Dirty Familiars: Colonial Encounters in African Cities

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Abstract:

This essay argues that the category of dirt has a long history of use in anti-cosmopolitan discourses and hate-speech in urban encounters, dating back at least to the colonial period, and that, when used to interpret the tastes and consumption practices of cultural strangers, dirt marks both a failure of interpretation and a visceral acknowledgement of that failure on the part of the beholder.

Keywords:

Dirt; imperialism; Africa; Lever Brothers; homophobia; ethnicity; urbanization.

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> We need much deeper knowledge about the ways in which modernity has historically evolved in the cities of the non-Western world, what urban constellations and conflicts it has created there, and what such developments might mean today for city cultures at large (Huyssen, 2008: 2)

While travelling with William Hesketh Lever and others on a lengthy tour of inspection of Lever Brothers' numerous trading stations in West and Central Africa in the mid-1920s, Thomas Malcolm Knox (1900-1980), Secretary to Lever, adopted an interpretive framework that is both depressingly familiar today in anti-cosmopolitan discourses, and richly symptomatic of the economic relationships embedded in encounters between strangers in urban environments. The city of Lagos, Knox (9 January 1925: 72) noted, "turns out to be a town of unspeakable squalor. It is no wonder that it is the nurse of disease. Filth everywhere." For Knox, the source of filth was easy to identify, for "[e]verything reeks of dirty natives" (9 January 2915: 72). Yet this same city, he recognized, "is the representative of a much higher state of civilization" than the "squalid" African trading posts he recently visited in the hinterland of the Belgian Congo, for Lagos boasts European shops built to supply local consumers with household products manufactured in Europe using raw materials exported from Africa's "uncivilized" interior (Knox, 9 January 1925: 72).

Several scholars (McClintock, 1995; Burke, 1996) have commented on the circular, self-serving nature of the connection between cleanliness and civilization in the writings of European travellers during the colonial era. Perceived and narrated through "imperial eyes" (Pratt, 1992), the figure of the "dirty native" legitimized European cultural expansion into the most intimate corners of Africans' daily lives. In the eyes of imperial commentators, "dirty natives" were far more dangerous than objects discarded by the wayside, or urban trash, and their ubiquitous presence in colonial cities caused colonial governments to enforce regimes of sanitation and urban racial segregation. Not coincidentally, these regimes also helped to transform imported luxury manufactures such as Lifebuoy Soap, Sunlight Soap, Lux and Vim--all produced by Lever Brothers in the UK--into household necessities for urban consumers in global locations (Burke, 1996; Allman and Tashjian, 2000).

In a book about globalization, garbage, and the contemporary city, it may appear paradoxical, if not perverse, to begin a chapter with a focus upon late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century intercultural encounters that do not fit current models of globalization and urbanization in which high-speed communications and mass travel make possible the rapid repositioning of people and objects, consumers and commodities, discardable and recyclable materials, through international economic and

cultural circuits. Indeed, as demonstrated by the recent media coverage of the transmission of Ebola within and beyond West African cities, a key feature of globalization is the potentially uncontrollable rapidity with which people are able to move from place to place.

Knox's negative responses to the strangeness of others in the 1920s, however, and the similar reactions of numerous other European travellers and traders in Africa in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, provide us with a historically situated, context-specific prologue to an unpalatable side of current discourses about globalization and urbanization. Such a prologue is embedded in the economic, political, and discursive power-relations that underpin contemporary global networks of trade and migration. Knox, and the other colonial white men who feature in this chapter, are not presented--or made present--as individual travellers in Africa who somehow merit biographical visibility above the Africans they describe. Rather, they feature as vectors for a distinctive, shared anti-cosmopolitan discourse that reaches back to the early days of empire and exploration, and continues to have global currency in contemporary public discourses about migration and mobility between global cities.

