

THE WAITING ROOM

for Youth on the Move in the Global South

An exhibition mounted for the International Convention of Asian Scholars (ICAS) 13

Surabaya, Indonesia, 28 July-1 Aug 2024

Curatorial Note / Abstract

The Waiting Room is an exhibition-proposal to invite participants of the ICAS13 conference to linger through the inquiries of the research programme 'Youth on the Move: Performing Urban Space in Global South'. Sponsored through the grant programmes of the Urban Studies Foundation since 2023, the project has grown substantially through collaborative networks and intellectual exchanges sustained through the support of French Institute Pondicherry, Humanities Across Borders and International institution for Asian Studies, Leiden and the Lagos Studies Association. 'Youth on the Move' investigates diverse and non linear space-time relationships that the youth inhabit and co-produce while navigating urban space across Asia-Africa. 'The Waiting Room' is a knowledge-sharing exhibition narrating about 50 stories of youth across Africa-Asia documented in collaboration with the growing network of actors and institutions that have germinated through the ongoing field work and across the region.

Literally, 'The Waiting Room' is a place within the conference through which people not only pass by, sit, idle, catch up on breath, take rest, chit chat but also note information, read stories, make connections, wander, contemplate; activating the work of imagination. Metaphorically, it indexes a host of allied practices and subjectivities through which the urban youth perform the politics of living within the global south, navigating the never fully implemented infrastructures, lack of sufficient state support or traverse desires and destinations to escape everyday anxieties. The practices invented to reconcile or circumvent these situations demonstrate modes of enterprise and meaning making, and showcase a liminal situation of becoming, thus bringing the notion of a static space, i.e. the waiting room, in dialogue with that of being on the move.

Imagined as a transitory and fragmentary portal / pavilion within the conference site, the waiting room is a receptacle of multiple temporalities in material and space that hint at the politics of (in)visibility of youth in the region of Africa-Asia. It brings viewers to consider the dialectics of youth-actions and corresponding (un)folding urbanities through stories that may offer new insights into their own practice of maneuvering their respective contexts. In the form and material held within the waiting room, visitors may engage and play, make friendships, maneuver around rules, share information - thus building agency and networks for the(ir) future.

In addition to the above cited institutions, the curators would like to acknowledge the academic support offered by Peking University (Beijing), Tongji University (Shanghai), School of Environment & Architecture (Mumbai), Ambedkar University (Delhi), Geoffrey Bawa Trust (Sri Lanka), DBSA Art Programme (Nairobi) as well as the local partners from Surabaya. Scholars from the above institutions shall contribute to the story-telling and participate in the round table discussion entitled "Linger Longer: Collaborative Engagement in Collecting and Narrating Young Peoples' Stories".

Youth on the Move Team

Anuj Daga (School of Environment and Architecture, University of Mumbai)

Min Tang (Tongji University)

Ying Cheng (Peking University)

Contributors

Advit Kalgutkar
Andrew Adigwe
Anu Sabhlok
Brian Otieno
Collective Research Initiatives Trust (CRIT)
Dream Building Service Association (DBSA)
Dimas Ijat
Dwiputra Rizkyandhani
Ennovate Dance House
Illuminate Theatre Productions
Ka Kin Cheuk
Li Dong
Min Tang
Nadya Perera
Nancy Chelwek
Nisha Nair
Nitesh Patel
Patrick Shomba
Prakriti Shukla
Pranjal Sancheti
Prasad Shetty
Rezsa Lellyana
Rupali Gupte
Ryan Herdiansyah
Qidi Feng
Segun Adefila
Shambhavi Bhushan
Studio Immaterial
Tatiana Thieme
Wong Liensheng

Ying Cheng
Yusuf Avci
Zenzo Siamenda

Production

Tasyha Febrycha
Taufiq Ezha Prianto

Site Assistance

Ayos Purwoaji
Gata Mahardik

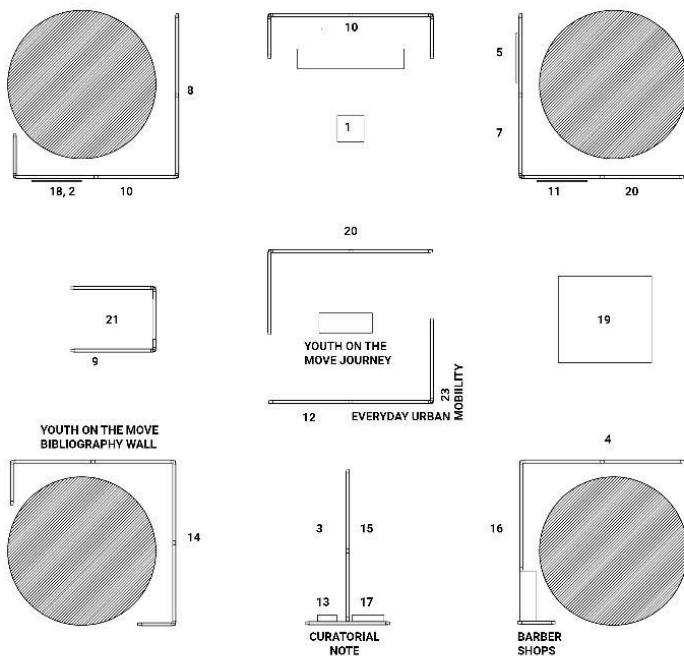
Execution

Anggie Arizal Geovanni
Gilvan Rachmadhany
Lutfiah Setyo Cahyani
Aliyya Azra Amanina
Annisa Rahmatillah
Muhammad Afif muqsith
Sarah Nur Rizqi
Nayla Dewi Putri Wardana
Happy Firnie Nur Khaila
Bryan Setya Darma

Acknowledgements

A4 Museum
Charlot Ngwenya
Deep Desai
Dimas Kuswantoro
Sunil Jambhulkar

Exhibition Plan



THE WAITING ROOM: EXHIBITION PLAN
ASEEC Tower, Ground Floor Lobby, Universitas Airlangga

Work Abstracts

TIME PASS GATEWAY

3d printed model (1:100)

2023

Imagined as a petit infrastructure at the edge of an urban village in the suburb of Borivali in Mumbai, the Timepass Gateway acts as an entrance to the residential rooms while providing an opportunity for pause for the labour passing by. At the same time, it offers shade to the steel workshop, seating space for the adjoining paan and chai (beetle leaf and tea) shop, includes facilities for drying clothes for the houses behind and becomes a viewing gallery for leisure or the occasional passerby. The lower level is designated for workshop storage, ensuring practical use of space and addressing the needs of the steel workshop. The upper level serves as a leisure area, fostering social interaction among the residents. Additionally, this space, making it a multifunctional area that addresses both practical and social needs. The stepped form creates moments of pause for users - both settled and moving, scaling the rapidly transforming urban village for micro social interactions. The gateway thus becomes a portal of holding time for a variety of people to connect.

