



Editorial Notes

Notes on the diaspora, and other things

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One of the pleasures of editing *Nokoko* is the breadth of submissions. One of the challenges is editing a special issue amidst such plenty, while remaining committed to publishing all cogent contributions. This issue brings together three articles for a special issue on the theme of the African diaspora conceived broadly: cutting edge work which addresses the Somali community in Toronto, the metaphysics of migration found in transnational African cinema, and the displacement of black communities in the Pacific northwest of Colombia. Bookending these are four articles, which demonstrate our breadth: a reading of oral poetry as text and a thick description of a festival as theatre, both from Nigeria; a critique of closed caption television and policing in Johannesburg; and, from a promising new scholar, a review of the colonial legacies which lead to the genocidal violence in Rwanda.

How do shifting relationships of gender and work shape the lived experiences of people who have left Africa? How do Somali

market women in Toronto benefit from their social networks? Sophia Jesow addresses these questions with her article "African Canadian" (pp. 83–91) about social networks, which, she argues, help reduce the socio-economic and linguistic barriers that Somali women in the Greater Toronto area face. Jesow, herself a speaker of Somali and a researcher of immigration, settlement, transnational networks, and health care, conducted over 200 hours of participant observation in *Suuqa Ceelgaab*, a Somali shopping centre located in Rexdale, Toronto, where Somali women occupy all of the 100 rental units. To this, Jesow adds both formal and informal interviews with over 50 women in both individual and group settings and an analysis of the secondary literature. Jesow shows how Somali women in Toronto face challenges in accessing the labor market, overcoming language barriers, and having their qualifications recognized. At the *Suuqa Ceelgaab*, the community of Somali women benefit from what Jesow describes as an 'ethnic economy.' These female social networks within the Somali immigrant community allow women to address their social, economic, and linguistic challenges, to confront feelings of loneliness and alienation, and to face gendered and racialized challenges from living in the diaspora in Toronto. Jesow contributes a nuanced analysis of a suburban mall to a growing literature on black social economies in the Americas.

The experience of the diaspora is, of course, neither recent nor just a story of immigration to North American cities. What do other experiences of migration and displacement say about lives in motion? What do reflections on Afro-descendant social movements in rural and urban contexts in other parts of the Americas illuminate? What can life histories of migration tell about the lives of people forced to move? Claudia Howald, a researcher and lecturer based at FUCLA University in Quibdó, the capital of the northwest Colombian province of the Chocó, addresses these issues in her brilliant French language article "*Paysans, afrocolombiens, déplacés*" (Peasants, Afro-Colombians, and the Displaced, pp. 135–170). She writes in a

nuanced way about Afro-Colombian peasant leaders displaced from rural to urban contexts in the Chocó, where the population is 90% Afro-Colombian and descended from former slave communities. Howald turns to Afro-Colombian leaders to explore how displaced rural Afro-descendent peasants arrived in the city after being forced from their land by armed conflict; many settled in the 'neighbourhood of the displaced' in Quibdó, which they call Villa España. Howald describes the role of local and international networks in responding to violence on the Lower Atrato in the 1980s and 1990s. The history Howald describes address the creation of an ethnic consciousness and political, cultural, and social-contestations using ethnography and life histories, or what she calls *trajectoire de vie*. The contribution weaves together a life history of an urban community whose population was displaced by rural war and violence in the 1990s, and formed ethnic associations after the 1991 Constitution to defend a territory wrapped up in imaginaries of ethnicity and environment. Howald brings a new perspective to ethnic communities and leadership in the Colombian Pacific, and shows how an urban community became a rallying cry for political organizing to fight for local concerns, recognition, and land claims all intertwined with particular people's lives. The article contributes to the growing literature on Afro-descendant social movements in rural and urban contexts in Latin America.

What does diaspora itself mean? How is the term deployed? How can a focus on diaspora create connections and uncover relationships, even as it renders other phenomena less important? How might film provide insight into the diasporic, migratory, and displaced identity? What does home mean? Suvi Lensu, a social scientist and an activist who works on globalization, post-colonial identity, gender, migrations, and borders, opens this issue with her phenomenal article "Filming Home, Plurality of Identity, Belonging and Homing in Transnational African Cinema" (pp. 1–34). In this article, Lensu offers a subtle discussion of transnational African cinema

using a case study of three films. Lensu meditates on the meanings of home and belonging in an increasingly transnational and multicultural world: How is home transformed and what does rootedness mean for an increasingly mobile and deterritorialized people? The article deftly tackles this meaty theme and the metaphysics of diaspora through an analysis of three 'transnational African films' which explore what home means inside and outside of that most conjured yet non-existent country—Africa. The first, *Restless Wandering* by Nouri Bouzid (2009), is one of ten short films in the *L'Afrique Vue Par* collection. *Restless Wandering* takes place in the old ruins of Tunisia; the film focuses on the interactions between a group of children and a West African *griot*—a keeper of oral cultural tradition and heritage. A security guard breaks up an exchange between the children and the *griot*, in what Lensu reads as a pan-African encounter between various colonial histories from the north and south. Tunisia becomes an appropriate setting both as home of the filmmaker Bouzid and as a transit route for illegal migrants to Europe. Lensu reads the film as a Pan-Africanist meditation set in a transit point, a way-station place of becoming diaspora, crossing borders, and going elsewhere. *That's My Face / É a Minha Cara* (USA, 2001) by African-American filmmaker Thomas Allen Harris crosses the ocean to address African spirituality and identity from New York to Tanzania to Brazil, where he takes on diasporic spirituality through *Candomblé*—a religious practice with which Harris identifies strongly. *The Place in Between / Notre Étrangère* (Burkina Faso, 2009) by Sarah Bouyain is set in Bobo-Dioulasso, the second largest city of Burkina Faso, and Paris. Bouyain explores leavings and families and what Lensu reads as a transnational space, the diasporic space in which all people from multicultural backgrounds and otherwise live. Lensu's brilliant exegesis of three films becomes a meditation on African transnational cinema, the genre that Lensu locates beyond the trope of 'Africa' usually found in film, the Africa of the colonial gaze which historic and contemporary cinema continues to reproduce. The article pro-

