

Hyperapartheid

*Mvuselelo Ngcoya**

Imithwalo

St. Lucia, June 1993

Even though I've visited St. Lucia many times, I can't forget that first night in June 1993. South Africa, and particularly the then province of Natal, was caught in the grip of another deadly season of blood ahead of the first democratic elections the following year. I didn't have a home. Hadn't had one for three years. In April 1990, my family had been coughed out of our home in Phatheni, Richmond. Spat out like a TB patient's sticky, gunky brown phlegm. Into a rusty tin – the tin settlement of Mvuzane, Clermont, west of Durban. We were squatting, that's what we called it. Squatting. I hated that word. Squatting as if we were in a permanent state of shitting. Sure, it often felt like that. You wanted to relieve yourself. Of the permanent itch. School holidays were never pleasant as there was no home to go to. Except this time. St. Lucia.

My colleagues and I had organised a trip to this little tourist town. This was my coming out act as a bona fide tourist. I was a young teacher in one of the few multiracial boarding schools in Natal. We lived on site. Seven of us were on the trip: four white and three black teachers ranging from the ages of about 55 to me, then aged 19. All men. I'd looked forward to this trip for months. I wasn't going to that dump in Clermont. Mine was the puffed up chest of a tourist. For the first time. Not a vagabond. We'd come to the northern part of the province *ukuyobona amabhubesi* (to see the lions) as our Zulu speaking white colleague Makepisi¹ would always remind us. I'd never seen a lion. My *imithwalo* (luggage/burdens) were ready. I'd never been a tourist. That I come to think of it, we don't even have an equivalent word in my Zulu language.

Still, there I was, a proper tourist. The world of apartheid was changing or spinning. We were going to use St. Lucia as our base to visit the nearby game reserve of Hluhluwe. *Ukuyobona amabhubesi*. Did I see lions? I honestly can't remember. The only thing I do remember about that trip is that first night in St. Lucia.

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¹ While these are true encounters, all the personal names and the names of the restaurant and B&B are pseudonyms.

Richmond, October 1983

All I knew of tourists were the canoe-carrying 4x4s that drove past our neighborhood when I was growing up in Phatheni on their way to the Umkhomazi River. They would slowly scale the undulating hills of kwaNkukhu like women carrying firewood on their heads. I remember one Sunday morning, around October 1983, I was in the local store, Vinks River Store, as the peeling paint announced. One of the 4x4s stopped and a white family walked in. We always stepped aside when a white person appeared. A man, his wife, and two children. He was big. They always seemed imposing and hairy, the white men. I saw the sun shining through his ears as he entered. He walked to the fridge and grabbed a liter of Coke. It was a delicacy in those days, Coke. He looked at Mr. Zondi, the owner, and walked out without paying. His wife looked at us, at the shopkeeper, and offered that meaningless half grin I've seen from white folks. Mr. Zondi's eyes were glossy and his hands were trembling. These were my first encounters with tourists, with apartheid. Tourists were white and I was black.

St. Lucia

For the last three years, I've visited Mtubatuba and St. Lucia quite frequently, primarily for research purposes and occasionally as a tourist. Although there is evidence of 'prehistoric settlers,'² the majority of the residents today are white.³ St. Lucia is a small tourist town located some 250 km or about 3 hours by car north of the city of Durban. Anna's B&B, one of the local businesses, describes the town as: 'Tucked in between the Indian Ocean and the St. Lucia Estuary, and could almost be described as being on an island. As the only private town in the world, it is completely surrounded by a Natural World Heritage Site but despite this, it is very easy to access the town via the R618 road.' It's tucked all right – tucked between Portuguese and English colonial domination and Afrikaner apartheid.

Manuel de Mesquita Perestrelo, a Portuguese navigator named the area St. Lucia on 13 December 1575, the day of the feast of Saint Lucy. If his name sounds familiar, it's because he came from Portuguese nobility and was a relative of the wife of Christopher Columbus, Filipa Moniz Perestrelo. I often think about this link when I'm here – this twisted line of global colonial domination that links St. Lucia to the Americas via Columbus and the Perestrelas.

