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## Peregrinations of a Skiapod

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### Rollbahn

Spaziergang hinter dem Gundhof. Leichter Regen, Friedhof, Wildschweine in Bedrängnis. Zuviel Flughafen. Alte Mauern dennoch. Und die Rollbahn. Unter den Lichtern der hochmodernen Anlage, die aber die Geschichte der 1700 ungarischen Frauen, die im Sommer deportiert worden waren und im Winter hier Zwangsarbeit leisten mussten, nicht ausbleichen können. In ihren Sommerkleidern haben die Frauen in der Kälte eine Rollbahn gebaut, die leeren Zementsäcke zum Schutz vor dem Wind unter die zerschlissenen Blumenmuster geschoben. Wenn das entdeckt wurde. Das Taxi fährt an der Stelle vorbei, an der ich als Kind noch immer ein Stück Geleise (ein

Dreieck) gesehen habe. Da kamen sie an. Es haben am Ende nur einige überlebt. Vor etwas mehr als zwanzig Jahren wurde die Gedenkstätte eröffnet, da waren noch neunzehn alte Frauen dabei. Der Großonkel hat nochmals zwanzig Jahre davor Briefe vernichtet von einigen von ihnen oder anderen, denen es so ging wie ihnen, in denen um Entschädigung gebeten wurde. Von hier wird seitdem gestartet. Keine Masken, leere Gänge, sinnlose Wege. Was, wenn wir das nicht mehr machen?

Im abendlichen Regen glänzt es draußen vor dem Panoramafenster. Keine Ziegel, keine Backsteine, mit denen ich mich nun monatelang beschäftigt habe, sondern Zement. Die leeren Zementsäcke, die über das freie Feld wehen. Die Ziegler und die Zwangsarbeiterinnen, die

Leute, die hinter dem Riegel der Hotelresorts auf irgendetwas hoffen, Gelegenheiten, Regierungen, Recht.

Dann rollt es los mit uns über die Startbahn West, unten ist Walldorf, dann Mörfelden, dann Groß-Gerau. Dann Wolken. In Mombasa schiebt sich die neugebaute Architektur effizienter Straßen über die etwas älteren Wohnviertel am Rand der Stadt. Die Wandbilder mit Fanon und all den anderen sind fort. Schilder lesen, während das Auto an den Läden vorbeirumpelt. Vor einigen Jahren seitlich der Straße abgerissene Häuser haben dauerhafte Ruinen hinterlassen, so wie die stillgelegten Clubs und Hotels am Strandort. Da wo sie waren, stand zuvor einmal Wald. Küstenwälder werden, wo auch immer, selten überdauert haben. Aber es muss überwältigend gewesen sein: während am Meer wenig außer den Wellen zu hören ist, genügen schon wenige große, dicht stehende Bäume, um den Vogelrufen ein Echo zu verleihen. Ich stelle mir vor, wie das ausgesehen hat: das flache Meer zwischen Riff und Strand und dann am Strand unvermittelt steil aufragend der Wald. Eine Hochhausschlucht aus Wald, voller Leben und Resonanz.

### Stone Embodiment

Colonial Architecture is made looking so sterile here. Even though plaster is coming off the walls, giving way to older plaster to come off later, and even though the coral stone that is underneath the plaster reveals all the life and living that has lead to its existence, it is still not alive. This might be because it all is so much stripped off the traces and imprints of those who had been here, who built this or were forced to work and live in it. The castle, which is called a fort, is void of any of such traces except



that what is kept in the archive where we will not go. I think the guide knows.

Babu A. has a beard that is getting red. He has a stick with which he can point and fight. The two inscriptions by the Portuguese (who might this be: the Portuguese; there is the coat of arms of Hapsburg, and the inscription itself has been made by a mason) say much about oppression and violence. A niche for a cross, now empty, but remains of a fresco. Inside there are walls and ruins, ruins of bastions, powder magazines and houses; a chapel, a mass grave, a fake skeleton. In some places, like the ruin of a house close to the sea and cliff, the ground is studded with sherds. Pots, Babu A. suggests, roof tiles, I think. The structure on the burnt clay is exactly that of rooftiles in Europe: fingertips must have stroked from top to bottom so that the rain water could run down on the roof. Just sherds.



But they make sense. So close to the cannons and the powder magazine no roof would have been thatched with palm leaves. Fingers ran down the wet clay. Whose? The people who had carved the castle out of the coral stone cliff and who had made the roof tiles have been about three thousand, Babu A. says. Not slaves, but almost. They do not figure prominently in this story and their bodies are long since removed. Maybe still a trace of a fingertip on a sherd.