Advit Kalgutkar

Student of Architecture

School of Environment and Architecture, Mumbai



OLOIBIRI

Short Film

13 mins 04 sec

2023

The film explores the daily hustle, bustle, and struggle of young people in Nigeria. Shot in Lagos, sub-Saharan Africa's largest city, it captures young dancers' bodily movements across various urban landscapes. Drawing its name from Oloibiri, a now-deserted town where oil was first discovered in Nigeria, the film highlights Nigeria's "oil dilemma" —the country is one of Africa's leading oil producers, yet it paradoxically imports a significant portion of its refined oil due to insufficient domestic refining capacity. Apart from that, the film extends to other issues such as oil exploitation-related pollution and the use of generators due to unreliable electricity. The embodied movements of the performers captured in the film document the challenges faced by youth and their strategies for survival, highlighting infrastructural failures and their profound impact on daily life. These scenes also exemplify how national politics are often scrutinised through the lens of the everyday in contemporary Nigeria.

Andrew Adigwe

Travel documentary / lifestyle photographer, Lagos

Illuminate Theatre Productions

Creative lab based in Lagos

Its founding members are Ojudun Taiwo Jacob, Olowu Busayo, Uche Enechukwu, as well as a few other young performance artists based in the marginal communities in Mainland Lagos.

ROAD CHRONICLES: A SUBALTERN TRAVELOGUE

Accordion Fold Book

Mixed media collage on paper

4" x 7.5"

2024

This project tells a human story of the Hindustan-Tibet Road and the Manali-Leh Highway. It is envisaged as an alternative travelogue – that tells the stories of the 90,000 or so seasonal labourers who travel every year to build roads in the upper reaches of the Himalayas for India's Border Roads Organization (BRO). Their life stories; seasonal journeys; meanings given to their temporary homes in the border areas; the dangers and perils they face; the attempts to create a sense of the community in an alien landscape; lifestyles and cultural idioms carried over (and back) from their villages; the lives of the children who travel each year with their parents, the recipes of the meals cooked...

Road Chronicles is a subaltern travelogue assembled as hand-made messy and patchy accordion book using images, narratives and sketches gathered over 10 years of fieldwork. It collages together moments in these migrant journeys over time and space on the ubiquitous brown paper used for shipping goods in transit. Anu Sabhlok has been following road construction labourers that seasonally migrate from Jharkhand to road construction sites in Himachal, Ladakh and Kashmir to build India's border roads. The work references circularity, linearity, connection and movement. It enables diversions in the form of fold outs and can represent transformations and continuities even as it shows flow.

Relevant links or further reading:

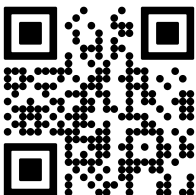
www.migrantlabourers.wordpress.com <https://roadsides.net/sabhlok-sharma-002/>

Anu Sabhlok

Architecture, Urban Studies, Geography, Women's Studies

Professor, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research Mohali (IISER Mohali)

With photographic assistance from Harsha Dantuliri and Harsh Vardhan Singh, former students at IISER Mohali



THE GENTLEMEN FROM THE SLUM

Photographs

Prints on paper

297 x 420 mm

2020

In Kibera - the largest slum in Kenya and one of Nairobi's most bustling informal settlements - waiting is an art form mastered by its resilient youth. This practice is not merely a passive act but a testament to their patience, hope, and determination. The "Vintage Empire" members exemplify this spirit as they navigate the complexities of their everyday lives through the art of fashion. Vintage Empire is a distinctive group formed by four unemployed but visionary young men living in Kibera. This collective is characterised by its unique and stylish vintage fashion sense, which includes wearing stylish suits, colourful ties, hats, and leather shoes bought from local second-hand markets. Their choice of clothing is not merely about fashion; it serves as a personal, social, and political statement that reflects their diverse journeys and the multiple realities they navigate daily.

These young men blend personal expression with a powerful statement against the harsh socio-economic conditions they face daily. Their unique fashion sense symbolises their aspirations and defiance against the limitations imposed by their surroundings. Waiting takes many forms for these youth—waiting for opportunities that are often scarce, recognition that transcends the boundaries of their environment, and the chance to redefine their narratives. Their stylish attire is more than just clothing; it represents their dreams and resilience. Balancing dreams of higher education with the immediate need to survive, these youth meticulously maintain their vintage wardrobes as a form of silent protest and self-preservation. They embody creativity inherited from their families, calling on their peers to embrace individuality and reject uniformity. The 'Vintage Empire' members are making more than just a fashion statement through their clothing. They are also sparking discussions about Kenya's socio-political landscape, using style to engage others in conversations about real change. Adorned with vintage collections, their shacks become sanctuaries of self-expression and inner peace, transforming painful pasts into creative presents.

In Kibera, waiting is not a sign of inaction but a powerful declaration of faith in a better tomorrow. These gentlemen from the slum stand as a beacon of hope, illustrating that even in the most challenging circumstances, the youth of Kibera continue to wait, dream, and strive for a future where their voices are heard and their identities are celebrated.

