



Working Group B 'Multiple Futures through Time' (Winter 2013-14)

Workshop

"Changing Futures through Time"

16-17 January 2014

Art and Technology offering Africa different cultures to choose from *Akosua Adomako Ampofo*

The perspectives reflected in this proposal emerge from shared musings with young people aged 17-25. The title borrows from thoughts of a young Ghanaian Science student, Paapa, in the Diaspora who does music "on the side", but in an increasingly big way—he comes home for concerts annually that have developed their own dedicated following. In one song, *Kukua*, Paapa sings an ode of regret and longing to his homeland Ghana, captured through the metaphorical character of *Kukua*.

Kukua, the name for Wednesday-born females in Ghanaian Akan traditions, matches Kwaku, Paapa's own Wednesday day-name. The song plays out as a dialogue between the two, Kwaku telling *Kukua* he "just got a scholarship" and will be "moving to the dollar ship"; that the "cedi and pesewa" (Ghanaian currency) "cannot afford my dreams." *Kukua* sings, "Please don't l-e-eave me-e," ending in a low tremor, "If you leave / Please write songs for me / And come back to me...". And Paapa uses technology and the internet to create and share his craft in a big way (<http://framework5.wordpress.com>).

I am a former architect and a sociologist, not an historian—and yet I despair that our failure to examine our past condemns us to a barren future devoid of identity. I am certainly not a youth, and yet I am self-interested enough to appreciate that Africa's future is theirs, and if I am to survive in that future I better respect that fact. I am not an artist, and yet I acknowledge the strong bonds that tie Africa's youth, her future, popular culture and technology together. And into that mix I must throw the environment, religion and sexualities. The relationships will, hopefully, become clearer in my musings. I am both heterosexual and religious—and yet the homophobic murmurings, sometimes growling, in the church and mosque bear little resemblance to the tolerance of traditional understandings of minority identities. And as I traverse the urban spaces of my city, Accra, gleaming ever more with luxury apartments striding adjacent to overflowing gutters, and that claimed the lives of century-old trees, I weep—wondering what Africa's multiple futures hold, and if there would be any recognition for my ancestors? Where does *future* lie here? And yet, the young people I reflected with assure me that they construct, and de-construct both past and future, politically and aesthetically, and that arts and technology will shape the continent's future mindscape.

Thus, while I am interested in all the questions of the Working Group, I am particularly intrigued by the question of which temporal, social, political, logical and aesthetical dichotomies are involved in concepts of 'future'? and the extent to which historical, biographical, communicative or environmental processes are related to concepts of 'future'?

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For example, as young people conceptualise *future*, and think pop culture, technology and social network platforms linking up with identity and contributions to Africa's future, they recognise the potential risks of leaving others behind. Without necessarily meaning to, they question and destabilize notions of future. One way to speak to the question could be to look at the evolution of popular culture--music, education, fashion, language and expression, technology etc—comparing youth today with their parents and grandparents when they were youth (a generation history, including perceptions). Particularly interesting would be the perspectives of “Afropolitan” youth who live in temporal multi-spaces, at home both in Africa, the Diaspora and virtual worlds. They crave support for multiple identities, including sexual, and care, indeed worry, for a sustainable environment that will allow them to live out a comfortable future. Can they have their cake and eat it—a seeming future mindscape at odds with that of their parents and grandparents. At the same time a lot of young people talk about "not fitting in" when they return" or "not having the same opportunities" as they would abroad. They talk about tensions between people “back home” and them, about their notions of future (and by default, past) and those of their parents.

Sexualities, Religion, the Environment, Health, Employment, Political Participation, Pan-Africanism, ... in all of these both Art and Technology loom large for the future and potentially offer Africa, through its young people, different futures to choose from? Which they will choose will be very much influenced by how they read “past” and what they call “future”? These would be the reflections and curiosities I would be excited about engaging with.



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Translation/Traducture as tools for interrogating future: The case of knowledge management through insights of the global Africana world

Wangui Wa Goro

The main focus of this proposal to engage in the research is within the context of “moving ideas” across the globe, particularly deeper meaning and sense-making through translation and traducture and their impact and implications within the project “Future Africa – Visions in Time: Narratives of the Future in Modern African History” within the context of the above question theme.

