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Anti-Pathos

by Dominique Malaquais

To live in Europe in the early twenty-first century is to daily witness governments and the police forces that act at their behest violating the rights of men, women, and children hailing from the “South.” In large part, this violence is perpetrated in the name of a “migratory crisis.” Politicians and large swaths of the media insist that the “old continent” is bursting at the seams with “illegal” or “irregular” migrants whose presence threatens its economic and demographic equilibrium (Beauchemin and Ichou 2016: 15). These claims are belied by reality. From Denmark to Germany, Spain, and beyond, immigration numbers have decreased in recent years (IOM 2020: 38) and, with them, as in the United States, prospects for economic growth (Goolsbee 2019). Most European countries are in need of foreign influx to fill jobs, counteract falling birth rates, increase tax bases required to shore up deteriorating social safety nets, and boost innovation (Albis, Boubtane, and Coulibaly 2018; Goldin, Pitt, Nabarro, and Boyle 2018; IOM 2020: 24; OECD 2014). On this, even conservative sources agree (Giuligiano 2019; Kenny 2019).¹ Such facts, however, are not compatible with populist vote-mongering, a practice in which most political leaders on this side of the Atlantic engage, some in the most overt manner, others (as in France, where I live) in terms all the more pernicious for the humanitarian doublespeak in which they are couched.²

This practice and the constituencies whose approval ratings it aims to attract commonly single out immigration³ from the African continent as a particular danger (Smith 2019). Steeped in systemic racism, such

DOMINIQUE MALAQUAIS is a senior researcher at Institut des Mondes Africains (CNRS, Paris). Her work addresses intersections between contemporary urban cultures and political and economic violence in the Capitalocene. She is the author of several books and numerous articles, notably on contemporary arts and political engagement in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon. With Kadiatou Diallo, she is cofounder of the experimental curatorial platform SPARCK (Space for Pan-African Research, Creation and Knowledge). dmalaquais@gmail.com



I Kongo Astronauts
Untitled; *After Schengen* series (2019)
Digital print
Photo: © Kongo Astronauts

finger-pointing hinges on three fallacious claims: that massive numbers of people are entering Europe from Africa; that this movement is overwhelmingly driven by economic rather than political causes; and that freedom from economic insecurity is not a universal human right. Activists positioned on the left work determinedly to rebut these claims and to show the extent to which they are rooted in the late capitalist project. Mainstream actors tend to eschew structural considerations of this kind in favor of arguments they feel are more likely to sway large numbers of people. Accordingly, their campaigns primarily focus on the deadly conditions often faced in transit by persons seeking to exit the continent and on the dehumanization to which they are subjected on arrival. Foregrounding this abysmal state of affairs is, needless to say, critical, but highlighting it alone can have noxious effects. Among these is the risk that the people in whose name such campaigns are waged will be seen as figures of pathos rather than as self-determined protagonists making reasoned decisions in the face of catastrophic odds.

Artists based in Africa and in the diaspora are increasingly taking to task such perceptions. In work explicitly centered on questions of agency, they cast aside tropes of disempowerment. Shunning sentiments of sadness or pity and steering clear of sensationalism, they deploy a stark critique of global systems at play in the late capitalist era. The resulting films and photographs, assemblages, installations, and performances act as striking interventions in, and powerful correctives to, the media-saturated, politically instrumentalized discourse on immigration.

I consider here two bodies of work that stand as rebukes to this discourse. Quite

different in terms of materials, form, content, and intent alike, they do not belong to a genre—an art of immigration. Indeed, only one directly addresses the subject. What links them, rather, is a thematic focus on Africa as a staging ground for movement: movement of people, objects, and ideas between the continent and the world at large, in active refusal of roadblocks thrown up to impede it and of the social, political, and economic structures that undergird these obstacles.

AFTER SCHENGEN?

In 2019, the Kinshasa-based artists’ collective Kongo Astronauts produced a series of performances and photographs titled *After Schengen*. These were orchestrated in a grounded and gutted jet on the outskirts of the Congolese capital. In each of the photographs—even in all—a lone astronaut appears, clad in a gold helmet, jumpsuit, and boots. He stands at the center of an airplane cabin emptied of all but its insulation (Fig. 1), in one of its wheel wells, on a wing (Fig. 2), framed in the craft’s doorway, or walking away from its carcass-like form (Fig. 3). The astronaut is performance artist Michel Ekeba, the photographer Eléonore Hellio. Together, they founded the collective in 2013.