This essay uses examples from imperial-era travellers' and traders' journals to suggest that an understanding of cross-cultural relationships from the past can help us to contextualize the anti-cosmopolitan current that remains prevalent within contemporary debates about multiculturalism and migration, particularly in urban environments. In countless colonial-era travelogues and memoirs by British white men, a similar hermeneutic operates to that in Knox's diaries, leading to the same dead-end conclusions each time. A rhetoric of difference is mapped onto the body of others through a spectrum of dirt-related words. In one undated memoir by an anonymous trader (UAC 1/11/14/3/1b: 164) who worked for a Lever Brothers franchise in the early twentieth century, for example, "the bushmen tribes" are described thus: "Not only did their bodies give off a horrible smell, but their hair was tousled like dirty rope, and their skin a dull black. The bits of cloth around the loins were pregnant with filth." In an earlier, similar, example from a memoir by the trader John Whitford (1877: 125-126, 160), one "hideous-looking ju-ju man" is regarded as "filthy" not because of his unwashed status but because he localizes and subverts imported items such as Western clothing and rum for his own cultural ends, wearing clothing in the "wrong" way rather than as it was intended to be worn by the manufacturers.

Reiterated by numerous colonial travellers in Africa, these conclusions are not simply, or solely, a case of closed ethnic categories being pasted onto the "other" by colonial selves located on the moral high ground in the decades before African independence. As the latter part of this chapter will argue, Knox and his contemporaries' discourse has a vibrant historicity that reverberates through the decades, changing with the times but permeating how the bodies of migrants and strangers are observed and produced by those with the power to tell stories and to be heard in present-day global contexts.

As Knox and his fellow travellers in the mid-1920s[1] moved southwards into Arab-Islamic Africa and beyond, a visceral hermeneutic increasingly dominated their descriptions of the inhabitants of the new urban environments they encountered. In the Moroccan city

[1] At least 7 other men travelled with Knox and Lord Leverhulme on this expedition, including William Hulme Lever (Lord Leverhulme's son and heir), Ernest Hyslop Bell (Chairman of the Niger Company), D'Arcy Cooper (Chairman of Niger Company), and Jonathan Simpson (architect and co-creator with Lord Leverhulme of the model town of Port Sunlight near Liverpool).

of Casablanca, Knox "was disgusted with one of the main streets. On one side, bazaars: carpets and brass work hanging out over the street … on the other side *Brasseries Majestie* and the like—dirt and filth—there is something most repulsive to me in these endless *Brasseries*, all dirty, crowded with dirty people drinking dirty looking drinks" (29 September 1924: 3).

This connection between the category of dirt and the consuming body of the "other" starts in Europe for Knox: "I was repelled by it all in Brussels," he notes, although, for no stated reason, "it is ten times more repulsive in Casablanca" (29 September 1924: 3). From Casablanca onward, Knox and his fellows passed through urban environments where African and Arab traders from diverse religions and ethnicities interacted cross-regionally with traders and consumers from other towns and cities; where African women and men interacted with European men and women in intimate and domestic relationships, as well as in public urban spaces; and where European colonial officials undertook to rule in collaboration with local African elites, including chiefs, churchmen, educators, lawyers, imams, traders, local intelligentsias and political activists. Each set of relationships brought its own cross-cultural efforts to interpret and understand the other.

What revolts Knox in Casablanca is the entire public *habitus:* the busy local cafes and the messy protuberance of local commodities displayed for sale in the shops. What revolts him, in short, is the presence of the foreign body as a consuming entity that participates in a cash economy but desires merchandise that is completely alien to his own trade interests.

The powerful physical feeling of revulsion that he experiences marks the moment at which Knox recognizes the other's humanity as a consuming subject—eating, drinking, socializing, purchasing goods—and instantaneously disavows the other's tastes as unpalatable to himself. This argument differs somewhat from theorizations of dirt as that which society expels, excretes, or treats as abject or excessive (Bataille, 1985; Douglas, [1966] 2002; Kristeva, 1982; Smith, 2007). In these accounts, dirt figures as a category that mediates between the margins and the mainstream, facilitating the expulsion of particular types of matter from social visibility.

The category of dirt cannot be divorced from the judgment of people's dirty *habits* (in both senses of habit as clothing plus lifestyle choices). What appears to the onlooker's eyes to be the dirtiness of others generates clear moral and political judgments about their behavior and lifestyles. In spite of his protestations of loyalty to judgments based upon the observation of "empirical phenomena" (18 February 1925: 100) in Africa, Knox's disgust and repulsion are not focused upon unclean streets or unwashed bodies but upon unrecognizable objects. In Jebba, Nigeria, for example, he describes how "We stopped at various native stalls and examined their wares--capsicum (pepper of a particularly strong variety), chop of various sorts, extraordinary and repulsive stuff all of it" (9 January 1925: 75); at the market in Zaria, Northern Nigeria, he finds that, "[t]he meat presents the most disgusting appearance. It is covered with flies and vermin and even were these absent seemed to consist mainly of the least savoury looking parts of animals" (17 January 1925: 81). Also in Zaria market, he finds that, "The knick-knack stalls were the most curious of all. Little bits of stick, a few knobs of ginger, little bits of stone, a tooth pick or two, all apparently things of little or no use" (17 January 1925: 81-2). Locally manufactured African products are regarded as inferior to their imported counterparts, their very presence marking a lack of civilization among native consumers (see Burke, 1996; McClintock, 1995).