This is why this place seems silent. As if it had fallen from the sky, or even better, from a cargo ship, the castle just stands here. The people who were forced to build it might have inscribed their bodies in it nevertheless. Still a trace of a fingertip on a sherd. Certainly it has not fallen out of anything. It has been built by people whose hands and feet must have been slit open by the sharp coral stone. Their hands will have left traces on the stone as their fingertips have left traces on the sherds. They will have spoken to one another, because this is work that requires cooperation and solidarity among the workers, slaves or not. Fingertips, blood, words. For that alone this is a complicated place and a spiritual site. But then the Portuguese (whatever this means) were besieged by the Omani (who were they) and they starved in their castle or died of the plague. The mass grave which is in the back still holds them,

Babu A. says. We are walking over fingertips, blood, bodies, words maybe. Babu A. also says we are walking over one large body, as the castle as seen from above has the shape of a lying man.

We walk up the left arm, over the chest, into the head, over the shoulder and the right arm. We cross the belly and the bowels in it where the starved Portuguese are. Down on the left leg, and up the ribs to the left arm again. Somewhere around the right arm there was a wall which might have been part of a room. Maybe sailors, maybe soldiers, maybe a painter had painted a fresco on it: ships and boats and people. Portuguese and Ottomans and Arabs fight or wave at one another. There is work and play, and the ships are drawn in such detail that I want to think that this is a sailor's work. Amidst the Arab and Portuguese and Ottoman ships there are sea snakes, fishes, some ivory, a veiled woman. Palaces, churches and castles all around the fresco. To me this is an abstract, a very simplified version of a 17<sup>th</sup> century genre piece, harbor with ships and battle. After this had been painted on the wall, a second wall was built in front of the first one and a mosque was constructed at the site. The space between the two adjacent walls was filled with garbage and rubble. I imagine how Benjamin's angel of history got trapped in the space between the two walls, facing the fresco, and how all the debris fell in front of him. Or her? Finally, all the rubble obscured the gaze at the past, and the future was blocked by the second wall. The mosque is now gone. The fresco was rediscovered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was removed from its excavated original wall. It now is on display in a building constructed especially for the fresco.

A few meters towards the bowels there is a museum, which is a lengthy corridor that contains material culture. Jars and Chinese porcelain that come from various places, but not from the castle, are on display in the display cabinets. A map shows trade routes. As I pass



*The Journey headed south, not in search of sun, life and oxygen*

by the collection of things produced by people, living in different environments, some working on sites of mass production (of Chinese bowls), some working as indentured laborers, slaves, craftsmen, specialists, artists and experts, I find them all already erased. I struggle to understand the connections between marginalization and annihilation. For the traces of fingertips, gazes of sailors, bleeding bare feet are not relevant for all the material culture that surrounds us; there is much diversity of where these things belonged and what their production was based on. But labor and the lives of workers don't seem to be of any interest – it is all about objects and the abstract lines between dots on a map between which these objects were moved. Relationships between people and world reduced to vectors. So much emptiness.

But then Babu A. makes us walk on this body of a horrible, unimportant, multiply lost castle and maybe this is a way to bring in embodiment. He says about himself that he has roots of six trees. His Turkish-Swahili mother, then Omani, Somali and Zanzibari ancestors on his father's side, and Abyssinia somewhere too. He has ties to many clans and places and stories. Not knowledge that annihilates the depth of time, but laughingly filling the voids and offering generosity in exchange with nothingness.

Later, I read an old book. Dapper describes Mombasa as a rock with a castle on top, which however was not considered particularly valuable. What he also has to offer are details about how it was destroyed, by letting explosives explode just at the very moment the besiegers entered the castle. The remaining ruins were unimportant debris not worthy of any more detailed description. Yet, his chapter on Mombasa is exploding with power and violence. Because,



then, it is also the seat of a sacred king who has roots of multiple trees. Formerly a roman catholic but offended by Portuguese men, he turned to Islam in 1631, sustaining a different order from now on with his magical powers. Dapper finds no other way to draw a portrait of this king then as an incarnation of an excessively destructive power that once active moves over the land:

Sie haben einen König / den sie gleich als einen Gott ehren. Ja sie sagen / er sey derselbe / der auf dem Erdboden herrschet / gleichwie die Portugallier auf der See. Man meldet / er sey so töricht / vermessen / und aberwitzig / daß er / wan es wider seinen Willen regnet / oder alzu heis ist / aus heftigem Grimme seinen Bogen spannet / und nach dem Himmel schiesset. Kurz / er nennet sich selbst einen Weltherrn des ganzen Erdbodems; und vermisset sich / er wolle das ganze Erdreich verwüsten. Er helt gemeinlich ein Heer von 80000 Kriegsknechten zu Felde: welches in folgender Ordnung aufzuziehen pfelegt. Erstlich gehen unterschiedliche hauffen Tiere voran / welche des Feindes anfal abkehren und vereiteln sollen. Darnach wird Feuer vor ihm her getragen; damit er anzeigen wil / daß alle dieselben / die er überwindet / nichts

anders zu gewarten hetten / als gebrachten /  
und gegessen zu warden. Endlich lesset er alle  
Dörfer und Städte des Feindes / da er durchhin  
ziehet / verwüsten / und alle Menschen und  
Tiere / die ihm auf dem Wege begegnen / ohn  
unterscheid tödten; dergestalt / daß ein ieder  
vor ihm erschreckt / und darvon fliehet /  
sobald er seines anzugs gewahr wird. (Dapper  
1671: 648)

### **Invention of the present**

Kongo mosque dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century according to colonial academic sources and from the first millennium according to the community it serves for Friday and Ramadhan prayers. It stands amidst a group of dilapidated graves. There are old baobab trees right in front of it, dwarfing the ancient Swahili architecture with its coral stone walls and tiny greyish domes. The Imam is absent. People around say he is famous, a respected man who has given plenty to the needy in these times of crisis.