Brian Otieno

Photojournalist and Documentary Photographer, Nairobi, Kenya
Kiberastories, Everyday Africa

BEING NICELY MESSY

Collective Research Initiatives Trust, Rupali Gupte, Prasad Shetty and team
Multimedia Video Installation
2012

The work here is an excerpt from the exhibition 'Being Nicely Messy' originally exhibited as a part of the Audi Future Initiatives 2012, where CRIT was invited. It is an attempt to give form to the complex urban ecosystem, where different kinds of relationships play out to produce a highly networked city. It is through this ecosystem that one has to navigate in order to mobilize one's own urban future. The exhibition had five sections:

(a) The tracing of trajectories – an animated diagram that uses our research of the nine sites to show the complexity of the urban condition and the multiplicity of its future towards drawing broad trajectories that will shape the future. (b) The poles of future cities – a set of poles that house miniature conditions of everyday life and the urban landscape in 2030 shaped by the urban contradictions of today. (c) Shelves of tools – which house a series of tools devised by CRIT to engage with the future (d) The screens of possibilities – a set of screens illustrating how the new landscapes could be reshaped using the tools at different sites. (e) Stories of mobility – a text-collage that describes the complex urban ecosystem identifying relationships, tools, agents, and platforms that constitute the urban realm. These stories run across the exhibition space connecting the different elements of the exhibition. In the waiting room, we have four videos from this exhibition.

A. The Tracing of trajectories (animated diagram)

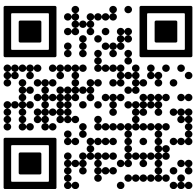
B. Possibilities a. Bandra Skywalk b. Mumbai Trans Harbour Link c. Mohammad Ali Road

Relevant links or further reading: <https://crit.in/initiatives/emerging-urbanism/being-nicely-messy/>

Collective Research Initiatives Trust

Artist, Architect, Urbanist group, Mumbai

The project 'Being Nicely Messy' was led by Rupali Gupte and Prasad Shetty. The team for the project included: Rupali Gupte, Prasad Shetty, Prasad Khanolkar, Chitra Venkataramani, Rohan Shivkumar, Khyatee Kanchan, Anuj Daga, Jeet Dutta, Kartik Gala, Vinita Gatne, Shivani Shedde, Prachi Patel, Apurva Talpade and Namrata Kapoor with support and assistance from RR Planks, Addmake India and Lycodon fx.



CROWN TROUPE OF AFRICA

Crown Troupe of Africa is a theatre troupe established in 1996, in Bariga, Lagos. It has been the most active Nigerian theatre troupe in the past two decades. As one of the leading performance institutions in Bariga, the troupe has produced many professional performance artists who are active in Nigeria and abroad. Besides its substantial original repertoire, Crown Troupe is also renowned for their groundbreaking and innovative interpretations of existing plays, which are adaptable for both conventional and unconventional performance spaces.

The founder of Crown Troupe of Africa is Segun Adefila (also known as 'Oriade'), one of the leading contemporary Nigerian theatre artists. Adefila's first encounter with the arts could be dated to his childhood in Omu Aran in Kwara State, where as a child he danced with masquerades during traditional festivals. This background has greatly influenced theatre practices of Segun Adefila (and Crown Troupe) who consider the role of art a veritable tool for social rejuvenation. With its theatre festivals such as "Eko Theatre Carnival", Crown Troupe has become an essential platform for opening up critical debates on public issues, and for forging radical politics among young performance artists and their audiences in Nigeria.

**COMIC BOOKS AND MOVING NARRATIVES:
a storytelling journey between Mathare and China**

Comic books + Photos

2015-ongoing

Why is art important for slums? The comic books are part of the outcome of the DBSA ART PROGRAM's 2019 storytelling workshop in the Mathare slum (Nairobi, Kenya). As Kenya's second-largest slum, Mathare youth face crucial daily challenges such as violence and poverty. Art and basic needs may seem like controversial elements, and art has never been the primary focus of the local schools' curriculum. However, by exploring the art program with local schools and civic associations since 2015, we have recognized that art is an important tool for vulnerable individuals who may not be adept at public speaking. For them, narratives generated through the art workshop are powerful expressions of their daily survival experiences. Art also enables narratives on the move. Stories from Picun (Beijing) and Storyland (Shanghai) became materials for the comic book and photographic workshop in Nairobi. The comic books created in Nairobi (2019-2023) traveled to Paris (2023), were exhibited at the 10th iSTART Art Festival at A4 Museum in Chengdu (2024), and now to Surabaya. The DBSA Art Program workshop has expanded into a series of storytelling journeys. At each stop, local materials encounter traveling stories and become part of the journey co-produced by many actors.

Dream Building Service Association (DBSA) and partners

Collective Art workshop led by Min TANG and Art Program volunteers from DBSA, in collaboration with Local Schools at Mathare slum (Nairobi), and many civic partners including Picun (Beijing), Storyland (Shanghai), Mwelu Foundation (Nairobi), and A4 Art Museum (Chengdu).

ENNOVATE DANCE HOUSE

Ennovate Dance House is a dance group established by dance artists and activists from Oworonshoki, a marginal community in Lagos located at the foot of the Third Mainland Bridge. This group is transforming the narratives of the slum communities with their dancing practices. In the past years, they have organized influential public dancing events and festivals such as “Slum Party”, “Afro Communal Offering”, and so on.

The founder of Ennovate Dance House is Sunday Obiajulu Ozegbe (popularly known as ‘Valu’) is a dancer, activist and creative from Nigeria. Valu a trained dancer from the QDANCE CENTER—one of the most active dance schools in Lagos, and a seed award recipient of Prince Claus Fund. In 2017, Valu was selected for training in Artistic Activism at the Center for Artistic Activism, New York. Through his work he focuses on amalgamating performance with community development, bringing the style of dance activism to the fore.

ILLUMINATE THEATRE PRODUCTIONS

Illuminate Theatre Productions is a multidisciplinary creative lab where a collection of young Nigerian performance artists collaborate to create different experimental and artistic projects. They work in the field of dance, music, drama and performance art. Founding members of Illuminate Theatre Productions are Ojodun Taiwo Jacob, Olowu Busayo, Uche Enechukwu, as well as a few other young performance artists based in the marginal communities in Mainland Lagos. With great sensitivity and originality, the young artists of Illuminate Theatre Productions have been using public performance as a way of intervening in the public. Particularly with their works in public spaces, they aim to make live performances accessible to everyone.

STUDIO IMMATERIAL

Studio Immaterial is a multidisciplinary art collective initiative officially established in 2023 in Surabaya, East Java. The collective delves into the study and creation of Architecture, Installation, Performing Art (theatre), Performance Art, and Video Art. Utilising a research-based approach, Studio Immaterial focuses on philosophy, reality and alternative reality, psychology, aesthetics decolonisation, and history and cultural heritage.