vocatively explores the meaning of home, intertwined and interwoven with identity in mutually constituting ways: Home becomes a production, a process, a feeling, a psychological state of mind, a place most alive in the imagination. Lensu deftly interprets these films against the literature on nomadism, and sets the stage for a vision of lives in motion, too often forgotten in the histories of sedentary people, which ignore shifting identities, movements, and relationships between insiders and outsiders.

In conceiving this special issue, we were interested in themes of identity, of new and unexpected connections between the diaspora outside of Africa and social movement organizing, urban and rural identities, and so on. We wanted to explore how identity becomes a rallying cry for political organizing to fight for local political concerns, recognition, and land claims. How social networks forged through shared diasporic experience create forms of social solidarity. And, how the imagination of home and away leads to shifting understanding of diaspora itself. While this special issue has not been an exhaustive contribution to understanding diasporic lives, it is clear that these three articles do contribute rich perspectives.

The remainder of the articles turn to other themes. Emmanuel Avwarosuoghene Mede, who teaches language courses at Delta State University in Nigeria and researches English and the Urhobo language in the Niger Delta region, provides a linguistic analysis of three Urhobo poems in "A Discourse Analysis of Three Selected Urhobo Oral Poems" (pp. 65–81). The 'Ile-eha' is a genre of oral poetry often performed informally in village playgrounds in the evenings as a form of recreation. This reading undertakes an analysis of three poems, and shows how they possess qualities amenable to rich textual representation. In the piece, Mede makes a compelling case for the literary value of the poetry itself, even as many aspects of the oral performances are untranslatable to English, because they convey nuanced sensations of color, smell, and texture in ways unique to Urhobo poetry.

Peter Emuejevoke Omoko, who teaches English at Delta State College of Physical Education in Mosogar, Nigeria and who studies translation and folklore, offers another analysis from Urhoboland through a study of a dramatic performance in his rich description of "The Dramatic and Poetic Contents of the Idju Festival of the Agbarha-Ame People of Warri" (pp. 93-122). Omoko describes the bi-annual festival with its intense ritualistic activities, a war duel, and a war dance. Omoko argues that the festival is an important cultural dramatic practice, understandable within its own worldview and aesthetics. The festival is a cultural event and an art performance with human and spiritual components, whose drama and poetry emerge to create an identity. Omoko argues that the festival performance contributes to an emerging heritage in Nigeria and Urhoboland amenable to analysis as a dramatic performance.

Brittany M. Hopkin, who researches post-colonial criticism, human rights, decolonization, and violence, race, and gender, addresses genocidal violence in Rwanda. Despite the fact that her article "Black against black, blood against blood" (pp. 34-64) addresses the oft-written subject of the Rwandan genocide, Hopkin undertakes a brilliant review essay which makes a compelling case that the 1994 genocidal violence in Rwanda can be traced to deep colonial histories of Belgian colonization. Hopkin details how the Belgians created tensions between Tutsi and the Hutus; the former being who the colonial 'masters' created as the ideal ruler, and the latter the ruled. Hopkin argues this fueled later to a post-colonial violence, the ferocity of which culminated in the genocide. The incompetence of the United Nations and the imperial countries makes the colonial ideology clear, and fanned the tensions between Hutu and Tutsi, leading to the genocide. Hopkin makes a provocative argument, her prose is lucid, and she leaves us to ponder how disturbing legacies of colonialism lead to violence.

Heather Donkers, a law student at Osgoode Hall in Toronto, offers "Is Surveillance the Solution?" (pp. 123-134). Her brief contri-

bution traces the installation of closed circuit television surveillance in the late 1990s and early 2000s by the police department of Johannesburg. Donkers follows the violence in Johannesburg back to apartheid South Africa, and includes in this broad category of violence high crime rates, disparities in wealth and poverty, attacks on migrants, and segregation. She looks at how Johannesburg became the crime capital of South Africa and the hyper-surveillance, through CCTV cameras, that became the 'solution' taken up by the metropolitan police department. Donkers argues that this project might have generally improved the functioning of the police, but for the fact that it had poor and unarticulated goals. On the one hand, she finds little evidence to show that CCTV reduced crime, and argues, on the other hand, that they made certain kinds of crime invisible. Essentially, this technological solution solved crimes that impacted predominantly white, urban, upper classes, while it made invisible crimes against others, especially sexual crimes against black women. She concludes by advocating for other crime reduction projects, as part of larger response to crime, violence, and fear in Johannesburg.

Nokoko 5 brings together these seven articles that demonstrate both the breadth and the depth of our concerns: The fields *Nokoko* serves are indeed vibrant.