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Despatches from Kasbah Tammdakht

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Dannabang Kuwabong

*since feeling is first / who pays attention / to
the syntax of things / will never wholly kiss
you.*

e.e. cummings, 1959

so pry the touchables. sift the shadows of your
feelings. suck the sound of kissing sands.
hear silence. still voices of Babel. your visions
are sound-storms in the voids of divides.
above seas. below mountains. across deserts.
Maghreb. Sahel. Savannah. Forest. Vast waters.
entangle your contradictions. where journeys
intersect, shift. sift your sands of attachments.
fire your Pentecost of tongues from all con-
tours. then dance. tremble between corrugated
plains. wait. wait for the drumbeat of still small

voices. those whispers from medinas of ideas
along caravan circles. there shall be no naming
rituals on these routes of roots. names testify
of themselves, chanting. we are a flag waving
welcome and goodbye. a banner where names
become directions:

*Penelope Allsobrook da kuma Don Walicek;
Genevieve Bateman kwaye Charleston
Thomas; Bettina Migge agus Barry Lovette
Green aning Anne Storch; Angelika Mietzner*

¹ This piece is a product of my imagination and should not be taken as historical truth. The piece originates from my visit with some other scholars to a residency program organized and sponsored by Anne Storch, University of Cologne and Nick Farclas, Universidad de Puerto Rico, with the theme "Hospitable Linguistics." The residency was housed in Kasbah Ellouze in Tammdakht near Ouarzazate, Morocco from August 26-September 1, 2018.

und Nico Nassenstein; Fatou Cissé Kane ak
 Nicholas Faraclas και Christine Bongartz;
 Janine Traber futhi Dannabang Kuwabong.

new ibn Batutas. Sifting sandsteps, seeking
 Timbuctoo in Kasbah Tamdaqht. I am the tod-
 dler without shoes. Stutterer without tongue.
 Only the art of hand washing. called. steady
 the *two zafi* bowls of elders. hold the *fufu* bowl
 of knowledge. squat. hold steady the bowls
 couscous. learn to eat with clean hands. i won-
 der about these desert temptations salvations.
 nakedness of deserts. plainly. deserts hide. des-
 erts reveal. no guarantees. footprints in Kasbah
 Tamdakht, in Kasbah Ellouze, read: mirages to
 parched visions for oases of knowing. unless.
 we here parambulate in faith, torch wisdoms of
 castes. so. begin. in the beginning. **Nayja and
 Ghana Oxford floating over folded words.**
post-lingüística 6550. a rendering.

Oga Nicholas: Oga, abi yu go gri folo os
 go Moroko fo Ogost? Wi wan invayt yu
 for joyn awa grup fo Ouarzazate. Wi go
 go wan Berber pleis fo atend smol smol
 miting dem de kolam Ospitabul Lingitikis.

Oga Dannabang. Weh kayn ting bi dat?
 Ah neva heya enitin layk dat befor atol.

Oga Nicholas. Na im oh! Mi nah ah no
 sabi eni détel for am. Eniwe, mek yu gri
 for go.

Oga Dannabang. Na wa oh! Haw Ah
 no go gri folo yu go ma broda? Tel de
 pipul dem se mi Dannabang, son of she
 who will not eat earth, the crosser of
 deserts, go folo dem go for dis wan kaynd
 pleis weh dem de kolam wetin? Na
 Kasablanka Abi? Mi naa, Ah bin wan go
 Moroko long long taym, bat a no sabi haw
 for go der sef. So yes. A gri wan taym.
 Wich de wi go tek go?



Figure 1.
 Ammon Ra welcomes us to Ouarzazate (photo DK)

Figure 2.
 A sign of welcome to Kasbah Tammdakht (photo DK)



Oga Nicholas. Yoh! Mi a go imel Anne for telam se yu don gri finis.

Bat afta wan de, Oga Nicholas kom tek wan sarp luk for ma feis si se wan katakata wahala de nyam ma forhed, gbura gbura basaa. Bikos ah kom wori nyafunyafu for ma hinsayd Na im kom tok se. "Oga, mek yu no wori atol atol. For tikti for fly, moni go de, for kyop, moni go de, efin sef for wakabaut, moni go de, for slip beta slip nko for wan gado sarkin berekete, moni go de." Afta a kom heya dis, na im mi a kom smayl gbagbalajaa. Afta,

Oga Dannabang. Bat haw Ah go no dis?

Oga Nicholas. Ah go gif yu leta for invayt wit plenti ditel dem for am.

Afta wan wik, na im Ah get ma on invayt imel for dokta Madam Anne and dokta Oga Nicholas. Ibi layk drim kom drop for mi hawstop. Na so ma jorni we kari mi go Kasbah Tamdaqtkom bigin.

mental sojourns. plan/(ts). mission to measure dreams. Nicholas y Dannabang. Irma y Maria survivors. restare the vision. dance anti-Atlantic to sources. begin in Eastern Caribbean Islands-in-Between, and bam! Ghana. ride

r e t u r n i n g
t y p h o o n s .
jinns jet from
San Juan to the
edges of the
Sahara. trace
over seascapes

journeys across Columbus' map. hear the *abeng*. dare. dive into cyclones of knowing. see wisdom in circular entanglements. (re) visions and re-perceptions. rhizomes of relations², drink the still clear waters of hospitable cultures. "Ng taang be mang be" (Dagaare proverb: "We are; therefore, I am," start then from the inner room of selftonowhereanywheresomewhereanyhowand, leap.

August 24-25, 2018. step-Hop-and-Jump. San Juan over Atlanta. pause for breath in Paris. be lost in the purgatory of CDG.³ 23 hours a nomad. in a tunnel. meerkat pasting my scent in these entrails of empire, a four-toed hedgehog seeking desert cousins. aware your quills could spike fears in anxiety's captives. a cockroach doublé-dutching among water hens. Hurtle through the debris of tornedos to progress. Chaos is come again. you seek hospitable places to land. you are lost in un-translation. without tongue to cry your name. you sit. hunched. gastrocnemii turn to marble-rump roasts. you rise. you walk. bloody crabs stam-pede down the legs. you sit. you wait. you rise. you walk. you sit. you
.well
.....whatever.....

