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For the City Yet to Come: Remaking Urban Life in Africa
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Introduction

Urban Africans have long made lives that have worked. There has been an astute capacity to use thickening fields of social relations, however, disordered they may be, to make city life viable.

Yet, if the primary resource that urban Africans have had to draw upon to make their cities has essentially been themselves, then the process of configuring an urban public life is crucial to this story. If an accelerated differentiation of social practices and organization has had to compensate for the long-term absence of investment, infrastructure development, formal employment and multiplex economic articulations with the larger world, how are the ensuing complex social fields managed? How do residents construct the differences in livelihood activities, accumulation possibilities, specialization, and social identity incumbent in urban life and yet maintain their anchorage in cultures long valuing a sense of equanimity, mutuality and social balance?

It is true that African cities have been an ambivalent refuge when livelihood was no longer possible in rural areas. It is true that these cities most visibly serviced the agendas of external interests, and that those interests shaped the physical and social terrain in ways that constrained a broad range of uses and developmental possibilities. It is true that these cities reflect a certain marginalization from the prevailing trajectories of urbanization that emphasize capital intensity and technological innovation. The costs of this history have been enormous.

Urban Projects in Africa

Still, African cities enclose a multiplicity of projects. Putting bread on the table and maintaining the social relationships that enable one to do so are key projects. There are also projects informed by dreams and by consultations with spiritualists and mystics. There are projects honed through the affiliations and discussions of those who share the same age group or the same quarter. There are projects honed through memberships in various societies, associations, and religious movements. Individual urban histories are largely intersections among the plurality of these stories and the sites in which they are embedded. Urban life in African cities asks enormous things of individuals. From the beginning, residents have to juggle, duck, weave, bend, and assault the larger narratives in which their lives are ensconced.

These narratives include the tensions between colonial and postcolonial, as well as exogenous and local histories that constitute the city as a particular site of power. Here, identities and practices are put together which are tailored to continuously mark and straddle divides rather than integrate them. Places and practices of compliance also become those of escape. Assimilation to external norms becomes an instrument through which local distinctions are elaborated and ratified.[1]

The negotiation of projects —their mediation and balancing— requires an adeptness at intersecting things that would not appear to belong together, that seemingly do not coincide. So a coincidence of the unexpected —very much at the heart of the entire building of African cities from the beginning[2]— persists. This continuity takes place through the intersection of local understandings about what it means to be urban and the precarious economic status these cities occupy in the global marketplace.

Across Africa, a new urban infrastructure is being built with the very bodies and life stories of city residents, but what kind of city is being put together is not clear. This ambiguity is not only a reality that urban residents must face but also seem to author. In many cities, this process of making urban life opaque is reflected in the architectures of movement and dwelling. There, the layout of many quarters is meant to always confound those who try to make any clear statements about what is going on or clear plans for how these quarters should operate.

This infrastructure is also temporal. What looks to be stasis, when nothing appears to have been accomplished, may actually be the highly intricate engineering of interactions among different events, actors and situations. In such occurrences, events, actors, and situations may "pass through" each other and take notice of each other without discernible conditions actually changing. It is just these possibilities —of different actors and situations dealing with each other without apparent ramification— which make African cities, appear dynamic and static at the same time. On the other hand, things can happen very fast, and where seemingly nothing has been brought to bear on a particular setting. In other words, sometimes conditions change with remarkable speed —e.g., the structures of authority, the alignments of loyalty and collaboration, the mobilization of money and resources— where it is not apparent just what is going on and who is contributing what to these changes.

Despite these capacities, we still must recognize that larger numbers of urban Africans are disconnected from both the post-independence narratives of national development and the collective social memories that had established an interweaving of the present with the past. Much of everyday life in cities has been reduced to an endless process of trickery. All in all, the conditions that have been relied upon to sustain dynamic and stable urban quarters —fraught though most have been with major problems concerning urban services and ineffective management— are becoming increasingly strained. These strains are sometimes political as quarters are given more official responsibility to manage different urban services.[3] This responsibility generates new modalities of collaboration, but also intensifies competition.[4] In some instances, communities have become polarized along lines of social stratification that were more open-ended and interconnected in the past.[5]

The strains are also economic in that employment of any kind —formal and informal— is increasingly difficult to access.[6] As a result, formerly highly elaborated extended family and residential support systems find themselves overburdened.[7] It is estimated that roughly 75% of basic needs are provided informally in the majority of African cities, and that processes of informalization are expanding across discrete sectors and domains of urban life.[8] Whereas unemployment has long been a persistent reality for African cities, available compensations now require more drastic action.[9] Floods of cheap imports made possible through trade liberalization are shrinking local productions systems.[10] At the same time, various components of economic rationalization have opened up possibilities for the appropriation of formerly public assets —land, enterprises, services— by private interests, particularly for the emerging elite well-positioned in the apparatuses managing structural adjustment.

There has been an enormous range of studies on African urban informal economic sectors, land markets, and livelihoods. But most of this work has focused on informalities as a compensation for the lack of successful urbanization, particularly in terms of deferring heightened levels of spatial, economic, and social integration within the city. Other studies have looked at informal or "real" economies as instruments through which sustainable and viable processes of a "normative" urbanization might be consolidated. For the most part, they have not examined the ways in which such economies and activities themselves might act as a platform for the creation of a very different kind of sustainable urban configuration than we have yet to generally know.

We know that families are undergoing significant change; that social solidarity is fragmenting; and that most African cities are in trouble. However, we don't know so much about how changing cities are changing urban users —their behaviors, associations, logic, ways of doing things, understandings, imaginations, and even their ways of life. Despite all the things that are going wrong, the city remains a dynamic place to make things happen. What are those things, and how are they made to happen —i.e., through what practices and social forms?

The process of furthering our understanding of these issues is complicated because it is difficult to carry out sustained and systematic social research in many quarters of cities where the changes seem most pronounced. Because the conventional categories for understanding such changes are themselves opened-up, "twisted out of shape" and re-arranged, it is difficult to have the confidence that one is working with stable and consistent entities over time.

