

# cityscapes

re-thinking urban things

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Issue 01 Summer 2011



## CAPE TOWN, WORLD DESIGN CAPITAL?

*We look at the gentrification of Woodstock in the context of the creative economy*

## TEACHING FOR TOMORROW

*"In a sense, we are experiencing our future today." Aromar Revi*

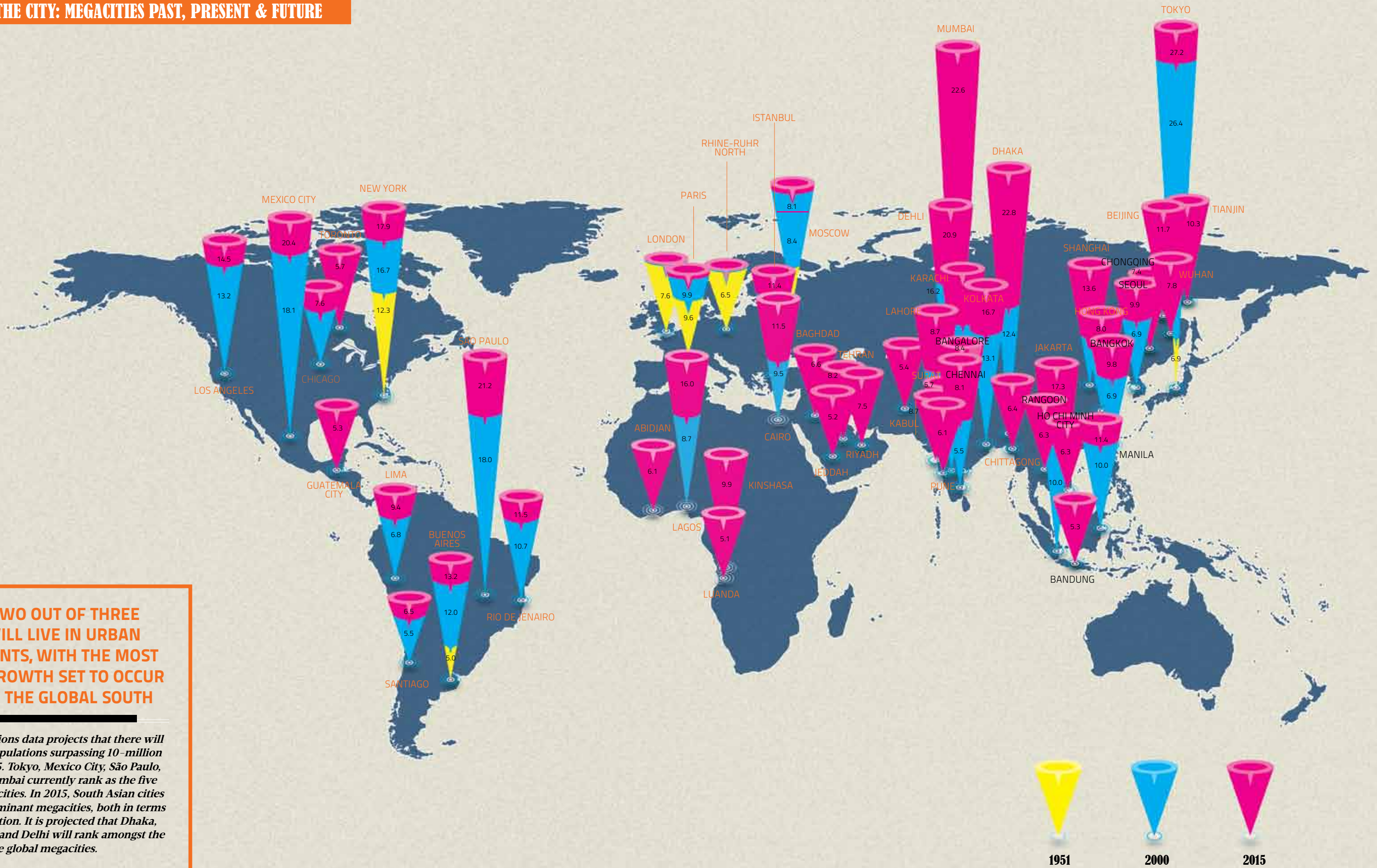
## WAYS OF DOING THINGS

*Achille Mbembe speaks to AbdouMaliq Simone about his work, faith and research*

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*"We exist as hybrids of analogue and digital personalities." Neo Muyanga vs Ntone Edjabe*

THE FUTURE OF THE CITY: MEGACITIES PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE



CAIRO, EGYPT

# ARCHITECTURE OF RESISTANCE

On January 25, Egyptians initiated a campaign of non-violent civil resistance against the rule of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. It culminated in his resignation 18 days later, on February 11. Much has been written and said about the Egyptian Revolution, in particular the use of social media by activists to mobilise and co-ordinate dissent. Revolutions, however, require more than good organisation and management: they necessitate a commitment to physically being in a space, to harnessing the latent potential of a diffuse and ephemeral online community in the real world. Mass rallies, sit-ins, the building of barricades and hoarding of makeshift arsenals, these are some of the other things that also happened during the Egyptian Revolution. This photo essay records how ordinary Egyptians reconfigured their urban space in the agitated two weeks after January 25, in particular at Tahrir Square, Cairo, the locating symbol and central site of the non-violent resistance to Mubarak’s 30-year rule. What remains striking is the temporal and makeshift nature of the architecture that arose. Also how uncommon and unexpected things—a porthole-shaped window, or the articulated track of a military tank—were repurposed to decisively assert the primacy and place of the human body in the city \*



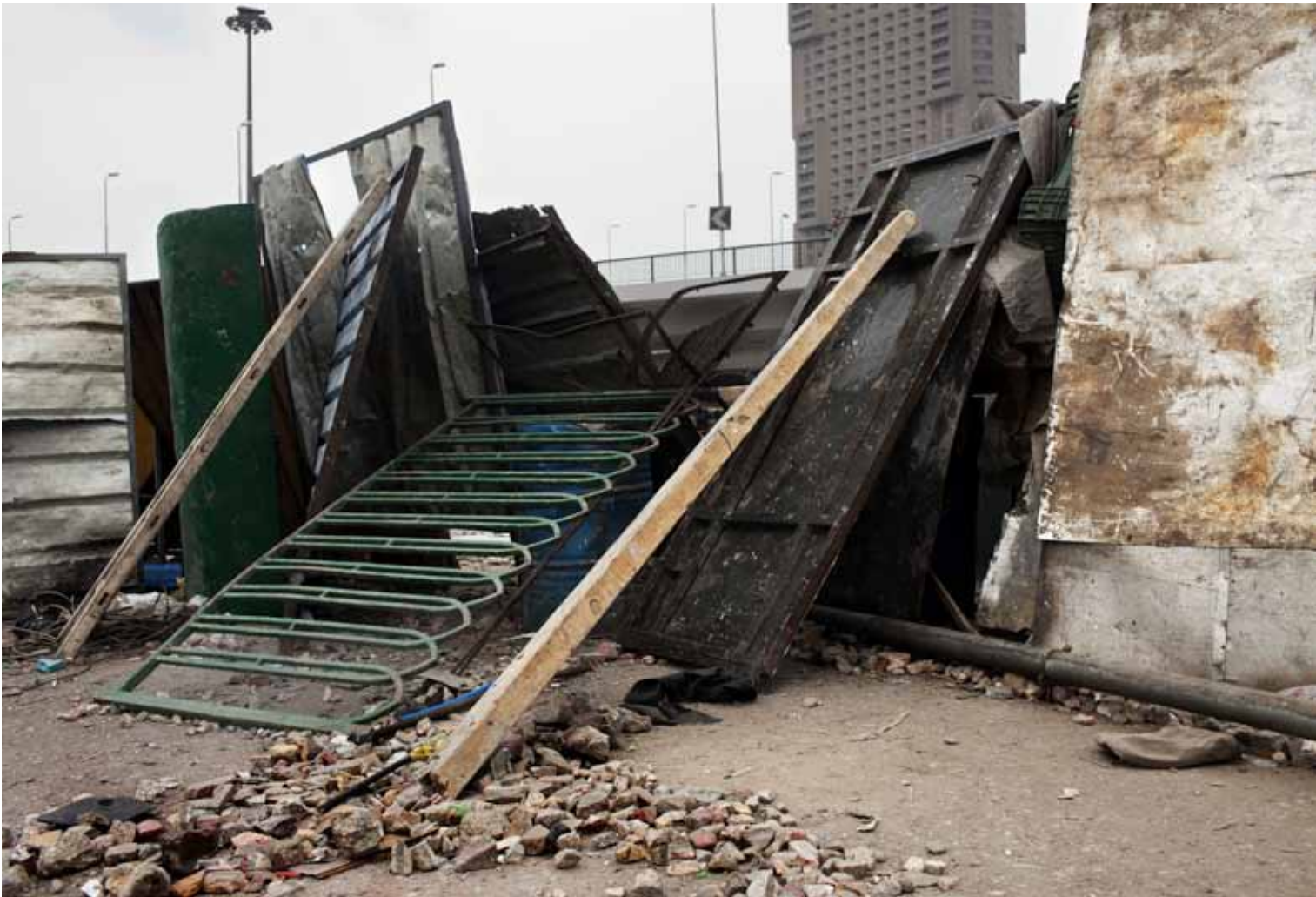
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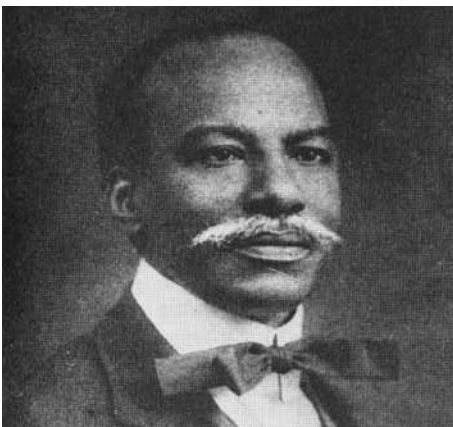
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"In a sense, we are experiencing our future today." Aromar Revi



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*This project is supported by the Africa Centre & National Research Fund South Africa*

# editorial

Somewhere in these 120 pages—on page 70 actually, or thereabouts—musician and composer Neo Muyanga speaks of a complexity he describes as “more akin to elegance”, a complexity about “getting to a space where you understand the deeper links between divergent points”. Elsewhere in this new addition to the mediascape—on page 14, to be exact—Edgar Pieterse, our colleague and a guiding force behind the establishment of *CityScapes*, speaks of how this publication needs to constantly navigate between dystopia and hope. Adopting a singular, pedantic position is therefore not enough. Turn quickly to page 38. (Welcome back.) That is Indian photographer Dhruv Malhotra. Between 2007 and 2009 he walked contemporary Delhi, by night. His photographs picture just a fraction of the megacity’s inhabitants, finding shelter in the shadow of its opulent structures, claiming their share of the city’s promise, however tenuous. These three things—a transcript of an interview, an editorial, a photo essay—all herald the same thing. “They all connect to each other.” (That’s Aromar Revi, speaking with Edgar on page 55.) The keyword here is connect. Although engaged in very different practices, all three the highlighted examples illustrate the idea that everything, no matter how disparate and unrelated it may seem, is connected. *CityScapes* is interested in exploring, finding and mapping those connections. In the last few months we have spent a not inconsiderable amount of time ferreting around for ideas and opinions, also looked hard for practices that animate our guiding philosophy. This new magazine is the outcome of that activity.

We mentioned the word philosophy just a moment ago. *CityScapes* has a philosophy. Actually, it’s a pretty simple statement of intent. *CityScapes* is founded on the belief that the African city, like cities elsewhere, is a multi-form, multi-storied and multi-nodal organism. Rather than present a priori assumptions, the magazine assumes the position that knowledge is empirical and accretive, plural not singular, a constellation of possibilities rather than a set of known variables. Inquiry is not an end. The very act of inquiry produces a new destabilisation and reconfiguration, which demands further inquiry. Underpinning this editorial remit, which we spent many months arguing over and refining, is a series of basic, if philosophically directed questions:

- What is the role of the city, as an intellectual and social construct, in our earth’s future?
- How does academic study impact urban transformation?
- How does practice impact urban transformation?
- How do macroscopic and microscopic readings change our understanding of the city?
- Can a dialogue between academics and those in practice in various urban-centric fields yield a new understanding of the dynamism of southern cities?
- What do we learn when we compare discrete experiences from different geographies on the African continent and the global south?
- Can a notionally difficult argument be presented non-verbally as a photographic essay or reinterpreted as information graphic?

This is our first shot at answering these questions. Good reading ✨

cover image by Yto Barrada

Girl in Red, Tangier, 1999 from the series *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project* (1999–2004)

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Building a funky and rigorous applied research centre around the problematic of African urbanisation is an odd business to be in. I often spend my days in sessions at the African Centre for Cities (ACC) dwelling on statistics, such as the fact that certain African countries don't have any architecture schools whatsoever, or no basis for teaching design, and even less by way of equipping people to manage and run the unruly spaces we designate as cities. Engineers per 1000 of the population in a suburb of a typical OECD city would be the equivalent of the endowment of an entire country or cluster of states in Africa—and the same deficit applies in other critical fields such as spatial economists, planners, ecologists, and so forth. Thinking through the logical conclusion of what it means to have to contend with twice as many people in African cities in just two decades, when we are already at a loss as to how to respond to the current prevalence of almost 400-million urbanites, is indeed an odd business to be in. Of course, we have a reasonable idea of what policies are required to “fix” slums or tattered economies, but the truth is that the large-scale prevalence of structural economic and settlement informality is testimony of ignorance, or incapacity.

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## Liquid University

EDGAR PIETERSE

***African universities and centres of learning will have to radically rethink their functioning to be relevant and effective in a period of urban change.***

The narrative becomes even more surreal. Not only do we have to figure out how to accommodate, employ and educate these new city dwellers, but somehow African cities have to do all this at a time in history when a number of massive cost adjustments must be taken into account to deal with the long-term consequences of unbridled extractive growth models. Put plainly, African cities are marked by dramatic market and state failures. While this is being addressed, interventions are required to tackle the tightly woven poly-crisis of food, water, energy, ecosystem degradation, employment and safety. Exactly who is meant to lead and propel such interventions is anyone's guess. This train of thought ineluctably leads to dystopia. Yet, since the bulk

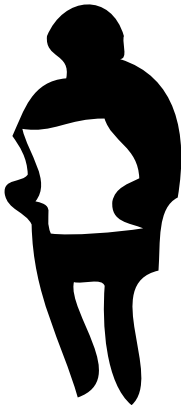
of urban growth over the next 40 years will occur in Africa and Asia (2.5-billion people), a different future arguably lies in the actions and practices of those spaces, particularly the diverse and often unruly and therefore surprisingly adaptive urban conurbations. This self-evident, but still largely under-appreciated fact is the seam of exploration that we are continuously rediscovering as we go about enacting the ACC experiment, with its focus on knowledge production, training and fostering epistemic communities of thought and practice.

Since Latin America has more or less completed its urban transition, it will prove to be a vital laboratory for the choices and prospects of cities in the rest of the global south. Similarly, South-Asia has been much quicker in coming to terms with the implications of the unfolding urban transition, and so equally holds important lessons for what Africa could be doing and should be asking. At this moment there are thousands of researchers, activists, innovators and public policy practitioners taking decisions and making plans to come to terms with unprecedented needs, challenges and opportunities of differential urbanisation patterns across the global south. Their stories are, however, seldom told. Their dreams, visions, ambitions and desires are not considered worthy of attention. In fact, their ideas and sources of inspirations are opaque. This state of ignorance and myopia is incredulous and unacceptable. It is clear that an enormous body of endogenous knowledge must be

produced to come terms with the rapidity, scale and ramifications of spatial change across the global south. Universities and other centres of learning will have to radically rethink and remake their functioning to remain relevant and effective. At the same time, it also evident that an army of urban practitioners with integrative skill sets are required to deploy and adapt the new knowledge that our universities must produce. For these actors and institutions to emerge, a uniquely liquid milieu of ideas, provocations and cross-cultural learning is required. Set against these imperatives, *CityScapes* intends to become a critical resource to foster new knowledge cross-fertilisation, inter-institutional learning and cross-context thinking and communities of practice. It will tap into a rich and emergent vein of forward-looking innovation that is always firmly rooted in context, but is also propositional. *CityScapes* will demonstrate that criticality, proposition, openness, listening,

aesthetics, style and contestation are not contradictory stances, but rather vital ingredients for the new metropolitan sensibility that must underpin the second urban transition as Africa and Asia become substantially urban in just two decades. *CityScapes* embodies a suitably hybrid identity, being part thinking magazine, part academic journal, and part popular design rag. In this sense, *CityScapes* is both academic and popular—yet neither. This is the only approach that makes sense when one is forced to continuously oscillate between dystopia (realism rooted in contemporary trend patterns) and hope (the beauty and meaning that flows from thinking freely to bring solutions and answers into the heart of dystopic prospects). It is a high-wire act. Not only is *CityScapes* a vehicle to embody and promote the intense, indefinable character of complex and dynamic urban scapes across the global south, it is also an epistemic project that

will force universities to transform into something less baroque and more relevant to the needs and desires of the contemporary era. *CityScapes* is therefore, by definition and *design*, an experiment that will evolve and become imprinted by the various people and institutions that undertake this journey with us \*



Urban challenges in India are often phrased in terms of the missing objects: roads, buses, metros, power connections, clean water access points, sewerage treatment plants, schools, hospitals, houses, parks and the rest of the inventory of urban infrastructure required to meet the needs of growing cities and towns. The most high profile government report on the urban trajectory this year, for example, was created to estimate the infrastructure and service needs as well as the financial resources required. To their credit, the High Powered Expert Committee (HPEC) for estimating the investment requirement for urban infrastructure services went beyond this mandate and also discussed the institutional changes required to ensure that these objects would actually appear and be useful. The broader global discussions of urban potential, on the other hand, are visions of what happens in the interstices between these objects: the movements of people and goods that the transport network and carriers enable, the economic transactions and social relationships that the urban layout enables, the hard to quantify amenities of well-designed public spaces. The promise of urban eco-friendliness depends in large part on the way people choose to travel; the promise of urban social mobility and opportunity depends on their options for movement and interaction. The “proximity” Edward Glaeser celebrates in *The Triumph of the City* (2011), his best-selling paean to the urban, is the root of everything, from resource use to social interactions and economic interchange of ideas. Inclusion—a current synonym for development in Indian political rhetoric—happens in the interstices. The possibility that meeting the urban challenge will not guarantee seizing

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## Visible Interstices

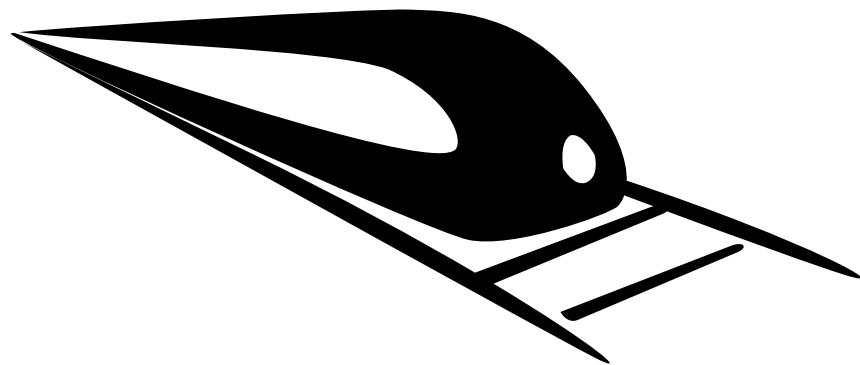
JESSICA SEDDON

*The difference between responding to the urban challenge with infrastructure and investing in the urban potential of India will get more complicated in future*

the urban potential is exacerbated by the highly administrative nature of urban governance in India. Local governments’ existence and potential jurisdiction over a variety of services are constitutionally recognised, but the pace at which money, people, and actual responsibility are devolved to city governments depends on state political whims. “Funds, functionaries, and functions,” has been the rallying cry. It has largely fallen on deaf ears. States aren’t that interested in giving up control, nor are state leaders especially interested in urban issues—rural India is the political heartland, and politicians who are too friendly to urbanites risk dismissal. So cities have effectively been left in the care of bureaucrats and administrative processes attached to (fortunately increasing) funding from state and central government programs. Administrative processes recognise objects more effectively than interstices. Objects are self-evident; relationships and movements are transitional. It is far easier to assess and monitor the existence, location and physical parameters of housing units, for example, than to quantify

the cultural, social and economic environment created by the living quarters in the larger setting and network. The mistakes become apparent in the long run, emerging from the statistical fog of partially reported crime rates, persistent low-level respiratory infections and other social indicators, many of which don’t exist at such a fine scale as a housing project. But by then the objects and interstitial spaces have already been created and the obvious challenge is off the list. The difference between responding to the urban challenge and investing in the urban potential is likely to get more complicated with the rise of evidence-based policy making and transparent, objective monitoring as the mantra of good governance. The ready prescriptions for ensuring that objects create interstices, planning and its cousin urban design and participation, are unlikely to deliver a resolution in time. Planning and urban design both operate on hypotheses about social reactions to objects as much as knowledge, especially in the locations where the challenges—the absence of objects—are the greatest. Traffic data may be easy to come by where EZPass (the electronic toll system common in the US) operates, but estimates in India can be off by an order of magnitude, much to the chagrin of everybody involved in toll road public-private partnerships. There also aren’t very many planners in India. The country has 4000 planners for 5000 urban centres and graduates 350 new planners every year. Political and market participation in decision-making about urban objects and their placement is in principle an alternate route for difficult-to-observe information to make its way into decisions. As long as something can be known at the scale of personal experience, the information can be incorporated by involving the person with the information in the overall determination of the outcome. Political processes that involve neighbourhoods in reviewing decisions about situating parks or

sewage treatment plants assume that the people in the neighbourhood will base their inputs on what they know about how the objects will affect the interstices. Similarly, the process of protest and response reveals substantial information about the impact of road placement, urban renewal, and other infrastructure meant to address the challenge, even if the information simply hangs in the ether. Market participation in the urban challenge could be seen as offering a similar benefit: let a profit-seeking company decide what to do, and it will have every incentive to ferret out information on how to create interstices that will guarantee a customer base. Citizen-customers vote with their purchases, so the logic goes, and there are always ways to adjust for equity and other concerns. But politics and markets are far from the pure information revelation mechanisms mentioned in academic possibility theorems. Their outcomes reflect power, money, and favour trading across time, geography and interest groups, as much as information about the interstices. Profit-seeking private infrastructure providers focus on those who can pay, unless contracts or regulation include especially clear provisions for more inclusive business plans. Urban design in Chennai, in southeast India, is influenced far more by well-heeled coalitions of industrialists and middles class civic leaders than it is by the federation



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**It is far easier to assess and monitor the existence, location, and physical parameters of housing units than to quantify the cultural, social, and economic environment created by the living quarters in the larger setting and network.**

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of informal sector workers. The dominant groups may be well-meaning, but the information set they are revealing in vision summits and submissions to civic bodies simply does not incorporate the lessons learned from experience of those who live and work on the pavements. These citizens have a formal space to comment on city plans through the consultative process required to access funds from the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, the largest urban investment programme in the country, but this is a one-day event with no clearly enforced avenue into the details of how the funds are spent. The urban agenda in India is at a crossroads. There is a widespread recognition of the challenge, potential

and urgency of seizing the latter to really meet the former in more than an administrative sense. We can train more planners, but that will take years, never mind the turf wars that would ensue from absorbing them into the systems for infrastructure planning. We can seek more participation, but it’s hard to see how to build in enough safeguards to tease out the information of experience from the actions motivated by other interests. What is left? A return to the core of the problem. An advocacy agenda that drives the formation of indicators of urban interstices into the set of evidence defining the challenge. An agenda that focuses on influencing arcane government committees on estimating the informal sector, mapping the professions and professional relationships between street vendors, and updating sampling methods to produce reliable scale estimates of economic activity and social indicators. An agenda that scours alternate sources of data for information, including administrative records of public transport companies. An agenda that experiments with interactive e-governance to systematically embed large-scale citizen feedback into administrative decision-making. The quest for inclusion must focus as much on reforming the statistical system and the types of data recognised as relevant for policy as it does the more typical bargaining for material goods and services. As the administrative foundation dictating the where and how of the response to the challenge, the process of collecting and interpreting data is perhaps the most critical point of leverage for achieving the potential of an effective and equitable urban transition \*

The grand transition to a new democratic dispensation in South Africa is fraught on all sides by changes in multiple dimensions, emerging from both global and local scales, and including socio-economic, cultural, institutional, generational, political, ecological, spatial and behavioural factors, to name a few. Yet, 17 years into the transition it is clear that urbanisation is the spatial nexus of multidimensional change in South Africa from which the future social fabric will emerge. South Africa, and Africa in general, is urbanising rapidly; today more than 50 per cent of South Africans live in urban areas. Viewing this transition through the lens of urbanisation is intriguing, because the multiple factors that inform and drive transition come together in the processes of urbanisation. Urbanisation contextualises the processes through which contestations between competing dimensions become manifest, and must be resolved. While it is important to acknowledge that the society of the future, and the form of its national identity, depend critically on the processes unfolding in the urban context today, it is equally important to acknowledge that urbanism is not entirely new. South Africa was urbanising rapidly before the advent of apartheid. In fact, apartheid itself can be understood as a reaction to earlier phases of urbanisation which threatened to dilute racial purity. Even during apartheid, the struggle against racial oppression was informed by the desire to urbanise. “Through a combination of brute force, dispossession and expropriation, and the imposition of negative laws and sanction,” observes Achille Mbembe of the history of struggle and urbanisation in South Africa, “the right of blacks to live in

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# Urbanisation & the Transition to the Future

CAMAREN PETER

*A fragmented sense of urban belonging defines the South African urban psyche and cuts across different social and cultural groups*

the city were constantly under threat, if not denied in full.” According to Mbembe this is why most social struggle of the postapartheid era can be read as “attempts to reconquer the right to be urban”. This fragmented apartheid and colonial history is still reflected in the South African urban landscape today, spurred on by decisions that have reproduced what Edgar Pietrse describes as a “neo-apartheid spatiality” in the urban form. Informality and slum urbanisation are key features of this new urban spatiality, which escalated alongside the hasty adoption of neoliberal economic policies (widespread privatisation and deregulation of public services) early into the democratic era (circa 1996). This has affected South African cities profoundly. While increased governance capacity was devolved to city governments, they had less control over newly privatised service delivery

infrastructure, such as water, energy, waste, rail, roads and so on. Moreover, massive job losses in the state sector occurred as the transition to liberalised commerce was escalated, and are in part responsible for the high levels of unemployment in South Africa. Informality and slum urbanisation are direct consequences of choices made early on in the democratic transition, and were compounded by the influx of citizens to urban cities following the abolition of the Group Areas Act in 1991. Core to this neo-apartheid spatiality, evident in large cities such as Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg, is the fragmentation of the urban landscape into an archipelago of sprawled and disconnected enclaves. This spatial fragmentation perpetuates a class system noted for the vast inequalities around access to services and socio-economic mobility. South Africa has the highest Gini coefficient in the world. Twenty per cent of its citizens own 80 per cent of the country’s wealth, and one in four people are unemployed (approximately 25 per cent by the standard definition, and 36 per cent by the expanded definition). Perversely, the very rich and the unemployed share a common trait: both exhibit limited mobility across the urban archipelago. Those who move between the spatial islands every day often have only a cursory understanding of the spaces they pass through—for the most part, they are merely passengers. Yet how a person individually negotiates the different urban spaces that co-exist within a city informs their sense of urban citizenry. Increasingly, the affluent middle class have retreated to sterilised enclaves in order to work, live, recreate and consume. Hence the great number of office parks, strip-malls and townhouse developments to which access is restricted. These environments are beyond the tainted reach of the poor, so to speak, allowing the middle class to live out their lives largely unaffected by the unfolding crisis in poverty and inequality. The poor, in turn, are cordoned off and

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**This pervasive urbanism is not entirely new. South Africa was urbanising rapidly before the advent of apartheid. In fact, apartheid itself can be understood as a reaction to earlier phases of urbanisation which threatened to dilute racial purity.**

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prevented from participating in the activities and evolution of premium, securitised enclaves. Yet, they are additionally burdened with lack of access to basic services and mobility and opportunities for learning and employment. This fragmented sense of belonging is central to the South African urban psyche and cuts across different social and cultural groups. Fragmented societies and communities fail to cultivate a sense of belonging that goes beyond the neighbourhood, precinct or even city block—they are parochial and inward looking, and cooperate within a pluralist social project only as long as their core interests aren’t adversely affected. These islands of class, race and ethnic disparity strongly inform the emerging social fabric and formation of group and individual identities. They are contested spaces, informed by a fraught discourse that accommodates historical memory differently, and are where the clues to the emerging sense of nationality in South Africa can be detected. Competition and contestation around the influx of refugees, for example, which resulted in coordinated xenophobic attacks across South African cities in 2008, are strong indicators of how legitimacy is being framed in relation to national identity and citizenship. The pressures of urbanisation provide the stress tests under which nationality is emerging. The continued progression towards an urbanisation that increasingly separates people from each other according to class, culture or sexual orientation will not lead to the kind of country that stays true to its egalitarian constitution. Instead, it will reproduce and intensify the levels of difference that exists in society and diminish shared understanding and tolerance. In the long term, it does not auger well for South African society. A bold new approach towards urbanisation is required, one that can address the fragmented sense of belonging that prevails today, and provides the ingredients for an

urbanisation that facilitates greater access, socio-economic mobility, cohesion, tolerance and freedom. Creating humane, liveable and accessible urban environments will go a long way towards ensuring that the South African transition arrives at its intended destination. A variety of actors converge in the mediation of differences and conflicts that shape future outcomes. Civil society, government, business and labour all possess differing and sometimes overlapping mechanisms of influence, some as a result of representivity, others as a result of where capital flows and interests converge to open up new opportunity spaces. The remaining challenge, however, is still one of integration. That is, integration that can effectively bring civil society, governance and business together to mediate inter-sector and inter-institutional tensions, and to share different visions and understandings of urban futures. By giving expression to sentiments around which collective positions congregate, or by increasing access to power and decision-making, participatory governance has the potential to bring greater levels of integration and coordinated effort. Ironically, by adopting a developmental urbanism that is strictly top-down we run the risk of becoming locked into a cycle where the history we are trying to overcome is reinforced and repeated. A city and a future that is co-created is far more likely to be owned by everyday urban citizens than a city that is created independently of the people who live in it and serves the needs of a few \*

In 2000, I saw Claire Denis’ *Beau Travail*, I think it was at Angelika in New York, and I wanted to go to Djibouti. The 1999 film, a loose retelling of Herman Melville’s unfinished novella, *Billy Budd* (1888), depicts repetitive sequences of French Foreign Legion troops training in the desert, interleaved with scenes of Djibouti city after nightfall. Galoup, the unsmiling protagonist, visits lurid nightclubs full of stumbling legionnaires; on other evenings he makes love to his black mistress, whom, there are hints, is a prostitute. By the time I reached Djibouti in 2005, George W. Bush’s War on Terror had begun and, in addition to France’s Legion base, there was also a NATO contingent monitoring activity in the Gulf of Aden.

A country of fewer than a million citizens teemed with foreign soldiers. I saw mostly the legionnaires. In the Djibouti Sheraton (\$140 per night; leaky rooms) there were brawny French and German officers in battle dress, their boots on the furniture. Their presence had been paid for and they knew it well. The Americans kept to themselves on their own base, which I imagined was well stocked with Doritos, Budweiser and other goods Yanks will not go without. I was in the capital city, Djibouti, to offer communications support for an international meeting aimed at drawing Somali businessmen into their country’s political rehabilitation. Nothing happens in south-central Somalia without involvement by its tycoons, many of whom are warlords, and who, on the face of it, were unlikely underwriters of an attempt to re-establish government. But, for a moment, the world—or at least the UN, the EU, and the Americans—was attentive, fearing instability in the Horn and its ostensible twin, Al-Qaeda. And the

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## Your Booty

OLUFEMI TERRY

### Late nights and French legionnaires in the Horn of Africa

businessmen seemed enthusiastic so I kept my doubts to myself. I encountered in the streets the languor one finds in coastal towns and the openness of port cities. France’s influence was everywhere to be felt: Islam’s hard edges had been smoothed, as in Mogadishu before Siad Barre’s fall. There were a great many bareheaded women, women in western clothing. And social congress between the sexes was less constrained than in Hargeisa, in neighbouring Somaliland. Djibouti is home to clusters of deeply rooted expatriates: a small community of Greeks, importers and middlemen, with its own church; and Yemenis and other Arabs from across the Gulf. Curiously, a number of trades had been monopolised along ethnic lines. Djibouti’s barbers were Indians; Hindus likely take up other occupations and yet all the barbershops I passed seemed to be operated by Indians. Senegalese are jewellers and sellers of jewellery, as they are across West Africa. And a great many nightclub prostitutes were young Ethiopian women. The Somalis that had travelled with me, Puntlanders and Somalilanders, were also new to Djibouti and didn’t know what to make of it: the extortionate cost of food and drink,

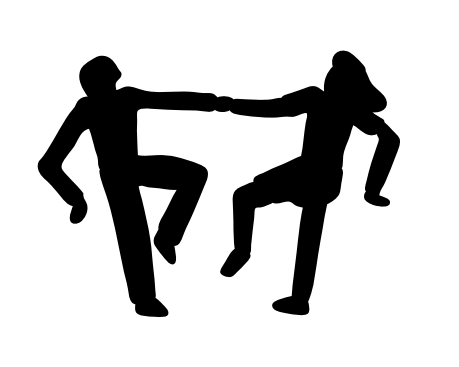
the permissiveness that allowed women to go about uncovered; the crowds of legionnaires in their topi hats, like characters from Biggles or Tintin.