August 26, 2018. I text Fatou Cissé Kane. Meet me in Marrakech. Look for a Ghanaian with a forest-covered face. Fatou Cissé Kane, daughter of directions. Fouta Djallon. Cologne. Lisboa. Marrakech. we join a Marco Polo to Ouarzazate. Back seated.



Figure 3.

Fatou Cissé Kane and Dannabang Kuwabong (photo Barry)

² Play on Edouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relations* and the theory of Caribbean circular nomadcity and rhizomatic relations.

³ Charles de Gaulle Airport.

think: Ouarzazate must be nearby. But desert distances are never near. meander through mountain passes and sudden changes of sand rushes. distances in small spaces are vast on these sky-rubbing/robbing mountains. and death gazing valleys. let smart phone shoot photos, but capture no horizons. pencil scratches on paper. how to capture surreal beauty in sublime heights. acrophobia grips your gazes. sublime. surreal. singing:

I'm gonna lay down my sword and my shield

Down by the riverside
Down by the riverside
Down by the riverside⁴

down by the river side, down by the river side, dry beds. Nobody knows the trouble you've been through. True. sandy and/or stony. to reach these flat plains opening to Ouarzazate at midnight. Ouarzazate. Where the saints of knowledge go marching across the Limpopo, beyond the Niger across the Rhine, over the Mediterranean. Trans-Atlantic memories. Trans-Saharan memories. Fatou bargains for a taxi to Aït Ben-Haddou. Is it to Kasbah Valentin? Is it to Kasbah Aït Ben-Haddou? Is it to Kasbah Telouet? What does Kasbah mean to newborns in the desert? Na so wi kom forget de pleis im nem weh we mos tu go. Tu, hongri and taya and slip dem kom wahala os wel wel. Na im egen Fatou kom memba de takarda weh go sho de pleis for go. No bi Kasbah Valentin. Na Kasbah Ellouze. Ibi layk se na afta midnaye, or na forede morning weh wi tek rich. Mi ah no sabi. Slip katch mi wel wel.

August 27- September 1st, 2018. The sun also rises. here. lights up sand cliffs. Kasbah Ellouze rouses in her nest of solitude. voices, voices I do not recognize. I am not imperiled. excitement holds my hand, leads me down staircases. at balcony turned dining lounge. I am enveloped in warm embraces. I sit. I snuggle up to sunshine smiles. breakfast. after. perambulation in Aït Ben-Haddou. Foot stamp by footstep. where Ouet Ounila flows below asphalt, we are sliced in halves. one split to right of civilized walks. one split to the left to natural paths. both splits to join again at Paradise of Silencing.

Don, Janine, Fatou, Anne, Nico, Charleston, Bettina, Dannabang. Nico leads us. Sure footed. Cautious. footstep by cautious footstep. desert travelers at dawn. We sketch the bank of Ouet Ounila.⁵ empty yet not dry. wet yet dust. beside our shadows pomegranate bend branches lining banks, begging. we trickle down. trek through the vast empty entral of this arroyo. an oasis stranded in the middle of the river's belly beckons tired feet. tired feet stray into still clear waters, too sluggish to flow to the sea of middle earth. percolate to underground passages. resurrection myths of harvests in Ounila Valley⁶ are spun. But now, drinking donkeys, drinking goats and drinking camels, bow.

we walk, we talk. about somethings nothings. soon split into a trinity of guessing games. Our words, gobble-de-gooks caress small breezes. footprints, more than footprints, hieroglyphics, accidental sandscripts. We walk, we talk, we gaze, we wonder, we

⁴ A Spiritual composed and sung by enslaved Africans before the American civil war about the burden of slavery and the hope of a future of liberation.

⁵ River that runs between Ouarzazate and Aït Ben-Haddou.

⁶ Valley with lush vegetation in the Ouarzazate region.



Figure 4.

Anne, Nico, Bettina, Charleston, Don, Fatou, Janine
(photo DK)

dream our inventions as borderless arrivals. lest departures erase memories. We taunt ideas in this open gutter of sand. we stand. mystified by two supermen cliffhang their way over Atlas. We shout: Rappelers rapepeeling? No rappeling. this here is a daily occurence for we who c/would not be kings.⁷ sublimity of heights in silence of descend. We memorialize our presences. Re-visionaries of imaginary **CONQUISTADOR HISTORIES**, we map *tierras incognitas* with selfies and group polaroids. Here, we say, we belong. together. Here in this river bed our world is piquant. luscious under Atlas' shadow, there are no streaks of castes cast. except. except Atlas plays hide and seek with the sun, and clouds frown. lumpen pixals fleeting across screens, aggregations

printed on gloosy papyrus will be testimonies to those we have left behind. pics on Facebook slides will certify like pin-ups that we too were here; that though our footprints be suddenly washed away, we too walked the walk of dreams. here, myths are born in afternoon downpours and Khepera rises from Nu.⁸ Legends, gods, grumbling humans. Amen.

our feet our poets.

Our conversations signatures of moments. of heads and hearts. Moments released into cloudscapes and landscapes that swallow us up. Monumental dreams of freedom dreams in vast spaces. I ponder. In this walk, we claim liminal startups of recognition in acceptance. I ask: "what ritual petitions have we made to seek a place in these sands of history?" "I do not know." "None then." I feel entitled. To know. Ask me again. "But this sp[l]ace welcomes us. In these sp[l]aces, communities of humanity thrive in open doorways. How different from the elsewhere(s) we live. How different from the barracoons of sealed doors. Fear sharing floor spaces. Borders. Castes. Walls. Copyrights. GMOs patents. Yet who gave us this place of life as a carte blanche to toe-print our nightmares on? We do not quote from the aromas of green figs, pomegranates, dates, olives, tangerines, rosemary, mint, sand. children, walking, dreaming, sweating, thirst

⁷ *The Man Who Would Be King* is a film adapted from the Rudyard Kipling's story. The movie was shot at Pinewood Studios and at locations in France and Ouarzazate, Morocco. It tells the story of two rogue ex-soldiers, former non-commissioned officers in the British Army, who set off from late 19th-century British India in search of adventure and end up in faraway Kafiristan, where one is taken and made their king.