The main approach is in relation to knowledge production and management as a trajectory for global transformation over the time/space conundrum and the important role that translation and traducture have played and continue to play in shaping knowledge management in general but in this case, and our understanding of future in particular.

The traducture input seeks to explore the ways in which languages, and the notions of *traducture* and *translation* can be used to historically illuminate future in relation to Africa and the Africana world and its global impact through communication primarily through literary and intertextual translation/traducture practice using orature, texts, digital tools and localisation, and more importantly, social human interaction and performance as communication itself.

Traducture is based on conceptual frameworks of translation as deeper meaning, which offers a variety of interdisciplinary and intercultural avenues for engaging future and transformation from different standpoints, including perspectives which seek to unravel dominant discourses, through sense-making, restitution and transcreation, particularly where reality is distorted through misrepresentation, such as stereotyping or exclusion. It seeks to re-centre exploration particularly of humanity in its fullness or explore the creation of new discourses or draw attention to existing discourses in varied multilingual, transcultural and transnational locations in relation to future. Future itself, as a site of exploration also needs to be contextualised and the contested emergent theories put to test. Terminology also which lays claim to future also needs to be interrogated. Exploring the question of transitional justice and restoration for the Africana world is central to these explorations and research, scholarship and sense-making, for exploring recovery (re)discovery and complexity.



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Social Media and the Future of African Diaspora Identity

Alondra Nelson

As is widely acknowledged, parallel developments in computing and molecular biology precipitated the genomics era. A noteworthy extension of this interdependence of bytes and genes is the budding role played by social network sites (SNS) on the terrain of consumer genetics. The Google-backed personal genomics company 23andMe that sells consumers genetic inferences about their "health, disease and ancestry," for example, was launched in 2007 as an e-business with a social networking component. As envisioned, this feature allows 23andMe's clients to tap into the wisdom of the crowd by sharing and aggregating data about their respective genetic analyses. Virtual communities have also risen up more organically around other types of direct-to-consumer (DTC) genetic testing in the form of listservs and blogs through which users disclose and discuss the SNPs ("snips"), Y-chromosome DNA (Y-DNA), mitochondrial DNA (mt-DNA) and haplotype group results they purchased from various enterprises toward the end of conjecturing identity, familial origins or disease predisposition. In this project, I examine another iteration of the interplay between on-line community and DTC genetics—the use of the video-sharing SNS *YouTube (Broadcast Yourself)*™ by African American genealogists, who have purchased DNA testing to learn about their ancestry.

With this phenomenon, the authoritative "imprimatur" of genetic science and the practice of genealogy are married to the media cultures of Web 2.0 and reality television. These broadcasts that predominantly feature men and women in their twenties and thirties suggest the centrality of social networking to community formation among young adults. This phenomenon also suggests the broadening demographic appeal of genetic root-seeking; interest in genealogy, a practice that has long been the provenance of older adults and retirees, may be growing in a younger generation, owing in part to the recent technological mediation of root-seeking. The founding of YouTube followed by just a few years the emergence of DTC genetics. Recently a genre of broadcasts that we describe as *roots revelations* has emerged on this SNS. With these videos, genealogists use YouTube's functions to disseminate and court reactions to their root-seeking journeys. In these tightly shot, almost confessional videos, genealogists describe the genetic ancestry testing process and their reactions to it. They try on genetically derived identities. Using image, sound and text, they perform the new or elaborated selves made available to them through genetic ancestry testing. The practice of genealogy was popularized in the late 1970s after the publication of Alex Haley's book *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* and, soon after, the debut of the eponymous television mini-series. The roots journey involves the reconstruction of family history, principally through the use of archival documentation dutifully



