

# #17

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## CITIES

A special issue of the  
**Postcolonial Studies Association** newsletter  
• Summer 2016

# #17

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# editors' introduction

Welcome to **Issue #17** of the **Postcolonial Studies Association Newsletter**, which takes a special focus on the topic of 'Postcolonial Cities'. Since the Arab uprisings in 2011, cities have become more than ever the sites of political, grass roots resistance to the ongoing forms of colonialism, discrimination and social injustice that continue to shape our contemporary world. Processes of gentrification, austerity policies and the increased privatisation of urban space drive marginalised populations out of the city, whilst the few remaining public spaces—from Tahrir Square to Gezi Park—function as key sites for forms of protest and dissent. As both people and capital flow through these urban nodes, whilst the spaces within them become increasingly marked by division and segregation, cities might be said to become not only 'global', as Saskia Sassen observed in the 1990s, but also evermore post/colonial. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that cities have also become centres for different kinds of cultural production, from literary writing to performance poetry, from street art and graffiti to art installations, and from comics and graphic novels to creative non-fiction. As postcolonial critics, analysing these urban cultures might help us to diagnose the new kinds of colonialism that are shaping our cities and even imagine alternative future trajectories that might help us think past, or beyond them. As Andy Merryfield argues in his 2014 re-writing of Manuel Castells' 1977 book, *The Urban Question*, the 'new urban question' for radical theory 'means figuring out the curiously novel mode of urbanisation we have in our midst today', whilst the 'new urban question for radical politics [...] means figuring out what to do about all this'.

In its first section, this special issue of the PSA Newsletter explores the ways in which literary and cultural forms might allow us to rethink the way we inhabit increasingly divided and discriminatory city spaces through a number of special articles. **Léopold Lambert's** photo essay of the Calais 'Jungle' expands the notion of the urban to the

refugee camps that increasingly mark Europe's landscape, whilst **Marie Coffey's** account of the way in which graffiti culture is globalised through circulation on the internet shows how online and offline cultural spaces intersect. **Aya Nasar** shows how Cairo is captured in the ephemera of the archive before reading the city itself as a kind of urban archive, whilst contributions from **Zahira Asmal** and **Monique Michal Marks** look to South Africa—once home to the apartheid, and arguably the archetypal 'postcolonial' city—to analyse the new kinds of segregation that are shaping cities in the Global South. Given the increasing spatial complexity of the postcolonial city, photographic contributions from the **Philadelphia Museum of Art** and **Jodi Bieber** help us to visualise the physical realities of these urban spaces, new and old. These articles address key questions for postcolonial urban studies: How have cities become locations in which new forms of colonisation are taking place? And, correspondingly, how have cities enabled new forms of resistance and political engagement? Can we still draw distinctions between cities in the Global North and the Global South, and should we compare them? Can postcolonial literary and cultural production help us to imagine alternative urban futures, and if so, how?

Perhaps as a testament to the increasing academic interest in, and study of, postcolonial cities, the second section of this special issue includes reports on a number of networks and conferences from institutions around the world that have specifically addressed the postcolonial urban question. **Jade Munslow Ong** and **Rena Jackson** report on the Third Biannual Northern Postcolonial Network Symposium, which took the pressing issue of asylum, refuge and migration as its theme, which is increasingly altering and shaping urban spaces in the Global North, whilst **Ed Charlton** reports on the third Writing South Africa Now conference, indicatively entitled 'Writing the South African

City'. Looking beyond the UK, **Ágnes Györke** reports on the Gender, Translocality and the City in post-1945 Literature and Visual Culture Research Group located in Hungary, and **Gregory Bracken** introduces the work of the Postcolonial Global Cities Research Cluster at the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), Leiden, in the Netherlands. Finally, **Dominic Davies** and **Elleke Boehmer** offer their thoughts on the culmination of the two-year Leverhulme-funded Network, 'Planned Violence: Post/Colonial Urban Infrastructures and Literature', discussing specifically the photographic essay and exhibition they put together over the project, some of which are included here.

