

PIETER VAN DER HOUWEN

AFRICAN TABLOID



Europe 9,90 Euro | South Africa 150 Rand | UK 7,50 Pound | US 10,95 Dollar | China 70 Yuan



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AFRICAN

TABLET

In 2012, I travelled to Guangzhou to research a documentary about the vibrant African community in this massive Chinese city. At any given moment there are upward of 250 000 Africans in Guangzhou, who spend \$40 million a day on average.

The intense interaction between the Africans and the Chinese was remarkable; language barriers were overcome and business flourished. In this economic frenzy, it soon dawned on me that the Chinese and the Africans have something in common: they both have no sense of entitlement. They can never look towards a government for assistance or support – a trait not shared with Europeans, who (some might argue) have an over-developed sense of entitlement. I felt as if I were witnessing a global shift announcing a new social and economic order. This revelation led me to expand this project, documenting various migrant communities on four continents, which resulted in this publication.

African Tablet celebrates the adaptability and resilience of migrants. It is a testament to a new and inexorable process heralding a changing world – a world that Europe seems to have difficulty coming to terms with, as it is still preoccupied with its commanding past, but sadly has no idea of the shape of its immediate future.

In 2010 I came across a startling statistic claiming that the amount of money sent back to the African continent by African migrants exceeds that of all Western aid. These so-called remittances are well targeted and are not subject to corruption as the money flow remains in a closed circuit of trust, mainly between relatives. I was surprised to learn how well-kept a secret this statistic is. It did however trigger my interest and was the beginning of this ongoing project.

One of the biggest contradictions in this new globalized world is the tension surrounding migration. In a world where the mobility of capital, goods and information has been liberalized to unprecedented levels hardly restrained by border formalities, the actual bodily movement of people is more curtailed than ever before.

Migration dominates the political agenda, it has struck a visceral cord among the electorate, and populist politicians are more than willing to play into the fears that preoccupy the potential voter. Fuelled by an accommodating media, migration has seized Europe's imagination. However, in this frenzied debate focused solely on the legality of migrants, one thing is often ignored: the existing 'legal' African Diaspora. Once perceived as a straightforward avenue from departure to assimilation, migration is now recognized as a process in which migrants establish communities within a globalised world as they continue to participate in cultural, economic and political life in both their home and host countries. Money is sent 'home', along with political and democratic agendas. Social media has created a platform where cultural ideas are communicated vigorously. It is undeniable that the African diaspora will be pivotal in changing Western perceptions of the African continent. For example art produced from within the African diaspora isn't

defined geographically and escapes the categorization of "African art". This development might seem trivial but is in my opinion a harbinger of new perceptions of the African continent.

The concept of "diaspora" has traditionally been connected to the dispersal of the Jews, thereby carrying a strong connotation of suffering, loss and eventual return. In recent years the concept has gained political currency, and a growing interest in diasporas as political mediators of development and peace building has emerged. The African Union considers diasporas to be the sixth region of Africa. Globalisation has transformed political dynamics and new patterns of human mobility have created global social networks. New political processes are rooted in communities and networks that are not restricted by geographic location.

More and more people agree that fifty years of traditional aid and development has not resulted in any significant poverty reduction. This has triggered the recognition of the diaspora as a significant development resource. The untapped potential within certain African migrant diasporas has been widely ignored. It has, however, become evident that the economic, political and cultural influence of the African diaspora is substantial.

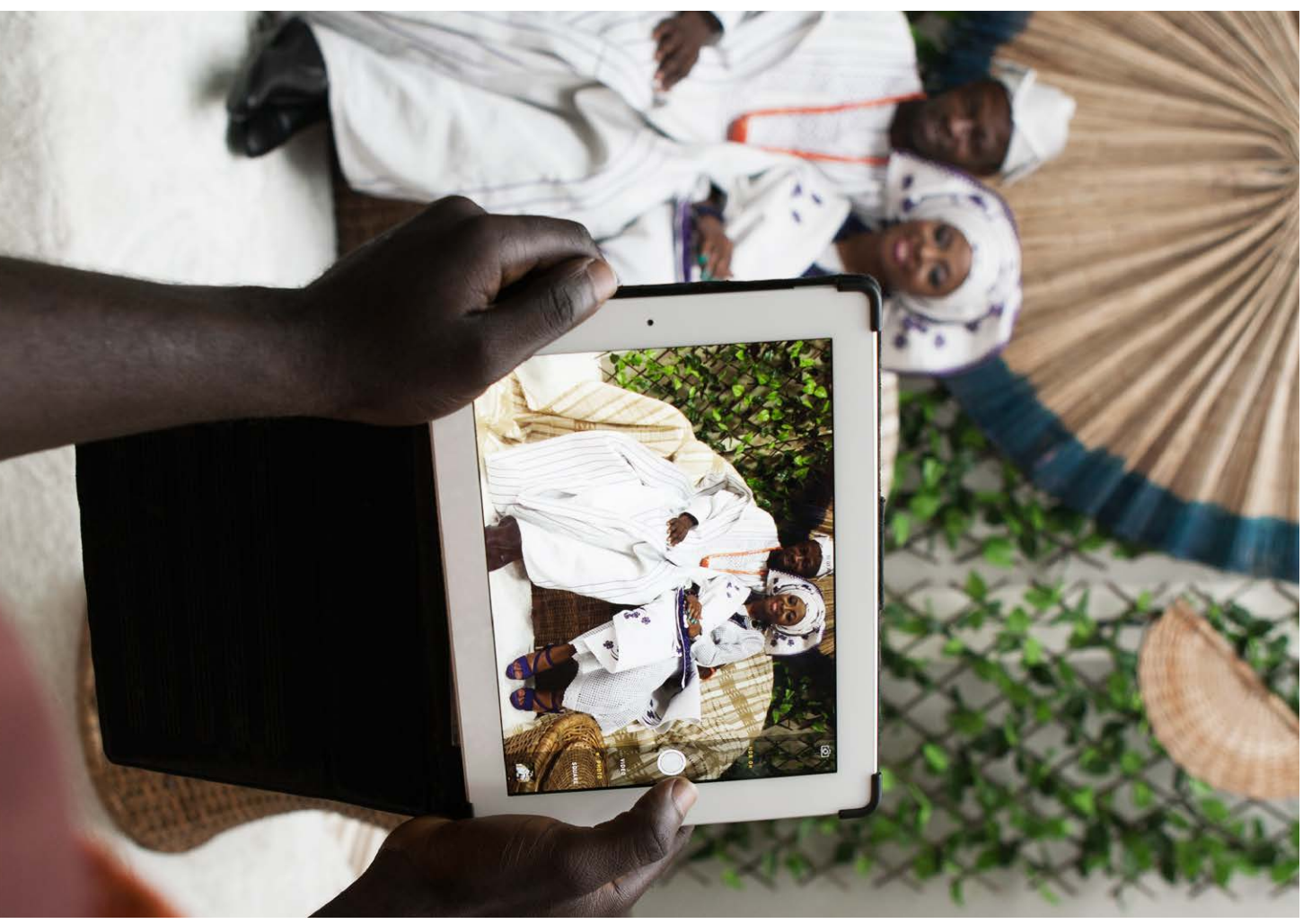
The objective of this publication is to put migration into a more realistic context. The images depict resilient and successful migrants. The tabloid format was chosen to counter the numerous tabloids that present an image of a so-called "tsunami" of African immigrants heading towards Europe.

Africans carving out an existence in China are more representative of the new global order - one that differs specifically from the relationship between Africa and Europe, devoid of any colonial hangover. This explains a slight emphasis of focus towards the African migrants in China.