When the survivors of the wrecked Portuguese ship São Bento named the town Rio dos Médãos do Ouro (River of Gold Dunes) in 1555, they had little idea that four and a half centuries later, European tourism would be the 'gold dune' for the area. Surrounded by the Isimangaliso Wetland Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, St. Lucia is one of the major tourist destinations of the province of KwaZulu-Natal as it is conveniently located close to game reserves and the Indian Ocean. The town's economy depends on tourism (480,000 tourists visited the Park in 2012).⁴ Tourist companies promote this coastal town as a must-see paradise.⁵ Here's how the travel website Lonely Planet describes it:

² At least that's how the town's Wikipedia entry puts it. There is evidence of stone implements and various human remains dating back to the middle and early stone ages.

³ According to the 2011 census, the Umkhanyakude District, of which St. Lucia is part, has a population of about 626,000 people, 98.8% of whom are black African. See, Statistics South Africa, Census 2011. Available at http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=3839

⁴ Isimangaliso Wetland Park, Annual Report, 2013, p.32.

⁵ Heritage Tours & Safaris, "St Lucia Accommodation, Activities, Tours & Safari Packages." Available at <http://www.stluciasouthafrica.com/st-lucia/>

This pleasant village... is a hotbed of activity as the population swells from 600 to the thousands. The main drag, McKenzie St (a former hippo pathway), is packed with restaurants, lively hostels and bars, but the quieter avenues behind it offer a touch more hush and a good selection of B&Bs. Hippos sometimes amble down the town's quieter streets (beware: these are not cute, just dangerous).⁶

The uncanny presence of colonial history unfolds spatially and economically. Despite this bedrock of historical colonial hierarchies and racial and economic antagonisms, we hope tourism will help us strike new equitable bargains.

St. Lucia, November 2014

As on that fateful night some 21 years ago, as we check in at Ouma's B&B in St. Lucia, South Africa feels decidedly undecided. Former President Mandela has been in hospital for many weeks. We are wringing our collective hands in national anguish. This time I'm traveling with two of my graduate research assistants. As we check in at the B&B, I ask Alex, the white young manager why the establishment is named Ouma; he says it was named in memory of his *ouma* (grandma) who left the family money to build this family holiday home turned B&B. Vusi, one of the research assistants, grunts. As we collect our bags, Alex announces: 'My girls will show you your rooms.'

My girls? This possessive pronoun 'my' and the racialized 'girls' shock me.⁷ The 'girls' are Thobi (in her mid thirties, I supposed) and Mama Duma (certainly over 50). Judging by the dates of the BMX biking awards he has proudly displayed on the walls, Alex must be in his late twenties. My girls. I cringe. But I say nothing. I don't know why. Was I too embarrassed? Or was this one of my little acts of cowardice? Or have I simply come to terms with the fact that whites like Alex will celebrate Mandela's legacy while simultaneously guarding and enjoying the racialized privileges of apartheid?

Responsible Tourism?

Tourism, international politics, and military adventurism are not such strange bedfellows.⁸ Aware of the limits of the bulldozer approach to international relations, colonizing countries increasingly see the efficacy of tourism. Proponents of mass and conscientious tourism tout its ability to heighten awareness of other places at home, to improve cross-cultural understanding, and economic cooperation.

⁶ <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/south-africa/kwazulu-natal/st-lucia>

⁷ This evokes the paternalistic language of American slavery where planter families infantilized enslaved black men and women by calling them 'boy' or 'girl'. See, Lori Lee, 'Discourse of Slavery: Freedom and the Negotiation of Power and Identity in Context,' *Transatlantica 2* (2012), published online 10 October 2012, accessed 04 May 2015. Available at <http://transatlantica.revues.org/6237>

⁸ While there are often stale attempts at theorizing tourism and travel in the academic field of International Relations, there are many robust and complex formulations of travel and tourism in Sociology, Anthropology, Cultural Studies and other fields. For examples, see John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage, 1991; James Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures,' in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. A. Treichler (eds), *Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1992; Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003; Adrian Franklin, 'The Sociology of Tourism,' in T. Jamal and M. Robinson (Eds), *Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies*. London: Sage, 2008.

If Americans see tourism as a key component of their imperial designs,⁹ it appears that South Africa sees it as a strategic tool in fighting our own political and economic demons. Indeed, it has been touted as South Africa's post-apartheid peace dividend. Derek Hanekom, the Minister of Tourism, has argued that the success of the tourism sector will be assessed by how well it contributes towards alleviating poverty, inequality, and unemployment.¹⁰ The sector is now so important to the economy that it has passed traditional sectors such as mining and automotive manufacturing in terms of numbers of people directly employed by the sector.