We need to know more about what kinds of everyday practices are being used potentially capable of revitalizing a desire for social interchange and cooperation that might contain the seeds of social economies that extend themselves through scale, time and reach. But, this is not about civil society organizations and NGOS, micro-credit associations or people's associations. Rather, attention must be paid to diffuse but no

less concrete ways in which diverse urban actors are assembled and act. What are some of the ways in which urban residents are building a particular emotional field in the city, trying to restore a very physical sense of connection to one another? This is not the work of detailed ethnographic examinations of new social movements, new living arrangements, or new forms of urban productivity. It is a practice of being attuned to faint signals, flashes of important creativity in otherwise desperate maneuvers, small eruptions in the social fabric that provide new texture, small but important platforms from which to access new views.

The following short narratives, then, attempt to point out some of the provisional and ephemeral forms of urban collaboration at work in remaking the city today. They are not fully fledged case studies, but simply try to make more visible some of the social logics at work in ensuring a broader sense of access to opportunities to secure some kind of space of operation in the city.

Adjame Gare

From the Adjame *gare routier* —a warren of streets, half-streets, barely streets filling a vast cavity in near-central Abidjan, Ivory Coast— you can go nearly everywhere, at least in West Africa. But is not clear whether the "you" that leaves will be the same "you" who arrived at this vast zone of small and large buses. The operation of travel would appear simple: a prospective passenger knowing their destination and having some information about the various companies serving it would go the company's depot, purchase a ticket, have one's bags loaded and take off.

Instead a seemingly uncomplicated operation in a series of clear tasks is continuously interrupted by a network of touts, handlers, hawkers, porters, ticket agents, mechanics, cleaners, and messengers who recompose the act of travel in ways often difficult to anticipate or map. Whether entering the domain of the *gare* on foot, public transport or taxi, young boys and men functioning as steerers jockey for position in order to attain the best view of prospective passengers. Not only do they rush to vehicle windows or to those on foot and ask about their destination, but they also make rapid appraisals of the way the passengers are dressed, what they are carrying, their accents and ways of speaking.

For while the competition among different companies serving the same destinations fuels an almost frantic search for passengers, much more is at stake. The order of departure of buses heading to the same place can entail differences in the quantity of unofficial "road fees" paid to various "officials" along the route; the quality and price of various produce and goods to be both acquired and sold on the way. The objective is not simply to quickly filled buses but the supplement of particular passenger compositions of the buses as well —i.e., who is travelling, what appears to be the purpose of their travel, what kinds of possible interchanges amongst passengers might ensue, and thus, what kinds of resources might be put together or conflict and; how might drivers and their assistants benefit.

Conclusions that otherwise would take months of in-depth investigation have to be made in a matter of minutes. Once taxis, other vehicles, or feet are steered into specific depots, baggage must be unloaded and reloaded —another opportunity for assessment. Some passengers will want to leave quickly no matter where their baggage might be positioned or where their seats are located in the bus. For others, these considerations matter. As companies and their drivers prefer to minimize the lag time in their respective departures, balances must be struck among the touts who make deals amongst themselves for passengers with particular desires, as well as profiles. Then there is the issue of minimizing the wait for petrol, of clearing police checkpoints and inspections— and it here that the positioning of loads is particularly important, especially for buses heading toward borders or troublesome regions.

All of these mostly young men, acting at different points in these transactions, know that they can exert only a very limited control over how each passenger's story unfolds. They know that they must quickly pass these passengers on to the next position in the game —the steerer to the tout, the tout to the porter, the porter to the baggage loader and so forth, each trying to derive the maximum potential benefit from a speculative reading of the passenger's behavior and cargo.

Who is in a hurry; who is worried about possible theft; who is unlikely to report a theft of what may be illicit cargo; who seems uncertain of the final disposition of goods; who might appreciate advice as to more beneficial market opportunities; who is a frequent passenger; who is going to bury loved ones, who is going for celebrations —all of these are the elements of a "bet" all those who work the *gare* take in doing their

part to compose the travel in ways where the journey produces an expansive supplement whose rewards might "trickle" back to them. At the same time, all those who work the *gare* know that their collaborations with each other are not fixed or institutionalized.

There are hundreds of youth involved in this game. They must constantly make split decisions as to how and to whom they pass on the passenger to the next position. History here has little currency, for they must constantly exceed their past abilities, and they can never count on any specific turf belonging to them —for neither the companies, no any one else backs them up, identifies them as "their boys." They know that they can be intercepted at any time, quickly replaceable by those showing greater muscle or skill in a game where the criteria for what constitutes effective skill is itself never clearly identifiable, is always being remade up along the way, as if a collective phantasm of a presumed efficacy hovers over and seeps its way into the crowd.

In professions requiring a capacity to displace oneself into a swirl of readings, guises, speculations, deceits and transactions, the young men must make themselves as invisible as possible in their very hyped-up visibility. For while they should constitute themselves as an unavoidable insertion into the operation of travel, they should always appear, not as an obstacle or a gatekeeper, but a conduit, without interests of its own, to the realization of the concrete aspirations of the passenger as well as some possibility the passenger did not expect but now discovers that they wanted all along. The toughness in the face, in the walk, and in the manner in which everything is dealt becomes both a mask for what is an almost ghostly intelligence at work in navigating the *gare*, the acts of travel and, unavoidability at the same time, the style of young guys desperately holding on.

Bapenda

In Cameroon, president Paul Biya established Operation Command on February 20th, 2000 as a means of rectifying the alarming increase in violent crime taking place in Douala. At first residents across the city widely applauded this military operation, as they had become increasingly terrified of venturing anywhere in public, even during daylight hours. It was common for people from all walks of life and in all quarters to tell stories of being held up at work, on the street, or in their homes. Equipped with vast powers of search and seizure, as well as arbitrary detention, Operation Command quickly zeroed in on a vast network of warehouses harboring stolen goods, as well as illicit acquisitions of cars, houses, and consumer goods.