My colleagues were not so much disgusted as fascinated, perhaps faintly titillated by bared flesh. Teasingly, I threatened to drag one of them, Moktar, into a nightclub. He laughed. His wife would kill him, he said, but in his laughter was an acknowledgement of temptation. During working hours I sat with foreign ministry staffers, performing translations in uneven French. By the end of the second day I longed to escape the jargon and platitudes. Zamzam, a young aide, told me her sister, Anisa, would take me out. She, Zamzam said with a whiff of disapproval, had an active social life. Anisa fetched me in a taxi the next night from my damp and airless \$100 hotel room in the centre of town. We arrived at an apartment in a quiet, expensive suburb that was full of young affluent Djiboutians, a mix of residents and visiting expatriates. It was not difficult to pick out the ones that had not yet left: they appeared, in dress and behaviour, stranded between home and abroad, between the known and the alien. They would soon depart the tiny country. The night was hot, 40 degrees, and I stood on the apartment balcony feeling giddy. It was the vodka, but also the sensation of being among people very different from those I’d met in Somaliland or Mogadishu. There was no overt sexual charge in the air and little certainty of what was possible or permissible, of what might be occurring beneath the surface. Djibouti, in fact, seemed timeless and inert. Its elites lived lives that approximated a Western existence; their affluence tempered the heat, the bureaucracy and the insularity of life. The country had achieved a sort of stasis; the transformation had occurred during the colonial handover, when the government agreed to the continuation, perhaps permanent, of a foreign military presence.



Downtown in the city. Djibouti by night

“*Tu es Antillais, non?*” Anisa asked. I swayed in the heat. You’re from the Caribbean aren’t you? I’d become used to being taken for an American. How did she know? “You look like one,” she told me. As the night wore on, Anisa’s perceptiveness did not seem so remarkable; the legion draws recruits from every part of France’s empire. There was another man present, a Martiniquan, with an appearance I thought more Antillean than mine. He had a yellowish face, and his hair was slightly wavy. He was, he told me, with the foreign legion, but I do not think he was a soldier. “I’m actually Sierra Leonean,” I explained to Anisa. It was startling for me that there, in the horn of Africa, my African lineage might be the exotic one.



I pressed her to take me to a nightclub, but her crowd preferred intimate get-togethers, drinking and socialising in their parents’ houses. Their universe did not intersect with the seedy one at the heart of the city, the world of moneychangers, prostitutes, and shoddy goods shipped from Dubai and China. That world was removed by one solitary generation from the old nomad life in the desert. Zouk music began to play and, light-headed still, I danced with the host, who had just returned from France. She laughed in a coarse, loud way. Her tights hissed as her plump thighs rubbed against one another. All the while she attempted to lead me rather than the reverse. But there was another woman I wanted to dance with: she was slim and with a diffidence that signalled she was based, for the moment, in Djibouti rather than abroad. She was a skilful dancer and wholly at ease in a stranger’s embrace. Holding her, I said, “You’re not drinking?” In her glass was fruit juice. “*Non, je bois pas,*” she murmured. “*Je suis Musulman.*” She was Muslim. It was good, I thought distantly, that dancing groin to groin with a man need not offend religious sensibility. A surreal night. The next day I wondered, Cinderella-like, whether any of it had taken place.

“**Nothing happens in south-central Somalia without involvement by its tycoons, many of whom are warlords, and who, on the face of it, were unlikely underwriters of an attempt to re-establish government.**”

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I was determined still to enter the nightclubs. Finally, alone, I went. *Beau Travail* had been faithful in its portrayal. The legionnaires were there, ludicrous in their white topis, short-sleeved shirts and tight shorts; there was something exultant in their dancing. The drinks were exorbitant and the whores bored. In every club, it was the same. At midnight, the dance floors emptied and the legionnaires departed for, presumably, their barracks ahead of curfew. I stared at an Ethiopian whore, a hard-eyed gamine of no more than nineteen years, dancing before a mirror to dancehall reggae. Her skinny hips writhed. There was no expression on her face. It was the last night of my visit and I contemplated bringing her back to my hotel. But I was deterred by a vivid fear of meeting a colleague returning late from a Qat session. She never once looked in my direction. The harder I gaped, the more intricate her movements became. I wanted to enter her head. What had drawn her here? And where had she learned to dance? Then I went out into the hot night \*



# Unheard Voices

ANTON HARBER

*Diepsloot has no local or community media covering its complex problems and aspirations*

In 1951, a British mathematician and Quaker pacifist named Lewis Fry Richardson was researching the unlikely question of whether there was a link between the probability of two countries going to war and the length of their common border. He noticed that they often could not even agree on the length of their borders: the Spain–Portugal border was quoted at between 987 and 1214km and the Netherlands–Belgium border at between 380 and 499km. The difference lay in how they measured the border and his simple but penetrating observation was that the smaller the ruler you used to measure, the longer the border got—because a smaller unit of measurement had to take into account more detail and complexity. Measuring every twist and turn made it longer, and the closer you went in, the more twists and turns there would be. In 1967 a French–American mathematician, Benoit Mandelbrot, used Richardson’s finding to write a paper called ‘How long is the coast of Britain?’ He concluded that the coastline was—theoretically—of infinite length. This is now called the Richardson Effect.

Going into Diepsloot, an informal settlement north of Johannesburg, every day for some months to observe, interview and gather information for my new book, I was struck every day by the fact that the closer I looked, the more complexity I saw. It was the journalistic equivalent of the Richardson Effect: peeling away layer after layer of this community, I learnt more ever day. Things did not become clearer but more complex. I did about five months of research, and for purely practical reasons I had to stop and get down to writing my book. I could easily have researched for another year or two, and I have little doubt that my view of the place would have become more complicated, my explanations more difficult and the challenge of a journalist—to convey complexity with clarity—ever more formidable. Every extra day would have given me more material and insight, though not necessarily understanding. My model lay in two extraordinary books by a Washington Post writer, Alex Kotlowitz, who wrote *The Other Side of the River* (1999) and *There Are No Children Here* (1992). For the latter, he followed one family in one place for two years. The richness of the work lay in the Richardson Effect: the more time he spent, the closer he looked, the more he saw. Compared to Kotlowitz, and most of the best of American long-form journalism, my book was in the middle range of time spent researching. Most journalism in this country is at the other extreme: a few hours, maybe a day. I found this when I surveyed media coverage of Diesploot: reporters had dipped in, grabbed some insights and went back to their offices to pronounce on the place. Who they chose to talk to was arbitrary, even accidental, and it was done with little awareness of the conflicts and differences in such a place, and how this might shape what they were hearing or seeing. The two exceptions were at the extremes of global reporting: the Daily Sun man in Diepsloot, who was really only

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**How are we to deal with the most formidable challenges facing our city, and our country, if our understanding is based on cursory reporting in most of the media?**  
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interested in murders, and New York Times correspondent Barry Bearak, who was researching a major piece on a single incident of mob justice. How are we to deal with the most formidable challenges facing our city,

and our country, if our understanding is based on cursory reporting in most of the media? When I asked questions and talked to people in the city machinery about service delivery, I found too how inadequate most reporting on the subject is. I am an avid consumer of political journalism, but I quickly realized that the knowledge we have of these issues is extremely thin, and I had little appreciation of the challenges and difficulties facing the city in dealing with Diepsloot and the other 181 informal settlements of Johannesburg. The problem is rooted in the fact that the people of Diepsloot have no media of their own, no local or community media in which their faces and voices appear, in which they expresses themselves politically, socially and culturally. How are we to deal with service delivery if we don’t hear the voices

of those who we are delivering to? How are we to know the political views of those in places such as Diepsloot if their only means of expression is to vote every five years or march through the streets and confront the authorities? How are we to understand the dynamics of ANC branches, which effectively choose our president? How is democracy to happen where people are largely excluded from the media that defines and shapes the issues we and those in authority mostly talk about? My book tries to give voice to some of these issues, and a texture to the lives of the people of Diepsloot, but most of all it is an appeal to hear the voices of Diepsloot. \*

# The Suburbs of Eldorado

LAURENCE BONVIN

“Photographing in and around Johannesburg has been an exciting and intense experience for me,” says Laurence Bonvin, the Swiss-born photographer whose work autopsies contemporary urbanism in spare tones and with an inquisitive criticality. Bonvin, who studied photography in the southern French city of Arles, and lives between Geneva and Berlin, has over the past decade spent time making arresting photographs on the urban edges of Amsterdam, Cape Town and Istanbul. Commenting on her new essay on Johannesburg—it is titled *In/Out* and was exhibited at Johannesburg’s inner city Photo Workshop Gallery earlier this year—Bonvin says she started at the city’s margins, looking at those transitional landscapes where changes are taking places but the marks of history are still visible. “Over time, I then gradually moved to the city centre as I got more familiar with the place and had learned to tame some of my fears,” offers Bonvin, who is the author of four books, most recently *Ghostown* (2010), an essay on Madrid’s new urban-edge suburbs. “Downtown Joburg is a fascinating place, which inspired me to do street photography as I was strongly attracted by the coexistence of the random, hectic human activity and the grid plan of the streets, and the somehow monumental modern architecture. I figured out that a more intuitive approach would work better in such a context. I generally think that the complexity of Joburg today requires more than one series, and that in order to recede its spatial fragmentation I would have to change perspective and points of view and address both the centre and the periphery, which in many ways, are blurred and intertwined here.” ✱

[www.laurencebonvin.com](http://www.laurencebonvin.com)



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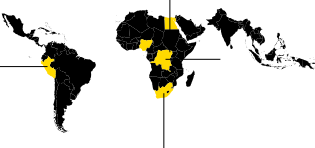
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05



01. Far East Bank, Extension 1, Alexandra, Johannesburg, 2009  
02. Diepkloof Zone 2, Soweto, Johannesburg, 2009  
03. Corner of Von Weilligh and Bree streets, Johannesburg, 2011  
04. Corner of Biccard and De Korte streets, Johannesburg, 2011  
05. East Bank, Alexandra, Johannesburg, 2009  
06. Zinnia Drive, Alexandra, Johannesburg, 2009



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01

LAGOS, NIGERIA

## Radio the Nigerian Way

*How a Pidgin English radio station in Lagos is connecting with residents*

Lagos, with its 15-million inhabitants, is Nigeria’s most populous city, and its commercial hub. Remarking on the pattern of daily life here, George Packer, a *New Yorker* staff writer, observed: “Its undifferentiated human swarms seem to move with the blind logic of insect colonies.” Many of Lagos’ insects-residents were drawn to its promises of light–streets and creeks shimmering with sweat-free gold. But that undifferentiated character vanishes as soon as you take a closer look. Lagos is a city of levels. There are the rich, and then the super-rich, both loaded enough to escape from the city for summer holidays, university degrees and medical check-ups in Europe and America. There is a large middle-level who would not call themselves rich, but who are

definitely not poor. Let’s call them the average. And then there are the rest, actually the majority of the city’s inhabitants, an estimated 70 per cent, who eke out a distressing existence below the poverty line. But if you turned on the radio, you’d be hard pressed to find an accurate reflection of the demographics of the city. Foreign-accented presenters are regularly heard on the most popular radio stations in a city where most people do not and will never speak very good English, and certainly do not speak with American accents. The story changes when you dial into 95.1. Wazobia FM is Nigeria’s only radio station broadcasting exclusively in Nigerian Pidgin English. Launched in October 2008, it is a lifesaver for multitudes in Lagos–and not just those who do not feel at ease speaking English. “It’s Radio the Nigerian way,” the station’s Facebook page declares. A 011 survey crowned it the most popular station in Lagos. In very few places globally will you find the extremes of poverty and wealth so starkly juxtaposed as in Lagos: hungry street children knock on the tinted windows of gleaming SUVs, corrugated iron shacks lean against the fences of

Italian-marbled mansions. In the enduring contest between the haves and have-nots, Wazobia FM, through its linguistic accessibility and irreverent air, allows the poor and marginalised to claim a space that is all their own. The station delivers content–song and birthday message requests, relationship counselling, quizzes, adverts, music, even news, sometimes to hilarious effect–in a language its audience can understand. Radio is a widely accessible medium in Lagos, available in most of its derelict mini-buses, and on the cheapest of Nokia phones. Pidgin, with its restless inventiveness and the absence of fixed rules governing usage, is the perfect metaphor for Lagos. It is also a unifying symbol in a land of disparate ethnic and linguistic groups. Lagos, by virtue of its location belongs to the Yoruba-speaking part of Nigeria. But its identity as Nigeria’s mercantile capital means that it is home to large numbers of non-Yoruba speakers, migrants from other parts of Nigeria. Alaba Electronics Market, touted as the largest in West Africa, is populated by Igbo traders from southeast Nigeria, as are the city’s pharmaceutical and movie (Nollywood) markets. There are also large numbers of northerners, many of them making a living as barbecue-merchants, commercial motorcyclists and night-guards. Wazobia presenter Steve “Yaw” Onu recently told Lagos newspaper, Business Hallmark, that Pidgin represented the only viable language when speaking to Hausa, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Yoruba or Ibo people. “It is also the language of the common people,” added Onu. “If you even travel to Sierra Leone, Ghana, Gambia or Liberia, anywhere, the Pidgin English is a brand of language that appeals to everyone.” Musician Fela Anikulapo-Kuti knew its power, and sang in Pidgin. A recent Saturday morning point of discussion on Wazobia asked whether men ought to help their wives out in the kitchen. Guests sent text messages, called in, or left their

comments on the stations’ Facebook page. “It’s not bad for man to help his wife for kitchen,” offered a female listener. “It’s a good thing.” Male listeners were more circumspect. “E no dey bad as far say I dey house, I no dey busy, I go help am,” said one.

There was, of course, humour too. “I can help my wife,” remarked a male listener, “but if fish miss inside pot, make im no call police.” No surprises there: in lawless Lagos, fear of the police, or any uniformed personnel, is the basis of wisdom ✱. —**Tolu Ogunlesi**

KINSHASA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

## Congo River Boogie

*How arts and culture can shift Kinshasa’s image*

How do you spell transformation in Kinshasa? Like this: a-r-t-s, a-n-d, c-u-l-t-u-r-e. There has been an explosion of arts and multiple forms of cultural expression happening in the capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo of late. On any given Friday or Saturday night, one is spoiled for entertainment choices. One could swear that some arts and culture lovers, spotted everywhere, like Jacques Bana Yanga, the renowned African dance performer and instructor and Amine El-Ayoubi, a Moroccan businessman who moonlights as a singer, have managed to clone themselves rather than make a choice. Their omnipresence thus lends a familiarity across a varied range of venues like Ibiza Bar, home of arguably the best jazz band in Central Africa, the Grand Hotel, which regularly features megastars like Papa Wemba, and the French Cultural Centre, which just recently hosted an international dance festival featuring modern dance troupes from across Africa and Europe. The Congo River region, plays hosts to a vibrant nightlife and music scene. Across the river, in Brazzaville, the bi-annual AU-sponsored Pan-African Festival of Music (FESPAM) has been a fixture since 1996–it was closed prematurely this year following deaths due to overcrowding at the opening event. Kinshasa, which changed its name from Léopoldville six years after it gained independence in 1960, is similarly vibrant.

Once known as “Kinshasa la belle” (Kinshasa the beautiful), the city is however now popularly referred to as “Kinshasa la poubelle” (Kinshasa the dustbin). In a city struggling to shed the pejoratives piled on it in the last 30 years–poor, dirty, chaotic–Kinshasa’s transformative potential may well lie in its ability to harness and channel arts and cultural activities as drivers of social and economic change. For the most part, foreign donors are spearheading this change. The French Cultural Centre, like so many of its counterparts throughout the developing world, acts as the anchor of the Kinshasa arts and culture scene. France’s unwavering commitment to focusing its bilateral support in developing countries on arts and culture has played a vital role in fuelling the vibrancy of many African cities. In Kinshasa, local arts and culture practitioners complain of marginalization by city and national leaders who tout infrastructure projects (malls, office buildings, five star hotels) as Kinshasa’s urban salvation. If bricks and mortar are Kinshasa’s veins, arts and culture should be seen as the blood that pulsates through them ✱ – **Eve Thompson**

 CAIRO, EGYPT

# Cairo Rising

*Egypt’s democratic revolution was anchored in geography*

In Cairo, a dilapidated city of 20 million people, public life unfolds in the shaabis, teeming residential neighbourhoods whose dusty, narrow backstreets double as gathering spaces for neighbours exchanging gossip while they borrow a cup of sugar. Here men sit on rickety chairs, sip tea and play backgammon. The April 6 Youth (A6Y), as the young, social media savvy activists who mobilised Egypt’s populace called themselves, understood the public role of shaabis in urban life, and used their keen understanding of the city’s social geography to help bring the masses flooding into Tahrir Square, in a way that was entirely unprecedented. Studying an aerial map of Cairo, one sees the chaotic spider-web patterns of the shaabis fanning out all over the city. Tahrir Square, by contrast, is a massive wide-open space, ribboned through with traffic-clogged streets—a natural landmark, and the obvious gathering place for popular protest. Precisely because of its centrality and prominence, however, it never fulfilled that role during former president Hosni Mubarak’s rule. Emergency laws forbade public gatherings of more than three, while security forces were vigilant in monitoring political activity, and would normally find out about and stop prospective protests long before anything like a critical mass could build. On January 25 of this year, however, some 50,000 protesters from across the city converged on Tahrir Square, overwhelming police with their sheer numbers, and, within a couple of weeks, toppling the regime and

rewriting history. Whereas January 25 protests planned for previous years, to mark the annual National Police Day, had always fizzled out, this one snowballed. What had changed? In the wake of the Egyptian revolution, urban planners have been considering urban geography as a factor in the making of revolutions. Crucial as it may have been for protesters to have a central, prominent space like Tahrir Square to amass, it was in the shaabis that they built up that necessary support. The A6Y organisers studied maps of Cairo—and also drew their own—in crafting a plan to use the shaabis to build a critical mass of marchers before the authorities were any the



wiser. Journalist and author David Wolman recently investigated their tactics (see his reportage feature ‘The Instigators’). Using phone lines and Facebook sites they knew were rigged and tapped, organisers publicised a plan to gather for a protest at a prominent mosque some distance west, across the May 15 Bridge from Tahrir Square. “This is a story that was—and is—anchored in geography,” says Wolman. As that location crawled with plainclothes policemen on the afternoon of January 25, the organisers had in fact fanned out across the shaabis of an adjacent working-class neighbourhood. Walking through the vibrant labyrinths and backstreets, they

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**The A6Y organisers studied maps of Cairo—and also drew their own—in crafting a plan to use the shaabis to build a critical mass of marchers before the authorities were any the wiser.**

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chanted slogans like “Long live Egypt” and “Bread, Freedom, Human Dignity,” and appealed to inhabitants to join their march. By the time these groups all converged at the mosque, their numbers totalled some 7,000, far too large for police to disperse. From all directions, vast seas of humanity descended on Tahrir Square. Once people finally took to the streets, something changed in Cairo’s public life. January 25 brought about a new political era, one in which people have begun expressing themselves politically in public, says Mohamed ElShahed, a doctoral candidate from New York University currently working on his dissertation on architecture and urban planning in mid-twentieth-century Cairo. Now, people are gathering in Tahrir Square and other public locations to openly vent their political views. “People are much more politically explicit in public spaces,” says ElShahed. “A lot of political diversity has come out of this. Before, you never would have seen Islamists being so public about their views, or liberals being so forward with their views. You have people who were not political six months ago, but are now interested to learn about all of these things in public space.”✱  
– **Megan Lindow**

Ben van Rooijen



02

01. Wazobia FM DJs strike a pose, Lagos, Nigeria  
02. Inside a Rea Vaya bus station in central Johannesburg, South Africa

 JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

# In the slow lane

*Gauteng’s private motorists, road tolls, taxis and the hope of public transport*

The signboard gracing the Rea Vaya bus station in the heart of Johannesburg’s regenerating inner-city Fashion District has one neon message emblazoned across its entire surface: “ZZZZZ.” It suggests the current failings of the smart new bus rapid transport (BRT) service, launched ahead of the 2010 World Soccer Cup to initially link Soweto with the CBD. Not only is the signage generally dysfunctional but Rea Vaya is missing an ideal moment to capitalise on public transport momentum as it readies itself for third-phase expansion. Students at the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) researched Rea Vaya for an undergraduate assignment co-ordinated by multimedia lecturer Terence Fenn. Sabelo Ngobase suggests that with pending freeway tolls, the operator should run a campaign akin to an election blitz. “They need to give people more information, signage,” he says, “and public announcements.” His fellow researcher Tanita Murray says of Rea Vaya’s shortcomings: “[As] with taxis, if you know your signs, you are fine. If you don’t ... then you’re going to go for a very long ride!” She adds: “We are very private-vehicle dependent. With Rea Vaya, it only operates until 9pm, but at least you know ... you will get home safely.” Indeed, the mid-July fuel sector strike illustrated just how attached motorists are to their cars as panic-stricken queues formed at service stations. But the reality is Johannesburg’s drivers are facing a protracted multi-pronged assault. In addition to tolls for the Gauteng Freeway Improvement Project, there

is constant congestion from transport upgrades, general economic activity and increased urbanisation. In many European cities, urban planners are deliberately inconveniencing motorists with strategies like more closely spaced traffic lights, no-car zones and fewer parking bays. Johannesburg is rather upping the public transport ante. In addition to expanding Rea Vaya, the high-speed Gautrain rail service is now linking up Johannesburg with Tshwane (Pretoria). And Metrorail already runs a popular Business Express between the two centres. “We cannot build ourselves out of traffic gridlocks on our roads and freeways,” Ismail Vadi, the MEC for Roads and Transport, told the Gauteng Legislature on July 5. “We must develop and integrate our public transport system... to a point where commuters—both working and middle classes—would consider public transport rather than private transport as a mode of choice.” This potential market, according to Wits University’s Gauteng City-Region Observatory, is substantial: 67 per cent of respondents in a 2009 quality of life survey used public transport daily. Taxis were the most popular (95.6 per cent), followed by trains and buses, with one-fifth using multiple modes. Ngobese says a prime motivator for residents in Soweto to switch from taxis to Rea Vaya is cost, especially among youth, as well as taxi strikes. He says older commuters are more influenced by safety and comfort.

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**...the stations are equally impressive, and a slick service seems to run on time. Yet navigating the system is an alienating experience...**

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◀ from p.35    Certainly, many are converts—buses are full, even on afternoon inner-city routes. They are smart, the stations are equally impressive, and a slick service seems to run on time. Yet navigating the system is an alienating experience for a newbie that requires a lot of asking around. Some suggestions from the UJ researchers include more automated processes like cashless payments, signage in other languages besides English, improved mapping schematics, commuter alerts and interfaces for a variegated target market rather than some generic notion of a standard passenger. Operators like Rea Vaya need to become more responsive to the new user experience to get more bums on public transport seats. It could start with waking up the signboards \* —**Kim Gurney**

 MEDELLÍN, COLOMBIA

## Contact Zone

*A former landfill is now the meeting point between rich and poor*

For several years, the city of Medellín had imaginary walls that divided it into two antagonistic worlds: the informal and violent city of the poor, located on the northern slopes of the city; and the developed city of the rich on the southern plains. The presence of physical boundaries defined by the complexity of the geographical landscape, and the social segregation produced by real and imaginary limits created a city of fragments, gaps and marginal spaces and borders, which strengthened social inequalities, insecurity and violence. The impoverished communes of the northern zone begin where the old Moravia landfill was located 60 years ago. Over the last decade the Moravia region has witnessed a sequence of unique initiatives and new architectural interventions. Events have been organised and meeting points and contact sites have been

created as places of intersection for the new social tribes dominating the city. The northern zone is now, at times, the expression of a utopian idea—it is what we would like Medellín to be. Carabobo Norte Street is today an example of the success of Medellín. It is the site of large open-air public demonstrations, concerts and fairs. It is a street that changes or becomes a different space according to the time and day. During the week, it serves as a neighborhood park, as a space for passage, and on weekends and public holidays it is the ultimate expression of the pulse of this intense city. One of the areas landmarks is Explora Park, an architecturally remarkable science and technology centre that is also one of the most modern in Latin America. “The park is a place for transcending barriers,” says Ana Ochoa Correa, a communication officer at Explora Park. Correa says the park’s open-plan design is “a precise metaphor of what we want to be: in permanent communication with the neighborhoods”. At the city’s botanical park, the new wood and steel Orchideorama Hall (or House of Orchids) provides a space to spend the afternoon, maybe escape the rain or glaring sun. Completed in 2006, it is a viewed with pride by Moravia’s residents and is a new symbol of the city. The central pavilion, with its distinctive, floating roof design, brings together a heterogeneous audience from all social classes; it is a new place for intersections and encounters. Elsewhere, the Moravia Cultural Centre, located in the heart of the neighborhood, takes its name from the old city dump, which was originally only used by recyclers. Today it is a neutral space where non-violence prevails amongst the city’s urban tribes. Carlos Uribe, director of the centre, describes it as “ public space where people feel at peace in the midst of neighborhoods affected by raw violence”. He adds: “Through daily work and activities it has become a kind of unintended oasis where the forces

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**...the social segregation produced by real and imaginary limits created a city of fragments, gaps and marginal spaces and borders, which strengthened social inequalities, insecurity and violence.**  
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trying to weave the territories and control them do not place restrictions.” Another popular meeting point is the Park of Wishes, a large stone square sloping downhill to allow the viewing of movies and images at night. While it serves as an official stage for music events, festivals and plays, its day-to-day use is shaped by the youth from the northern suburbs, who invade it in the evening. Medellín’s northern zone is today a diverse landscape full of new events, symbolic references, contact spaces, green spaces and linked infrastructure that complement each other. It is a space which has reconstituted and healed itself, partly through powerful symbolic architecture, also the generous availability of open spaces without defined functions. Moravia is a place that has transformed itself from being the borderline zone between downtown and the northern neighborhoods to a crossroads and meeting point for the entire city \*  
- **Alejandro Echieverri & Laura Gallego**

**video and audio podcasts  
featuring leading urbanists  
from the global south  
available soon on  
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NEW DELHI, INDIA

# Seeing at Night

DRUV MALHOTRA

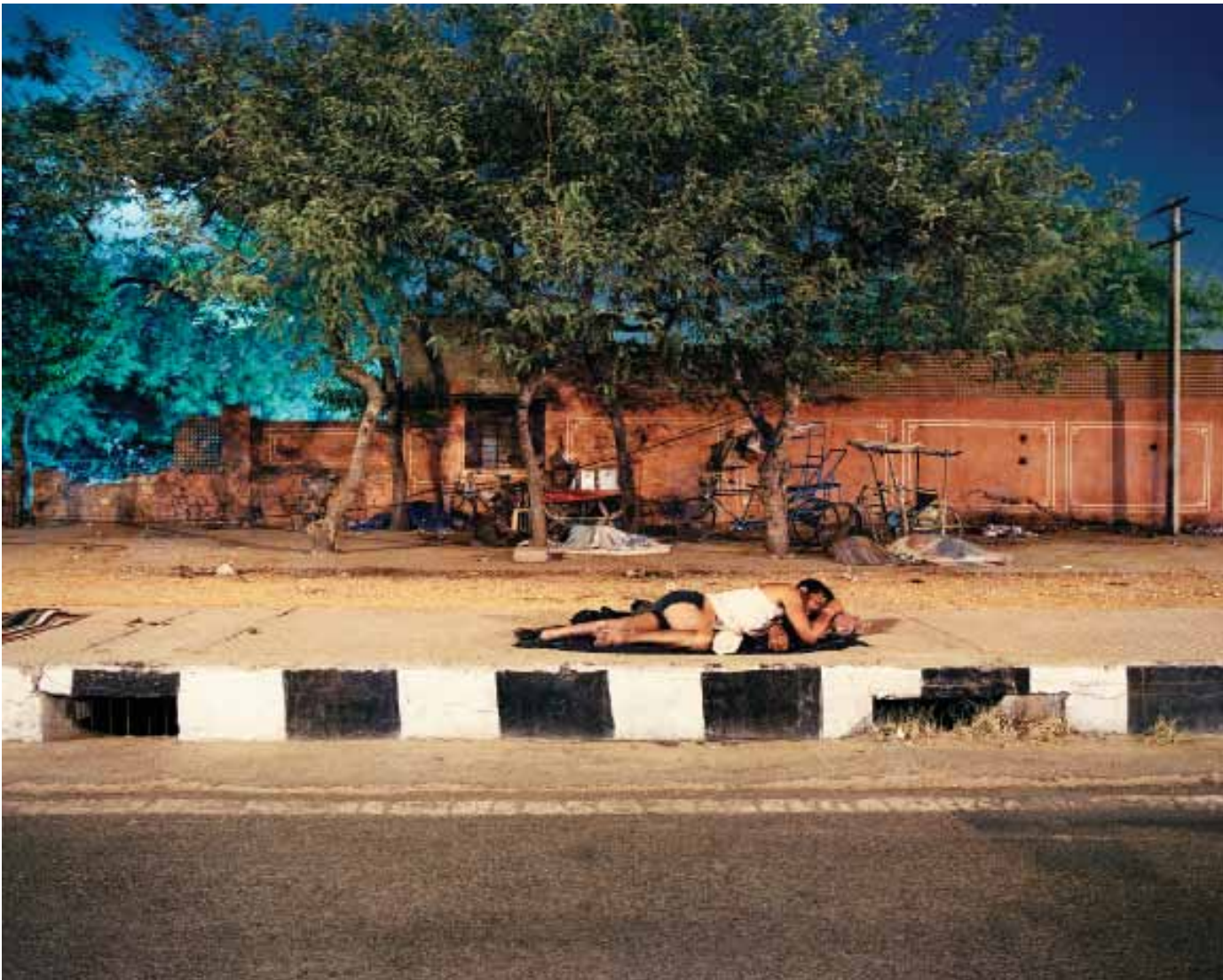
In 2007, a year after he graduated from Mumbai University with a degree in economics, Jaipur-born photographer Dhruv Malhotra began work on his first photographic essay, *Noida Soliloquy*. A sprawling complex of residences and industrial buildings, Nodia is located 40-kilometre south-east of New Delhi and is one of the largest state-planned industrial and education hubs of India. While wandering the streets of Noida taking photographs, Malhorta noticed the many men who slept in the open. A new project was initiated. Working with a medium-format Mamiya camera and sturdy tripod, Malhotra patiently recorded the urban rhythms of a city at sleep. “My intention is not to comment on poverty,” insists Malhotra of his essay Sleepers, “rather it is to look at the sleeping figure in a particular context—the urban environment. I am interested in the way people occupy open spaces.” Included on the exhibition, *New Ways of Looking*, a showcase of new conceptual trends and aesthetic innovations in contemporary photography at the 2010 Brighton Photo Biennial, Malhotra’s essay is not without implicit social comment. “In India, sleeping under the open skies is a common custom,” he explains. “For many, sleeping outdoors is an escape from the stifling heat due to the lack of electricity in their homes. For some, it enables a higher degree of vigilance near their properties. People hired as guards inevitably fall asleep while on duty. Many are also migrant workers who prefer to sleep near their place of work, thereby saving rent money.” \*

[www.dhruvmalhotra.com](http://www.dhruvmalhotra.com)

All quotes from interview with Joerg Colberg on the online photo journal Conscientious, July 7, 2010



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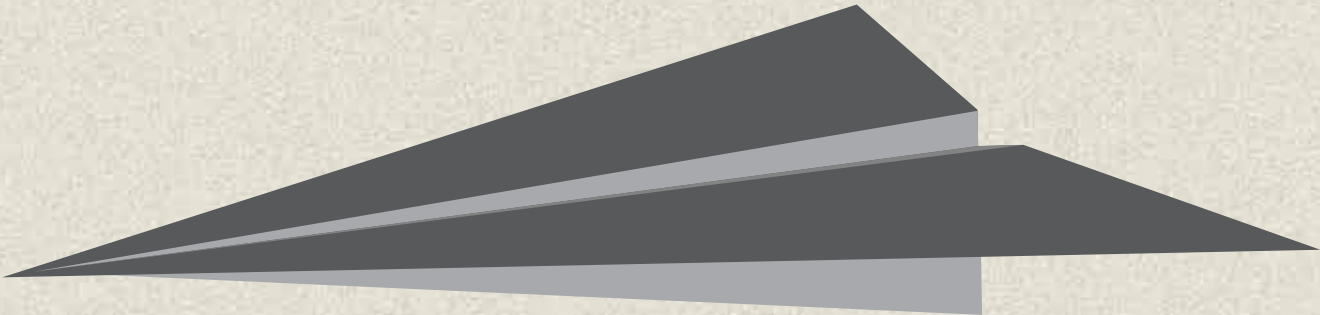
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01 – 05: From the series *Sleepers* (2009). All the photographs are untitled and were made on location New Delhi, India.  
*Courtesy of PhotoInk: [www.photoink.net](http://www.photoink.net)*



**FOR EVERY DOLLAR SPENT ON INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA, 30 CENTS IS SPENT ON MILITARY HARDWARE. IN 2010, AFRICAN COUNTRIES SPENT US\$30.1-BILLION FOR MILITARY PURPOSES.THE CONTINENT WILL RUN A US\$90-BILLION ANNUAL INFRASTRUCTURE DEFICIT UNTIL 2020**

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute / Africa Development Bank





AbdouMaliq Simone

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INTERVIEW

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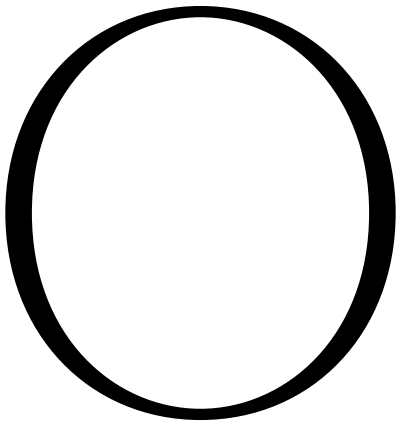
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# Ways of Doing Things

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**AbdouMaliq Simone** is an important contemporary urbanist whose research surfaces overlooked narratives and makes apparent what he once described as “the sheer volatility of urban life”. He speaks with **Achille Mbembe**.

