

# LOS-HEL: POSSIBLE CITIES

## CONTEMPLATIONS

EMEKA OGBOH & ILPO JAUHIAINEN

13. Lagos Drift	5:49
14. Informal Economy	4:32
15. Lagos State of Mind	5:40
16. Up Blues	3:56

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Cover by Emeka C Mastered by Niklas Sjöen at Good Will Mastering Produced by Emeka Ogboh and Ilpo Jauhainen

12. Obalande Moonlight

15. Lagos State of Mind

13. Lagos Drift

11. Iyanukpoja Feelings

14. Informal Economy

10. Lagos Drop

08. Go-Slow

POSSIBLE CITIES

07. Danto Trip

09. Brother



SPRING MAKES NOISE. And the spring 2011 seemed to make more of it – and more different kind – than usual.

One day in mid April 2011, I was having an afternoon break from my album recording. As I walked around Helsinki's city centre, I found myself lamenting quietly about its lack of colour, new sounds and inviting moments that I often miss. As I passed by Kiasma, the Museum for Contemporary Art, suddenly the homogeneity of the city's soundscape was interrupted. There was a sound – someone yelling or speaking in a pattern atypical for Finland, and then more sounds, giving a sense of a larger and much busier place that seemed at odds with what I was seeing around me. It was a strange echo, completely foreign sounds cutting through the spring air. I welcomed this change in the soundscape even if I found it slightly irritating at first, but kept walking without stopping or thinking about it anymore.

During the weeks that followed, my walks took me by Kiasma almost daily, and I realized this sound was always there. Having just finished a collaboration for Another Africa with Nigerian-born painter Odili Donald Odita, and having traveled mentally through the streets and market places of West Africa during the composition process, I came to heartily welcome this sound intervention in the air. It somehow made me feel connected to the greater activity of the world and see the connection between what I was doing at the studio and what I was suddenly hearing in the streets of Helsinki.

Finally I went to see the exhibition – ARS 11. The economy of the sound installation inside by sound and video artist Emeka Ogboh made me envious: just headphones and a couple of street signs pointing to Lagos! I stood there for a long time listening to the soundscapes from the Nigerian megacity while looking through the adjacent vast window at the Finnish parliament house, dreaming of a world that could juxtapose the culture of colourfulness as well as the chaos of Lagos with the politics of order and simplicity of Helsinki.

– Ilpo Jauhiainen



28 APRIL 2012:

Lately I've spent a lot of time in Lagos, sound-wise that is, studying and listening to various soundscapes recorded by the Nigerian sound artist Emeka Ogboh, and turning them into compositions for the project that we are collaborating on. Lagos is amazing: you soon forget that you're listening to „just“ a recording of a city, and you are drawn into these audio dramas, complex ecologies (symphonies) made of unintentional sounds, the very experience of being alive through sound. A lot of the intentional music now feels stale in comparison. I have similar recordings made in Tokyo and London but those feel just like soundscapes of a city after all - nothing more. „Listening to the world in a musical way“ as John Cage put it is worth doing once in a while, it seems.

- Ilpo Jauhiainen

## SHARAWADJI

AN AESTHETIC EFFECT THAT CHARACTERIZES THE FEELING OF PLENITUDE THAT IS SOMETIMES CREATED BY THE CONTEMPLATION OF A SOUND MOTIF OR A COMPLEX SOUNDSCAPE OF INEXPLICABLE BEAUTY

THE SUBLIME OF THE EVERYDAY

ALTHOUGH SHARAWADJI REMAINS A SUBJECTIVE EFFECT, SOUNDSCAPES, PARTICULARLY URBAN SOUNDSCAPES, HAVE THE POWER TO PRODUCE THIS SENSATION BECAUSE OF THEIR UNPREDICTABILITY AND DIVERSITY

THE TERM SHARAWADJI IS APPROPRIATE TO REFER TO THE UNINTENTIONAL „MUSIC“ PRODUCED BY CITY SOUNDS...