To reach its targets, South African Tourism has international offices and centers in many key countries, where the tourism officials carry responsibilities of promoting tourism, separate from embassy functions. They are located in the following embassies: Australia, China (PRC) and Hong Kong, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, United Kingdom and Ireland, and the United States.¹¹ There are no regional offices in the five African regions yet.

Government and industry discourse on tourism in South Africa centers on 'responsible tourism'. Following this trend, the Isimangaliso Wetland Park also has this as one of its strategic goals: 'To optimize the Park's revenue generation in a commercially- and environmentally-sustainable manner, that fosters job-creation and empowerment of historically-disadvantaged communities.'¹² When 'the people of the slogan'¹³ speak of 'responsible tourism' I wonder if they think about Alex's 'girls' at Ouma's B&B in St. Lucia. And I wonder how they think about responsibility then?

Tourist Responsibilities

'How is Alex treating you, *sisi* Thobi?' I ask.

Her eyebrows are always heightened as if she is permanently surprised by the world. She says, '*Ungumlungu njengabanye* (He is white, like other white people).'

I wonder aloud about this *ubulungu* (whiteness) she seems to be talking about and ask, 'What does it mean in practice to say *ungumlungu*?'

Now only one eyebrow is raised. 'You know what I mean,' she says. 'He has to make money. He runs the show. We do the hard work; he manages. *Unomqondo kabasi nokuzishaya isifuba* (He has the boss mentality, a puffed up chest).'

I turn to Mama Duma, to see if she wants to elaborate on this *umqondo kabasi*. She is sitting down, her left elbow on the table and her hand cupping her cheek. 'I have children to feed. I can't complain.'

As she wipes her face with her pinafore, I suddenly notice that she and Thobi are dressed in black tunics, like mourning widows. I ask them how much they are paid.

⁹ Wynne-Hughes (2012: 640) examines the discourses of tourist guidebooks (such as Lonely Planet) and government policy, to demonstrate how tourism promotional campaigns reproduce counterterrorism policies and discourses. Her co-constitutive approach to tourism and counterterrorism disrupts distinctions between soft and hard power and reveals 'the complex and mundane means through which Western liberal democracy is protected.'

Elisa Wynne-Hughes, "'Who would go to Egypt?'" How tourism accounts for "terrorism", *Review of International Studies* 38 (2012): 615–640.

¹⁰ South African Government News Agency, 'Minister says tourism must reduce poverty,' 15 April 2015. Available at <http://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/tourism-must-reduce-poverty-says-minister> Accessed 8 January 2015.

¹¹ Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Presentation to Portfolio Committee on Tourism, 18 September 2012. Available at <https://pmg.org.za/files/doc/2012/120918dirco.ppt>

¹² Isimangaliso Wetland Park Authority, Annual Report 2012, p.33.

¹³ Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* (London: Heinemann, 1988).

'*Ikhulu* (a hundred rand) per workday,'¹⁴ answers Mama Duma.

I press her, "What do you mean by workday?"

All along, Mama Duma keeps looking at the door. Alex is not back yet. Later, I discover that they recognize his arrival by the hum and sneezing of his bakkie (van). She says, 'He pays us only when we come to work. That is, if there is work. B&B work is seasonal. Sometimes there are no visitors, and he doesn't call us; no work no pay.' All I can utter at this point is that inimitable national cry of exasperation, '*Eish!*'¹⁵ I ask her how far they live and how much they pay for transport. She says they both live at Ezwenelisha and it's a bit far.

Thobi (chuckling or rebuking me, I couldn't tell) says, 'We walk, man. It would take too much of our daily earnings if we took the taxi. So we walk.' Mama Duma says she can't walk as fast as Thobi. 'It takes about an hour. Now it's the rainy season, sometimes we're forced to take the taxi. In winter it's dangerous because you have to be here at 6am and that means you have to walk in the dark early in the morning to get here. We are women and you know how this society is.'

Ukuluma uphozisa

It is encounters like this one that demonstrate the extreme complexity of the afterlife of apartheid. Black people live in deep despair, but they are the bedrock of the economic system, toiling as miners, waiters, security guards, domestic workers, factory employees, and so on. Twenty years into democracy, many black families rely on the government social transfer system, one of the most expansive in the world, yet inequality remains entrenched. The latest census data show that average annual income for white households is six times that of black households.¹⁶

This inequality is most visible when you go to restaurants. Later that week, we are sitting outside Bush & Tale, St. Lucia, one of Lonely Planet's 'lively restaurants'. It's early evening and the moon seems to be throwing a golden fishing rod of light into the estuary. It's still hot and the waiters are struggling in their blue and black viscose-linen uniforms. All of them black like their uniforms. There are about 30 customers - all white, mostly foreign and some local, judging by the Babel of languages I overhear. That is the essential element of this town: invariably all the workers are black, the tourists white. Hyperapartheid tourism.