⁸ Neb-er-tcher, Lord to the uttermost limits metamorphosises into Khepera through a water rebirth in Nu, Ocean.

for *Les Eaux Minerales d' Oulmes, ou de Sidi Ali ou d'Ain Atlas, S'il vous plaît*. No swollen lollygag argot escapes our withered labrums.

We hop on ankle-high stone bridges. We cross without drowning where water still flowed Clamber up tricky sand banks. Our cranky knees groan up a bank. tumble toward our quiescence. in Aït Ben Haddou. Mission. dawdle boogie over a concrete bridge. clamber the promenade of ruins of Kasbah Aït Ben Haddou. blustering busloads of flustered strolchs arrive. I interrogate my dogma of identity. I, blithering termagant strapped to appétence of vacuous insides? "who took the cookie from the cookie jar?" "who me?" "yes sir." "it cannot be." "then who took the cookie from the cookie jar?" silence. Not Here? I shy away from the gazes of Berber faces. they offer hospitality with open doors: "step inside for good luck. wrap your fear of emptiness in this Kano cloth. stride with fullness of spirit." For them. For me. For us. I dummy up my fears. yet, their eye language troubles me. their lustration purifies, resurrects the corpse of history. me. they know me! they see me! they feel me! I look elsewhere. Fearing my wall might be crack and crumple under recognition. like Kasbah Aït Ben Haddou. We make it through. Whispering. Step by step. We botch up broken walls. ruins "la maaleng"⁹ ruins. I pose for a picture. I tell Nico. Capture the roof tops of the town behind me, not my image. these houses call me home. the wind in my face blow tears from my eyes. then the smell of rain. mere drops and sand hisses. Now UNESCO pays some money to keep these ruins on touristic E-Bay.

⁹ Dagaare phrase for again and again.

¹⁰ Title of a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley.

¹¹ *Ozymandias* by Percy Bysshe Shelley.

We descend. Hunger grumbles like low thunders. We gather at *Restaurant L'oasis D'or* or is it *Chez Brahim*, i forget. So, I define myself: **I am an Arrivalist**. Barnstormer in the ruins of Kasbah Aït Ben Haddou. **Ozymandias**¹⁰: i am the traveler from the antique land. i see the mighty works. Former sanctuaries for the tired of feet. They seem to say: "My name is Pasha Glaoui, Pasha of Pashaa / Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair! / Nothing beside remains. . . ." except five families. they live and tend "[this] colossal Wreck, boundless and bare" for our pleasure. But I see defiance. defiance against, "The lone and level sands [that] stretch far away."¹¹ I do not despair. Yet. Their eyes and smiles haunt me. Yet. Their words and winks haunt me. I see survival. I see scattered immortality. Here, ruins reshuffle. ruins communion with ruins and yet to become ruins. Ruins are eternal. Thus, plenty besides ruins remains. History. Culture. Memory. Vibrant and Lived. Something vast remains yet to be told/sold. the story is not fully cold; the act not fully performed. here is not a place of death and decay. here in the preserve of life's secrets, history unfurls in the sands of time. these ruins are texts that resist writing. These ruins are texts resisting tweaking. sanddunes preserve their own in slices of memories. ruins.

Figure 5.
The bridge across a dry Ouet Ounila to the ruins
of the Kasbah Ait Ben Haddou (photo DK)



i am slain. word scratcher in exodus without two tablets¹² to break. imaginary nomad circulating in labyrinths of knowledge on these plains of Afri.¹³ my sameness is my difference in these desert contours of no beginning or ending. i re-dream kaleidoscopes of seeing and learning. i say: the people know what they know. love. they feel the presence of what they live. generosity. They know the land of they breath. harmony. they open their doors to what they give. hospitality.

So, I look around. This Sahara. (un) overscripted but whispered histories. Aït Ben-Haddou, a chapter of unrevised stories. words stayed unframed. imagination sans horizons. no controls. possibilities. limitless counting to count the grains of knowing, of receiving, of giving. After. count dust grains of sand storms in citadels of crafted knowledge. you may then arrive at the miracle of Luxor.¹⁴ Speak the language of mind renewing and tongue-tying riddle of the Sphinx. Then enter blindfolds of thoughtfulness. For you must not follow *Oedipus at Colonus*.¹⁵ The silence of the desert's voice engulfed me. I am possessed. I am transfigured. Eureka: Trans-normaliminality. I was i-mage. Captured on permanent evanescence of desert sandscapes. Sandscape.

Not beachscapes. Here, sand invites no strip-tease sun-worshippers. There is no sea except sand seas. A vast spatial trans-normaliminal liminality. Yes, "unforeseeable encounters take place and transformation seems to dominate" or terminate here (Storch et al 2017: 12). Tell me some more.

Yes, the Trans-Sahara is maximal. A place of fear and forgetting. An arena of transformations: Fusions. Marrakech and Makola¹⁶. Transfigurations/ transubstantiations. Maybe. We recline. Sip sweetened mint tea in Kasbah Ellouze. dream up *great expectations* for Miss Havisham¹⁷ may yet forgive and rise from her empty nuptial dreams someday. break down experiential power. Breakdown! these "divisions (or castes) and how they [are] constructed and named [and policed]; as well as unifications in terms of how the merging of [ideas] variety of backgrounds serves to create a special (spatiotemporal and conceptual) arena[s]" in learning "context [s]" (13). Breakdown and unhinge the doors of knowledge castes. Demand a hearing. Demand embrace. Beat your restless drum. chant down your babylon of sameness on the play-ground of difference. in this paradise of silence. learn your heartbeat.

Figure 6.

Sign not taken for wonders (photo DK)



¹² Ref. to Moses and the two tablets with the ten commandments.

¹³ Berber goddess of fortune and fertility.

¹⁴ Luxor was an important political and religious center since it was part of the ancient city of Thebes, the capital of Egypt. The Temple of Luxor, located near the banks of the Nile, was dedicated to the veneration of Amon. It was built by Amenhotep III (about 1411–1375 bc).

¹⁵ Sophocles's play *Oedipus at Colonus*.

¹⁶ Central market in Accra, Ghana.