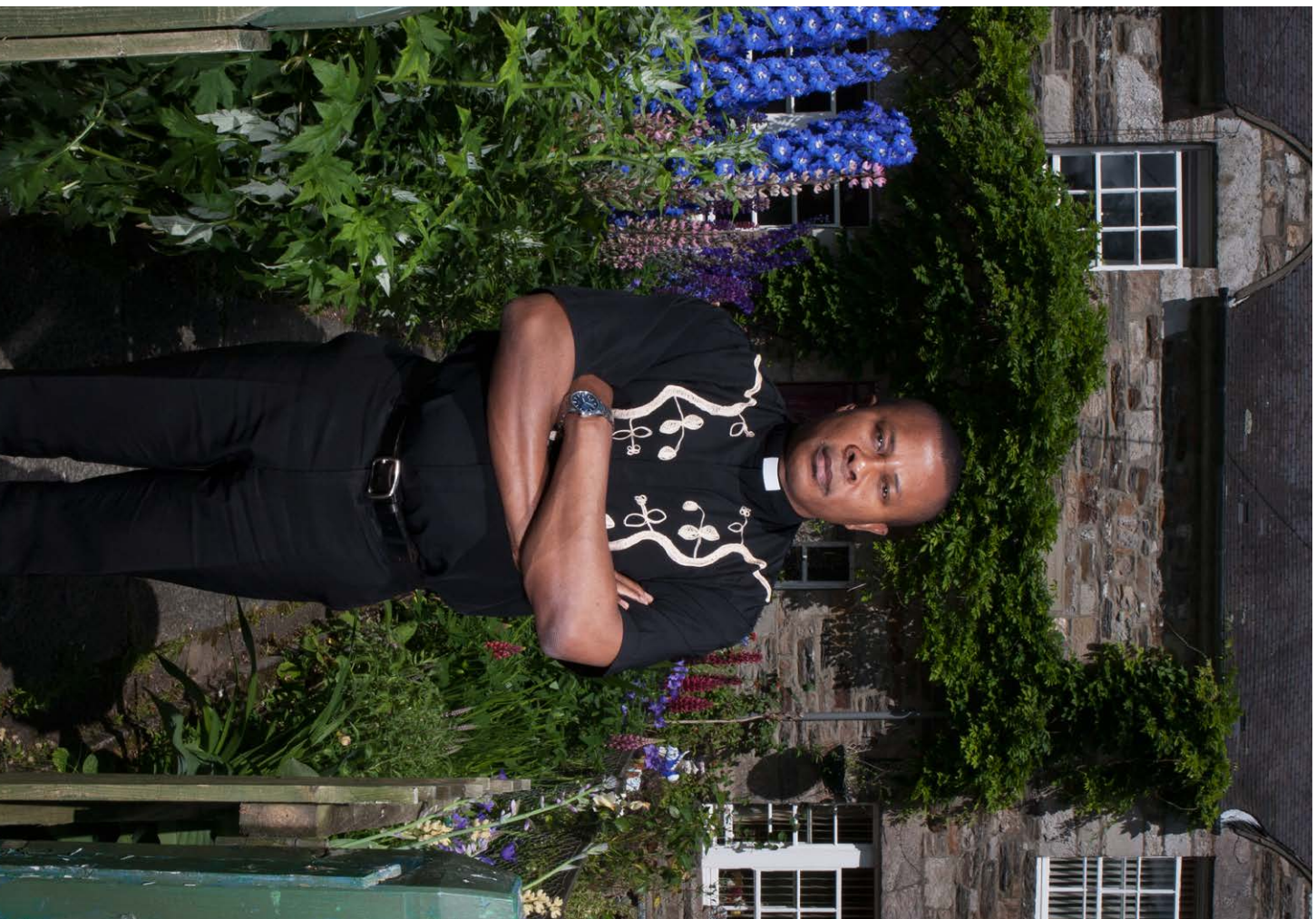
HIDDEN TRUTH

PIETER VAN DER HOUWEN

The wedding of Olunayomi Oyeleke & Temitope Olatunji who returned to Lagos after thirteen years in Johannesburg.



Nigerian Priest Tobias Okoro, Pitlochry, Scotland



Scotland is a relatively new destination for African migrants. A steady influx of migrants started arriving around the beginning of this century. The majority has relocated to Scotland from England and has settled in Glasgow, Scotland's largest city. →

ETHIOPIA

→ Most Africans I meet find Glasgow less racist than the large English cities down south. I find it hard to believe that racism is less prevalent amongst Glaswegians than amongst English urbanites. Glasgow, once an industrial powerhouse and the second most important city in the British Empire, went into complete economic meltdown in the early 1970s. The shipping industry (20% of all ships in the world were built in Glasgow) vanished within a decade. Glasgow in the 1980s is often compared to present-day Detroit after its massive automotive industry relocated to more labor competitive countries. Both cities have frequently been labeled “post-industrial apocalypses”. Glasgow has slowly recreated itself, but the scars are still visible and unemployment is high – not the most welcoming environment for migrants.

However, research by the Migration Observatory at Oxford University reveals that acceptance levels of migrants are significantly higher in Scotland than in England. At a UK level, immigration dominates the political agenda and for some time has been one of the most salient issues in the media. The issue dominates all political parties. This, however, is not the case in Scotland, where immigration has not (yet) permeated the political arena. The trajectory of racist rhetoric is from above to below. It seems that once politicians embrace populist slogans such as “British Jobs for British people” (Gordon Brown 2009), it is then picked up and embellished by mainstream media and this inevitably gives the general public license to voice their own grievances. In their never-ending quest for votes, most politicians’ only reaction to dissatisfaction amongst a potential electorate is to harden the rhetoric surrounding immigration, creating a vicious circle of visceral populism. This is not yet an issue in Scotland.

Some theories suggest that the Scots hold the “English” political establishment responsible for all social and political grievances, conveniently using Westminster as a deflector for internal Scottish issues. Consequently, should Scotland become independent, it could no longer blame Westminster, and therefore it would internalize its grievances, blaming the newcomer (and the migrant in particular) for all that is amiss in society.

The UK is a favored destination for many migrants; the main reasons being the English language and, more importantly, a favorable climate for entrepreneurs. I meet Bintu Summers in Parkhead, one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the East End of Glasgow. She is originally from Sierra Leone. Before arriving in Glasgow, she spent five years in the Netherlands. At first she enjoyed the Netherlands, but after some time she realized that her possibilities were very limited. Through the diasporic network, she heard that starting your own business was relatively easy in the UK. She now owns her own hairdressing salon located in Parkhead, which she runs with her Nigerian assistant Ruth, who specializes in cornrows and hair extensions.

Glasgow, with its industrial past and subsequent economic downfall, has always been a staunch socialist stronghold. The city’s hard line relationship with Westminster is best illustrated by an event in 1980, when the Glasgow city council gave Nelson Mandela the key to the city. This outraged Margaret Thatcher, who still labeled Mandela a terrorist, and she subsequently threatened to withdraw government subsidies to Glasgow. In 1986, at the height of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, the undeterred Glasgow city council renamed St George’s Place to Nelson Mandela Place. This was highly significant as “Nelson Mandela Place” then became the address of the South African Consulate, which was located there.

This is perhaps a captivating anecdote, but I seriously doubt it is the reason African migrants choose Glasgow as their final destination upon arriving in the UK. I am, however, surprised that a group of young Congolese men I interview are aware of the story. They have come to Glasgow by word of mouth, having heard that life here is relatively good in terms of acceptance. Migration doesn’t seem to be a big issue, and many Glaswegians like to think that this welcoming attitude represents a moral high ground. I suspect that only independence will reveal Scotland’s true moral compass on issues regarding the free movement of people.

