

You will find  
your people here



# About



Mobility  
Governance  
Lab



Nestled between performance, film, composition, and exhibition, *You Will Find Your People Here* is a collaborative, interdisciplinary work by pianist Mareli Stolp (South Africa), sociologist Caroline Wanjiku Kihato (Kenya), composer Clare Loveday (South Africa), and artist Awo Tsegah (Ghana).

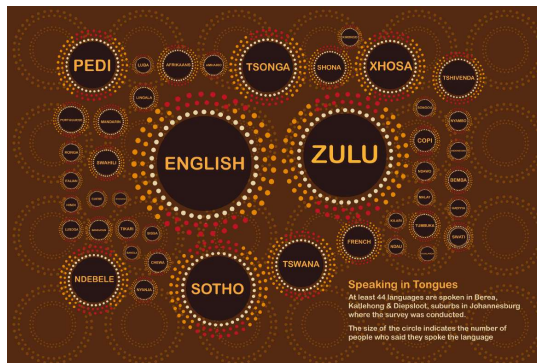
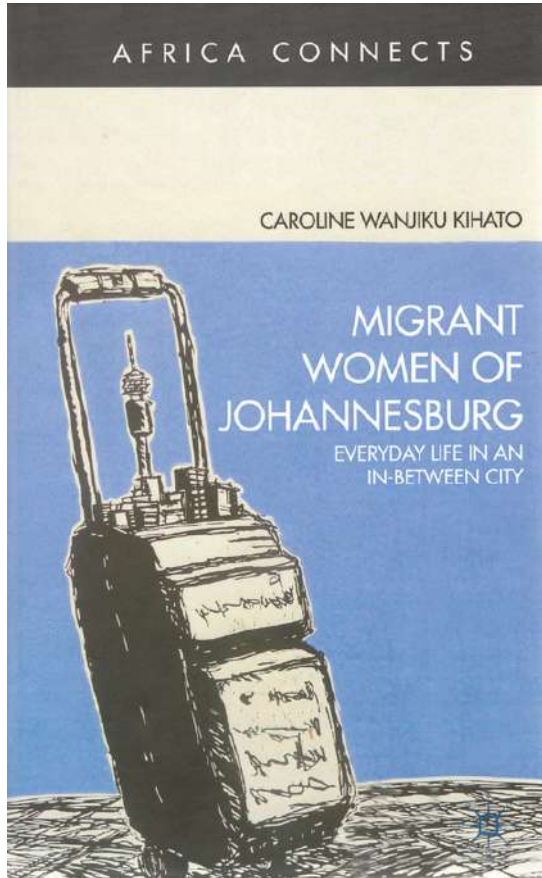
The thirty-minute film presents composer Clare Loveday and pianist Mareli Stolp's creative response to migrant women's testimonies collected in Kihato's book, *Migrant Women of Johannesburg: Everyday Life in an in-between City*. Written for vocalising pianist, the work combines piano, spoken word, and vocal utterances, to produce an immersive sound-world that interprets the words of migrant women who travelled from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, and Malawi to Johannesburg.

The film is situated in a recreated home-space symbolising the women's pasts, present and futures. But the construction of 'home' does not happen in a vacuum. It sits at the intersection of the public and private realms which shape women's experiences of being both located and dislocated, visible and invisible in the city. Far from being the private sanctuary where nuclear families take refuge from the world 'out there', these intimate spaces symbolise the tensions of safety and violence, pride and shame, love and loss.

Maps on language diversity, family connections and women's mobility to Johannesburg adorn the walls, unsettling how we understand urbanity, social-worlds, and family. They tell stories of a heterotopic city rooted here and there, and holds the contradictions of migration, at once offering hope and aspiration, deferred dreams, and broken promises.

**The film is situated in a recreated home-space symbolising the women's pasts, present and futures.**

Drawing on data collected by the Wits-Oxford Mobility Governance Lab in 2021, Awo Tsegah designed three fabric panels which surface the challenges of being in a place while out of place. The visual idiom of African women's fabrics - the East African Khanga, the Southern African Shewshwe, the Ghanaian Kente - serves as decoration and medium. So often carried by women on the move, they convey both the continent's diversity and the portability of domestic space, offering unsettled portraits of urban and family life to visitors who linger. They tell stories of a heterotopic city and the tensions of aspiration and absence, creation and deferral; connection and betrayal.



You Will Find Your People Here amplifies the experiences of migrant women in Johannesburg, a global city remarkable for its affluence, inequity, and diversity. Roughly one in two Johannesburg residents were born elsewhere, one in five outside the country. In the city's gateway neighbourhoods, few plan to stay. Lives are shaped by transience, ambition, uncertainty, and anxiety. In the shadows of repurposed office blocks, new arrivals dodge predatory police and hostile citizens. As they negotiate the unfamiliar, they continually refashion the space around them.

The installation moves us from census to senses; from demography and demagoguery to the fashioning of human futures. The work reflects social connections and imaginings from street corners to distant corners of the world, connections that offer a place to hide in plain view, to reflect and reinvent. Mirroring these spaces, the installation presents an intimate space symbolising tensions between safety and violence, pride and shame, love and loss.



