them to continuously renew the risk of things becoming sedentary, which the precarious economies of many African cities simply cannot afford. That economy of availability is a kind of “savings” in the bank. For example, in the seemingly most marginal worlds, such as the Chad Basin, transactions may simultaneously entail the barter of animals, the free-for-all distribution of common goods, insurance swaps, satellite imaging, intuitive maps of ancient trade routes, raiding, derivative trading on handheld computers, bulk deliveries of rare earth minerals, fake property titles, and leveraged

trading of oil platforms and mines. This heterogeneity of things is available to each other, creating new possibilities as well as spurring often opaque antagonisms.

At another register, this notion of availability is important in terms of the histories of racialization. As Denise Ferreira da Silva indicates, the aspirations of blackness concern *difference without separability*, where the availability of black livability and resourcefulness to the world is not the basis of a differentiated subjecthood of the modern, white individual or social, not a resource to be extracted from in order to buttress the formation of property as the substrate of white privilege, but as an elemental feature that exceeds any specific use or valuation. Urban justice is thus not the restoration of some overarching commonality, not the equilibration of difference through the fair apportionment of specific resources or opportunities, but rather the availability of differences to generate new dispositions for living without judgments of their efficacy in terms for which they have not contributed to developing.

Going beyond philosophical abstraction, this space of availability has been a critical historical condition of the possibility for African urbanities to elaborate a capacity to sustain growing populations and differences. This capacity to enact different ways of doing things outside the debilitating capture by purportedly “definitive judgements” of efficacy facilitated the formation of expansive associations, all of the different ways people, things, and places were associated with each other, with no guarantees that they would work, nor any expectations that they needed to be prolonged or institutionalized. So if many prominent Africans in authority believed that urbanization was antithetical to African mentalities, they perhaps confused inability with a refusal to be governed and settled within particular forms of standardization.

The entanglements of the urban and the rural in ways which obviated the salience of their distinctions, as well as the thickened conduits among towns and the substantiation of corridors as places of residence were the spatial outgrowths of such expanded associations.

Take the example of the corridor that runs from Douala to the Aba in Nigeria. To what extent can we describe this space as either rural or urban. Residents along this corridor often see themselves as the nodes or mediators in an uninterrupted series of flows passing through, a sense of positionality that enables them to know just as much about what is taking places hundreds of kilometers away as they do about their own “neighborhoods.” In the geopolitics of Cameroon, what is as disturbing to the state as the nationalist aspirations of the Northwest is the capacity of its inhabitants to choreograph a coordinated collectivity regardless of the crackdowns and repressions that state may apply to specific towns and villages. Extensive urbanization not only manifests itself in traditional tropes of densification but in a capacity for people and activities to extend themselves across heterogeneous terrain within multiple figurations of proximity.

Not dissimilarly the ways in which vernaculars, aesthetic expressions, and tactical practices of hacking into infrastructures and institutional apparatuses spread across different cities, expanding the archive of practical knowledge, constitute another instance of extended urbanization. Broken and partial infrastructures, instead of only signaling deficiency, also convey a sense of incompleteness and the possibilities of use and repurposing that articulate people and territories in unexpected ways that may be functional for only the short-term, but just enough to concretize a different set of imaginaries of what could be possible. The now substantial history of media and technical application rollouts in Nairobi suggest many different ways in which urban technicities can detour from the intended objectives to encompass the incipience of many projects, many of which will not reach fruition, but also remained undeterred by their “temporary” failures.

In Lagos, the long-hone facility with using social media was recently deployed as an instrument to call attention to and disrupt the arbitrary and ruthless practices of policing and security, eliding the state’s capacity to maintain the invisibility of its more vicious approaches to rule. The systematic and careful availing of the realities of local lives to a larger surrounds for the consideration of neighborhoods across the city enabled Leonians to piece together an eventually effective response to curtailing the impact of Ebola in Freetown. The circulation of TikTok music videos, music clips, WhatsApp videos enabled a sense of connection experienced across popular neighborhoods in Luanda, where the state attempts to rule through fragmenting and dividing the city. These are all works in progress, but again emphasizing an ethos of availability, putting messages, images, experiences, and thoughts out in the world to be tried out, reworked, and fed back through elongated circuits of reciprocity. Women’s associations in Agadez, a key nodal point in transmigration from across West Africa to the Mediterranean, and increasingly a locus of European interdiction and surveillance, adopt passing migrants as their own children so as to attenuate conflicts about who belongs and who does not. Again differences without separability come to characterize a critical dimension of urban production.