When we finish the interview, the Congolese have a question for me. Politely, they ask when the rainy season ends in Scotland. I only wish I had the answer.

Nigerian Community Hall in Glasgow.







Bintu Summers from Sierra Leone and her Nigerian assistant, Ruth, Pakkhead, Glasgow.

FOR THE SALVATION OF
THE WORLD THAT YOU
HAVE PROMISED
US THROUGH THE
SPIRIT

OPEN

Lately, China's economic involvement in Africa has captured the world's imagination. The media coverage is often polemic, describing China's public presence in Africa as 'neo-colonialist' or 'fuelled by short-term 'resource grabbing'. What the West fails to recognize is China's ability to forge a common history with Africa. For example, the West's humiliating treatment of Africa at the hands of former colonizers is reminiscent of the unequal treaties imposed on China by the West in the 19th century. China's foreign policy with Africa makes the most of their similar history with the West. The policy is slowly pushing the West toward the economic periphery.

I have travelled to many different parts of China, but nothing could have prepared me for the city of Guangzhou: an enormous metropolis with 18 million inhabitants, and home to more than 100 000 Africans. →



China Eboh, Nigerian trader, in his Guangzhou apartment.

→ The ten-lane highway that connects the airport with the city passes infinite rows of identical high-rise housing blocks. Gradually, the masses of housing blocks become masses of office blocks. Garish advertising decorates the ranks of buildings, announcing that we have arrived in the commercial centre.

The highway then rises above the city, splitting into an intricate web of elevated flyovers and roadways. At one point, my taxi is suspended between two highways, one above me and one below. Far down through the traffic patterns, I catch a glimpse of everyday street life with the numerous street merchants peddling their wares illuminated by the harsh red glow of the ubiquitous neon advertisements.

My hotel room is on the seventh floor of the New Don Franc Hotel. The hotel boasts 250 rooms, all occupied by Africans predominantly from West Africa.

At eye-level, five meters from my window, a four-lane highway digested an endless convoy of trucks carrying shipping containers. The full containers heading south towards the harbour made a muffled sound, contrasting harshly with the rattling of the empty containers that headed north towards the vast industrial hub, eager to pick up their next load. I was overwhelmed and felt as if I had been catapulted into the future.

The sizeable lobby of the Don Franc Hotel doubles as the entrance of a large commercial centre housing hundreds of small glass cubicles displaying an array of consumer goods. Everything from high-tech computers, software, clothing, shoes, tools, hardware, jewellery, motorbikes, quad bikes and even small pick-up trucks is exhibited under the harsh green neon light.

The grating sound of rolls of wide adhesive tape being unravelled to secure a continuous stream of boxes resonates day and night through the hotel corridors. This is the sound of globalization. With large, black, felt-tipped pens, the boxes are adorned with their destinations: Lagos, Kinshasa, Bamako, Dakar, and Dar es Salam...

Guangzhou hosts two large African neighbourhoods. The Tong Tong district, dominated by Nigerians, occupies six large shopping malls adjunct to an eight-lane highway. The Xiaobei district, often referred to as 'Africa Town', is where the Congolese congregate in small bars and restaurants; here French is spoken, attracting Francophone Africans from all over West Africa.

Xiaobei is more intimate, with small streets congested by an array of different street vendors selling food customized to African tastes. One of the most popular hangouts is the JY bar. The bar is owned by Dmitri, who arrived from Kinshasa eight years ago. You would never guess that the bar is owned by an African. Dmitri hardly shows his face, as the bar is just a very small side venture compared to his substantial export business. In addition, all the staff members, including the manager, are locals. Dmitri explained that Congolese don't travel to Guangzhou to work in a bar. More importantly, he added, Congolese prefer to be waited upon by Chinese waiters, as this adds to the foreign experience.

The most common dish served is a grilled fresh-water fish which is almost identical to the African Tilapia in both appearance and taste. This is washed down with Tsingtao beer, or the more upmarket Heineken. Some Congolese customers prefer the Great Wall Chinese Cabernet Sauvignon to accompany their Chinese version of a Tilapia.

Trading takes place in a warren of small streets. There seems to be a presumption in the West that only cheap replicas and lower end goods are traded with Africa. However, the numerous trading

outlets that surround my hotel sell building materials, roof tiles, doors and windows, while others sell fully equipped kitchens and AC units. These are all clear indicators of a growing African middle class. These products have been designed and adapted to African needs; by no means are they 'seconds' or products that have been rejected in the West.

The creative energy spawned by the frenzied economic development between Africans and Chinese traders in Guangzhou (between \$20 and \$30 million is traded every day by an estimated 100 000 Africans residing or visiting Guangzhou) becomes palpable as soon as you step out of the hotel door. Walking the streets of the Francophone African neighbourhood of Xiaobei, the sense of being a Westerner pushed to the periphery becomes tangible and even oddly personal. During my ten-day stay in Guangzhou, I did not encounter one Westerner. From my Eurocentric perspective, the energetic interaction between Africans and Chinese seemed slightly daunting.

The Congolese I meet in Guangzhou feel a sense of freedom, having escaped the sometimes overbearing responsibilities generated by their extended families back home. Here, they can be individuals and explore their own potential; the remittances they send home take care of the guilt. They also feel that in Guangzhou they are global players meeting people from all over Africa. Even though Chinese racism is undiluted and in no way veiled, many Africans I spoke to preferred this in-your-face racism to the subtle and oblique racism that they had experienced in Europe, where you "never knew" if someone was racist, creating a slight sense of paranoia. They argued that Chinese people were either racist or not, and that intensive business transactions allowed no room for racial tension.

I shared an animated evening with Jules from Kinshasa and William from Dar es Salam; they both commented that they never would have met or done business in Africa. These men had little in common, except both being black and coming from the African continent. Witnessing their interaction proved that there is a certain irony in having to travel to China to fully understand the vast diversity and complexity of the African continent.

I spent my last evening in Guangzhou having dinner with Thomas Kyeba. He had just arrived from Uganda and it was his first day in Guangzhou. His main mission will be to purchase fully equipped modern kitchens to supply the up-and-coming middle class in Kampala. He told me that he hopes to buy enough to fill two 40-foot containers. After dinner we both gazed out of the large window, taking in the futuristic cityscape. The ribbons of highways appeared entangled, consuming the never-ending flow of traffic. For me, this futuristic vision was daunting, almost apocalyptic. I looked over at Thomas, who also appeared slightly overwhelmed. I was convinced he shared my apocalyptic vision. But I was wrong. "I wonder when Kampala will be able to lay claim to such wonderful roads and buildings?" Thomas pondered admiringly. It then became evident that we didn't share the same vision of the future. For Thomas, the futuristic paradise of Guangzhou is where we are all headed. Thomas's experience captures the thoughts of many Congolese I encountered; they all found Guangzhou inspiring, impressed by the Chinese expertise in poverty reduction. For many Congolese, it is feasible that someday Kinshasa could to a degree resemble Guangzhou. Mambeka Yan Leger from Congo Brazzaville summed it up best: "I've been to Paris and found it intimidating, knowing that Kinshasa could never resemble such a city steeped in tradition." Guangzhou having been pulled out of poverty is inspiring and perhaps even achievable.

Mambeka Yan Leger, student and trader from the Democratic Republic of Congo.