Finally, the issue includes reports from recipients of the PSA's General Research Fund, **Gemma Scott**, **Sourit Bhattacharya** and **Jacquelyn Teoh**, who explain how the PSA's grants helped their research, whilst the three book reviews included in the issue's penultimate section again return to the issue of the urban as well as looking to other recent academic studies that range outside of the question of the postcolonial city. The newsletter concludes with a series of

images from urban explorer, researcher and photographer, **Bradley Garrett**, to once again reiterate the centrality of the urban to the current field of postcolonial studies and to bring this issue's thematic explorations to a close. The PSA Newsletter Editors would like to take the opportunity to thank all those who contributed to this issue and generously allowed us to redistribute their excellent work and images in this publication.

**Lucinda Newns** (Design) and **Dominic Davies** (Editorial) are the editors of the Postcolonial Studies Association biannual newsletter. Lucinda is a lecturer in Postcolonial and World Literatures at Queen Mary University of London. Her current research focuses on representations of domesticity and homemaking in contemporary diasporic fiction. Dominic Davies is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Oxford currently researching the way urban infrastructures in post/colonial cities are represented by comics and graphic novels.



## Police, Fences, and Containers: A Photographic Report from the Calais 'Jungle'<sup>1</sup>

Léopold Lambert

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This introduction was written after a visit to Calais and Dunkirk in February 2016 in an attempt to consolidate some initial thoughts arising in response to seeing the refugee camps there. These thoughts do not address the individual and collective experiences of duress of the refugees who currently live in Calais's so-called 'Jungle' and Dunkirk's Grande Synthe encampment but, rather, the systematic and

This labelling exacerbates a primitive [...] imaginary of a place that is already subject to much discrimination from parts of the local and (bi)national population [...].

carefully planned ways in which national and local authorities make the lives of refugees increasingly difficult.

Calais and Dunkirk are the two French cities closest to Dover in England. As such, they are the main ferry ports towards England and the entrance to the Channel Tunnel is situated only a few kilometres away from the city centre of Calais. The name 'Jungle' designates a large, muddy area on the outskirts of Calais where about 6,000 migrants and refugees are currently living, often waiting for an opportunity to finish their long and tiresome journey to the United Kingdom (there are also two other similar sites near Dunkirk). This name is a distorted translation of the farsi term *jangla* (originally given by Afghani and Iranian refugees to the

place) that, despite a common root with jungle, refers more simply to a forest. The name 'jungle' was first spread by local associations attempting to help its population, and raises the problematic nature of some humanitarian interventions. This labelling exacerbates a primitive, if not racist, imaginary of a place that is already subject to much discrimination from parts of the local and (bi)national population and politicians.

When it comes to refugees, it would be politically radical for the European Union to simply do nothing. By this provocative statement, I mean that a significant proportion of the hardships currently experienced by asylum seeking individuals and families is due to the various policies and ideologies that are deployed against them by the European Union (borders, walls, police harassment, racism). The



Coptic church in the 'Jungle', run by Ethiopian refugees





The Shakespeare Globe Company presenting their interpretation of Hamlet to an audience of 300

dismantlement of these would drastically transform their daily lives and endeavours. Of course, this is not to say that their flee from various forms of individual and collective persecution should be met with indifference, but rather to emphasise the fact that the efforts currently made to antagonise migrants and refugees far outweigh those necessary to provide adequate welcoming conditions to their temporary or permanent resettling.

The following photographs focus on Calais to illustrate several physical embodiments of these hostile efforts.<sup>2</sup> Most striking, perhaps, is the overwhelming police presence. Vans from the Gendarmerie Nationale (a branch of the French Armed Forces with police duties among the civilian population in France), full of officers clad in riot gear, are visible everywhere around the Jungle, in the port, and in the city centre. A helicopter also patrols the sky to spot bodies trying to access the port or, further away, the channel tunnel. Any efforts such as these are, however, particularly difficult—triple layers of barbed-wire fences punctuated with surveillance cameras have been set-up along the four-kilometre border that separates the Jungle from the ferry terminal. This fence, though short in comparison to the walls running along the borders between the United States and Mexico or between Hungary and Serbia, functions as

the securitisation of the border between France and the United Kingdom.