Ekeba’s presence in, atop, and alongside the marooned jet can be understood in one of two largely contradictory ways. From France, one’s first reaction, conditioned by media coverage of immigration, is that one is looking at an allegory of clandestine travel.



2 Kongo Astronauts
 Untitled; *After Schengen* series (2019)
 Digital print
 Photo: © Kongo Astronauts

A Parisian colleague of mine, presented with the photographs, saw in them an expression of desperate flight. From Congo, the series reads differently. For a year, from 2018 to 2019, following a diplomatic row between the DRC

and the European Union, Schengen House, the Belgian-run administrative center through which all visa applications for travel to Europe are processed, was shuttered. Obtaining travel documents, already exceedingly difficult, became a veritable nightmare. Considered in this setting, the title *After Schengen* reads as a question: Where to now? The photographs present the collective's response: To the stars.

While the ambiguity is intentional (a point I will return to), in the larger context of the Kongo Astronauts' work it is clear that the second reading is the intended one. The heavens here, however, are less a physical location, a place the artists intend to visit, than a metaphorical arena. They function as a platform for thinking through Earth's decimation by an economic model rooted in the colonial project and amplified in the neoliberal era. This is suggested by Ekeba's garb. From head to toe, his suit is studded with bent and broken computer and smartphone parts collected from the city's markets and scrap heaps. This e-waste—detritus shipped (much of it illegally) from the "North" and, increasingly, the "East"—speaks to practices that have effectively turned the African continent into a digital dumping ground. The choice of materials also references the plundering of Congo's resources by multinational corporations: The discarded

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3 Kongo Astronauts
 Untitled; *After Schengen* series (2019)
 Digital print
 Photo: © Kongo Astronauts

motherboards, wires, and batteries that cover the astronaut's suit contain precious metals—copper and gold, zinc, tantalum, lithium—mined across the DRC amid abject violence by foreign conglomerates working hand in hand with a corrupt local elite.

In parts of Congo, the dumping and the plundering to which Ekeba's performances and Hellio's photographs allude have resulted in near-apocalyptic living conditions. The Kongo Astronauts' work calls out this state of affairs. Rather than spotlighting the conditions themselves, however, it points to their causes. This approach is characteristic of the collective's production in general: while it is often jarring, echoing the brutality of high-stakes extractive capitalism, it eschews pathos and rarely devolves into voyeurism. This sets it apart from much-touted work focused on Congo that hinges on precisely these modes of representation. A comparison of *After Schengen* with performances staged for a recent documentary on the Kinshasa art scene by Renaud Barret, *Système K* (2019), and with Congo-centered photographic work by Richard Mosse (2011) proves instructive in this regard. Some of the *Système K* performances are meant explicitly to shock; a case in point is a piece by Yannos Majestikos (Yannick Makanka Tungaditu), in which the artist is wheeled through a Kinshasa neighborhood immersed in a bathtub brimming with coagulated blood. Richard Mosse's *Infra* series (2011), shot in war-torn Eastern Congo, similarly deploys shock value. Verdant landscapes appear as if saturated in blood—the result of an infrared film technique that replaces green with garish pink hues.

The Kongo Astronauts' choice to steer clear of the emotional charge that animates many an image intended to represent Congo

extends to the subject of immigration. If, faced with a shuttered Schengen House, their answer is to aim for the stars, the larger point of *After Schengen* seems to be that Europe no longer holds much relevance, either as a place to inhabit (at least in the long term) or as one from which to think the world. This is a shift away from earlier Congo-based work by Eléonore Hellio—notably in the context of a now-defunct collective called Mowoso that she cofounded with video artist Dicoco Boketshu—in which exile to Europe was a significant thematic concern (Malaquais 2018). This is not to say that exile is no longer a focus—quite the contrary; the Astronauts' website⁴ is clear in this regard: “notions of exile” and “survival tactics,” they state, are central to their practice. It is, rather, to suggest that exile, for them, hinges only in part on physical location. First and foremost, it is a matter of “resistance to psychic ghettos born of the postcolonial condition” (the words are Hellio's). In this conceptualization, moving away in the mind is as relevant as doing so in person. Discussing his performances, Michel Ekeba underscores this. He describes his transformation into the astronaut as both exhausting and mind-altering: The weight of the suit and the heat it generates in Kinshasa's equatorial climate create in him a trancelike state that radically alters his viewpoint. In a Sun Ra-esque move, his eyes become those of a being come from another planet, able to register what he and others might otherwise fail to detect (Malaquais 2019).⁵