*Photos by Marc Schoul*



*On a recent visit to Johannesburg, urbanist AbdouMaliq Simone spoke with philosopher Achille Mbembe about his peripatetic early life, his formative investigations into urbanism in Khartoum, the influence of Islamic thought on his academic output, also living and working in South Africa at a time when Senegal was confused for a town near Bloemfontein.*

**AM:** Some of the meta-theoretical narratives that dominated the 1970s, 80s and 90s today seem to have dissipated. There is, one feels, a kind of emptiness in terms of powerful ideas that could renew our understanding of the city form in a variety of places, not only in the north, but also in what we’ll call the south. It seems to me that your work, the work you have been developing over the last three decades, represents a voice that is, as far as I’m concerned, extremely original and needs to be heard. So I thought that maybe what we could do is to create a space in which you yourself open doors of your work, and take us by the hands and show us whatever you want to show us from the interior of that home. I would like to start with the Khartoum period. How did you end up there? What led you to produce that book on political Islam and the city in Sudan?

**AMS:** Like many things, these kinds of engagements were largely accidental and fortuitous. I was in a critical period of my own political work, in relationship to various strands of Islamic activism, and part of that was a kind of participation in a project at the time on Islamisizing

the human and social sciences. I half took it seriously and half with a lot of scepticism, so I thought that at best if I was going to continue in that vein to try take some time away from being a psychology professor at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn, to do something different.

At this time the International Institute for Islamic Thought asked me if I wanted to go to Khartoum. I said, ‘Well, I don’t know Khartoum, and my Arabic is really bad.’ ‘Don’t matter,’ they said, ‘would you like to?’ I discussed it with my kids, step kids and my wife at the time—and off we went. The thing is that I didn’t know quite really what they had in mind. I was appointed as visiting associate professor of psychology at the University of Khartoum. It was basically an Islamic Brotherhood department in a very politically contentious university. The salary was \$80 a month, which they offered to top off. To this day I never could understand exactly what it is that they expected of me.

To some extent I think maybe they wanted some kind of American Muslim academic to be there as a showcase, but in my almost three years there the university was rarely open. It was around the time of the 1989 coup where Hassan al-Turabi [a Sudanese religious and Islamist political leader] and a lot of different forces were jockeying for power. The university was closed down most of the time. So what does a boy do, you know?

In cities there are always different kinds of actors—collective, institutional, associational—looking to use the city as a way in which to do something. There happened to be a theatre school, part of the university; it was the only thing that wasn’t balkanised. They knew that they were the one remnant of a kind of institutional form in Khartoum where there were communists, southerners, westerners, where there were all kinds of political tendencies and people from different kinds of backgrounds.

And so they knew also that this kind of thing wouldn’t last in this larger

environment unless they themselves could somehow actively find a way to work together in Khartoum in a way that required them to somehow have a kind of exchange, some kind of interaction. So it was in some ways fortuitous that we did this project on Khartoum: we organised an investigative team that also relied upon the theatre to perform in different kinds of neighbourhoods, different kinds of districts in the city in a way which in some senses disarmed people. It wasn’t like doing household surveys and stuff; it was about making people curious about the performance, bringing people together so that you could begin to have some kind of discussion. It involved connecting with particular districts in this city with maybe six million people, of which perhaps 2.5 million weren’t even officially recognised.

**AM:** We’ll come back to some of those issues in a minute. You mentioned your prior work as a professor of psychology and you also mentioned the political work you were involved in with various strands of Islamic activism. What were the dominant strands of Islamic activism then, and how did those relate to other political forms of activism that were current in Sudan then? You mentioned the Communist Party for instance, and you referred to yourself as an America Muslim academic. I would like you to comment a bit more on that part of you. When did you become Muslim? And what did it mean for you?

**AMS:** What did it mean for me? This is a tricky one because ... my mother is historically from a Muslim family, although she wasn’t Muslim herself. She never took it seriously. When I was a kid the obligation was for us to be sent to my grandfather in Detroit, because we were living in Sierra Leone much of my childhood. My brother and I were sent to Detroit to be trained in din (the way of the faith). We always hated it because it was really boring, you couldn’t do anything; my grandfather was kind of a jerk. I didn’t take it seriously, but during a short term in prison—I

“**Spirituality is a way to move with others in ways which are not so always accountable or explicable.**

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was 18 at the time—I amplified that particular aspect of my heritage for personal protection. It was a pragmatic thing. After prison I left the US for a while. It was when I was in Mali—I was 19 then—that I fully embraced Islam. In the mid-1970s I was asked by Da’wa Islamia, the Libyan version of Da’wa Islamia, who had connections with one of my cousins to help out on a project in Ghana involving Muslim residents of religiously mixed cities like Accra and Abidjan. Why is it that Muslim residents of these cities are marginalised in terms of their participation in the political game? Why is it that Muslims tend to be the least educated, the least involved in politics? This was my first real involvement in African urban issues, that is in terms of what would it take and how were people living, what were the levels of organisation. Through that I started participating more and having to think more in terms of the kinds of forms of Islamic organisation that people were participating in. Although many of the turuq (Muslim sufi associations) were important kinds of references, important kinds of vehicles in terms of anti-colonial struggles, they didn’t seem to be as adept in terms of providing vehicles of organisation that would bring Muslims into a greater participation in political and social and more official economic life. I thought that this required more articulation with growing sense of Islamic movements, even though I had many disagreements with Jebha Islamia, but they were the ones who were willing to work in Africa. There is a very divisive competition for souls on the part of the Saudis, Kuwaitis and Iranians.

They all were throwing in money, and it seemed as if Jebha, at least, were trying to avoid these kinds of compartmentalisations. I increasingly participated in this particular aspect of the Muslim Brothers. It is not necessarily the kind of formation as in Egypt, but in some sense an affiliate at an international level.

**AM:** So it was in Mali then that you self-consciously embraced Islam and you changed your name?

**AMS:** Yes.  
**AM:** Do you want to comment on that specific moment and on that act of name changing?

**AMS:** It was a difficult moment because I in many ways was really fucked at the time. I was without a passport and had faked papers. I had no really discernible means of support. I think there was something about Mali that attracted me. You know, the intense spirituality of Mali and Islamic traditions, that kind of eschatological aspect of it. For Malians Islam is not just a textual relationship; it occurs through all the senses, it’s open, it’s a way of living on many different levels. I was really powerfully affected by it.

I assumed the name that my grandfather had given me, which at the time was not the name that I have now, because my grandfather belonged to this really weird Tarouk, Libyan Tarouk, and he was a very weird guy. AbdouMaliq was really a kind of pragmatic change on the original name, which was Malicalim. The word Maliq has two meanings in Arabic. One is a very obscure verb which means “to become poor in”, which my grandfather intended as a sort of ironic comment, to become poor in the faith. For most Muslims Malicalim means “the king of the faith,” which is a haram (forbidden) name. You were always in trouble trying to front this too much, so I didn’t want to necessarily give up the name that my grandfather gave me. I had to hide it, enclose it. Then, when I was dealing more and more in Islamic movements and in Sudan I had to change it. Once I changed I became much more public with it.

**AM:** You mentioned the term spirituality twice. After your lecture here in Johannesburg two days ago, my wife [Sarah Nuttall], who’s a very good reader of your texts, told me that listening to you speaking she heard the most spiritual lecture on the city she has ever heard.

**AMS:** Wow, Sarah actually said that?

**AM:** Yes.

**AMS:** Damn!

**AM:** It didn’t strike me that much when she said it but I think now I’m beginning to put the pieces of the puzzle together. This is a topic you and I have never spoken about; we have always kept a kind of respectful discretion on this. What would you say that you have learned from that religious, spiritual trajectory that has helped you to write the kind of texts you are writing now or you have been writing over the last 20, 25 years?

**AMS:** I’m not quite sure. I think there’s a certain sense of comportment. Spirituality is in some sense dealing with certain feelings or senses of the inexplicable, with some things that can’t be ordered in a necessarily coherent way. It is a vehicle of movement, but not movement simply from one’s own personal needs or personal aspiration for salvation or to be a better person. Spirituality is also a way to move with others in ways which are not so always accountable or explicable. I’ve always felt that here I am, a not very well-educated person, someone without a lot of very discernible skills, someone with kind of a restless background, who has lived in situations with other people where I’ve had the benefit of being able to move with others in ways that enabled me to have learned a lot of things. And so, in the writing of the texts, I guess I want to think and write about those moments and ways of being together, those ways of moving together, which in some sense are not always very accountable in academic language, yet create the sense of a possibility—the sense that this is possible. Since I have been very affected by, for example, the Black Church, it means writing in rhythms that are familiar

and important to me as well—the writing must have a rhythm, a beat, a sense of invocation. You know, in the Black American vernacular the importance of the notion “to call on it”. When a mother says to her child, “All you have to do is call on it.” In some sense I want to do this in the writing as well. It’s not always clear what I’m saying. People can always argue with it, they can always accuse me of being a polemicist, but I try to use it as a vehicle to call on a certain kind of resource and possibility.

**AM:** Yes, I see that. I met you, I think for the first time, in Atlanta at an African studies conference. I now remember very distinctly us coming back from Atlanta to New York. We’re not sitting next to each other in the plane but I saying goodbye to you at the airport, and then I see you later on, because then I’m teaching at Columbia University, and you tell me that you have this possibility of going

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**There is something about South Africa that I will always be indebted to, which is the respect that I have been shown as a person in my work.**

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back to Africa. Do you want to talk briefly about that period, because it seems to me that it really was quite important in terms of what followed your coming to South Africa? Under what circumstances did you come back to the continent?

**AMS:** By the end of my time in Sudan, I had become really disillusioned or fed up with Jebha, fed up with what I saw as a kind of racism, tolerance of racism in Sudan. When you get to see at the top how these guys, mostly guys, behave, and the sleaziness of their behaviour at times, I was really disillusioned. At that point I had some contact with Farid Esack, one of the leaders of the Call of Islam, a progressive activist

association of Muslims involved in the political struggle against apartheid. The entire membership of the Call of Islam was most generous. I basically just rocked up. Farid was very generous. I liked it in Cape Town. It restored some of my faith in a kind of political version of Islam. Then I left. I wanted to go back and live somewhere in Africa, so that’s when I talked to you and you said that I had to go.

And the other thing too was that the Fulbright at that time was reopening in South Africa. This happened as Jakes Gerwel [rector of the University of the Western Cape] was looking to appoint someone. Jakes talked to Betty Shabazz about the need to find someone he could trust. Betty told me to go. I had this long, problematic relationship with Betty, which we won’t go into now, but I did owe her. I never was that interested in South Africa. I always thought South Africa really dominated the media. It got way too much airplay. I mean, of course, the struggle, but ...

**AM:** Then you arrive here for the second time.

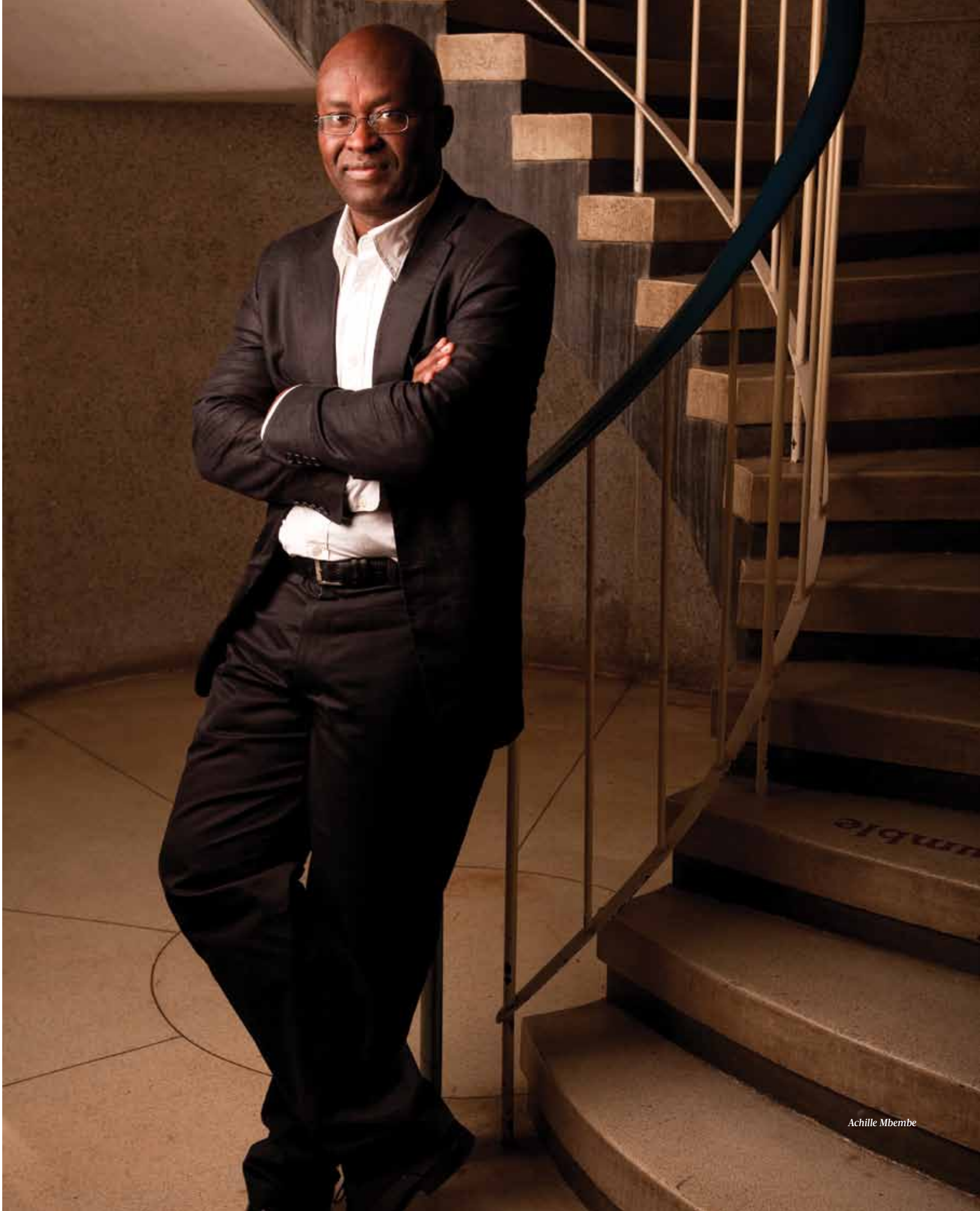
AMS: Yes, at UWC for one year.

**AM:** And then what happens? You teach?

**AMS:** I taught, and basically met someone, a good friend of Edgar’s partner.

**AM:** What is it that your eyes were seeing when you came for a year? What were you looking at? I’m not talking of a project. What caught your eye?

**AMS:** The real generosity of people from the Call of Islam. I lived in Bo-Kaap. I had a kid, she was one or two years old, also two step kids in high school. I singularly had to manage this weird family—and there was this generosity of the Cape Muslims in Bo-Kaap, love, respect. These things were taken seriously, valued. My work was valued too. What I had to say was valued, and not just by Cape Muslims but also in coloured households, by communities in general. In some ways I wasn’t much of nothing, you know, but there was a real sense of being enfolded into a place. I’d been a loner for most



Achille Mbembe

of my life, and I appreciated this opportunity of being folded into a large extended family. I’d never really experienced that before and that was valuable to me on a very personal level. And then the opportunities that Edgar provided for me throughout the years.

**AM:** I was just about to bring Edgar in. So you have this connection to him, through the friend of his partner, but also purely as an intellectual. At what time and under what conditions does that intellectual thing begin to take shape, and around what kinds of projects? I just want to have some kind of map of your itinerary. AMS: Here again there’s a fortuitous possibility. The best example of this, and an example which would be absolutely inexplicable at this moment, is that at some point during the early 1990s I was part of the official South African delegation to Israel. Who in their wildest imagination?

**AM:** Yes, it’s only in South Africa that these things happened. And then when you came back you were the CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) ambassador to South Africa.

**AMS:** During that year at UWC I went to the post office one day to send a package to Senegal. The people at the post office kept insisting that you don’t need an international stamp to send something to Senegal. I said, “What do you mean?” They thought Senegal was near Bloemfontein. So I began to understand. In my classes we tried to talk about Mali and Burkina Faso. No one had the faintest idea. There was an obvious boundary between South Africa and the rest of the continent. If you had some kind of knowledge about what was taking place in West Africa or Central Africa, there were so many possibilities. Of course, the entrepreneurial elite in the country, well, oftentimes they knew well about these places. I would have these discussions with the head of the Premier Group, one of South Africa’s largest companies at the time, who would fly to Kinshasa every two weeks, who knew Mobutu



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personally. I wanted to build upon the kinds of articulations that some South Africans had with these areas, to build upon the kinds of existing economic links that were there, no matter how much they had been in the interests of the regime, and no matter how illegal or how small they might be. It was a remarkable opportunity. Because of the work that I had done in West and Central Africa over the years, it offered a way of reading things that could have at least some resonance here, not applicability so much, but a certain way of thinking about things here, in some ways even to substantiate the kinds of repressions that were here. There is something about South Africa that I will always be indebted to, which is the respect that I have been shown as a person in my work. I owe so much of that to the kinds of opportunities that were provided me here.

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**Wherever you are you make something of something. You can get over, you can adapt. You can be flexible. You always can do something.**

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**AM:** You referred to Tshisikele Biaya during your lecture here two days ago. You too were friends. When I think of you I think of him. What is it that attracted you to him? What did he become for you and for your work? **AMS:** Oh boy. Given all the baggage that he carried with him, given all of the things that he was running

away from, there was always with Beail a resounding sense that no matter where you are, and no matter with whom you are, there is always something to be done. Not something that can be done, but something to be done. Wherever you are you make something of something. You can get over, you can adapt. You can be flexible. You always can do something. That’s one thing, but where I value Beail most is the sense that wherever you are there’s something to be done. It’s a kind of ethical imperative, that there’s something about this particular scene and moment that calls you and whatever you are, however limited you are, no matter how strange you are, to do something. Again, it’s almost like you are called. Beail had this remarkable sense of wherever he was that there was

something to be done, a sense that this moment has a kind of potential. This ethical imperative is not easily defined, and often it is something you never know whether you really have achieved or not. Oftentimes Beail was willing to act without evidence, without a sense of evidence or efficacy. To Beail everyone was his people, you know, “my people”. Now, “my people” would seem to have a kind of sense of ownership. It could be a little bit of a feigning of something, it could be over the top, but with Beail you really always believed it. He would excuse himself from a conference to be with “my people”. And you always believed that, even if the people he referred to never had any strict identification. It could be petty criminals, it could be dockworkers, it could be the old elite, who had such an inflated sense of themselves. He had this remarkable sense of being able to bring out things in people that you would never have expected, and of course with his wild sense of humour and irreverence. Beail wanted to have the best sex, the best time, the best food, the best drink. I could not imagine a life without him, and yet we are without him.

**AM:** We talked about your writing a moment ago, and you explained the tradition in which it is rooted. One thing is striking in view: it’s the work you do with language. There is almost a whole dictionary that you have invented in order to account not only for the city as a form, but more importantly account for who inhabits that space, what they make of it or what they don’t make of it, the events which happen, those which do not happen. I would just like to throw at you some of your own terms, and you play with them whatever way you would like to. Let’s play with the word “articulation” first. **AMS:** We are very familiar with its use in theory, its multiple connotations, the kind of simultaneity its gestures to: you speak from that to which you are linked. I guess for me I want to rely upon some of these well-known notions, but in some ways it’s also

01. Congregants gather at a mosque in Bo Kaap, Cape Town, South Africa

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**We are at this important moment in rethinking urban things in general. There is an intense willingness nowadays to think in much more global terms.**

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device that seems useful in terms of what people have to do in urban life. People have to configure a particular kind of vantage point, and that’s what to pay attention to, what not to pay attention to. There’s always a plurality of things that one could take into consideration, but cognitively, socially, politically one never can, so one has to be in some sense selective. You have to construct a way of deciding what you pay attention to or what not, and then you consider the implications. What implies you, what are you going to be implicated in, or what can you safely think that you’re not going to be implicated in? These are everyday calculations, sometimes habituated, sometimes not self-consciously paid attention to, that I have to think of, and also the inverse, because every time you decide to pay attention to something this is conveyed, this is communicable. So people take this as that which you’re paying attention to, but you can also simulate this, you can always perform this and do the inverse as well. You have to manage

a kind of plurality of agendas and aspirations and constraints. You have to decide how much you are going to aggrandise a particular version of yourself, how much to accumulate, how much to collaborate, how much to compete—these are all things that one has to manage as a writer. You have to operate in many kinds of social domains at once. So there’s the distribution of the self across many different contexts. So in terms of these kinds of decisions and calculations, the word “articulation” to me becomes a kind of device, a device through which you consider these kinds of performances, calculations, ways of being in the city, because in some sense you never can go it alone. Who do you go with, under what circumstances, and how do you assess the implications of these things? In some sense “articulation” is for me the device that tries to consider this kind of work. **AM:** Some more words: “interstices” and “intersection”. Once in a while you use intersection, other times you use interstices. Is there any difference between these two notions, or do they basically refer to the same specifications? **AMS:** I borrow a lot from Jean-Luc Nancy. He has given me some kind of way of thinking about the collective, the common, being together in ways in which are not in the locus of formal associations and formally mobilised manifestations of economic and political life, ways of thinking through the terms of that, the shapes of that, the possibilities of that. I can say a lot about intersection, but I think for me, in city life you arrive at things that work—a job, a household, a moment of stability and security. But like in finance, securitisation is a kind of expensive proposition. If you want to reproduce the conditions of your stability, at some point it requires an expensive manoeuvre. In cybernetic terms, if you continue to do the same thing it atrophies or implodes. Whatever you do is subject to the volatility of the city around you, and so the kind of practices, the

kind of points of view, the kinds of people you talk to, your own frame of understanding has to move, and as it moves it is going to have some kind of intersection with other things, people, ideas, practices, agendas, histories and ways of doing things. But the notion of that intersection, it is a kind of spatial thing, a sense of collision. Intersection becomes a kind of point of view then—it is a kind of mode of visibility. Now you have to see what it is that you’ve relied upon in the past, what you think is familiar to you, what you’ve been accustomed to: your words, your point of view, your ways of doing things in terms of this momentary colliding, coming together of other practices, of other points of view, of other bodies. So intersection is a mode of visibility then. It is a certain sense of a viewpoint, a bringing into view. But it is not just a spatial phenomenon, it is also a kind of moment, a moment of things coming into view. **AM:** I would like you to comment on two other terms. The first one is “eligibility”, which is quite prominent in your most recent work, and “majority”. In the second instance the concept of majority refers, if I follow you, to those who are not poor but not rich either. At the same time the term is not the same as that of the multitude. What are you trying to do with that concept of “majority”? **AMS:** As you said at the beginning, we are at this important moment in rethinking urban things in general. There is an intense willingness nowadays to think in much more global terms. The concrete realities of urban efficacy in the conventional sense are not being defined by Europe and America, but in places like China and, increasingly, India. I think that this is the impetus for now having to think much more globally. People like Jenny Robinson are asking us to think about the terms we use to articulate this comparative moment. It’s not simply a matter of trying to incorporate the subalterned urban south into the existing discourse. In terms of my own relationship this

moment, for the past couple of years I’ve been working in Bangkok and Jakarta, which has shown me how the production of urban knowledge in general leaves out such a large number of people. The dominant discourse in Sao Paulo, Bangkok, Jakarta, some of the major cities of the world, emphasises neo-liberal urbanisation: the maximisation of ground rent and the increasing segregation of cities. But this is in some sense certainly the prevailing global process, no question, even though there are substantial swathes of existing urban space available for inhabitation, economic operation, even political mobilisation on the part of people, even though it’s not quite clear who these people are. No, that’s not true. We’re presently doing a survey of 450 households in Jakarta, old-fashioned social research. There are people who are drivers, policemen, nurses, factory workers, storeowners. It seems to me that if one is going to now rethink a kind of global urban knowledge incorporating the experiences of cities of the south, to quantify the new forms of rule and management of major metropolitan areas, that one should take into consideration the concrete histories of inhabitation, the histories of social relationships, what kinds of devices, mechanisms, tools, instruments, understandings, inclinations—even psychological, as psychologies have been at work in maintaining large areas in the city where there’s a significant heterogeneity—lengths of inhabitation, class backgrounds, occupations, ethnicities, ways of doing things. It’s a kind of heuristic, it’s a kind of irony, it’s a kind of playful notion. This inevitably raises some interesting questions. If I’m talking about a majority in the kind of metropolitan politics which is supposed to be more intensively and extensively democratic, then where has this majority been all of these years? The question is what have artisans, service workers, civil servants, storekeepers, drivers, police, petty bureaucrats, nurses and teachers, to

name a range of occupations, been doing in cities. Is this a majority identified simply identified by all of that which has been left out of a certain kind of urban knowledge and points to a loosely assembled population which has no common basis beyond a diffuse sharing of particular practices and orientations aimed at securing and reproducing their life in the city? It is important to look at the practices and instruments that enable an intersection among different ways of life, different positions and vantage points within the city. I have emphasised the need to produce opportunities for work and that these opportunities are distributed in ways that fold in various experiences and skills, that put to work the different perspectives of different generations and places. This is why many residents today circulate through various jobs as a means of facilitating access to different networks and experiences. Work must be able to produce value, not just in terms of money, but value in terms of economic activity reaching different scales, of being able to renovate itself when necessary—change gears, products, and ways of doing things. You have to do more than just simply create markets and entrepreneurship, but create kinds of networks of association that are attentive to how resources, time, capacity, and opportunities are being distributed across a locality. You have to be very careful about what your temporal horizons are in what you show. You have to take care for the possibilities of being able to collaborate with these kinds of different heterogeneities in ways that continuously are able to mutate. It seems to me that one of the practices and orientations that is a part of that is the willingness to suspend notions of eligibility. We talk to each other. We may be of different length of time in this city. You may be much more educated than I am. You may have more money than I do. But we talk to each other. We try to find out things about. It’s this sense, this willingness to suspend

eligibility as part of practice that aims to keep these kinds of circulations of ideas and information going through the system. For example, if the majority were in some sense to have tried to consolidate itself as a kind of political majority based on certain kinds or forms of consensus, certain forms of organisation, certain forms of identifications of roles and responsibilities in territories and sectors, might that have in some sense made vulnerable a large number of inhabitants who have relied upon the possibility of creating economies at a certain scale and certain kinds of values of production and exchange? Could that maybe have made those kinds of needs, those kinds of practices, vulnerable in a situation where, even if you were employed, your salary may never have been sufficient, even if you did have certain kinds of social capital in terms of identity based social capital. The demands and the obligations were always going to be too much to be able to satisfy them with what is on hand, and so we’re trying to really look at these practices, these instruments and devices in relationship to what kinds of things might be necessary in order to think about a politics from this kind of speculative position. There’s always a politics there, and a very complicated one that has varying kinds of relationships with formal government institutions. But I think we’re also at a critical moment as to the terms and forms of articulation between these kinds of practices and the larger metropolitan system, which is already facing strains on infrastructure, municipal finance and budgeting. Metropolitan areas across the world are, and will continue to face really serious kinds of crises in terms of generating sufficient housing, sufficient infrastructure, sufficient kinds of managerial efficacies ✱



Aromar Revi

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CONVERSATION

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# Teaching for Tomorrow

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The Indian Institute for Human Settlements is an independent, privately funded, globally ranked education and action-oriented research institution created by a number of India's leading entrepreneurs, professionals and thought leaders to address the multi-dimensional and inter-disciplinary challenge of the country's urban growth. **Edgar Pieterse** speaks to **Aromar Revi**, the institute's future-orientated director, about his revolutionary approach to curriculum and imagining what is possible.

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*India’s urban population is expected to increase from a little over 375–million in 2011 to about 800–million by the middle of the 21st century. At this future point, urban India will account for more than half of the country’s population. Nearly two-thirds of India’s economic output already comes from urban areas. The challenge of equipping the country to deal with this pervasive urban future has been taken up by an ambitious independent research institution and prospective national university for innovation, the Indian Institute for Human Settlements. Headed up by Aromar Revi, this fledgling institute aims to create a new profession and new discipline focused on “urban practice” to address the needs of working professionals and younger learners, practitioners and researchers.*

**Edgar Pieterse:** From the vantage point of the African Centre for Cities, and the community of scholars and practitioners in Africa who are all beginning to wake up to the magnitude and implications of the urban transition in Africa, we’ve really been inspired by the scale and ambition of your work. By what it means in the Asian context, and specifically in the South Asian context, but also because you haven’t been overwhelmed by the scale of it. Can you give us some background as to how you stumbled into this field, and how come you’ve ended up leading a systematic educational response to the organisation question? It is probably the largest experiment of its kind in the world? **Aromar Revi:** The big challenge has been to transform the discourse from

that of a problem into an opportunity, and I think that has happened over the last ten-odd years or so. Many of us have been involved for a quarter century in trying to address this challenge, but we’re just starting to pick up a new momentum. It provides us with a tremendous opportunity of a new trajectory of development, a new way of life, and addressing many challenges—from the lack of water and power to sustainability. But centrally, it is an opportunity for social transformation. This is something that some of the leaders of India’s Freedom movement from nearly 60 years ago saw—that cities were an opportunity to address questions of social transformation. If cities are going to provide t opportunities for this transformation, then the question is: How can you help educate and train a new generation of change-makers? Things are happening at such a quick pace, and at such a large scale, giving us the opportunity to create the environment to make transformational change happen. But we’re really short on time. It takes a decade or two to build a new educational regime—that means a couple of hundred million new urban residents. To be honest, we should have done what we are doing now over 15 years ago, when India’s economic reforms were just taking root. **EP:** Do politicians and policy makers grasp or understand the need for higher education and training? **AR:** They are starting to understand that now. A recent report talked about the need to do this at scale, to train not only ‘leaders’, but also a wider range of people. Part of this discourse comes from the fact that we are imagining what it is possible in the future, with the recognition that constraints today are less resources and technology but people and institutions. It’s a contradiction in terms: in a region that has almost 1.5-billion people, the constraint being appropriately educated and trained people. But that’s because of the way our higher educational system has developed or degraded over the last two decades.

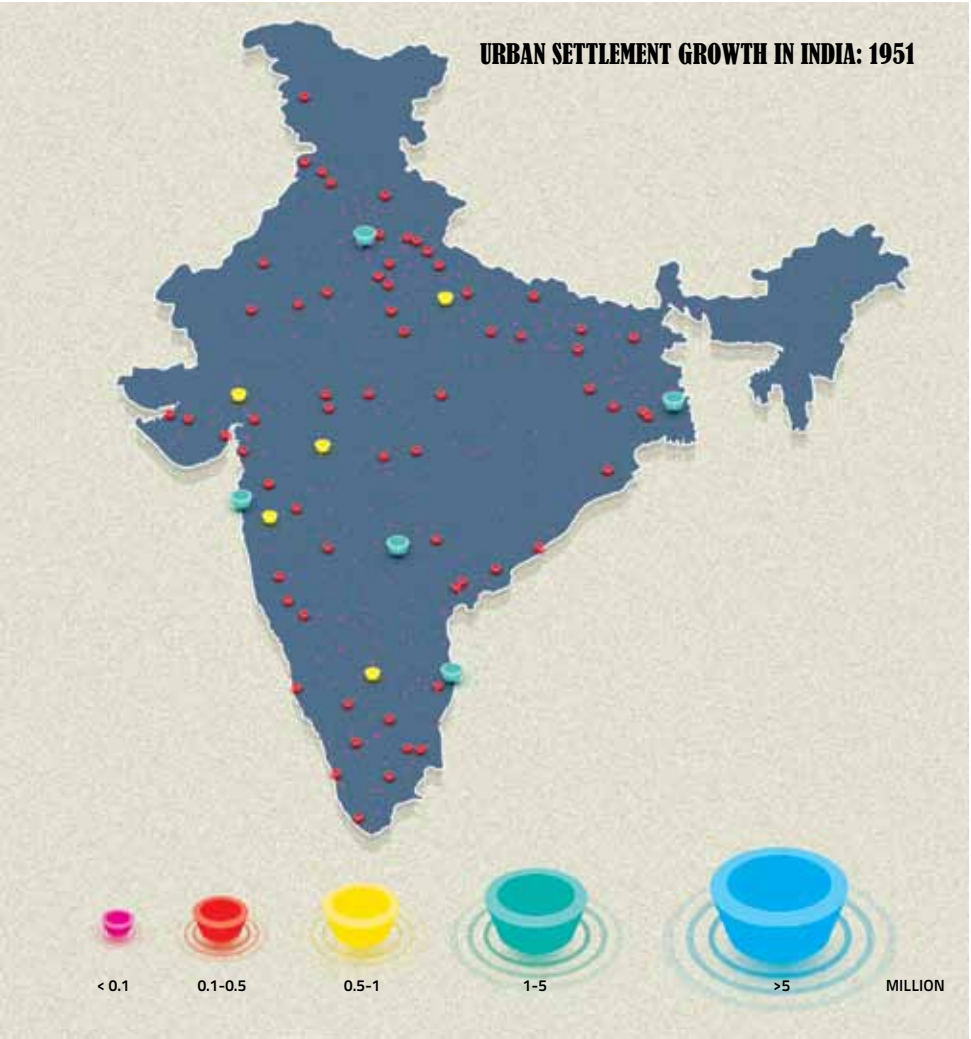
**EP:** I’d like to hear more about how you’re biting into this challenge, and what the pragmatic approach to this is. But, if I can, I want to reflect what you’re saying onto the African context. Our reality is that we have both the human challenge, on the one hand, and then the financing and institutional challenge as well. Obviously one can’t equate Africa with India. We’re not seeing the same levels of growth. There are about a dozen countries with resource portfolios on the continent that are achieving growth, but then there’s still another 40 countries left. I’m trying to think about what the implications could be for how we should be thinking about this challenge in the African context. I’m curious whether you have some thoughts on that too?