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assembled by the root-seeker over many years or decades. More recently, a spate of genealogy-themed, unscripted (or "reality") television shows, such as prominent Harvard University academic Henry Louis "Skip" Gates Jr.'s successful *African American Lives* franchise, have highlighted the ease and immediacy with which the roots endeavor can currently be undertaken, be it carried out for a root-seeker by another individual (e.g. a certified genealogist) or a company (such as Gates' African DNA that sells traditional and genetic ancestry tracing). On this novel family history landscape, the apex of the roots journey is "the reveal"—to borrow a concept from reality television—the revelation of new or surprising information, often based upon genetic test results, to a subject who expresses astonishment or elation or both before an audience. Thus, in the post-Haley era, the practice of root-seeking might be said to now require not simply the reconstruction of a familial narrative or excavation, but also the performance of one's response to this genealogical account, as well as the presence of an audience to observe it. Broadcasting oneself on YouTube is one means to these ends.

Moreover, as an SNS, YouTube is inherently a vehicle through which the audience can express its opinions about roots revelations back to the videos' creators. These broadcasts provide not only a way for genealogists to circulate their genetic test results, but also an audience with whom to share their experiences and, potentially, with whom to develop affiliations. In the words of *yeamie*, from the epigram that begins this essay, genetic genealogists use the site, in part, to generate "positive feedback about [their] results." A diverse array of viewers differently bears witness to the roots journey: Viewers' reactions indeed include "positive" responses. Audience members claiming ties to the ethnic groups or countries to which a root-seeker has been associated by a testing service, for example, may enthusiastically receive (and thus authenticate) a broadcaster's results. At the same time, some in the audience may reflect skepticism about genetic ancestry testing and, implicitly, also about the presuppositions about kinship and community that undergird it. In both instances, the circulation of roots revelations offers a small window on public perception of the growing use of genetic ancestry testing.



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Middle-class chronotypes and changing self-perceptions in Kenya

Rachel Spronk

Through time we understand and represent ourselves in the world. Time informs the ways in which we articulate our sense of self, the ways in which we conceptualise our origins and possible futures in relation to others. Among young urban professionals in Nairobi, notions of the future draw heavily on idea(ls) concerning emotional well-being in the form of an intimate relationship ('modern marriage'), material wealth and prestige. In this paper I tease out how three powerful notions are crucial to structuring the ways these Kenyans think about the future: the notion of the 'modern', its counterpart 'tradition', and the idea of Africanness. These notions form three temporal modalities from which subjectivities and socialities emerge and become articulated in young adults' self-perceptions. I will explore how a multiplicity of chronotypes is helpful in understanding the pursuit of social mobility in Kenya.



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'Maendeleo Mema': Concepts of 'progress' in late colonial East Africa

Emma Hunter

In his seminal collection of essays, *Futures Past*, Reinhart Koselleck set up a contrast between pre-modern and modern ideas of the future in Europe. For Koselleck, one of the characteristics of modernity was the idea of a future which 'transcended the hitherto predictable', characterised both by the 'increasing speed with which it approaches us' and 'its unknown quantity'. In the nineteenth century, alongside utopian visions of radical change, the concept of 'progress' became increasingly central to self-understandings and to political projects in Europe, tied to political philosophies of liberalism. However, as recent work in the global history of ideas has shown, it also became a global concept. This paper explores the concept of 'progress' in late colonial East Africa. The concept of 'progress' was integral to ideologies of legitimation in late colonial East Africa and framed the discursive terrain in which colonial subjects engaged with colonial rulers in Tanganyika's Swahiliphone public sphere. This paper uses empirical evidence from Swahili-language newspapers to map out the ways in which African writers engaged with the concept in the public sphere, and demonstrates that it was characterised as much by an optimistic vision of the future as pessimism about the fragility of progress and the risk that it could go backwards as well as forwards.



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Kenyan Life Stories: Remembering the Future, building the Present

Christiane Reichart-Burikukiye

Kenyan public has seen a considerable increase in the publication of autobiographies during the last two decades. Politicians (G.G. Kariuki), religious leaders (John Henry Okullo, Obadiah Kariuki), intellectuals (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Maina wa Kinyatti, Muthoni Likimani, Bethwell Ogot) and human rights activists (Wangari Maathai, Wambui Wayiaki Otieno, Joseph Maina Mungai) as well as ordinary citizens, male and female, added personal stories of their life experiences as makers of Kenyan past and presence to the already existing rich body of autobiographic literature in Kenya.