As the net widened, almost everyone came under greater suspicion. During raids on homes, if the residents were unable to immediately provide receipts for items like televisions or refrigerators, they would be immediately confiscated. Increasingly, the Operation Command appeared to Doualaise as organized military theft. There were also reports about large-scale extrajudicial killings, of detainees disappearing from prisons. Bodies of suspected criminals were often found in the streets with signs of torture and bullet wounds.

On January 23rd, nine youths from the Bapenda quarter were picked up after a neighbor had reported them as having stolen a gas canister. They were taken to a gendarme station in Bonanjo, on the other side of the city, where they were allowed to visit their families and correspond with them, although they reported being physically tortured. On January 28th they were transferred to an Operation Command post whereupon all communication from them stopped. The parents of the children were unable to find out any information as to the location of their children. Following the disappearance of the "Bapenda 9", Douala witnessed the first in a series of marches and demonstrations which were brutally repressed by the police.

During this time there were many reputed sightings of the disappeared, usually at night and usually in quarters considered highly dangerous. The sightings would describe the boys as beaten and emaciated, but desperate to hide from the expected onslaught of Operation Command from whom they inexplicably slipped. There was widespread concern that if there were any validity to these sightings, that all should be done to keep the boys alive as testimonials to what was assumed to be a practice killings thousands.

It is common practice in Douala to take in young girls from the rural areas as unpaid domestic servants. Many rural households can no longer provide for their children and so either throw them out of the home or sell them to intermediaries. These girls remain the "property" of the households they work for and are usually badly mistreated and have little freedom of mobility. As Marc Etaha, Frederic Ngouffo, Chatry Kuete, Eric Chia, Jean Roger Tchiwan, Charles Kouatou, Chia Effician, Elysee Kouatou and Fabrice Kuate —the

Bapenda 9[11]— served as a kind of "last straw" for the public patience with the Operation Command, there was a uneasy mixture of guilt, anger, impotence, and mysticism wrapped up in the larger public response to their disappearance.

Whether people actually believed in the reputed sightings of the disappeared or not, in some quarters of the city, a ritual developed where efforts were made to feed the disappeared. Because the sightings were most frequently in very dangerous parts of the city, households would sent their girl domestics, often great distances, to deliver food. From one sighting to the next, from one part of the city to the other, these girls took the risk of their own disappearance on these feeding expeditions. In the process, however, they crossed Douala at night in ways that were at the time without precedent. Sometimes they would meet up with other girls they had met on previous journeys and share what they had seen, as well as embellish stories and invent new ones. The danger entailed was secondary to the flush of this sudden and usually daily freedom, for soon they would meet up in particular spots and go where they wanted, never mind whether it corresponded with the destination they were instructed to seek out.

They would leave ciphers and other marks on cars and household walls, on store windows and security grates, or pile up empty pots and pans at key intersections. They would then tell their respective employers that the disappeared were attempting to leave messages, to communicate with the residents of the city about what was really taking place. Word spread that these girls had become interlocutors between the disappeared and the city and not merely deliverers of food. Their capacities were greatly inflated in a city where the reputations of those able to navigate the world of the night were already inflated. And so several of the girls started being sought out by various officials, businesspersons, and even top personnel of the Operation Command itself. They came not so much for direct information about the disappeared themselves nor to interpret their supposed conveyances. Rather, they wanted interpretations for their dreams, advice on new ventures, insights on the wheeling and dealing of colleagues and competitors.

Girls of thirteen who not long before went hungry in rural areas experiencing through economic and social decline, bought and sold to fetch water for forever, now suddenly found 10,000 CFA notes pressed in their hands, and started demanding more. Although I never saw her, stories spread how one of the girls, Sally, would hold court by the pool at the Meridien Hotel, cellphone in hand and her entourage of body guards.

Inner City Johannesburg

1. Reform and Ruin

The central city of Johannesburg is replete with images of violence, anarchy and decay. Nothing is what is appears to be. In an urban culture where everyone was assigned a particular place and time, and where places embodied narrowly circumscribed connotations, it is only reasonable to expect that in the post-apartheid era a massive and concrete "respatialization" of the central city would take place. It is clear that a contest has ensued in Johannesburg over who has the right to use the city in what kind of way. The rights of some are often seen as fundamentally illegitimate and, therefore, give others the right to do anything with those rights that they want. The order of some becomes the disorder for others, and vice-versa. It is an essential contest over who will ensure the stability of urban life.

A prolific micro-politics of contestation is seemingly normalized as the language through which one's "right" to the city is expressed. It is as if people are saying, "we are in the city now; we must do whatever it takes to make the city work for us, even if it means by doing so, the city is less capable of working for others." It is a "language" increasingly full of violent and brutal grammars tending to crowd out the new forms of civility ushered into South African cities during the times of the struggle for democracy. Images of young men running down streets afraid to walk and not knowing what lies around the next bend have become a dominant representation of the central city image. There is also an impressive, albeit distorted intelligence at work. For example, there are "citizens" who look down Jeppe Street and can tell you exactly how many staff are out sick at a particular business. They can tell you what time salespeople on a particular floor take their tea break, the varying temporal rhythms used by certain shopkeepers to lock and unlock their stores, the varying patterns used by banks to transfer cash. In other word, they can convey the most minute information and details that connote some sense of vulnerability, and thus opportunity for incursions of all kinds. Foreign Africans are known to complain about the way people are scrutinized in public space —how

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one looks, how one is walking, what one is wearing. Such scrutiny is not done to assess conformity to some urban norm, but to assess weakness.

But it would also be a mistake to see the "excessive" only as an instance of violence. For, the municipal is woven out a sense of the extravagance of individuals and communities extending themselves to each other, providing support beyond the call of duty. No matter how violent, for example, the Johannesburg inner city may be, it continues to function largely through such an extravagance of sharing space, resources and opportunities in hundreds of small stories of accommodation and non-threatening opportunism played day in and day out.