All the way from Casablanca to the interior of Congo, the marked preference of local people for locally produced commodities--unrecognizable to the traveler--above imported commodities purchased from the European companies operating in the region filled commentators with revulsion and rendered the local a nauseating other who resisted assimilation into the global economy represented by the European trader. These visceral responses have little to do with dirt as an empirical substance, and more to do with white traders' subjective reactions to local consumption practices. As one anonymous memoirist recalled of his time as a trader in Sapele (Nigeria), while European company workers exchanged Trade Gin with Africans for rubber, "[s]avage and unclean hunters, almost naked," arrived on the scene with their own trade-goods, carrying, amongst a range of unrecognizable objects, bush-meat and "monkeys and gray parrots for sale" (Anon., UAC/1/11/14/3/1: 5). An earlier trader on the River Niger, John Whitford, was similarly revolted by the unfamiliar appearance of local people and goods, especially the women: for Whitford in the 1870s, villages were "filthy" because they contained "hideously ugly" women, whose ugliness stemmed from their "strong limbs developed by hard work, which should pertain to a man only" (1877: 142).

The category of dirt signifies disorder, inefficiency, and the unrecognizable, in these traders' accounts of the continent. In this, their interpretive framework conforms to the anthropologist Mary Douglas's resonant assertion that dirt marks the limits of a society's understanding of itself and signifies people's need to withdraw from any habitus that is perceived to be dirty, and, in reaction, to re-assert their own interpretive boundaries (1966: 117-140). For Douglas, as Richard Fardon notes, "ideas of impurity and danger hold members of a society to account to one another, and they do so with a character and intensity that stems from and rebounds back upon that particular form of society" (Fardon, forthcoming: 7-8).

Disorder is not the stopping point for Knox and his fellows, however: the out-of-place-ness they attribute to "dirty natives" is further translated into the visceral category of disgust. In so-doing, the materiality of people and things is firmly re-situated in a moral realm: visual observations about the stranger's consumption habits are processed by Knox and his peers into domestically meaningful opinions (and projections) about the stranger's *habitus*. Interestingly, invisible "sights" are also projected into this set of opinions. The army officer, Captain Alan Field, author of a bestselling book of advice for first-time travelers to West Africa, summed up European suspicions, asserting (1913: 49, 144) that "Africa as a country [*sic*] tries to conceal the vileness of current flowing through it." From the visual perception of other people's consumption practices--or, as in the above citation, the paradoxical "observation" of concealed social phenomena such as cannibalism--arises the visceral representation of Africans as disgusting, and thus as morally and ontologically inferior. Dirt is the mediating category for this intercultural encounter.

Commentators such as Knox and Field were writing in an era that followed the exposure of dreadful slum conditions in British industrial cities in the 1890s, and Knox's journal occasionally compares the squalor of native quarters in African towns with the slums in British industrial cities (4 November 1924: 42, 18 February 1925: 99). Such a conflation of British dirt and dirt in colonial contexts had, however, become dangerously unsettling to the British imperial mission by the time Knox wrote his journals. Ethnographic accounts of dirt in Africa had been overtly referenced in sociological accounts of the dire conditions of British working classes in industrial cities, epitomized by William Booth's *In Darkest London and the Way Out* (1890), published in the wake of Henry Morton

Stanley's bestselling and much-serialized *In Darkest Africa: Or the Quest, Rescue, and Retreat of Emin Pasha, Governor of Equatoria* (1890). Similarly, Margaret Harkness's (1889) account of London slums, originally entitled *Captain Lobe: A Story of the Salvation Army* was changed immediately, upon the publication of Stanley's volumes, to *In Darkest London*. These social reformers' conflation of "white" dirt with African dirt added political weight to their campaigns to halt so-called primitive conditions in British industrial cities. Their use of the metaphor of "darkness" for domestic cities created a shock value for audiences familiar with the descriptions of African cultural darkness to be found in Stanley's celebrated journals and the popular literature they inspired.