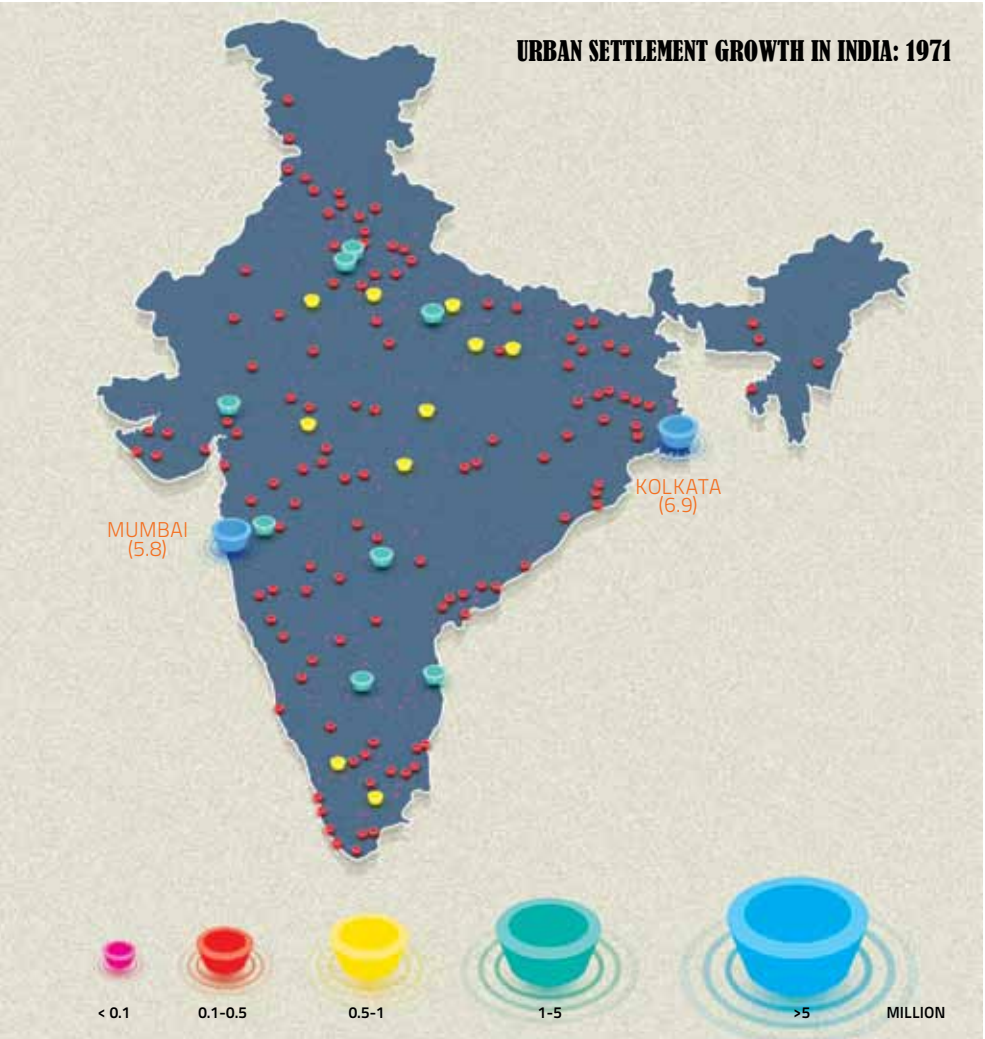
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**AR:** I’m not an African specialist but I think a critical opportunity would be a pan-African response, linking up between experiences, ideas and people across different contexts. If you’re able to do that and not become completely constrained by national boundaries, or particular ethnicities, that would be a significant beginning. I think what you are trying to do here, with the ACC, for example, is a very important step in that direction—educating a cadre of people who can think in wider and deeper terms. If I look back, there was a whole generation of people from a particular university in the Eastern Cape [University of Fort Hare] who transformed this part of Africa. Contemporary challenges are no less, except that responses may not

only come from political leadership. A new generation of change-makers would need to have new technical competencies and the ability to go and actually muck around and work in cities. They may well become future political leaders. **EP:** This has been our central learning from the last two years of building up the ACC: the moment is absolutely ripe, if not overripe. What’s been instructive for us as we’ve gone about trying to imagine what a curriculum could look like, one that could really equip these practitioners, is the realisation just how redundant a lot of ‘world class knowledge’ and ‘best practice’ is in our context, especially in a situation where the current pressures are so extreme and unprecedented. Of course, in your case, you’ve actually gone out and you’ve reviewed what the best in the world has to offer, Can you share a

few reflections on what that process revealed for you, and how that has informed your thinking? **AR:** It’s actually been very interesting for us, because we started with the hypothesis that from our experience much of what we were teaching was less relevant—and then we went out to prove it, formally. We reviewed programmes from across the world, from maybe 60 odd universities, 2,000 courses or so. What we found was startling. The first thing was that even at the best places in the world, the theory was lagging, even innovative practice—it was anywhere between ten to 20 years behind. And we were able to test that, because we had people involved in the process that could speak to that question, in India, in Europe, the United States and China. The second thing, of course, which we knew beforehand, was that what





we are typically teaching in India is about 20 years behind what is already redundant elsewhere. So we were effectively transacting ‘knowledge’ that was 40 years out of date, which had nothing to do with the reality that people are experiencing today. How can we move teaching and learning out of that trap? The challenge was to reconstruct knowledge that would be relevant for today, knowledge that would be important for practitioners and policymakers. We asked one basic question: What will be relevant in 2030 for the young people today who have the potential to transform the system? We’re therefore teaching for tomorrow, not only for today. There’s almost a three-generation difference between what’s being taught and what needs to be engaged in—that’s been a very interesting shift that we have started to make progress on

at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS).  
**EP:** I’m curious about that revolutionary approach to thinking about curriculum. What has the response been amongst India’s established system of academics, those people who currently transact and produce urban planners? What and how are you managing those potential tensions?  
**AR:** It’s a mix of things. At the moment we’re going through a process of educational sector reform. At the top end of the system, there’s a degree of openness—there is consensus that we need a dramatic change in our higher education system, if India is to make many of the transitions we talked about. We are teaching stuff that is 30 or 40 years old. You cannot build a knowledge economy around this. For a service sector-led economy this could have dramatic impact. There are a number of dramatic new educational initiatives, like the IIHS, India’s first prospective National University for Innovation that focuses on its urban transformation. But that is at the macro level. Practitioners are desperately looking for this opportunity and we have such tremendous people innovating across the country. From the practitioner’s side, there’s a great deal of engagement with the IIHS because we’re an open institution where there’s little of the traditional hierarchy between academics—the ‘experts’ if you will—and practitioners. It leads to a good synergy between these cultures. In terms of people who are in academic roles at the moment, there is the excitement of a new openness to a dialogue around problem solving and knowledge creation from below that cuts through traditional barriers. I was teaching one of our interdisciplinary programmes a couple of months ago, and many people came up and said, ‘This is fantastic, this is what we started to do 30 years ago, but we lost ourselves in a maze of bureaucracy. It’s nice to know that you’re trying to make

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a change in such a measured and systematic way. Can we come and help you?’  
**EP:** The one thing I really want to probe, and that I think is potentially really important for the larger community to understand, is if you design a curriculum and if you’re trying to prepare practitioners for the future that is in 20 or 30 years time how do you go about that? How do you source the new kind of knowledge that’s required? Maybe just a few thoughts on how you’ve practically engaged with that kind of work?  
**AR:** There are two realities. One reality is that most of today’s solutions are linked with today’s crisis and tomorrow’s opportunities. There are tens of thousands of innovative responses taking form across our cities and towns. The question is how to connect those processes and innovators with other actors and systems—you have to reach out and connect them in ways that have been rarely explored before, except maybe by movements and markets.  
**EP:** It’s how one taps the energy at the bottom.  
**AR:** Absolutely. We want to try and bridge the asymmetry of language, and hence the asymmetry of power and hierarchy. The bulk of expert knowledge is embedded in control of advanced technical systems. As soon as you’re able to bridge that, in a somewhat more effective manner, that has the benefit of joining markets. The reality is that we have to be completely open to different worlds. Latin America does great things in their cities, which we don’t do very well. If one reflects with them on their experiences, we’re in a sense experiencing our future today. Similarly with China and various parts of Africa, including Southern Africa. A key question for us when we examine trans-national experiences is if this is the place that we want to go to. And, what can we learn from this process?  
**EP:** What’s been striking for me being part of this experiment is

that you (the IIHS) deliberately and consciously opened yourselves up both to the north and the south?  
**AR:** Absolutely, we’re at an age in which openness to all geographies is important. We traditionally had a colonial and northern engagement, but our orientation has slowly shifted. The real innovation is actually happening in the southern hemisphere. Whether it’s Brazil, Mexico or Colombia, various parts of Africa, South Africa—that’s where the real experimentation is happening. People in our cites and parts of the world have to innovate just to survive, it’s very simple. The challenge is of aggregation of this innovation, to be able to engage and adapt and co-create at a cross-country scale.  
**EP:** It seems to me that there is a new paradigm in the making. So all of the biology with it is between university and society, or between the state, the private sector and society, between qualified academic knowledge and practitioner knowledge. You’re collapsing all of these boundaries, but still there is a method to the madness, in a sense.  
**AR:** Yes.  
**EP:** And, it seems to me that this idea of experimentation and innovation is a very powerful notion to unpack, because what we’re grappling with in our case is how to animate a capacity to be rigorous and systematic in understanding the obstacles to structural change, but at the same time imbue people with a capacity to be passionate about driving change. The structural reading of the problem often leads to a kind of paralysis, in part because the programmatic expressions that have been tied to that have often run aground. There’s been this endless splintering off of various efforts and collectives. So, there seems to me to be something really profound at the core of what you do. It presents the seeds for a much larger re-theorisation of structural change. It is about how to invent new institutions, new categories, new concepts, new classes of things, and, of course, figure out how they network together and intersect. Is there a mechanism

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Most of today’s solutions are basically linked with today’s crisis and tomorrow’s opportunities.

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within this methodology you’re adopting to build up the institution and embed it in society? In other words, is this just about delivering the vehicle to produce new people, or are you also thinking about it, and building out the capacities to actually document and capture these processes so that you can begin the process of re-theorising from these experiences?

**AR:** I guess it’s all three of those things, but probably more of the first one. In a sense, we build the vehicle, and the vehicle has to be viable and sustainable, physically, financially, institutionally and so on. We’ve tried to be reflective as far as that is concerned.

We’re also attempting to be flexible. History will only tell whether we have been adaptable enough, but mostly what we are trying to do is reflect as much as we can. Our team currently is fairly small; reflection does require redundancy in terms of time and effort, which is difficult in early stage institutional development.

**EP:** I can see the point of really building effective change agents, but if those agents are restricted to a particular class and cultural category, there’s a problem?

**AR:** There’s this absolutely huge challenge of class capture, or capture by a particular interest group. We come from a terrain in which educational institutional capture is the hobby of most political parties and interest groups. What we will try to do to counter that is to reach as deep as we can across the country, into pockets of ‘disadvantage’ or those advantaged with life experiences of struggle. Our success will be dependent on actually reaching out.

**EP:** Can you give some sense of what kind of timeframe you are working with? When do you start with your first intake of students?

**AR:** We’re hopeful of initiating our master’s programme next year. This year, we’ve already started teaching a whole range of professionals and students, via more than a dozen short courses that span quite a range of questions as far as cities are

concerned—traditional challenges like water, sanitation and housing, but also strategy and municipal finance. We’re simultaneously testing the integrated Masters in Urban Practice curriculum.

**EP:** Why don’t we go straight to some of your thinking around the emergent south-south dialogue? In what way is this south-south articulation different to earlier efforts at tri-continentalism, non-lateralism and so forth?

**AR:** Well, I think the world is changing quite quickly, and the new south-south dialogue is different from the 1970s and 80s, because global geopolitics and the global economy has changed quite dramatically.

A big shift is the rise of China and a change in perspective from 20th century imperialism and its model of hard boundaries. The Chinese view of the world is not based on classical western political theory. Its perspective is less within the Westphalian frame but much more civilizational—soft boundaries, zones of influence; a dynamic view of cultures and spatial and temporal relationships between each other. So, the shift from an Atlantic to a Pacific-centric world-system which partitioned Africa into planes and straight lines—to a much more nuanced kind of engagement.

It is not as if the United States will wither away as a great power. Its asymmetry as far as hard and possibly economic power is going to persist for a significant time. Early 21st century south-south engagement needs to be seen in that context. A range of engagements that are building and how they will coalesce and work themselves out is still unclear. If you look at the old dependency theories, Brazil, South Africa and India are somewhere in the ‘semi-periphery’.

**EP:** What do you see as the main difference between China and India’s particular conception of itself and approach to this kind of journey? Because, presumably that will be a fairly key variable in how this unfolds.

**AR:** To some extent India is still fairly messed up. We don’t really have a very clear sense, geopolitically, of where we are and where we may be going. We’re still moving out of the phase of looking at the rest of South Asia as a ‘significant other’, to looking at other kinds of regional and continental relationships. We’re still in our middle adolescence, so to speak. China has a much longer view of history. It is much more organised and a much older nation state, which is difficult to compete with if you are primarily a soft power. However, India’s resilience is something that may come into play as things become rather tough.

So, whether it’s the firms or it is civil society, or it is individuals there’s a lot more flux and suppleness in India, partially because the idea of India is a relatively new one. South Asia has typically absorbed and integrated influences that have come to it from across the world. The ability to absorb external forces and transform them is a particular strength. I think it is going to be a really important capacity as we move into a more fractured future. The fact also that we have, for better or for worse, a functioning democracy at the scale of a billion plus that has held together for 65 years is really important. If I think historically, when the United Nations was founded in 1945 it comprised 50 countries. A decade later it doubled, because of decolonization and the retreat of western imperialism. And so the number kept growing. By the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, it numbered 170 countries. I think the UN is about 190 now. So there has been a trend of the creation of new nation states and the breakdown of some large agglomerations, especially the Soviet Union.

But there are also large pockets of experimentation around nation-state consolidation, of which the largest is the European Union. One of the fundamental challenges there, of course, is how do you assemble a multi-poplar, multi-cultural system of scale, which is able to bring together the economy, politics and

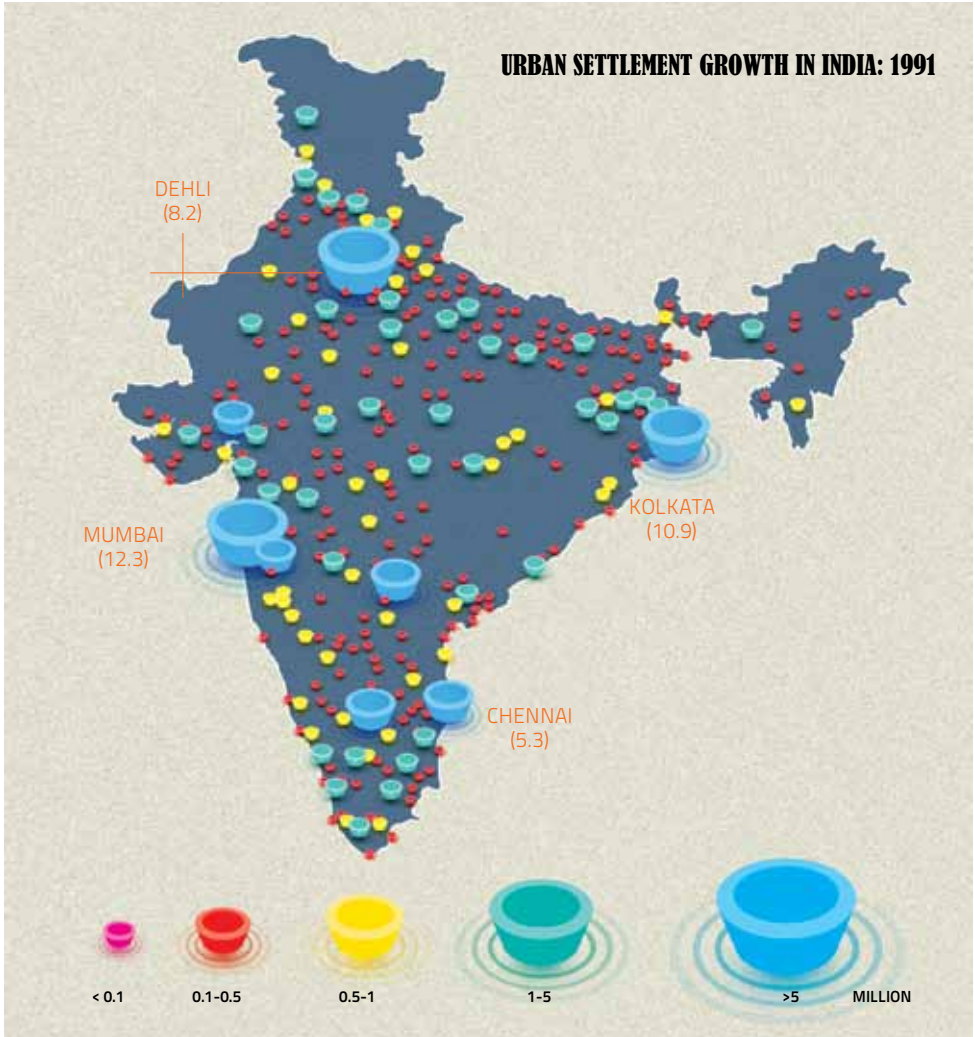
regional socio-cultural diversity simultaneously. I guess that was part of the project that was imagined, but seems a long distance away for many parts of Southern Africa, at least.

**EP:** It is interesting that in the last while, this has probably been the most important Achilles heel of the African Project, making the regional economic blocks work. To even think beyond that has been quite a challenge. But I think the penny is starting to drop, both in terms of the cost implications, the infrastructure investments that need to happen, and also the need to coordinate in a much more efficient way across these geographies.

**AR:** There is greater acceptance now that, in some ways, there are no effective barriers to the flow of capital and finance. Setting up a global system to manage that is one of the most significant challenges in the international order. There is

an understanding that in order to enable trade and physical movement of goods and services, you need to establish infrastructures that allow movement back and forth as part of the project. But I think the real challenge is the movement of people. One big part of this intellectual south-south project is trying to reconceptualise that. Sub-Saharan Africa is one place that could be tested and have the most significant dividend, because of the history of how territory was defined leading to genocide at the one end, and suboptimal economic outcomes and development outcomes at the other end.

**EP:** What is interesting is how the kind of partial engagement of China, and to some extent India and other Asian states wishing to access particular resources, is undermining that to some extent.



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**‘The Renaissance was a good idea but maybe not in our part of the world.’**

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**AR:** Yes, absolutely.

**EP:** So, it seems until we get a stronger cohort of forward-looking leaders across the continent, it’s going to be quite an uphill battle for Africa, going forward.

**AR:** Absolutely. I think the core of that is the political imagination of what is possible with one’s resources, and the fact that Africa as a continent, and particular parts of Africa are where the future is going to unfold. That realisation has probably not struck home so clearly. It is because it hasn’t struck home that accommodations are possible, and alliances around interests are not so clearly organised.

**EP:** I want to move in theme, Aro, to this question around the relationship between academic research, advisory services and practice. Since this is something that’s fairly fundamental to the design of IIHS, could you share some reflections on that? Is there really a virtual circle, or are we actually potentially setting up something that could undermine the quality of scholarship or dilute the strategic focus of advisory work? What are your views on this, and why have you decided to make it so central in the design of the institute?

**AR:** It’s a tricky question. If you look at it within a conventional institutional development frame, it’s a significant risk, partially because there are bringing together people who often think quite differently. You’re setting yourself for a battle between those cultures and possibly setting yourself up to fail. But we are looking at a larger project. An older colleague paraphrased it by saying, ‘The Renaissance was a good idea but maybe not in our part of the world.’ We don’t need to reproduce the social organisation of western Atlantic institutions, which came out of a particular tradition and history starting from the collapse of the Roman Empire through the Black Death to the Renaissance. One of the legacies of that development is the separation of practice and theory. We have somewhat different histories. One of the questions we are asking is how the 21st century will reconfigure

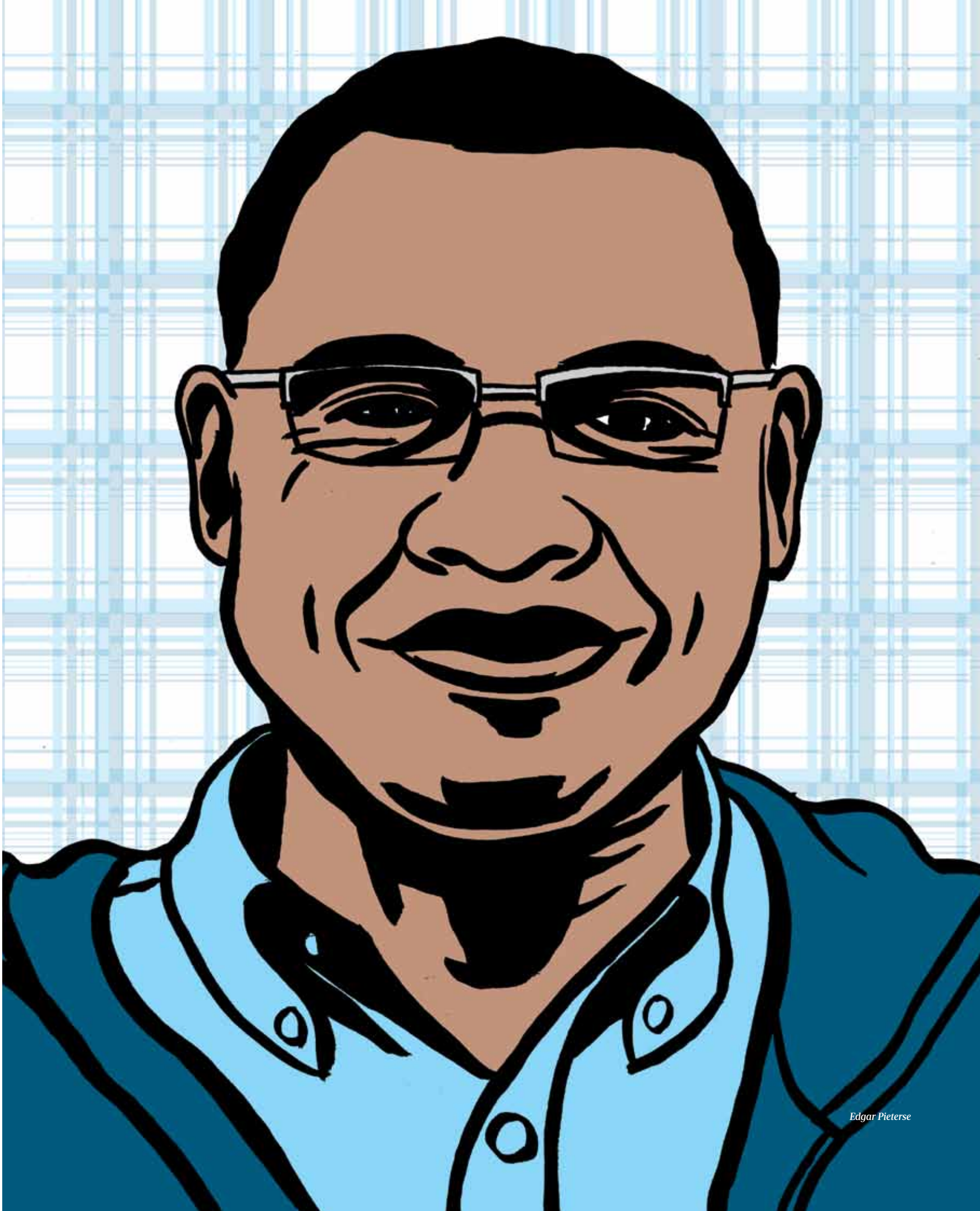
this? The socio-cultural environment is so different. Technology can play a very different role. Innovation is happening all over the place. Is there a way of trying to aggregate and focus this innovation and by doing that, transform the greater tradition itself?

**EP:** How do you translate this intent into practice, particularly in terms of the institutional design of IIHS? Presumably, at a very concrete level, the qualifications to access higher education will present a very practical barrier to entry.

**AR:** Well, the opportunity of scaling before us is quite substantial. India is starting to universalise its elementary education and close to 90 per cent or more of our young people up to grade eight go to some form of school. In another five years, that will probably be extended to secondary school. So there are going to be a large number of people who will come out of secondary school who will be looking for a university education. This large pool of people really presents an opportunity for the IIHS and India. The challenge is to move from an elitist view of knowledge creation to a more inclusive one. We are saying something a little different from top-of-the pyramid institutions: ‘Innovation is actually happening at tremendous scale at the middle of the system. The elites are useful but not as effective or efficient as in a pre-networked society.’

In a society that’s highly concentrated, both geographic and temporarily, economies of scale tend to dominate. But as you expand using network-based systems, that becomes less important. Moving to the middle of that system is really the place to go in terms of social transformation a fundamental IIHS agenda. Our secondary aims are economic and political transformation.

We’re trying to build a highly inclusive institution that values people’s life experience, both in terms of the curriculum and the learner engagement. What might normally have counted as a disadvantage may actually becomes a significant advantage. We are looking



Edgar Pieterse

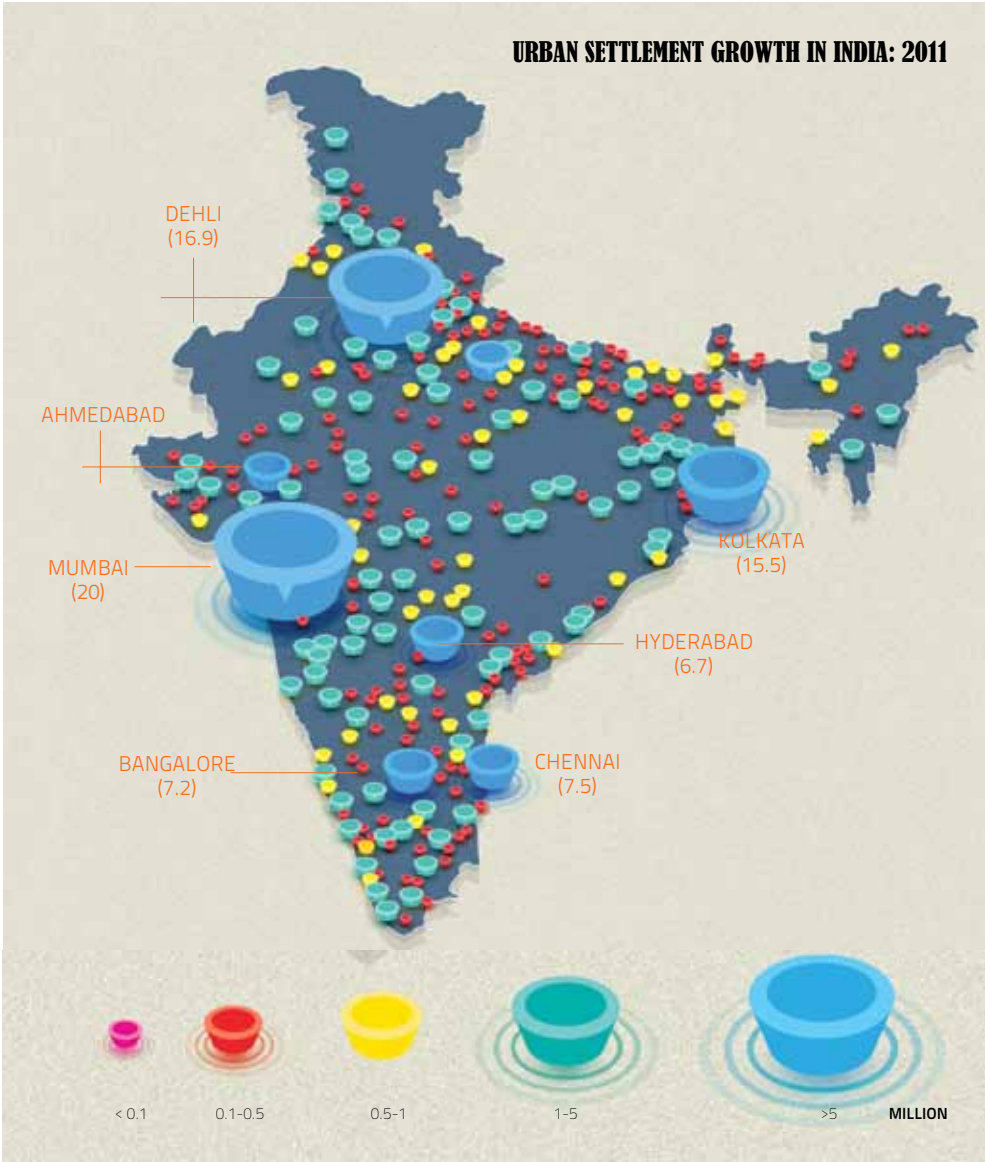
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We want to train at least 50,000 students over the next 30 years, which is the minimum we require to actually transform our system.

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for people who can learn fast and learn effectively. We want to enable other people to learn, because in a world that’s changing so quickly, the ability to learn is really a huge comparative advantage. People from an elite tradition of knowledge may not be the best people to actually take the processes forward.  
**EP:** Yes, thanks for that, you’ve usefully explained the importance of the access aspect. But on the other end of it, once you have your structures in place, your academics or your faculty, will these people be expected to be able to go into an environment where they provide consultative or advisory services? How do you retain your criticality and autonomy while crafting a

practice that can really engage with the problems of clients? So, if possible, some thoughts on that. And then related to that. What is very clear is that in the global structure of the production of knowledge, 95 per cent, if not more, of what is considered valid knowledge—work published in journals and books—still emanates from northern universities. Clearly if one is going to shift that, it’s going to be important that institutions like yours publish. There is certainly a school of thought that we encounter in our context, that says, if you contaminate people with getting too close to the messy realities of practice, it strips out the criticality and they’re not able to produce high quality scholarship because they are



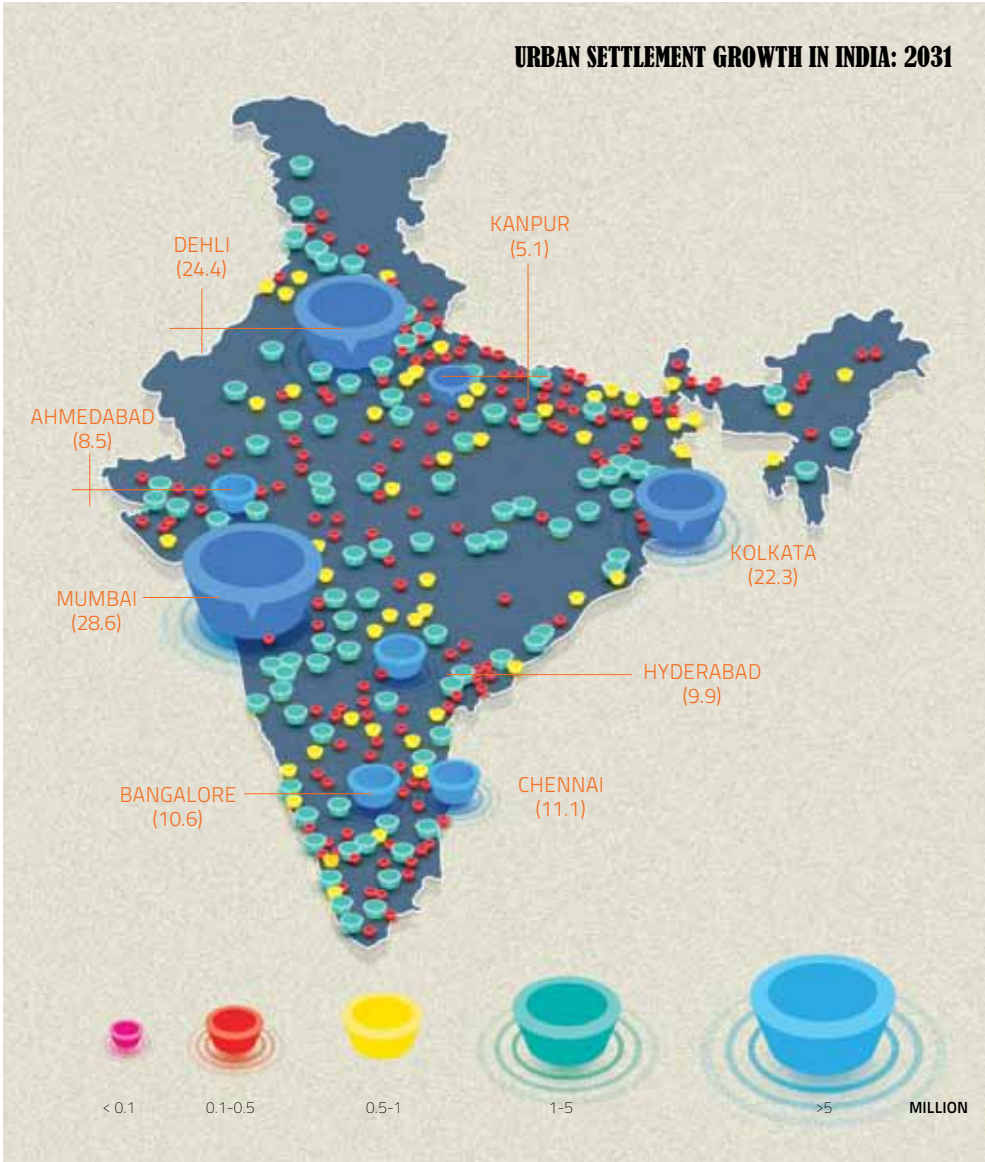
too immersed in the realities. The business of writing and scholarship requires a very different kind of training. It is about disposition and distance. You know all these arguments, and I know that this has obviously featured in your design processes, but what are your thoughts on all these questions?  
**AR:** I think they are very valid arguments. It’s about distancing yourself in the classical subject-object orientation. You do have to have a particular quality of preparation to be a good researcher and a good academic. The counter question is this: Is it not also important simultaneously to be able to be a good pedagogue, researcher and academic? We want to train at least 50,000 students over the next 30 years, which is the minimum we require to actually transform our system. This is why we need a markedly good set of teachers. While I agree with you that if you are overly embedded in institutional and other contestations, you may lose your sense of criticality. The redefinition of rigorous subjectivity even in the cutting edge sciences, some areas of physics and certainly in the life sciences, are changing this very dramatically. We have very old living traditions of knowledge in India, much older than the beginnings of what we know as western scholarship. It’s a strongly ‘scientific’ tradition, of using subjectivity as a basis of criticality. If the philosophical underpinnings of your knowledge system are connected with the challenges of everyday life, there is no reason why your science should not actually reflect that. The geography of science actually changes. I imagine we will see a rather different way of doing science, and hence a rather different definition of what is acceptable as good science.  
**EP:** I want to turn to something a little bit more personal. You straddle these different domains, and you’ve got a keen interest in the arts, music and composition. How does that translate into a south-south institutional project?