WAITING IN KEQIAO

Collage

Photography, text, and fabric samples

2009-ongoing

In the county-level district of Keqiao, a global hub for low-cost fabric trading in Zhejiang Province, China, waiting is a constant experience for both people and goods. Over half of the local population, including Chinese and foreign traders, especially those from India, Pakistan, and the Middle East, work in the fabric trading industries and related sectors. Many of them spend most of their time in offices, waiting for customers to make inquiries, collect samples, or call for updates on shipments. Fabrics often wait for long periods before traveling across the globe. Fabrics stored in warehouses wait to be processed, transported to shipping ports, and then shipped across oceans.

The fabric trading activities in Keqiao - the focus of my long-term and ongoing ethnographic research since 2009 - are an integral part of the broader global textile supply chain that sources raw materials, processes them into fabrics, and then transports those fabrics to reach the next round of buyers. These downstream buyers will then manufacture the fabrics into final textile products - such as garments, home textiles, and other consumer goods - before they ultimately reach consumers. Within this larger system, the people and goods in Keqiao are constantly waiting on one another - whether it's fabric traders waiting for buyers to place orders, transportation companies waiting to pick up shipments, or warehouse operators waiting to receive new inventory. This interplay of waiting is not limited to just those in Keqiao. Stakeholders at every stage of the supply chain, from raw material suppliers to end consumers, are all impacted by these delays and interdependencies. Retailers waiting for new inventory, consumers waiting for products to become available, and even the end consumers themselves are all part of this complex web of waiting experiences.

Ultimately, no single party - whether in Keqiao or elsewhere in the supply chain - is able to fully control the time frames involved. These long and convoluted chains mean that the waiting times remain subject to ongoing communication, intense negotiation, and closely coordinated activities across the entire textile value chain. This helps limit the potential for any particular player to accumulate outsized power or authority within the system, serving as an everyday counterweight against the existing hegemonic regimes - especially those perpetuated by the global North - in international trade.

Dr Ka-Kin Cheuk

Professor of Anthropology, University of Southampton, UK

AFRICAN COMMUNITY IN GUANGZHOU

Photographs

297mm x 420 mm

2013

Born in the 1960s in China, photographer Li Dong left his corporate office job in 2012 and picked up a camera, immersing himself in Baohanzhi Street, Yuexiu District, Guangzhou—the once largest African “enclave” in the city. Over two years of living and observing life on Baohan Street, he became a neighbor to the African community, initially met with caution but ultimately understood, capturing their daily lives and struggles in a foreign land. Through Li Dong's lens, the stories of these Africans, like those of young Chinese migrants working in Guangzhou, are inseparable from the city's transformation into a hub which is seen by some as the “capital of the Third World”.

People come and go in his photographs, witnessing the evolution of this “African street”, amidst a series of government-led rectification projects. In recent years, Li Dong has captured numerous stories of moving and waiting: an Angolan businessman pioneering online commerce between China and Africa, a Cameroonian clothing merchant marrying a Chinese woman, and a young African ceramics trader settling in Foshan. He has also witnessed the departure of many African businessmen compelled to leave due to visa expirations and the pandemic.

Li Dong

Independent Photographer, Guangzhou, China

OCCUPYING PARIS : ASYLUM SEEKERS' WAITING AND MOVING

Photographs

105 mm x 148 mm

2020-2024

While the so-called European refugee crisis no longer occupies the headlines, the continuously high number of asylum applications (131,000 in 2022; 142,649 in 2023) highlights its ongoing nature. However, asylum seekers have become much more invisible in Paris, occupying the city in a different way. Instead of gathering in large camps, they hide in tents scattered across various corners. These tents have become symbolic of the failure and saturation of both the "emergency shelter" and long-term "social housing" systems, as well as the absence of effective pathways between these systems. Since November 2020, police have evacuated encampments without offering adequate shelter to all. Even the evacuated migrants are only temporarily placed in gyms before being forced back onto the streets. These evacuations have triggered monthly protests from frontline CSOs, who also use tents as a symbol of their dissent.

The large number of new arrivals, many of whom are Africans and Asians, must constantly be on the move for basic survival, seeking places to eat, shower, sleep, work, and navigate the complex asylum system. This constant movement for survival is accompanied by long waits at each step of the application and appeal processes related to the asylum system. These photos, captured daily between 2020 and 2024, provide continuous documentation of the tents and the associated practices of waiting and moving.

Min Tang

Urbanist and Researcher, Research Professor, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University, Shanghai, China

POPULAR CARTOGRAPHY : NARRATING AND (RE)MAPPING OF / WITH DHARAVI YOUTH

Maps

2022

The sets of maps are outcomes from an experimentation of co-produced mapping practices with 30 youth in Dharavi, Mumbai. Publicly conceived as Asia's largest slum yet to be (re)developed, Dharavi has been branded by various names. However, by examining the everyday movements of young people within and beyond the official boundary, Dharavi is no longer seen as enclosed, but rather as part of a larger territory consisting of different times, spaces, and meanings performed by the youth.

Each map showcases two vital components. On the left is a 'Base Map' that crystallizes the drawing and narrating process of a dialogical session focusing on daily life, movement, memory, and imagery. The map is drawn and narrated by one Dharavi youth in conversation with Min Tang. On the right is the 'Narrative Map,' redrawn from the 'Base Map.' The Narrative Map places the drawn and narrated spaces of the Base Map onto a regular satellite map showing Dharavi and its surroundings. Both maps are juxtaposed and annotated with the drawing sequences and names of the mapped spaces, with the primary core space, indicating 'home,' highlighted in yellow.

This kind of redrawing became possible because of 1) multiple interactions between the youth and the researcher, and 2) the mobilization of other field knowledge by the researcher. Redrawing from the 'Base Map' to the 'Narrative Map' demonstrates a step in how knowledge co-produced in the field can be transformed into other forms in an open-ended way.