SOURCE:

JEAN-FRANCOIS AUGOYARD AND HENRY TORGUE, EDS. *SONIC EXPERIENCE: A GUIDE TO EVERYDAY SOUNDS*. TRANS. ANDRA MCCARTNEY AND DAVID PAQUETTE. MONTREAL: MCGILL-QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2006. 117-123.



**IJ** *In this I've used a recording of yours called Bend Down Boutique. What does that refer to?*

**EO** Bend Down Boutique refers to the second hand clothing market where buyers have to bend down to sort through bales of imported second hand clothing dumped on the floor. It is a common feature in some markets in Lagos, with piles of clothing surrounded by people bent over, sorting through them and making their selections. It's normal to have the sellers advertising their goods and discounts at the top of their voices and ringing bells to attract as much attention as possible.

**IJ** *I often hear the notion that the market places are the true heart of an African city, or society. How do you find it in Lagos?*

**EO** The market is a melting pot of socio-economic activities where you'll find people from different ethnic, religious and social backgrounds, converging and interacting through buying and selling. Here you can hear the different languages and dialects in Nigeria being spoken, during the exchanges between the buyers and sellers. I do find the constant buzz of trading very interesting to record. The traders calling out their wares and hustling potential customers, the movements of goods from one spot to the other, the crowds pressing against each other as they squeeze through the narrow lanes between the shops, the constant chattering and gossiping between the shop owners as they while away time. The energy the market place exudes is quite overwhelming and can be sensed in the sound recordings made there. It's indeed the heart and soul of cities.

**IJ** *What about motor parks? A lot of your recordings have taken place in and around those urban hubs...I've also used a soundscape you've recorded in Obalende Motor Park in this.*

**EO** The motor parks are key public transport nodes in Lagos, connecting different points in the city with the yellow danfo buses, and it's the main depository of the verbal maps with tens of bus conductors operating at the same time there. The parks are in many ways similar to the markets in relation to the constant movement of people in and out of a space, this is where the majority of Lagosians who use public transportation congregate and disperse to their various destinations. These parks are my favourite sound recording turfs, the almost non-stop flow of its energy, the bus conductors, the revving engines, melodious horns, loud speakers blasting music, hawkers, human traffic and voices all congregate in this one spot, creating one of the most interesting spaces in Lagos to record and listen to.

## GRANULAR MARKET HYMN

**IJ** *The Lagos soundscape used in this is from the Obalende motor park again, I presume. Any thoughts on the piece?*

**EO** Could you give a little insight into the title ‘New Engine’?

**IJ** *This is just a playful title, inspired by the feeling and the atmosphere I got from the music that I was making around your soundscape. It could mean a new (actual) engine in a bus, a fresh start of a new day, or a new social and cultural engine that drives a city onwards.*

**EO** New engine is the starting point, a new hustle...Again, this was recorded in Obalende, it is the beginning part of a recording of a bus ride from Obalende to Oshodi. The recordings were moments around the point of locating the right bus heading to Oshodi, and waiting for the bus to fill and take off. It focuses on the bus conductors and their activities, the way they navigate and interact with this space.

## NEW ENGINE

**IJ** *So the bus conductors in Lagos have traditionally 'verbal mapped' the city?*

**EO** I don't know when this tradition started, but I believe it has been around for a long time, and it probably had to do with the lack of visual materials that provided the directions and stops made by the buses. So the bus conductors had to improvise by calling out the bus stops and routes verbally. Verbal maps are also the main indicator of the Lagos soundscapes; the bus routes the conductors are calling are unique to Lagos only. When you hear these verbal maps in a recording, you can be almost 100% certain that the sounds were recorded in Lagos.

**IJ** *With the introduction of new buses and their 'digital maps (direction displays)', how do you think it will affect the urban experience of Lagos?*