¹⁷ Ref. to Charles Dicken's *Great Expectations*. In the novel, Miss. Havisham, a wealthy but bitter and depressed woman who has worn her wedding dress and one shoe, and has never left her bed and home, since the day that she was jilted at the altar by her fiancé and who is teaching Estella to hate all men.

Prologue: “Here we are, dressed in serendipity. Not blue-turbaned. Not white gown. No desert tents guarded by cod-chewing camels. Sipping syrupy-sweet mint tea we smile satisfaction. Tomorrow we will like the Lorax¹⁸, lift ourselves out of here. Here among history’s memories life germinates through cracks in rock. Here within history’s acts, roots wriggle through sand. Silent waters rise from below sand beds to give life to stumps. Here our amazements distribute questions. Voiceless, without word sanctuaries. We recognize histories in wind sculptures. Water polished. Sun-baked on Sandstones. Terraces by unseen artists tell how nature here maintains her own memories. Between the shadows of each terrace. Wind yields secrets in whispers of the ghosts of memories. Skit over furrowed rocks. Like surfers on a stormy night.”

“I recall an over-heard confession. Pilgrims that strayed to a neo-plantation of France. Recall the histories of lost dominions. Vanishing dominations of the children of Europa. Now recreate a Pasqual reentry. Salvation is come again from Hollywood’s outreach. Vanishing histories will be re-visioned, remade, repackaged, redistributed, resold, and gulped down. A new Paris with Berber tilt. Rises like a colossus. Mocks the pain of tears collected. Then a neo-kingdom is claimed. A neo-imaginary is chained to a past of cultural flaying. His neo-kingdom is Blakean. His ears have not heard, his eyes have not seen. The mighty works of Ozymandias. But Balaam’s donkey¹⁹ speaks through the horses of the buggy. Conquering Gaul, like Balaam cannot

hear the language of jinns. Horses rare up. Whining! Neighing! Frightened as the *koboko*²⁰ lands on heated hides. They stand ground. on hind-legs. Front legs paddle to ward off unseen assassins. We and the dislodged subjects of the new kingdom stand. Mortified. Petrified more than mortified. Something more than both. A horror of knowing death by whiplash.”

A sign not a wonder:

BIENVENUE DANS LE ROYAUME DE VERCINGETORIX, PIPPIN DE GAUL.

A crumbly voice grates the silence: “I am Vercingetorix, Pippin de Gaul. Lord and master of this realm. I built all this, alone Alone! I say, with no help at all with my soft plump moneyed palms to restore the Gaullism, dominance these people, I mean natives too lazy, too ignorant, too lazy must be kept subservient Like the good-wife in the good book Like the good words in the good book: “that the master cannot be hospitable to share meals with servants at table.” We listen to the voice of dismay. In this our day and time. Neo-ballads of conquests.

A sudden silhouette. Steps over the gravels of power. Voice. Grainy like sand-dust. Cracks the still mid-morning air. Blank-blue-pupils sucks in and mocks the sun, blinds us in their hold. Breath, hot like intoxicated whirlwinds, tears at our soul-bowels. Bone-white finger beckons. We follow, silently, softly. A door opens into “Nero’s” coach. The horses neigh against panic. Beg to not go on this trip. quivering, whimpering. A traveler reaches out hand. Strokes manes and speaks kindly. Roweled.

¹⁸ Children’s book and movie: *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss about ecological disaster caused by human greed and industrial malpractices.

¹⁹ *Holy Bible*, Numbers 22: 23

²⁰ Hausa word for a long flexible whip made of cow skin or horse tail used for horses or to discipline and punish.

The horses are calm, obedient. We crawl into the red velvet seats. We ride. we return. We grin our Gratefulness. Uncertain.

A silhouette. Lanky zombie. Wraith or human. leans on a golden tripod. He limps towards us. His shadowed face swallowed by a sun-thief sombrero. Stiff-upper lip lifts to reveal a rusty smile. A wrinkled muck-wink of welcome. A withered hand shoots out from a deep-blue Berber gown. Mesmerized we touch it with our lips: *"Je m' appelle Vercingetorix, le prince d'Arveni, sauveur des Gaulois; Seigneur de cette oasis de civilization. Je suis enthousiasmé par votre visite."* To each he gives a flag that reads: **Bienvenue dans le royaume de Vercingetorix Pippin de Gaul.** We follow. "See? Take a long and reasonable look. Reason with me: you too are here. Not to shed off old mind folds, but to secure planned forgiveness. You are here to imagine charts of new frontiers of power. Why then be dismayed by my brazen domination of people at one with landscapes. If only to raise my image above this brief and withered frame draped in these overwhelming costumes?" *We are muted, we sit, we wait.* "my subjects know my wishes. my subjects know my desires. now I offer you goblets of divine wine floated from Awariam or Gergovia.²¹ Sip, mind your steps, mind your heads. let me show you my magic maze. Here in this inverted oven, Dante's Inferno is non-existent. here these women in blue veils bake bread France could not afford. here I live in paradise regained²² or is reframed. Yes. It is rewelded. here in these lush orchards drunk with below-sand streams

made possible by hand dug canals I proof my intelligent spirit scares the jinns of drought and yields these plump-pomes mon Dieux. what a heaven I say C D G²³ should never have agreed to lose the fight to these people. retake and re-tame what are mine. these arid lands, these guileless places. we are suffocating.

"But wait, this place resists overcrowding. Parisian trenches parade long-coats and bank-notes. no future kingdoms. here in my Kasbah, cogito ergo sum. roi de le sable. cinq villages d'Aït Ben Haddou. roi des ruines. Hollywood, Bollywood, Nollywood. no match for my grandeur et dunes de sable et pouvoirs. vive Gaul! mon nom. mon nom? **Vercingetorix, le prince d'Arveni, sauveur des Gaulois;** Seigneur de cette oasis de civilization." another endnote lurking at the white bottom of my yellowing memory. about madness and power. another Kurtz in the *Heart of Darkness*?²⁴ Oh Kasbah Aït Ben-Haddou. darkness threatens after a sudden shower. We sneak home to Kasbah Ellouze.