Min Tang

Urbanist and Researcher, Research Professor, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University, Shanghai, China

WHILE YOU SLEPT

Short film

23 minutes 55 seconds

2015

With the end of the war, there's been a substantial rise of Chinese investment in Sri Lanka. Hambantota, in the South of the island, was seen as a strategic centre and witnessed a sudden influx of Chinese male migrant labour. At a 'massage parlour' in Hambantota, a local girl tends to Chinese customers. She makes herself-up look 'Chinese' in order to appear more authentic in the eyes of her clients. When, without a warning, the management hires a Chinese woman to live and work there, the local girl fears being made redundant. She's threatened but at times finds herself fascinated by the new girl, in spite of herself. She grows obsessed with trying to imitate her competition. The metamorphosis has begun. Into what...remains the question. With the transition of power, ushered in by the presidential election in January 2015, the country's relations with China entered a hitherto unfamiliar, transitional phase.

Nadya Perera

Independent Filmmaker, Sri Lanka

Story and Direction: Nadya Perera

Screenplay: Nadya Perera and Boopathy Nalin

Producer: Anomaa Rajakaruna (Agenda 14)

This film is presented by Youth Create Project of Care International, Sri Lanka

NICHE MILTE HAIN | MEET YOU BELOW (IN THE BASEMENT)

Playing cards

Print on Paper

2024

The setting is a basement parking lot in a new, gated housing complex of suburban Mumbai. Amongst these array of parked cars is where the subaltern waits! Here, the women who work as house help (/maids/domestic workers) in the various houses of this complex meet at different times of the day based on their work-shifts. As they often walk long distances to come here, their place of work here, and many of them work in multiple homes to make ends meet, the wait time in between and after work, is spent in these basements on some discarded benches. Here they meet each other, huddle over phones to watch videos, gossip, exchange information, simply stretch their feet and rest, sometimes play cards - a sliver of social time within their otherwise laborious day. As they pass each other in the corridors, they just say – *Niche milte hai* or Meet you below (in the basement). Sometimes when the benches are empty, delivery personnels and drivers (mostly men) take over to rest. Behind the columns or a group of cars, the women and benches are strategically located to be hidden away from watchful 'formal' eyes - the prying watchmen, the CCTV cameras - of the upper class residents who 'don't want to see' their service staff as they move around in this housing complex. Thus the social spaces, created at the podium level - replete with parks, club houses, butterfly gardens - are meant strictly for the residents, so are the corridors and elevators. Though expected to be invisible, the women domestic workers know their movement is heavily monitored (They enter the premises first displaying their I-Cards and announcing their codes at the service gates, followed by separate elevators and sometimes separate servant doors). The bench in the basement is a chance they take, to rest and to wait.

The form of this work is inspired by the game of playing cards that the women and men sometimes play while waiting here. A game of thrill, promise, risk and chance; a game to pass time. Much like a deck of cards, in spite of an inherent rhythm, for a passerby this space and the people seem shuffling. Spanning across a day, the text offers a mere glimpse of the moments within the lives of these many women as they wait in the basement.

Nisha Nair

Architect, writer and urban researcher

PhD scholar, IIT Bombay, Mumbai

WILL YOU CROSS THE LAST RIVER?

Photographs

Size varies

2024

Nestled in the network of numerous rivers and rivulets is an archipelago of roughly 300 islands called Sundarbans. It is the largest contiguous mangrove forest in the world spread along the coast of India and Bangladesh. These moody rivers, never content with their creation, continually sculpt the islands and keep the topography of the region in constant flux. New islands are formed, and old ones are chipped away. This ephemerality of landscape, conditioned by cyclones, sea-level rise, and government neglect, makes survival difficult in the Sundarbans. When cyclones make landfall, they breach embankments, and the intruding brackish rivers make local groundwater and soil saline. An increase in water and soil salinity disrupts agriculture and fish cultivation for many years. Loss of livelihoods coupled with the government's lack of investment in creating alternative livelihoods pushes people to migrate out. In the Indian Sundarbans, people move to Kolkata (the nearest metropolitan area), other states in India that are rapidly urbanizing or in need of farm labour, or countries in need of construction labour. If they stay, they take on riskier professions such as catching crabs and fish in the narrow creeks of mangrove forests. This exposes them to tiger and crocodile attacks.

If people stay, they go through cycles of destruction and reconstruction, keeping them entrenched in poverty. However, access to their farmlands keeps them food-secure and cushions them from sudden economic shocks, such as loss of daily wages during a prolonged illness. If they leave to work in cities' informal economies, then they have no social safety net to fall back on – a grim reality that the COVID pandemic exposed through the mass exodus of migrant workers from Indian cities. In 2020, thousands of migrant workers were left hungry, penniless, and without any means to return to their villages. And then there are those people, who might benefit from migrating out but do not have the resources for it. Which is why the imminent question: *To migrate or not to migrate?* is not an easy one to answer. With exacerbating climate change impacts, we need to ask, 'should people migrate as a way to adapt?', 'who can migrate and why?', 'what is lost or gained with migration?', and many more questions that uncover the inequities of migration and adaptation. These are impending questions not just for the 7.5 million people of Sundarbans but also for the 500 million people living in other deltas.

To leave the Sundarbans one must cross a river or few. When one crosses the last river and moves to the city, they leave their family and social safety net behind. Would *you* cross the last river?

Prakriti Shukla

PhD Candidate, Urban and Regional Planning, University of Michigan

HOME AS ASSEMBLAGE: ARCHITECTURE FOR CIRCULAR MIGRATION

Interactive installation including drawings and text

15" x 15"

2023-24

What are the spatialities of home for circular migrants in Mumbai? This question is framed in the backdrop of the pervasive practices of circular migrants in Mumbai whose rhythmic circulations between near and far regions of India call into question common housing imagination. This research studies the repeating patterns that circular migrants across the regions of India follow during their journey. The idea of home is shaped through networks that they build throughout the journey. The analysis opens up the identity of a migrant, household configuration, type of social and political encounters and spatial affordances. The home in this condition becomes precarious and uncertain due to the repetitive movement of the migrant. It shapes through assemblage of networks within the socioeconomic context and aspirations. The durability of housing resides, not in the materiality of builtform, but in the durability of socioeconomic and political networks that constitute the production of home. The overlap of multiple intersecting scales of tenement, cluster, neighbourhood and settlement produces infrastructural encounters of home-making practice.