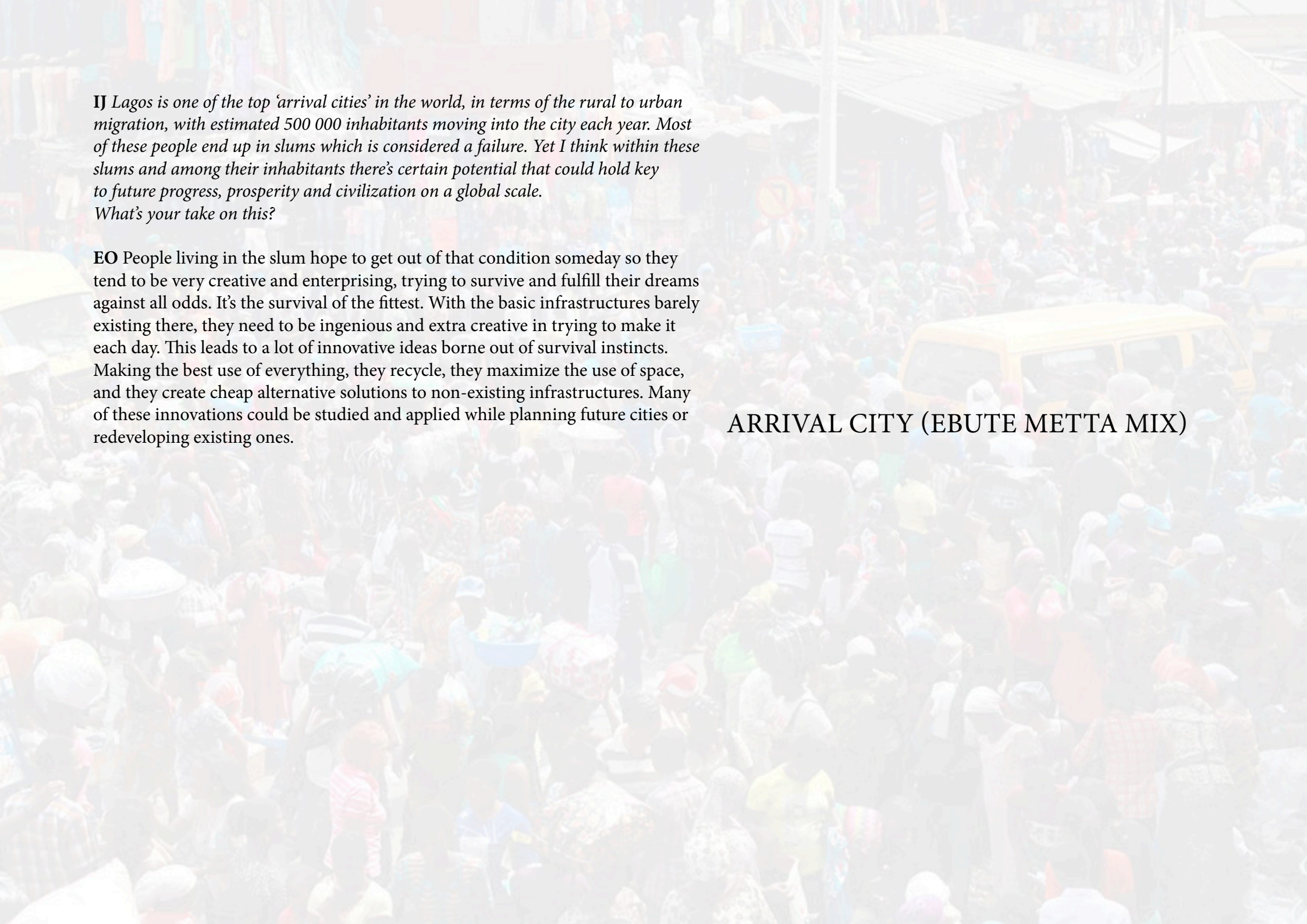
**EO** For sure the drama and excitement the bus conductors bring to the city will be gone. Its interesting the way the bus conductor calls out and freestyles with the names of the bus stops, incorporating real time events into this flow as it happens. They are comic reliefs, providing different forms of entertainment for the passengers, ranging from haggling and fighting with the passengers over change from payments made for the bus fare, exchange of banters and insults with the city's transport officials, opinions on practically everything from sports, politics and religion, to directing the bus driver through go-slow (traffic jam). There's never a dull moment with the bus conductors. Though the bus conductor can be a nuisance, but as one of the principal characters in the city, they do provide some excitement while one navigates city in a danfo bus.