Bwana Abdul explains a few things about the mosque, not because he is particularly knowledgeable (he has never been to school he says, and has only little information to share), but because he has been waiting for clients for weeks. The bark of the old baobabs is covered with inscriptions of previous visitors. The oldest one I can decipher is from 1954. There are many names here, and dates and signs, like on many of those monuments that are among the destinations of imperial tourism. Names of noble men, men who have been to school, men who had the right and ability to inscribe their names not only on baobabs but on the tips of pyramids and the walls of caves. Mostly men, but not only men. Also noble women, women who have been to school, women who had the right and ability to inscribe their names not only on the bark of trees but on the peaks of mountains and the walls of subway passages. Not exactly taking possession of these things, I think, but of the moment. Eternalizing the present, extending it so that future visitors will know that we were here.

When Walter Benjamin writes that standardized and written language – objectified language – has destroyed magical language, this powerful mimetic property, I imagine him as thinking of these inscriptions. Because these names and the dates of learned and noble men and women do away with contingency, the magical possibilities that emerge out of the crack between past and future. For the magic of the speaking voice is that it will always refer to that what is already in the past or still in the future. The voice that says “present” is already past once the word has been completely uttered. The voice that is just there, merely sound, merely existence – is this presence? Mladen Dolar has written that the voice itself

death and

heavy breathing.

*Shimo means cave.*

(not yet the word formed by it) is always already reaching out, suggesting meaning, connecting that what you and I can see.

'mmmmmm. 'aaaaaaa.

But words, and thus language, are a different thing altogether. Once I have put the sentence together, uttered an utterance, the present usually is already over.

I hear you, or rather have heard you.

So we have to employ a little magic here too. Invent a present by creating the sonic means for it. Like the names on the bark of the baobabs, this present needs a place and a body.

n shii m̄ri yak

I sit inside walk

n ri yak yage

I exist walk walk

Just one out of the many Benue-Congo languages that are all connected through walking, walking of the past and the future. The present is similar in many of them, and so what I hear nearby the baobab trees is

nanendeka

nanendeka kila wakati

Inventing the present means to take a seat in it and extend our existence in its profoundness. And isn't the present, before we do that, not simply contingency, a liminal sphere that has almost no duration, such as a border has no extension, when we step over it? And thus isn't the magic that language then does not simply helping us to get contingency on our side, as we take our seat in the present and do the things we need to do? Doesn't the magical tool of grammaticalized verbs of existence and posture create a site in contingency in which we can relate to one another, sit together, share? To me, this is transforming liminality and contingency into something else, without of course denying the power of contingency itself. Maybe

language here needs to be thought of as mimesis of time.

This is contradictory of course – this making liminality and contingency our ally in order to connect with one another and to share time. At this point the ubiquitous inscriptions on the bark of the baobabs don't seem very interesting. Taking possession of the moment, the present is quite different from taking a seat in it. Or am I mistaken in the end and these inscriptions are really a form of collectively taking the sites of the spectacular into possession? Claiming possession over the wonders of the world by inscribing names of men and women of power and influence and the dates of their appearances at these places into the bark of a tree that will finally die from these wounds. For the grammar of the present in the age of plunder erases not only contingency but also life.

Donatella Di Cesare in her philosophy of migration makes an interesting observation. While there has been no convincing argument in the history of philosophy to support the idea that a place, a country could really be owned by anybody, it is precisely the idea of being in possession of land that makes the migrant so dangerous to the ideology and practice of nationalism. This also has some consequences for the uses of the grammar of possession:

Das Gesetz wird vom Prinzip der Staatssouveränität diktiert, das die Nation zur Norm erhebt und aus der Migration eine Abnormität und Rechtswidrigkeit macht. Dieses Prinzip artikuliert sich in einer Grammatik des Possessivums, um die herum der politische Konsens zur Gerinnung kommt. Es handelt sich um die Grammatik des „Wir“ und des „Unser“, des Eigenen und des Eigentums, von Identität und Zugehörigkeit. Berechnung, Kontrolle



und Selektion werden zu selbstverständlichen Kriterien – genauso wie die Abschließung ein beinahe unumstößliches Postulat darstellt. (Di Cesare 2021: 22)

### The flickering light of duration

Barry and I spend the morning talking about the options that seem to remain. Maybe, I say, the people who met at Sharm el-Sheikh on the COP would have come to some useful results if they all had decided that this is now the time to finish with nationalism, imperialism and colonialism. Remove the borders and cooperate. But Barry says it most likely is too late anyway, too much carbon in the atmosphere. A process taking place now of what, however, our ancestors must have experienced several times before, maybe in a less catastrophic way, and then they were fewer than we are now. I imagine what the slow but steady rise of the sea level will result in psychologically. Amsterdam, Manhattan, London, some Hanseatic towns – they are all going to sink in these waters. What will that mean to people, this disappearance of these epitomes of colonial plunder and imperial power? The wealthy inhabitants of these cities might already prepare themselves, buying land and property in Bali and New Zealand Aotearoa. But the millions of people living in the deltas of Niger, Ganges or around here who will just move anywhere regardless of borders – what about their impact then on nationalism, imperialism and colonialism? It will all go away.