Pranjal Sancheti

Independent Architect

School of Environment & Architecture, Mumbai

HALO QUEEN

Installation

Stainless Steel, Head Mannequin, Human Hair, Plastic and Paper

2024

Afro wigs are a major part of African fashion; yet most human hair used in Afro wigs is sourced from Asia, including China, Vietnam, and India. This work is a recreation of a wig shop in Meibocheng, the largest wig mall in the world, located in Guangzhou. Halo Queen is the name of the wig shop where the artist/anthropologist Qidi Feng works. The trace of hair serves as a physical metaphor for the mobility of the human body. It is sourced from Asian women (Chinese, Vietnamese, Indian), and then sorted, assembled, and tailored by Asian women (Chinese, Bangladeshi, and North Korean). You are invited to touch the hair. Please feel the strength, smoothness, and texture of the hair strands. Female bodies are standardized by terms and jargons, packed in plastic bags, and shipped according to the world trade order. This work reflects the Asian end of the supply chain.

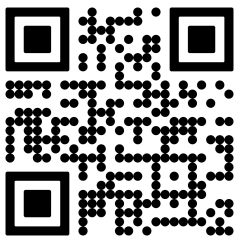
Relevant links or further reading:

<https://www.chinaafricafashionpower.org/>

Qidi Feng 冯颀

Anthropology, Cultural Analysis, Migration Studies, African Studies

PhD Candidate, University of Amsterdam



HOMESCAPING:

AFRICAN MIGRANTS AND SOCIO-SPATIAL STRATEGIES IN BENGALURU, INDIA

Domestic Objects and photographs including Spices, wig, wooden comb, local candies, nail extensions.

2024

This work delves into the struggles and obstacles African migrants face in Bengaluru, India, illuminating their daily strategies to carve out a semblance of home amidst pervasive social, political, and economic barriers or what I call “homescaping”. Drawn to Bangalore by its alluring rhetoric as the “Silicon Valley of India,” African migrants arrive with aspirations of affordable, high-quality education and subsequent employment opportunities. However, the reality they encounter is a stark contrast to their hopes: substandard education systems driven by profit motives, racialized immigration policies, and deep-seated local caste and race-based discrimination. These challenges manifest through inflated rents, property vandalism, and, in the most extreme cases, mob lynching and death.

In this landscape of everyday othering, homescaping emerges as a dynamic and continuous navigation and negotiation of spaces, objects, memories, and moments to forge a sense of home, however transient. This scaping of home, the author argues, is not in isolation from the Indian socio-cultural norms and legal rules but navigates and negotiates through them. African migrants, through their innovative socio-spatial practices, craft spaces of belonging by gathering and assembling objects, food, clothing, culture, and memories, intricately woven into multisensory experiences of taste, sight, and smell, evoking the essence of home. Creatively homescaping—moving, spending time, talking, drinking and waiting in spaces like illicit African Kitchens, African Churches and enclosed small, rented apartments—African migrants keep producing changes, novelty, potentiality, and a sense of home.

Shambhavi Bhushan

Associate Fellow

Institute for Human Development (IHD), New Delhi

NAIROBI HUSTLE

Video montage

3 mins 10 seconds

2017

Hustling in Nairobi has become the city's expressive articulation of struggle, solidarity and soul. Hustling has diverse meanings, moral connotations, and points of view. Tatiana Thieme conceptualizes hustle as four interconnected elements: First, it is a narrative of struggle associated with 'getting by' when income is made beyond the wage, and basic infrastructure is insecure. Second, it is a dynamic urban practice of (sometimes communal) self-provision that constantly adapts to volatile and uncertain environments. Third, it is a socially-embedded and place-based practice of exchange, distribution, and reciprocity shaped by the complex structures of opportunities and obligations unique to each individual's position and stage of life, involving different forms. Fourth, hustling is an oppositional as well as performative disposition that reflects 21st century versions of anti-colonial self-determination and agentive autonomy. Each of these four elements reveals the entangled web of economic, spatial, temporal, social and political life in precarious urban environments.

In Nairobi, hustle reflects the layered histories of anti-colonial struggles and uneven urban planning, and the role youth have played in shaping the first, and contesting the second. But hustling also reflects wider global histories and continuities of urban inequalities and insecurities. Therefore, inviting audiences to *think with* Nairobi opens up a wider reflection about the uncertain future of work, and the modalities of self-organised provisioning in cities with uneven services.

Nairobi Hustle catches a glimpse of the plural hustles that take place throughout the day, from the popular neighbourhoods to the city centre. The montage of images dance such that the audience could sense the micro-scenarios of urban life in Nairobi that reflect the diverse modalities of hustling at play. The physical, social, relational, material, political, cultural, affective, rhythmic, sensorial registers of hustling. The everywhere-ness of it, and its situatedness.

This short film was the result of a creative collaboration including: Urban ethnographer Tatiana Thieme, cinematographers Pato Shomba (co-founder of Ghetto Films and Creative Concepts), together with David Mwangi and Charles Kimani, with original music score composed and performed by Seb Thieme.

Tatiana Thieme

Associate Professor in Geography, University College London, UK

Patrick Shomba Mwai

Filmmaker, Nairobi

SUPERNOVA LAND

Artist Book

210 mm x 148 mm, 304pages

2023

Dinghai Qiao swings over the northeastern corner of Shanghai "with ease and power". It was a shelter and a haven for industrial workers, immigrants from northern Jiangsu, vegetable vendors, fishmongers, butchers, migrant workers, mutual aid societies, cats, dogs, moss, cockroaches, mosquitoes, maggots...and me.

In the late 19th century, the riverside village was incorporated into an International Settlement, where foreigners built roads and factories, and immigrants set up simple dwellings along the streets and riverbanks. People filled up the riverbed and continually self-built and added onto houses, forming a community with an extraordinarily rich architectural hierarchy. The namesake street at the center assumed the combined functions of transportation and a market, with nearly 150 stores concentrated within 400 meters, in addition to various temporary street vendors.

The Chinese title "Rainbow Bridge"(彩虹橋) is derived from "Bifrost" in Norse mythology and the reincarnation myth of the Taiwanese indigenous Atayal people, referring to a burning path that connects the human realm to the divine realm, a crossing to eternal life. If you have also opened this photobook, we will first take a ride from north to south, following the route that many take to the rainbow bridge. Burning rainbows, supernova-like bursting shock waves, the eternal return and constant transcendence of the everyday world. New times repeatedly unfold and variegate, accompanied by collapsing background noise, sparks igniting, burning away until they scatter like smoke, then regathering—the dream of an entire planet will exist within our bodies.