As prevailing paradigms of governance emphasize bringing management of public affairs and goods down to the most immediate and practical levels of where they actually take effect, what social units will actually practice this management? Who are the relevant social actors in highly fluid urban spaces? What kinds of effective institutional forms and identities of citizenship are possible? As the central city is a locus for diffuse and highly contested authority on a day-to-day basis, how do residents assess what it is possible to do? What kinds of assumptions about visibility, collaboration, affiliation, and mobility are operative in environments where it is not clear just who has the capacity to do what to whom? As a larger proportion of the population is made up of youth living on their own, as well as those who are HIV-positive[12], how do more provisional forms of social life, affiliation and residence impact upon the mores and practices of all residents?

While these questions may have special resonance to the central city of Johannesburg, they are being increasingly asked in terms of a wide range of urban environments. As such, these considerations are a part of a recent history of important investigations on urban informal economies and social formations.[13]

The central city is a place of great ethnic and national diversity. Perhaps some ninety percent of the area's present residents were not living in the central city ten years ago.[14] Foreign African and Asian immigrants and black South Africans coming from across the country are all vying to establish some foothold.[15] All attempt to do so without substantive institutional support and with an urban infrastructure in severe decline.[16] It also appears that most residents are also living in ways highly dissimilar to those to which they have been accustomed in the past.[17]

Elaborate relationships are configured among hawkers, those with some form of formal employment, social networks organized around their patronage of specific bars and hotels, taxi drivers and passengers, railway workers, and the clients of the large number of hotels in the area.[18] There are also large numbers of people operating in the central city, both residents and non-residents, who simply wait for something to happen, or aggressively pursue an opportunity to steal, work in somebody's else scheme or live off of someone else's income.

Thus, survivalist activities undertaken in highly provisional ways and with limited scope seem to be appropriated by "entrepreneurial" networks operating at larger scales. These scales would include in ascending order: the level of the specific quarter, e.g. Hillbrow, Berea, Yeoville; the translocal scale, e.g. flows between Hillbrow and Soweto; Yeoville and Alexandra; Berea and the central business district; and transurban scales, e.g., flows between Johannesburg and Durban; Johannesburg and Maputo.

A great difficulty in assessing the character, composition and scale of such activities is the high degree to which these activities are illegal and are protected by various affiliations with legal institutions and transactions.[19] Within the density of activities and population numbers, information itself becomes an important resource —who is going where, who comes and goes at what time, who guards what, who knows whom— for all of this can be converted into a potential "income-generating" activity. Concomitantly, there is an intricate economy of managing impressions and the visibility of actions that accompany these broadly informal economic activities.

Take for example the following: A warehouse in Dar es Salaam and a shipment whose waybill indicates origin from the World Muslim League —a shipment of thousands of sealed *Qurans* and between pages counterfeit dollar bills— religious texts to guide the *Ummah* throughout Southern Africa. And take Taha Jabbir, who comes to Fordsburg, Johannesburg in 1995 to take over the African Muslim Association after spending years in Malawi, where he built a series of fortfications all along the border with Mozambique that, on the surface, provided a bulwark of protection against the insurgency, but were also facades for the

coordination of substantial illicit transborder exchanges. Jabbir, citizen of Kuwait, was the son of an enormously wealthy Iraqi family, who also owned sixteen major office buildings is São Paulo.

And take the 789 conversions to Islam officially recorded at masajids in Fordsburg by Angolan immigrants during that same year —some eventually housed informally on large tracts of land outside of Neilspruit in Mapumalanga owned by the historic Hoggs Farm Deobandi family, one of whose branches controlled the labor provided to reconstruct the docks in Dubai. Others ended up in Winterveld, a large peri-urban area north of Winterveld, which until today, has large sections of land owned and settled by successive generations of former Mozambican mineworkers. Indeed, many of these former mineworkers who settled in Winterveld, having heavily invested in mini-bus taxis, channel goods provided them "under the table" by today's mineworkers to a wide range of buyers. These goods come either from their countries of origin or from the networks of other mineworkers with whom they once worked. On the other hand, goods acquired from compatriots and other various networks are sold to mineworkers throughout the country. Individual entrepreneurs are thus plying large territories. The trade continuously changes —from the smuggling of diamonds and precious metals, rhino horns, and guns to more conventional consumer goods such as electronics and packaged foodstuffs. Some of this illegal activity is elaborately syndicated.

Winterveld entrepreneurs constitute a nodal point in links between mineworkers, buyers, and workers at the Maputo port in Mozambique. Most of these activities seem to be loosely organized. Cooperation does exist, but on a deal-by-deal basis. In part, these arrangements act as a mechanism of protection, since threats from more "endowed" syndicates and other competitors can be quite intense. Perhaps more to the point, loose cooperation provides a mechanism for the individual entrepreneur to access a more diverse and wider range of opportunities. For the most part, specific deals or activities are rarely repeated in the exact form in which they have already taken place. They rarely take place in the same location or with the same composition of "collaborators" more than a few times.

At the same time, some consistency must be brought to the playing field. If the structures of deals and the composition of deal-makers are too fluid, things could get out of hand. Competition may be debilitating, even violent. While traders don't want to be locked into overly fixed structures, there also must be mechanisms to socialize trading practices and behaviors. There must be means of ensuring some consistency and predictability. The local churches that have sprung up in Winterveld during the last several years play an important role in these socializing tasks. Some churches play a major role as points of reference for temporary "business coalitions" or syndicates that are formed among members of different congregations. There are scores of small independent churches scattered within the predominantly Mozambican and/or Shangaan speaking wards. The individual memberships are quite close given the quantity of time individuals spend together fulfilling religious obligations and attending prayer meetings.