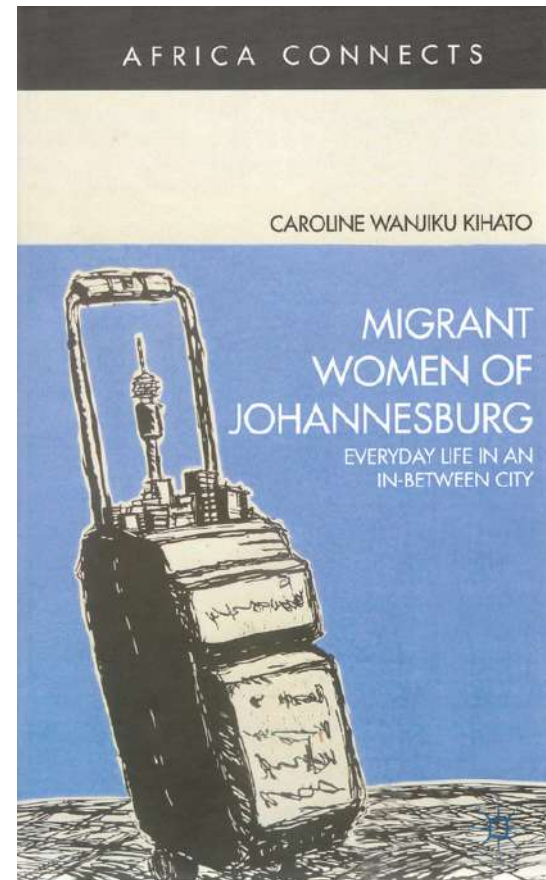
Photo by LB Landau

# The Process

In many ways, the iterative process of producing this exhibit mirrors the stops and starts, the setbacks and leaps forward in the journeys of migrants all over the world. From listening to their stories to transposing, composing, rehearsing, performing, recording and editing, the version we wanted to tell changed many times and grew to encompass many voices.

At the beginning—before this installation was even the seed of an idea—Caroline Wanjiku Kihato collected women’s stories for her book, *Migrant Women of Johannesburg*. She spoke with women who’d travelled great distances from Congo and Rwanda to Johannesburg. Employing an attentive, feminist methodology, she spent time with them, within and without their homes. Allowing, rather than eschewing, the gradual entanglement of their lives with hers.

Now, we invite you into this entanglement.



## A skein of yarn

Visual artist Awo Tsegah's fabric panels take survey data collected in 2021 by the Wits-Oxford Mobility Governance Lab and render them familiar. Depicted in the colours and patterns of the Khanga, Shewshwe, and Kente worn by women across the continent, the data becomes paradoxically intimate and domestic. So too, does the room. Pushing back against the white-walled sterility of contemporary exhibition spaces, we do what migrants do—we make a home.

### Weaving a tale

Surrounded by these complex portraits of city life, we invite you to take a seat, to make yourself at home and allow yourself to be vulnerable. *You Will Find Your People Here*, performed by Mareli Stolp and composed by Clare Loveday, pulls no punches. With words taken from Kihato's book, the piece confronts the unvarnished realities of life for these migrant women—mingling loss and ambition, uncertainty and resilience.

The performance is a patchwork; snatches of spoken word, vocal utterances and music are interwoven to create a tapestry of sound evocative of the migrant women's testimonies. We engage your senses to immerse you in the frenetic push and pull of these transient lives. Both the performance and the installation circumvent linguistic and cultural barriers by shucking literalism and embracing lyricism, aesthetics, affect. The exhibition space is transformed into an untidy microcosm of the contact zone of Johannesburg, wherein cultures and people grapple with each other despite and because of asymmetrical power relations that unfold over centuries.

## Loose ends

There are always stories that don't get told, voices and ideas that slip through the cracks. No matter how large the sample or how long the study, our attention is finite. Blending the breadth of knowledge contained within Tsegah's maps and the minutiae of life excavated by Stolp's performance, we come closer to seeing the whole picture. That said, we encourage you to dig into unanswered questions, to follow your curiosity about issues raised and thoughts left unfinished.

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What happens now, once the work is let loose on the world, is just one more step in this grand collaboration. As with people, ideas that migrate settle in new places and make new connections, they inspire new avenues for exploration and bring new histories. It is our sincere hope that *You Will Find Your People Here* finds fertile soil for radical conversations about affluence, inequity and justice. That it teaches and inspires with a view of Africa's many thousands of migrant women richer and more complex than history has provided.

# Profiles





## Caroline Wanjiku Kihato

For Sociologist Caroline Wanjiku Kihato, the beginning of this journey was the end of another. In 2013, her book, *Migrant Women of Johannesburg*, finally passed from her hands into the world. It was a difficult but rewarding process drawing on all her years of experience working with migrants in and around South Africa. In many ways, it was the culmination of a life's work. From her childhood in Nairobi, living a twenty-minute walk from one of the largest slums in Africa to a storied career in the research and policy space, Kihato has dedicated herself to telling untold stories, excavating and shining a light on the most marginalised of voices.

One of the people who were there throughout, as copy editor and friend, was Clare Loveday. As they said goodbye to the book, she and Clare lamented the end of their collaboration and talked about the possibility of future collaborations. They held onto this intention for many years, waiting for the perfect opportunity.

It wouldn't be until 2020, just before the pandemic, that anything came of it. When Loveday came back with an idea for a speaking pianist piece, inspired by her own conversations with Mareli Stolp, Kihato was thrilled and curious about the possibilities. How could such a piece hold everything it needed to? What harmony was there to be found between the words of her interlocutors and Loveday's music? The concept was difficult to envision and harder to manifest.