**IJ** *The vocal delivery is very musical (the recording here has been randomly pasted on top of the music without any editing – and it works). Do conductors use different vocal patterns to one another (melody, rhythm, tone) in order to stand out in the noisy motor parks, or simply depending on the route?*

**EO** You have to understand that this is an art form, rapid-fire freestyle rap deliveries honed by many hours of non-stop ranting. The bus conductors use these vocal deliveries to stand out, to draw the attention of potential passengers in these cacophonous bus station... imagine engines revving, music blasting from loudspeakers, hawkers advertising their wares verbally, vehicle horns, people talking loudly... the bus conductor has to stay above these din. The words they use change according to the different routes, and the vocal patterns are unique to each conductors, though they do copy each other sometimes.

## VERBAL MAPPING





**IJ** *Lagos is one of the top 'arrival cities' in the world, in terms of the rural to urban migration, with estimated 500 000 inhabitants moving into the city each year. Most of these people end up in slums which is considered a failure. Yet I think within these slums and among their inhabitants there's certain potential that could hold key to future progress, prosperity and civilization on a global scale. What's your take on this?*

**EO** People living in the slum hope to get out of that condition someday so they tend to be very creative and enterprising, trying to survive and fulfill their dreams against all odds. It's the survival of the fittest. With the basic infrastructures barely existing there, they need to be ingenious and extra creative in trying to make it each day. This leads to a lot of innovative ideas borne out of survival instincts. Making the best use of everything, they recycle, they maximize the use of space, and they create cheap alternative solutions to non-existing infrastructures. Many of these innovations could be studied and applied while planning future cities or redeveloping existing ones.

**ARRIVAL CITY (EBUTE METTA MIX)**



**IJ** *Is this a recording of a bus route from Obalende to Oshodi? Sounds to me more like sellers advertising their wares at a market...?*

**EO** This recording is that of the bus conductor calling out the Oshodi route from Obalende. The interesting thing here is how the conductors play with the words, twisting them and adding their spinoffs to make it sound more interesting and unique. Many people may not be able to decipher what exactly they are saying unless you pay close attention and listen. And yes, it does sound like sellers advertising their wares. The bus conductor is trying to sell you a bus trip...he has to advertise his routes and destinations, and also the fact that his bus would not be overloaded with passengers.

**IJ** *I was drawn to the musicality of the voices (hence the underlying music left to remain rather modest), it's almost like a call-and-response pattern that they are doing. I guess the bus conductors and hawkers listen to each other and time their vocalizations so that only one "sings" at a time?*

**EO** Actually, on this track it's the voices of conductors that are very prominent, except for the hawker calling out 'bottled water' towards the end.

As for how it works at the bus stations, I don't think it's a planned synchronization of voices. I guess they just fall into rhythm. But in this space, the bus conductor is higher up on the power scale, so he has more leverage and authority. The hawker respects this and does not try to cut him out or stifle his calls with theirs, so as not to annoy him. The hawker relies on the passengers that the bus conductor attracts to make his/her sale...imagine focusing on one spot with many passengers that you could collectively pitch sales to, as against moving around the bus stations looking for potential customers. Consciously or unconsciously the verbal synchronization between the bus conductor and the hawkers just falls into place.

## OSHODI BY OBALENDE

**IJ** *Before hearing the original recording, I wasn't aware of the versatile uses of garlic. The hawkers must be like walking databases? How much of their information is actually accurate (or how seriously people take them), and how much is fabrication, storytelling – any idea?*

**EO** These medication hawkers are called 'dogaman', and I still have no clue where that name came from. I have to admit that they are indeed like a walking database, as you said. How true all the information they provide are, is the question though. Many of them go online to dig out this information, and as we know the Internet cannot always be reliable. For most of them, this information is provided by the manufacturers or representatives of the medication they are hawking. In the business of hawking medication, it is very important to appear confident and well learned, this helps boost your profile and people would trust that you know what you are doing. The 'dogaman' is not just a medicine peddler, he's 'pharmacist', a self-proclaimed pharmacist though. So he has to come gunning with vast health information and pharmaceutical terminologies.