One of the waiters wears her luminous smile proudly and asks us in elegant Model-C¹⁷ English what we'd like to drink. I stutter because I'm swept away by a wave of sorrow. Such impeccable English! Her words sparkle like her teeth, and her accent tiptoes like her elegant gait. English is gold in this tourist town, in this tourist country. I get depressed thinking that

¹⁴ R100 is about US\$8.

¹⁵ On South African English, see Rajend Mesthrie, *Eish, but is it English?: Celebrating the South African variety*. Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2011.

¹⁶ Statistics South Africa, 'Income and Expenditure of Households 2010/2011,' p. 11. Available at <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0100/P01002011.pdf>

¹⁷ Former Model C schools are public schools that are administrated and largely funded by tuition set by a school governing board of parents, alumni, or other private funding. They tend to perform better academically than public schools. They are so called because at the end of constitutional apartheid, parents at former white schools were allowed to convert to a third model (neither entirely public nor private). There are numerous media stories about the lack of integration in these schools. In February 2015, *Pretoria News* reported that Gauteng MEC for Education, Mr. Panyaza Lesufi, came down hard on one such school. He told school management that 'it was unacceptable that it did not have any black teachers, saying black children attending the school should not only see people of their race as cleaners and gardeners.' See Tebogo Monama, 'Ex Model C schools lack black teachers,' *Pretoria News*, 9 February 2015. <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/ex-model-c-schools-lack-black-teachers-1.1815160#.VUpeGahD2lw>

her parents would have spent a fortune sending her to an expensive former Model-C school, only for her to end here, a waiter. The cost of the first grade in one of these schools is higher than annual postgraduate tuition at my university. We really can't enrich the absurdity of the present; it is perfect. The words of one of my students, Ntando, spoken a year ago in November 2013, haunt me:

I was raised on a false promise. If I spoke well, if I enunciated and articulated like a middle class white English girl, I would make it. I went to a black girls' school. We were all black – but only in skin. We spoke English and knew no Zulu, neither language nor culture. But the problem was that I became the Oreo nobody wants. I would never be white, but I was never black enough.

I think about this 'racial contract',¹⁸ hyperapartheid, which is defined by the unjust racialization and socialization of wealth and poverty. These mostly informal but also formal meta-arrangements that ensure that a subset of our population continues to benefit from the historical endowments of apartheid while the majority toil in a subordinate civil and economic standing. The good or bad intentions of whites matter little, it seems. Of Alex, Thobi says: *ungumlungu njengabanye*, a beneficiary of the racial code of hyperapartheid, even if not a signatory.¹⁹

Sure, it is not all bad. Here I am wrapped in my chocolate skin but part of the so-called growing black middle class. But success is often equated with whiteness. At the petrol station for example, I cringe when the attendant refers to me as *mlungu wami* (my white man). Indeed, the majority of black people are in a permanent nervous condition,²⁰ *bahleli ngesinqe esisodwa* (sitting on one buttock), not sure how to act, wondering how to name and claim things that are legitimately theirs, while minding the big toes of those in power, those who benefit from the system. The Zulu people describe this situation well: *ukuluma uphuzisa* – biting while soothing. Although the center is marked by its predilection for violence, precision, and lechery²¹ (*ukuluma*), it also has a remarkably softer side (*ukuphuzisa*). The system relies on a regime of extreme violence (the Marikana massacre,²² for example) but it has a pacifying side or *demulcere*²³ (for example, social grants, 'responsible tourism'). The striking element here is that this is not just a project of the state bureaucracy alone. It seeps right into the capillaries of society.

The Burdens of Travel

¹⁸ Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997 (first edition).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004 (second edition). Dangarembga borrows this powerful phrase from Jean-Paul Sartre, Preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, 2005 (reprint edition).

²¹ See Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. California: University of California Press, 2001.

