

Editorial
Considering Africa

Emma O'Shaughnessy

The initial call for papers for this edition, Volume 5, Issue 1, was entitled, 'Resistance in Africa.' Our motivation for this stemmed from the fact that I had recently been sent a call for papers for a colloquium, themed 'Struggles in Africa,' taking place in France in November of this year. The colloquium is organised around how Africa resists being cast as 'indocile'— to use a phrase attributed to Francophone, and now South Africa-based scholar, Achille Mbembe. The event drew my attention to the problematic of how, decades after independence in many African countries, new forms of intense struggle have emerged, lain over those in Africa's history, struggles which register Africa still as a beleaguered continent. Many thinkers and artists focus on the harsh realities born from the post-independence, and in our case, post-apartheid eras. Equally, however, many observers are focusing on the ways in which Africa responds creatively to these struggles and how, through various practices, it resists being relegated to the position of a place *always* beset by trauma and difficulties. For us Africans, these pathways are immediate and visible. For outsiders, they are not always easy to see— especially for those who may benefit from the lacks in Africa's economic or socio-political models, and especially for those for whom it is customary to read Africa as abject and 'Other.'

There are tensions here that have generated, and continue to generate much debate. We thought it a brilliant idea to tap into some of these debates and publish an edition of *postamble*, also alongside this global, student event. In many ways, I felt we had an obligation to be political, to create a radical platform of discussion.

A month after publishing the call, we had not received more than two submissions. Naturally, we felt that the theme's urgency and

contemporaneusness would have elicited a generous response, both from within the bounds of our own university, and from abroad. Interestingly, this was not the case. So, we changed tactics. The subsequent weeks saw a hasty, more hands-on approach, a kind of cold calling on fellow graduate students. This, unlike the first month after the call, did yield a wealth of submissions, all of a very high calibre, all original and thoughtful. These later submissions were from students desiring to submit their current work and their immediate research-work that did not necessarily have an overt political edge, essays that were not emplaced within distinct schools of thought, or, for that matter, that did not conform to our theme. Practically, we realised that the themed issues have the potential to be as much as a hindrance as an inspiration to an audience of potential contributors. We were humbled by the fact that the work itself directed the journal into a certain direction. In becoming subsumed within the trajectories of the papers and projects, this edition of the journal was crafted along rich critical lines, ranging from philosophical ruminations to sensitive readings of the African terrain, some through the lens of fiction and literature and some through the lens of culture, society and space. The experience of these last few months, from the call to the final deadline, put us in a position where the submissions organised *us*. Fittingly, it was through the conversations between these diverse pieces that we found the title for this edition, 'Considering Africa.'

The looseness of this phrase conjures the discursive nature of the edition and its range of voices: from African and English literature students, to urbanists, social anthropologists and law graduates. What is particularly inviting about the scope of essays is the deft use of ideas, continental and global. Furthermore, what is striking about this issue is the sensitivity shown by each contributor as he or she charts his or her way through a literal and symbolic African landscape. In many ways, you could say that this edition defies the limitation of the theme.

Carlo Germeshuys, in "It's a matter of the choices you want to make": Literal and symbolic Africa in Nigerian writer, Isidore Okpewho's *Call Me By My Rightful Name*' draws from Western philosophical traditions and critical African

debates to make a lucid and original contribution to the African Diaspora argument. Staging his argument within Okpewho's novel, Carlo steers us through the tensions within the literal and the symbolic manifestations of the Diaspora 'Myth of Return.' His intellectual grasp of Western and African philosophical traditions and the ease with which he manipulates these traditions makes his critical analysis of *Call me by my Rightful Name* a most deft performance.

Equally strong in form and content, Kelly Rosenthal's 'Culture, Politics and the State' outlines the debates in anthropology around the ways in which South African politicians mobilise culture as part of their political identity and exercise of power. Drawing from incidents in the South African public domain, Kelly raises pressing questions around the ways in which culture has been, and possibly should be understood conceptually, discursively and as a socio-political construct in post-apartheid South Africa.

Emma O'Shaughnessy's 'Kant, Fabian and Achebe: From the Enlightenment to Colonialism: time, discourse and the temporal Other' brings a three-tiered discussion onto the page. Using Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* as a site of enunciation, Emma works Johannes Fabian into a discussion with Immanuel Kant, to demonstrate the ordering capacity of time within ideology and discourse, as demonstrated in the colonial terrain. Also creating bridges between different traditions and schools of thought, Emma demonstrates the power of literature to embody the nuances of philosophical and political interrogations, across time.

David Durbach and Melissa Steyn's 'It's like talking about Chinatown and seeing Greeks: Gentrification and residential diversity in the Bo-Kaap, Cape Town, South Africa' asks us to take a longer look at the process of urban renewal in the South African city suburb of the Bo-Kaap. The authors remind us that understanding gentrification as a loaded political and economic maneuver is essential in the current urban climate. Thoroughly researched and lucidly written,

this article shows how ordinary citizens comprehend their rights to the city and also, how space can never be divorced from power-formations and ideologies.

Karen Jennings's 'The Palm Stone as Non-site in the *Long Silence of Mario Salviati*' is a lyrical and sophisticated investigation into the relationship between human agents and the raw, geologies of the South African landscape. Using Kantian notions of the sublime along with Robert Smithson's cartographic historicity of the earth and J.M Coetzee's quest to unmask our relationship to our own soil, Karen draws us carefully towards the symbolism of the site and non-site, as evinced in Van Heerden's novel.

Micah Salkind's 'A Genealogy of Kwaito' is an exciting delving into the body politics of kwaito— as a local and worldly art form and mode of expression. Tracking its origins to the dawning of South Africa's democratic era, Micah follows some of its major players and critics, mapping out the place that the music has come to occupy, symbolically and physically, in the post-1994 context. Cleverly evoking its diasporic energies, Micah insists on the loyal yet expansive responsiveness of Kwaitos' musicians and singers to their world around them.

Seton Nicholas' photographic essay, entitled 'Indie' allows the viewer to access his own journey with the Christian religion and its traditions in Ghana. Showing us a series of images from a speech and prize giving ceremony at a local school, he raises questions around the place of inherited Western rites and practices in African today. Deeply personal and subtle, this project offers us a glimpse into the everyday of Ghanaian Christian life, yet problematised by the photographer.

We finish off the edition with two thought-provoking book reviews. The first, from Natasha Himmelman, is of a recent urban fiction from Nairobi, Kinyanjui Kombani's *The Last Villains of Molo*. The second, more an opinion piece than a strict review, is Nyoko Muvuanga's musings on Wole Soyinka, Desmond Tutu and their projects on forgiveness.

I feel that this edition, 'Considering Africa', showcases some of the best writings that *postamble* has had the good chance to discover. We continue striving as a platform for postgraduate publication, and as a knowledge site that generates academic, intellectual and even grassroots debate around the study of Africa, in all its manifestations.