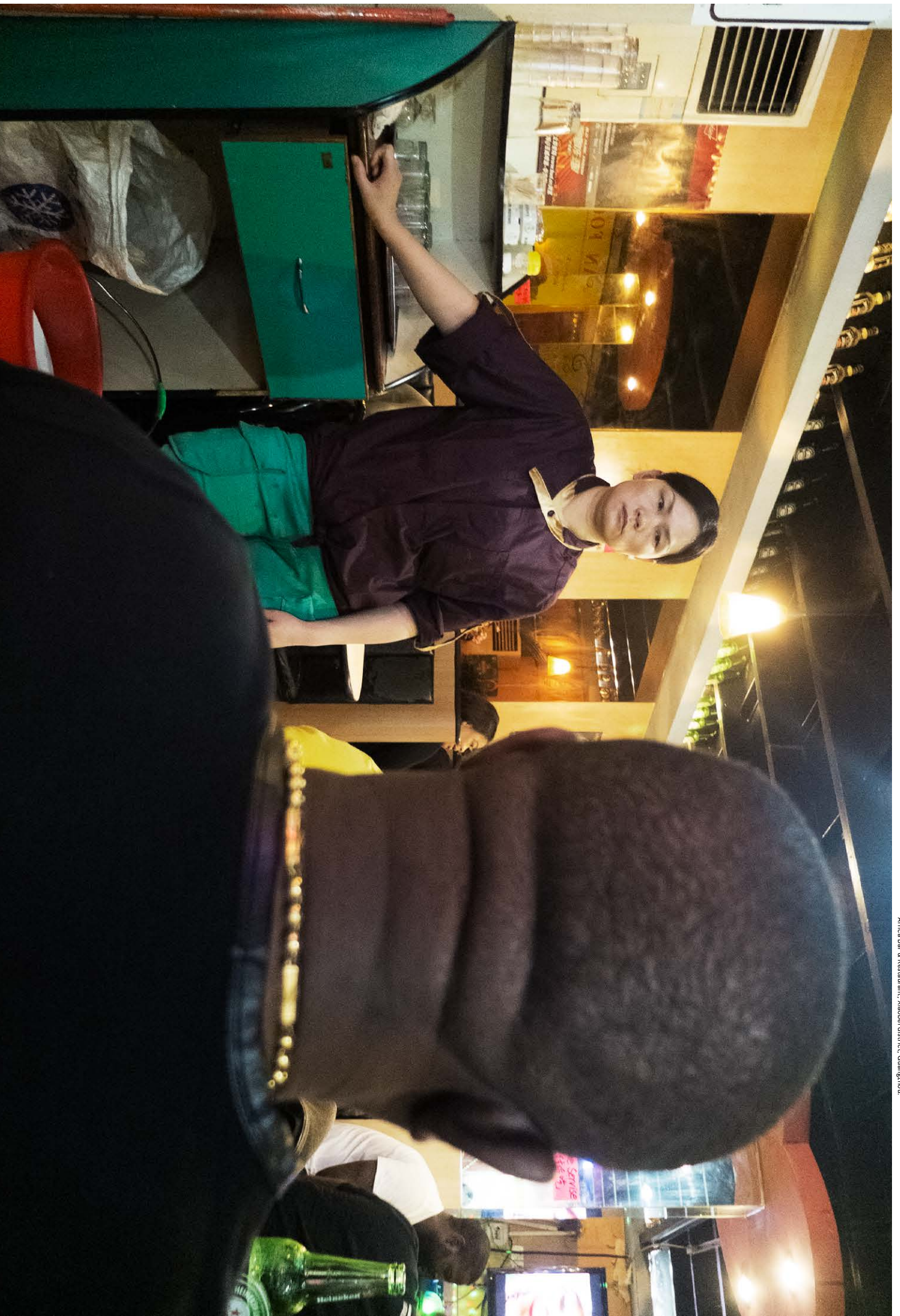
New arrivals from Nigeria.





'EUROPE IS EXHAUSTED. IT'S SENSE, IT'S NO LONGER THE PLACE FOR INNOVATIONS THAT MIGHT HAVE TREMENDOUS IMPACT ON THE PLANET'

ACHILLE MBEIBE

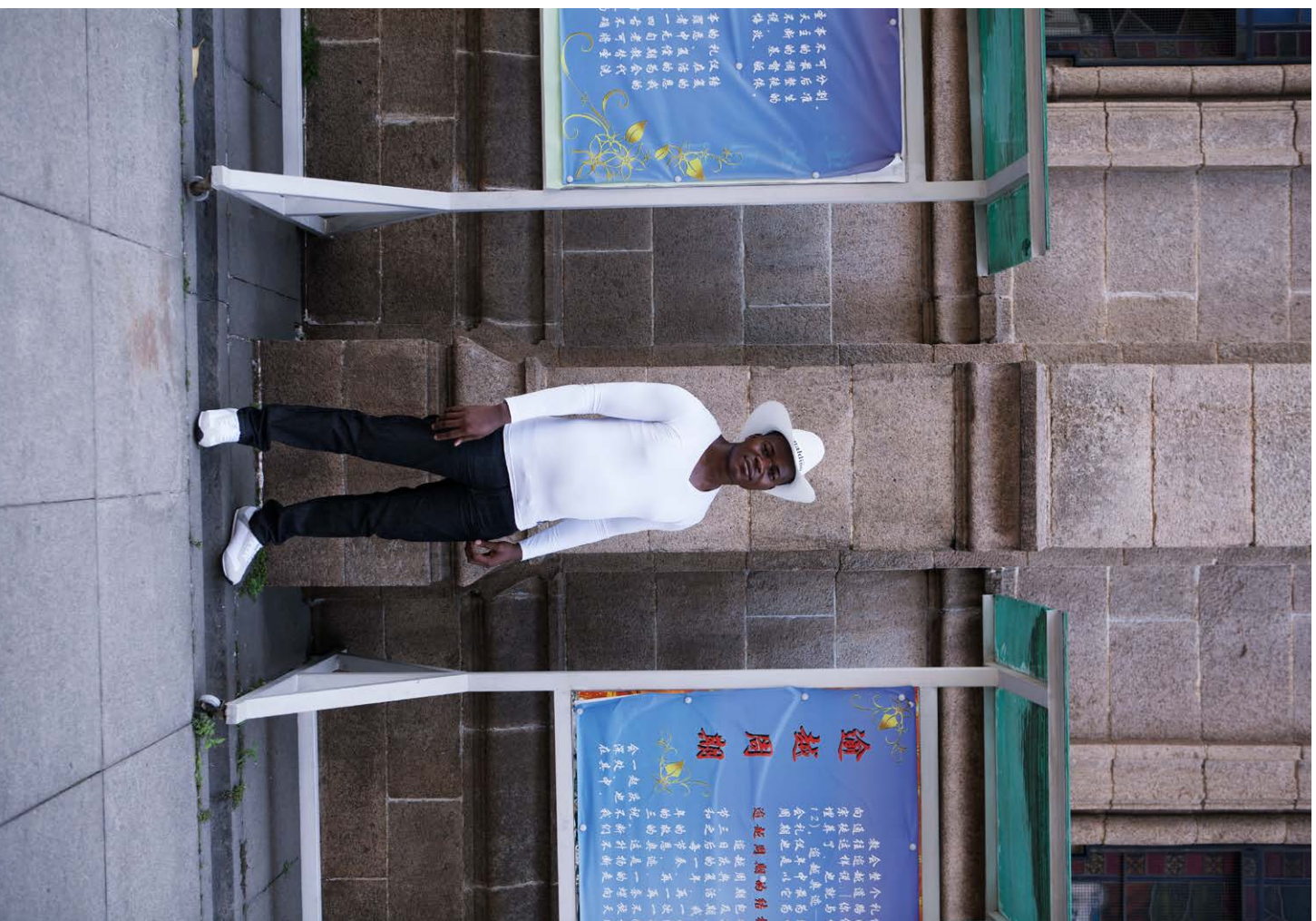


Africa Bar & Restaurant, Xiaobei district, Guangzhou



1 o'clock in the morning, Xiaobei district with predominantly Congolese traders.