Autobiographies as “fictions” (Benesch) or “inventions of the self” (Eakin) are individual lenses into a wider historical context and as such of great value for historians of future concepts in Kenya. Autobiographies narrate the past by those who possess the presence: they are constructed with a permanent view onto how the now present future was shaped. Thereby, autobiographies not only remember the writer's individual performances and opinions. By placing themselves into the history of a family, a community, a region, autobiography writers created source books for the experiences, actions, aims and thoughts of their parents, grand-parents and other family members, of personal friends and opponents and of their interaction with the respective cultural, political and religious environments through time.

Based on the material provided by these autobiographies I aim to examine the changing concepts of future in Kenya during the second half of the colonial (ca. 1930-1960) and the early independent period in their relation to narrations of the pre-colonial past and the colonial conquest, to experiences in the colonial setting and to promises of an independent future.



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Mau Mau Inc.: The privileging of conflict memories and histories in Kenya

Lotte Hughes

The recently ended Mau Mau war veterans' case against the British Government, which was settled out of court with £14 million in reparations, was a major triumph for the plaintiffs and Kenyan human rights groups. But less positively, it has left its mark narratively on public and scholarly debate about colonial-era and more recent conflict in Kenya, and (together with other socio-political developments) allowed for one set of patriotic histories and memories of liberation struggle to be privileged over all others. Local and international discourses around the lawsuit have further concretized, in public history production in Kenya, for example in museum spaces and school textbooks, a binary opposition between 'resisters' and 'collaborators' which is both ahistorical and undermines efforts to reconcile different ethnic communities. These efforts became vital following the 2007/08 post-election violence which tore the country apart; the new Deputy President, William Ruto, is currently on trial at the International Criminal Court in The Hague for his alleged role in this violence, and President Uhuru Kenyatta will join him there in February. The Mau Mau case has also reinforced a particular metanarrative of nationhood, driven by primarily Gikuyu war veterans, which excludes many other voices, memories and histories. Drawing on fieldwork and archival research, this paper explores some of the ways in which these phenomena manifest, in the context of transitional justice processes, and asks what the future implications are.



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On images for a liberated future and the historical condition of the work of the Instituto Nacional de Cinema de Moçambique (INC)

Luis Patraquim

There are "multiple futures". These multiple futures are already an interference influenced by concrete political processes of the context they emerge from. Involved in the question of "future/s" is also a linguistic one – in this context it is particularly interesting to look at Bantu languages and the changes within languages, not only in relation to the term "future", but also to "culture". Mocambiquan society has own ways of dealing with the issue of future. It would be wrong to assume a continued immobility of thought towards the future. As a journalist; I worked for the INC and was involved in its conceptualization, which directly had to do with providing images for a liberated future.

The Mozambican context is particularly interesting here: there is multilayered process of conceptualizing future in a highly political and power-related context. The concepts of future designed by a colonial power till the mid-1970s that are interrupted by the war of independence and the introduction of a socialist political system that – in a Pan-African and International socialist network – struggles for concepts of future. At the same time, local concepts of future based on time and memory conceptions in Bantu cultures enter the scene as local cultures are valorized in the nation-building. The death of Samora Machel in 1987 is a further rupture in this conceptualizing process. The civil war and the abrupt turn towards neo-liberal politics from 1992 onwards but still under the aegide of Frelimo is part of the often painful process towards a future that – in ideas and concepts – turns back to the past.



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Queer Times, Black Futures

Kara Keeling

Queer Times, Black Futures further develops and elaborates the work on temporality that I began in my most recent book, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*, putting it into conversation with current scholarship on queer temporality, queer futurity, and new media. To do so, I look at selected texts from recent queer cinema, theories about digital technologies and new media, and a set of the cultural productions that have been labeled Afrofuturist, with a particular interest in Afrofuturism's predilection for creative and complex musical expression. *Queer Times, Black Futures* is part of the growing body of vibrant and exciting interdisciplinary scholarship that seeks to build bridges between areas of intellectual inquiry previously held to be separate areas of investigation; it will contribute to African American and Postcolonial Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Queer Theory, and Media and Cultural Studies.