A number of *Danaus chrysippus* fly by. Now this is really kitsch. The end of borders and then butterflies. But they are there, busily flying through the unsteady semi-shade under the trees as the foliage is moved by a soft breeze, adding to it the flicker of bright brick-orange.

*Danaus chrysippus* is a migratory butterfly that is moving down these coastal forests and bushland since the last ice age, maybe. Wings open and close as the animal moves by, flickering, brick-orange. Black-and-white on the tips of the wings and on the body, mimicking the semi-shade under the trees.

The danaine butterfly *Danaus chrysippus* (L.) is the most ubiquitous butterfly in Africa and is found throughout the continent in natural lowland biomes ranging from wooded savanna through grassland to semi-desert. Closed-canopy forest, high mountains and sand desert are dispersal barriers; even gallery forest fringing major rivers such as the Nile or Niger may present an effective barrier. Today *D. chrysippus* reaches its highest densities in areas of human disturbance such as farms, gardens, waste land and roadsides but this must be a recent phenomenon. [...] The butterfly would be regularly sighted along the entire route of a road journey from Cairo to the Cape or from Dakar to Dar es Salam. (Smith & Owen 1997: 127)

*Danaus chrysippus* must have encountered countless eyes gazing at them, and countless ways in which the ground underneath over which they are moving has been organized. Today they are one of the most common large butterflies to live in agricultural environments, among humans, cars and livestock. And even though the ancient coastal forests are almost all gone while hotels and roads and houses are ubiquitous, they have not been here for long, from a *Danaus chrysippus* perspective. Just some decades, half a century maybe. To me the crisscrossing flight of the butterfly and the flickering light of its brick-orange wings, opening, closing, opening, closing, opening,



closing, opening, closing, opening, closing is duration, the way in which time extends itself, not moving from one end to another as in a vision of development, but simply existing in this place. Time is there. While the farms might once disappear again, people might leave again, time remains in this place and sustains Danaus chrysippus in signifying duration through the flickering light of its brick-orange flight.



Then the sun changes the course of things, living and dead, and it is time for me to move on myself. I walk out of the garden, reach the road and walk on for a few hundred meters, take another path and go down to the beach. It is ebttide now and the beach lies there wide and bare and empty. A blue plastic bottle that has once contained Zan Aqua that has danced on the waves of the ocean, mimicking the blue flickering light of the water, on its way from Nungwi on the northern coast of Zanzibar to this place, is pushed by the breeze. A few other blue plastic bottles lie on the sand as well and are also dancing with the wind. Perhaps it is migration season for them, too. But of course this is misleading because the blue flickering color

is nothing but a false promise and the plastic will soon turn out to be a lethal trap for an animal living in the ocean or at this beach.

As the different blue plastic bottles roll to and fro on the white sand, to and fro, like a terrible ballet of poisonous creatures, to and fro, I begin to feel a little dizzy. As I walk on I am in the busy shade of a beach restaurant, sit down and order a water melon juice. It seems nice here, very distinguished, all painted white with kangas atop the tables to provide shade. The cushions on the chairs are made of the same material, and the vests of the staff as well. White painted wood and turquoise kangas. Flickering blue decoration. I sip. A group of German visitors at the table behind mine chat about the cold winter they have left behind them for a few weeks. A woman says she bought a torch that doesn't need a battery. It just works by pulling something. A man says he thinks there might well be power cuts this winter. A woman says the government should not have given up lignite and nuclear power plants. Better to remain safe and also comfortable with these resources and the convenience of the industrial age. They complain and demand and eat and drink, in front of them the beach-stage with the violently flickering ballet of blue plastic bottle migrants (something that they will surely despise), while they are greeted – for minutes – by a man who has coconut for sale. Jambo, fresh coconut, jambo, fresh coconut. And he lifts his arm that holds the coconut, lowers it, lifts it, lowers it. After a while he turns away, still smiling politely, albeit at no one because no one watches. I feel so dizzy that there is no reason to stay here any longer, in this turquoise flickering light of plunder, and move on as well.