Nigerian Church-goer at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Guangzhou.



A so-called suitcase trader from Senegal who visits Guangzhou four times a year.



Nyenpui Kermee, Liberian choir singer, New Life Church, Staten Island New York.



Rufus Arkoi is the community leader of the nine thousand strong Liberian community of Staten Island, New York. He arrived in New York in 1986, at the beginning of the civil war. We meet on the eve of the second Liberian elections in a suburban Italian restaurant on Staten Island. Rufus recommends the meatball sandwich. At an adjacent table, a large family is celebrating the 85th birthday of their grandfather. The patriarch is a WWII veteran. He is wearing a baseball cap depicting his regiment. From a table in the back of the restaurant, a mother sends her young daughter to the festive table. The child is about 10 years of age. She taps the old soldier on the shoulder. He turns slowly towards the girl who comes to attention and promptly salutes him. We bear witness to a patriotic sermon in which the young girl declares her love for the armed forces, and for the old man in particular for fighting for her freedom. Her oration is greeted with loud applause from everyone at the table. Proudly, the girl retreats to her mother, who is glowing with pride. I look towards Rufus, who looks tense and embarrassed. He turns to me and hisses: "Only a country that has never suffered war can idolize it in such a way." →

NEW YORK

→ Until this moment, I had been lulled into thinking of Rufus as an average American – baseball cap on his head, a considerable paunch trapped in a Giants T-shirt. It became immediately clear that all the trappings that America could offer had not seduced Rufus. His life in America is dictated by what is happening in Liberia. A few days later, I'm meeting Rufus and some of his Liberian friends in his living room. We are witnessing the second democratic elections in Liberia's history, broadcast on Al Jazeera. The living room is a shrine to America and especially to Barack Obama. Rufus and his friends are staunch supporters of Liberian presidential candidate Winston Tubman and his running mate, the famous football player George Weah. They deeply oppose the incumbent president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. None of the nine thousand Liberians on Staten Island can vote, not even by proxy. However, the influence of the Liberian diaspora is deemed important enough for the main candidates to actually campaign in New York.

As the evening progresses it becomes obvious that President Sirleaf Johnson is heading for a second term. A near tangible sense of animosity fills the room; abusive names are hurled towards the screen. Sirleaf Johnson is called a "Jezebel". At first I find this amusing, until I realize that the term is used with full biblical

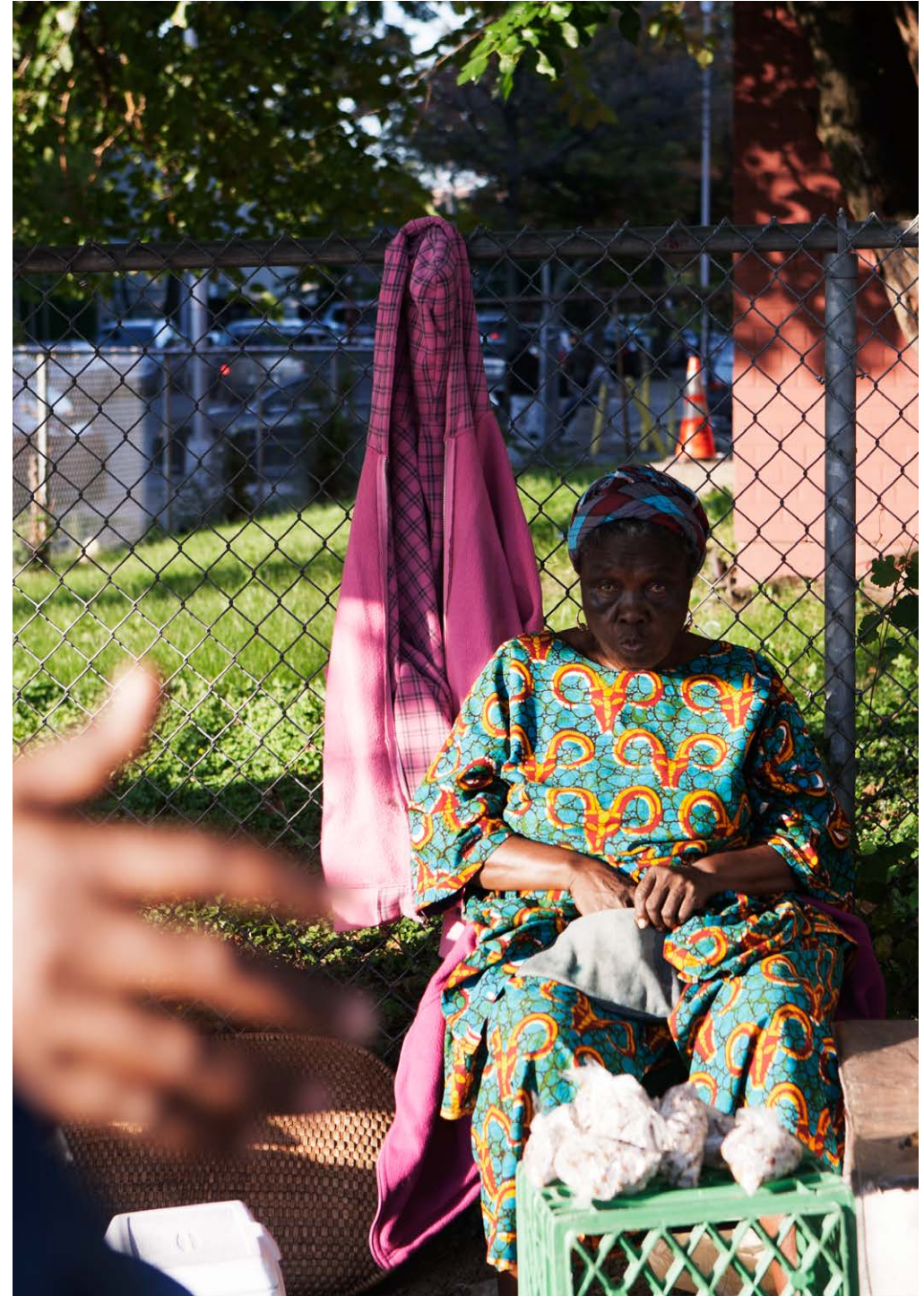
implications. Rufus slumps in disappointment. He is a successful football coach within the Staten Island community. Had Weah been victorious, Rufus would have become Minister of Sport and Culture. The evening becomes sinister. I cannot escape the fear that, in this suburban living room, the foundation of the next civil war is being laid.