"Here in Kasbah Ellouze no direction is permanent. to strangers. only nuanced sublimities. con-fusions of cultural poly-visions. my savannah blood stops on these flat rooftops. breath caught in cracks of mud-walls of mud. i seek my birth stone in buried river beds. landscape. cliffs of shifting eternity. sand or rock. sand and stone. sandstones. In the shadow twilight. I dance ancient footsteps with my Berber uncle. my Tobogonian brother moans and groans. deep like volcanoes of pain over goat taut skin. ecstasy in architecture; ecstasy of artistic wares; ecstasy in the generosity of spirit. sublime ecstasy. as a cloud across Mount

²¹ Wine regions in France.

²² Play on John Milton's *Paradise Regained*.

²³ Charles de Gaulle, under whose presidency most Francophone African nations got their independence.

²⁴ See Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Hombori,²⁵ i drift. sift and scratch shifting thoughts on yellow sheets. blue dots across sand-colored horizons. sleep. there is safety in this homeland's breath."

Le Kasbah Telouet

The Road:

depends on how you spell it. depends on how you see it. from a distance, or from inside its own stories. depends who tells what, when, where, and how. depends on how and what you hear. Sine dubio, its brevis historia. Pasha Thami El Glaoui, son of Zora²⁶ from Ras Dejen and Si Mohammed ben Hammou, Lord of the Atlas. so, we set out. members with cataract visions. safe on the back of half-way we disembark. zeal to contemplate on the meaning of Caves Troglodytes of Tazelft. we stop. safety at distances. Fear of cave-dwellers in these untraceable (s)p(l)aces.

Figure 7.

Caves troglodytes at Tazelft seen from a safe distance on the road to Kasbah Telouet (photo DK)



²⁵ Mountain in Mopti region of Mali.

²⁶ Highest point Simien Mountains in Ethiopia. Zora was an Ethiopian wife of Si Mohammed ben Hammou, father of T'hami el Glaoui.

we have heard of disposessions in travelers' tales. Zoom-focus smart phone cameras. Steady. Aim. Shoot. Targets captured in I-Clouds or G-Drives. We see only caves. We do not hear stories of courage. Eternal retreat against despair. The marvel makes my head swim. I hear Elijah's despair over Ahab's search for him. Yet his Yahweh did not thunder at him. Yet his Jehovah Gere did not roar like sand-storm cyclones winds at him. You need rest. tiny whispers and wisps of mint tea are all you need. in the Caves Troglodytes of Tazelft.

Clothes drying in Anguelez, Ounila valley.

The dust blows across these mountain brows. Settles in Ounilla Valley. Rivers take breaks from flood waters. The place teams with life. Cleanliness. In this village of Anguelez, is a defying act negotiated with nature. so. life in colors reign here. Flowing gowns and sparkling robes hang out to dry. Facing a frowning mountain. They know for certain, a sudden change of mind. The hills become a stampede of brown water, hurling boulders down the cliffs. Riding on sand surf boards to a waiting river bed. Miracle of water swells the belly of the Amazeen River. In the villages of Inanumazin and Nou'fafa, water gazers stand in wonder. A flash of the Red Sea stories. This was not an act of magic. Yet women wash their clothes and hang them to dry. they tend their crops. their animals graze nearby. they do not look at us. we are no subjects of inquiry. we are ghosts of those who fly by and never see.



Figure 8.
Kasbah Telouet under restoration
(photo DK)

Entering Kasbah Telouet.

silence. haunts of repressed prolonged lamentation disorder. shadows of defeat scar the walls. 65 villages. 14000 souls. stranded. only ghostly grunts of caravan camels from Gao. only flitting shadows of ghosts of glory hide in the leaking hall of greatness. If you listen carefully, you may hear the clamor of merchants. haggling and howling at the unction block over miserable souls: from Kulikoro to Kissidougou, from Tambacounda to Fada N'Gouma, from Tillaberi to Selibabi. Some names are replaced. So dream up a name anywhere behind the Atlas sky-thieves. toward the Niger and Volta. toward the Zambezi and Limpopo. Toward the Blue and Red Niles. Webbed between cancer and capricorn. toward. Gold has no voice. Salt has no voice. Hena has no voice. Mansa Musah and Askia Mohammed must have passed here too. sold gold of souls and shiny stones to benefit the pasha or king.

Ahmad al-Mansur! Oh. The name recalls the fall. stampede of horns and hooves. flaming arrows. blood. submission. fragments. a kingdom collapses on gold mines. greed betrays bloodlines. Stampede and blood. Coagulations inot stone. Tondibi. A circle completes itself. he who could not see/hear beyond sanddunes of deceit. beyond Taghaza. chains in Marrakech. Judar Pasha marches again. crunches sand. crunches stone. crunches skulls. burning. burning. eyes glinting with the avarice of yellow tongues. reduce an El Dorado to refuge below a Tropic of Cancer. refuse of shadows. refuse of memories. re-imagine. Gao. Numidia falls again to Scipio.²⁷ invasion. extinction.²⁸ New beginnings. today.

I have no tears to ourn. soul sails to now. return to the present. sob in the lamentation of a glorious past. stand poised by a door. said. This here hall. Walls decorated by word scratchers. Patterns. illusions of grandeur. See. Rafters from cedars of Lebanon. See. Marble from stones of Italy. See. silk from worms of China. Testimony that the life here meant something. We snigger about harems. I whisper. If in those times. i was a Berber woman. would i, could i also veil 7000 problems in a cacophony of 7000 voices? Would I be currency to seal the deal between men of fortune? Would I rather be among 1000 hewers of wood and carriers of water? Would I be stirring giant cauldrons of couscous to feed royalty? How about sitting cross-legged weaving fez hats in a narrow hall of women? I shiver to think so. But I am undefined in the market hall of brain merchants. Academia. More harlot or virgin than concubine or wife. I shiver. Relieved with

²⁷ The invasion of Carthage, otherwise Western Numidia by Rome during the Punic Wars with Hannibal.

²⁸ The invasion and destruction of Songai in 1591 by a Moroccan army led by Judar Pasha, under the orders of the Saadi Sultan of Morocco, Ahmad al-Mansur (Shillington 2012: 186)

a sniff of Rose Mary flowers. Rain calms the heat. Retreat from too much thinking. “inda jahilci ke da ni’ima,²⁹ its folly to be wise.” We leave. Retreat from too much ballades of history.

Preparing for departures.