The recently assembled 125-container camp which now houses a few hundred of the 6,000 refugees that currently live in the Jungle is another instance of violence towards refugees, despite the humanitarian claims that have accompanied the containers' construction. Beyond the extreme sparsity of their design, these containers and the clinical symbolism that their architecture conveys, indicate the hostility towards bodies, which in turn

encourages them to go back to where they come from. This informal city is shaped by a securitised urbanity (rigid alignment, no social space, etc.), and there is an atmosphere of absolute control that rules it. The camp is surrounded by a fence and is accessible only by a palm-recognition through a device that I was forbidden to photograph. I even had trouble distinguishing between humanitarian or security workers—though of course, to assume they are two separate groups is to ignore the functions of state-mandated NGOs. The entrance to the camp is monitored by the NGO 'La Vie Active', and employees at the gates refused to answer my questions, let alone to grant access to regular citizens wanting to inspect the living conditions provided by the premises.

Of course, it is bizarre that security is such a defining feature of this place, in particular when a significant section of its population is made up of women and children. These security infrastructures are not imposed by concerned actors as a temporary solution, but rather are informed by various prejudices and the desire to living conditions at a deplorable level to deter new arrivees. The only legitimate strategy that could have been applied here, in a situation that (we should not forget) only exists through the application of illegitimate enforcement of borders, would have consisted in providing



Calais's 'Jungle' – The container camp





Jungle graffiti

for political ideologies with which I fundamentally disagree. If you would like to use them, please send me an email to ask for authorisation ([info.funambulist@gmail.com](mailto:info.funambulist@gmail.com))

**Léopold Lambert** is the editor of *The Funambulist*, a bimestrial printed and digital magazine complemented with a blog and a podcast (Archipelago). Its subtitle, 'Politics of Space and Bodies', expresses its ambition to bridge the world of design (architecture, urbanism, industrial and fashion design) with the

world of the humanities (philosophy, anthropology, history, geography, etc.) through critical articles written by long-time collaborators as well as new ones.

Many aspects of *The Funambulist's* editorial mediums are available for free (in the form of books, blogs, and podcasts) and readers who enjoy the forms and contents of the platform are invited to consider purchasing or subscribing to the magazine as a form of support for this form of production of knowledge. These are available from <http://thefunambulist.net/>.

*A version of this article originally appeared on The Funambulist's blog on 4th February 2016. The written piece and accompanying photographs are reproduced here with the author's permission.*

some basic infrastructural services such as sanitary and water infrastructure. In view of the drastic economic, material and human investment deployed to control the 6,000 inhabitants of the Jungle, such beneficial infrastructures would not have been difficult to implement.

## Notes

1. Although the photographs presented here are meant to contribute to a larger imaginary about the Calais 'Jungle,' they represent only a fragment of it and, as such, can be misleading. The main reason for this is that I did not want to take pictures of people. This means that some important spaces are missing, most notably the Jungle's 'main streets' with its Afghani and Kurdish restaurants, its small shops and its religious buildings (three of which were demolished on 2nd February 2016). The audacious inventiveness deployed to build these buildings, a particularly innovative urbanity, is therefore absent on the photographs presented here.
2. I have decided to reserve all rights when it comes to these photographs (rather than licensing them under creative commons, which is my normal practice), as I'm wary that their use could be instrumentalised



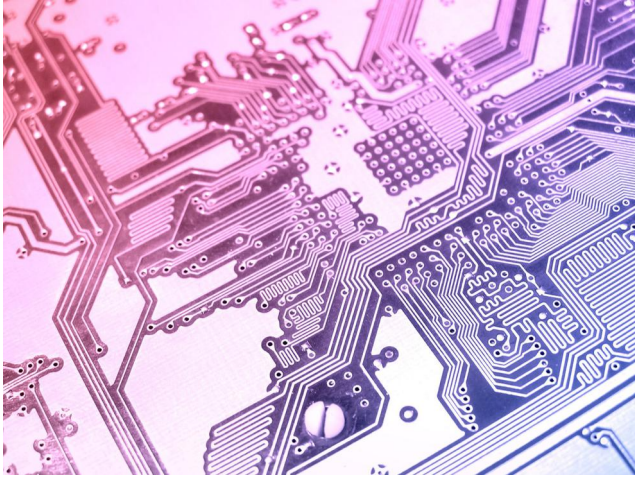
Toilets in the Jungle



# Graffiti and the Digital: The Migrant's Appropriation of Urban Space

Marie Coffey

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We are in the age of the digital migrants and digital warfare.