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I imagine that the web, not the text web, but the oral web is going to be a really important part of our own cultural experience and scholarship.

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**AR:** I’m not sure whether I’m a very good example, but what an important thing is to be open to multiple cultures from across the world, and to accept that everybody is both a learner and a teacher. Cultural engagement is a high form of exploration, something is deeply embedded within South Asia. You really have to know or try to engage with yourself, your own cultures, and other cultures in their own terms, not in colonial or post-colonial asymmetries or artificial dichotomies.  
**EP:** Yes, I see. And, if you will, non-verbal or non-written texts will be a key part of how IIHS will transact, and how your pedagogy will transact?



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**The fundamental challenge is to enable and draw out full human beings. That’s the core of the process, if you don’t get that, then you haven’t got very much.**

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**AR:** I think it’s an important point, because one thing that we often forget about in India is that we are largely an oral culture. I imagine that the web, not the text web, but the oral web is going to be a really important part of our own cultural experience and scholarship.

**EP:** What do you mean, the oral web, I don’t understand?

**AR:** There are large numbers of people who are not comfortable with text or don’t actually read it, but as processing of voice becomes much more ubiquitous, it becomes easy to navigate around a knowledge system by just speaking. You don’t have to be ‘literate’ to have control over knowledge.

**EP:** Interesting. Now, I raise this question because part of what we are trying to do with Cityscapes is to implant the idea that different registers of knowledge are equally important. It’s important to facilitate a translation between these different formats. In that articulation we will be able to build this new language of innovation that’s required to deal with the kind of really interesting phenomena that are emerging at present, but also to resolve some of the challenges that we’re engaging with. Your thought?

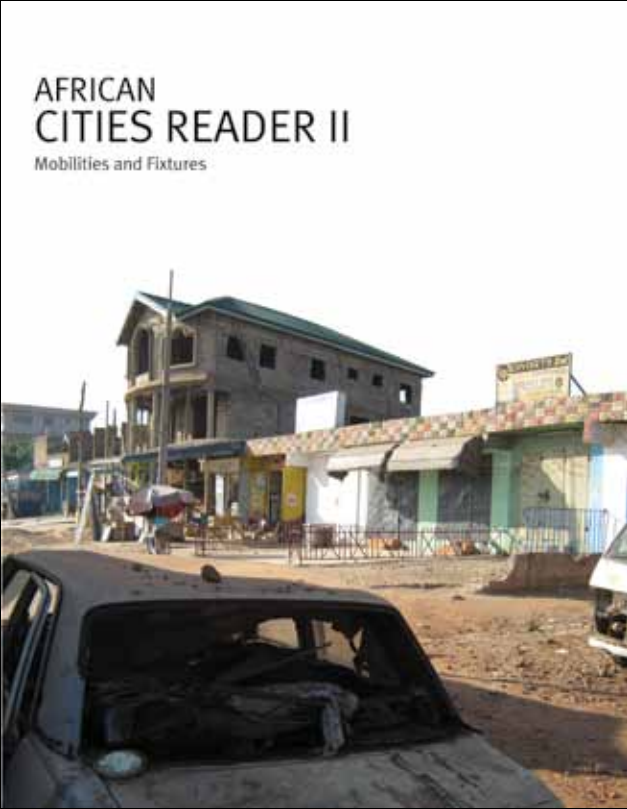
**AR:** I think it’s important, you’re reaching out to a very interesting space. I think the fundamental thing that we’re all trying to do is to explore a postcolonial, transmodern revisioning of humanism. The fundamental challenge is to enable and draw out full human beings. That’s the core of the process, if you don’t get that, then you haven’t got very much. Added to that is a need to integrate a whole range of different ways of knowing. Like you just said, Edgar, knowledge exists in multiple registers. If you want to create a composition, you have to be able to bring them altogether.

In fact, a good example lies in the difference between Indian and western classical music. The great western compositions are put together; they’re written to a score. Great Indian classical music is never written to a score; they are built

around what we call a raga. Multiple musicians will come together, they know what composition of the raga is, and they will create as they play—a new composition will never be repeated again, both in time or space. So it’s a little bit like our biology, the biology of the earth. No individual in a species will be repeated again and we are all unique. Yet there is continuity and great harmony in the music of life

**EP:** That’s very helpful, and a very nice metaphor also. One last question, and a shift in register: You are offering a pilot course this year on the ‘world class city’. We were curious why you chose that theme, given how bankrupt this idea is that cities can be ‘world class’. It promotes a kind of simplistic mimicry that reproduces political elites. Why did you choose that theme?

**AR:** We chose that theme precisely because it is bankrupt, and also because it tends to capture the imagination of local and global elites. It followed in the wake of the Commonwealth Games, which were a little bit like the World Cup in South Africa, a grand event which was really the emperor’s new clothes in Imax 3D. So the course worked around that. We were building up from professional experience, and using that as a means of trying to enable a critical reflection on the context in which we work. We were also trying to challenge people to address some of the complex issues that these imaginations attempt to respond to, using a simulated teaching case to establish a new Global Financial centre that will create one million jobs with a capital investment of \$15 billion. This is an impossible learning challenge to deal with, that our learners had three days to work on. They had to throw away all the baggage of prior experience and learn to work as an interdisciplinary problem solving team to address this challenge \*



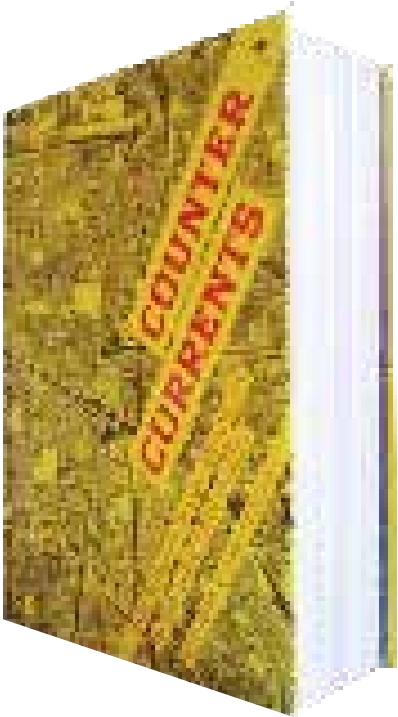
# THE AFRICAN CITIES READER II

## Mobilities & Fixtures

The African Cities Reader is a biennial publication that brings together contributors from across Africa and the world to challenge the prevailing depiction of urban life on the continent and redefine cityness, Africa-style. It is a joint creation of Chimurenga Magazine and the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town. Contributors include Jonny Steinberg, Brian Chikwava, Dominique Malaquais, Mowoso Collective, Doreen Baingana, Teju Cole, Ed Kashi, Sean Christie, Khulile Nxumalo, Nicole Turner, Iain Chambers, Tim Cresswell and many more

The Reader is edited by Ntone Edjabe and Edgar Pieterse. For further information: visit [www.africancitiesreader.org.za](http://www.africancitiesreader.org.za) or contact Terry Ayugi: +27 (21) 422 4168.

# WHAT CHANGES THE CITY? HOW DO WE IMAGINE THIS CHANGE COMING ABOUT?



Counter-Currents represents both a critique of unimaginative urban growth and a showcase of bold urban development initiatives by both the state and the private sector with the aim of shifting public ideas and discourses about the kind of Cape Town we should be imagining and nurturing. Available from most good bookshops, Jacana Media & [www.kalahari.net](http://www.kalahari.net)

## WONKY BEATS MIDTEMPOS, BLEEPS & BLURPS, CRAZY, ZANY PHRASEOLOGIES & INTERGALACTIC ORGANICS\*

“There are other worlds out here they never told you about.” This handwritten note, which casually rephrases a song title by San Ra, appears on every page of the Pan African Space Station’s website. With its emphasis on “here” not “there”, it describes everything you need to know about Neo Muyanga and Ntone Edjabe’s experiment in music, writing and city mapping. Okay, almost everything.

L-R. Neo Muyanga and Ntone Edjabe  
Photo by Sydelle Willow Smith

\*with thanks and apologies to Roots Manuva

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*Founded in 2008, and held annually in Cape Town’s early spring months, the Pan African Space Station is a genre-busting 30-day musical intervention held in a variety of non-musical communal venues, churches and town halls included. The curatorial team of Ntone Edjabe and Neo Muyanga, in partnership with the Africa Centre, spearheads it. The event, which encompasses a range of on/offline musical happenings, has showcased a range of artists, including the virtuoso guitarist Doctor Philip Tabane and his band Malombo, Cameroonian percussionist Brice Wassy, Ethiopian singer Endress Hassen and Kisangani-based dance collective Studio Kabako, to name but a few. PASS is distinguished not only by its duration but also its innovative approach to programming, which, in its own temporal fashion, reconfigured a fragmented, racially ghettoised city into a series of interconnected episodes. CityScape’s editor Tau Tavengwa met up with Edjabe and Muyanga to trace origins, achievements and future pathways of PASS.*

**Neo Muyanga:** Yeoville in the 1990s is where the Pan African Space Station (PASS) really began. There were a lot of people in Yeoville at the time trying the change the world, a kind of Afro hippy community.  
**Tau Tavengwa:** And that’s lost now?  
**Ntone Edjabe:** No, no.  
**TT:** Yeoville really built its identity as a place, I think, on that community, which has since been widely dispersed. You two ended up here in Cape Town, at the centre of a very similar community, you, Neo, as a composer and musician, and you,

Ntone, as editor and publisher of Chimurenga. What prompted you to start thinking of creating PASS?  
**NM:** We had been speaking about music a lot over the years. I used to go to the places where Ntone was DJing and we’d talk about where stuff comes from and how that relates to what people are doing. I think we listen to music in similar ways: we’re attracted to stuff that breaks out of itself, that isn’t bound by a narrow definition. Around 2006, maybe the year after, we started having this conversation about creating a space where we could have very simple and cheap food, a place that would have easy access and allow people to dance to music that you can’t necessarily dance to in Cape Town. Then Ntone was invited into the Africa Centre founding process. One of the questions that came about through that process was how to create a music festival that could be a pan-African platform, that didn’t shut things down as opposed to celebrate them—something that doesn’t freeze frame culture.  
**TT:** Explain that some more.  
**NM:** Well, the western idea of a museum cleans a square where a curio object will sit rarefied, untouched and preserved. The Africa Centre was interrogating how to make a museum of the living, an exhibition platform of the essential, the mundane, the everyday—you know, the usable. This conversation came out of the reference team set up to think about an arts intervention. We quickly realised we didn’t want to do a music festival; we wanted to have an intervention that lasted longer, that was much more about how to get in contact with what moves people as opposed to what hypes people to pay for the coolest shit in town. So we started thinking about how to make this thing, something that touches people, something that is philosophically and ideologically owned by a community, a greater community, as opposed to directed and marketed by a handful of clever and rich people with access.  
**TT:** You’ve spoken about this a lot before. What is the difference

between a music intervention and a festival?  
**NE:** It’s about the celebratory aspect that is inherent in a festival manifestation. Remember, we are in 2011 here and there seems to be a singular motto as far as African culture is concerned in this country. At the time we were reflecting on how we could contribute in a broader public platform that showcased true music, true literature and so forth. The motto of the festival is different: to have fun, to forget everything, to spend your money. There’s nothing to think about, the struggle is over. You choose whatever sentences fit here, but it all says one thing: we’re now just consuming culture. That for me is the difference. If you can afford the ticket you pay, you go to the festival and you swallow its offerings like you would eat food at a restaurant, go home and tell your wife, your girlfriend, boyfriend, children, ‘Oh, I did something great today.’ But the truth is that you’ve in no way participated in what is being produced—you’re no longer a cultural producer. That is how festivals are conceived. Whether it’s a music festival, theatre festival or literature festival, it’s always about who’s the big star coming this year, and who can afford to go see them, and why you should go and consume them. We wanted to create something that forced people to think differently about their participation in the thing. Although there is an element gift giving by the performer, we wanted to enhance the participatory aspect—everyone who is at the event is part of the event. It is like the many playwrights and directors who tried to break that fort wall, you know what I’m saying, the classic performative space of a theatre. We wanted to break that fort wall in a broader citywide event, to create an event where everybody who is in the city is participating in making the event. We wanted to remind audiences that they were part of the making of an event, as opposed to just consumers. So we had to imagine a place, one singular place that was that, and try and expand it across the

city. We had to create a space, a very physical space, where there was no stage, where the moment you enter that space you were the performer, a physical space that could function as a metaphor for how one thinks about the festival or the performances across the city.  
**NM:** I play a lot of festivals, so I approached it from a performer’s perspective. Typically, a festival organiser will call you with a date and ask what your fee is; you give them a quote, and they say they can have you on that day. Most bands arrive that morning, two hours before, going straight from the airport to backstage. You do your line check, sound check, and then you’re on. You’re supposed to be professional, polished and smooth. You get there and you dazzle your crowd immediately in the first ten minutes. You’ve got probably 45 to an hour, and then after that you leave through the back door—you’re gone, back onto your plane, onto the next city. There’s been no transformation of you as a creator or co-creator with the audience. What we wanted was something that played itself out over a longer period. We wanted to create a space where we could take visitors out of their fast lane lives into a small town—Cape Town is actually a small town—and introduce them to a few people who know certain things that are interesting about the space, tell them a bit of the history, put them in spaces that are awkward, and ask everybody to extend themselves beyond

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**We started thinking about how to make this thing, something that touches people, something that is philosophically and ideologically owned by a community.**

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themselves. The spaces we chose over the past three years haven’t been the easiest spaces. In fact, our sound company, Eastern Acoustics, constantly looked at us as if we were mad. ‘Why here, the acoustics are wrong.’ We’d say, ‘Yes, but the history is right, the iconography is right.’  
**TT:** Let’s pull back a little bit. Your curatorial team, The Heliotronics, get this opportunity to do a festival, or intervention. Given that you guys had all these spatial ideas for your intervention, what made you name it the Pan African Space Station?  
**NM:** We both think of ourselves as contemporary beings, but also as quite futuristic. We exist as hybrids of analogue and digital personalities, if you like. We exist with the history that has built us, and as Africans that is who we are. We come with baggage, but we also realise that Africa has an opportunity to leapfrog itself, and everybody else. We don’t have tried and tested ideas of what it means to be avant-garde on our streets, in our townships, in our cultural spaces. We can go from having nothing, from a rural market space, to suddenly a futuristic stock exchange where cell phones are used to exchange the latest figures, not just from that environment, but from the global, and we can buy and sell in quite technologically evolved ways, because we are not tied to an old architecture. We very much wanted to see ourselves playing with that dichotomy. We asked ourselves what does that signify, what does that mean? Using the internet you can now create content that inhabits space, not just a physical space anymore, but the virtual space. It can be shared almost instantaneously with people around the globe, people who are like us. At the beginning people would ask us, ‘Who is your market? Who are you talking to?’ Our answer generally was, ‘We’re talking to everybody.’ The reality is that there are many people like us, people who think like us, and they are stationed everywhere on the planet. So it was this idea of reaching out to that community, not just the Cape Town community.

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PASS MOMENTS

Studio Kabako, Kisangani, DRC



This dance collective, fronted by Flamme Kapaya, presented a two-hour set in Cape Town’s former City Hall during PASS 2010 that left everyone speechless. In the language of PASS, Kabako “infuse the hybrid rhythms of Ndombolo music with hefty doses of punk rage and cosmic energy to deliver a pre-Sputnik space travelogue into the unknown”. Their Cape Town gig was a kind of rock opera with slam poetry and dance. It featured poetry by Antoine Vumila Muhindo, a political prisoner in Kinshasa, costumes by the Malian fashion designer Xuly Bèt, and choreography by the Congolese dancer Faustin Linyekula. Plug in at: <http://www.panafricanspacestation.org.za/?p=1744>

Cindy Blackman, New York, USA



Born into a family of classical musicians, Blackman is accomplished as both a jazz and rock drummer. Blackman, who has recorded and toured with Lenny Kravitz, almost caused a riot when she performed in the Slave Church, then a relatively unknown building in the centre of Cape Town, during PASS 2008. With a preacher’s pew as her backdrop, Blackman delivered an energetic set that lasted an exhausting hour. Blackman has said that “drummers should have a lot of impact and a great sound, without being limited to a conventional role in the band—the drums should speak just as freely as anybody.” Plug in at: <http://www.panafricanspacestation.org.za/?p=339>

**TT:** Cape Town seems to have been almost incidental as a host venue, because your audience, the majority of people who got really excited about PASS, were everywhere else. **NE:** I guess that’s what makes it a ‘space station,’ quite literally, that it’s out of its own context and beaming into an undetermined kind of scape, right. But the name, PASS, I don’t want to put too much emphasis on the name because that’s really, as we were talking earlier, about heliotronics, heliocentric, heliotropics, whatever. We really have not talked very self-consciously about the naming process. We didn’t create it to historicise it, to put it in a glass cage. We spent our time trying to identify the content: all the things we kept playing to each other, a lot of it had to do with an exploratory feel. I wouldn’t call it avant-garde, but it had this searching, this complexity. It wasn’t the kind of polished and recognisable ‘African music’ thing. The ‘space station’ in the name refers to something exploratory, like technological advancement. We were talking about and thinking about this from an African context, perhaps, because African states did not participate in the space race, did not participate in this kind of technological posturing. We have other ways to show the inventiveness, the creativeness, and really the core innovation that happens on a day-to-day basis on this continent. We really struggled to find a way to describe this thing when we were first formulating it, and the name PASS was actually the closest description we could come to for what we were doing. It just came up at one of the meetings. People kept asking what we were doing. We eventually started to say, ‘We’re doing a space station.’ There just

wasn’t enough terminology to say what someone like Philip Tabane was doing—really, he is a space traveller—enough language to describe it, so we had to create another language to really describe it. **TT:** Let’s speak of the iconography and aesthetic choices that you made, which have come to represent PASS. It’s futuristic, but on another level it’s very surreal. I don’t even know what to call it. There’s always this very interesting allusion to the whole idea of time and space. **NM:** Science fiction in the township. **TT:** Sun Ra. **NE:** Very good. **NM:** When we first did the posters one of the things that was very clear to us was that it had to celebrate itself like a work of art, a work of art on the street, something that could potentially be stolen in the middle of the night, because it is so attractive. When we made that map of the city for PASS 2008, it was response to everybody who says Cape Town is so segregated, racist and un-African, all of this rubbish that probably was relevant 20 years ago. I don’t know if that’s a true reflection of what is happening now. The leap from Long Street to Langa is not that far, so the proposal we made was, ‘Hey, look, you can do this.’ It is just another way of looking at your thinking and design of this place, another way of looking at your transport system. We tried very hard to invent a shuttle that would go through these places, but we didn’t have enough resources to do that. But that’s why we don’t call it a festival, because thinking always went around where are the posters going to go. Are the posters being exhibited, and is the city then becoming our gallery, and how does the gallery speak to the live music stage, and how do we celebrate that before the hype night? The radio station became an important node. Festivals are over in a flash. They last one or two nights, whereas what we wanted to do was to impact on somebody’s life over a period of time. **NE:** That’s why there are three aspects to PASS. There is a blog, which involves a live broadcast stream and

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**01.** LA based hip hop musician Ras G  
**02.** PASS included an online radio station  
**03.** The Hypnotic Brass Ensemble at Guga’s Thebe  
**04.** Toumane Diabate is one several high profile musicians who performed at PASS  
**05.** (overleaf) Nothembi performs live at Guga’s Thebe in 2010

podcast. It also involves the creation of writing and making images. People sometimes just participate there, not through listening or producing sound, but through writing an impression or an article about artists. The second level is the live performances, and the third level was the visual art exhibition where we always insisted that we use the city as an exhibition platform in creating these artworks. We commissioned artists and asked them to create images— posters, very well put together original works that could have been in a gallery— which we’d use for mass distribution and consumption. So those three aspects were always running together. We didn’t have the money to do what the bigwigs do all the time, you know, splash radio and TV with advertising. We have to come up with very inventive ways to touch individuals, as opposed to nameless faces. So, for instance, a lot of our communication about the festival happened through small, beautifully made and informative cards that we handed out to people individually. It might have a beautiful photograph of Philip Tabane, a short original text about the artist and some links. It served the purpose of communicating

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the project, but also established a personal connection to the thing. It’s not just information you grab along the way while watching TV. Our thing was always, ‘Let’s try to communicate as much as possible to individual persons.’ For us that’s what disrupted the mapping of the city, because the city deals with itself in terms of groups of nameless faces. Black people go there, coloureds go there, etcetera. In a way this illustrates the success of apartheid, but our project was an attempt to disrupt these divisions. **TT:** What you say is perfect because I was hoping we would talk about that disruptive nature of PASS. **NE:** We wanted to connect individuals. You like Tabane, I like Tabane, regardless of where you are, and so that becomes our connection. That was the one was creating a disruption, through communication. The second disruptive element was our choice of venue. We focused on venues where people get together as opposed to premeditated or expected music spaces. We tried to find spaces where, historically, people got together—churches, civic halls—and then transform them. These spaces already have value and meaning

for individual people and citizens. Let’s then bring content, a different kind of content, to these spaces. St George’s Cathedral, for example, was a place where people went to listen to Desmond Tutu and participate in the struggle, a lot of built-in memories, which are very different for each and every one of us. We wanted to tap into that and on some level disrupt the way we look at this space and the city. The third attempt was around the circulation of bodies. We wanted to create a system that would allow people to go to places they don’t usually go to. We tried, for example, to create a transport system that allowed audiences move from the Slave Church on Long Street to Guga S’Thebe in Langa, to offer audiences the possibility to navigate the city in ways other than how they normally would. It wasn’t very successful. Of course, what you place where disrupts how bodies circulate: placing a sound, which is seen as avant-garde and exploratory, into a place like Guga S’Thebe where a clever marketing guru would put ‘music for the people’. Not everyone in Langa is interested in the poppy shit that is broadcast on Metro FM or whatever, so our programming was an attempt to disrupt all these assumptions we have of the city and how it functions. We wanted to tap into the really avant-garde jazz and funk cultural pockets of Langa, people who get together every Saturday and listen to music that no one else in Cape Town is listening to, also the young electronica crowd who have this little club in Gugelethu. We really wanted to explore the city differently. **NM:** We also wanted to get out of the prison of genre. These songs can be played together but not these, because they have guitars in them and the others have drum machines. This is traditional and that is hip-hop. Bullshit! These are just people making music. Some of it is good; some of it is not good. There are lots of us who listen across the board. **TT:** Let’s talk a little bit about the programming of the performances.

You guys obviously have very eclectic listening tastes. How do you go about inviting someone to play? Some of the choices were pretty interesting. I listened to Culture Musical Club from Zanzibar and Cindy Blackman, a drummer with Lenny Kravitz’s band, on the same night. It was very schizophrenic. Everybody was asking, ‘Who the hell put this together?’ **NE:** Actually it’s very simple. One of the things we worked really hard on was having a programming that felt good to both of us. **NM:** One of the problems we always had was money. We also don’t have the time and the space to put up the stuff we want. On any given day we could have come up with 20 acts that we thought everybody in Cape Town should see back to back, because that progression says something. The problem was we had to limit ourselves to what we could afford, to what was manageable for us. It took us months to agree on the daily content. By contrast, the online radio station was pretty free-for-all, quite improvised. People would come and contributed whatever they wanted. **NE:** You didn’t know what was going to be on the radio. **NM:** We never knew. We were never gatekeepers of the process. All we asked was somebody to tell us beforehand, ‘Look, I’m going to be popping by the studio in the next 20 minutes or so.’ We never asked people about the quality. Actually, it was anti quality control. But the stages, because people are paying a fee and because of all the organisational stuff that goes into ... **NE:** The limitations of space ... **NM:** ... preparing a night that actually works for people. We discussed that ad nauseam, because we wanted the feeling at the end of an occasion to be the right one. One of the things that was very important for us was connecting roots, old school and new school. **TT:** Explain that? **NM:** To illustrate how Philip Tabane can be as futuristic as Johnny Cradle. There would be no Johnny Cradle if there had been no Philip Tabane.



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Whether Johnny Cradle knows that or not is immaterial. The visual was equally important. If I think how I constitute my bands when I perform, I constantly think of what it looks like. Is it full of black people? Is it full of white people? Is it full of men? Not because I want to make everything equal and politically correct. It’s about questioning these modes that we inhabit of just assuming that something is going to be like this because that’s what you’ve seen. Interrogating things visually and aesthetically was always a very important part of how we programmed PASS. We would come up with all kinds of acts that we love and then we had to sift through the progression. We thought a lot about who went first, second, third, what feeling it would create about the event at the end of that day, and whether it would make people join the celebration the following day and the following day, as opposed to what is the show that is going to sell the biggest. We never sold tickets based on a big name. Our job was to find out who those people are going to be big in a year or two, and make sure you could see them in Cape Town for R30. **TT:** Studio Kabako [from Kisangani, DRC] was an interesting choice because they were the first act to play in 2010. They set the bar so high. **NE:** They have an unbelievably busy schedule. We had to find ways to

structure the entire festival around having them open PASS that year. We really wanted to start as big as possible instead of work the usual chronology, with your biggest thing at the end. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t, but that’s our intention. You won’t always stay at that level, but at some point you just focus and say this is our first performance, this is what PASS is about, or this is what we’d like it to be about. It’s not in the linear progression of entertainment where you build and, boom, big show. That’s the festival’s rhythm. We had Thandiswa Mazwai, who is understandably a popular act, open the evening’s line-up, with Georgia Anne Muldrow playing later. The point is not to challenge for the sake of it; the point is really that there are other possibilities of experiencing this thing. We’re always looking for those. **TT:** Let’s talk about ‘African music’. Is there such a thing anymore? Was there ever? **NM:** The thing about the continent and its diasporas is that it is defined by complexity. Everybody tries to collapse them into these smooth or cleanly defined spaces. Some people will tell you African music is happy, it’s major scale, it’s call and response—all of that stuff. The reality of our continent, the reality of our lives is that this is a complicated place. It’s contested. There’s lots of beauty, there is a lot of violence, there’s a lot of need, but there is a lot of surplus, a lot of greed, so we wanted to speak to that in a sense. Take Cindy Blackman, for example. She lives in New York and for her there’s this need to connect to the root, and that root is a worldview that binds us together. To define something as African music, that’s too simple. There are two kinds of simplicity: the one is superficial and lazy, but the other simplicity is more akin to elegance in its true complexity. It is about getting to a space where you understand the deeper links between divergent points. Those are the connections we’re looking for mostly.

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**We never sold tickets based on a big name. Our job was to find out who those people are going to be big in a year or two, and make sure you could see them in Cape Town for R30.**  
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Another example, the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble. I was listening to them play at Gugulethu and I overheard some people behind me whisper, ‘Why are these American here to play at an African music festival?’ I was like, ‘Hmm.’ The first thing they played was Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrica because their father, who is from the generation of Abiodun Oyewole of The Last Poets, brought them up on that song. They thought it was the coolest shit. In a way it facilitates us looking at ourselves in a completely different way, and that increases the connections. That’s the skill, that’s the outlook. **NE:** Africa is a concept. There is also Africa as a place, very physical, geographical space. So you are describing one engagement, but it’s one of many engagements. There is also the engagement with place, which is very important. We travelled to Cameroon for a week, to my house in Limbe, and every single night we went to listen to music, DJs, bands playing covers of The Beatles, bands playing original music, whatever. One wants to get to a place where you are never just following a particular trajectory. It is about uprooting yourself and inhabiting this kind of cerebral place where you are connecting with loose individuals, always dealing with real people on the ground who are doing things, making music, performing music. **TT:** Let’s talk about Cape Town. Some of your shows were in historical buildings in the city bowl, which has

Thandiswa Mazwai, Johannesburg, South Africa



South African songstress Thandiswa Mazwai, who began her career in 1998 with Bongo Maffin, had the crowd chanting for more at PASS 2010, where she performed in a trio at both the Slave Church and Guga S’Thebe. Her pop credentials notwithstanding, Mazwai was selected for her “fiercely individual” investigations into traditional Zulu and Xhosa melodies and rhythms. True to form, the idiosyncratic pop icon wore a gorgeous Yves Klein blue dress for her daylight outing at Langa. *Plug in at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/pass2010/>*

All Pics courtesy of the Pan African Space Station and the PASS picture blog

EXPLORING THE SPACEWAYS:  
PASS’S ANCESTORS & INFLUENCES

“The mayday signal of Black Atlantic Futurism is unrecognisability, as either Black or Music,” writes Kodwo Eshun in his elliptical but brilliant 1998 book, *More Brilliant than the Sun*. “Sonic Futurism doesn’t locate you in a tradition; instead it dislocates you from origins.” PASS is all about immersing you in this contradiction, of making you hear without naming, appreciating without the need for chronologies. And yet, in its strategic wilfulness, PASS celebrates a defined trajectory in modern music. The influence of these four sonic philosophers is palpable on PASS.