There are definitely some fabrications in these information, especially exaggerating the effectiveness of their 'cure alls', and the testimonies of the users of their medications. And yes, some people do take them seriously and do patronise them, even though the drug regulatory board did not approve of most of the medications sold. Moreover the 'dogaman' is more affordable than going to see a doctor.

## BUS HAWKER

**IJ** *How successful might they be?*

**EO** I think they're quite successful in what they do, not enough to become very rich but enough to keep going. The fact that many of them are still around after many years attests to that...people patronize them.

**IJ** *I've understood that hawking, as well as preaching, are becoming increasingly prohibited in Lagos buses (I was expecting some verbal drama when entering buses in Lagos, but mostly I saw signs prohibiting any informal trade). How do you view this development? Does it take something characteristically important to the city away?*

**EO** These days there are a lot of signs warning people to desist from hawking, preaching, and other activities that could be considered public nuisance. Lagos is in a bid to become more civil and better organized. Personally, these bans are taking out an important characteristic of the city. The people, especially the in-bus hawkers, did provide some mild comedy relief for these journeys through the go-slow, provoking the passengers into participating directly or indirectly, with their banter and jokes. Nowadays I see bus passengers totally cocooning themselves in their world, wearing earphones listening to music, or flipping through their mobile phones. The concept of the danfo bus as a mobile village square is changing, people are now insulating themselves while in this public space. Of course not everyone will agree with my perspective, for many people these hawkers and preachers were a total nuisance. I personally did find them interesting and they provided interesting recordings for me.

**IJ** *This is a moment inside a bus on a ride to Obalende. The idea was to elevate a seemingly ordinary situation to something more sensuous, transported even. How is the daily life in Lagos? And the experience of moving around using public transport?*

**EO** Daily life in Lagos is basically the same as in most mega-cities around the world, though I might add that the Lagos hustle and bustle probably comes with greater intensity. It's a non-stop grind, and sound wise, you can hear it on the traffic and human activities.

The experience of moving around in Lagos has a common denominator...Go-slow. Go-Slow or traffic jam dictates your movements; when and how you move, and it's a no respecter of persons, it screws both the rich and the poor, unless you have a helicopter.

I'll say the experience of moving around Lagos in public transportation may not be so comfortable, but at the same time it's a very interesting and entertaining experience, with all the mild drama's that is associated with it. Be it the bus conductors haggling with the passengers over bus fares and change from payments made, passengers beefing other passengers over seat space and loud disturbance (mono-directional conversations on mobile phones), passengers taking on bus driver over careless driving or loud volume Fuji-music he's playing, or the whole bus (driver, conductor and passengers) against the transportation authorities over harassments and waste of time...it's non-stop real-time entertainment. These replaces the advertorial TV screens found in public transport in the global north.

## DANFO TRIP

\* After finishing this piece I came across an essay by Massa Lemu called *Danfo, Molue and the Afropolitan Experience in Emeka Ogboh's Soundscapes*, and I was struck by his description of a Lagos bus journey, especially the reference to Foucault's ship: "With their peculiar claustrophobic dramas, mishaps, and entertainment, danfo and molue are heterotopias or "non-places" between the home and the destination as Foucault described them. One could compare the buses to Foucault's ship: "a floating part of space, a placeless space, that lives by itself, closed in on itself and at the same time poised in the infinite of the ocean."<sup>1</sup> In the Foucauldian sense, danfo and molue are poised in the vast metropolitan concrete jungle of Lagos, offering temporary distractions for middle and lower class Lagosians as they shift and drift from destination to destination in their daily struggles, dramas, and misadventures. Danfo and molue are transitory spaces defined by their own relations and experiences but they are also microcosms for understanding the heterogeneous city of Lagos."

That seemed suddenly like a fitting description of the music.

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(1) Michel Foucault "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, M. Dehaene and L. De Caeter, eds., (New York: Routledge, 2008). 22.