The negotiations lasted months. After their first in-person meeting at Loveday's studio, Kihato was given the task of selecting which stories from her book would work best in the project. The goal was to select testimonies that might reflect the diversity of experiences migrant women in Africa have—capturing all the foreboding and excitement, the hope and fear. The three of them set out in pursuit of a three-dimensional, living depiction of these women

It wasn't until opening night that Kihato heard the piece in its entirety and, although she'd been there and spoken to those women, hearing their stories again so differently interpreted and delivered, it was as if she was encountering them anew. Kihato talks about the way the performance "transposed the words from her head to her heart." And this, ultimately, was a sign of success. Through the mingling of their respective skills, they'd created an affective soundscape that reframed the testimonies and afforded them new salience.

This is at the core of Kihato's work and emerges also in the second component of the exhibit, Awo Tsegah's fabric panels. The panels unsettle any straightforward assumptions Kihato gleaned from the data and instead embed them thoroughly in an intimate, domestic, and historically rich medium. The goal here too is to reimagine abstract data in a way that is legible to lay folks, to give the audience something more concrete to hold onto.

In Venice, the data and performance will find a new audience. Kihato looks forward to this encounter with excitement and trepidation—conscious of the complexity of a conversation across cultural, linguistic, geographic differences.

# Clare Loveday

Composer Clare Loveday has lived and worked in Johannesburg her whole life. With a doctoral degree in Music Composition from the University of Witwatersrand, she took jobs playing in musicals and theatre venues around South Africa. Then, after a sojourn playing on cruises in the South Atlantic, she returned to the city.

No matter her travels, she always finds herself back in that interstitial city. Thus, it invariably grounds her work. She believes that one's place in the world, not only the location itself but their relationship to it, will naturally influence and inform creative endeavours. From trends and attitudes to mood, it all finds its way in. This holds true of *You Will Find Your People Here*.

It is through this lens that Loveday explores the complexity of life in a post-colonial city; navigating how the city changes, how it stays the same, and how these things relate to her experience of it.



Her work with Mareli Stolp on the 2014 public arts festival explores these questions in Cape Town, but in *You Will Find Your People Here*, she returns home. Through the stories of women who have moved to Johannesburg, she encounters the city anew.

Oft unheard in the symphony of city life, Loveday is interested in elevating specifically women's voices. Caroline Wanjiku Kihato's research, and the women therein represented, opened the door to a wealth of experiences quite foreign to Loveday. Their stories of strangeness, mobility, and belonging broke open the continent and poured its contents into her palms—no less complicated for having been heard.

How, the collaborators asked themselves, could they encompass these experiences? Do them justice? They grappled with questions of representation and voice, taking up space versus making space. Along the journey, artist Awo Tsegah joined the trio, merging both data and art with a bold and sensitive attentiveness to African women's experiences.

Ultimately, the composition weaves together the plurality of voices, incorporating the danger and the hope in moments of harmony as well as dissonance. Just as the piece traces the emotional journeys that brought these women to Johannesburg, it has gone through its own. Emerging out of the collaboration between these women, and now, travelling from South Africa and Ghana to Italy.

She is excited to see the piece grow wings, to migrate and reach new audiences, with new experiences. Letting go, she thinks, is an important part of the creative process, in which a piece outgrows the artist and becomes its own entity. And so we see how this vulnerable, precious story finds its way into Europe via this relatively privileged route.



## Mareli Stolp

anist Mareli Stolp's journey began in Pretoria, but her career and her music have taken her around the world. From Amsterdam, where she got her undergraduate degree, to Stellenbosch University, where she completed her PhD in Music—hers has been a mobile life. Throughout this time, she has found herself drawn to music that challenges not just her skill but the role and potential of music as a medium for telling stories.

It was this ambition, the drive to push herself and her music, that has found her collaborating with Clare Loveday time and again. After hearing one of Loveday's compositions in 2013, Stolp secured a collaboration with her in 2014. *Voyeur Piano*, performed as part of the *Infecting the City* public arts festival in Cape Town, explored the experience of urban space as both voyeur and walker. This interest in the city persists to this day and finds expression in *You Will Find Your People Here*.

Just before the pandemic, when the seeds of an idea took root, Stolp was teaching music at a boys' school in Pretoria. Once again looking for a challenge and recalling her PhD performance of *De Profundis* by Frederic Rzewski, she reached out to Loveday about the possibility of composing a piece for a speaking pianist. But they needed the words to accompany it.



In Rzewski the words are those of Oscar Wilde, taken from a letter he wrote while in prison. piece is experimental and physical and deeply political. Stolp and Loveday met many times, discussing and ruminating on the idea until a collaboration with Caroline Wanjiku Kihato entered the frame. The stories she gathered in her book, *Migrant Women of Johannesburg*, would be the ideal lynchpin.

Stolp was excited too about the prospect of this project with, for, and about women. Moving away from the androcentrism of her field, of the music industry in general, producing what would go on to become *You Will Find Your People Here*, was a space of collaboration and negotiation unlike any she'd previously experienced. Bringing together their respective skills and strengths, Stolp treasures the warmth and generosity of spirit she found in working with these women.

That is not to say it was easy. The piece is, she says, one of the hardest she has ever worked with —both technically and intellectually. Like all music to a greater or lesser extent, it is an exercise in translation and so concerns questions of authenticity, legitimacy and intelligibility. As the performer, Stolp grappled with what it means to be a white South African woman performing a musical interpretation of Black women's stories. And ultimately, this dynamic is reflected in the piece itself, which ebbs and flows as it takes us on journeys across rough terrain, through moments of levity and lightness, and onto dreams of unburdened futures.