**PHILIP TABANE** (1934–)  
aka Dr. Philip Nchipe Tabane  
Jazz guitarist and bandleader



**SUN RA** (1914–1993)  
aka Herman Poole Blount  
Free-jazz composer, pianist and bandleader

54,000 residents and about 450,000 people coming in on a daily basis. But at the same time you put on shows in Langa, at Guga S’Thebe, with the idea that people travel between the spaces. Did that actually happen? Did people come into the city bowl from the townships, places like Mitchells Plain and Khayelitsha? The city doesn’t easily allow for that sort of mobility, especially at night. **NM:** To be honest, we really were not so scientific about that. Our show last year at Guga S’Thebe was sold out. It was full of people who drove in from Sea Point and Kommetjie, but there were also lots of people Langa and nearby Gugulethu. I think something had happened over time, people had gained trust and understanding of where you come from and what your intention was. It was a similar thing with the city. It’s a very strange thing that places like the Slave Church Museum didn’t see themselves as economically viable spaces not so long ago. When we first approached them they didn’t have a pricing structure because they’d never been asked to host an event like this, and they didn’t see themselves as relevant. **TT:** They are a museum. **NM:** We’re a museum too. People kept asking us where the Slave Church Museum is. It’s at the top of Long Street, near the KFC, which we used as a landmark. It’s very difficult—these symbolic places are invisible to people now. One of the biggest compliments I got was at PASS one

night. Some people who didn’t really know that we were the organisers we saying, ‘You know, I’ve never been in a space like this where I don’t feel uncomfortable because of my race.’ We tried to create a comfortable space, something that wasn’t racialised—a black space, a white space—just a space where people who love music could hang out. **TT:** In Cape Town those are the terms in which people look at spaces. Space has got a race, which is very interesting. **NM:** That’s your currency. That’s how you sell your club, that’s how you sell your bar. **TT:** You guys even had a concert in the dark. **NE:** And no handbags went missing. **TT:** That’s a measure of success ... forget how good the music was. **NM:** On that note, one of the very important things, again, about engaging the artists and challenging everybody to stretch themselves: a lot of the ideas came from the artists. Our approach, usually, to the artists was, ‘Look, we happen to have some money and we’ve got influence for the time being. What kind of thing would you like to do that you’ve never been able to do before? What kind of thing would you like us to support you with that you’ve never been able to do before? And how do we put resources together to make that happen?’ The idea for the blind show came from Madala Kunene. We asked him what kind of setup he wanted to work with. He said, ‘I’ve

always wanted to play a show in the dark because I want people who are sighted to get an inkling of what it feels like to be blind.’ **TT:** You got Bheki Khoza to compose a piece. **NM:** We initially asked if we could commission him to do something. He said yes, so we gave him a book to read and asked him to write music. He complained: ‘I’ve never been invited to a gig and given a book to read.’ **NE:** He’s a very beautiful and important musician, and I think he brings back this thing we were saying about how we receive, how we package, how we present the music so that we are able to experience it differently. Bheki has been around since forever, but needed to create a context where he could come out with all his knowledge, experience and sensibility, because he is totally in charge. We just said, ‘You’re a thinker and as a creator here is a platform, just do whatever choose.’ I think that kind of freedom played a lot into the quality of the content that we received, and not just for Bheki but for major stars like Toumani Diabaté, who had never been in a context such as this. Diabaté’s such a big star that when he gets to New York he plays at the Carnegie Hall, but here he is playing in a small slave church. He had to rethink everything when he got here because of this kind of human level experience. He only has it in Bamako, where he lives, where



**ALI FARKA TOURÉ** (1939–2006)  
aka Ali Ibrahim Touré  
Singer and guitarist



**FELA KUTI** (1938–1997)  
aka Olufela Olusegun Oludotun Ransome-Kuti  
Singer, multi-instrumentalist and composer

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**The complete denial and deletion of an African presence and history and experience of life in this city forced us to be quite radical about how we presented things. The chances we took may not have been possible in a place that self-consciously sees itself and lives out its African-ness.**  
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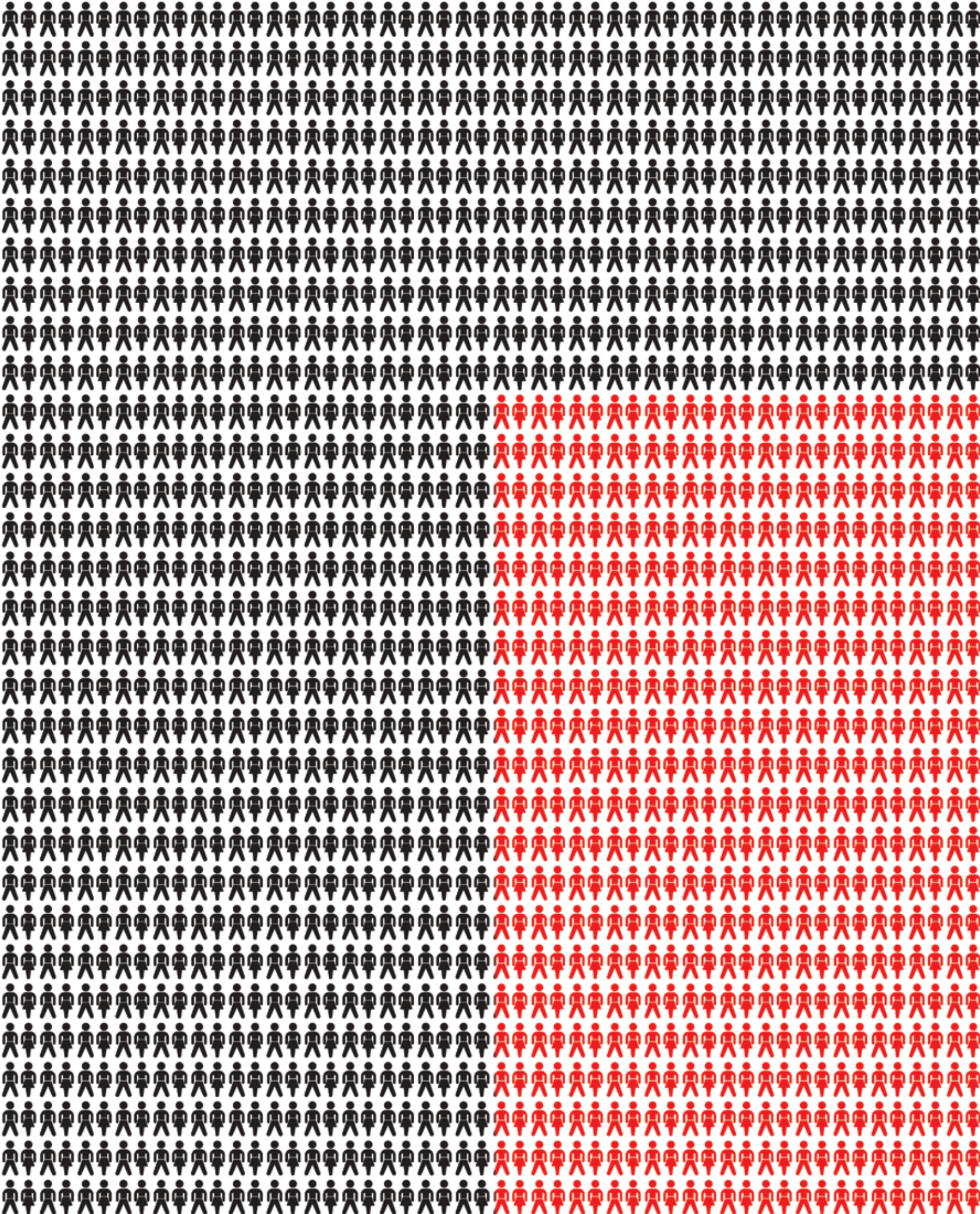
he really engages with people as people, not as a \$100 ticket paying audience. How do you allow this person to say something that other platforms do not allow them to say, to feel at home, so to speak, in the same way that we would like the audiences to. The artists’ engagement with the audience on that level was very crucial. About the city, I just wanted to say something else about Cape Town. I haven’t thought this through completely but I continuously feel that, for all the terrible things that we know about the city because we live here and we experience it daily, in many ways Cape Town gives us the opportunity to explore in these kinds

of ways, perhaps because of what is pushed down our throats in terms of the African experience in the city. We always put ourselves in the place of the inventor, the innovator, as opposed to one who is supposed to be carrying out a particular tradition. I do know that this initiative would have been possible, and perhaps even more possible, in Joburg, or in Kinshasa or Lagos, but in very different ways. **TT:** It would never have been the same. **NE:** You know what I’m saying. The complete denial and deletion of an African presence and history and experience of life in this city forced us to be quite radical about how we presented things. The chances we took may not have been possible in a place that self-consciously sees itself and lives out its African-ness. **TT:** One gets the feeling Cape Town always looks to Europe, it never looks to Africa except for tourist friendly curios, but in terms of culture and stuff it aspires to Europe. So it was very interesting to this African event in this environment. It forces the city’s residents to rethink their positions on stuff. But let’s shift gears and talk about the funding. You’ve already spoken about how you managed to do this despite the fact that you didn’t have enough money. In a place where you don’t have much state support for the arts sector everything ends up becoming quite corporatised. Can you discuss your relationship with the Africa Centre?

How did that whole relationship come about, and how did it work. Also how sustainable is this model? What is the ideal model, particularly in an environment that doesn’t really value arts funding? **NM:** For the past three years we had core funding from the Africa Centre, a scenario where an organisation that was cash flush could say we dedicate these resources to do what you have envisioned for the next three years. It allowed us to play a radical game. It was also a big luxury to be able to do that, because that allowed us to play, I think, in the correct ideological space for our purposes. But that three-year window is up and we are now in the process of exploring what else we can do with other partners. We are in a position of strength now because, of course, we’ve got a track record and we’ve got ideas that have worked in the marketplace, as well as artistically. We didn’t make huge amounts of money, but PASS does attract a whole group of people. One of the things we’re very clear about now is that PASS has got to become a bigger intervention, while retaining its homeliness. One of the things is to take it out of a month cycle, one month of the year cycle, and to make it happen throughout the year. **NE:** We want it to be a permanent installation as opposed to an intervention \*



Source: State of the World's Cities Report 2010/2011



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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| REPORTING                                                                                                        | DEBATE                                                                                                          | DEBATE                                                                                                      | COMMENTARY                                                                                |
| <b>Ghetto to Gallery</b>                                                                                         | <b>Not so fast</b>                                                                                              | <b>Yes, we must</b>                                                                                         | <b>An Eventful City by Design</b>                                                         |
| <i>Gentrification is changing the outlook for many of Woodstock's long-time residents.<br/>By Janine Stephen</i> | <i>Not all discourses which Cape Town's World Design Capital bid plays to are favourable.<br/>By Kim Gurney</i> | <i>Cape Town's bid to be the 2014 World Design Capital is both necessary and defined.<br/>By Zayd Minty</i> | <i>Six lessons for the Cape Town 2014 World Design Capital Bid Team<br/>By Ivan Turok</i> |



# CAPE TOWN, A WORLD DESIGN CAPITAL?

On June 21 a flurry of emails, text messages, tweets and status updates made public the news: Cape Town had been shortlisted for the next round of evaluation in the lengthy bid process that prefaces the awarding of the World Design Capital accolade. Along with Bilbao and Dublin, Africa’s southernmost city is vying for the honour in 2014. The winner will be announced in October 2011. But what exactly is this title all about? “The World Design Capital designation is a city promotion project that celebrates the accomplishments of cities that have used design as a tool to reinvent themselves and improve social, cultural and economic life,” offers the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design, an administrative body that overseas the biennial award. Fair enough, but what does this shortlisting really mean for Cape Town? In the first of an ongoing series of multi-vocal and investigative engagements with a key design issue, *CityScapes* asked three urban-minded thinkers to offer their opinions of Cape Town’s bid. Their insights are prefaced by a journalistic enquiry into Woodstock, a dishevelled Cape Town neighbourhood where a burgeoning creative economy has prompted uncertainty amongst long-time residents. How is design—which is really just a synonym for creative thinking—improving social, cultural and economic life in Woodstock, and by implication Cape Town? Good reading.

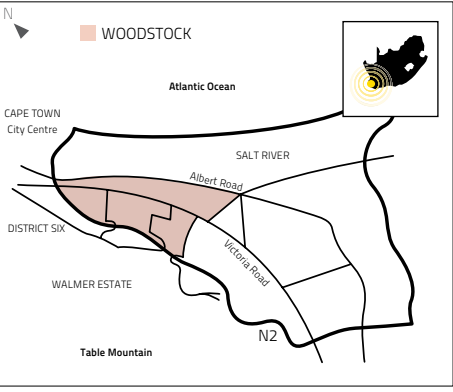
CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

# Ghetto to Gallery

*Situated at the southeastern edge of Cape Town’s inner city, Woodstock is an ethnically, religiously and financially diverse community. Gentrification is, however, changing the outlook for many of its long-time residents. By Janine Stephen  
Photos by Sydelle Willow Smith*



01



Cape Town population: 3.4-million  
Cape Town number of households: 904,000  
Woodstock number of households: 4,040

Lutfie Majiet is working on his third client in 40 minutes. His scissors skim the man’s ears as he makes his point. “Youngsters?” he asks. “The only time you’ll see a teenager in this barber shop is when his grandfather, his father and his brother before him all had their hair cut here.” His clients—most over 60, with deep roots in Woodstock, where Majiet has lived all his life, or neighbouring Salt River—mutter and nod. Besides bioscopes, and development, the topic this morning is the local youth, all too many of whom, Majiet says, wear R2000 takkies but are hopelessly unemployed. “We were talking about new development,” Majiet says, snipping furiously against a backdrop of photos of District Six. “These people who have moved into Woodstock

employ cheap labour: foreigners. The original people from Woodstock don’t get the opportunity. If the children could get work, then they wouldn’t hang around on the corners... that’s when the merchants get them.” Majiet, 63, has grown-up children who have not succumbed to the drug merchants, despite being surrounded by some dozen-odd drug houses where they grew up, near the William Street mosque. His oldest son works for Blue Ribbon bakeries; his daughter for Standard Bank. They are a hard-working family, and like many in Woodstock, welcome the waves of creatives and developers who began filtering into the area in earnest in around 2006, in search of space close to the city centre, and cheap rent. Developments like those now sprinkled along Albert, Sir Lowry and Victoria Roads “put the area back on the map,” says former resident Clarence van Vrede. Yet Majiet has never set foot in the galleries, boutique stores, or trendy restaurants. His leisure pursuits—he’s a huge draughts fan—are less consumerist. But every so often, the two worlds intersect. Like when property developer Andre Potgieter slips into his chair for a R40 haircut. Potgieter is something of a renegade. Immaculately dressed, he sips soup and wine on the deck of his most visible development, The Bromwell, once a run-down brothel and declared health hazard, now a showy boutique mall with a doorman in a top hat at the door. The deck lies over the remnants of Gelb Lane, which just three years ago was, as Potgieter puts it, “infested by bergies and street shebeens” (the street people were eventually moved on by authorities). His waiter calls Potgieter “Godfather”; young professionals dancing at his “township” themed eatery aMadoda! (off Albert Road) say they’ve heard he’s Italian. He’s not. Potgieter is a “boer” previously involved in the “low-cost housing market” in Gauteng. Ten years ago he moved to Woodstock, following his daughter, who had set up the advertising agency Mad World, and



02

son, who had joined her. And he began buying property. “I believe Albert Road has to become the next Fifth Avenue, as in New York,” he says, “or the next Oxford Street, as in London. This is where it’s going to happen.” The family’s first purchase was a R1-million “shell” in Treaty Road, now Mad World headquarters. Next to the building, a twisted, surprisingly short milkwood tree stands in a forgotten park—in times gone by, transgressing slaves were hanged here. Potgieter is a true believer in the Woodstock revival, as it’s often dubbed. His personal (and, without a heavyweight partner, financially unreachable) dream is buying up all buildings along a swathe of Albert Road, building a “cohesive, aesthetic” mixed use development including affordable housing, and pedestrianizing it. He’d also like to

see historical tours, and B&B options for tourists in local homes. “We want to integrate the ghetto with the gallery,” says Potgieter. “But we’re not land barons. Mad World believe that if you start affecting positive change, not in the bulldozing way typical of some Western tycoons, but buying buildings rich in heritage, restoring them to their former glory and creating within them attractions, this will not only serve the suburb but draw people from other suburbs and other countries too.” Woodstock is Potgieter’s hood, and “without wishing to become too poetic, we live the Woodstock dream”. Lutfie Majiet and Andre Potgieter: two different people, two wildly different Woodstocks. The neighbourhood divides are multiple: working class and upwardly mobile; lower and upper Woodstock, Muslim and Christian. Never mind race, which

saw areas like Pine Road in upper Woodstock bulldozed under the Group Areas Act and industries in Salt River shifted to places as far away as Atlantis. Decay and crime ate up lower Woodstock in the 1980s and 90s. The city began debating how to revitalise the Woodstock area in 2003. It recognised that providing an “efficient and qualitative living environment” would be complex, that privatisation could have unwanted spin-offs, including further dislocation of the poor. But in Woodstock, private development has been the key feature of improvements to date; resources for public facilities remain scarce. Current policy promoting the idea of Cape Town as a creative city—or Design Capital—is justifiably upbeat about how creative industries can help divided areas reinvent

themselves. As Andrew Boraine, Chief Executive of the Cape Town Partnership, has highlighted, Cape Town’s bid for Design Capital is not about high-end “stuff”, but aiding social and community development and designing a “more inclusive economic vision”. Design can be a tool for progress. But, it’s how progress is measured that gets interesting. For some, it’s a wave of new development. For others, railings around the local park, or a low-key refurbishment of the local town hall – places that locals use – are just as exciting.

It is local government election day. Voters pause outside Woodstock Town Hall to discuss their neighbourhood. Community worker and councillor candidate Tahir Levy speaks of high rates and rentals sending working class families to Blikkiesdorp and the townships, and African “foreigners” moving in. Masturah Solomon laments a lack of facilities for youngsters. A young hipster with skinny legs says that when he thinks of Woodstock, it’s “the Old Biscuit Mill, it’s young, trendy, up-and-coming designers – and it’s real, you know?”

Furniture designer Haldane Martin moved into Woodstock in 2008, buying an old NG church that had already been home to a motor mechanic, a carpenter and a movie production house. It met all his criteria: it was “a building with character, it was affordable, it worked spatially for my needs,” and it was close to town.

He liked the scale and mixed-use nature of Woodstock; the edginess—and since the Woodstock Improvement District, violent crime was down. He is a believer in design as regenerative in that it simply “makes cities nicer to live in, more interesting from a cultural perspective”. But he thinks design needs to develop as a real economic force, rather than a side-industry granted a tentative kind of “nation building” status.

There is a certain ‘naivety’ in expecting South African design businesses to be a panacea for social



03

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**You get letters chucked in here, estate agents, encouraging you to sell.**  
”

ills, with their complex systemic roots. While his studio provides employment to crafters, and he is very conscious of materials and resources, he finds there is a danger of a kind of stereotyping. For example, international clients expect a positive narrative behind designs. “They want to see the weavers,” says Martin, “they want that little story: how we’re helping the marginalised. It’s very sweet, and there’s no doubt the business has gained from having this side to it, but we need to move on to the next level.” Designers should aim to be world class, not “keep playing the poor me card, the happy rainbow nation card—we’ve got to go beyond that.’ He wants to see design businesses become real brands with clout in the region.

There are interesting echoes here in the language used by authorities and developers about how creative industries can lift an area. Diversity is often lauded as an attraction, but

seldom actively protected. Nobody challenges that creative businesses are good for Woodstock—it is, as furniture designer Liam Mooney puts it, a “no-brainer”. But gentrification is real. In an area like Woodstock, development doesn’t casually bring a better life for all. It brings conflicting needs.

Cathy Stone, city director of spatial planning and urban design, says that much of the Woodstock boom has been organic, and driven by the private sector. She says that there is a “desire” by city authorities not to push out poorer communities from being close to jobs, amenities and opportunities, and the places they have grown up. But aside from the standard poverty rebates for the poor, she was “not aware of any mechanisms we may have to protect certain communities in the context of gentrification, especially on privately-owned land.”

Strategic land owned by the city and province, including the Woodstock Hospital and Salt River Market sites, is being looked at for redevelopment. The likelihood is that the private sector will be invited to submit expressions of interest. Realistically, this means devoting the sites purely to low-cost, social housing won’t be considered (although affordable



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- 01. A remodelled Warehouse, now comprised of studios and designer shops on Lower Main Road
- 02. Lutfie Majiet the barber attends to a client
- 03. Some members of the Saamstaan Community at home in a series of informal houses adjacent to Percy Barkley House, Woodstock
- 04. Product designer Heldane Martin in his studio
- 05. A fruit vendor awaits customers next to his stall
- 06. Hawkers push their wares through the streets on their way from the market

housing may be an element).

Abdurrahman Harris, 68, who has lived most of his life in the Essex Street house his parents bought in 1954, would be disturbed to hear that the hospital may go. The Harris’ survived the Group Areas Act, the notices of eviction they received were never acted upon. Harris’ father Suleiman started the first congregation of Muslim people in Woodstock, in 1933, and oversaw the building of the William Street mosque, completed in 1954. (It now accommodates over 1,000 people; about 30% of the congregation lives in the community.)

Suleiman passed his cloak to his oldest son, who is still Imam of the mosque at 76. Abdurrahman acts as a kind of deputy and community leader. His house is full of visitors; he is considered a “good man” and called imam too, which, he says, “just means leader”.

Abdurrahman Harris is happy to see buildings upgraded and parks improved in Woodstock. He’s deeply protective of community assets. He laments the closing of the community swimming pool. “The good thing about Woodstock is that you can get everything here,” he tells me. “Everything is near: hospitals, doctors, shops, everything.

Other places, you have to take a train or taxi, but in Woodstock you can walk. He talks of the incentives to move, the letters from estate agents encouraging him to sell. Homeowners are sometimes tempted. “They’d buy in Goodwood and places like that. My neighbours went there and they’re sorry now, because transport really eats [money].”

Designer Woodstock exists at the margins of Harris’s life, with little impact aside from ever-increasing rates. Some locals are getting jobs, he says, but local shops are also closing down. “What is a pity is that our own people didn’t have the initiative to create something like [the Old Biscuit Mill]. But it’s an example of a good thing.”

One of Woodstock’s splashy successes is the arrival of top chef Luke Dale Roberts from Constantia. His Test Kitchen, in the Old Biscuit Mill, is eternally fully booked. Roberts: “People did ask, ‘Ew, why are you going there?’ I think they expected me to move to somewhere like Stellenbosch.” But he was drawn to Woodstock’s up-and-coming energy. Because he engages so much with local designers, he says their work has influenced the look and feel of the restaurant. He also gets everything he needs from within a “two-mile radius” –from a signage maker to fabric for uniforms. Like Haldane, he doesn’t see gentrification changing Woodstock too quickly. It’s a “long way off,” says Roberts.

Other areas of Cape Town are hungry for the design dollar. The East City is being punted as Cape Town’s design district, despite Woodstock having the jump on it. Its appeal is limited by the fact that it doesn’t have sufficient existing building options to choose from.

Another high-profile immigrant to Woodstock is the furniture producer Gregor Jenkin who, together with Johannesburg interior design studio and retailer Tonic and art gallery Whatiftheworld, bought a synagogue. The new premises will open onto Albert Road, a strategic advantage; Martin, who is selling his building post-recession, found ► continues p.92

Not so fast

Cape Town’s WDC bid is locally funded but it plays to a number of western assumptions and discourses, not all favourable. By Kim Gurney



07

We can and should control!” The unexpected declaration by a supposed security guard was all the more surprising in a freethinking art school. She stood for a moment, in her formal attire and stiff pose, before exiting the room and leaving bemused viewers to London’s Royal College of Art (RCA) June degree show. The relief was short-lived. Several minutes later, she peered from the upper level to proclaim: “I take no risks!” This performance piece reflected a preoccupation among graduating students with security and private versus public space. Such issues are of global concern. Safety is one repeated quality-of-life metric in popular indices about what makes a city most liveable. The results tend to favour a particular kind of place. The Economist has ranked Vancouver in pole position for five straight years. Readers of the Financial Times recently rated Istanbul while Monocle magazine thought Helsinki tops. What such polls fail to measure is the vibrancy more chaotic megacities offer, according to FT journalist Edwin Heathcote. “In a strange way the conflict with the (unliveable) city can also become part

Kim Gurney is an independent journalist and artist based in Johannesburg.

of the attraction,” he wrote in a March article. “If everybody is where they want to be, nobody is going anywhere.” The latest shortlist for the World Design Capital (WDC) touches upon this interesting tension. The International Council of Societies of Industrial Design makes the award every two years. Helsinki, Monocle’s top city, is preparing for a year of events as 2012 titleholder. But the newsflash is that Cape Town is competing against Dublin and Bilbao for the 2014 honour. It is of course very significant to be an African shortlisted city, but this fact also cues a potential schism in expectations between the first and developing world around what design can and should achieve. Central to the award is design that acts as a catalyst for development and reinvention—in particular, improving social, cultural and economic life. Cape Town’s bid, themed “Live Design. Transform Life”, showcases examples on its website of how design is helping alleviate problems in low-income communities. But not everybody believes design should be instrumentalist. Anthony Dunne, a designer and head of the design interactions department at the RCA, explains his approach in a 2009 journal article: “The role we see for design [is] a questioning around critical process rather than one that solves problems and provides answers.” Dunne chiefly operates in a more academic environment but he offers an interesting counterpoint to design as social entrepreneurship. South African artist Ralph Borland teases out related problematics in a recently completed doctorate on “objects in development”. A central argument is: because many contemporary objects designed for use in the developing world rely upon first-world audiences to fund them, the requirement to sustain interest from these audiences threatens to supersede the needs of end users. “We need to continually touch back on the question of whose needs we are designing for,” he said in a June 2010 video for a Toronto symposium, “and we need to interrogate what we mean when we talk about innovation.” In an emailed elaboration, Borland says innovation is mainly used to describe a kind of narrative quality to a

proposal, something with an engaging or spectacular value to audiences, whereas new objects as such may not be needed. And a drawback of the social entrepreneurial model is that benefits will tend to flow to the rich in systems connecting rich and poor.

“We need to continually touch back on the question of whose needs we are designing for.”

“Focus on design and innovation as social changers allows the focus to be on positive, instrumental approaches rather than on the fact that regulation, redistribution [etc] may be necessary parts of social change,” he adds. Cape Town’s WDC bid is locally funded but it plays to a first-world adjudicator and competes against two rival western European cities. As such, there is a parallel critique to be drawn, particularly in a city with such racial, cultural and economic faultlines. Furthermore, city pageants are linked to a global ‘world city’ discourse, which promotes culture for identity formation, urban regeneration and other related objectives but does not necessarily account for realities like the informalism of the African city. Last but not least, sponsoring the entire project is the notion of the creative economy. It essentially values the arts, culture and heritage (ACH) sector by its contribution to economic growth and employment. A number of recent studies have shown this to be significant: a Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) research report drafted in September last year put the annual Gross Value Added (turnover less cost of production, excluding labour and capital) for visual arts alone at R791-million. “The creative industries make up an extremely important part of our local economy,” said Patricia de Lille, the mayor of Cape Town, in a June statement about the WDC shortlisting. “The value of an event such ▶ continues p.94



08



09



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11



12

- 07. Eliajes Davids, caretaker, 37 Buitenkant Street
- 08. DJ Levi “Slewdada” Josephs at Cold Turkey party Amadoda’s, a pub/shebeen off Albert Road in Woodstock
- 09. The Old Biscuit Mill hosts a market every Saturday
- 10. A view down Buitenkant Street
- 11. Mr Harris outside the Williams Street Mosque
- 12. Informal traders outside The Old Biscuit Mill
- 13. Many of Woodstock’s small retail businesses are now run by immigrants from central Africa, creating tensions with older residents
- 14. A man makes deliveries on a busy weekday
- 15. Woodstock still has a large homeless population, many of whom are catered to by charities and church organisations in the area
- 16. Informal trading is a feature of Woodstock’s mixed economy
- 17. A view towards the Bromwell, a trendy bar and restaurant off Albert Road
- 18. Partygoers at a Woodstock club
- 19. Woodstock has few green areas and parks, children often having to play on the streets



## Yes, we must

**Cape Town's bid to be the 2014 World Design Capital is both necessary and defined.**

By Zayd Minty



On June 21 this year, Cape Town was short-listed—together with Bilbao and Dublin—for the new but sought after title of World Design Capital. The Industrial Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID), the body responsible for the title, has indicated that 56 cities downloaded its application form. Why do cities apply for the title? What do they hope to gain by bidding? Why is Cape Town bidding? How could the title take the city forward, and in what way? To date there have been only three World Design Capitals: Torino, a test case, in 2008; Seoul, the current holder, since 2010; and Helsinki, which will assume the title next year. The WDC title provides an interesting space for cities to reinvent and showcase themselves to a global audience. It is instructive how Seoul used the bid. South Korea has been economically on the rise for a few decades, a fact symbolically marked by its hosting of the 1988 summer Olympics. By sheer determination, it has lifted itself out of poverty, birthing such important global brands as Hyundai and Samsung. It ranks amongst the world's 20 major economies and is a member of the G-20. But at what cost?

*Zayd Minty is the Co-ordinator of the programme Creative Cape Town, an initiative of the Cape Town Partnership.*

Seoul is an austere city; it is hard to penetrate and hard to imagine as a design city at first glance. Suicide rates are historically very high. Seoul's bid was an attempt to soften its urban character, to make a city where its citizens felt happier, less stressed, while still building on its edge as an innovative, creative city. The city's bid was supported at all levels of government, including the presidency. One of the many successes of Seoul's WDC bid was the raising of the Han River, buried for years under a concrete highway. Today it is a landscaped environment where citizens can relax and interact with each other. People have been placed centre stage using design. Cape Town has similarly been on a reinvention path. Many of the city's key stakeholders agree that the time is right to bid for a title of this nature. Cape Town has had a measure of stability in government for the first time in a few years, with one political party (Democratic Alliance) enjoying an outright majority in both city and provincial legislature. The 2010 football World Cup helped push forward the development of important connective infrastructure, including the Integrated Rapid Transport System (IRTS) and rollout of a comprehensive broadband infrastructure. There are also a number of successful design institutions that have contributed to the city's design capabilities, including the annual Design Indaba conference and expo, and Cape Craft and Design Institute. Cape Town's popular tourist status has also been the subject of scrutiny, the emphasis now on shifting its brand essence from pleasure and nature to business, creativity and innovation. There is a growing realisation amongst city administrators that Cape Town cannot address the deep social and economic divisions without significantly shifting thought and action towards a collectively shared vision. The WDC can be seen as a collective road map for change, with a clear deadline. Cape Town's bid emerged from members of civil society involved in urban change, the creative industries, and business and tourism lobbies, which have at various points in the last decade worked together to develop

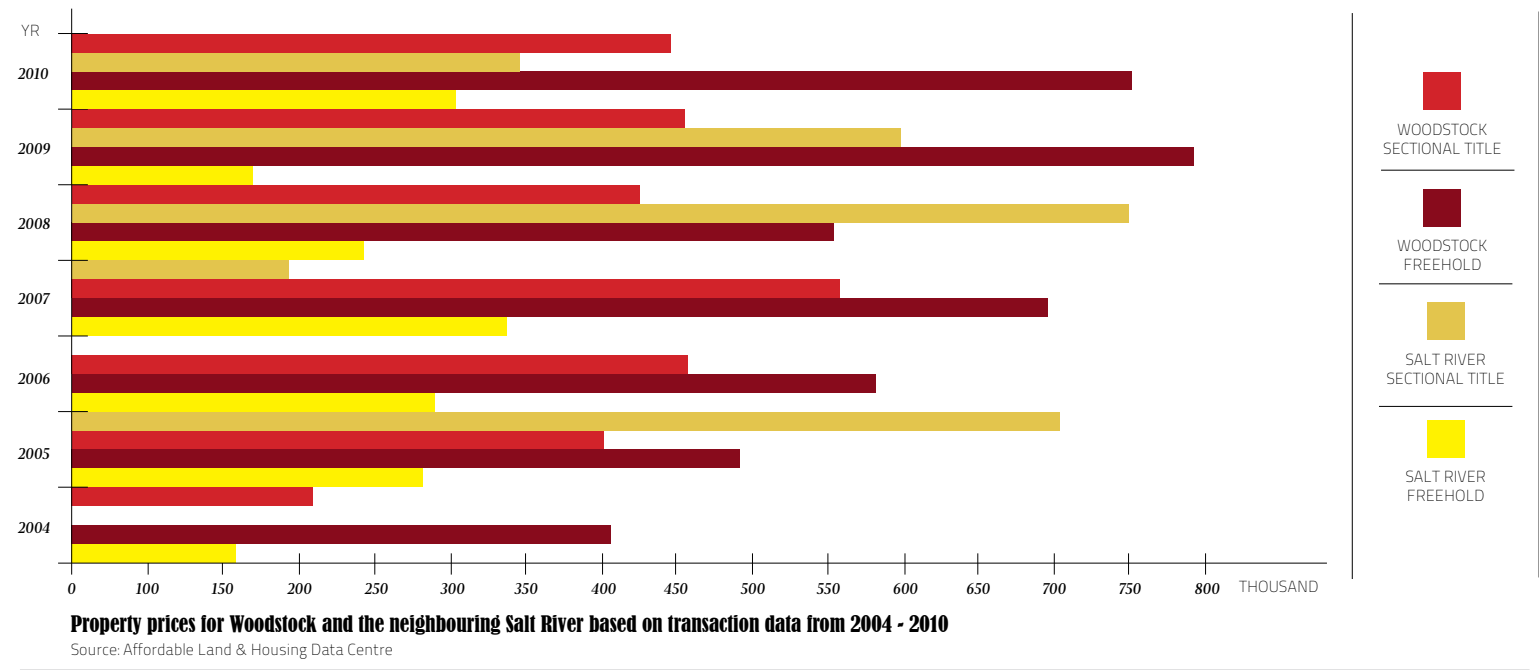
various common visions. Administered by the Cape Town Partnership (CTP), a public-private agency focused on issues relevant to Cape Town's city centre, the bid was enabled by a modest R2 million budget allocation from the city government. Using this allocation, CTP was able to secure more than R4 million in media coverage, complete the initial research for the bid, write and publish a 465-page bid book and host the visit of the judges in July 2011. The bid book has been hailed for the extensive information it offers on design assets and opportunities in Cape Town, as well as its aesthetic appearance. Central to the bid is the recognition of Cape Town's position and possible roles in relation to the rest of the African continent. The bid also argues the need to envision a future for Cape Town that is inclusive and sustainable. As such, the bid therefore focusses on the importance of socially responsive design, being design that responds to the needs of the society rather than the commonly understood version of design as object and consumer orientated. The bid also highlighted a number of existing state and private initiatives which seek to overcome the deeply divided nature of Cape Town. The Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) project in the township of Khayelitsha is one example. VPUU is a city-sponsored initiative aimed at reducing violent crime and improving social conditions in Cape Town communities across the Cape Flats.