Dirt was a key ingredient in the making of imperial identities and in the marketing of imperial products to global consumers in the colonial era. Out of it grew new global markets to the extent that, in one advert at least, soap as a commodity replaced the Victorian moral principle that "cleanliness is godliness." A famous advert from the Pears Soap Company in 1890 starkly reminded consumers, via a misquotation from Justus von Leibig, that "[t]he consumption of soap is a measure of the wealth, civilisation, health, and purity of the people".[2] Significantly, this advert is printed on the back cover of a special "Stanley Edition" of *The Graphic* celebrating the recent Emin Pasha Relief Expedition led by Stanley from 1886-1889. Through numerous vivid drawings of Stanley's expedition from the East coast of Africa into the interior of the continent, the special issue illustrates the contrasts between the moral authority, bravery, and leadership of British men, and Africans' lack of control, illustrated not least through their lack of clothing. Appearing in the wake of these images and reports, the Pears Soap advertisement on the back cover is a tangible by-product of the "dirty native" ideology.

As a marker of ontological differences between the self and the other, the category of dirt usefully confirms the beholder's sense of superiority over the rejected body. Colonial commentators had to maintain the boundary between self and other, and not allow the category of dirt to shift out of place: if white working-class dirt had coincided with African dirt, the ideological and moral foundations of the so-called civilizing mission would have collapsed. Dirt "sticks" precisely because it is presented as descriptor of visible features: revulsion and disgust are experienced by the beholder as natural, biological, sense-based responses to observable phenomena, rather than as personal imaginative failures in the onlooker's effort to comprehend new environments.

Knox, Field, and Whitford were not alone in their feelings of revulsion toward the consumption practices of strangers. For these cross-cultural commentators, however, whose livelihoods depended upon the expansion of European trade and the development of local markets in Africa, the perception of dirt was riven with ambivalence. As an industrialist seeking to expand global demand for the household products manufactured by Lever Brothers, as well as to secure an efficient workforce of African wage-laborers for the extraction of raw materials in the colonies, Knox continuously had to resist his visceral revulsion and attempt to re-domesticate the other body. As he points out in a later report to the Chairman and Board of the United African Company in 1929, "the successful European trader is he who can mould the native taste," not he who passes by, holding his nose in disgust (UAC/2/34/4/1/3: 4). For the

[2] Leibig's actual words were: "The quantity of soap consumed by a nation would be no inaccurate measure whereby to estimate its wealth and civilisation … This consumption does not subserve sensual gratification, nor depend upon fashion, but upon the feeling of the beauty, comfort, and welfare, attendant upon cleanliness; and a regard to this feeling is coincident with wealth and civilisation… [A] want of cleanliness is equivalent to insupportable misery and misfortune" (1843: 18).

white trader in Africa, large profits were to be made from successfully anticipating "native taste" for particular imported items in exchange for local produce such as rubber, palm nuts, and palm oil. As one anonymous trader's boss stated starkly in a word of advice, "There is no doubt if you can get the patterns on the cottons printed in colours the Bushman likes, they'll bring plenty of trade" (Anon., UAC/1/11/14/3/1: 72).

Traders' feelings of alienation and revulsion can be understood as their physical internalization of other people's resistance to capitalist expansion. William Hulme Lever noted in a letter to his father from an earlier expedition, "[t]he Pagans are very disinclined to work, their wants being so few," rendering "the possibility of trading with them … very limited" (UAC LBC Box 1376 TT 3819 location SR1, 5 August 1921: 8-9). The aim of trade was to transform the natives from "idle loafers into real workers" with a weekly wage to spend on consumer goods (Knox, 29 October 1924: 34). In other words, the trader's feelings of revulsion signify his failure to "mould the native taste." Thoroughly affected by economic factors such as the expansion of industrial European markets into colonial households, and the creation of cash economies through the employment of African wage laborers, those who are repelled by the "native" experience the full visceral affects of local consumers' resistance to the expansion of industrial capital into their own economies. By contrast, local consumers who "became more intimate with the whiteman, and made money in trade," also became more physically palatable to the European trader by the fact that "they went in for fancy [imported] cloths as well" as local materials (Anon., UAC/1/11/14/3/1: 164). Such a person could never resemble the white man, for "even when they purchased cheap perfumery … the other 'scent' was the stronger" (Anon, UAC/1/11/14/3/1: 164).