The long nightmare of separation in South Africa, having been inscribed into every infrastructure, points to how difficult it is to reverse and repair the damage inherent in trying to keep things apart—all the violence entailed, all of the immeasurable distances that have to be reconciled and sutured. And the question is in what language is such suturing done, can such a wound ever be healed? At the same time, to posit the city as a space of cosmopolitan flourishing cannot avoid the burdens of the historical situatedness of that city within deeply rooted architectures of belonging and contests about belonging, such is the condition of contemporary Addis Ababa. In other cities, where only a fraction of the territory is subject to any measure of development or real administration, neighborhoods and districts veer off into different directions under conditions of state indifference, at

becoming inaccessible to one another as residents have to hunker down and focus on small attainments in circumscribed arenas of possible action.

All reflect the conundrums of the intensity and extensiveness of availability. Individuals and collectives certainly cannot be completely available to any use made of it, for the sustenance of that which would be made available would inevitably disappear. Some sense of integrity and definitiveness have to be maintained, which entails the insertion of boundaries and boundedness. But how to deter the reification of such boundedness into an essential condition of endurance and identification rather than simply a necessary pragmatic maneuver deployed to maintain a sense of coherence at each moment when something is demanded of it. As young people in Abidjan, for example, “find” themselves across a wide range of “versions”—jobs, hustles, identifications, locations—they depend upon the consumption and display of particular brands or styles as a way to assert a specific and strong identity that serves as an instrument of continuity as they constantly change social performances. These practices are more than simple resilience; they are forms of computation that try to recombine the materials at hand to find new spaces within which people can operate and make some kind of living. Such recombination is premised on the availability of materials to such new arrangements.

Still, it is important to emphasize the deep stresses and strains that persist for urban inhabitants; the intensity of struggles to keep things afloat, particularly amidst different forms of structural indifference. The requirements of inhabitation still far exceed the capacities of urban operating systems to provide them. Everyday survival is hard work for many, often requiring multiple contortions of body, mind, and soul, as well as navigations of a claustrophobic space of competing obligations and urgent desires. If an aspect of a refusal to be governed was expressed through an unwillingness to be counted as individualized citizens, there is equally a determination to count as eligible residents of cities, something expressed through the desire to acquire land and house as a concretization of a right to urban inhabitation. Many efforts to emplace will be subject to repeated rounds of contestation over tenure; many homes will remain perpetually unfinished; many locations settled will be too far from available work to be viable any time soon. Bringing the necessary infrastructure to these “extensions” will require arduous maneuvers, both in terms of dealing with metropolitan governments and engineering. Urban growth proceeds largely on the speculation of prospective growth. At distant removes from recognizable cities, residents often impatiently await the arrival of the “city” to them.

What appear to be the defining vulnerabilities of African cities are difficult to navigate in terms of clear-cut meanings and implications. At the level of the prolongation of life, of life as an evolving potentiality of flourishing and sustenance, the ethical and political imperatives would seem clear-cut, informing a trajectory of meeting basic needs, providing for adequate levels of work, and of maximizing the values of human and material

resources. On the other hand, it is vulnerability as a structural underpinning of the availability of people and things to each other, of the capacity of people and things to be re-arranged and the concomitant generativity of new combinations of elements to create multiple courses of action, and thus endurance, that has underwritten urbanization processes in large swathes of Africa—in conjunction with an array of political technologies. It is not easy to disentangle availability as precarity and subjugation and availability as generative resource and capacity.

It is not that the differences between these conditional states disappear or collapse into each other. Rather that decisions require careful engagement in the turbulent borderlands of these distinctions, a way of reading in advance the implications of policies, material inputs and development trajectories for each of form of vulnerability as simultaneous states of being. A way of always acting both forward and sideways, of thinking of the costs of what appears to be each progressive intervention in terms of what might be lost or distorted. An urbanization of a multiplicity of small gestures as well as amplified pronouncement, of acupunctural experiments as well as grand designs. Above all, taking into consideration the *systematicity* of everyday practices and the collective resonances in the intersection of people and things that seemingly don't have anything in common.



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