My bag is repacked. Two days yet to go. I do not want leave. But I have other promises to keep. I plan to join the group to Atlas Studios. Perhaps. I may get excited and be angry. At what it all means to sell this landscape in foreign places in illusions.



Figure 9.
Atlas Studio, Ouarzazate
(Photo Fatou Cisse Kane)

Atlas Studios.

I who the stranded tears		of those wedged
Between Saharan marshes	and	receding forests
I am transfigured in stone hieroglyphs	and	sand diaries
Templates of shifting memories	and	stories of forgetting

At the gateway to Atlas Hollywood Studios. arms akimbo i await my turn. my bold head and naked hairy arms. Steaming. perspiration lines rivulets down my bearded face like melting stalactites. i see the colossal statues of fake protectors of fake Medina Habu of Rameses III. i stand under their disdaining frown. deep in imaginary thought. take pictures. Join those who believe in illusions of grandeur. we enter Hollywood Atlas Studios. i walk trying to peel away any regrets. enskinned in painted dialogue as my garment of acceptance. jabberwalk. Before the imagined throne of imagine pharaohs, i line-up for my turn. sit in the false throne. imagine myself. pretender to the *Kingdom of Heaven*, Anthony in Cleopatra’s dreams. Pontius Pilate in *The Passion of the Christ*. all is over. fear flashes like a neon-noon-sun in the darkness of my eyes. do I pose a smile or do I wince a pose? I chose a grinning wince. a shimmering of moustage hairs, a lip curls. at the corners of my mouth. less to part lips is to let out my agony. agony of distortions. collusions. in these snad papered histories across a fleeting screen. somewhere. not here.

²⁹ Hausa for ‘where ignorance is bliss’.

Agadirs of Kasbah Tammdakht

eroded or chiseled sand walls

scripted abodes of Kasbah Tammdakht

burnished shadows of foreknowledge

they cast terraces of stumbling stone

not ruins of conquests

nor uprising spirits of futures

but gendarmes of crenulated Kasbahs

or are they ghosts of Eden

stranded in Ounila Valley

beyond Atlas' gaze?

Dunia bihi,³⁰ this is beyond academies if you too walked here, dazed
 at dusk or dawn with the sun luminously red like a fire
ball sudden around a sand mountain running from a
Pasha of hard work you, like *Musah* of Egypt would hear *Neith's*³¹s
voice slide from these corrugated or dazed by
*Magec*³²'s glance you would fall face down on dunes etch
*ziggurats*³³ of wisdom to live on these defiant walls of the land

I hear the call in the stork song
of a silent *Kasbah Glaoui* ³⁴
rising from a marabout's sealed mouth
he rests beneath this holy dome

filter through the adobe parapets
or is it the call to prayers
clothed in blue and red tunics
where Berber women orbit in obeisance

³⁰ 'people of the world' in Dagaare.

³¹ Berber goddess who migrated to settle in the Nile Delta and Latopolis in Luxor province. She became coopted into the Egyptian pantheon. She is believed to be creator of the universe, its laws, all it contains, and she rules over it.

³² Berber/Tuareg god of rain.

³³ Ref. to William Blake's "Ancient of Days" painting.

³⁴ A palace built by the Pashas as resting place in Tamdakht.

perform ancient rituals for the dead	dream dreams and see visions
cusp healing words for the people	
I gaze to the hills, desire rising	descend into a cool orchid of life
snug between <i>Kasbah Ellouze</i> ³⁵ and a sand dune	pray that these old joints will join me
with fellow deserters of knowing	peregrinates embracing <i>Marhabas</i> ³⁶
in these parts where myths are dreamed	Bettina of Éire ³⁷ and Nicholas of <i>Hellas</i> ³⁸
	Genevieve and Penelope of <i>Mzantsi Afrika</i> ³⁹
	Janine of <i>Deutschland</i> , Dannabang of <i>Dagao</i>
trace seconds in the wind to tomorrow	
they will rise follow the path of others	dare watchful eyes behind smiles and
veils	
clamber up unmarked footprints	along the banks of <i>Ouet Ounilla</i> ⁴⁰
anxious to believe by seeing	perhaps enter the darkness of one
<i>Agadir</i> ⁴¹	
seek stored seeds forgotten by a daughter	who sells mint at <i>Medina</i>
<i>Marakech</i> ⁴²	
<i>Ouet Ounilla</i> , leaking with yesterday's shower	communicates a silence of departure
flood waters had roared through	like defeaters across this middle earth
where sea of sand and water debate	why Atlas stands between their love
<i>Ounila's</i> almost dry bed of stone and sand	whispers sign meanings into noisy heads
we resshelf our bookish foci on seeing	in this vastness of welcome
beyond greed	
our guide, silent, solemn, gentle	leads us through Kasbah Tammdakht
offers us the courtesy from his wife	
carried on the platter by their daughter	
and we hesitant with no knowledge of desert ways	
receive with wilted smiles and nods	our tongues stifled in a place of
silence	
saunter guileless behind our guide	eloquent certainties of his
step	

³⁵ A hotel built to the architectural designs of the ancient Kasbah by a French couple, Michael and Colette Guillen with their wonderful and angelic staff, Omar, Mohammed, Abdul, and Lakhzen, and all our tour guides.

³⁶ 'Welcome hello' in Arabic.

³⁷ Gaelic for 'Ireland'.

³⁸ Greece.

³⁹ Xhosa word for 'South Africa'.

⁴⁰ River that runs through Ouarzazate province in Morocco.

⁴¹ Berber word for 'granary'.