Relevant links or further reading:

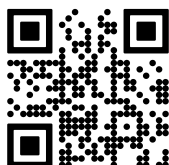
<https://www.douban.com/note/856267819/>

Wong Liensheng

Photographer

Graduate from the Department of Sociology at Shanghai University in 2016

Independent artist



ALTERNATIVE ART SPACES IN LAGOS

Photographs

2013-2024

The past decade has seen a remarkable emergence of youth art spaces in marginal communities in Lagos. As a result of the significant processes of neoliberal urbanism in Nigeria, conventional art spaces like theatre halls, art galleries and studios become increasingly exclusive and enclosed. In mainland Lagos, young artists from marginal communities along the lagoon (such as Bariga, Iwaya, and Oworonshoki) are occupying temporarily “abandoned” spaces—many of which face frequent threats of demolition—and transforming them into accessible creative hubs for local youths.

The photos demonstrate the spaces and artistic practices of artistic groups, namely Crown Troupe of Africa, Vernacular Art Lab, Ennovate Dance House and Illuminate Theatre. The young artists establish an embodied, critical relationship with the city by their performative activities (such as rehearsals, workshops, exhibitions, communal gatherings and protest performances) in the urban margins. The operation of these spaces enacts and interrogates the ambivalences of neoliberal governmentality in Lagos, especially its uneven distributions of infrastructures and its promotion of a self-reliant citizenship ethos.

Centralizing the body and lived experiences as essential sites for their politics of livelihoods and resistance, the generation of these art spaces diverges from the increasingly normative practices of “enclosure”, and animates new structures of feelings and social relations within the city. As an alternative form of knowledge production, the embodied practices provide the young participants with the language and tactics necessary to renegotiate their place in society, further shaping the trajectories of social and political events in and beyond the community.

Ying Cheng

Assistant Professor, Department of Asian and African Languages and Cultures, Peking University

CHINA BAG: THE SYMBOL OF GLOBAL SOUTH MIGRATIONS

Objects and Research Paper

2018

These bags are purchased from Dragon City, a Chinese wholesale market in Johannesburg, South Africa. In this market, this kind of mesh bags made of red, blue, and white polypropylene fibers are often referred to as “China bag” or “Chinese tote,” referring to its place of manufacture.

The bags are frequently used as mobile storage containers or baggage by migrants and traders moving across borders, and it has become an essential visual element of migrations and movements in different urban landscapes across the world especially in the Global South.

In South Africa, the bags are also commonly known as “Zimbabwe bags,” and other names based on who uses them or where they come from. For instance, “Mashangani bag” is related to the Shangani population in the eastern part of Limpopo Province. “Khonza ekhaya,” a Zulu term for the bag, means “goodbye home.” These bags go by many names in various parts of the world: “Bangladeshi bag” in the UK, “Turkish bag” or “Turkan Coffin” in Germany, “Mexican bag” in the US, “Samsonite” in the Caribbean, and so on. These naming patterns invariably imply different trajectories of human movements and encounters. Moreover, geocultural differentiation in the naming of the bag addresses the spatial arrangement of current economic and social processes and illustrates the complicated networks of movement and migration globally

Ying Cheng

Assistant Professor, Department of Asian and African Languages and Cultures, Peking University

TRAVELING WITH YOUTH IN IN MARGINAL LAGOS

A Research-Based Performance Tour

In June 2023, the Youth on the Move team travelled with invited artists from Nairobi and Mumbai to Lagos, and co-curated a research-based performance project together with Nigerian artistic groups in the urban margins. The project aims to bring scholars, practitioners, and community members together through workshops, public performances, and community roundtables. We see this project as a shared journey, examining the gaps and exploring the interactions in knowledge productions between the street, stage, and seminar rooms.

The project begins with field trips through marginal neighborhoods along the lagoon, namely Bariga, Iwaya, and Oworonshoki. In the first few days, we navigated these communities using local transportations and participated in the rehearsals for three performance pieces themed around “youth on the move”. These experiences—such as maneuvering through the bustling Yaba market in a keke and traveling by small wooden boat on the lagoon from Iwaya to Bariga—have to some extent allowed us to immerse ourselves in the daily lives of local youth. Walking through the flooded streets of Iwaya during the rainy season, some residents generously lent us their rainboots to help us traverse the seriously waterlogged roads.

These encounters have also helped us understand why young artists choose specific themes and methods for their public interventions, such as choreographing collective dance performances on flooded roads to urge local governments to repair them. At the same time, we also realised that to foster genuine dialogues between the campus and the streets, we must explore a more egalitarian and embodied collaborative approach. We opted to use danfo—the yellow minibuses, a daily commuting method for most Lagosians—to connect the three public performances. The initiative encourages scholars to embark a danfo journey, stepping out of the classrooms and into the marginal communities of Lagos alongside the artists.

Our performance journey began with the Annual Conference of Lagos Studies Association at University of Lagos. Hundreds of international and local scholars attending the conference witnessed the performance by Ennovate Dance House. Youth from Oworonshoki brought their life stories to the open square in front of the university library, where graffiti artist Nancy Chelagat’s minibus creation stood before the iconic statue of the Reading Girl. Amidst the rain, booming sound systems and intense dance movements narrated the youths’ life trajectories, disrupting the serene campus and normative academic conference programmes.

The second stop of the performance was at the community school in Iwaya. Illuminate Theatre Productions has been collaborating with youth here for years, emphasizing intergenerational transmission as vital to knowledge production. They view dance as a medium for transmitting knowledge and expanding educational opportunities for all. With inscriptions like “Change us, do not chain us” (as well as monologues written by themselves), the youth address their daily experiences of precarity, unemployment, violence and exclusivity to the audiences and community members. Here, audiences had to wait in the scorching sun, endure power outages and broken sound equipment amidst busy traffic on the streets. These challenges tested everyone’s patience, reminding us of the daily struggles faced by people living here.