GPS systems are allowing Syrian refugees to navigate safer routes, while Twitter feeds from Gaza are jammed with real-time tweets from Israeli soldiers. Social media and video coverage are operating as panoptical cyber-tools of oppression on our globalised screens. We are in a time of transition. The *Locution* and the *Location* of enunciated narratives are boundless in the digital-spatiality of cyber-space (1994).

In this moment of hiatus, to echo Edward Said, we must observe how the itinerant 'excavate[s] the silences' (2004, 81). It is our responsibility as theorists of the humanities to ask the question: how are the displaced migrants of Syria, Palestine, or Cairo, appropriating space? How are the arts mediating a counter-narrative that runs against the bloodied-sprawl of urban colonialism? Given the rise of graffiti art in West bank, Tahrir Square and refugee camps, it is important for us to examine how urbanised art is being used as guerrilla warfare against the institutional power of state and occupation.

Since its inception in the 1970s, street art has served a site for protest that visually signifies the citizen's discontent with hegemonic systems. It follows a custom, as discussed by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, of tactical appropriation (1984). Embedded

in the visual grid of the city, the graffiti becomes a subversive act of enunciation. The ordinary citizen reterritorialises his or her position within urban space by an insurgent writing back: a re-modification of the prescribed uses of urban environment and received culture.

Yet, as is often the case in moments of high transition, the *operatus morandi* of traditional protest art seems almost reductively problematic. Despite being powerful conceptualisations of dissidence, the layers of graffiti that were originally inscribed upon the Berlin Wall, including contributions from artists such as Bodo Sperling or Greul Aschanta, were spatially-localised acts, and merely served to maintain the dialectical succession of interdependence and 'Othering'.

It is in the contested plight of the West Bank—as it manifests in the apartheid wall of Palestinian-Israeli separation—that a contrapuntal point in the narrative of the artistic migrant is emerging. Similar to the Berlin Wall, Graffiti in the West Bank remains a ubiquitous expression of cultural resistance. The aesthetic act is, as one Palestinian observed, 'a reading of the street'—a de Certeauian social performativity that rewrites the imagined community of power (1996, 139). While the ordinary citizen is still subjecting the localised walls to the semiotics of street art, the insurgency of the migrant artist is amplified and altered by the growth of digital media and cyberspace. Both the rise in digital documentation and digital museums, such as

There is no longer a  
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It has become global.

*Virtual Migrants* and *Ayyam Gallery*, have facilitated the inter-global connection of ideas about resistance, and has created a space where protest art can be shared and distributed across various online platforms instantaneously.

With this separation of performativity and physicality, digital art has de-synchronised the spatial and temporal materiality of contested sites of artistic resistance. There is no longer a need for a local site of enunciation for protest. It has become global. The Syrian artist and migrant, Tamman Azzam, is symptomatic of the new wave of digital migrancy. Fleeing his art studio in Damascus with the rise of the Syrian crisis, Azzam has used digital platforms to find alternative modes of writing back with a counter-narrative of resistance. In 2013, as part of his 'Syrian Museum' project, Azzam superimposed Gustav Klimt's Western art deco painting *The Kiss*—a symbol of universal love and brotherhood—onto a photograph of a bullet-ridden Damascus building. This digital transposition, entitled *Freedom Graffiti*, went viral and became prominent in news syndicates as a signifier of tactical resistance of the marginalised citizen. The conflation of the Western/Eastern images offered a phenomenological intervention into the locality of space typically dominated by state power. The global migrant is no longer limited to the heuristic performance of onsite graffiti, but can enunciate his or her dissidence through an intersubjective and boundary-less global citizenship.