I see him standing in front of the next beach bar, which belongs to a hotel. Some

sunbeds are occupied, by people who stare at open books. Jambo, fresh coconut, jambo, fresh coconut. Lifting his hand, lowering it, lifting it, lowering it. A smile regardless of it all. We both move on and now he sees me, offers his coconut, and now I see the swollen eye bags in his face and the protruding bones of his chest. I do not feel thirsty but I have some questions about language, and so I take a Chidigo lesson at the beach. He speaks about the similarities (and not the differences) between Chidigo and Kiswahili and then talks about the coconuts. They need to be sold, because they do not remain fresh for so long. He doesn't simply sell them as a commodity he has to trade, but he looks after them and the palm trees and the farm. The ways in which he does this follows certain rules, utsi rules. They have been here for long, as long as his family's ancestors have been in a relationship with the land. He says that whenever the elders see that a palm tree is ready for harvesting, he climbs up that palm tree and harvests the coconuts and takes them to the beach. Unfortunately, though, the rhythm in which he is told to harvest and the rhythm in which tourists feel thirsty for them are not synchronized. Which forces him to stand in front of the hotels and restaurants, smiling politely, offering his harvest in vain. Maybe. But what is certain is that *Danaus chrysippus* will fly through his farm, signifying time through the flickering light of its brick-orange wings.

### **Plot not for sale**

Before we go for the walk we are asked to take a seat in the education center, a hall with a model of the forest on the floor and some information leaflets on the walls. In a corner there is a small display case with a group of worn-out

butterflies in it. There is a story that belongs to it, I assume. What I have heard before is that because the forest is sacred it is forbidden to take anything out of it. It is also forbidden to move into it beyond the limits of the circuit that has been laid out for tourists. And it is forbidden to enter the forest after nightfall. The spirits forbid all that and the elders do too. Yet, the forest is not only a sacred forest and a heritage site of the Wadigo, but also a conservation area. It still is a site where endemic plants and a considerable number of vertebrates, insects and other animals live. Its emerald-green canopy is only a faint memory of the giant coastal forests that once grew here. But still. There are wondrous things in here, bursting with their life-giving powers, healing substances that run through their veins. Like the aromatic oil that unfolds from a bundle of leaves or the sourness of the tamarind.

The story that belongs to the butterflies in the display case though is the Ingo story. Ingo was (and hopefully still is) a lepidopterologist who studied butterflies in the forest. At one time, Ingo also set out to study its moths. The elders forbade him to, but he still went, with a companion and a small generator and his butterfly traps, to undertake his work in the nocturnal forest. He got there by dawn, and by the moment he tried to switch it on the generator was drawn into the realm of the spirits. For it didn't work. No light, no moths. Out again, maybe the thing needs more diesel. Outside it works. Back in again. Nothing. No generator, no light, no moths.

Such stories abound. Sacred forests and trees, as long as they are nurtured by the elders and the communities, have a power that overwhelms machines. This changes though when the continuity of offerings that need to be made

in the forest is interrupted. For now, there is a big heap, a mound almost, of ashes that have accumulated there over centuries of making fires for roasting the sacrificed goats and cattle. Fresh light grey ashes right in the middle. But elsewhere, where all this is not there any longer – elders, sacrifices, ashes, undisturbed nights for the spirits – the forests go away and give way to the plastic world of the resorts and shopping malls that offer intoxication and addiction.

For now, the forest is there and since it is mid-day we may enter. Butterflies abound. Cobwebs. The broken shell of a conch. We phone the sea with it. A fig tree has crawled over the ground and now slowly strangles another tree. Maybe not slowly. Maybe rather all the time. Maybe even quickly. Where it has started from there is the shell of a large achatina, big and white like a piece of elephant tusk. The fig has moved to that other tree by first growing a vector-like root. Straight ahead, on and on. Another tree grows on coral rocks, with all its roots clutching the rocks. They look like giant snakes, leeches maybe. This tree needs to be hugged. Mohamed, who works for the education and conservation center, hugs first. Steps back and says “wow”. We hug too, one after another, and say nothing. It feels good to put the nose and forehead on the cool, smooth bark of the tree and inhale its scent of the bark and tree and humidity.

In the forest, spirits may be addressed in any language, Chidigo, or none, or even by saying “wow”. Because the spirits are there to conserve and transmit wisdom, and this is all about education. Mohamed says “freedom of education”, everybody can participate. I reflect on how often people speaking about tree-hugging and sea-phoning have been ridiculed at the university departments they are from.



These things already go too far. Yet, they are the most hospitable way of inviting somebody to take part, learn something about a different view of the world, a different way of engaging with the environment, create relationships and use language. We should have treehugged and seaphoned more. It would have offered much.

Dr. Pakia comes over later in the afternoon for a chat. He has studied Digo botanical knowledge and has worked in conservation projects for long. Presently, he is concerned with a project that is about getting the forests back. Too often it is so much more profitable to have them cut down for new playgrounds for smart-phone addicted people to live in. The former custodians of these sites have all been removed from the land that is close to the beach, and live on the other side of the coastal road. By now, they not only lost the forests but also their Indigenous agricultural knowledge and practice. The crops that were diverse and sustainable, and which yielded seeds that could be kept and planted in the coming season, have been replaced by Monsanto crops. Dr. Pakia says it makes him angry to think of all this loss, of what has been created over hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. All the deep knowledge about gardening. Dr. Pakia says the alternative to Monsanto is to get lucky. Just go to the beach and wait forever. Whereby forever means a limited period of time.