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**Even if we don't win, we can't lose.**

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It uses specific design “tools” to implement the safety principles, including the introduction of a clear signage and wayfinding system, creating visual connections along walking routes, ensuring movement routes are as clear and short as possible, the clustering and integration of public activities and ensuring that ► continues p.94



◀from p.87 that most visitors simply didn't venture up Woodstock's side streets. Young furniture designer Liam Mooney, who decamped from Albert Road for the city centre, is sceptical of Woodstock as design destination. He believes the city location is better for his high-end, purely retail needs. In town, he gets more serious buyers. He thinks the CBD is somehow more accessible, there is less "apprehension" about stopping by. And bizarrely, his rent is cheaper. "People keep on talking about how Woodstock is going to be the next big thing, but I just don't feel it," Mooney says. "When I started out, I hoped to be part of... well... that it would become this really wonderful community. You want to be neighbours with your contemporaries. And it wasn't happening. There are a lot of day trippers, people who have decided to have the Woodstock experience; so they come through and they go to the Biscuit Mill and Superette, and they have a coffee and they look at paintings in the gallery, and then they go back to Newlands and places like that. Those people just didn't buy from me." Moving out is not a trend. Buildings are still being snapped up. St Mary's School has been sold, supposedly to a large antiques company. (Abduraman

Harris remembers working to raise funds for the beleaguered church itself; he says religions supported each other in Woodstock.) Potgieter has his eye on a row of old homes opposite The Bromwell, and entire blocks on Sir Lowry and Victoria Road are now lined with interior furnishing businesses. Resident and businessman Felix Furtak, who lives with his wife Khungeka and two sons in Plein Street, says the gentrification is "frightening". Furtak resigned from community forums after being threatened by pro-development individuals. A social democrat, he was branded "a communist". He is baffled by the "apathy" of the local community. The important question, he says, is who is gaining from development: "more jobs for parking attendants," he says, is not an improvement. He complains that rates are up 300%. In total, his household and business pays R3,500 a month to the City of Cape Town. To qualify for relief from the city, the poverty line is set at R3,000 a month. "The irony is, if you earn R3,000 a month, you're not living in a house," says Furtak. "You live in a shack. It can't sustain someone living in Woodstock." Many local residents grumble vigorously about African immigrants moving in, opening up what one

man calls "money-making churches" in shops, also for their purported involvement in nightclubs and the drug trade. In a way, unlike the "day trippers" and non-resident developers, such newcomers engage with local residents in a more direct way—and so are possibly seen as more of a threat to existing culture. Potgieter, however, fears other kinds of foreigners. "Commercial land prices have more than doubled," he says. "Inevitably you have people from other cities or countries capitalising on that. When something like this is in motion, word spreads like a disease. The Bible says there where the carcass is, there will the vultures gather." ✱

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**The important question, he says, is who is gaining from development: more jobs for parking attendants is not an improvement.**

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## An Eventful City by Design

*Six lessons to ensure that the beneficial effects of an event like the WDC bid is not outweighed by the costs and other drawbacks.*

By Ivan Turok

In the face of growing economic pressures and converging patterns of consumption, cities around the world have been exploring new ways of showcasing their distinctive features to grab more attention, investment and jobs. Staging events has become an increasingly popular device for cities to stand out in a crowded marketplace with strong competition to lure firms, visitors and investors. Cape Town's current bid to become the World Design Capital in 2014 illustrates this trend, in some ways. What should be done to ensure that the city benefits, whatever the result of the bid? Lots of cities are now branding themselves "cultural capitals", "festival cities" or "creative cities". Events have become so widespread because they can build an appealing image, generate media coverage, attract tourist spending, increase social participation and improve amenities in neglected parts of the city. Events are usually cheaper and simpler to organise than investing in signature buildings, iconic infrastructure or new technologies, and they are more flexible because themes can change. Events can also enhance the value of under-used sports stadia, conference venues, concert halls, even local hotels, and they can allow old buildings to be upgraded and adapted to contemporary uses. There are all sorts of dangers in focusing on events to develop or revitalise cities. They can become one-off spectacles or opportunities for professionals to party. The expense of organising events can easily escalate and there may be hidden costs of diverting the energies of top politicians, senior officials and

*Ivan Turok is deputy executive director at the Human Sciences Research Council and formerly a professor of urban economic development at the University of Glasgow and Mellon Fellow at the African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town (2008 -2009).*



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**Cape Town needs a coherent plan based on its own identity, strengths and challenges.**

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activists from more pressing priorities. In the course of becoming a regular eventful city, short-lived successes may get confused with the sustained effort required to deliver progress on underlying socio-economic challenges. In addition, the rules of the game set by the external bodies which award winning status can conflict with the needs and interests of the host city. South Africa, for instance, experienced many problems with the rules and regulations imposed by FIFA during the 2010 World Cup, such as restrictions on the local production of merchandise. What lessons can we learn from experience elsewhere in the world about how to ensure that the beneficial effects of events outweigh the costs and other drawbacks? **One:** it is vital to establish clear objectives and build a compelling case for the event. What exactly will it deliver for the city and its citizens, and what are the priorities that warrant concerted effort and attention? It is no good having a series of laudable but diffuse goals that stand little chance of being achieved. The city must start from its existing position and inherited resources rather than some abstract high-end ideal. Deliberate programming and target setting are

other important elements of careful event planning and management. **Two:** events shouldn't be seen in isolation, or as ends in themselves, because it is usually difficult for them to deliver much on their own. They should be planned as part of a long-term development strategy, which they can help to initiate or accelerate. This is particularly important if Cape Town's bid for WDC status is to act as a real catalyst for re-thinking the structure and functioning of the city. Enlightened design is an essential tool for socio-spatial transformation, but this needs to be embedded in other institutional practices and procedures that govern the built environment to have a lasting impact. This is also about timing and sequencing to ensure that the main features of the event reinforce other things that are happening or need to happen. And it involves aligning the different ways in which decisions are made and resources are allocated so that the outcomes are complementary and mutually reinforcing. **Three:** events should be clearly connected to the city or district in which they are located, and avoid gimmicks to grab attention. They must draw on and reflect the authentic character and creative strengths of the city. Can the kudos of being dubbed WDC help Cape Town to devise novel solutions to its big infrastructure challenges, and to take forward a new green growth vision of a more sustainable future? Can it help to break the city's current planning impasse to boost residential densification and social integration? The desire to try and reposition the city into new markets by changing how people think about the place needs to be handled with sensitivity. The temptation to imitate projects and practices from elsewhere should be resisted, unless they are directly relevant to local circumstances. **Four:** successful events have effective champions who are able to mobilise wider support and ensure leadership and political will at the highest levels in order to deliver meaningful change. Activities should seek to capture the public imagination and involve all the main groups and interests in the city. They should help to cement partnerships between stakeholders involved in the various ▶ continues p.94

◀ KIM GURNEY, continued from p.88

as WDC not only exposes our creative design talents to the world but in turn develops our local industry into an asset for decades to come.” This creative economy discourse takes its cue from countries like the UK, and the South African government is keenly embracing its directives in current policy-making. This includes the New Growth Path—it specifically highlights the cultural and creative industries to create employment in tourism, with an emphasis on “large-scale”, “high-impact” programmes. Yet a cursory glance at the UK post-financial crisis shows a haemorrhaging of state funding, closing of various art institutions, a push towards private philanthropy and concern about the future of art for art’s sake. Simultaneously, economics as a discipline is soul-searching, with a growing call for qualitative alternatives to GDP to measure a nation’s wealth. The WDC bid is a great opportunity for Cape Town and chimes with a louder voice from the Global South. Yet we should guard against losing sight of the less tangible, more nuanced and abstracted values of the sector, even in the more applied art of design. These are arguments that are tougher to articulate when economic rationalisation in policymaking dominates and exerts a trickle-down effect. But they need to be assertively voiced to help fuel a bid agenda that best serves both its ultimate audience and long-term broader sector interests •

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**This creative economy discourse takes its cue from countries like the UK, and the South African government is keenly embracing its directives in current policy-making.**

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◀ ZAYD MINTY, continued from p.91

the site layout has active edges to increase passive surveillance. These principles and design tools are used in all areas of the upgrading process to ensure that the main challenge – crime prevention – is addressed in the new interventions. This approach is in direct contrast to grid-like layout of government-built RDP houses, where little thought is given to the surrounding environment. Even if Cape Town does not secure the status of WDC, a bid of this nature is already performing a variety of important functions, from boosting the city’s profile internationally to connecting actors and agents working in the urban context locally. Hence the bid team’s mantra: “Even if we don’t win, we can’t lose.” •

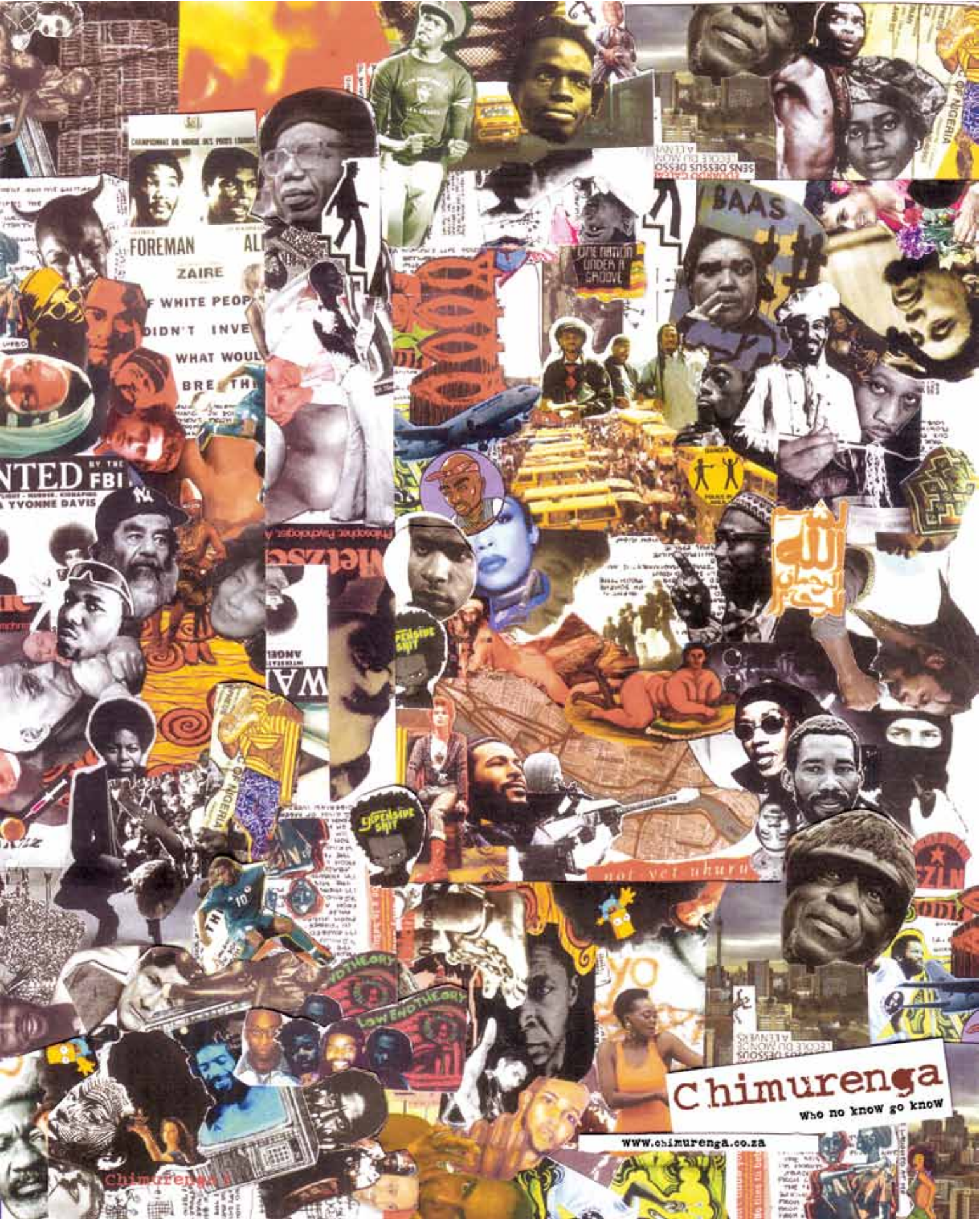
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**Even if Cape Town does not secure the status of WDC, a bid of this nature is already performing a variety of important functions.**

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◀ IVAN TUROK, continued from p.93

facets of design within the public and private sectors and civil society. Cape Town Partnership has proven leadership and strategic credentials, although it’s current geographical remit and composition may impose constraints on what is really needed. **Five:** it is important to encourage spontaneity and calculated risk-taking—a genuine spirit of creativity and imagination. Careful event planning should not exclude the opportunities for new ideas to emerge and for new relationships to be forged. Space needs to be created for all kinds of experimentation and innovation, including provoking established ways of thinking, challenging orthodox and out-dated practices, and sparking debates about suitable solutions to our problems. There should be a degree of edginess and uncertainty to the experience. Programmes that are very predictable may prove boring and quickly lose their appeal. **Six:** legacy planning is an essential ingredient of good practice. This requires dedicated time and investment in follow-through activities to secure a sustained impact. One of the best ways of building a durable legacy is probably to develop the creative and technical capacities of talented local people and dynamic enterprises with the potential to serve wider markets. This includes the ability to undertake original analysis, engage in lateral thinking, venture into new initiatives, learn from experience and consciously innovate. Public organisations in Cape Town need to think hard about how they can best use their wide-ranging powers as regulators, investors and purchasers of all sorts of goods and services in order to nurture, encourage and sustain high quality, appropriate local design capabilities for the future. There is no panacea for creating an eventful city that is fairer, more prosperous and more resilient. Cape Town needs a coherent plan based on its own identity, strengths and challenges. A strategic approach aimed at developing the capabilities for dynamic change and enabling steady improvements over time could help to secure lasting benefits to the everyday lives of citizens and to the fundamental fabric and functionality of the city •



# Constructing a fiction

MIKHAEL SUBOTZKY & PATRICK WATERHOUSE

In 2008, South African photographer Mikhael Subotzky and British artist Patrick Waterhouse, embarked on a project documenting Ponte City, a 54-floor residential block erected in 1975 at a cost of R11-million in central Johannesburg. The 470-unit building, designed by architect Rodney Grosskopff and vaguely reminiscent of Chicago’s iconic Marina Towers, had recently been acquired by developers aiming to cash in on a sea change in attitudes towards inner city living after nearly two decades of URBAN decline. “Their aim was to target a new generation of aspirant middle-class residents – young, upwardly mobile black professionals, business people from across the African continent, and all those seeking chic Manhattan-style inner-city living,” explain the collaborating pair, who were awarded the prestigious Discovery Award for the project at the 2011 edition of Rencontres d’Arles, an annual meeting of global photographers held in southern France. “The developers emptied half the building and stripped the apartments of everything, throwing all their rubble into the structure’s central core. They started to redesign the flats with a variety of exotic themes – “Future Slick”, “Old Money” and “Glam Rock” – but their financing required sales up front and these, it seems, failed to materialise in sufficient numbers for the construction costs and occupational rental to be maintained.” The R300-million re-development project went bankrupt. The following pages, excerpted from Subotzky and Waterhouse’s forthcoming book on Ponte, describes a moment before the collapse of this fanciful scheme, which resulted in Ponte’s old owners repossessing the building, cleaning it up and refitting the stripped apartments. “Another cycle in the building’s life ... before the last illusions of a grand future could be erased.” \*

www.subotzkystudio.com



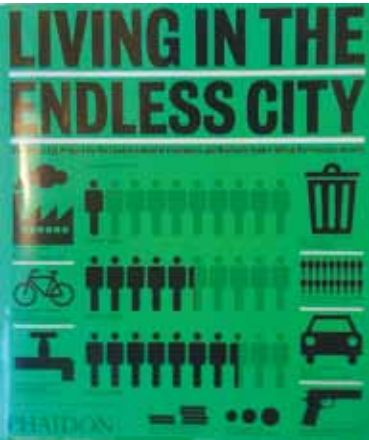




Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse,  
Cleaning the Core, Ponte City, Johannesburg, 2008

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|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 102 BOOK REVIEW            | 103 PREVIEW                                   | 102 PREVIEW         | 102 RESEARCH PAPER            | 104 EXCERPT              | 106 EXCERPT            |
| Living in the Endless City | Social Networks & Natural Resource Management | Rethinking Urbanism | Design Led Urban Regeneration | Anton Harber's Diepsloot | Yto Barrada on Tangier |

BOOKS



Living in the Endless City

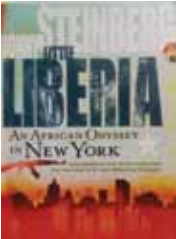
Edited by: Ricky Burdett & Deyan Sudjic  
Phaidon & Urban Age

This is a fitting companion to *The Endless City*, published in 2008. Based on a series of conferences held by the Urban Age Project (organised by the London School of Economics and Deutsche Bank’s Alfred Herrhausen Society), *Living in the Endless City* examines Mumbai, Sao Paolo and Istanbul. Combining smart writing, powerful photographs

and incisive research conducted by the Urban Age Project, the book is an investigation into the physical and social aspects of the modern urban condition. It is written by leading thinkers from all around the globe under the editorship of Ricky Burdett of the London School of Economics and Deyan Sudjic of the Design Museum, London. *Living in the Endless City* brims with reports and data on vital themes including security, climate change, density and globalization. Its focus on three of the most vibrant and fastest growing mega-cities in the world; Mumbai, India’s economic powerhouse; São Paulo, Brazil’s most populous city; and Istanbul, Europe’s largest city and one of the most resilient urban economies in the world, gives the book a sharper edge than its predecessor. Urban Age hosted a sequence of conferences from which a sizeable amount of the analysis in this book emerged. These brought together influential figures in the field of urban development, including mayors, planners, architects, scientists and community groups – to study the growing, and in some cases

shrinking, cities of the twenty-first century. The book sets out to ask questions like why so many cities continue to grow; what the complex relationship between urban form and city life is and how we can intervene at all levels to bring about positive change. Another key question addressed is whether or not the model for the western city has become redundant in the face of globalization. The investigations of the Urban Age Project have found that cities are becoming more spatially fragmented, more socially divisive and more environmentally destructive. These are the challenges and threats faced by the next generation of urban leaders who are tasked with steering their cities through what will be complex and difficult times. But, the narratives also suggest, cities are uniquely placed to harness their human and environmental potential, guiding urban growth towards greater social and environmental equity. This, the book argues, will be the main task for the mayors, governors and city leaders of the emerging cities of the future \*

Notable Books



BOOK  
**Little Liberia:  
An African Odyssey  
in New York**  
Jonny Steinberg  
Jonathan Ball Publishers

Steinberg’s book about the Liberian community in New York is the tale of a conflict that reaches beyond borders. The book gives an insight into a community ripped apart by sins from an earlier time and paints a complex picture of the relationships of Africa and its diaspora \*



BOOK  
**Republic  
of Luanda**  
Michael McGarry  
Stevenson

Artist Michael McGarry spent time in Luanda capturing daily life in the city. From club goers to the local yacht club all the way to the busy new chinese led construction project sites dotted accross the city, the book provides a unique view of a city in a state of transition (See extract on page 118) \*

ESSAY

Akin Adesokan  
Herbet Macaulay’s Lagos

PREVIEW

Social Networks and Natural Resource Management

Edited by Örjan Bodin & Christina Prell  
Cambridge University Press

Social Network Analysis (SNA) , a quantitative approach to the study of social relations, has recently emerged as a key tool for understanding the governance of natural resources. Bringing together contributions from a range of researchers in the field, this is the first book to fully explore the potential applications of SNA in the context of natural resource management. Topics covered include the role of SNA in stakeholder selection; improving fisheries management and conservation; the effect of social network ties on public satisfaction and the ability of environmental movements to protect urban ecosystems and create larger-scale institutional changes. Numerous case studies link SNA concepts to the theories underlying natural resource governance, such as social learning, adaptive co-management and social movements theory. Reflecting on the challenges and opportunities associated with this evolving field, this is an ideal resource for students and researchers involved in many areas of natural resource management, environmental biology, sustainability science and sociology. Contributors to the book include Carl Folke, Örjan Bodin, Saudiel Ramirez-Sanchez, Henrik Ernstson, Christina Prell, Beatrice Crona, Mark Reed, Klaus Hubacek, David Tindall, Howard Harshaw, J. M. Taylor, Ken Frank, Annica Sandström, Marney Isaac, and Evans Dawoe \*

PREVIEW

Rethinking Urbanism

From the book *Just Transitions to Sustainability*  
by Prof. Mark Swilling and Eve Annecke  
UCT Press

The chapter “Rethinking Urbanism” in Mark Swilling and Eve Annecke’s upcoming book, *Just Transitions to Sustainability* is a journey through the changing landscape of actors, networks and flows in – and between – cities, and their relationships to urban infrastructure. This urbanism takes different forms. These urbanisms are without the ability to solve the multidimensional crisis facing urbanists that are concerned with cities that are dominated by slum and splintered urbanism, while preserving fragile vestiges of inclusive and green urbanism in predominantly middle class enclaves, who are hived off from the realities of their slum-inhabitant neighbours who face dire and desperate challenges. The chapter asks the question, how can we justify types of ‘sustainability’ that actually reinforce the failed neoliberal economy and its accompanying ‘techno-apartheid, where technocentric and technocratic solutions are focussed solely on servicing middle class markets and their affluent lifestyles, thereby reinforcing the inequalities of splintered urbanism? The text touches on and integrates a variety of themes that inform how we understand the changes that are happening within, between and beyond the boundaries of modern day ‘cities’ in their various forms \*

*Just Transitions to Sustainability will be available from December 2011.*

RESEARCH PAPER

Design led urban regeneration: A critical appraisal

Mark Jayne & David Bell  
Sage Journals Online

“This paper develops a critical perspective on ‘design-led’ urban regeneration, which is a fuzzy term used to describe a diverse raft of economic development strategies. A definition of design is outlined and then utilised in an assessment of a number of local and regional design-led urban regeneration schemes. A more detailed critique of one such project, the North Staffordshire Design Initiative, is then undertaken. The authors argue that there is a lack of best practice models and empirical research to guide policy makers.” \*

from the abstract

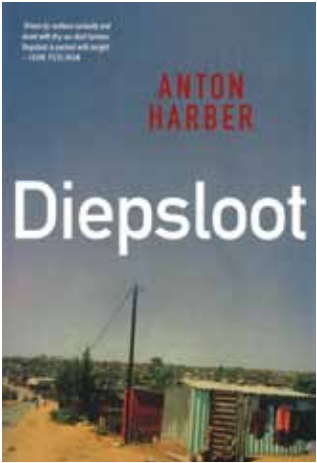
REPORTS

STATE OF THE WORLD’S CITIES REPORT 2010 - 2011

Unhabitat

The 2010/2011 edition of this biannual report sets out to record current urbanisation trends throughout the world. Subtitled “Bridging the Urban Divide”, the report examines the social, economic, cultural and political drivers of urban poverty and deprivation. The good news from the report is that a total of 227-million people in the world have moved out of slum conditions since 2000 \*

EXTRACT



## The Bullfrog With an Attitude

*An Excerpt from Diepsloot by Anton Harber; Published by Harper Collins.*

I first hear about The Frog in passing remarks among Diepslooters. Francinah Mbaduli, a community leader, says she has heard that one of the reasons for the delay with construction of new houses is “some frog or something”. A councillor tells me vaguely that there is an issue with a frog that has to be sorted out—at a consultative meeting a city official had said that the one thing that was not up for discussion was the area that had to be kept for frog breeding. They could discuss the size of houses and plots, the kinds of houses, the space for sports fields, businesses and churches—everything except The Frog. Apparently the meeting moved swiftly on. It is as if there is some strange presence, like a troll, lurking around the area, to which people will only refer in passing, in a slightly embarrassed way, avoiding it if they can. I struggle to learn more. An internet search for a combination of “frog” and “Diepsloot” draws 13,000 entries (more than 12 per cent of all Diepsloot entries) and the first is Issue 12 of the Bullfrog Bulletin, December 2006. This has pictures of volunteers in green World Wildlife Trust shirts attaching

cotton bobbins to the backs of huge frogs in Diepsloot. Caroline Yetman, who enjoys the imposing title of Giant Bullfrog Project Executant, is trying a new research technique for tracking the movement of these animals by gluing a bobbin to their backs so that they leave a cotton trail in their wake—cheaper and more efficient than the radio-tracking that researchers usually use, according to the Bulletin. The frogs are inspected at regular intervals, “firstly to check that the frogs were okay and secondly, to check that their bobbins were working properly ... By midnight, both were performing remarkably well, so an end was called to the observation work.” The bobbins stay on only two days, but render some “incredibly interesting findings” about where the frogs move and burrow. A nine-page formal letter from Yetman on the letterhead of the University of Pretoria’s Centre for Environmental Studies alerts me to the full scope of the problem. When an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was needed for the Diepsloot housing development, she was called in because her doctoral research was based in that area. It had come to her attention, she wrote to the authorities, that the planned Diepsloot East houses “would threaten the Giant Bullfrog population that uses the three seasonal pans”. She proposed three options to deal with it: protect the bullfrog by creating a buffer zone where there would be no development; relocate them by hand, though they are philopatric (breeding in the same place every year) and the success rate of such removals is very low; or relocate them slowly over 3–5 years, thus postponing the development but raising the chances of success. The first option is most desirable from the frog’s point of view, Yetman says, but she is realistic enough to know that it is probably the least likely from the developmental point of view; the latter option is the most realistic and least risky. The discussion of where The

Frog could be moved to brings to light something unexpected: the nearby upper-income Dainfern development had obliterated the bullfrog in its area despite an outcry from environmentalists, but this was in 1992, before legislation made EIAs a compulsory part of the planning process. Now the people of Dainfern want the frogs back for their golf course, where they can assist in keeping insects in check. The Diepsloot frogs can go there, Yetman suggests. They stand to be the beneficiaries of the most significant class mobility in the area. Next I find the full EIA, produced by Newtown Landscape Architects in August 2008. They say they are working with Yetman on a Management Plan for The Frog, and introduce a new, benign alternative: make a section of the land an environmental education centre where the frog will be safe and kids can learn about the environment. Yetman has published a very useful tract on The Frog, “What you need to know about bullfrogs”. I do not think my need is great, but actually I learn a great deal. Pyxicephalus adspersus is the beast’s proper name. It is green-brown, about the size of a small football, and makes a soft, deep “whoooooing” call. It eats animals ranging in size from flies to small chickens. Hibernating is what some animals do in winter, while aestivating, I learn, is a summer or year-round activity, or inactivity—when animals live in a dormant state. In the case of The Frog this is as much as 11 months of every year, when it burrows up to half-a-metre underground, its breathing and heart-rate slowing down dramatically, and it seals itself in a keratin cocoon, leaving only its nostrils open. (Keratin is the stuff of fingernails or rhino horns.) When the heavy rains come around November, The Frog emerges, sheds this skin and returns to the same place every year to breed prolifically. All breed within 1–2 days of the rains and only in very specific conditions: they need still, shallow water because the female

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...the nearby upper-income Dainfern development had obliterated the bullfrog in its area despite an outcry from environmentalists.  
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stands in the water but extrudes the eggs in the air, where they have to be fertilised before falling into the water. During this period, the males are “spectacularly aggressive,” attacking one another, sometimes dislodging rival pairs in flagrante in fits of jealousy. Because they need such specific conditions to mate, and Gauteng experiences periodic drought, when they get to do it, they do it furiously, producing thousands of eggs in the hope that a few will survive and make up for those years when the conditions are not quite right. Once the eggs are laid, a few large males remain behind to defend them, and they do it in a way that would make proud any protective father. They shepherd the tadpoles together to keep them from predators. If the water dries up, the males will dig a large canal up to ten metres long to connect them with deeper water, and herd them to safety. They pounce on any intruder, such as a human or a horse which comes strolling along. They don’t have teeth, but have two bony studs on the sides of their jaws, which they use to deliver a painful bite, particularly effective when a large number of them team up to defend their watery turf. That is, I am told, surprisingly dedicated parenting for such a primitive animal (one still practising external fertilisation). But don’t be too impressed. When they get a bit peckish, they eat some of their young. And the young often eat each other: if there is just a slight difference in size, the bigger will eat the smaller, thus contributing to their

evolution in size and strength. Once they have had their fill of their brethren, the surviving froglets hop off quite large distances to find other breeding communities and spread their genes around a bit. The adults spend a month eating themselves silly and then spread out to burrow into the ground and settle in for a long, warm, keratin kip. So there you have the good life of the Giant Bullfrog: sleeping 11 months of the year, and spending the rest fornicating and eating. And then along comes a developer who wants to build houses. Their breeding ground is the marshy area in the southern corner of where the Diepsloot East development is planned, and their burrowing ground is spread in a large area around that. Yetman puts me on to Vincent Carruthers, who has come up with a radical new solution to the problem of The Frog and who becomes my primary instructor in these complex matters. I find him in a quaint cottage office in a leafy Joburg suburb. Now retired, he is a passionate lifelong amateur herpetologist, which is what I learn one calls someone who spends time studying big, ugly, troublesome frogs with bad attitude. He is the author of many papers and books on the frogs of South Africa and speaks with the enthusiasm of someone who has devoted many years to an arcane topic and does not often have an interested audience. Carruthers had rejected the idea of moving The Frog, saying there was no record of success in such ventures, even if done slowly. He suggested instead that that they try to “herd” it, encouraging it to burrow in a more southerly area, and create a buffer zone for it. He proposed that when The Frog emerged and converged on its breeding water, they put up a fence 800 metres away along the north side, so that it had to burrow closer to the water. This fence would be moved forward 200 metres every year for three years, gradually shifting The Frog southwards. This has never been done before, so it is experimental, and Carruthers is

most excited by the prospect. “I can’t wait,” he says. “I want to see if this provides a solution which can be used elsewhere.” Through all of this, I presume the fuss is because the beast is endangered. It is, sort of. Globally, it is in the bracket of frogs of “least concern,” because it occurs in a number of Southern and East African countries where it is—I can’t resist it—safe as houses. In South Africa, it was until recently on a “near-threatened” list, but now only appears on a Gauteng provincial list of protected animals. The Frog has been progressively displaced by Joburg’s northward sprawl over 50 years. In the 1960s they were studied in Blairgowrie, much closer to central Joburg, and that population has clearly been wiped out. Now they cover a much smaller area and it is their misfortune to share a liking for the land of the Diepsloot area with Gauteng urban developers. I am told The Frog is very tasty, with meaty legs, and that I can buy one for the pot in Diepsloot for about R10. But when I ask someone, he laughs at me: “I grew up in the Northern Province,” he says, “and we used to eat them there. They are quite tasty. But here, we don’t eat them. Here, we are civilised.” Shingai Mpinyuni, of the provincial housing department, tells me that they have incorporated Carruthers’ frog-herding regime into their development plans. They will start building in the northern section and work downwards towards the frogs’ area in stages, so that there will be 2–3 years for The Frog experiment. The breeding wetland will be left intact and protected. I learn one more thing which sticks in my mind: frogs are an indicator species, which means they provide us with early warning signs of problems in the environment. They are the aquatic equivalent of canaries in coal mines. Their skins are very absorbent so if, for example, there is a problem with the water they will be the first to die. If you want to know if a place is healthy, I am told, listen for the frogs ✨

INTERVIEW

# Tangerine Dreams and Magic in the City

The Tangier-based photographer **Yto Barrada**, winner of the talks Deutsche Guggenheim’s artist of the year award, talks to **Negar Azimi** about flea markets, representations of the Moroccan city and Club Med.



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**Y**to Barrada came to photography by accident. While studying history and political science at the Sorbonne, Paris, she travelled to the West Bank for research. “I was living in the West Bank working on roadblocks, and the strategies of people who tried to cross in negotiating with the Israeli police, military police, and I started documenting my work with photographs,” she told the website Open Democracy in 2006. “And as my work evolved I started taking more photographs than notes, and then it completely shifted.” Barrada, who cofounded the Cinémathèque de Tanger, Morocco’s only venue for independent cinema and repertory programming, gained widespread prominence for her large-scale photographic essay, *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project* (1998–2004). While rooted in pressing social issues—North African economic desperation, European dependencies on illegal immigration—her photographs eschewed pictorial realism in showing these circumstances. “Rather,” offers Okwui Enwezor, an astute observer of Barrada’s work, “its principal focus is the political subjectivity of the photograph ... and to question the limits of living in the shadow of deprivation.” Also photographed in Morocco, *Riffs*, her latest body of work, is a more inward looking enquiry, offering idiosyncratic vantages of contemporary Morocco and its visible social schisms.

**Negar Azimi:** I find your photographs very painterly. As are your subjects—landscapes, portraits, and so on. Where does this come from? Did you grow up looking at a lot of painting? What was your visual universe like? **Yto Barrada:** I do love painting. The Renaissance, Symbolism and Kurt Schwitters were important in my visual education. Storytelling and enigma in painting, representations

of mythologies—these all interest me. My interest in sculpture and architecture came later. I was lucky to be taken to some museums as a child in Italy and France very early on, on family trips. There weren’t really museums in Tangier. Except the museum housing Malcolm Forbes’s collection of tin soldiers, which was one of my favourites. It’s closed now. A big loss.