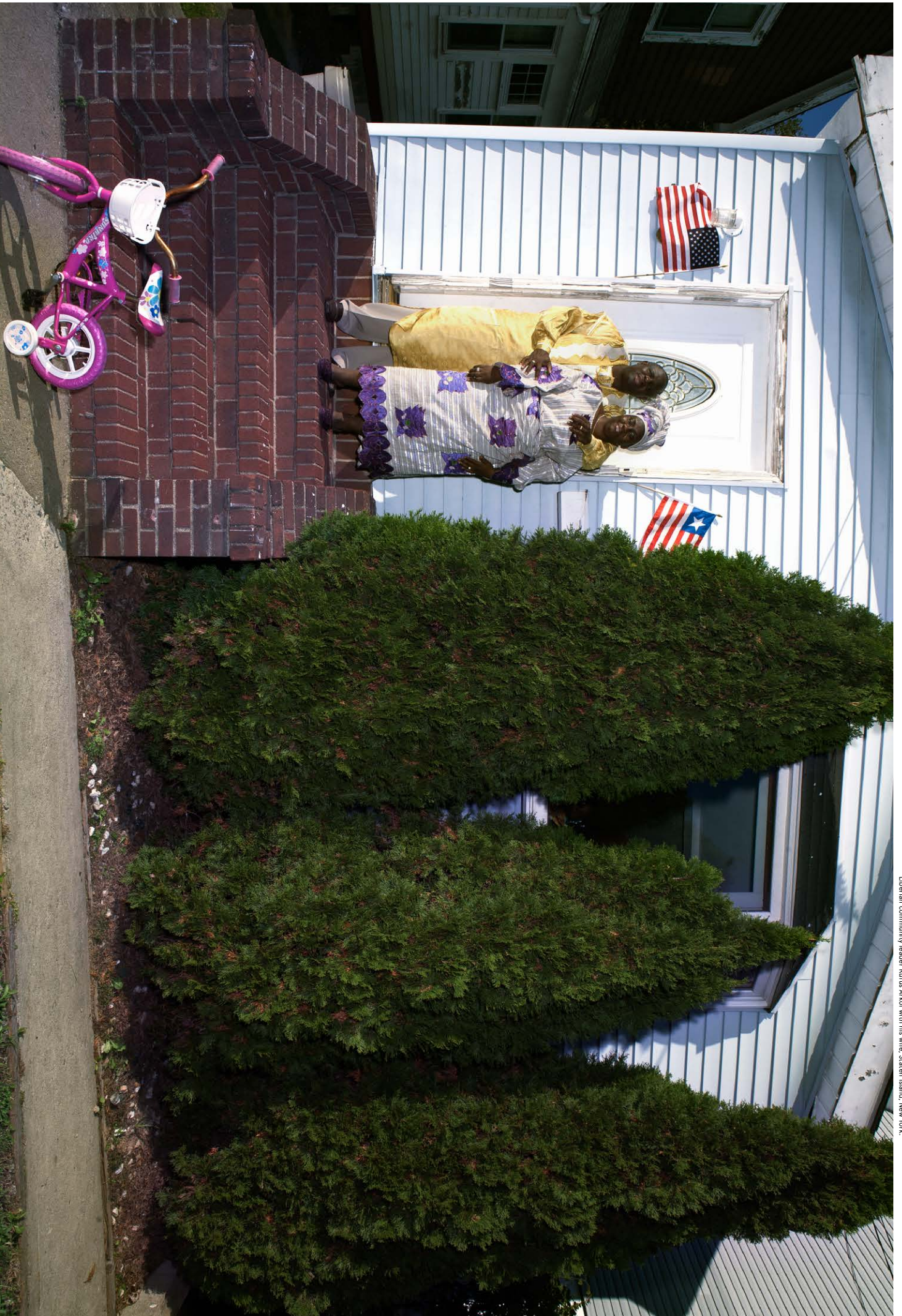
Democratic elections obviously do not yield democracy. The fundamental nature of democracy is to accept defeat and, even with the greatest reluctance, to have a degree of faith in the opposition. This principle took time to evolve in Europe and is relatively easy for Europeans to embrace, as change of government does not fundamentally change a way of life. But can the same apply for Liberia, where there is no democratic tradition and society is deeply divided? From the comfort of a Staten Island living room there seems to be no urgency for dialogue or compromise. The Liberian Staten Island community has Liberia in both an economic and political stronghold. I had always thought of the diaspora and the remittances it generates as a panacea for Africa's challenges. My experience in New York showed a more ominous side to the influence the diaspora can have.

LITTLE LIBERIA

NEW YORK – STATEN ISLAND

Liberian street market, Staten Island, New York.





Liberian community leader Rufus Arkoj with his wife, Stefan Island, New York.

Street market, Staten Island, New York.



Community leader Rufus Arkoi in his living room, Staten Island, New York.



THE RE MORE AFFRAN
DOTTORS, MORSES AND
ENIGMAS OUTSIDE AFFRAN
THAN AFFRAN

Nejar Gonzeh, a cook in an illegal Liberian restaurant Staten Island, New York.





Johannesburg is the chosen destination for many African migrants; the 'New York' of Africa, it has attracted many Nigerian and Congolese entrepreneurs. While populist politicians refer to a 'tsunami' of Africans heading for Europe, the truth is that 86% of all African migration takes place within the African continent. →

JOHANNESBURG



→ Yeoville, the old Jewish quarter of Johannesburg, became a fashionable neighbourhood in the early post-apartheid era. Known for its trendy restaurants and jazz bars, it became the place to be for young urbanites. In the early 2000s, African migrants slowly started settling in the neighbourhood. South Africans, both black and white, refer to an 'African invasion' of Yeoville. Rocky Street is the main thoroughfare in Yeoville. It hosts an array of bars, restaurants and shops. With its vibrant street markets, Rocky Street could be in Lagos or Kinshasa; only the architecture echoes a distant white presence.

"Eat the World" is a restaurant located halfway down the street. It was established in 2010 by Sanza Sandile, a South African entrepreneur who seized a business opportunity by creating a restaurant that serves Pan-African dishes. The venue is immensely popular amongst both locals and migrant Africans, and it is a hub of social activity. In a small way, the restaurant is proof of what many economists proclaim: movement of people generates economic activity.

Until recently, the Nigerians and Congolese had their separate bars, and any interaction was mostly in a business-like context. Now, however, as the language barrier diminishes and trust increases, there is more social interaction.

The Nigerians refer to the Congolese as the 'Italians of Africa'. They question their diligence and presume they are preoccupied with fashion and food. On the other hand, the Congolese think the Nigerians are too serious and don't know how to fully enjoy life. These comments are similar to the sweeping generalizations that Europeans often use to label each other, and are by no means malicious.

I'm continually warned not to venture into the neighbourhood. An ongoing debate about foreigners shrouds my two-week stay in Johannesburg. I'm surprised and shocked to hear a black South African barkeeper complain fervently about foreigners. He utilizes all the familiar tropes of the populist rhetoric in Europe: "They are taking our houses and jobs, we should close the borders..."

I realized how naïve I was. Europeans are lulled into believing in some kind of 'African solidarity'. This superficial presumption comes from the idea that Africans, having dealt with heroic

levels of suffering, occupy a higher moral plane. This explains why mainstream media (including myself, in this case) and governments struggle to deal with moral ambiguity in Africa. Europeans reduce and simplify political contest to a struggle between good and evil, and ignore the role of ideology. Africa becomes 'politically empty'. In this political vacuum, politicians and journalists embrace and perpetuate prevailing depictions of Africa, namely that African politics are about identity or personality rather than political ideology. The West can only relate to an Africa that remains morally unambiguous.

The harsh economic reality in South Africa has spawned a generic xenophobia akin to that in Europe - the difference being that in South Africa it is manifested through sporadic yet violent street protest, and that the aggression only focuses on African migrants. The influx of white migrants, mainly from the UK, never seems to be an issue. Perceived as 'job takers', the unskilled Mozambican labourers take the brunt of most of the hostilities, whereas the Nigerian and Congolese entrepreneurs reside in the relatively protective shelter of Yeoville. "They discriminate more amongst themselves," is a common mantra chanted by some white South Africans, as if the tensions amongst Africans in some way justify their own behaviour during the apartheid era, conveniently relaxing the lines between undiluted racism and populist xenophobia.

South African attitudes towards migration are intrinsically linked to the apartheid era. During apartheid, there was no tradition of emigration or immigration. The free flow of people was an alien concept for the designers of apartheid.