This out-of-body experience is what Hellio's photographs seek to capture, for in it she sees the basis for an alternative reading of a world gone haywire. She intends for us look as if through the astronaut's eyes (Malaquais 2019).

Considered in this light, the *After Schengen* photographs read not as, per my Parisian colleague's gaze, an image of exile—yearned for, attempted, desperate—but as an image *from* exile: an exile that has already taken place, in the mind, away from the violence visited on the country by a century-and-a-half of savage extractivism and in opposition to spectacular, pathos-ridden representations of chaos produced largely for foreign consumption.

Built into the *After Schengen* images is also a distinct sense of the absurd. The photographs were taken on a hilltop overlooking a 10,000-hectare nature preserve, Parc de la vallée de la N'Sele, founded in 2018 by the government of then-president Joseph Kabila. Populated with imported wildlife, the preserve is advertised online as a place where visitors can reconnect with “animals that represent this part of the world in our collective imaginary, yet had previously disappeared”⁶ and as the ideal location for corporate team-building retreats.⁷ The marooned jet, as it turns out, is not an abandoned craft at all, but a retired plane that was brought piece by piece to the hilltop and then reconstituted. The plan, closely overseen by First Lady Olive Lembe di Sita, was to refurbish the jet as a luxury restaurant:

A l'intérieur de cet avion ... les visiteurs, coupés du monde, pourront voyager à leur manière sous losmose d'un déjeuner 5 étoiles en première classe dans un vol le moins fallacieux qui puisse exister ... A côté sera érigée une tour de contrôle fictive avec chambre à coucher VIP, une terrasse panoramique avec baie vitrée offrant une vue splendide sur le paysage.⁸

Inside this plane ... cut off from the world, visitors will be able to travel in their own way in the glow of a 5 star meal, in a first class cabin as real as could be ... Nearby, a fictitious control tower will be erected, complete with VIP bedroom and panoramic terrace overlooking the splendid countryside.

The choice of this particular location as the set for *After Schengen* is inspired. What reads, out of context, as a locus of despair—a plane to be boarded by a would-be stowaway—is in fact a “first-class cabin” in the making. The astronaut has lighted in a Disneyesque pseudo-Congo, intended for use by foreigners and a tiny local bourgeoisie, as witness an advertisement on the business-oriented website Congo Autrement (“Congo Otherwise”) that features pictures of the park alongside a spot for Kinshasa's most expensive hotel, Fleuve Congo, together with the website's mission statement—“enhancing Congo's oft-tarnished

image”—and the logo for Congo Airways, accompanied by the slogan “le plaisir de voyager” (“the pleasure of travel”).⁹ Adding to the absurdity of the set-up is a precedent for the first lady’s ersatz deluxe jet project (now stalled as her husband is no longer in power) and for the animal preserve it overlooks. From the mid-1960s to the early 1990s, the very same Nsele Valley was home to another wildlife park, complete with imitation Chinese pagoda and sprawling marble palace built for then-president Mobutu Sese Seko.

After Schengen responds to the economic and political systems that undergird such precedents, projects, and slogans with ambiguity, humor, irony, consternation, and anger. An undercurrent of tension renders the work still more complex. A binational team, Michel Ekeba and Eléonore Hellio are not affected in the same ways by the European Union’s bunker politics. Hellio, a citizen of France, can readily avail herself of the “pleasure of travel”; Ekeba, because he is Congolese, cannot. Positing an “after Schengen” is a luxury she can afford; he has little choice but to look beyond the EU’s ambit. The violence of a late capitalist world built on strategies of divide and conquer is both a subject of the performances and photographs and an inherent condition of their production.