ART 10000  
"Queen" 2010  
Awo Tsegah  
AT.8



ART 10000  
"Queen" 2010  
Awo Tsegah  
AT.11



ART 10000  
"Queen" 2010  
Awo Tsegah  
AT.12

Awo Tsegah

Awo Tsegah is a Ghanaian visual artist, whose path crossed with *You Will Find Your People Here* later in the process. Long after Kihato wrote the book, after Loveday composed the music, and Stolp honed the performance, the project took on a life of its own and began its voyage north. Where Kihato's book captured the stories and Loveday's composition and Stolp's performance voiced the emotional landscape of the women's journeys, Tsegah joined the team to visualise them.

With a background in graphic design and advertising, Tsegah left education with the ambition of seeing her work splashed across billboards and reaching the eyes of the masses. But she found the work to be nothing more sophisticated than sales. She found it limiting and narrow in scope; it wasn't her work and it wasn't art.

Now, with unlimited freedom and the support of African women's art collectives such as Aya Editions, Tsegah produces speculative pieces that open up alternate universes. She is interested in creating safe spaces for conversations about difficult topics; art that elicits both comfort and discomfort. The comfort necessary to allow people to speak freely and the discomfort that comes with true introspection. Her work begs the question, who gets represented in the culture? And who does the representing?

It's this interest in representation and power that drew Tsegah into *You Will Find Your People Here*. A story about, for, and by women needed a woman artist who is invested in telling women's stories in all their complexity.

Her work bridges the gap between the music and the Mobility Governance Lab data, which informs our understanding of mobility in sub-Saharan Africa more broadly. Tsegah digested and processed enormous amounts of data in order to produce maps and figures that might mean something to the individuals whose stories they represent.

Too often, she argues, data is extracted from and rendered completely incomprehensible to those they represent. Her visualisations, however, make use of African textiles—the very patterns and fabrics the women in Kihato's book wear—as well as maps of the continent and images taken in Johannesburg to illustrate the languages spoken, the clothes worn, and the journeys made. In them, these women can see themselves, how far they've come and all they've brought with them.

Understanding the data well enough to translate its meanings was not simple. But Tsegah was driven to do right by these stories. And so she joined the ranks of women pursuing joy and splendour, through trials and disappointments.