**IJ** *This is similar to Danfo Trip, in terms of elevating the aesthetic of everyday. 'Go-slow' of course refers to the congested traffic often experienced in Lagos, and the idea has been to make a more contemplative and sensuous 'jam' out of a mundane, chaotic and stressful situation (it is composed entirely of car horn sounds and their accompanying street ambiances heard in Lagos traffic).*

*Are the reasons for the congestion well studied and known? I wonder if the new Lekki-Ikoyi Link Bridge and the forthcoming 4th Mainland Bridge will actually ease the traffic jams or simply increase the amount of cars in the long run?*

**EO** One of the main reasons for traffic congestion in Lagos is the poor road infrastructure and network. The road networks and infrastructure in the city did not develop on par with the population explosion. So the Lagos government is spending a lot of time and money working towards alleviating this situation now, by expanding roads, and upgrading existing infrastructures. And in fairness to them, I have seen the traffic jam in some places reduce recently, mainly due to the expansion and repairs of roads and the installation of working traffic lights at junctions. But, at the same time you have more cars plying on the road now. The economy is also booming and more people now have the financial power to purchase cars, and so it's common to see one family with multiple cars on the road at the same time. In Lagos, a car is a necessity, the public transportation system is not that effective or comfortable, so many people would rather own a car.

A very good and efficient public transportation system will definitely change things, and the government is thinking in that direction. They are introducing more modern buses and upgrading the bus terminals to ease the flow of public transportation.

The Lekki-Ikoyi Bridge has been completed and functioning for some time now, and yes it did ease the traffic jams in that area. Before the bridge was constructed, there was only one way leading out of Lekki, but now the bridge has changed that.

[...]

GO-SLOW

**IJ** *There's also a metro system being built in Lagos?*

**EO** Yes, a monorail that will run through the city is currently being constructed. It would be interesting to see what dynamics a metro system will bring to the city.

**IJ** *How do people make the time pass while waiting in the traffic? Has any certain habits, behaviors, social forms or media content arisen to address this space in people's lives (eg. a micro culture)?*

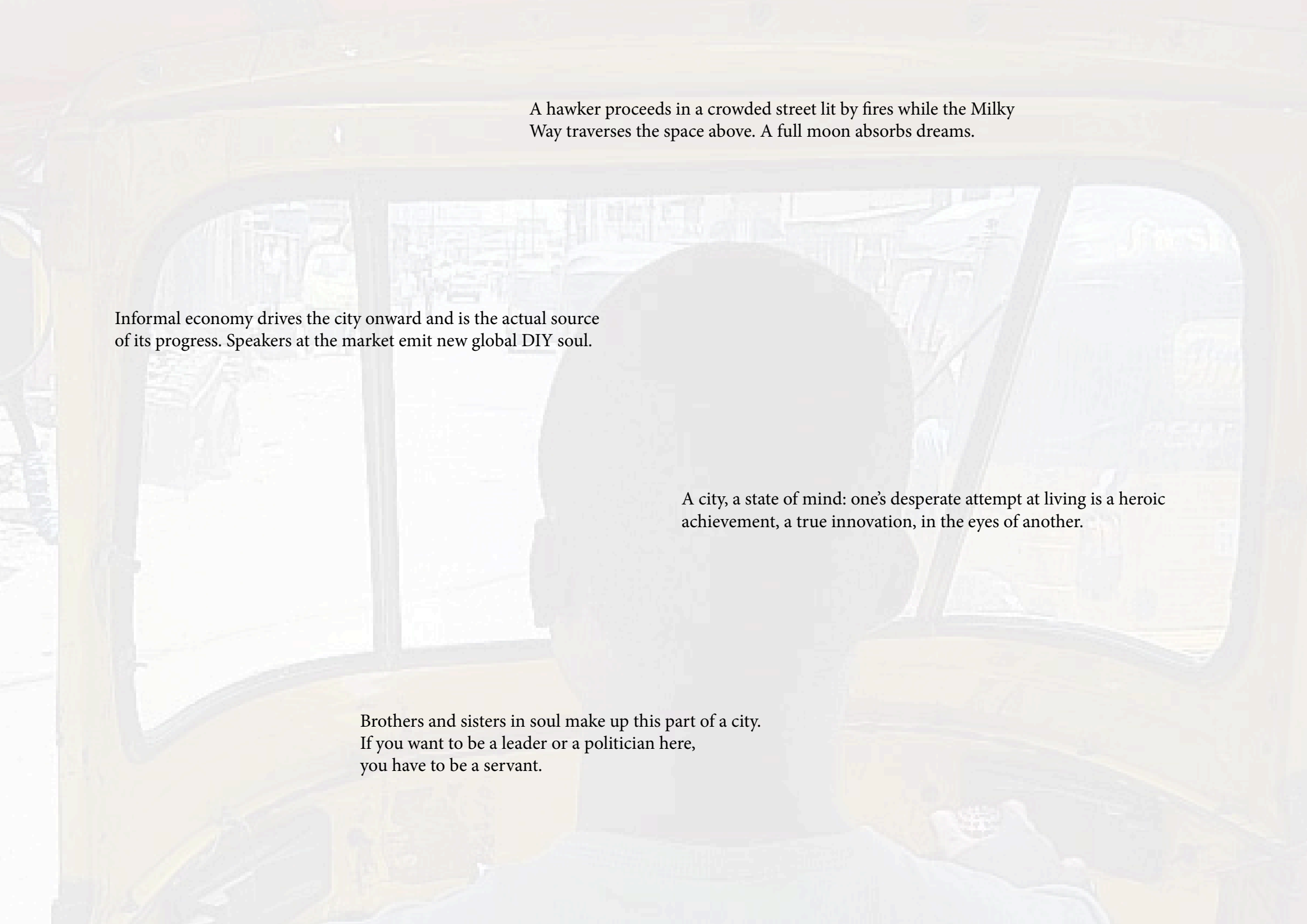
**EO** The Lagos traffic jam is probably one of the most notorious in the world, and it is an unavoidable aspect of living in the city. It has become a life-style, and people are trying to make the best out of it. Radio stations are developing programs that cater for people stuck in traffic, broadcasting routes that are blocked or free of traffic-jam. They are hosting live phone in sessions, for updates from people in traffic and also providing some mild entertainment to keep people entertained while stuck in traffic. There are twitter accounts dedicated to tweeting real time information of the traffic situations, and offering tips on how to navigate or avoid the traffic jam.