⁴² Central square and market in Marrakech, Morocco.

string us along a *dogo dogo*⁴³ line clinging to the river's edge
frightened compact sand may betray us fling us down four feet below
 and a sudden flood sweep us to the sea of middle earth
I hold firm to my fear of falling block breathing to count heart beats
as *Aisha Kandisha*⁴⁴ consorts with *Lalla Aicha*⁴⁵ in soft gargling tones below rocks that
mock
the power of water armies soon overcome by the resilience of sand grains
and sun rays.
unaware of his shadows chasing dreams a bored tourist circles on a donkey
holds tight less the donkey rebels and gives him a baptism of wet
sand
his illusion is draped in Berber tunics balances and snaps selfies
to enshrine his imagined lordship stores the shadows near *agadirs*
 called iCloud, G-Drives, floats spineless
Ra. In the shape of goats. our sentries of safety. atand alert from fig branches
each obedient to their posting. East. West. North. South.
pass catch phrases we do not understand

I sigh, lack any taste for such glory thankful watch my feet
movements
over water arranged stones anxious not to misstep in this toe-
deep water
pray silently to *Lilu* to spare us for we are neither Pharaohs armies
nor deshelled nomads of Israel neither weary in plodding escape routes
 nor energized in heady pointless pursuits
we are spared any miracles of defeat limp up the rocky pathway guarded
by whistling-thorn acacia open gates to sandy
carpets
welcomed by ghosts of children we enter to the welcome smiles
 of the *Agadir keepers* of Kasbah Tammdakht.

Children's graves in Kasbah Tammdakht

rising with sunrise and birdsong
 spared any miracle of defeat
 guarded by whistling-thorn acacia
 welcomes by ghosts of children
 of guardians of *agadirs* in uptown Kasbah Tammdakht
 little graves tones dot a gravelly courtyard
 names and faces entombed facing east
 said to be sanctuaries for children
 to prolong a sojourn in this world
 no short bios to boast dates or names or faces
 yet I dare not ask for any stories of departing
 leaves
 Of Ounilla Valley among desert orchards
 souls
 ride steam swirls of hot stones
 their lithe bodies walled-in
 feed foliage as if to assert
 retain a memory of soil
 that they too are here still in green
 memorialized as shifting sandscapes
 they ride westward winds on dust grains
 where Niles, Voltas, and Nigers
 cross
 their spirits sprinkle Harmattan blessings
 across New Atlantic
 Guineas
 then the sandscapes of history
 in every land and clime
 sweep over ancestral footprints
 in every home with a granary
 still
 filled with grains of hope.

Mellah Jewish graves in Kasbah Tamdaqt

here entered within village memory
Mellah Jews settled, ate, and died
their empty synagogues recall tales of manna for the hungry
also, no graveyards of hospitability
these Methuselahs of Kasbah Tammdakht
showed them the Salem of their dreams
yet now nothing remains
only scattered memories on falling stones
bramble of acacias, cacti and rising sand dust.

in these bald undulating horizons sandcrete parapets rise on
rooftops
i say, not all parapets are hand chiseled by slave sweat and native tears
nor do the slabs atop slabs held firm with blood and mire
in this here Kasbah Tammdakht shaded by Atlas' shadow

beneath these shadowy stretches unseen rivulets yield waters
create feed bucolic orchards point pathways to some vegetal eternities.

designed in concrete dreams. erected with sandcrete beams. old ways are
blended in new spaces. secure temporary presences against shifty futures. these
landcrete walls uphold old mud roofs.

in the coolness of *zauris*⁴⁶,

they hold welcome fiestas of mint and fig for those with empty stomachs and
thirsty throats

an ancient aqueduct of five miles silently coils between river bends
slivering its water into leaning homes

saturate fig and almond with sap *Luxors*⁴⁷ of vegetation

nestle along sharp concrete banks these lascivious figs entice
but they are beyond my finger clutches their broad leaves

fan vapors that rise to cool homes where we sip fresh mint
tea

gobble fleshy figs and crunchy almonds

I muse: Jesus would never have cursed any of these here trees
had he in his fit of hunger also walked among these
miracles

where people and land are one

we enter a “*zauri*” of welcome

our host, a traveler like us over antique lands, clouds, seas
spreads a hospitable table of welcome: no introductions needed.
manna freshly baked, served with humus almonds freshly cracked and shared
figs freshly plucked eaten palates sated. we join rehearsed interrogations
groping through the five Ws we rise. bow thanks. desert. proclaim enduring
promises
perhaps uncertain another wind may blow some of us back.

⁴⁷ A city of ancient Egypt on the eastern banks of the Nile in the southern part of Thebes.

Tizi N'Tichka Pass:

Tikabiene

Passing Ouarzazate facing Marrakech

Cacti sandstones sand rocks

Pomegranates hold shifting sand

Acacias, figs, almonds, play seed games on stone-hills

Dates and olives dart around in valleys

Houses like eroded hills Awnings of flaming hillsides

Roofs protrude like massive foreheads

Caper above mountain brows

People descending. People ascending. Suck sun-ripe tangerines.

Tikabiene!

Tizirina!

on this winding road

you never see what you face

you never glance back at the past

four pilgrims cruising to Marrakech

Penelope and Don and Janine and

Dannabang

Huggers of desert fever in a cruise-liner SUV. Rappel.

Suspend anxieties in recalls

Resurrect magical key-words Chanted two days before beside a baptismal pool:

Fantasy huntingwordsmithshunters of meanings of meetings

In Kasbah Ellouze:

Lamboore (Dagaare word for consensus of mouths)

Embouchure of Groaning

Caravans and Crossing

Fortifying and Eye-Opening

Message and Calling

Admit, Caste, Waiting

Kasbah and Enabling

Control and Relevance

Accompaniment

Saliva."

Then Tizirina!

RAPPEL

At sudden unseen spots the sign: RAPPEL. as if compelled by a jinn Abdou our pilot heehaws our 4W Drive. Right foot falls heavy upon riding pedal. mini SUV mustang gallops. hurtles and

twists through loops. like birds in a hurricane we harmonize our screams a cacophony of clarinet-
ists envisions our scattered brains in these sites of Star Wars⁴⁸ picked with toothpicks
our spirits in search of bodies to enter the kingdom of heaven or forever mummified and lost
in these living daylights with our undelivered message under the sheltering
sky where the last temptation of Christ occurred under the tower of babel.
Abdou reads our pandemonium. reassures us in these words: "Je parcours
cette route tous les jours et je n'oublie jamais les zones de danger, même s'il en
a une invisible, je la prévois et me retire." Smiles and wink. our fears recede.

Then Anakrine!