# The maps

Khanga: Welcome to Johannesburg

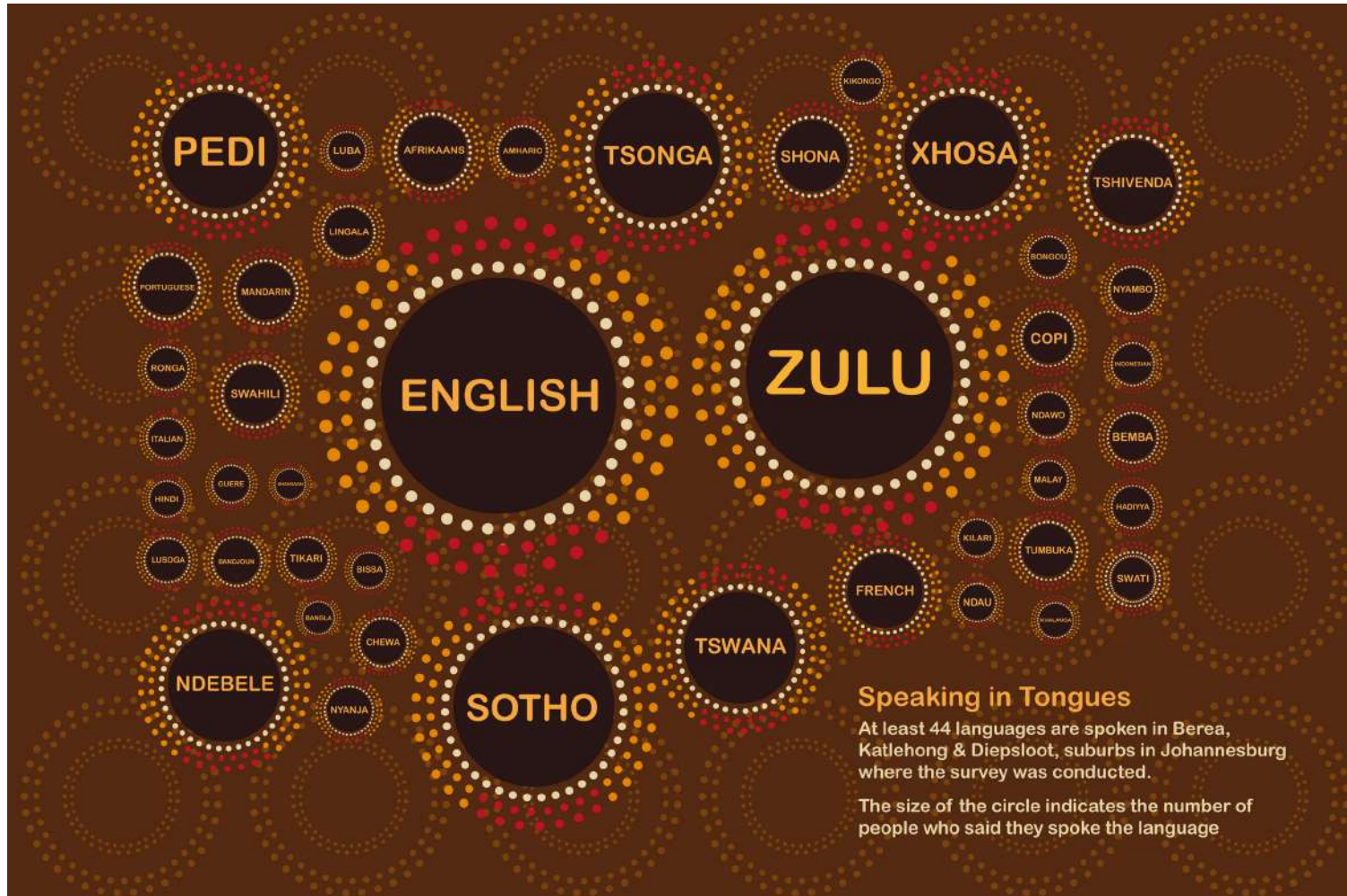


Designed by Awo Tsegah | background photos by Heather Mason

Migrants make Johannesburg. An urban estuary of over six million, arrivals build lives alongside those passing through or packing to leave. These currents shape the city, linking it to distant places and processes. Multi-local moral and material exchange shapes interactions in the city's markets, street corners, and kitchens. Pastors preach in unfamiliar tongues; buses come and go loaded with hopes and fears; residents find and lose themselves. The city marks them and their relations but they too wear paths others will tread. The city changes all who walk these routes but it too is altered, taking on lasting traces of communities in states of movement.

Background photos by Heather Mason

## Shweshwe: Speaking in Tongues



Designed by Awo Tsegah

Johannesburg's 20th century economic boom attracted people from across Europe, Asia, and Africa to work its mines. They created a cosmopolitan city of mixity and hostility, repeatedly entrenching and eroding boundaries of race, religious, class, and gender. Those now coming to the City of Gold - eGoli - fill the streets with tongues familiar and foreign. Most residents speak three or more languages. Some nine or ten. Each becomes a marker of difference, a way of identifying or distancing oneself. Yet these are tools that can create communities, some enduring and some evanescent. In alleys; barrooms and bedrooms; in sites of punishment or prayer; languages bridge and build, creating dynamic soundscapes that are as much a part of the urban infrastructure as the buildings from which they echo.