In *The Witch's Flight*, I provided a reading of Frantz Fanon's elaboration of the temporality of colonial reality in his oft-cited *Black Skins, White Masks*. According to my reading, colonial temporality continues to structure and (in)form our present reality, thereby rendering liberation from colonialism's regimes of representation and the logics of exploitation and domination they hold in place presently (im)possible. Because colonial temporality operates according to what Fanon describes as a "hellish cycle," in which "the Black" exists as "one who waits" in a situation wherein the terms of his waiting are pre-ordained, it forecloses foreseeable futures in which Black Liberation might be achieved as something other than "White." What remains, however, are futures that are unknowable and unforeseeable. These are futures that cannot be anticipated, but must be awaited, openly, without prescribing their content, yet with a desire for justice.

Certain Afrofuturist articulations provide insight into the "freedom dreams" (in Robin DG Kelley's words) that historically have proven to be a generative force in the Black Radical Tradition and point towards the ways that African imaginings have sought to generate futures, even in the face of what has been referred to, however problematically, as "social death." "Social death," a concept generated from within African American thought and culture, resonates with Lee Edelman's polemical call for queers to recognize the position to which they have been consigned in the Symbolic and embrace the ways queers figure "no future" through our relationship to Jacques Lacan's notion of the death drive as Edelman reads it. Edelman's polemic has become a prominent part of a broader conversation about queer time and queer temporality; yet, much of the discussion of his argument hinges on an either/ or relationship solicited by its polemical stance - either one embraces his argument on its terms or one rejects it. By putting Edelman and other theorists of queer temporality into conversation with Afrofuturist imaginings of impossible Black futures, *Queer Times, Black Futures* stages a different conversation, one that seeks to build bridges between the political (im)possibilities of queer times and those of black times.

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In my contribution I propose to focus on recent changes in patterns of mobility in order to grasp shifts in people's visions of the future. As an anthropologist I prefer to study ideas through their material expression (cf., for instance, Birgit Meyer's approach to religion through its 'materiality'). For present-day Africa, changing practices of mobility offer an apt entry point for tracing changes in visions of the future. This relates to a context of globalization (cf. its characteristic by Arjun Appadurai as increasing mobility of things, people and ideas). But for African societies there was always a particularly close link between mobility and visions of the future. Mobility was crucial for the reproduction of precolonial forms of authority, both in state and stateless societies. No wonder that colonial authorities were obsessed with fixing the 'floating populations,' seen as structural elements of disorder (Janet Roitman 2004). Yet, in practice colonial interventions encouraged new forms of mobility. Up till the present-day mobility remains a crucial element in people's reflections on the future.

All the more important that in many parts of the continent the 1990's brought some unexpected shifts in the patterns of mobility that had developed during the late colonial and post-colonial period. Since then relations had been marked by a particular form of urbanization, described as a rural-urban continuum (cf. Joseph Gugler 1971). Urbanites continued to take their relations to the village of birth most seriously, constantly returning there (cf. the burial 'at home' as a high point of 'belonging'). Such relations were crucial to the reproduction of patrimonial forms of politics and governance. However, especially since the 'post-Cold War moment' (Charles Piot 2010) these trans-local forms of solidarity seem to be under heavy pressure. New, adventurous forms of transcontinental migration (cf. the Cameroonian *bush-fallers*) make the ongoing commitment of migrants to the home community highly unsure. New forms of enrichment (the Nigerians 419's, the Cameroonian *feymen*) seem to break out of the city-village frameworks of belonging.

In this contribution I propose to address a few aspects of these shifts in mobility patterns, and explore their implications for people's visions of the future. I will mainly refer to Cameroonian examples – notably from the Grassfields, seen by many in the country as a vanguard of social change – but I will address also the broader relevance of these examples for the continent as a whole.