Signs not taken for wonders⁴⁹

along the zigzag spine of Tizi n'Tichka⁵⁰

a sign waves by the roadside

wherever in ⁵¹Sous Valley. :

"Huile d' Argan de Co-operative Feminine Berber de Atlas"

not to be taken for wonders by wonder women
gnarled hands

these signs signal brown and

before veiled faces, healed in henna balms
spider veins like cobwebs on faces
oil

conspicuous veins lurk in dorsals
payments for Argan's perfection

their labor of love sweetens the bitterness of toil transports me to shea-butter
cooperatives

where the agonies of women with cracked palms
butters gorged veins and crying husbands loom

beat incessant kernels into beauty

in zigzag distances from Tamale to Nanville

From Diébougou to Tombouctou⁵²

from Ouarzazate to Marrakech

whether Berber, Wolof, Tuareg, Mande
Dagao, Gonja, Nanumba,
Dagbamba⁵³

wherever nutty oils

are lisped

mysteries beyond these women's memories perform wonders of sand-string bandings

⁴⁸ Some scenes of Star Wars are shot here.

⁴⁹ A play on Homi Bhabha (1994: 102-122).

⁵⁰ Tichka Pass. Road between Marrakech and Ouarzazate that runs through the Atlas Mountains in Morocco.

⁵¹ Located in southwestern Morocco.

⁵² Tamale, Nanvilli (Ghana), Diébougou (Burkina Faso) and Timbuktu (Mali).

⁵³ Names of ethnicities in various nations across the Sahel from Ghana, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, etc.

Sous Valley

INKRAL. A word in dazzling while
between Ouarzazate and Marrakech
of fat fruits and green herbs:
figs
singing clementines, daring dates, sly olives
oranges
tasty tangerines, grumpy grapes
stack by stack, some in overturned baskets
desires
between these sustainable roadside plazas
lights in ice
dizzy with desire, i am between Wa and Kyebi⁵⁴ a confused eye plowing this
zigzag strip
gasping in deliriums of heights and hunger
if I perchance survived here
middle earth
or let these dessert dreams of lush
valleys
i wonder if when soul desert body
skull
among these squat white tombstones
jottings above sundrenched places
rain
or somewhere in these Atlas heights
Jangare⁵⁵
or join the dance of those gone before at the market of spirits at Duong⁵⁶
sunbathes on Atlas' brow
roadside parades
pomegranates, fleshy freshly ripe
bitter lemons, sour limes, navel
angry red chilies and slimy okra
I try to calculate how to squeeze my
and fake fresh fruits under neon
I meditate on my life's sojourns
would I trek across the sea of
control my steps between these
would I chose to rest my empty
nestled like anthills in flat spaces
above these dusty rivers awaiting
ride a cloud of ameenas to

TA DARTE

we exhale in choric Ameenass. sandstones and sandhills yield to the call of granite boulders
an angry Ogun must have smelted here, and a Kuribini⁵⁷ was created.
leaving cold lava as mountains
now they threaten sojourners
should these Titans stage a coup

⁵⁴ Towns in Ghana.

⁵⁵ Mythical town of spirits in border region of Nigeria and Niger.

⁵⁶ A town in the Upper West Region of Ghana reputed to be the place where the spirits of the departed meet to trade.

⁵⁷ Dagaare word for 'slag' and place in Nanvilli, my holy village in Ghana.

against the way we tunnel their vision
to carve speedy paths to hades
i see them heave, move, and sigh
uncertain what to do in times like these

we hurtle headlong to Ta Dart
a sleepy stop-over town of convenience
i am reminded of our shared banana
between Fatou Cisé of Futa Jallon⁵⁸ or is it Futa Toro⁵⁹
and I Dannabang of Tenakourou⁶⁰ or is it Kantolo⁶¹
as we enter the mysteries of sandscapes
where some ancestors must have force-treked and died
with no comfort to eat of forest pleasures
as we rocked in the groaning bus
through the inviting jaws of death
from Marrakech to Ouarzazate

we exchange pews for balance
I erect imaginary sand altars
offer protection sacrifices against the jinni of accidents
chant down the spells of tumbling down the ravines
where cacti burdened with luscious fruits
yield to the touch of River Tuoama⁶²
Suddenly, we zoom past Sidi Rahal

Approaching Marrakech

mixed aromas of fumes and food
are the *marhabas* of Marrakech of flat lands
eucalyptus sway to wind beats
silent behind the Atlas range
noisy like mating cicadas
this landscape of homes and hotels
line brazen brown horizons

⁵⁸ Mountain range in Senegal.

⁵⁹ Mountain range in Senegal.

⁶⁰ Mountain range in southwestern Burkina Faso.

⁶¹ Mountain range in southwestern Burkina Faso.

⁶² River in Morocco between Marrakech and Ouarzazate

mock, jeer, ready to keen over and shatter
doorways like caves, beckon me with imagined romances. Eden. in the desert valleys.
we slow down into a jerking speed. crawl behind bully sleek
bodies
of cars undersigned. for hot rusty airs. *gendarmerie royal* tout taut batons.
fingering guns at invisible checkpoints. whistles to lips. suspect passengers whisper feras in
prayers. clutch beads. I see my black-uniform counterparts in Ghana. i flash a sign: "merci pour
votre compréhension."

we emerge from Atlas' shadow. Marrakech Medina. each departs to fulfil our contracts
with transit hotels. Each dreaming of a safe return to the combines of labor. At out plantations of
knowledge mills, we husk youth. Sift them. Grind them. turn them into refined flour. Bill-board
them for our masters. Rulers of markets of paper dreams. I take my leave. I sit in Puerto Rico.
Recall the healing time spent with other dreamers. It is raining outside. It had rained daily in
Kasbah Tamdaqt. I have no regrets. I carry these eight birth stones from the Ouet Ounila River,
the smell of desert sand, rain, and mint of memory. i dancing to ryhtms of identity crevasses. in
the market square. exotic homesters on unction blocks. surprised. courting misteps of initiation
fees to be found. seized in this Medina of Marakech among the i-Mazigh-en. so still i dance. so
smiling. smiling at the winds [. . .]. running to catch harmony.

i-running. am running. fleeing to catch myself in the forgetting. spirit of the wind carry me. eave
no trails on clouds of dust and water. rocks clean these ruins of memories. memoies. memories . .

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Figure 10.

Dannabang dancing with Berber brothers
(Photo Fatou Cisse Kane)



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