The Crown Art Factory in Bariga was our final destination on this journey, and it was the perfect venue for our roundtable forum on knowledge production. Over the past twenty years, Crown Troupe of Africa has been dedicated to engaging unemployed or out-of-school youth from the surrounding communities, generating hundreds of youth performance groups in the Bariga area. This is not only a platform where young people spend their free time but also where they understand national politics and the world around them. In their Pidgin English performance titled "Progressive Express", the performers compare Nigeria as a minibus (danfo) that "needs treatments" driven by "irresponsible leaders".

In addition to the programme at LSA, the invited rap artist Nitesh Patel of YOTM team, stayed in Lagos between 11th-17th July and participated in the 2023 Slum Party initiated by Ennovate Dance House in Oworonshoki. Two songs were produced and performed through the collaboration between African and Asian artists (including young artists from India, South Africa and India) during the 2023 Slum Party titled "Village of Dreamers".

By constructing a repertoire of personal stories and local histories, these performative practices and movements of the youth centralise the body and the living realities as essential sites for decolonial politics, and they demand alternative frameworks for interpreting citizenship and publicness in the Southern cities today. Moreover, the comparative and collaborative model adopted in this project casts new light on our understanding of "Southernness" and prompts us to reflect on the multiple meanings of "southernness" in our ongoing projects across Asia and Africa.

HAIR SALONS, BARBER SHOPS AND WIG STORES AT HOME AND ABROAD

Multimedia Installation

In many African and Asian cities, hair salons and barbershops are essential sites of livelihoods and identities for urban youth. They are not only means of economic struggles but also spaces of socialising, self-care, aspirations and leisure.

Amidst rising unemployment rates, many young people in urban areas are finding employment or entrepreneurial opportunities within hair salons and barbershops. They work as hairstylists, barbers, or assistants. Some even embark on starting their own small businesses, often beginning with a small outdoor space within their community.

Hair salons and barbershops provide venues where individuals can express their aspirations through their hairstyles. Whether experimenting with new looks, maintaining cultural traditions, or embracing global hip-hop styles (as detailed in anthropologist Brad Weiss's insightful book on Hip-hop barbershops in Tanzania), young people use their hair to perform complex identities. Moreover, hair salons and barbershops are vibrant community spaces. For the urban youth, hair salons provide more than just grooming and styling services; they offer opportunities for networking and the exchange of experiences and ideas. For young people from another southern country striving to make a living far from their homeland, this place offers a temporary sense of home. These spaces are integral to the social fabric of urban environments, fostering connections through shared daily experiences and the embodied politics of hair.

YOUTH ON THE MOVE: EVERYDAY URBAN MOBILITY

Installation

Size various

2024

In many cities of Asia and Africa, informal modes of public transportation such as mini-buses, motorbikes, and tricycles play a vital role. Take the minibus for an example, they are known by various names: “matatu” in Nairobi, “trotro” in Accra, “danfo” in Lagos, “daladala” in Dar es Salaam, “poda-poda” in Freetown, “taxis” in South Africa, and “angkot” in Surabaya. These informal modes of transport are indispensable to urban life, particularly in the context of inadequate formal infrastructures. They serve as crucial lifelines that keep cities moving, offering flexible and accessible transportation solutions for the majority of urban dwellers.

Informal vehicles are devised not merely for moving people, but also for moving goods and mobile enterprise. The *haathgaadi* (hand-cart) and *thela* across cities of South Asia are found in different iterations, with two and four wheels respectively, that are (un)motorised and economic means of transporting a variety of things. These are also suited to the conditions and sizes of lanes available to move within inner cities areas. Such forms of movements entangle the machine and the body in unique ways, the performances of which get inscribed forever into the space and people of place.

These means of informal transport are more than just means of getting around; they reflect dynamic urban spatial politics. They are constituents of urban popular culture, shaping unique subcultures, lifestyles and identities among the youth (Mbugua wa-Mungai, 2014). Aesthetics and slogans of mini-buses are considered forms of “people’s art” (Daniel E. Agbiboa 2023), representing not just how people move but also their beliefs, aspirations, grievances, struggles and resilience. Understanding informal transport is essential to grasping the pulse of the city in the Global South.

**Collected by Youth on the Move team
in assistance with Sunil Jambhulkar**

WAITING IN JAPAN: ASYLUM SEEKERS' JOURNEY FROM DETENTION TO LOVE

Dialogue cards and photographs

Paper

2024

Japan has one of the lowest refugee acceptance rates among developed countries. Consequently, the majority of asylum seekers, mainly from Sri Lanka, Turkey, Pakistan, India, and Cambodia, are either waiting for a decision or have been refused. It also means that they live without legal protection or working rights, do not have access to the health system, and are even subjected to detention. However, their lives are not solely defined by pain or entirely negative experiences. On the contrary, many asylum seekers have established meaningful lives for themselves in Japan. Their experiences are encapsulated by the concept of "productive liminality," which explains their liminal yet productive lives in Japan.

Liminality is often used with negative connotations to emphasise spatial and temporal in-betweenness, waiting, limbo, and legal complexities. In the Japanese context, however, asylum seekers apply precisely for this liminality, aware that their chances of being recognised as refugees are slim. Nevertheless, they still apply because this in-between status buys them time to improve their lives in Japan, a concept understood as "productive liminality."

This exhibition draws on a year-long ethnographic research in Tokyo, including participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews, to explore how asylum seekers experience, negotiate, and cope with life within their liminal status in Japan. These experiences vary based on legal status, personal traits, and social networks. Those with legal status enjoy certain privileges, such as residence and work permits, while those without face restrictions on mobility, employment, and even detention.

The exhibition underscores the resilience of asylum seekers within the Japanese asylum regime, particularly in the contexts of detention, work, love, and marriage. Despite the challenges, asylum seekers manage to assert their identities and resist dehumanising treatment even in detention. In the realm of work, they create informal networks and find employment opportunities, demonstrating remarkable resilience and adaptability. The quotes and stories presented here offer a glimpse into the lives of asylum seekers in Japan.

Relevant links or further reading:

Avcı, Y. (2020) 'An Ethnographic Inquiry into Being an Asylum Seeker in Japan', PhD thesis, University of Sheffield. Available from: <https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/28467/>

Yusuf Avcı

Anthropologist, Assistant Professor, Social Sciences University of Ankara, Türkiye