### **This too shall pass**

The new road passes by the titanium mine and sugar factory. New and old substance to plunder. Feeding addictions, transforming reality. The road leads to the border, just forty kilometers more. We branch off and stop at Shimoni. So much for where we went. Others went too, for it is a Sunday and Shimoni is a port from where boats go to Wasini island, across the beguiling blue sea. Quel azul, deep and intense. Of course, this too is misleading, for such a blue endlessness has a price. It always has. We see the island in front of us and a few hotels and resorts at its beach. Young men ask for our plans. But no boat ride, we come to see the cave. The thing is that Shimoni was more a boating and fishing destination before, not a caving one. Hemingway came here to fish, as did Roger Whittaker. The sailing clubs that existed here were the town's main visitor attraction.

Shimoni is also a port from where the ferry to Tanga leaves. The Tanzanian-Kenyan border is also a colonial border, separating a German and a British colony. It is diverse here; diverse

people and languages and destinations and purposes. Wynne-Jones & Walsh (2010) write that this has been like that for long. In colonial times, the Wavumba, who now live on Wasini island, have brought people from the hinterland to here, whom they enslaved. Slavery yet differed in this region, so we must be careful in how we construct this past. Not as a long past with a history of orientalised tyrants and slavers, but a close and shallow past with a history of diverse and evasive participants who reacted in diverse ways to duress and violence.

One thing that makes it rather difficult to grasp this shallow and multifaceted past is the large void in the center of Shimoni, the cave which is actually a system of caves and which is now a slave cave that is presented as a heritage site. We buy entrance tickets and walk down a few stairs, led by a guide. Inside, there is a path, electricity, a site of spirit worship, a bit of an iron chain fixed onto the wall of the cave, then trees that grow through the holes in its top, and a well. Some bats. The guide explains how long hundreds of slaves were imprisoned in the cave, enduring its humidity and darkness. Many died, he says, and were disposed of in

o nice here.

Said Athman on the Journey.

Who had the choice to go, to breathe, to go on.



the sea. Those who rebelled, he says, were tied onto the wall of the cave and beaten. And then he puts one hand on the remains of the iron chain and stretches his arms and says the other hand would be fixed by shackles too and then he stands there as if he was crucified. Crucified by the Arabs. After the Arab responsible for the beating was tired, he says, he would sit on the rock next to the spot where the iron chain is and this rock therefore now is a stool. Every geological feature is now a sign and in need for interpretation. For embodiment and semiotics are the spectacle on offer to the tourists who demand something to be seen and to be felt, so that the visit is real, authentic, meaningful. Of course, this is a performance, and not a unique one. At other sites of difficult heritage, like Elmina, Gorée, the Castle of Good Hope, the performances are similar. Even though nothing but colonial debris is left there, the guides precisely construct what could be the past that these sites have to offer. A deep history of violence to which only the process of civilization – in the form of missions, movements, reforms – which visitors may identify with will put an end. The crucified guide in the dark cave thus is a hospitable offer to take whatever helps to maintain an othering gaze (at the Arabs, the Portuguese) and consider this story not being about us and so that we can be comfortable. There is no way to reject this offer, for we have no concept any longer what to replace it with.

These heritage sites, too, get commodified. Wynne-Jones & Walsh write about the earlier written accounts of the caves: that they were described as a hiding place, sometimes also as a dump and occasionally as a site for smuggling activities. Commodification began with Roger Whittaker's song *Shimoni* and his and a sailing club official's representation of the caves as slave cave. A documentary of Roger Whittaker's journey home, a kind of musical safari film, shows him in the then less accessible cave, speaking about the Arab legacy of slavery, before a skull of a cat on which a spider is having a walk is shown. And then back to blue. Quel azul. Roger Whittaker grew up in Nairobi as the son of British colonial settlers and fought in the British army against the Mau Mau rebellion. His safari film does not mention the headquarters of the East African Company that still stands nearby the cave entrance. He has nothing to say about the ruins of the first prison the British built in East Africa, just a few meters from the headquarters building. There is nothing to say about what fueled the Arab slave economies. Nothing about forced labors in the British and German colonies that were right here.

Nothing about Western greed for sugar, tea and coffee. Addiction and punishment existed in a violent relationship. Fittingly, the walls of the ruined prison bear traces of blackboards, for after serving as a prison, this was a school. Disciplining after disciplining. I ask the guide who built the headquarters and the prison, and he says, people from the area. They had been invited by the colonial government to build these sites of oppression, just like people could be invited by a village head to get together and build a house. The mwera system of communal labor was manipulated in order to force people to work on something that would never be of any



Until there is an eternity.