In another of his works, Azzam has modified Francisco Goya's *The Third of May 1808*, a painting depicting Napoleon's army executing Spanish resistance fighters during the Peninsula War. Again, acting in resistance to the Syrian regime and their derision of this type of 'Gulf-sponsored art', this piece has globally become a bottom-up exposure of the urban and colonial power structures of the Syrian crisis. As Azzam asserted to *Swide Magazine*, this work is about illustrating that 'Syria is living the Third of May every day and no one stops it' (6 Feb 2013).

The growth of digital media and new modes of digital technology have altered the situationist and material typography with which street art is traditionally associated. The inter-global world is discovering new forms of cultural production that can resist colonial and other oppressive powers. This conflation of the digital and graffiti art has heralded a new age. The digital migrant is no longer limited by temporal-spatiality to express a

The growth of digital media and new modes of digital technology have altered the situationist and material typography with which street art is traditionally associated.

counter-narrative. Rather, s/he is re-negotiating the parameters of possibility and generating a dialogical and metachronous narrative of artistic dissidence.

With the rise of social media Twitter feeds and the interconnected intrusiveness of our Smartphone updates, we are all fast becoming 'real-time' participants in the realpolitik of our global city. In fact, we are all potential practitioners in the performance of digital warfare.

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**Marie Coffey** is a Masters graduate whose work has focused predominantly on Joyce's *Ulysses* and the intersections between colonialism and queer gender performativity. She has recently become interested in the question of the 'Urban City' and refugee resistance literature and intends to begin a Doctorate in this area.



# CityLeaks Cologne: Diasporic Figures of Colour in Urban Spaces

Cathy C. Waegner

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Few of the millions of tourists to Cologne, Germany, stray from the Rhine River's left bank, the location of the breathtaking cathedral, the Roman ruins, the large museums and grand department stores, to the 'Schäl Sick', the so-called 'other side' of the river<sup>1</sup> and where, in the district of Cologne-Mülheim, a high percentage of the population has migratory roots, mainly Turkish and Kurdish. Keup Street there is popularly known as 'Istanbul Boulevard', and it took almost a decade for the instigators of a brutal nail-bomb attack that took place there in 2004 to be ascribed to right-wing racist violence by non-locals, rather than, as was officially assumed for a long time, intra-community feuding. It is no coincidence that in 2015 the organisers of the third CityLeaks Urban Arts Festival<sup>2</sup> chose to focus on Cologne-Mülheim as the venue for the façade murals, the workshops, and the street installations through which CityLeaks accomplishes its agenda of 'hacking' into the fixed structures of the twenty-first century metropolis and promoting what Ulrich Beck calls 'cosmopolitanism from below' (Beck, 2004): inviting diasporic, often cross-ethnic artists to create giant figures of colour, thus lending the postcolonial city a vibrant facelift.

As their contribution to CityLeaks' 2015 theme, 'the ideal city' (literally, 'the city that does not exist'; 'die Stadt, die es nicht gibt'), Acidum, a duo-collective based in Fortaleza/Brazil, created 'World on a Wire'<sup>3</sup> to grace the side façade of a building that houses a Turkish shop and apartments at Vincenz Street 14. Rich in detail and deliberate irony, the mural depicts a woman of colour looking downward toward a globe swinging on a wire between a telephone pole and a radio tower. The antennae on her head and in the bottom left of the mural integrate her into the technological parameters of the picture. But the careful observer notices that the hands controlling the globe do not belong to her; indeed, they appear male and of their colouring is

ambiguous. It could be said that she rejects this domination, her pixelated eyes refusing to participate in top-down urban manipulations. The falling figures on her garment reference the iconic videos showing the tiny shapes of employees leaping from the burning Twin Towers in the iconic catastrophe of 9/11. Acidum's bright mural thus signals the real dangers that can arise in global cosmopolitanism, but also suggests that alternatives to control and victimisation do exist.

The well-known Egyptian street artist Ammar Abo Bakr joins Acidum in linking the depicted person of colour with both urban dangers and forms of escape from, or subversion of them. At Dünwald Street 41 in Cologne-Mülheim, Bakr conducted a CityLeaks workshop while creating his mural that depicts a man with clasped hands and wearing an Egyptian turban, possibly a homeless person