"We have delivered civilization to the Southern region of the dark continent, beyond our borders the chaos of the jungle prevails." Spread through media and education, this was the predominant rhetoric during apartheid. Rulers such as Idi Amin and Robert Mugabe were presented as the harrowing alternative to white rule. Inevitably this attitude created a sense of disdain towards the rest of the continent, slowly forging a feeling of superiority between both black and white South Africans towards the rest of Africa. Apartheid has a long shadow and now, in conjunction with a faltering economy, this harsh shadow has created a volatile stage for migration.

'EAT THE WORLD'

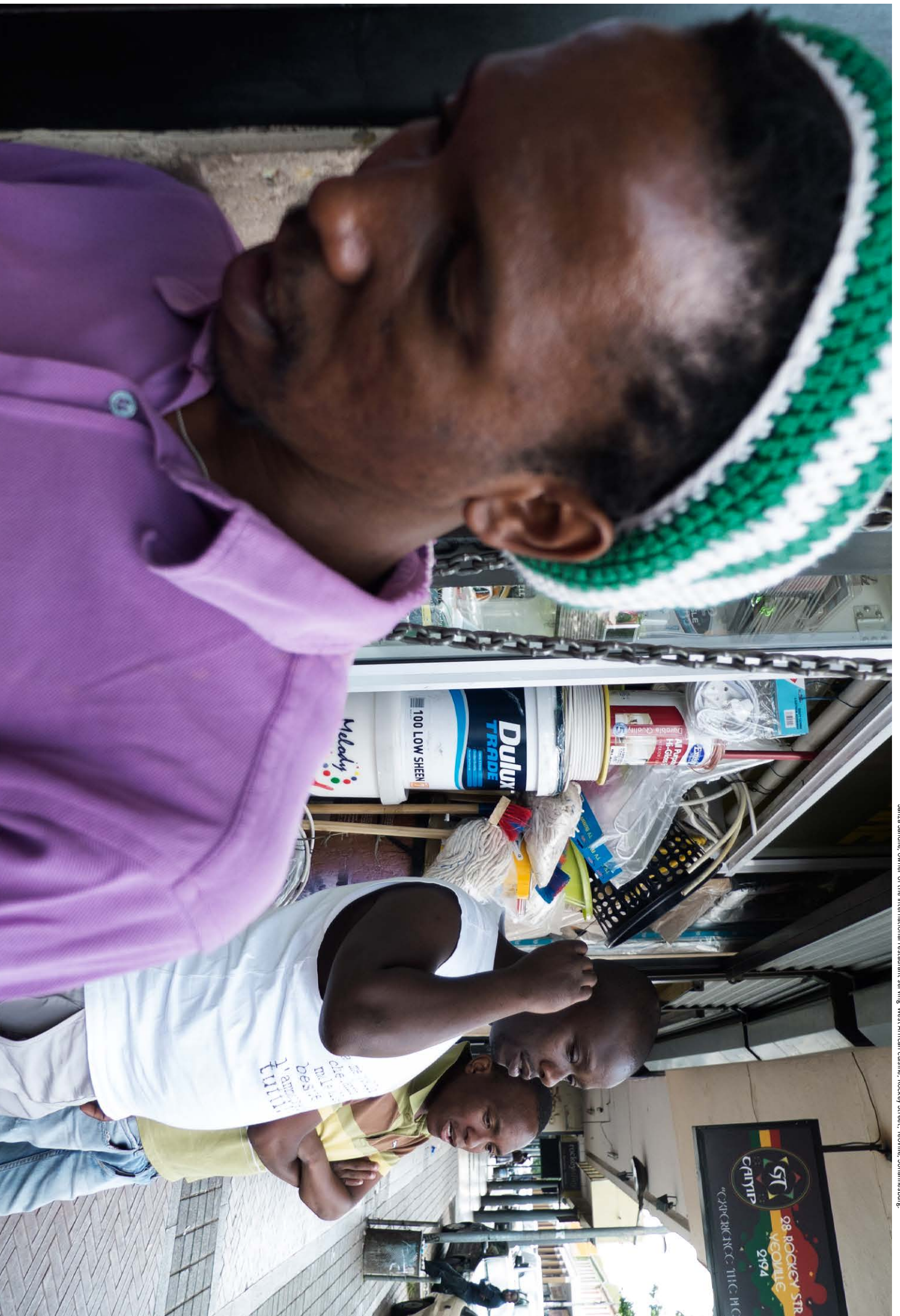
JOHANNESBURG - YEOVILLE

Benedict Muriu, Congolese owner of a security firm, Yaounde, Johannesburg.



Don Alvero (stage name), Congolese recording artist





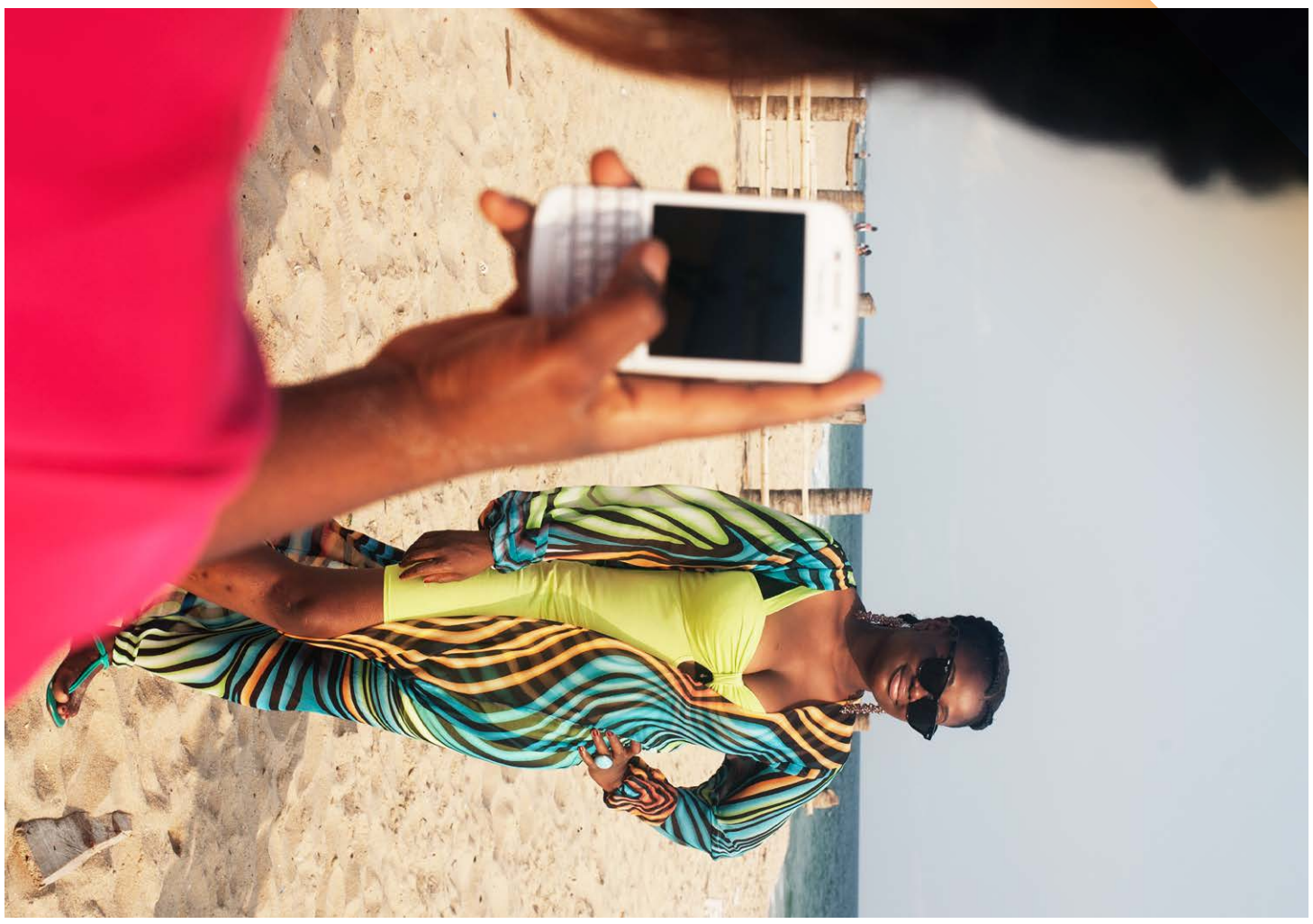
Sanza Sandile, owner of the international restaurant serving West African cuisine, Rocky Street, Neowille, Johannesburg.