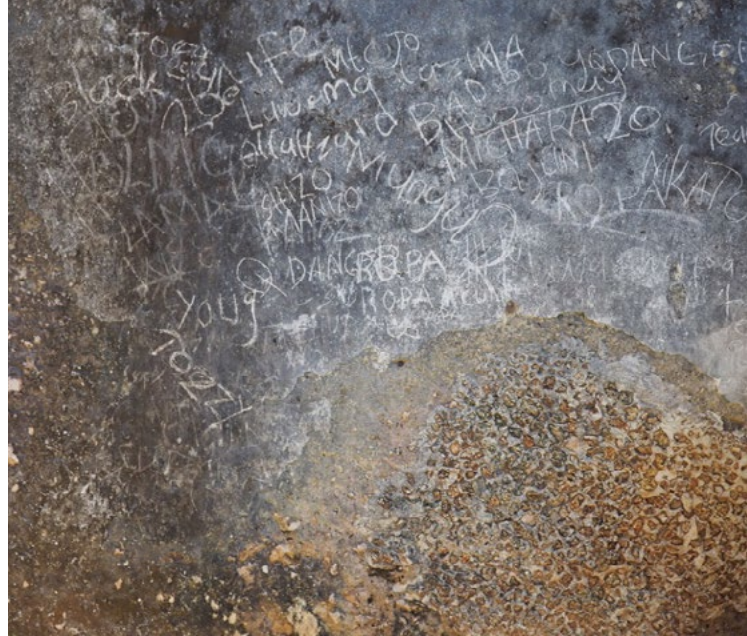
The beginning is when



communal benefit, but harmful. But then, the guide says, there were the caves and the enslaved people in them, and so being forced to work for the colonizer was perhaps also associated with liberation from the Arabs. And then Wynne-Jones & Walsh write about an excavation of the caves in which archaeologists found evidence for the presence of humans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and also for slavery in this time. But then, they could not say anything about who enslaved whom in these caves, and Wynne-Jones & Walsh are as reluctant. Maybe it was something local communities were involved with, maybe it was part of the slave routes of the Indian Ocean. We should be careful with all these binary constructions, such as that of tyrant and victim. The shallow past that has no spectacular views to offer is the tense in which messy stories are told that have no heroes, only participants.

As we move on from the prison ruins, we once more see the ocean. There are frangipani trees that grow on an old graveyard. They are very old and have wide tops that are in full bloom. Some of the blossoms have fallen on the grass and look like giant daisy flowers. Underneath our feet, the guide says, are unmarked graves, almost down to the shoreline. Before the wall in front of us had been built, the flood often washed out bones. Two graves have tombstones. There is an inscription on one of them that reads "Here lie the remains of Capt. Frederick Eyre Lawrence Rifle Brigade / killed in action at Mgo-bani in the cause of civilization and freedom to East Africa / on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 1893."

On our way back, Mr. Rogers is in the mood for a chat. On a quiet day, he says, the road is not very busy. But it is a busy connection nevertheless, which is used by people to transport qat from Kenya to Tanzania and marijuana from Tanzania to Kenya. Shallow, porous motion across lines drawn by colonialism.



### Nekrolog für einen Wiedergänger

Licht fällt durch das Laub des alten Iroko-Baums und durch die Fächer der Palmen. Sonne und Schatten flirren und sind sanft auf der Haut. Eine Galerie in einem alten Haus, dessen Balkone und Veranden Beispiele kolonialer Architektur sind. Rascheln von Laub und Kleckse reflektierten Sonnenlichts.

Undeutliche Erinnerungen, aber da war ein Schrein. Weiße Gestalten aus Lehm waren da doch. Blätter bewegten sich winkend, es war ein Iroko-Baum, da war Lehm, den hatte man weiß bemalt, da waren Gestalten, die waren tot. Lehm, der tot im Halbdunkel stand und irgendetwas bedeutete. Vielleicht mich bedeutete, vielleicht eine andere Person. Flirrende Gedanken, aber Iroko war das dennoch



mit ganz bestimmter Gewissheit. Ein sehr schönes Grün im Laub, das hell und dunkel auf die Wände des kolonialzeitlichen Hauses warf.

Da war noch etwas Kühles dabei, vielleicht ein Sitzplatz, ein Getränk und ein Wind. Kühle war noch dabei. Iroko auf jeden Fall und dann dieser weiße Lehm, der da stand und weiß und tot und ohne auf die Zeit zu achten irgendwohin schaute. Wohin, keine Ahnung. Weiß nicht von wem das handelte. Eine Stelle, deren Seitenangaben mir entfallen sind, handelt davon. Das ist zumindest ein Hinweis. Es ist zumindest ein deutlicher Hinweis, der nicht flirrt. Es würde mir gefallen, damit weiterzumachen, Lehm zu finden, geformten oder ungeformten, ihn kühl und wohltuend zu nennen, nitapoa, und das Flirren auf der Hand zu wissen, leicht und gut.