Knox's travels with his employer leave a great deal unsaid about the use of forced labor in Lever Brothers' Congo concessions, meticulously catalogued in Jules Marchal's *Lord Leverhulme's Ghosts: Colonial Exploitation in the Congo* (2008). As with many imperial traders before him, Knox's vision is inward-looking rather than externally focussed as he continuously attempts to overcome the presence of the resistant "native." In an effort to recognize the strangeness of Africa in terms that are familiar, he uses similes to reach across the vast geographical space separating "home" from West and Central Africa. As a Scotsman, he finds that the journey from Boma to Matadi in the Congo is "similar to that up Loch Fyne," while up-river, "I was really reminded a bit of Killiecrankie" (20 October 1924: 11, 12). The further up-river he travels, however, the greater the strain on his similes: further on into the Belgian Congo, he finds, "It is Inverness to the Kyle of Lochalsh *only more so*" (20 October 1924: 16; *emphasis added*). Commenting on the territory as a whole, he writes, "for real beauty and grandeur I am bound to say that I prefer the Rhine gorge and, in some ways, Loch Fynne; *but it is very hard to make comparisons*" (17 October 1924: 20; *emphasis added*).

These similes mark the onlooker's efforts to reach across an untranslatable divide in order to retain contact with potential markets and consumers. Knox's similes are, however, used almost exclusively to describe landscapes and vistas. The towns and cities he and his fellow travellers pass through are filled with people, and as a consequence of the human element, "[t]his tropical beauty was full of danger and disease" (Anon., UAC/1/11/14/3/1: 79). Landscapes, buildings and objects can be clean, but only *people* (and the things people do and sell and touch) can be dirty for the imperial traveller. People and communities attract dirt-related words: they are ugly, revolting, disgusting, diseased, and filthy. Such words mark the end-point of a process of cross-cultural interpretation that moves via similes and likenesses towards a failure of recognition of

the stranger as a fellow human being. This discourse is familiar in current reactions to the transmission of the Ebola virus, as examined in more detail below.

Not all imperial travelers and traders adopted this anti-cosmopolitan discourse. Many white men developed intimate and loving relationships with local people, and celebrated the beauty of life in mud huts with clay floors, local "wives," and home grown foodstuffs (Anon, UAC/1/11/14/3/1: 107). For one anonymous trader, life is rendered exquisite in Nigeria by the presence of his beloved companion, known to him as "Ting a Ling" (UAC 1/11/14/3/1b). For another long-term resident in West Africa, John Moray Stuart-Young, the cleanliness of the bustling market town of Onitsha was incomparable to the dirt of the Manchester slums in which he was born (Newell, 2006). Such men were seen to have "gone native" by anti-cosmopolitan commentators, their consumption habits dangerously unsettling the imperial right to rule.

Dirt as Interpretive Failure

If dirt functions as a category of urban understanding, and as an interpretive tool in multicultural environments, it is deployed viscerally rather than deliberatively by the people who use it as a mode of comparison between the self and others, neighbors and strangers. The category of dirt puts matter firmly into place, fixes it in an interpretive hierarchy that relates to the sight and behavior of people, and draws what is hidden into view. In short, dirt *matters*: it is visible, materialized physically and viscerally to the beholder through sight, smell, touch, hearing and taste, and it is based—for the beholder at least—upon incontrovertible physiological reactions such as nausea and disgust that spawn value-judgments about the behavior of others.

In his analysis of European "orientalist" modes of perception in the nineteenth century, Edward Said describes the manner in which the repetition of particular analogies about the Arab-Islamic world "*create* not only knowledge but the very reality they appear to describe. In time, such knowledge and reality produce a tradition" (1978: 94; *emphasis in original*). For Said, the recurrent use of particular labels and terms of comparison in a dominant discourse will, over time, take a hold of the existential complexity of the person described and replace it with an essence, a condensed and repetitious metonym that stands in for—and takes over from—the whole. For Said, after Foucault, representations and repetitions serve to define realities: in this way, the dominant group's power is exercised through the production of knowledge about "the Orient."