Information that participants in these loose-knit syndicates generate and exchange among themselves is important. But, this exchange is not the most important means through which deals are put together. Collaborations tend to take place on a deal-by-deal basis. Participants for a "team" are recruited from various churches. Information about the trustworthiness and capacity of potential participants and about the possible roles they might play in the deal is largely based largely on the roles participants in these deals play in their respective churches. Churches provide a context that implicitly "vouches" for the behavior and reliability of particular individuals. At the same time, those putting together deals don't want to recruit others from their own churches in the event that things go wrong. The church may implicitly recognize the existence of such unconventional activities. By leaving it to other more "invisible" or provisional networks to "carry out" deals, the congregations, however, don't risk being identified with them. They are not committed or dependent on their success or failure. In other words, whatever happens does not "bounce" back as a piece of information or feedback relevant to the maintenance of social ties within any individual church.

And take the story of one man from Douala who walked much of the way to South Africa to find himself, finally, on the outskirts of Cape Town, in a refugee camp doubling as an insane asylum (getting in and out, he notes, was complicated: security could not distinguish between the displaced and the deranged); of life in a squat called *l'ambassade*, overseen by a another Doualais known for claiming rights to residents' girlfriends; of masks and mangoes, raybans and cellphones from Malaysia on their way to Malawi (some counterfeit, others not) sold and re-sold in an ongoing flux of coming and going, and of visits by strange long-bearded Arabs in jellabiya bearing airline tickets to French Guiana via São Paulo and Caracas.

And take the Winterveld owned long distance taxis, one a day, that ply the route from Johannesburg to Dar es Salaam, filled with Angolans. And take these Angolan at Dar airport with Kenyan passports and freshly

minted dollar bills on their way to Dubai for one of the well-known shopping fairs. And imagine my surprise to this past summer in Tamatave, Madagascar when ten Angolan converts with whom I attended a hulqa —a study group in Fordsburg with— walk in after having just returned "home" from "working" a ship just landed from Dubai.

This entire circuitry of exchange both finds anchorage in the central city and is also displaced from it; it has simultaneously everything and nothing to do with it. What does this double position mean? If these stories are indeed a small sampling of what is undoubtedly a much larger domain of translocal shadow economy, it would seem that a larger proportion of the overall economy seem to disperse urban resourcefulness across wider territory with unclear consequences.

2. Post-apartheid city

On the surface such dispersal would appear to be a problem for a city that lacks strong histories of social cohabitation. The lack of social cohesion is often cited as the primary characteristic of Johannesburg. Khetso Gordan, the city's top urban manager in the late 1990's, often said that no sector, community or group has any sense of belonging to the city as a whole, or anything good to say about the city. There is a fundamental absence of public life and of concrete opportunities for diverse populations to acknowledge that they share the same universe of operations. Daily life can be increasingly parochial for both rich and poor, although the rich retain enormous capacities to preserve a way of life that barely differs from a typically Northern urban existence.

In this situation where vastly different modalities of existence largely operate in parallel to each other, the overall global space of the city is increasingly privatized. In other words, the space of the city beyond work and housing-related enclaves is increasingly beyond the apprehension, use and affiliation of all but those whose capacities enable them to manipulate a "bird's-eye" view of the city. Such manipulation entails intervening at the level of the city's position within the larger abstract space of inter-urban flows and transactions. The city at large, then, becomes an increasingly dangerous unknown universe, full of threats and unseen circumstances, to the majority of inhabitants.

Urban residents become more defensive and particularized in their social and public relations. In Alexandra, one of Johannesburg's densest black "townships," there exist some 170 different community organizations.[20] The multiplicity of these organizations represents different modalities of inhabitation —from homeowners, shack-dwellers, backyard tenants, renters, and squatters. They also represent different territories within the district and other divisions of interests. Cooperation and collaboration is rare; as the motivation for organization is largely the perception of threat and using associations as a means for engaging in a more intense competition for scarcer resources and opportunities.

Municipal authorities are faced with a situation where maintaining the ability to run the city requires keeping many of the trappings which excluded people from the city in the past. At the same time, they must allow the city to be radically re-arranged by very diverse populations and interests no longer forced to "stay in place." Attempts then to make the city more livable for those who have been historically excluded often become perceived as yet another instrument to control those who have been excessively controlled in the past.

While households and communities may adamantly defend their "hold" on specific residential territories that have been informally settled, this "holding" is often mistaken as an expression of an intent to remain within that settlement over a long period of time. Such patterns are usually not the case. While rural to urban migration may have slowed, the South African labor force is increasingly mobile within and among cities, and such a defense of territory is more about defending the "right" to be in the city, to have a place in it —but without commitment to a specific place. Thus the subsidization of rudimentary housing structures, which has been the cornerstone of South Africa's response to the country's housing needs, largely misunderstands the bulk of the population's approach to settlement. For example, housing sub-markets have become increasingly murky and complex as former shack-dwellers sell off their new homes for income and return to living in shacks.[21]

Intensifying mobility is also reinforced by the diversity of strategies employed to secure basic needs, e.g., simultaneous participation in formal and informal economies, dispersion of dependents across different localities, and diversifying sources of borrowing and evasion. Such mobility, in turn, cultivates particular

economic and social practices that can weaken customary modalities of social affiliation and social capital. Policy efforts to constrain the mobility of domestic private capital and to attract and maintain mobile external capital have had the effect of intensifying the mobility of the poor. This, of course, is not an upward but rather a lateral mobility —within and between townships and informal settlements, cities and regions, in an incessant hunt for livelihood.

In some areas, such as the inner city of Johannesburg, the extent of demographic shifts is certainly unprecedented in contemporary urban history. Also unprecedented is the degree to which social boundaries are marked by spatial arrangements in high density quarters and the ways in which the physical trappings of wealth and security can be penetrated by "roving bands" of "opportunists" taking whatever they can. The apparent wastage of large parts of the Johannesburg CBD actually house an increasingly vibrant sector of informal businesses engaged in a wide range of artisan production. Nothing is what is appears to be. In an urban culture where everyone was assigned a particular place and time, and where places embodied narrowly circumscribed connotations, it is only reasonable to expect that a massive and concrete "deconstruction" would take place. South African cities are certainly being remade, but by whom or how remains largely undecided.