CHARM(ED)

The second body of work addressed in these pages specifically focuses on movement in the face of the will of the “North” to bunkerization. While it is not concerned with Europe alone—as we shall see, it addresses the world at large—it does explicitly take on Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. Schengen is very much in its sights. The work in question, entitled *Gris-gris*, meaning “charm” or “amulet,” is by the Cameroonian and French installation and performance artist Lamyne M. His *Gris-gris* series consists of 111 sculptural objects, ranging from 9–110 cms (3.5”–43.5”) in size. All are collaborative creations: Conceived to provide protection for persons transiting between Africa and other continents, the multimedia assemblages were crafted by spiritual practitioners (in francophone terms, *marabouts*) in the artist’s presence and to his specifications. The joint nature of the project is underscored by inclusion of the *marabouts*’ names in the labels accompanying the *gris-gris* when they are exhibited.

Each charm has a specific purpose. This purpose is referenced in the charm’s title and

in an accompanying explanation provided by the artist—a sentence or a phrase that states how it is intended to act. Together, the titles and explanations function as an inventory of aspirations, a summa of hopes harbored by women and men pursuing lives outside the African continent. They range from the fairly general to the highly specific. *Massassy*, produced in Morocco in 2014 by the artist in concert with a *marabout* named Alvatan, provides “comprehensive personal and property insurance.” Whereas some of the charms are location specific (intended, that is, to work in a given country or region), *Massassy* provides “worldwide coverage.” The same is true of *M’bappélepé* (Fig. 4). Its action, however, is more targeted: Made in Liberia in 2018 by Lamyne M and *marabout* Fékomanan, it ensures “success abroad as a football player.” Its holder can expect “100% assured stardom” and aspire to “a Ballon d’or trophy.”¹⁰ The name *M’bappélepé* references French football player Kylian Mbappé, star striker for the Paris Saint-Germain team. Equally precise in its intended use, though in a significantly different vein, is *Bang-Bang* (Lamyne M and *marabout* Gekefu, Chad, 2014), which promises induction into the French Foreign Legion from anywhere within the European Union. Access to the EU is facilitated by a charm collaboratively produced in Libya in 2019 with *marabout* Alnuur. Titled *Aguko*, it offers “anti-Frontex camouflage”—specifically, it acts to “deflect the gaze of Frontex officers.” While, as this suggests, the primary scope of this charm is Europe, its powers of deflection can “potentially extend to the Mexican border.” It belongs, as such, to a subgroup within the *Gris-gris* series that addresses immigration to the Americas. *Alpharay* (Lamyne M and

marabout Modusalmary, Senegal, 2017) guarantees “a high level of social success in the United States.” The difficulties encountered by those who would settle in (or indeed simply visit) the United States are counteracted by *Forlamy* (Lamyne M and *marabout* Kunfayakun, Gabon, 2018), which provides “community protection from Donald Trump” (Fig. 5). This same charm “preserves from Viktor Orbán and all forms of extremism.” Also offering protection against Orbán and such far-right actors as Marine Le Pen and Matteo Salvini is *Horban*; described in the *Gris-gris* inventory as an “anti-facho” device, it was created by the artist and *marabout* Oguun (Congo Brazzaville, 2018).

The *Gris-gris* corpus provides assistance as well to persons worried about falling prey to other forms of “extremism”; hence *Pakarapackcha* (a collaboration with *marabout* Kan Kan Game, Kenya 2014), aimed at safeguarding its holder from “radicalization” at the hands of pro-ISIS actors. The *Gris-gris* series takes into account the aspirations both of persons first arriving abroad—“*primo-arrivants*”—and of those who have made their home overseas for two and three generations. For the former, in quest of family reunification in France or Belgium, with *marabout* Touré (Mali, 2019), Lamyne M created *Ittoto*; for the latter, he developed *Ewossu* (a collaboration with Congolese *marabout* Kofu, 2015), meant to endow its possessor, a third-generation inhabitant of Russia, with an ability to see the otherwise invisible.