Said regards the production of knowledge as a sign of discursive hegemony, but dirt as a category for knowledge-production contains within itself a complex process of aspiration and failure. Dirt marks an effort to understand and cross into the world of the other, a realization of the failure of empathy (or humanist understanding), and a retreat into the sense perceptions of revulsion and disgust.

Numerous negative cross-cultural encounters in the twentieth century are mediated in this way. In his classic study of colonial racism, *Black Skin, White Masks (Peau noire, masques blanc*), for example, Frantz Fanon (1967: 109-140) reports on the traumatic moment when, while walking anonymously down a postwar Parisian street, his complex humanity is suddenly reduced to a state of epidermal otherness. His identity is fixed permanently in place, skin-deep, by a white person who reacts to the sight of him with the words, "*Sale nègre!*". The racial descriptor, *nègre*, is inextricable from the adjective, *sale*. There are at least 22 different translations of the French word *sale* (also *la saleté*), all with negative connotations that resonate, cumulatively, through its most basic translation as

"black," including dirty, smutty, trashy, grubby, foul, messy, oozing, depraved, obscene, greasy, nasty, unclean, disgusting and defiled.

The fear of defilement experienced by Fanon's white observer in the 1950s is reiterated many times over in racist speech. In 1958 in Congo, for example, the doctor Jacques Courtejoie recollected, "two months after independence I went to dinner at the home of a white regional administrator. He came home late, because he'd been to a political meeting of the Abako. When he got home, his wife said: 'I certainly hope you didn't shake Kasavubu's hand!'. I can still hear the way she said that. Even by that time, people still thought Africans were dirty!" (Van Reybrouck, 2014: 290). These sentiments persist in current Western popular reactions to Ebola, a virus that can only be transmitted by direct contact with the body fluids of an infected person: thus in October 2014, a half Sierra Leonean boy was excluded from a primary school in Stockport, Cheshire, after a Facebook campaign against him by parents of other children at the school.[3]

A powerful parallel to this interpretive process can be found in the experiences of its targets. In his exposé of the physical and psychological affects of racism, Fanon (1952: 109-140) describes how racist representations stick to their objects--just as "dirt sticks"--contributing to and partly creating the realities and ideas by which people live in metropolitan and colonial cities. Sapping the subject's sense of self with powerful negative representations, the observer fixes the other, influencing and shaping the identity of the target *on the inside*. When he is hauled out of urban anonymity into the visual field of the white passer-by on the streets of Paris, Fanon experiences physical nausea, or self-revulsion, at the way his skin is re-cast by the gaze of the commentator. These intimate encounters live within the psyche in the form of what Stuart Hall terms an "enigma," a "tense and tortured dialogue," and cannot simply be expunged from a culture or an encounter (Hall, 1993: 400).

Obvious, if extreme, other examples of the conflation of dirt and cultural otherness include the labeling of Jewish people as vermin by Nazis and European anti-Semites in the 1930s and 1940s, and the Rwandan genocide of 1994 that was initiated by a media campaign on *Radio Télévision Libres des Milles Collines* (RTLMC) to "exterminate/crush the cockroaches" (Prunier, 1998). In Rwanda, the media made use of the word "cockroach" to re-label the Tutsi people and their sympathizers as vermin; as with Nazi ideology in Europe, the analogy with dirt became mass-murderous in the process. A similar discursive manoevre occurred in February 2014 when President Yahya Jammeh of the Gambia described homosexuals as "vermin" who should be tackled like malarial mosquitoes. Uganda's long-standing President, Yoweri Museveni, also explained his introduction of new, toughened legislation against homosexuality using associations learned directly from the "*sale negre*" discourse of dirt and contamination, describing gay people as "disgusting" and "abnormal" (Landau, Verjee and Mortensen, 25 February 2014). Within this logic, homosexual men (noun) = vermin (analogy) = filthy (judgment) = to be eliminated (social and legal response).

In each of the above expressions of revulsion from the 1950s to the present, a similar interpretive process to that used by Knox in the 1920s is employed, whereby culture (public opinion, arts and media) imbues politics (government and the law) with

[3] http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sierra-leone-boys-uk-school-placement-cancelled-over-misguided-hysteria-by-parents-over-ebola-9781366.html [accessed 8 October 2014].

perspectives that are predicated on the category of dirt, and where the category of dirt is rendered sensual, visceral, and material through reference to vermin, infestation, contamination, filth and disgust. Discursively, as Foucault and Said argue, one can trace a pathway from mediated perceptions and opinions—newspapers, radio broadcasts, political speeches—to political and social outcomes at street level, and back to the media once again, reinforced by the truth-value of repetition.

