

Negotiations Chapter 1-i —Em'kal Eyongakpa

Notes on orchestrated field recordings—by Amal Alhaag

Hello Douala meet Paris! Oi Paris meet Douala! This is not an introduction, but an attempt to re-familiarize two old acquaintances that meet briefly on street corners and markets; Forest spices of Cameroon in France or the perfume of France in Cameroon. Whose negotiation is this? Where is the deal? Was it made in 1914 when a joint Anglo-French alliance governed the city of Douala, Cameroon? Or does the century long and strained negotiations summarize the perilous long-distant relationship between the two cities. 6637 KM, the Sahara desert and the Mediterranean Sea could not separate this bond forged during colonization and re-shaped by the era of the globalized urban commodity where as long as the price is right, everything is for sale.

In the sound installation “negotiations Chapter 1-*I*” by Em'kal Eyongakpa— Paris and Douala, are (un)comfortably situated as the two special guests in the orchestrated field recordings from Château Rouge, the African neighborhood in Paris and the heart and lungs of Douala; the informal markets Nkoululu and Marche central. Created during a 3-month residency at Kadist Art Foundation in Paris, in 2015. Chapter 1-*i* negotiates a linguistic, geopolitical, cultural and a spatial currency which blend these distinctive urban jungles into a sonic cocktail that elongates and collapses time to facilitate a prelude to a series of work that reflects on the ongoing fragmented and distraught socio-economic interrelationships between France and *its* Africa.

Negotiations Chapter 1-*I* is an experimental sonic dialogue between two cities, which reflects on migration, capitalism, language politics, and social cultural correlation between the inhabitants, constantly evolving environments and the continents Europe and Africa. The Martinician philosopher Édouard Glissant suggests “artistic journey is destined to have a geographical itinerary. ” This itinerary is revealed in the blurring lines presented in fragments of the installation—vendors chant the symbolic currencies of both cities constantly echoing relics of #Fort EU and French colonial imperialism. These alien currencies are recognizable but equally estranging because they potentially distort our existential and spatial understanding. Is this Douala or Paris speaking? Periodically this question alters geographic boundaries. The market as the multi-layered metaphor is the linguistic factory of "Creole", birthing place in a country where "Creole" is the product of a range of tension, pluralities and interactions that can be traced back to colonial presence & formation of the nation-state. If the market is the linguistic factory, then music is the place of rebirth, where young Cameroonians bend *linga francas*, indigenous languages and big city jargon to stretch and translate the collective imagination.

One could perceive Eyongakpa's practice within the context of Kenyan philosopher and author Ngugi Wa Thiong'o who underlines the importance of constructing the world in one's own terms. In Eyongakpa's case it entails intermingling voices without directly quoting, skipping time, borrowing and shopping from the source to create audio landscapes that are coded . In this installation the compositions continuously switch positions, voices and rhythms—strips layers of sound to punctuate the suspension of music. Here, the imagination expresses itself through the materiality of sound. Jazz musician and composer John Coltrane summarized it as a work method in which he " starts in the middle of a sentence & move both directions at once."⁴ Coltrane tactics are not unfamiliar to Eyongakpa since the repetitive and associative non-linearity is present

in previous works Njang Wata (2010) and ??Fullmoons later/ letters from Etokobarek (2014). In Khaliland It is not implausible that John Coltrane is in conversation with indigenous Etokobi rhythmic variations, which according to the work connects him to Amiri Baraka—men whose compositions suspend music and poetry.

In his own words Eyongakpa describes the “second zone in the exhibition as a window space to collect free-flowing sounds while accentuating references such as water/border politics, recorded phone calls, lyrics excerpt from rap song waka waka waka 2007 by Cameroonian Musician, producer and rap artist Edwin Nyambi as well as isolated vocals from unreleased Hustler Philosophy (2007) by Cameroonian soul-reggae sensation Daddy Black.”

Concurrently, in this vacuum, there is a probable possibility to experience a cacophony of vendors singing in pidgin French with a dash of some English lingo merging with a muezzin call to prayer that interjects lord savior Christ praise songs while travelers sell themselves to smooth taxi chaffeurs and muffled voices promise you the future for 100 Francs. The ears could burst from contradictions but it is the consistent meditative rhythm of the anthroponic whirlwind that keeps the listener at bay. These small compositions and happenings demands the listener to apply the rules of creolization, expand language and incorporate the non-existing concept of Cinematography: the science or art of the moving visual sounds. What Guyanese writer Wilson Harris refers to as “ritual habit, ritual normality that seals our eyes and ears,” is something that this makeshift definition combats and recognizes as the sonic worldmaking attached to the rich music traditions of Bikutsi, Assiko, Mangambe, (with hiphop, coupe decale influences). Touring various politically charged corners of Cameroon to arrive disguised as sonic chaos in a multi-layered historicized space, which still showcases ruins and scars of past exhibitions at Kadist Art Foundation in Paris.

The power of all these coded fragments does not lie in the details; it lies rather precisely within the language— dauntingly creole, results in a language that cultural theorist David Punter describes as “terms of strength from offering recounted rituals in a language that is not 'owned', that is not one's own; in observing the fireworks” of sounds, the installation deliberately arranges Eyongakpa's ability to encompass what he documents. It is not surprising that his work constructs references that deal with friction between languages, humans and nature, insiders and outsiders, sound and silence, binaries that do not meet on opposite ends but face to face, ear to ear. This sonic installation as a growing exhibition is the result of Em'kal Eyongakpa's residency at Kadist Art Foundation in Paris— its indicative of a practice that combines the paradoxal urban binaries of Paris and Douala to organically mesh diverse themes into a conversation that is politically charged and poetically framed negotiations. #tobecontinued