The intense levels of contestation over who has the "right" to do what in South African cities produces a situation where things can happen very quickly. Urban dwellers don't, as a result, feel constrained by the sense that specific places and resources belong to only certain kinds of uses or identities. There are constant and often violent arguments in apartment blocks, on streets, in taxis, in schools, and in stores about who can do what where. Such argumentation can open up places to greater flexibility as to their use, but it also can break down the integrity of places and a sense of propriety, which in turn, makes them vulnerable to incursions and distortions of all kinds.

Drawing on urban survival strategies used during apartheid to avoid pass laws and other forms of state surveillance, populations proficient in sending the "wrong" signals can continue to do so in order to "win" spaces of autonomous action. Who is a "real" police-person, security guard, domestic, gardener, deliverer, and who isn't is not only increasingly hard to discern, but in many cases doesn't matter, as levels of complicity between the real and the "pretender" intensify. At other times, things move slowly, since urban residents know that many people are paying attention to what they do, and they then try to conform to some sense of what can pass as conventional in order not to stand out. So in South African cities, spaces can change very quickly and also not at all.

Whereas this situation may be the case for all cities, there is a fundamental unwillingness to acknowledge these parameters of urban change or stasis within the collective South African imagination. Yet for the most part, the Johannesburg metropolitan government can do little to satisfy the interests and needs of one group without estranging those of another, who are more willing than ever to assume violent means of expressing their vulnerability. Efficacy in urban governance and planning now increasingly means that no single institutional or sectoral actor is likely to exert much control over how the urban is to be remade.[22]

Municipal authorities have attempted to engineer opportunities for different actors to work together while maintaining their identities, their interests, and sense of local "authority." These efforts include a centralized ranking and passenger distribution system, specialized markets for street traders, and attempts to manage, clean and service buildings where owners have long disappeared. An overarching development framework does not drive these efforts —although such frameworks do exist for the Johannesburg inner city. Rather, they have been affected by a proficient set of tactics. They are the result of municipal managers facilitating ongoing negotiations among diverse interests and groupings.

Each public municipal initiative has been informed by a concerted effort to determine what really is going on, who the actors really are, what resources they have, and how are they manage to put together livelihood. This has meant that what was formerly a largely invisible world of economic and social activities was made public. In other words, these activities emerged into some kind of view and, therefore, opportunity to be engaged and transacted with. For example, what appeared to be the largely abandoned sites of medium scale manufacturing in the eastern part of the central business district were often being used to house relatively clandestine small enterprises. Under-utilized office buildings were being converted into makeshift residential units. Instead of a few associations of street traders there were scores of various "organizations." In other words, there exists a complex patchwork of uses, appropriations, modalities of association and economic activities that are highly fluid, often unconventional, and often illegal.

Municipal administrations are charged with ensuring equity and order, some sense of coherence over who does what where. Conventional wisdom has usually indicated that cities have their regulatory frameworks and they must be enforced. Indeed, in a rough and tumble world like Johannesburg, a municipal administration must be seen as tough. For such toughness is the only way most citizens will be convinced that there is any kind of municipal leadership. What Johannesburg has attempted to do in the inner city is not apply some set of conventional rules or bend the rules, but to derive new regulatory frameworks from what actually is taking place. While enforcing codes and orders to ensure that buildings are inhabitable, that labor is not exploited, and that streets remain navigable and clean, it has done these things in such a way not to change the fundamentals of what people are doing or necessarily where they are doing it.

Rather, the municipality has attempted to facilitate a process where different "constituencies" figure out ways of adapting themselves to each other without necessarily feeling that they have to give something up; or that if they do give something up it is in order to gain new capacities or opportunities. In other words, a regulatory system is configured on the basis of what it might take to circumvent unhealthy, illegal or debilitating practices but maintain their basic shape and dynamism.

The departments responsible for the inner city have largely been able to do this through:

a) decentralizing responsibility and authority for the management of specific domains, precincts and activities to coalitions of sectoral actors most affected by and involved in them;

b) establishing project planning and implementation forums that bring different sectoral actors together to evolve the nuts and bolts of specific interventions; and perhaps most significantly;

c) making competing interests and groups co-responsible for the management of particular services and spaces; and

d) putting together a broad range of informal channels through which different sectoral actors can communicate and consult with each other in a more open-ended manner outside the obligations to represent particular points of view or interest or administrative responsibilities. In this way, different actors can more easily explore with each other various scenarios and ways of collaborating without being forced to produce specific outcomes.

This latter point is particularly important in terms of trying to manage the highly contentious politics that usually surround urban development activities. To cultivate new levels of cooperation on the part of various actors requires thinking about ways of facilitating connections among local resources, skills, and institutions. These connections act as both a means of assessing what kind of supply-side upgrading (e.g., skills development, external resource inputs, technical services) are appropriate and building the foundations for building external relationships with larger markets, political and regional contexts.

3. Re-assembling the Central City

Despite the efforts of the municipality, economic and social logics are at work in the inner city that prove not only difficult for the municipality to grasp, but without really a platform to engage them. The sheer rapidity of demographic and economic changes in the central city has created uncertainty as to what is possible to plan for and do.[23] The uncertainty has caused sudden and substantial divestitures of all types. These divestitures further impede adequate monitoring by adding a large volume of transactions to the quick pace of change. Insecurity is intensified and, with it, the practice of getting rid of property and position at a cheap price.

In response to these changes, a large measure of xenophobia prevails, where foreign Africans are blamed for an overcrowded informal trading sector, the growth of the narcotics trade and general deterioration of the inner city.[24] Many South African residents believe that it is because of such a foreign presence that government authorities and the private sector are unwilling to make investments in upgrading and service provision.[25]

In an urban area with such comprehensive demographic change, there are few grounds for anyone to cite and enforce a superseding claim to belonging. But this relative vacuum of belonging, i.e., a situation where almost no one presently living in the inner city can claim an overarching sense of origin, of a protracted

history of settlement, points out how, in the absence of effective governance, the "feeling" of belonging holds sway.