Several of the charms are identified as “wifi sensitive”: updatable, or rechargeable, at a distance by their *marabout* cocreators in response to the changing needs of those who would deploy them in their quest for lives abroad.



4 Lamyne M
 Collaboration with *marabout* Fékomanan, Liberia
M’bappélepé (ensures football stardom and Ballon
 d’Or trophy)
Gris-gris series (2018)
 Plastic soccer cleats, goat horns, cow leather;
 miniature perfume bottles, secret interior; 36 cm x
 22.5 cm x 8 cm
 Photo: © Lamyne M and Axis Gallery



5 Lamyne M
 Collaboration with *marabout*
 Kunfayakun, Gabon
Forlamy (for community protection
 against Trump, Orbán, and other
 extremist leaders worldwide)
 Gris-gris series (2018)
 Reptile skin (Nile monitor), plastic
 male figurine, data cable hardware,
 synthetic thread, cat claw, secret inter-
 ior; 47 cm x 11 cm x 13 cm
 Photo: © Lamyne M and Axis Gallery



6 Lamyne M
 Collaboration with *marabout* Touré,
 Mali
Ittoto (ensures family reunification
 for first-time arrivals to France or
 Belgium)
 Gris-gris series (2017)
 Metal curio replica of Eiffel Tower, goat
 hide and goat horn, secret interior; 32
 cm x 20 cm x 15 cm
 Private collection
 Photo: © Lamyne M and Axis Gallery

The *gris-gris* are made of a wide variety of materials. A short list includes: textile and thread; buttons, shells, coins; leather and skin of multiple kinds (bull and cow, buffalo, sheep, mountain goat, antelope, camel, snake, iguana); animal parts (antelope and gazelle horns, cat and vulture claws, hyena femurs, dried crocodile heads, eagle skulls, bird beaks and feathers) and, on occasion, whole animals (in two instances, preserved chameleons); factory-made objects (a compass, a flashlight, forks, glass vials, miniature Eiffel Towers, in one case a pair of tennis shoes, in another a beacon lamp of the type used by police); pop culture items (plastic soldier figurines, Ken doll limbs); USB drives allowing the charms to be plugged into a computer (see Fig. 5); inks of various sorts, some in the form of Islamic script or geometric designs visible on the surface of a given object, others invisible because diluted in water and trickled onto the charm ... For each object, the artist provides a complete list of constituent elements. In several instances, this list includes the mention of a “secret interior.”

That indication concerns not only the viewer, who is pointedly denied the relevant information, but also the artist: Lamyne M does not know what the charms in question contain. Only the *marabouts* possess this intelligence. That this is the case is fundamental to an understanding of the *Gris-gris* series. Ludic though they may appear on the surface (a point I return to shortly), the 111 charms are also—indeed, perhaps first and foremost—power objects. In Francophone terms, they are *chargés*: loaded, or spiritually endowed. In conversation, Lamyne M makes this quite clear: these are efficacious objects. Put simply, they are the real thing.

Their efficacy, however, is not a matter of the spirit alone. Aesthetics are a key driver of potency here as well. Lamyne M unequivocally conceives of the *Gris-gris* series as a work of art. In whole and in terms of its constituent parts, he intends it to be appreciated for its form and for its tactility—for what it can do to the senses—as much as for the material impact it is meant to have on individual lives and trajectories. He leverages affect and effect in equal measure. Leveraged as well is humor: A model Eiffel Tower teeters on furry feet made of tiny animal tusks (Fig. 6); an array of goat horns fan out from a pair of running shoes, yielding a cross between futuristic football cleats and booster rockets for scaling skyscrapers (see Fig. 4)¹¹; plastic limbs pop forth from an iguana skin bundle, akin to a Mattel figure gone rogue (see Fig. 5) ... This playful element merges with the stinging critique of Fortress Europe and North America built into the explanations accompanying the charms. Together, the political broadside embedded in the explanations, the spiritual and the aesthetic charge of the objects, and the whimsy they evidence give rise to one of the more powerful statements of the moment on the Euro-American immigration discourse.