The feature of this contemporary discourse that connects it to colonial-era discourse is that the expression of disgust--if not hate--is regarded by those who experience it as natural and instinctive rather than as ideological, precisely because it involves a set of visceral reactions to the habits and *habitus* of strangers. Thus, on reaching the town of N'Kunda in Congo on October 1924, Knox found that "the people were thoroughly repulsive, especially the women. The people were all cicatrised in a way which does not leave smooth pictures on the skin but which, as it were, makes patterns of ulcers … on all parts of the body. It makes the people look repulsive" (21 October 1924: 23). Invoking ulcers—painful pus-filled sores—rather than culturally specific beautification practices on the female body, Knox connected medical infection with the aesthetic category of ugliness in order to legitimize his own feelings of revulsion.

Knox's dystopic vision of an Africa with "children romping heedless of the endless flies and vermin" (29 September 1924: 3), where "thoroughly repulsive" people (21 October 1924: 23) and "degenerates" (23 November 1924: 55) live in "dirt, grit, dust" (9 January 1925: 72), where "deformed men and crippled children" intermingle with "people wandering about suffering obviously from loathsome and unspeakable diseases" (21 January 1925: 85) is a century-old iteration of reactionary Western responses to African urban environments during periods of famine or disease. In the recent international media coverage of the spread of Ebola in Liberia, *The Telegraph* depicted New Kru Town in an apocalyptic language that is reminiscent of Knox's tone: "sewage runs openly through its maze of corrugated shacks, and in Liberia's wet season--at its height right now – tropical torrents turn it into one vast, warm, moist, breeding pool for germs" (Freeman, 8 August 2014). Crossing the physical and the cultural, the potency of dirt as a category for interpretation is its capacity to express taste (the judgment of beauty, ugliness, and sexual preference) in the form of "gut reactions" to the proximity of the dirty body (nausea and revulsion), making the response of the beholder appear to be "natural."

IV. Coda:

Through dirt, this chapter has attempted to historically contextualize the phenomenon of anti-cosmopolitanism in postcolonial African cities, and to understand the ways in which contemporary urban relationships resonate with past ideologies in the form of politically charged re-iterations of prejudiced discourses. The category of dirt is a particularly useful tool to access social prejudices in global cities, not least because it influences the terminology through which people and the media continue to interpret one another today. In October 2014, for example, among the comments on the UK *Daily Mail's* website after an item on the spread of Ebola, one can find the following opinions about those in the West who allow African mobility to Britain: "The liberal will soon spread this disease to all corners of the earth"; "Please tell me all incoming flights are banned"; "I shudder to think the consequences of people from these areas being allowed in and

out of Britain".[4] Readers of the supposedly highbrow UK *Independent,* commenting on the exclusion of a West African boy from primary school, did not shy away from expressing similar sentiments: "I hate to say it but they are similar to lepers. Touch them at the wrong time and you have it and die with the rest. So bring them here and risk possibly thousands of Deaths"; "We should be closing our boarders [*sic*] to anyone travelling from West Africa."[5]

In spite of the orientation of this chapter, however, it must be remembered that dirt as a category for the interpretation of otherness does not originate in European colonialism, nor do colonial encounters provide the exclusive source for current interpretations of others and otherness in African urban contexts. A multitude of words can be found in African languages to describe the dirt and dirtiness of others, dating back long before the colonial encounter. In the nineteenth century, Ndebele people used "the Shona word *tsvina* (dirt) to describe their antagonists as *chiTsvina*, 'dirty people'" (Burke, 1996: 25-6). Similarly, evidence for the survival of pre-colonial concepts about dirt can be found in local ideas about "ritual impurity" amongst Sotho and Tswana speakers (Brown and Beinart, 2013).

What is missing from Knox's, Field's, Whitford's, and my own account above, and what remains largely absent from studies of hygiene and the history of public health in sub-Saharan Africa, are African perspectives on—and changing African historical understandings of—categories signifying dirt. Given the starting-point of this paper in the travel writings of imperial British men, and given the predominance of English language media in postcolonial Africa, dirt-related terms drawn from the English language have provided the primary source for this essay rather than African language terms and "African local knowledge" (Brown and Beinart, 2013). When African languages and creoles are added to the melting pot of colonial and postcolonial urban interactions, a proliferation of additional connotations and concepts arise, sometimes providing respite from (post)colonial discourses of hatred (Newell, 2006; Epprecht, 1998).