*Negar Azimi is a senior editor at Bidoun, an arts and culture magazine based in New York. She is a member of the Beirut-based Fondation Arabe pour l’Image, with whom she is working on photographic projects in Iran and the greater Arab region.*



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- 01 Portrait of Yto Barrada by Benoît Peverelli
- 02 Girl in Red, Tangier, 1999 #
- 03 Oxalis Crown, 2006 \*
- 04 Hand-Me-Downs, 2011 #
- 05 Vacant Lot, 1999 #
- 06 Quartier des Épines, 2001 #
- 07 Monkey Cage, 2008/2011 \*
- 08 Bricks, 2003/2011 \*
- 09 Raft in Strangler Figtree, 2005/2010 \*
- 10 Yto Barrada, Man at pool table, 2000 #

# from *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project* (1998–2004)  
\* from *Riffs* (2011)

As a teenager, I saw paintings in books more than in museums; I visited natural history and botanical museums more than art museums. I guess that made me hungry as a reader. I loved images in encyclopaedias and catalogues, but I also was looking at fabrics and walking around flea markets. I still collect picture books for children. Actually, I collect quite a lot of things. **NA:** A friend of mine worked in your studio last summer. I came to visit while you were away and she opened up a closet full of books. Beautiful books of all kinds—lay ethnography, history books, colouring books—all piled up. We both agreed that you are a hoarder. Is this true, and if so, what do you hoard? **YB:** I had lived in 15 different houses before I turned 18 ... We moved almost every year, so I suppose I kept accumulating until I had too many things to take with me. I wouldn’t part with my stuff. I became too heavy to take around. Still, there’s a distinction between hoarding and collecting. The accumulation in hoarding is about the fear of throwing something away that you might need someday. I am definitely a hoarder. Collecting is maybe a sub-activity of that. **NA:** I’m curious about your life in the markets. You’ve mentioned the importance of fabrics, too. You once gave me a beautiful scarf from a Moroccan market that I thought was Persian, or from Central Asia. I think you told me it had been made in China! Clearly, your experience of the market brings together many geographies. What is the world of the market as you experience it? And how do fabrics in particular make their way into your work? **YB:** An urban architect once referred to public spaces of strong and weak legitimacy, places on the fringes of official culture. I’ve always been interested in the vacant lot because of its undefined character. In Tangier today, we’re moving toward being a divided city, like the colonial city once was, and part of the pleasure of the flea market may be the freedom of still having this space to ourselves.

“**I’ve always been interested in the vacant lot because of its undefined character.**”

The goods are anonymous; the people are marginal operators in a gray economy. “Chiner,” the French verb corresponding to “thrifting,” is essential to who I am. In flea markets and junkyards, I can see and understand how things are built, how things are born as separate parts. I learn about chance associations, different tastes, the history of objects. I also like visiting auction houses a lot, like Drouot in Paris. My grandmother was, and my aunts are, excellent at embroidery and knitting. When I’m at the flea market I gravitate toward fabrics. Textiles are always tactile. Handling them goes beyond the eyes; there are smells too. If I’m building a textile collection, it’s by accident. The film I’m working on now is called Hand-Me-Downs. It’s made up of home movies from Morocco from the 1950s to the 1970s. **NA:** What is your work without Tangier? Or what was it before Tangier? Is there even a “before Tangier”? **YB:** It’s strange, people ask me what I will do next, meaning, When are you going to let go of this quaint provincial town as your main subject? But I am not a travel photographer. I am stuck here; it’s home, this is where I am. To me it’s as stressful and banal and everyday as New York probably is to you. I’m not exotic—I’m exhausted. Do you ask Helen Levitt what she would be without the streets of New York? Or David Goldblatt about South Africa? Yes, my nervous system is connected to this place. I cry when they cut down a tree or bulldoze an old hospital. In a way, Tangier doesn’t exist; it changes all the time. So I guess we will stick together until they have finished paving it over. Then I will probably go work on dinosaurs in the south of Morocco.



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**The idea of a “cultural renaissance” in Tangier today is propaganda. We need to be a little more modest.**

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**NA:** You have a keen interest in representations of the city—they’re often a subtext of your work. The city has been represented simultaneously as cosmopolitan, as avant-garde and home to counter-cultures, as a sleepy, luxurious resort ... Is Tangier all of these things? How is the image of the city exported today?

**YB:** Most of it is crap. The idea of a “cultural renaissance” in Tangier today is propaganda. We’re trying to catch up—in a terrible hurry—after 30 years of abandoning the most basic things: infrastructure, housing, education, health care. We’re putting all our eggs in one basket to generate revenue through tourism. And some industry. But when you see tens of thousands of new empty buildings like chicken crates, it’s hard to imagine where all the jobs are that they advertised. The 4 x 4-driving, shopping mall class is obsessed with consumption and social segregation. And this class generally views culture, if at all, with patronising condescension, like it would a child. The image projected to the world is completely different. We’re sold as part of the city’s renaissance, with the implication that it is rich enough to play host to an international culture. We’ve even participated in this campaign with the Cinémathèque. We’re a part of the renaissance. The reality is less enchanting. And of course the irony is that if you are 20 in Tangier, you’re bored out of your mind, there’s no culture for you, everything is mediocre. It’s totally do-it-yourself for young people.

**NA:** Your photographs depict that less enchanting reality. In them, we see a lot of detritus of a life once had. An

abandoned Club Med is haunting. The water park is even more creepy—the shell of another time. The photograph Casiers à Clés (Keyholder), an image of key cubbies, probably from a hotel, is also evocative. The little cubbies are covered in dust and are, in most cases, broken. Perhaps it’s not nostalgia that inspired you to take that photograph, but it does feel sad to me anyway.

**YB:** The Club Med photographs you describe, with the torn fibreglass hanging down from the ceiling of the empty restaurant, are to me like entering the stomach of a whale, a rib cage. Or a greenhouse with a torn plastic cover for ripening bananas, like the ones you find along the road to Larache. A bag of bones or a seventeenth-century painted ox carcass.

**NA:** Milan Kundera said that nostalgia is the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return. Are you nostalgic? And about what?

**YB:** I have no golden age that I look back on—after all, as you point out, I can’t even remember what I said three minutes ago. I’m rarely nostalgic in the sense of homesick, like missing some bygone space or childhood, or even the “old Tangier” for that matter. Nostalgia is a drag when it’s an endless re-chewing of the same old cud. When I do feel nostalgic, it’s for historical events before I was born: the end of empires, the nineteenth-century national revolutions, reading Albert Londres’s articles, the Dreyfus Affair, 1848, the Mexican revolution ... the invention of nations that comes with the crumbling of empires.

**NA:** While much of your work addresses the changes that Tangier is undergoing—that’s the big-picture story—there is also a great deal of belief, I think, in the heroic capacity of individuals. People fashion chairs or even homes from rudimentary materials; they find shade in unlikely places, and entertainment too. In this way, do you think your work reveals a fundamental belief in human beings?

**YB:** Yes, of course I believe in human beings. Don’t you? This would be the

saddest place in the world if people didn’t have some creativity in the face of power, domination, unfair laws. People’s everyday resistance shows that they haven’t consented to dominance. I’ve always been attentive to what lies beneath the surface of public behaviour. I am a big reader of Jonathan Swift. In public, the oppressed accept their domination, but they always question their domination offstage. The subversive tactics, strategies of class contestation, forms of sabotage used by the poor—this is what I am most interested in.

**NA:** Like the smugglers you depict ...

**YB:** Look at the smugglers’ strategies in escaping border control. I have a neighbour who brings food, cheese, and other goods hidden in his car motor, under the hood, back from Spain to supply his family grocery shop. Or look at the absurd customs rule that lets people enter Morocco from the Spanish enclaves on Moroccan soil only with whatever they can carry. Men and women, the elderly too, are turning into smuggling mules; they sew special jackets in which they can carry up to 20 kilograms—all inside their clothes. The woman in my film The Smuggler ties fabrics around her body until she looks like Big Bird from Sesame Street. I’m not idealising some kind of figure of everyday resistance. The bigger picture is quite a human disaster. The city is modernising, but people’s basic needs are pushed aside. The illusion is that growth, “renaissance,” all of these things will benefit everyone. It’s not the case✴

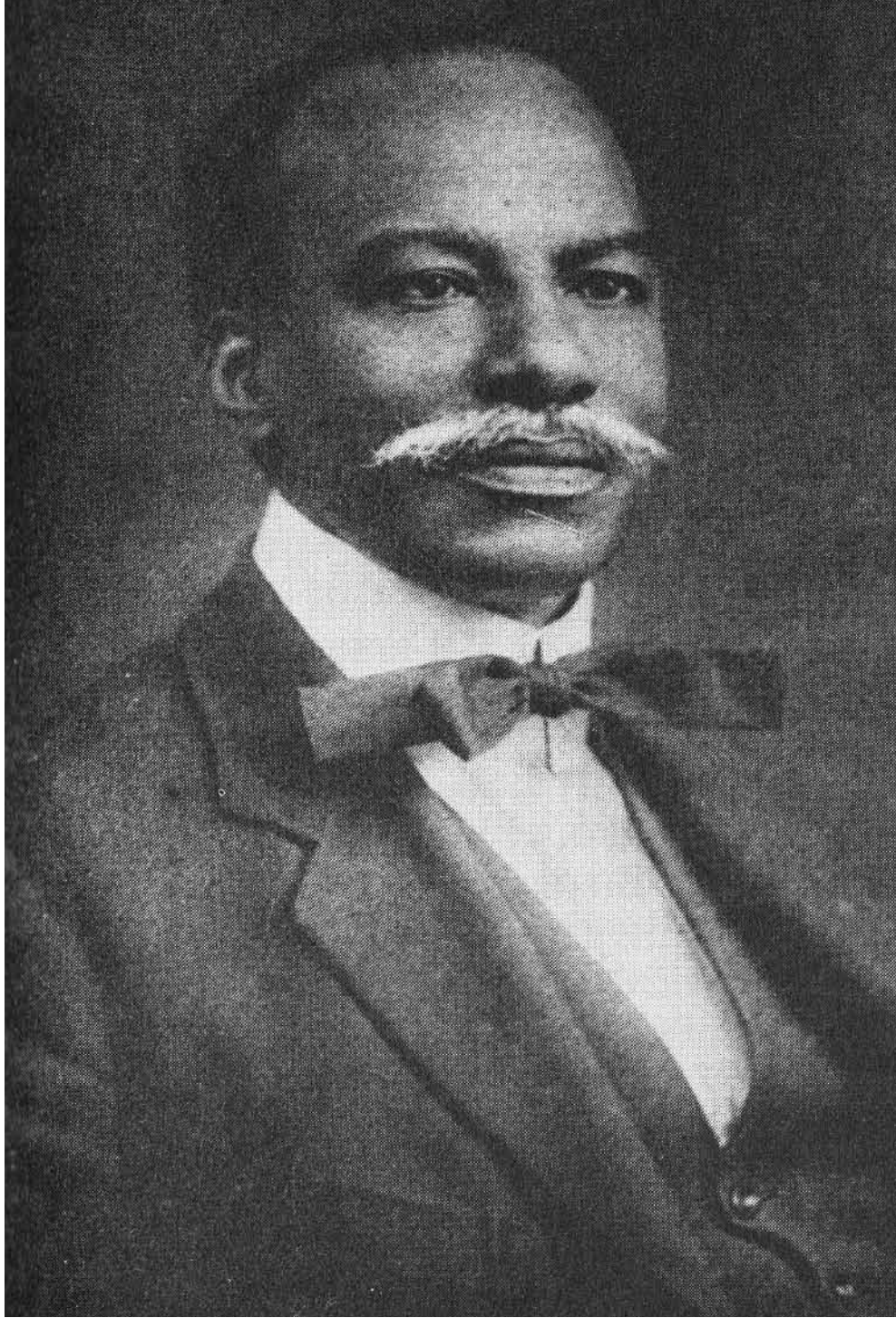
*This is an extract from Riffs by Yto Barrada, published by Hatje Cantz (Ostfildern, 2011), a catalogue accompanying the Deutsche Bank exhibition ‘Artist of the Year 2011 Yto Barrada: Riffs’ at the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin. The interview is published with the friendly approval of Deutsche Bank.*

ESSAY

# The Civil Engineer

*Herbert Macaulay was a nationalist politician, engineer, journalist and musician whose nous for political strategy and theatre awoke democracy in colonial Lagos.*

*By Akin Adesokan*



Sitting in the parlour of his Lagos residence, Kirsten Hall, one morning in mid-September 1944, two months before his eightieth birthday, Herbert Samuel Heelas Macaulay opened the pages of the *West African Pilot* and discovered a pleasant surprise. Already infirm with rheumatism, HM, the grand old man in the struggle for Nigerian political freedom (as this newspaper never tired of describing him), had got hints of the imminent report a few days before, so he had the newspaper brought to him by one of his children, curious to know

what surprise the *Pilot* had hidden in its crisp pages. Macaulay’s relationship with the newspaper was unambiguous. The *Pilot* was owned by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe who, just a month earlier, became secretary of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), the leading nationalist organization, with Macaulay himself as national president. Since Macaulay’s own *Lagos Daily News* was submerged in the rising tides of nationalist agitation of the past decade, a time of incendiary but better-produced dailies and young patriots who lacked the old

man’s Victorian veneration of the British Crown, the *Pilot* had become his favourite newspaper—nothing published in it was remotely critical of him. Still, his arthritic hands responded in anticipation as he flipped over the pages, eager to find the news. Grateful for the old man’s achievements, the *Pilot* had decided to launch a special fund, the Herbert Macaulay Octogenary Fund. This initiative, wrote Azikiwe, would “demonstrate to the world that the black man and the black woman also worship their heroes and heroines, in life and in death”. The initiative was inspired by a similar effort then being made in India in honour of Mahatma Gandhi, younger than Macaulay by four years, but already, in the mid-1940s, the acknowledged great soul of Indian nationalism. The news item drew upon popular assumptions about the two figures: like Gandhi, Macaulay was a strong advocate of freedom and justice and threw in his lot with the masses; he likewise desired the achievement of these political goals through peaceful means. The *Pilot* was optimistic about the general public’s response to an initiative in honour of its most selfless nationalist of the last three decades. The first target of £1,000 would be presented as a personal gift to Macaulay, and any surplus would be retained and spent at a future date in erecting a statue in his memory. Although his birthday was still two months away, Macaulay himself received the news with a sense of occasion. He spent the rest of the sunny morning in beatific contentment. By November 14, Macaulay’s eightieth birthday, the fundraiser had generated only about £108. Azikiwe, the fund’s treasurer, wrote a check for a hundred pounds to the celebrant as “a gesture of affection, appreciation, and gratitude”. He might have added the phrase, “ten per cent support,” but he merely regretted the public’s lukewarm attitude to the special fund. You may wonder why Macaulay should be the recipient of this gesture

tied to voluntary giving in the final months of the Second World War, notorious for their shortages and low personal earnings. The point is that in those months, the shadow cast over the British Empire by the Atlantic Charter was felt in the colonies as a benevolent shade from the scorching sun of imperial rule. The victory of the Labour Party in Britain was just round the corner. A trade union conference in Paris would provide an unexpected opportunity for the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester. In all of Nigeria, there was hardly a single political personality with Macaulay’s *gravitas* or accomplishments. His many aliases reflected this: HM, the Moghul, Civil Engineer, *Ejongboro* (Snake on the Prowl), the Musical Wizard of Kirsten Hall, Champion and Defender of Native Rights and Liberties. As early as 1907, when the concept of Nigeria was still the native’s nightmare—the amalgamation came with colonial governmentality and the introduction of martial law, interpreted in Yoruba to mean “it is compulsory to go”—local groups in different parts of the then-Southern Protectorate had found in him an auditor of their grievances, and he missed no opportunity to draft petitions giving perspective to their complaints. His party, the NNDP, the first well-organised political party in Commonwealth West Africa, had unfailingly produced the three elected members of the legislative council for Lagos since 1923; he had been publishing the *Lagos Daily News*, the most formidably anti-colonial periodical of the time, since 1928. He was also the author of some of Nigeria’s famous pamphlets, scripted in prose of baroque elegance and Socratic thoroughness. For days after the unforgettable raining afternoon of July 4, 1931, his finest hour as a public figure, having won the legal battle to reverse the colonial government’s deposition of the King of Lagos, Macaulay received scores of congratulatory messages from political figures across West Africa, including Dr. J.B. Danquah in Accra. All this political capital faced

terminal corrosion when, in 1934, the colonial government inaugurated Yaba Higher College, Nigeria’s first institution of tertiary education. This college was not affiliated to any British school, and in the opinion of the nationalists, this indicated that its diplomas would be inferior in status to those awarded by a British university. The agitation around this issue resulted in the founding of the Lagos Youth Movement, soon renamed Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in a progressive strike against the NNDP, which, despite the qualifiers Nigerian and National, had little support outside Lagos. Three other factors contributed to pushing Macaulay into political redundancy, which the special fund acknowledged by default. The first was the broad social base of the NYM, its overture to students, professionals, unionists, market-women, and the lumpen proletariat; the second was that Macaulay’s sole legendary status loomed over his party; the third was his confounding opposition of labour strikes, in 1937 and 1944. There was a fourth, parallel factor: his personal circumstances as a family head in an African society in profound transition. To ignore this personal dimension in an account of his political career is to underestimate his status as a radical democrat.

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**He was the author of some of Nigeria’s famous pamphlets, scripted in prose of baroque elegance and Socratic thoroughness.**

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There was little in Herbert Macaulay’s background to indicate that his life would take the direction it did, a fact that should have needed no remarking but for the severe constrictions of colonial society. He was born in Lagos on November 14, 1864, four years after the official annexation of the island. At this time, only the island was generally known as Lagos, a settlement about six miles in circumference and with a population of 30,000, according to the black American visitor Robert Campbell, who stayed briefly in late July 1859. Writing in the year before Macaulay’s birth, the British traveller Sir Richard Burton had an unkind portrait of the town as “one of the most unhealthy spots on these malarious shores [of West Africa],” and made recommendations for urban renewal that, a few years thence, seemed to have been acted upon. By the mid-1860s, the indigenous living quarters along the Marina had been cleared to make way for merchant stores, a racecourse, courthouses, and the like, and the natives resettled in the north-western parts of the city—Enu-Owa, Obun-Eko, Agarawu, and other areas of Isale-Eko. Demographically, the city was made up of Europeans who lived on the Marina; the Brazilian repatriates directly behind the European quarters, in places north of today’s Broad Street; and the Sierra Leonean returnees to their immediate west in Olowogbowo. Macaulay’s father, the Reverend Thomas Macaulay, was the founder and first principal of the famous CMS Grammar School, and his mother, Abigail, was the daughter of Bishop Ajayi Crowther, the first black bishop of the Anglican Church, who personally advised the King, Oba Dosunmu, during the treaty which ceded Lagos to the British. There must be poetic justice in the fact that Macaulay’s political life was dedicated to undoing what his grandfather had helped to bring about—the authority of the British in Lagos Colony. He was clearly a cherished child. As he later wrote in one of his

unpublished papers, “I was a Holy Child, innocent and lovable ... my Mother generally dressed me in a suit of purple silk velvet knickerbockers [with] coat to match, but excessive kneeling at prayers soon left a circular worn patch in the breeches.” Details about his position in the family are conflicting: while he claimed to be the seventh child, another account indicates that his parents had four children before him, and two more after. The latter account is likely to be true— a man with a sense of drama, Macaulay was given to mythmaking, and the number seven had a purely rhetorical value in the sense that he held it to be a “Holy Number”. He would grow up to become physically impressive: tall, courtly and impeccably dressed, with a distinct horizontal moustache parallel to his trademark bowtie parallel to the Equator line. Picture him with a baritone equally suited to the podium and the private musical soiree, talking his way to the raucous heart of the latest rally, the bearing of the deputy sheriff in a Hollywood flick. Imagine him speaking Yoruba with a Lagosian accent, quickly sliding into English with an orator’s facility, every public appearance an occasion to dispirit the absent white colonial functionary while overawing the native spectator. One line in a contemporary song about him says, “If you cannot speak English/You cannot speak with Macaulay.” He was the perfect champion of people’s interests in an age when the government would rather ignore them: partisan, fearless, flashy, knowledgeable, oratorical, lapidary with the pen, versed in the game of colonial politics but resolved not to play by its rules. After elementary schooling in Lagos, he was sent to England with government support to study surveying, civil engineering and piano tuning. The total cost was £504, 14s, 6d; the gesture was in appreciation of his grandfather’s service. Having qualified as a civil engineer and surveyor, he returned to Lagos in 1893 and entered public service. Essentially, his job

as “surveyor of Crown Lands in Lagos” meant determining the scale, extent and structural aspects of the areas then being annexed for official purposes. He also designed a number of buildings, including the house of Henry Carr, a man who would become one of his political adversaries. This career was short-lived. Discriminatory pay scales for African and British employees formed the basis of his dissatisfaction. Macaulay was proud and truculent, and social advancement in colonial society required absolute humility. The training in England however prepared him for the life ahead in certain ways. Not only did he secure a license to operate as a private surveyor, thus placed on a collision course with a government determined to alienate native land, he was also excellent on the piano. Cultural historians of his Victorian milieu praise his musical skills, his position on the social calendar of Lagos, giving at homes, concerts and social gatherings. Patrick Cole, in his highly readable history of modern and traditional elites of Lagos, writes that “it was in this milieu that [Macaulay] came to acknowledge the gift that was to stand him in good stead during his quarrel with the government over the Eleko—his remarkable genius for organising things and people”. A disciplined non-smoking teetotaler, Macaulay had a weakness for women, fathering many children without remarrying after his first wife, Caroline Pratt, died within a year of their marriage. The “wizard” in his *oriki* sometimes referred to his musical prowess, and sometimes to his uncanny ability to obtain classified information, which came in handy in his crusades against colonial injustices. Given Macaulay’s temperament, he could not have had a better rival at the height of his political life than Henry Carr, the African colonial Resident of Lagos (1918–24). Rivalry is an inapt term to use in characterising the relationship between the two men since Carr was too reserved and dignified to publicly respond to personal attacks from Macaulay. But in his notebooks,

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**He secured a license to operate as a private surveyor, thus placed on a collision course with a government determined to alienate native land.**

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Carr dismissed him as a man who manipulated the masses of Lagos “by stirring up mob emotions, by using tricks, propaganda, hate drill and all kinds of mumbo-jumbo”. To Carr, whose position in the colonial system made him an Uncle Tom to Macaulay’s camp, politics in Lagos was “a kind of systematic insanity”.

Even before his involvement in the famous Apapa Land Case (1913–20) that set the stage for his other, longer battle, Macaulay had shown himself to be a prickly thorn on the side of the government. The colonial enclosure of the areas now called Nigeria was complete by 1904, and the government in Lagos needed land for sundry purposes, including railways, government buildings, housing and merchant stores. According to British law, land was alienable, and since the island of Lagos was a Crown Colony, British laws must apply. Legally, the Cession Treaty of 1861 was understood to have passed ownership of Lagos land to the British. The problem, though, was that the King of Lagos had signed the treaty but had no customary right to land; it was the hereditary chiefs, the *Idejo*, who held all land in trust for their families. As a surveyor, a man with a deep knowledge of Yoruba customs, Macaulay mastered both sides of the argument. Land acquisition had been a controversial issue since the start of the century, and Macaulay, now out of government employ, had begun to throw up storms. By 1912, the year of the arrival of Lord Frederick Lugard, architect of modern Nigeria and promulgator of the so-

called West African Lands Ordinance, half of the useable land in Lagos had been expropriated for pittance. One of these cases concerned an *Idejo* chief, Amodu Oluwa, whose family owned Apapa, located to the west of Lagos Island. Declining the compensation of £500, the chief took the government to court but lost; he decided to pursue the matter to the Privy Council in London. Just before the appeal began, Macaulay found himself in personal troubles. He was charged with fraud in a case involving the personal estate of Mary Franklin, a relative who had named the civil engineer her executor before her death. The government convicted Macaulay in 1913 for inappropriate use of £350, and jailed him for two years. Most people believed that the trial and conviction were designed to remove him from the scene while the government disposed of the land case. The design, if true, did not succeed because the appeal never got underway until 1920. Macaulay’s visit to London as interpreter to Chief Oluwa in July 1920 coincided with the meeting of the nascent political organization, the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA), then mobilising metropolitan support for elective representation in the colonies. Both men were accredited for the meeting, and the chief even had the luck of a private meeting with King George. When the case was finally heard the Privy Council upheld Oluwa’s appeal for compensation to be paid to him as owner of the appropriated land, and not just for seigniorial rights, as the government wanted. He was awarded £22,500 in damages, paid six years later. This victory had tremendous political implications in Nigeria. On the day Macaulay and Oluwa returned to Lagos, 10,000 people gathered at the port to welcome them, with music and jubilation. The land case was the private suit of the Oluwa family, but it provided a channel for mass dissatisfaction with colonial policy. Macaulay understood this; he knew that any issue in the public domain created a basis for political mobilisation.

British subjects themselves, elites like Macaulay strongly believed in a system of rule that was fair to all regardless of race or creed. Progressive citizens of the colony considered the terms of the Cession Treaty unfair. More unacceptable, they diminished the status of King of Lagos, and virtually all cases of anti-government protests since the annexation were aimed at reversing those terms or ameliorating their civic impact. Before 1923 when he and Dr. CC Adeniyi-Jones and J Egerton-Shyngle formed the NNDP, the only avenues for articulating the principles of civic responsibility were pamphlets, street protests and court cases, and these cost them much. For example, when in February 1923 Macaulay travelled to Iroko in Oyo Province on official duty as a surveyor, the colonial resident accused him of being an agitator and issued an order banning him from the province within 12 hours. (The order remained effective until Macaulay died.) On the contrary, pro-government figures like Sir Kitoyi Ajasa, proprietor of the rival *Nigerian Pioneer* and a personal friend of the colonial governor, had overwhelming presence in the Legislative Council, whose members were mostly government nominees. While in England, Macaulay, who went everywhere bearing the staff of office belonging to the King of Lagos, Oba Eshugbayi, in front of the chief, granted an interview to the London *Daily Mail*. In the interview, he said that Chief Oluwa was a representative of the Eleko, “acclaimed by 17 million Nigerians as the titular king of Lagos”. In a phrasing calculated to appeal to a metropolitan audience, he referred to the Eleko (literally, owner of Lagos) as “the chief negro” in an area four times the size of Great Britain. His aim was to make a case for an increase in the stipend paid to the king, which had fallen steadily over the years as the government found ways around the letters of the treaty. In Lagos, the government interpreted these statements to mean that Macaulay was claiming that Oba Eshugbayi was the king of all Nigeria.

Indeed, he *meant* for the British audience to get that impression, but he didn’t actually say that. In fact, all 17 million Nigerians in 1920 would affirm that the Eleko was the king of Lagos. Macaulay was an astute publicist. He had been at meetings with politicians from Sierra Leone, the Gambia and Gold Coast, and he knew the political values of a sympathetic metropolitan audience. Politicians and agitators operating in the colonies routinely ran afoul of sedition laws and were often misunderstood by local opinion benefiting from official patronage. But who in Paris or London could ignore the pronouncements of a Bertrand Russell or a Jean-Paul Sartre? From the point of view of the institutional interests of the liberal media and Labour politicians, publicising nefarious aspects of colonial rule was grist for the mill. London was the seat of the Privy Council, the court of last resort in the British system, and such was the faith of those with grievances against the colonial government that they hoped the city and its liberal institutions would provide true succour. Considering the undemocratic nature of most colonial policies in Lagos, they were almost always proved right. The great irony of this episode was that the governor of Lagos at the time, Sir Hugh Clifford, had a reputation as one of the more sympathetic holders of that office. He was also a published novelist and personal friend of Joseph Conrad, author of *Heart of Darkness*. Macaulay’s statement only needed context to be clear, and he provided this by reproducing the *Daily Mail* interview in a pamphlet he published upon his return. But the government, licking its wound in the Apapa land case, remained bellicose. Thus was set in motion the controversial Eleko Affair, lasting 11 straight years. Reports of the interview preceded Macaulay to Lagos. The government wanted a disclaimer from Oba Eshugbayi whose staff Macaulay carried around in London. The king’s response was that he had given the staff to Oluwa, not to Macaulay, and so he could not be held responsible

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**It was also claimed by younger nationalists that his brand of nationalism was too bourgeois-liberal, his fascination for the British Crown unbecoming of a man so committed to undermining colonial rule.**

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for the statements he had not authorised. He even volunteered to go to England so he could hear what was actually said and decide what to repudiate. Then he wrote a denial of Macaulay’s statements and sent it to all the newspapers in Lagos. The government wanted him to instruct his town crier to broadcast another denial, written by Henry Carr. The king refused. The government suspended him, withdrawing his recognition and stipend. So sustained was the government’s resolve in this matter that the suspension was followed by the deposition and exiling of the king after five years. But did Oba Eshugbayi actually give his staff of office to Oluwa to take to London? According to one account, the staff, originally a present from Queen Victoria to Oba Akitoye, in 1852, had been buried in the grave of the man who contested but lost the throne to Eshugbayi in 1900. But Macaulay got wind of this plot and, at night, took a mason with him to unseal the grave and retrieved the staff and other important documents. These were hidden in his house until 1919 when he gave them to an Accra-based lawyer. When Macaulay and Oluwa set sail for London in July 1920, the lawyer joined them with the items.

Stories like this deepened Macaulay’s popularity, casting him as a daredevil affronting colonial authority in the public interest. He was fearless and selfless: he refused to hold a position in the NNDP or seek elective office, content to be recognised as just one of its leaders. Meanwhile, he gave freely of his money and time—to beggars, the poor, the illiterate supplicants with one grievance or another. This grandson of the first African bishop championed the cause of the Muslim-dominated Ilu (City) Committee and gave unwavering support to a king whose religious identity was largely ceremonial. There was thus an auspicious synergy between his temperament and the spirit of Lagos, the quintessential Nigerian city, a hotbed of perennial plots, political dissidence and incendiary pamphlets. Lagos, the base of power, the most cosmopolitan city in Nigeria, was paradoxically energised by a politics with fiercely local focus, but without this interplay of the colonial assault on native rights and the modern elite’s defence of them, the ensuing nationwide nationalism would probably have taken much longer. Highly urbanised, commercially vibrant, but sharply divided along class lines, Lagos was the sort of place where rumours prospered, hence the pamphlets. On the Eleko Affair alone, Macaulay authored three of his best-known pamphlets: *Justitia Fiat* (1921); *Transfer or Retirement: Henry Carr Must Go* (1924), published in the year of Carr’s retirement; and *The Incurability of Sir Hugh Clifford* (n. d.). Each of these reflected his sense of style, his command of local and international historical details, and especially the comic pleasure he seemed to derive from this genre of political engagement. Consider, for instance, this passage from *Justitia Fiat*: “Why Sir Hugh Clifford in his address [to the Nigerian Council] should have deliberately gone out of his way so glaringly to pervert a simple statement, and why he could not calmly and with dignity discuss such an ordinary political question, without descending



into the odious personalities, has completely exhausted my capacity for bewilderment.” Perhaps due to the manifestation of this synergy as public agitation, some commentators have been loath to accord any respectability to Macaulay’s ideas—even disputing that he had any. The scholar Robert July, in his *Origins of Modern African Thought* (1967), unfavourably compared him to Carr. “Macaulay showed all the signs of psychological insecurity which required ever larger doses of popular acclaim,” writes July. “Clever, articulate, celebrated and on the side of the angels ... he may have lacked Carr’s simple integrity and he may have realised instinctively that his emotional response to the world around him was unequal to Carr’s quiet thoughtfulness.” It was also claimed by younger nationalists that his brand of nationalism was too bourgeois-liberal, his fascination for the British Crown unbecoming of a man so committed to undermining colonial rule. These arguments reflect an inadequate understanding of populism as a political ideology. They clearly underestimate the odds against public intellectuals determined to bring about democracy in a context where two discreditable systems, African monarchical rule and European colonialism, engaged in a war of attrition. Macaulay’s strategic attitude toward both systems informed the real objective, which was to quicken their mutual self-annihilation.

After more than a decade of legal wrangling (during which Macaulay had another spell in gaol), the Privy Council, again, found against the government and ordered it to bring Oba Eshugbayi to Lagos from his exile. The king’s return was tumultuous. In spite of the heavy downpour on July 4, 1931, thousands of people trooped out to receive him, with Macaulay beside him. All the markets were closed; the city was in holiday mood. The government prudently handed the reception ceremony over to Macaulay. When the car conveying the king from Oyo arrived at Obun Eko, the crowd carried it for the hundred or so yards to the palace. He was so overwhelmed by the sight of the place from which he had been banished for six years that he fainted. Without a doubt, as in the Apapa land case, the masses of Lagos received a psychological boost from winning a battle initiated and prosecuted by the colonial government on its own terms. They composed satirical songs against his detractors, and christened Donald Cameron, the new governor, with adulatory Yoruba names. It was Macaulay’s finest hour. But it was also his saddest. Two of his children, Frank and Florence, died soon after this political triumph. By this time, all his older siblings were dead and the burden of catering to the family, including his living siblings, fell squarely on his shoulders. African public figures who discharged duties of this nature must be “big men,” practiced in the management of patronage. That was not Macaulay. The *Lagos Daily News* did not turn a profit, and he could not secure government contracts. He relied on wealthy supporters like Adeniyi-Jones to stand surety for him when he needed loans. Even in a sympathetic account like Tekena Tamuno’s short biography, Macaulay comes across as an unhappy man whose public triumphs did not always assuage these privations. At 80, with Nigerian independence on the horizon, he would regard the Octogenary Fund as symbolic and well earned✱

Excellent, but not always



Over the last decade China has emerged as a key net importer of commodities from Africa. Its dynamic role in contemporary African trade and development has occasioned vexed chin stroking and editorialising amongst western journalists and intellectuals. Co-edited by Chris Alden, Daniel Large and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, the book *China returns to Africa* (2008) delivers much-needed balance. Fact: China has long been involved in Africa, generally, and Angola, specifically. Angola’s ruling party, the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA), was supported by China during the early years of the struggle to liberate Angola from Portuguese colonial rule. Mário Coelho Pinto de Andrade, the poet-politician who co-founded the MPLA in 1956, becoming its first president, is on record as stating that his organisation’s “first money came not from Moscow but from China”. In 1962, due to a cooling in Sino-Soviet relations, the funding dwindled. China did however continue to offer aid, “but not in as substantial a manner as in the beginning”. China’s current relations with oil-rich Angola are described as “excellent” \*

**Caption:** Michael MacGarry, Chinese construction worker with his interpreter in front of the Agostinho Neto Mausoleum, Luanda.  
Excerpted from the limited edition artist’s book *The Republic of Luanda* (2011)

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Issue 02 – Out March 2012

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