The narcotics enterprises that constitute an important component of the inner city economy are commonly seen as the purview of Igbo-dominated Nigerian networks. While such composition may be generally true, such enterprises are by no means ethnically homogenous or formed exclusively on the basis of national identity. Rather, in a business that has little recourse to appealing to law or official commercial standards, the appearance of ethnic or national homogeneity conveys a certain impenetrability. It detracts from both external scrutiny, infiltration, and competition, which allows the enterprise to incorporate the diversity of actors it often requires in order to constantly change supply routes, markets, and so forth.

Such enterprises act as a parody of belonging. In the commercial culture of the inner city narcotics economy, the discrete tasks of importation, circumvention of customs regulations, repackaging, local distribution, money laundering, relations with legal authorities, territorial control, market expansion, and plotting traffic routes all are complementary yet highly territorialized domains. Usually, discrete "units" administer each domain so that disruptions in one domain do not jeopardize the entirety of trade. Nigerian syndicates, which use the hotels in Hillbrow to accommodate a large transient population that in turn serves as a mask behind which to consolidate a steady clientele of drug users including sex workers, have instituted an interesting governance structure.[26]

The hotels, now largely managed by Nigerian syndicates, become discrete "localities", housing not only workers in the drug trade, but also Nigerians working in a wide range of activities. The syndicates dominate the governing committees that are established for each hotel, with their concomitant sets of rules —for example, no-go areas are often established for Nigerians and fines for various infractions that are then used for legal fees. But, Nigerians who are not involved in the drug economy are also counted upon to provide a semblance of internal diversity, even if they are often used and manipulated.[27]

Yet, the domains must be well integrated —in such a way that complicity and cooperation become the prevailing practices. But within each domain, each operator has a specific place and is expected to demonstrate unquestioning loyalty. This is the case even if the illicit nature and the practical realities of the trade create an incessantly open space for participants to "take their chances" and seek greater profits and authority outside the hierarchies that each syndicate must attempt to rigidly enforce.

Thus, it is apparent to most inner city residents what hotels, residential buildings, and commercial enterprises belong to which syndicates and to which nationalities these syndicates in turn belong.[28] Yet, since any particular narcotics enterprise handles only certain facets of the overall trade, and leaves itself increasingly vulnerable if it expands its efforts to dominate more functions and more territory, spaces also must be maintained that clearly belong to "no one." It is precisely within these spaces, however, that anything might happen, that are contested and unpredictable and that are often subject to the most vociferous claims of belonging. This is often a "contest" over women. For as the vast majority of foreign immigrants are male, the impression is instituted that these immigrants, better off economically than most black South African male residents, are "stealing" local women.

Thus, the inner city is a complex geography, where residents must navigate according to constantly finely-tuned series of movements and assumptions.[29] There are places where they know they must not go, be seen —but in an often convoluted economy of safety. A South African municipal worker living in the Heidelberg in Berea is unlikely to sit and read the paper in the lobby of the Mark or Sands Hotel— the domains of so-called Nigerian drug dealers. But, he or she may in actuality be safer in this activity then making a telephone call from the public stand at the nearby petrol station.

The drug economy, with its "hyperactive" sensibilities and codes of belonging, could largely entrench itself in Hillbrow and Berea, because a highly dense, highly urbanized area with massive infrastructure was being vacated —both in terms of its former population and in terms of financial and governmental resources. The modalities of operation of the drug business tend to "provincialize" certain parts of the inner city —i.e., localize it in terms of clearly marked territories and "fiefdoms." But the definitiveness of organizations and territories is more a necessary "performance" than descriptive of actual operational practices. The more entrenched and expansive the drug economy becomes, the more it must generate ambiguous interfaces. For example, these interfaces are those between supposedly discrete groupings, between illicit activity and legitimate investment, between declines and consumption patterns and increased availability, and between

inner city Johannesburg as an increasingly well known site of the drug economy and other more invisible and thus often advantageous sites of operation.

Here, the salience of belonging specifies the need for its own demise. While a frequently heard rallying cry in the inner city is for blocks and neighborhoods to be restored to those to whom they really belong, who are these citizens and what would they do with these neighborhoods? To what extent is the inner drug economy the most visible component of an otherwise invisible unfolding of the inner city onto the uncertainties of the metropolitan region. In a city preoccupied with questions about who belongs where, and where within a city where movement and operations is incessantly precarious and insecure, there is a heightened need to identify plausible spaces of safe residence. Yet, the drug operations don't need the inner city —either as market or center of operation. Already, there is some indication that several syndicates are "moving on", seeking other locales. Thus, the heightened sense in the past decade that specific territories within the inner city have exclusively belonged to specific agents is revealed as something arbitrary. One can even hear local sentiment that claims that at least the drug dealers stalled the demise of certain blocks, now vulnerable to an influx of petty criminals.

Within an inner city, where jobs are scarce, everyday life precarious, and the need to mobilize available social capital acute, the very act of counting upon those close to one becomes a practice which leaves individual vulnerable to further difficulties. As has been repeatedly pointed out by Graeme Reid, director of the Johannesburg Development Agency, a critical problem for local governance has been the instability of household composition within the inner city. Families who reside in an apartment unit for several months frequently disperse, with new household arrangements being established in other parts of the inner city or elsewhere.

In part, this instability is directly related to the intensifying uncertainty permeating everyday kinship relations. It becomes dangerous for a person to interweave the details of their daily life too closely to those of family members. If something goes wrong, if one member finds out that they are HIV positive, or if a growing divide in economic capacity becomes apparent, one then leaves themselves vulnerable to witchcraft accusations and thus vulnerable to being ostracized or even killed. As a result, the very process of mobilizing social capital that is needed in order to elaborate a viable sense of belonging is precisely that process which becomes the most difficult to perform. In this absence, the apparent capacity of foreign Africans to elaborate supportive social connections becomes particularly threatening, as it is perceived to provide immigrants with an undo advantage to thrive in this urban environment.