²² The infamous Marikana massacre took place in August 2012. Platinum mineworkers had embarked on a strike for better wages and working conditions. Following orders, the police killed 34 of them in one of the most brutal episodes of recent South African history. During the strike action that lasted weeks, police officers were killed and 78 people injured. See the documentary, *Miners Shot Down*: <http://www.minersshotdown.co.za>

²³ A demulcent is a soothing preparation, applied to decrease the intensity of an irritation of an inflamed surface. See, William S. Haubrich, *Medical Meanings: A Glossary of Word Origins*, Second Edition; Philadelphia: American College of Physicians, 2003, p.64.

St. Lucia, June 1993

We got to St. Lucia late in the evening. It was about a 3-hour drive from our sleepy town of Kranskop where I was teaching. ‘*Safik’ emabhubesini!*’ (lions, here we come) exclaimed Makepisi. He went in and checked in all seven of us. He came back and cheerfully announced that we would be paired up in four rooms, with the senior among us getting a private room. I was worried I’d be paired with him. Besides his overzealous personality, I’d never shared a room with a white guy. I needn’t have worried. When we hauled our bags in, the white Mrs. asked Makepisi where the rest of the guests were. He pointed at us. Her jaw dropped. ‘*Jammer, jammer* (sorry, sorry),’ she stammered in Afrikaans and told him that there was ‘*n ernstige misverstand*’. I knew the code. This had happened too many times. Growing up in apartheid South Africa, ‘serious misunderstanding’ was your name and surname. To his credit, Makepisi protested vehemently. It was all in vain. I’d had my run-ins with the system before, but this cut deeper. I’d been called the K-word, and I knew my place. When I was 15 two bulky white boys had tried to drown me. In my final year of school, my friend Themba and I had unknowingly wandered into a crowd of rugby fans, big white men, and we had to run for our lives. But this was different. During all the previous encounters, I had strayed into situations. This time, I’d tried to escape my social place. To be a tourist. That neon sign of rejection was hard to accept.

How has St. Lucia changed since then? At most B&Bs and restaurants I visit in St. Lucia today, I’m often the only black person in any establishment. Are ‘native tourists’²⁴ people of exception?

Responsible Tourist

JFK, New York, 18 August 2002

I’m traveling back to the university after visiting my family in South Africa. New York City - only a few moons since the great disaster. I get pulled aside.

You are on a J-1 visa?

Yes.

What are you doing in America?

I’m on a J-1, sir, that’s a student visa.

You think I don’t know that?

I stutter and mumble something.

Follow me!

He puts me in a dingy back office and leaves me there to rot for half a day. I turn to my verbose pen for catharsis:

Green Card

I hold no sovereignty

Even over the governance of my anxiety

Banished from the ironic comforts of home

²⁴ Krishna B. Ghimire, ed. *The Native Tourist: Mass Tourism within Developing Countries*, London: Earthscan 2001.

I find residence in the comforting ironies of exile
Am I less of a man here
Than in the Bantustan?
I'm torn and besieged from within
Like the bleeding veil of a Sahawari woman
In that forgotten colony of Sahara
No ears want to grant asylum
To my furtive fugitive words
Should I get on that boat of despair
Or walk back to the journey of my destination
To escape the colonial hell?
But my passport
Is a permanent holding cell
Of this perpetually migrating spirit
But how do I escape?
When the occupier's garrison
Is headquartered in my head?

Fractured Tourist

Amatikulu, New Year's Eve 2012

I'd been invited by friends to go to an alternative New Year's party. We would drive an hour and a half to a rural area north of Durban, outside the town of Eshowe off the N2 highway. I'd thought about this thing: alternative New Year's party. Alternative? Rich white folk love alternative: alternative music, alternative summer camp, alternative globalisation. This alternative New Year's party would involve food, music, and overnight camping. I was a tourist again. Our travel party had about ten people. I was the only black man and there was an Indian woman. Everyone else was white. I had expressed reservations about this whole endeavor to my partner. Something made me uncomfortable. It wasn't just the cost (R400 per head). Promotional material for the event suggested it was going to be otherworldly, but it seemed overboard to me: R400 for camping and food? *Hhayi khona!* We drove through sugarcane fields and rural households into this rugged-looking restaurant located in the armpit of the land and sea. As soon as we got there, the reservations that had scratched my throat grew into a noose. I soon started suffocating. There was a knot in my stomach, my knees started dancing long before the official party kicked off, and my jaws gnashed. Yes, this was entertainment – but for white people plus the Indian girl and me. Not St. Lucia again, I thought. I was being kicked out. Again. Well, not me directly, but me, as in the embodiment of my black skin that is accustomed to being kicked out. Kicked out even before being kicked out. You know the feeling. When you get to a place where there are no signs barring you but the message is loud and clear. A code, a neon sign that only you and your ilk, see, smell, and sense.