# Kente: Family portraits



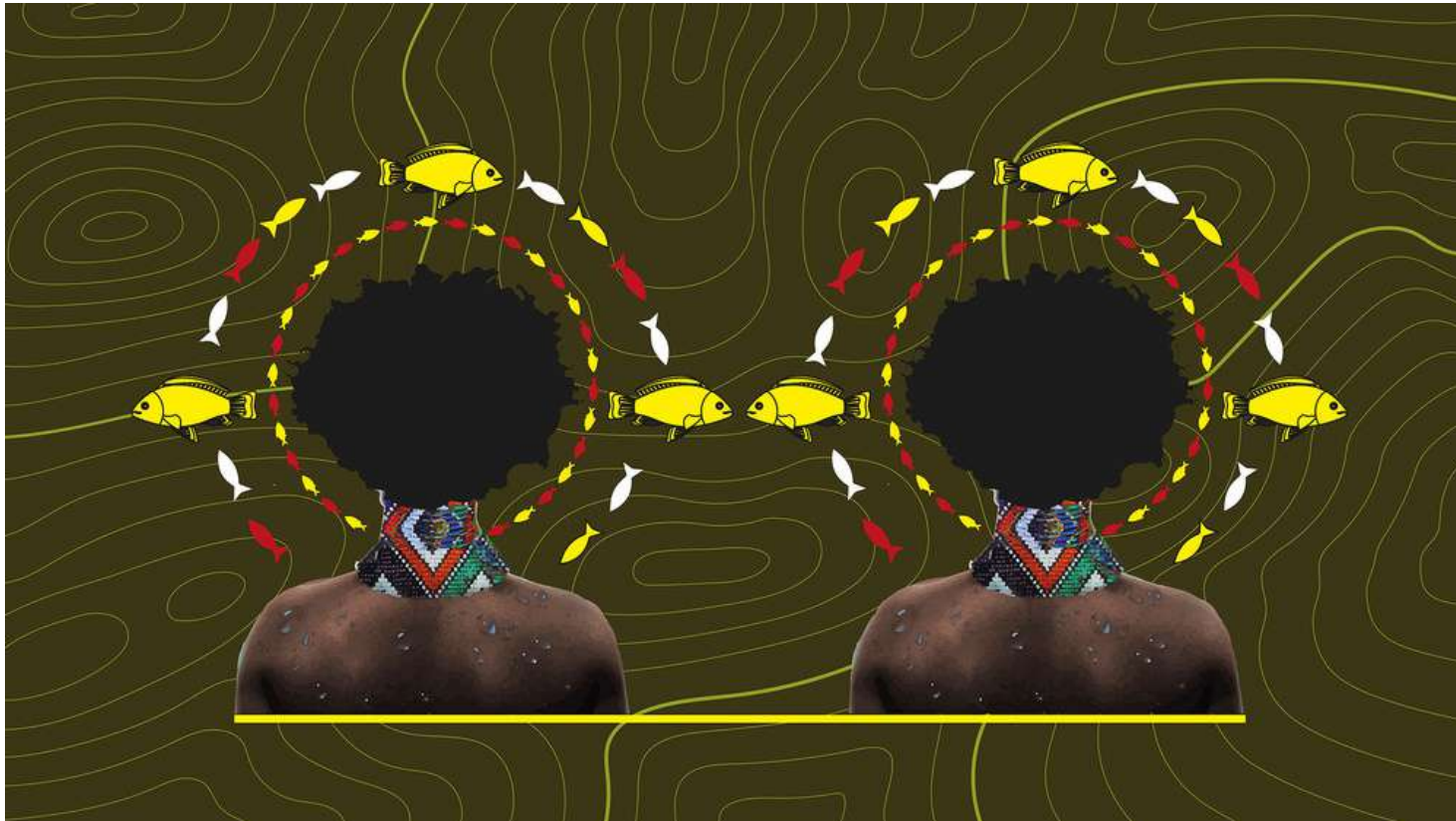
Designed by Awo Tsegah

Women's mobility transforms gender and generations. Urban life offers opportunities to evade elders' eyes and find novel freedoms. Yet one never travels alone. Whether living by themselves or with others, family members exert constant pull. From home villages, points along their journey or elsewhere in the world, kin make claims on women. As they move through Johannesburg, they remain enmeshed in the lives, values, and moral valences of far-flung geographies. Distance often brings obligation and loneliness as women. Yet the distance also offers opportunities for dissimulation and reinvention, to evade the control of parents and spouses. To learn, adapt, and become.

# The art

Inspired by the 'Kitenge' or 'Ankara' print fabric, Awo Tsegah's pieces are interpretations of migrants' envisioned futures. Using surrealist and abstract themes, they speak of raising children, hopes of a better future, investing money and restful retirement.





Raising children | Artwork by Awo Tsegah



Rest | Artwork by Awo Tsegah



Sky High | Artwork by Awo Tsegah

# In the news

Pampalone, T., (2023) 'How a South African data art project landed at the Venice Biennale'. Medium. May 21.

Turok, T., (2023) 'The African exhibition chosen for La Biennale di Venezia'. Daily Maverick. 12 June.

Brown, A., (Host). 2023. BBC Focus on Africa . [Audio podcast]. BBC. 26 June <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0fxdgwd>

Pisarevskaya, A., (Host) (2023) The IMISCOE Migration Podcast, 'About turning data into art'. Audio podcast]. International Migration Research Network. 1 July.



Photo by LB Landau



Photo by LB Landau

# Praise for You will find your people here

‘A wonderful, imaginative, mind-blowing project.  
Johannesburg as it has never been seen or heard before’.

Emeritus Professor Robin Cohen  
Senior Research Fellow, Kellogg College  
Associate, Department of International Development  
University of Oxford

‘Spellbinding’

Audrey Brown, BBC host: Focus on Africa



Photo by LB Landau

# Gender and mobility in the making of city and self

L.B. Landau and T. Asher



“What day is it?” she heard someone in the truck ask the driver.  
“Same day it is where you came from. Welcome to Hillbrow, you will find your people here.”

Fazila gathered herself and stepped tentatively into the commotion on the streets. She blinked as her eyes adjusted to the light. As she straightened the creases on her clothes, a heady feeling of excitement and fear came over her. “I am here, I am in Johannesburg.”

Caroline Wanjiku Kihato, 2013  
Migrant Women of Johannesburg: Life in an In-Between City



Photo by LB Landau

Mobility transforms families, spaces, and potentialities. It denudes and it builds: heightening precarity and poverty for some, creating pathways to accumulation and advancement for others. Africa's future is urban and, as people move, they are remaking cities and defining the continent's future politics.

The installation, "You Will Find Your People Here," and the book by Caroline Wanjiku Kihato from which the phrase was plucked, depicts these continental transformations in intimate form. On display at the Venice Architectural Biennale through November, the exhibit offers a reflective space built from music, video, fabrics, and visualized data that stands in relief against the Biennale's imperial architecture and history.

**The piece reflects millions of individual journeys across Africa by people grappling with exhilarating discoveries and wearying losses.**

The piece reflects millions of individual journeys across Africa by people grappling with exhilarating discoveries and wearying losses. The scale and outcomes of these movements push the limits of our conceptual and ethical vocabulary. So, too, do they stress the political and social institutions needed to support or police migrants – or both.

This intimate story about private spheres is also one of remaking public space, political and social imagination, and future possibilities around which people organize their lives. Colonial and apartheid residue overlays the city, but the futures people are creating will be distinct from what came before.

Across Africa, some of the world's fastest growing cities are fuelled by new arrivals looking for opportunities or escape, movements driven by economic inequality, aspiration, eviction, conflict, and climate.<sup>1</sup> People converge in neighbourhoods and cities not built for them, creating and repurposing spaces designed for others.<sup>2</sup> Some are privileged by class or connection, inserting themselves into wealthy neighbourhoods and global, professional circuits. Others alight uninvited, without visas or the familial and financial resources that can provide stable ground. As Fazila, a migrant from the Democratic Republic of Congo, laments in the first movement of Kihato and Claire Loveday's composition, "I lost everything," in the course of her nighttime journeys across borders. Florence, a traveller from Congo, must hide from the South African government and her own, living in perpetual anxiety. Pianist Mareli Stolp's gasps punctuate the composition, as if to reflect the frustrations local officials, long-term residents, and new arrivals face when confronting the city and each other. Whether citizen or foreign, new arrivals, ethnic or religious minorities, political outsiders must find their people.