While immigrant networks do depend on always activating a sense of mutual cooperation and interdependency, such ties are also often more apparent then real —especially as a complex mixture of dependence and autonomy is a work in relations among fellow compatriots. For many foreign Africans in the inner city, Johannesburg is neither the preferred or final destination, especially at present.[30] Its continental location and the degree to which the South African economy is increasingly intertwined with other African national and regional economies makes the city more accessible, despite the entry and stay regulations proffered by the government, than other European or North American destinations. The city's geographic location facilitates the petty to medium-scale conventional and unconventional trade activities that characterize a significant percentage of immigrant economies. From official commercial markets to informal ones in both Congos, Zambia, Angola, Mozambique, to name a few of the predominant national settings, a substantial amount of their inputs either originate or pass through South Africa in a trade frequently controlled or at least mediated by South African-based immigrants.[31]

Although most immigrants dream of a quick score that would enable them to return home with significantly enhanced prestige and purchasing power, such rarely happens. Instead, many years of toil in a series of low paid jobs is the norm, with the bulk of the limited earnings saved remitted back home to support an array of family members. Additionally, bribes to police often must be paid, as well as unofficial surcharges to certain landlords. For traders at any scale, goods are often seized, lost or stolen. The obstacles immigrants persist in dealing with, especially in South Africa, amplify the enormity of the difficulties of home. While fellow nationals or even immigrants of various nationalities may band together to share living expenses, information and risk, the possibilities for corporate action are limited. Each is trying their best to make ends meet and deal with specific family, community, or political situations back home. Each is in some way a competitor, and cooperation is based on self-interest, self-protection and camaraderie, and not on solidifying a long-term investment in the cultivation of a place of operation in Johannesburg.[32]

The inner city largely represents a process of "running away", where the inside and the outside make ambiguous any definitive sense of where residents are located, and what their identities and interests "really" are. Black South Africans are running away from the implosive sociality of township life —of a life for too long situated in a "nowhere", i.e. places arbitrarily configured to be apart and to embody the essence of a culture long uprooted from the chance to continually remake itself. Foreign Africans are running away from the impossibility of being at home, i.e. to do whatever is possible to maintain the sense (and often, the illusion) that they can have maintain a home.

This all takes place is an urban area which, however fleetingly, once hinted at the possibility of a more cosmopolitan urban South Africa. But the country has long repressed what that cosmopolitanism might look like. Instead, it is re-imagined primarily in politically vacuous, "rainbow nation" terms. The inner city existed for too many years —and in this case, the seven years between 1988 and 1995 when the rapid demographic shift took place proved to be a "lifetime"— without any significant elaboration of urban policy or programming. Inner city life became increasingly informalized, and in this informalization increasingly illicit. In this interregnum, the caution exhibited by incoming residents, not quite knowing what to make of their new surroundings gave way to the brashness of various "investors." These investors knew how to "recuperate" the trappings of city blocks of hotels with huge discos, rooftop pools, basement wineries, underground car parks into a distorted Miami to be run to the ground by a flourishing drug economy whose proceeds would largely be diverted elsewhere. Ironically, what remains is an inner city ready for nearly anything.

Conclusion

In most African cities, policy and programmatic interventions have focused on the need for the enhanced integration of cities. This is often pursued without coming to grips with the ways in which fragmented urban space —i.e., highly divergent characteristics of quarters and their relationships with each other— offers possibilities for the elaboration of livelihoods and social relationships that don't easily correspond to imposed normative frameworks. There is often the assumption that urban quarters —of varying histories and capacities— are primarily interested in consolidating local social fields into representational structures that can act as a platform for accessing and influencing power arrangements at larger scales. There is often the assumption that this consolidation inevitably takes the form of at least the semblance of well-cohered organizations and roles.

But popular investments in time and energy are often elsewhere i.e., focused on piecing together larger spaces of action —larger both in terms of territory and social interdependencies across status, class, ethnicity, generation, social position, and so forth. In other words, residents are pursuing a new urban infrastructure, that is ways of collaborating with people often very different from themselves, operating in different parts of the city, and with whom they work out highly particularized relationships and ways of dealing with each other. These networks are not constructed in terms of conventional organizations or grassroots associations, but often involve large numbers of people who implicitly coordinate their behavior in the pursuit of objectives that have both individual definition but mutual coherence among participants.

Sometimes they coalesce in organizations that have names, but where it is unclear to almost everyone what precisely the organization is and what it does. At other times, an event may trigger an entire neighborhood into apparently unfamiliar courses of action, but with a synchronicity that makes it appear as if some deep-seated logic of social mobilization is being unleashed. Still at other times, the arduous interplay of local social change and resistance, planned development and arbitrary decisions construct tentative platforms for be to collaborate in "silent", but powerful ways which have the potential of substantially altering the position of the locality within the larger urban system.

An important research agenda, therefore, is a greater understanding of the mechanisms that facilitate such lateral movement, affiliation, and transactions across fragmented urban spaces —i.e., that permit navigation and mobility without subsuming a wide range of urban practices into a dominant notion of integrated uses or values. In other words, a way of operating that accomplishes integrated actions without overarching rules or narratives that dictate what integration is, what it looks like, and how it is to be accomplished. These mechanisms are usually provisional and incessantly improvised and revised. For, they concern ways in which various urban actors, ensconced in various hierarchies, locations, and networks interact with each other in

different, out of the ordinary ways, without having to make irrevocable commitments to those changes. It is a means of getting accustomed to both expected and unforeseen implications.

Urban planning thus needs imagination, discourses, and methodological tools that enable us to better grasp and interact with the ways in which different kinds or urban actors are connected to each other, as well as the ways in which African cities can grow closer to each other, even as they may grow farther apart.

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