It was a restaurant in a rural area only a few meters from the beach. Two floors of 'fun fun' as one of the hostesses put it. Of the 400 odd people, there were maybe 15 black people including the Indian girl and myself. The majority of us blacks included the DJ, waiters, and security guards. I was completely agitated. White people coming to have fun in a black area and black people toiling away – on a public holiday to boot. And there I was among them. At

this point I hated my complicity – I felt I was part of something sinister, part of the social location of white dominance and privilege. I always travel with this moral entanglement of enjoying my hard earned privileges of travel that are built on black suffering. How do I travel and reject this open invitation to whiteness? What are the limits of my moral obligation? Wherever I go, the cleaners, security guards, gardeners, and waiters are invariably black and on minimum wage. I wanted to think I was not willfully participating in economic exploitation, nor fully embracing the inequities of hyperapartheid. But it felt like complicity nonetheless. There I was, part of the minority of black people who can afford to travel but also being witness to the economic violence of hyperapartheid. I sought refuge in the booze. I chucked the shots and beer until I felt the alcohol in my knees and ankles. I was free. Free from the scandalous complicity I felt before. In that drunken stupor that night, I put on my old union organizer hat: workers of the world unite! I aggressively asked the black employees how much they were paid. R750 for the DJ, about R100 for the security guard and the waiters. I asked one of the guards, Mandla, if he could count: 400 people x R400 each. All to the white owner, I told him. In your own effing backyard? Why are you idiots doing this? Why aren't you asking for more?

He told me off.

'Who are you?' he asked. 'Your big English, you think that makes you, that makes you clever? If *umlungu* fires us, do you have jobs for us, or just words?'

This strong rebuke from Mandla tore into my facile expectation about the universality and unity of the black experience, even in hyperapartheid. The old enemy had a name, particular features, a voice, and certain habits. He was abominable and he belched hatred. The new one is amorphous, omnipresent, hard to pin down. Or racism without racists.²⁵ Hyperapartheid obscures the centrality of race even as it reshapes the intersections among the state, economy, and social relations. Our venerated Constitution, liberal laws, tourism policies, even our determination, these seem like poor foot soldiers against this sophisticated machinery that has built garrisons even in the heads of our erstwhile revolutionaries. This system keeps producing itself, even in the minds of visitors and foreigners who quickly get accustomed to the racial order of things.

Becoming White

Durban, June 2013

Dieter: I've been coming to South Africa for the last few years. Quite frequently, in fact. I must say this is an amazing country. In Germany, I don't quite feel at home although it's my home country. You see, there, I'm the son of a single Russian immigrant woman. She was very young when she had me. There, I'm nothing. I grew up in a poor neighborhood and I got used to be treated like dirt. But here, this place, I can't say enough. And this is not the alcohol talking. I lived in Pretoria for a while and I was born anew there. I assumed a status I didn't know before. Durban has been similar. It's as if I was granted citizenship in the clouds, like a kite. It's not that I wanted it, it was just there. It was magic. I think I'll come back when I finish my university studies. I must.

²⁵ Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

Vagabonds

Port Shepstone, 27 June 2014

I took the day off today to travel to Port Shepstone, an hour south of Durban. It's my cousin's hearing. I haven't been in a courtroom since the divorce. My back feels like a prickly pear. I am not sure of the fount of my agitation until I see them. The chain gang. He's in the middle of it. Black youth in their prime, their 20s and 30s. Ragged, sums-of-bitches, caught in the vast net of our carceral system. It must have a magnet, the net, that it attracts so many black men. There they are, chained right ankle to right ankle. I had seen the same blank black faces on the Huffington Post on some boat somewhere off the Mediterranean, caught in the nets of European migration policy.²⁶ I see the same desperation. Where am I? Goree Island's 'Door of No Return'? These are no tourists. I hum that anthem sung by all lucky black people the world over: there but the grace of god go I.²⁷

For now.

²⁶ Jessica Elgot, '21 Pictures that Show the Scale of Europe's Migrant Crisis,' *The Huffington Post*, UK, 26 June 2014. Available at www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/06/26/european-visa-migration_n_5533357.html

²⁷ Houston A. Baker, *Betrayal: How Black Intellectuals Have Abandoned the Ideals of the Civil Rights Era*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.