It is notable that Lamyne M nowhere indicates whether the charms are to be used by people departing for economic reasons or by individuals or families seeking to escape political turmoil. A mainstay of the “migratory crisis” discourse, in which the figure of the “economic migrant” is brandished as a bogeyman, such distinctions are evacuated here. The *Gris-gris* series takes as its starting point that intercontinental movement,

whatever its motivations, is an unequivocal right. The charms are an expression of this and an instrument of agency, deployed by and for those who would avail themselves of a freedom they are denied.

CODA

Neither as an emotion nor as an intended mode of persuasion is pathos present in the bodies of work addressed in these pages. In its stead, *After Schengen* and *Gris-gris* foreground the will and the capacity of individuals to act. This is not to say that they equate agency with outcome, determination with concomitant effect. The critique of late-capitalist brutalism (Mbembe 2020) that undergirds both projects goes hand in hand with recognition of the fact that room to maneuver is constrained. Here, movement, I have sought to show, is understood not as an aspiration for which one seeks consent, but as a right to be exercised; that this right will be curtailed by all means necessary is equally understood. The Kongo Astronauts’ performances and photographs and Lamyne M’s *objets chargés* manifest this tension. If tension is the state of being stretched tight, however, it is also the act of applying force to something in order to stretch and, potentially, to rupture it. *After Schengen* and *Gris-gris* posit the former, imposed by a violent world order, as a condition to be combatted and the latter as a means of doing battle, for use by those whom this order would condemn to stasis. The works simultaneously embody a state of brutal tension—the lived experience of movement radically curtailed—and a force arrayed against the system that powers this tension: the force of movement itself. In this dual stance lies their power.

Notes

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1 There are, of course, also conservative sources that disagree. See, notably, Smith 2019. For a pointed critique of Smith, see Héran 2018a and 2018b.

2 A fine example of such doublespeak can be found on president Emmanuel Macron's Twitter feed. "Nous parlons de femmes et d'hommes qui continuent à mourir," the French president states. "Face à ce défi, notre réponse doit être structurée et solidaire... Il faut avoir de la détermination, de l'efficacité et de l'humanité. L'humanité sans efficacité, ce sont de belles paroles. L'efficacité sans l'humanité, c'est de l'injustice" ("We are talking about women and men who are continually dying. Faced with this challenge, we must respond with structure and solidarity... We must be methodical, effective and humane. Humanity without efficacy amounts to flowery speech. Efficacy without humanity is injustice.") <https://twitter.com/emmanuelmacron/status/951436152262877184>

3 Here and throughout this brief text, I use the word "immigration" in explicit reference to political and media discourse. I otherwise try to avoid it because, in current parlance generally and in France in particular, it is both imprecise and slippery. A cursory overview of mainstream sources seeking to define the term for Francophone lay audiences underscores this state of affairs. The 1988 edition of *Dictionnaire Petit Robert* offers the following definition: "Immigration designates the entry into a country of nonautochthonous persons intending to settle there, usually with a view to finding employment." Relying as it does on terms that are themselves slippery—"autochthonous" (a deeply fraught, politically loaded adjective, as Peter Geschiere has shown [2009]); "settle" (a verb that does not differentiate between permanence or temporariness, this a problem given the *Oxford English Dictionary's* online identification of immigration as "the process of coming to live permanently in a country that is not your own")—this definition, one might reasonably expect, would have fallen into disuse. But in fact, in its 2020 online version, *Larousse*, France's other go-to dictionary, provides a very similar definition: "Settlement in a country of an individual or a group of individuals originating in another country. (The most common motivation for immigration is the quest for employment and a better quality of life)." As a synonym, the dictionary lists "migration," which it defines as "the voluntary movement of individuals or populations from one country or region to another for economic, political, or cultural reasons." Self-evidently, the two definitions do not match: One is much broader than the other. As for the introduction of the term "voluntary," this poses a host of questions. Are persons fleeing war zones and who have not yet obtained (or have been denied) refugee status engaged in a process of "voluntary movement?" Do people leaving home because they cannot feed their families do so "voluntarily?" Insofar as, according to the United Nations, there exists no formal legal definition of the term "international migrant" (<https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions>), what is the status of the *Larousse* definition? Multiple print and online sources relate the words "immigrant" and "migrant" to "refugee" (for which a legal definition exists) and "exile" (for which there is no such thing). In daily usage, these terms and others still ("clandestin," "sans-papiers," "demandeur d'asile," "déplacé") are conflated—how, precisely, depending for the most part on the speaker's political stance.