Similarly, when detached from the interpretation of others' ethnicity or sexuality, dirt-related terms in Africa are not always negative or extreme as in the cases of ethnic and sexual chauvinism described above. In some contexts, dirt-related words may be used to express positive evaluations of others, albeit in the form of jokes and proverbs that comment on a person's wealth (see Maranga-Musonye, 2014). At a practical level, ordinary people's responses to globalization include frugality and the recycling of so-called trash (Coppoolse, Furniss, *in this volume*). The artistic transformation of "garbage" and "dirt" into beautiful, symbolic or useful objects is also an area for further research (Born et al, 2012; Whiteley, 2011). In several circumstances, therefore, visible signifiers of dirt may carry positive meanings.

In seeking to explore the opinions and discourses that fuel conflicted social relations in African cities, this essay has sought to examine the flip-side of debates about global

[4] http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2738473/Ebola-epidemic-spreads-FIFTH-West-African-country-case-deadly-virus-reported-Senegal-quarantine-lifted-slum-area-Liberian-capital.html [accessed 8 October 2014].

[5] http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sierra-leone-boys-uk-school-placement-cancelled-over-misguided-hysteria-by-parents-over-ebola-9781366.html [accessed 8 October 2014].

cosmopolitanism. The emphasis on negative and violent social interactions was not intended to suggest that African cities are any more (or less) culturally antagonistic than other cities globally. Contemporary African cities are characterized by urban dwellers' innovations in environments marked by extreme poverty and scarcity, as well as by multicultural inward migration from other regions. Urban subjects struggle to survive under increasingly severe constraints while continuing to produce indigenous responses to the flows of local and international commodities and resources in their cities (Simone, 2004, 2005). The provisional qualities of African cities and their instability are, in some scholars' views, the very features that allow for the emergence of creative responses on the streets (Barber, 1987; de Boeck and Plissart, 2004).

This chapter has sought to emphasize that globalization has a history in Africa that is refracted through the prism of diverse encounters, including the colonial encounter, that contributed to the continent's urban modernity. These urban encounters and identities—relationships with others, as well as the implementation of environmental and public health policies, and anti-racism initiatives—may be understood differently if they are filtered through concepts relating to dirt in its local and global manifestations, rather than concepts relating to hygiene and cleanliness.

The "dirtying" of particular populations remains common in numerous global locations, from the fear of the spread of Ebola from the megacities of Freetown and Monrovia to Lagos, and these representations can become devastating under extreme political and economic conditions. The highly charged, politically productive discourses of racism, ethnocentrism, and homophobia stem from a history of (re)iterations of cultural difference through the supposedly empirical category of dirt.

In attempting to render the category of dirt productive, however, significant methodological and intellectual challenges arise relating to "how to reconcile the universal and the particular in the practice of cultural criticism without lapsing either into empirical particularism or abstract universalism" (Huyssen, 2008: 4). Such challenges characterize the study of contemporary global urban cultures generally, but are of especial significance in cultural histories of postcolonial cities, where the temptation to source the (postcolonial) present in the (colonial) past through direct, connective comparisons risks reducing the former to the latter, and minimizing what Ash Amin (2012), AbdulMaliq Simone (2004), Arjun Appadurai (1996), and numerous other scholars of global cities highlight: if there is anything "essential" about the global city, they insist, it is the unpredictable, productive potential of diverse "urban imaginaries" in global contexts (Amin, 2012: 68).

Furthermore, the very discourses analysed in this chapter contain within themselves a host of interpretive (or imaginative) failures and, crucially, an embodied, sense-perceptive consciousness of that failure. If regarded as a failed interpretive category rather than as a biological substance or a "natural" response, our understanding of how dirt operates discursively can perhaps help us to comprehend, and confront, essentialist ideologies in diverse global settings. In other words, essentializing categories such as dirt are, paradoxically, filled with a vital historicity and cultural specificity that help to make visible the very production of universalist categories in response to particular urban encounters.

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Abbreviations:
n.dat -- No date
UAC -- United Africa Company (Unilever Archives and Records)
UAC LBC -- United Africa Company Leverhulme Business Correspondence

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