Es ist aber anders geworden, es hat sich geändert und auch die Bäume sind nicht dieselben. Es sind vielleicht irgendwo Nim-Bäume, ansonsten sind da dünne Palmen, die aus Quadraten, vom Verbundpflaster ausgespart, wachsen und dort jede für sich ohne die Zugabe von Wasser und Zeit bald sterben werden. Es kommt mir sehr heiß vor. Die Sonne brennt und mir läuft mein Schweiß in die Augen. Dennoch sehe ich klar. Ich sehe das Einkaufszentrum mit den Arkaden, in denen kein Schatten ist, weil die Sonne bis dahin reicht und die Platten des Gehwegs zwischen den Läden zu heiß zum Laufen oder Liegen macht, so dass auch die Hunde hier nicht sein können und woanders auf ihre Speiseabfälle warten müssen. Das weiß und hellrosa bemalte Holz leuchtet in den Auslagen der Schaufenster. Rautenförmige Augen starren starr, Tropenhelm auf dem Kopf, Koppel um den Leib, Fernglas, Gewehr, Blick: poliertes Holz, geschnitzt und gefräst, weiß bemalt und rosa. Fez auf dem kruden Kopf und

braune Farbe im Gesicht, Tropenhelm auf dem rosa Kopf und weiße Farbe. Kommt aus dem Kongo, und dann hergebracht von den Händlern, die Touristen wollen das, finden das schön und alt. Vielleicht auch irgendwie echt.

Ich schaue durch meinen Schweiß hindurch und sehe klar, was vor mir ist. Sehr viel Verbundpflaster und Geländewagen von beträchtlicher Größe, die auf dem Verbundpflaster stehen. In den Arkaden ist nichts als Sonne und poliertes Holz.

Wen diese Figuren meinen, weiß ich ebenfalls nicht. Sie weisen in die Geschichte zurück, nach Belgien, Deutschland, Großbritannien und bilden Akteure des Grauens ab. Das muss man aushalten, tönt es aus den Ritzen der Gehwegplatten, das ist Afrika, so ist es nun mal, immer noch geht nichts ohne Geländewagen, den unrasierten Bart, den Schuss auf das Großwild, die Figur aus bemaltem Holz, die aus dem Dunkel in das Grelle tritt. So sehen sie uns, die Afrikaner, das ist ein Blick in ihre Wirklichkeit, in die Authentizität. Beahlt und in Zeitungspapier eingewickelt und daheim aufgestellt. Das ist wie sie uns sehen und das ist Theorie von unten und deshalb brauchen wir ein Geländefahrzeug.

Vor den Arkaden sind Sonnensegel und unter den Sonnensegeln stehen Biertische. An den Biertischen sitzen Biertrinker. Sie sind gebeugt und ihnen ist warm. Die Hitze und der Alkohol beugen sie. Halb geschlossene Augen in roten Gesichtern und Schweiß in braunem Baumwolljersey. Ich denke nicht, dass die Holzfiguren von ihnen handeln. Glaube ich nicht. Und auch nicht von mir, denn ich trage weder Helm noch Fez, auch nicht gedanklich. Auch stehe ich nicht still und stramm, sondern setze meinen Fuß, stetig wandernd.

Dann aber noch.



Jenseits der Sonnensegel, im hinteren Teil des Ladengeschäfts, steht im Schatten der Auslagen, überbordenden Verkaufstische und Vitrinen eine Skulptur, die aus einem einzigen Stück Holz gemacht ist. Die Basis ist rund, nichts als ein Stück Baumstamm. Aus ihm erhebt sich ein Mann in Tropenanzug und Tropenhelm, hellrosa Wangen, starre Rauten- augen. Seine Linke hält er hoch und macht ein Victory-Zeichen. Neben ihm kommt ein zweiter Mann aus dem Baum, in Khaki und Fez. Braunes Gesicht, starrer Blick aus Rauten- augen, die Rechte erhoben. Darin eine Peitsche, an die mit Garn eine richtige Schnur geknüpft ist. Zu beider Füßen kommt ein Dritter aus dem Holz, der gar nicht wie ein Mann aussieht, wenn man nicht sehr genau schaut. Er liegt schwarz und fast nackt auf seinen Knien, kauert vor den

anderen beiden und schaut mit Rauten- augen nach vorn, dem Vektor folgend, der dorthin weist, wohin ihn der Eine im Namen des siegreichen Anderen peitschen wird.

An der Fähre steht ein Bettler in Kanza und Kofia neben einem vollklimatisierten Minibus. Durch die getönten Fenster ist eine kleine Gruppe deutscher Reisender zu erkennen. Sie wenden ihre Blicke ab. Der Bettler sagt

No father no mother  
No father no mother  
No father no mother  
No father no mother  
No father no mother  
No father no mother  
Please help  
No father no mother



No father no mother  
 No father no mother  
 No father no mother  
 No father no mother  
 Please help  
 Mother  
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 No father no mother  
 No father no mother  
 No father no mother  
 No father no mother  
 No father no mother  
 Please help  
 Mother  
 Mother  
 Mother  
 Mother  
 Mother  
 Mother  
 I am alone

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