To the terms "immigration" and "immigrant," I prefer that of "exile." In this, I follow the lead of scholars Alexandra Galitzine-Loumpet (2016) and Alexis Noss (2015). Both argue for a paradigm shift that replaces

the lexicon on migration with an approach founded on notions of exile, the exilic, and "exiliance." Highlighting lived experience over disembodied categories, subjectivity over (often situational) legal and political frameworks, agency over and in the face of arbitrarily imposed administrative labels, these notions, they hold, provide essential analytical and ethical tools to address the movement of people as a foundational condition of our twenty-first century world.

4 <https://kongoastronauts.wordpress.com>

5 The Kongo Astronauts explicitly point to Sun Ra as an influence or, to quote Helliö, an "ancestor." Early in their creative partnership, Helliö introduced Ekeba to the Arkestra and, more broadly, to Afrofuturist imaginaries and art forms. With him, she learned about Congocentric takes on the possibilities of travel to the stars, notably Mobutu's aborted plans to launch a Zaireois space exploration program in the 1970s. These joint discoveries, in turn, have led the duo to collaborate with artists and thinkers, both in Congo and abroad, for whom space is the place. In Kinshasa, they work with Bienvenu Nanga and Danniël Toya, two artists of different generations, both of whom are known for the elaborate, life-sized robots/cyborgs they create, with Céline Banza, a musician who, in *Prédic(a)tion*, a recent film by the Kongo Astronauts, plays a cosmonaut lost in the heavens, and with the musician/composer/poet/inventor Bebson Elemba (a.k.a. Bebson de la Rue), whose "tele-transport devices" and "interstellar environments" (Malaquais 2020: 20) make regular appearances in the collective's projects. (Elemba and Toya are such frequent collaborators that Ekeba and Helliö think of them as "copilots.") Outside DRC, the collective is increasingly drawing attention from cultural actors interested in space as a frontier for thinking through the possibilities of life beyond our damaged planet. Among these actors are the Chimurenga platform's Pan-African Space Station (PASS), founded by Ntone Edjabe; MIDBO, a Bogotá-based film festival whose 2018 edition was held, in part, in a giant telescope; and, most recently, Sideration, a festival held in Paris by Observatoire de l'Espace ("Space Observatory"), an arm of France's National Center for Space Studies (Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales).

6 <https://www.congo-aurement.com/page/rdc-tourisme-2/tourisme-kinshasa-le-parc-de-la-vallee-de-la-n-sele.html>

7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6ngARr2nCc>

8 <https://www.congo-aurement.com/page/rdc-tourisme-2/tourisme-kinshasa-le-parc-de-la-vallee-de-la-n-sele.html>

9 <https://www.congo-aurement.com/page/rdc-tourisme-2/tourisme-kinshasa-le-parc-de-la-vallee-de-la-n-sele.html>

10 The Ballon d'or is coveted trophy awarded by the French sports magazine *France Football*, which covers football news from around the world.

11 Were a second volume of Reynaldo Anderson's and John Jennings' brilliant *Afrofuturist Cosmic Underground Grimoire of Black Speculative Discontent* (2018) to be published, the resulting *gris-gris* would find pride of place therein. Indeed, while Lamyne M does not think of himself as an Afrofuturist artist, key notions he explores intersect with Afrofuturist discourses. Consider the inclusion of USB keys in several of the charms, as a means (we have seen) to plug into the world wide web for renewed activation. These devices promise unfettered movement not only across physical barriers, but past the digital divide as well—the latter a subject explored by many an author at work in the Afrofuturist literary genre. (A very recent example is provided by Cameroonian essayist Lionel Manga, whose short story "Are You Experienced?" (2020) is an homage to the Kongo Astronauts.) In broader terms, the *Gris-gris* series' focus on movement by African women, men and children in the face of a "North"-propelled political and economic order determined to stymie their freedom powerfully resonates with Afrofuturist themes and ideals. Octavia Butler, one suspects, would have been a fan—as she would likely have been of the Kongo Astronauts as well.

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