GO-SLOW

Go-slow is also boosting the hawking economy. You find hawkers (who pray for these jams never to end) migrating to notorious Go-slow spots that have become a huge shopping drive-throughs, offering every kind of goods and products that you can imagine; from the complete Shakespearean collection to live puppies, food, fresh vegetables and household goods. So the go-slow offers an alternative shopping experience, where people can purchase practically everything they need before they get home, because there will be no time to stop over at the market, especially after the stressful traffic experience. They have adapted to shopping from their car windows (shop-while-you-wait), and have become adept in haggling and scrutinizing the goods while in motion.

GOSLOW

EMEKA OGBOH & ILPO



A hawker proceeds in a crowded street lit by fires while the Milky  
Way traverses the space above. A full moon absorbs dreams.

Informal economy drives the city onward and is the actual source  
of its progress. Speakers at the market emit new global DIY soul.

A city, a state of mind: one's desperate attempt at living is a heroic  
achievement, a true innovation, in the eyes of another.

Brothers and sisters in soul make up this part of a city.  
If you want to be a leader or a politician here,  
you have to be a servant.



01. Granular Market Hymn	3:30
02. New Engine	3:34
03. Verbal Mapping	3:20
04. Arrival City (Ebute Metta mix)	3:08
05. Oshodi By Obalende	4:02
06. Bus Hawker	4:48
07. Danfo Trip	2:22
08. Go-Slow	3:00
09. Brother	3:24
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LOS-TEL  
possible cities

DESIGN, LAYOUT AND TEXT: ILPO JAUHIAINEN

BACKGROUND IMAGES: EMEKA OGBOH

EXCEPT

Emeka Ogboh + Ilpo Jauhiainen

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‘28 APRIL 2012,’ ‘NEW ENGINE’ - CHRISS AGHANA NWOBU  
‘GRANULAR MARKET HYMN’ - ROLAKE  
‘ARRIVAL CITY’ - AKINTUNDE AKINLEYE/REUTERS  
‘VERBAL MAPPING,’ ‘GO-SLOW’ - ILPO JAUHIAINEN

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