Photo by LB Landau

## Mobility transformed

The installation explores in dramatic terms shifts in migratory patterns which are shaping Johannesburg and other African cities take shape today. These are reflected in the data dramatically visualised by Ghanaian artist Awo Tsegah on the African-themed cloths welcoming visitors to the exhibit.<sup>3</sup> In the early 20th century, people flocked to many African cities to join an emerging formal workforce. Whether it was Johannesburg's goldmines, the railroads of Nairobi and Kinshasa, or the Lagosian transport trade, people came in accelerating numbers. The migratory paths connecting village to emerging city were largely travelled by men alone. Sometimes families joined though they returned home to the villages from which they came during periods of harvest or ritualized celebrations. Migrants during this period often built familial connections in both sites. Urban women were rare, but their presence sustained themselves and the economy.<sup>4</sup>

Contemporary migration patterns have changed. There are more women. And there are fewer jobs. As a result, African urbanism conforms little to patterns of the cities of the Euro-American industrial revolution or Asia's increasingly global cities in the twenty-first century. In African cities, people come together not because work awaits, but because their chances are better to find work in the informal sector, to educate their children, or to travel elsewhere.

| we remember home, we pray,  
we laugh, and we can forget  
how difficult Johannesburg is.

There are possibilities amid precarity. Travelling alone or with kin, women now account for close to half of migrants.<sup>5</sup> They too are powerful agents of change. The narratives haunting the composition speak of these hopes - whether bright or fading - just as the projected images by Awo Tsegah present images familiar from roadside vendors in defamiliarized terms, making visible the continental social forms and logics that individuals bring with them. Women's heads are replaced by buckets, a play on vendors who carry domestic wares on their heads along roadsides. Domesticity is rendered a portable idea crosses geographical borders in the form of flowers sold roadside that are carried from one geography to another. Jeanette, a migrant from Rwanda, puts this same dynamic in a different evocative form: "I like my home here" she declares even as she notes 'we remember home, we pray, we laugh, and we can forget how difficult Johannesburg is.' Fantasy of beauty and domesticity shapes trajectories as people arrive and stay. Quests for the status, peace and ease often lead them to leave.

## Geographies remade

The installation reflects urban geographies that are under rapid changes as a result of the arrival of women to Johannesburg from adjacent and more distant countries alike, whether the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, or any of the 23 destinations emblazoned on the kanga that doubles as a social map of the places from which women journeyed. When they arrive, many build lives in urban gateways, an increasingly visible hallmark of Africa cities. Often intended as stations on an extended journey, these zones are often unwitting destinations. They absorb and propel multiple movements of people. For those staying put, the city changes. Sites on the urban edge rapidly transmute from swamps, fields, and forests to densely inhabited city space. Inner cities churn with populations on the move -- Johannesburg a paradigmatic example of these continental shifts. The installation asks: what urban age will African mobility engender and what distinct social logics does it contain?

A partial answer is found in the social worlds animated by these mass movements. As people make lives across multiple sites – from where they come, live, and hope to go – they forge connections both material and moral. Circulations of messages, memories, and remittances accompany modifications in goals, values, and norms.

From the gateways or urban estuaries in which these multiple pathways converge, constellations of peoples and sites interlinked within and across space and time begin to emerge.<sup>6</sup> This is how cities emerge that are simultaneously cosmopolitan and heterogeneous, connected through tissues that prove more durable than many narratives about cities tend to convey. This is the precise dynamic explored in the stories retold by urbanist Kihato, composer Loveday, and pianist Stolp. It is also visible in the Kente cloth illustrating the diverse geographies where people's family now reside.

**Amidst this web of connection, individuals remake the spaces around them, generating novel forms of mobile urbanism and belonging.**

Amidst this web of connection, individuals remake the spaces around them, generating novel forms of mobile urbanism and belonging. Many of these local attachments are only loosely structured by dominant social norms or a comprehensive vision for urban development.<sup>7</sup> Women cross urban boundaries to work, play, and pray side by side in multiple languages. They slide past each other, leaving light traces while fashioning loose bonds. Speaking scores of languages and following almost an equal number of religious denominations, they connect and disconnect with neighbours and kin across diasporas.

his mobile urbanism rests on the dispersion of families, communities, and the transformation of gendered and generational relations.<sup>8</sup> Some will coalesce in forms familiar from other increasingly diverse urban centres: ethnic groups hunkering down and forming enclaves; neighbourhood associations formed around spaces, debates, or themes; home-town associations. Within these, women and men may revert to familiar roles, recreating family life recognizable and respectable to those at home.

“I know where I have come from,  
and I can be whatever I want,”  
Jeanette declares upon her arrival  
from Rwanda.

Others will take the forms of localized disconnection, where individuals actively resist local incorporation while building relationships – platonic and intimate, material and imagined – that may be fleeting or far-flung.<sup>9</sup> Men and women will escape the expectations of watchful families, assuming public and private identities and living arrangements that they cannot readily take on when monitored in the communities from which they originate. “I know where I have come from, and I can be whatever I want,” Jeanette declares upon her arrival from Rwanda. There is a liberatory aspect to these shifts even as there is profound dislocation and even violence that accompanies these efforts to remake oneself in a new city.



Approach to the exhibition, point of view by Reuben Fleisch

The installation does not ask us to decide which of these dynamics assumes priority or to reconcile the narratives. Both are true at the same moment as in the narrative of Sibongile, whose sister has fashioned a new relationship away from watchful eyes and encountered extraordinary violence in the process. Only her sister and the other migrant women protect her.



Photo by LB Landau



## Futures in another place and time

These emergent possibilities for social life require us to see the multiple rhythms of the city, lives made at once for the here and now and simultaneously for futures in spaces that may only ever be visited in landscapes of dream and aspiration. Some of the people who make the journey to a gateway zone long to return home when their working lives are done only to find the spaces and people to which they return are unrecognizable. Others build diasporic futures with investments and families in places they may never reach.<sup>10</sup> People's aspirations are often imbricated with fantastic images of contemporary achievement: the wealth of Nollywood films, hip-hop videos, the millenarian and miraculous promise of Pentecostal preachers,<sup>11</sup> or selfies from friends and relatives fabricating successes at odds with their material conditions.