NEED EUROPE TO BE
STRONGER THAN US?

WE WANT MORE FRANKS.



Nigerian artist Abdurazaq Amofeso, Newlands, Johannesburg



PHOTOS

Optimism has deep roots in Nigeria, particularly in Lagos, with a history dominated by traders and settlers. Nigerians believe themselves more industrious than the average African. They share a deep conviction that tomorrow will be better and that anything is possible, very much along the lines of the 'American Dream'. →



Nigerian returnees from the United States.



Nigeria could be seen as an African incarnation of the United States: fervently religious, naively optimistic, highly individualistic and holding a deep disdain for government. For good or for worse, this has earned them the label ‘The Americans of Africa’. After independence, Nigeria chose to drive on the right hand side of the road. This was a defiant step in cutting symbolic ties with the former colonizer, in stark contrast to Britain’s East African former colonies who remained driving on the left and where echoes of Great Britain still resonate.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, author of *Americanah*, argues that the British presence in Nigeria was minimal during the colonial period. The climate was too harsh to recreate ‘England’, as opposed to the Highlands of Kenya and Uganda, which because of the moderate climate attracted an influx of white British settlers. In her opinion, due to the insignificant presence of the British, the Nigerian mind was never colonized. As a result, Nigerians celebrate strong identities, and are brash and self-assured without a trace of submissiveness. Europeans, as well as fellow Africans, often construe this self-confident demeanour as aggressiveness.

I arrived in Lagos in the wake of some of the worst atrocities perpetrated by Boko Haram. Prior to my departure, Western newspapers had increased coverage on the terrorist group. The reporting on the 200 abducted schoolgirls had gained significant traction, albeit retroactively. I expected the terrorist threat to be prominent in the everyday discourse of Lagosians. This was not the case (although, if prompted, everyone had an opinion). The customary reason given was that the conflict didn’t yet resonate in Lagos, due to the geographical distance. The North is often perceived as a different country – not that unusual, taking into account that the British unification of the Islamic north and the Christian south was as recent as 1914.

A more reflective insight was that the ongoing tensions in the North only grabbed the West’s attention after the founding of Boko Haram in 2002 and its affiliation with Al-Qaeda some years later. Only then did the Western media have a label that it could identify with. Nigerians had been living with the troubles for decades. Admittedly, there is an increase in terrorist activities. Strangely

enough, some welcome the recent developments, as the escalations will push the issue more to the forefront of everyday life, creating a new awareness amongst Nigerians, which will hopefully put pressure on an inert government to take more decisive action. Terrorist threats have not deterred the flow of returnees. The need to contribute to a society in which you have a degree of ownership seems to be the prevailing emotion behind the return of the Nigerians I spoke to. Abdullaziz Awofeso (34), a successful artist who after 13 years in Johannesburg returned to Lagos, summed it up best: ‘Crippling corruption, terrorism, inequality, corroding infrastructure are all everyday realities, yet life is unpredictable and exciting in Lagos. It’s like stepping onto a fast train that can’t be stopped and not knowing the destination.’ The question remains, however: Does the average Nigerian want to get on a runaway train, and even if he does, are there enough seats?

The inequality in Nigeria is blatant, bordering on the obscene. Private helicopters crisscross the sky far above the gridlocked city where 50% live on \$2 a day. Average citizens trapped in never-ending traffic jams are pushed aside by convoys of SUVs with sirens and flashing lights. In any other country, such convoys would indicate government officials dealing with tight schedules. Not in Nigeria. Here, they are made up of wealthy private citizens on their way to their next business deal or social gathering. The economic discrepancies in Nigeria are vast.

How can you sit in your \$200 000 Bentley while the street hawker trying to sell you DVDs lives on a dollar a day? Such questions are unavoidable, but they presume and even demand a superior morality from Africans as if, in the light of economic fortune, Africans should demonstrate immediate solidarity towards their less fortunate citizens. I asked myself: How self-evident is solidarity towards the disenfranchised in European society? Does Europe have the right to condemn the sometimes-harsh reality of economic growth within the African context? Europe has vigorously embraced the free market economy, proclaiming it to be instrumental in the fight against poverty in Africa. Is it then justified to condemn new burgeoning African economies, even when social inequality is very much in the forefront?

THE NIGERIAN DREAM

LAGOS - NIGERIA



The two eldest Okoronkwo sisters.

They graduated from a UK university but returned to Nigeria because of stringent new immigration laws imposed by the Tory government. They don't regret returning to Lagos.



Olusgun Odierine and his young nephew. He returned to Lagos after spending 35 years in the UK.

IT HAS BEEN TYPICAL OF
AFRICAN NATIONS TO
DEVELOP ANE EXPORTS
POLICY FOR ADOPTION
TO NEW ENTRIES

Prince Edward - Nigerian trader with his family.



In early 2013, the Dutch TV channel VPRO broadcast a fascinating documentary about the Nigerian community in Guangzhou, China, and the impact of African mobility worldwide. In the film, Achille Mbembe, a Cameroonian philosopher and political scientist, and Ian Goldin, a South African expert on globalisation and development, shared their views on migration in a remarkably un-apologetic manner. Despite public rage and populist campaigns, both experts understand present day migration as a win-win situation for both newcomers and natives (whose ancestors were once newcomers themselves). While the sweeping movements of today do not happen without problems, the factual prospering of many new communities in our midst are evidence of often successful settlement. The film by Pieter van der Houwen – its beautiful imagery as well as the enlightening views and undisputable facts it contains – received high ratings and numerous accolades. It was screened at many different festivals and universities in Europe and it was hotly debated.

When Van der Houwen proposed to continue his journey into migrant communities in Johannesburg, Lagos, Glasgow and New York, ZAM immediately agreed to publish his findings as a follow up to the earlier production. Despite much being said about them, very little is heard from the individuals building new lives and communities, and navigating fertile grounds. This is the gap we want to fill.

We are fortunate that Erik Kessels is participating in this exciting project. The design of this tabloid is completely his. The material he worked with has been created by Pieter van der Houwen. It grew – and continues to grow – out of the friendships and collaborations with so many good people in Guangzhou, Johannesburg, Lagos, and New York. The support by and input of VPRO, Professor Ian Taylor of St. Andrews University, and Dr. Heidi Ostbo Haugen have been invaluable.

NEW SETTLERS

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The African Tabloid is published by ZAM.
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Photographs & text: Pieter van der Houwen



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This publication was made possible with the support of Fonds Bijzondere Journalistieke Projecten, OxfamNovib, Pascal Decroos Fonds, Stichting Democratie & Media.

Watch Pieter van der Houwen's documentary online:
http://www.npo.nl/tegenlicht/25-02-2013/VPWON_1169289

Pieter van der Houwen is a photographer and documentary filmmaker. He has worked extensively on the African continent. Presently he is pursuing a PhD at the University of Leeds, where he is researching the cultural, political and economic influence of the contemporary African Diaspora.

ISBN 978-90-824262-0-5



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