Whether liturgical or popular, informed by current affairs or historical and cultural bequests, imaginations include trajectories and markers of progress often closely associated with geographic mobility: a move to the city, a move across borders, a journey to Europe or America. Yet material circumstances, the increasing policing of borders between African states, and Europe's lockdown of African migration that fashions borders into barriers make these journeys increasingly difficult and life-threatening.<sup>12</sup>

Many become stuck in place and time, unable to progress or reach the next milestone of success.<sup>13 14</sup> Without such achievements, they cannot return 'home', but nor can they move forward, suspended in a state of what the anthropologist Alcinda Honwana calls 'waithood.'<sup>15</sup>

**If nothing else, Africa's urbanisation simultaneously centres and unsettles the margins.**

If nothing else, Africa's urbanisation simultaneously centres and unsettles the margins. Africa's urban gateways and estuaries often appear in city plans and scholarship as denigrated or degenerate spaces of poverty, violence, and exclusion. They appear to many as 'well-identified, bounded, and increasingly isolated territories viewed by both outsiders and insiders as social purgatories, urban hellholes where only the refuse of society would accept to dwell.'<sup>16</sup> Yet this exhibit - and the cities which inform it - call on us to see these zones as politically generative spaces, frequently contoured by sustained and varied forms of mobility. They are created, transformed, or maintained through interactions among the multiple ethnic, political, or religious groups within it but also through connections to allies, families, and interlocutors elsewhere that people in the margins draw in.



Photo by LB Landau

If we peer beyond the narratives retold in the composition, we begin to see a range of possible futures beneath a framing that is initially domestic but gives way to reveal broader forces at work. Urban gateways and estuaries are ultimately more than transitory spaces on the edges of power that contain and frustrate personal or collective trajectories. They may serve this role, but they are also sites of contestation, membership claiming, identity formation, and boundary production.<sup>17</sup> They are places where the political and institutional practices that define centre and periphery are taken up, adapted, recast, and reinvented. It is where conceptual categories of insider and outsider are forged with, or without, reference to material or institutional opportunities and endowments. They are places where new margins are drawn, sometimes creating spaces of exclusion and incorporation within the periphery. As people retain orientations to sites elsewhere, what was a community's centre becomes the margin of another. They are also places where new solidarities are forged. They are places where people develop new practices to break down divisions, but also new practices to mark out and enforce new divides. As people move, mix, and merge, the margins can become new loci of action and contestation. Economic and political fragmentation means multiple centres and margins with each space potentially serving as both.<sup>18</sup>

As space-time compression, multi-localism, economic precarity, and political fragmentation continue apace, these urban spaces are decreasingly discrete sites on the edge of the 'real' economy and politics. They are instead locations where lives are made, in which women sell Chinese or Dutch fabrics or - tellingly - maps of the globe, on the side of the road that they carry with them on their cross-border journeys for resale. And for tens of millions across the continent, they are the new normal. They are spaces at once hyperlocal and immensely global. They are marginal yet also central, emerging as connected sites together through multiple circulations within material and moral economies. Increasingly these constellations will define self, city, and our future politics.

**As people move, mix, and merge,  
the margins can become new loci  
of action and contestation.**

African mobilities are redefining urbanism, sociality, and the scale of politics, a point cleverly made by Tsegah in the doubled image of two figures' heads thrown backward, their elongated bodies taking the shape of buses or even airplanes alongside fans (yet another ubiquitous item sold roadside), exhaling with a force that obliterates the topographical lines of maps in the background.

What will become of these connected islands of space-time that are forming in cities such as Johannesburg? Undoubtedly, given vast contingencies, the future for people and the spaces they create will require time to work themselves out. Translocal or oscillating lives, diasporic imaginaries and deterritorialised politics may become the new normal. Yet there is not one African history, nor will there be one future.<sup>19</sup>

‘Being in between is not good. We are somewhere and nowhere.’

There is no single history to African cities. Some settlements (e.g., Timbuktu or Zanzibar) originate from deep histories of trade and exchange. Others were planned into being as colonial or post-colonial administrative or trading centres. These include some of the continent’s most dynamic cities: Nairobi, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Luanda, and Oyala. In the absence of the strong unifying disciplines of market integration, powerful political principles or effective formal institutions, contemporary patterns of mobility may present a critical juncture in which some forms of patterns established by colonial or post-colonial regimes may be overwhelmed, overcome, or simply substantially reshaped: a period of ‘openness and contingency’.

Yet while variations will continue, mobilities among these sites are likely to stabilise, creating urban forms that concentrate connection and entrench these constellations. Within forms of planetary urbanism,<sup>20</sup> micro-level socialities and individual and familial projects will make real, and reshape, global forms of extraction, exclusion, and expectation.

The politics of urban estuaries – with all their generative directions – are unlikely to be contained. They inevitably spill out over the social and political divides set up to contain them. Because of the mobilities that shape them, the alternative forms of social organisation they allow, and the new meanings and new identities they support, they may ultimately shape global politics and culture, as mass mobility becomes an increasing hallmark of our modern age even and we have yet to design political forms, or safety nets, wholly adequate to this phenomenon. If nothing else, the forms of sociality, time, and space remain objects of speculation about our own futures and the futures being created by the people around us, which this installation profoundly illustrates. As an Ivorian migrant quoted in Kihato’s book ponders, ‘Being in between is not good. We are somewhere and nowhere.’



Photo by Heather Mason

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