

## Project Global Prayers: Lagos, Rio de Janeiro, Beirut Artistic Research on the production of urban space

Our artistic research for the project Global Prayers focuses on the production of urban space through emerging forms of "religious" urbanism in Lagos, Rio de Janeiro and Beirut.

The concept aims to find and speculate on overlaps and similarities between the "religious" urbanism of (Neo-) Pentecostalism and Islamist movements and both the effects of historic modernization and recent neoliberal globalization. Despite the huge circulation of images which show the predominantly poor and/or conflictual urban areas (barrios, slums, marginal urban areas, contested urban sites) where Pentecostalism and Islamist movements are expanding to and establishing themselves out, these images hardly give an idea of the scale and dynamics as well as the historic and recent social and urban conditions of these new forms of "religious" urbanism.

Our research is based on a twofold structure in order to question the politics of representation of the expansion of religious-based urbanism:

### Research in Architecture on the Production of Urban Space:

Representation of Space, Symbolic Function of Architecture - Politics of Representation.

### Research in Urban Territories:

Production of Social Space through Media, Spaces of Representation - Politics of Images.

## Outset for Lagos



Catholic Church downtown Lagos

A starting point of our research was focused on modernist urban concepts and architectures, which held secular promises of social, political, and economic progress and of development. We planned to look at architecture and urban sites from the 1950s and 1960s, which shaped the fabric of the cities, for instance modernist buildings and public projects such as social housing developments.

In downtown Lagos we found a few modernist churches and 2 missionary schools. We visited the housing projects like the pre-fabricated Dolphin estate as well as **Festac Town**, the housing project which was built on the occasion of the second world festival of Black Arts and Culture in 1977. The housing project inhabits 5,000 units and was designed in a modernist grid consisting seven avenues. We are also working on a short video which we took at Festac Town, including a brief interview with inhabitants.



Dolphin Housing Estate Lagos

Initially we planned to also focus on exemplary architecture which represents near-utopian potentials (and therefore a critique) of modernization from the late 1960s and 1970s. This would include prototypes of buildings, modular elements, and temporary structures which are related to metabolist concepts.

During our research in Lagos we could not identify any structure or building which we could refer to as a historic example of metabolism; but nevertheless we could expand the idea of metabolism as organic, temporary and flexible principle to the informal nature of the city of Lagos. With the photographic material we gathered of street-life, traffic chaos and the informal ways how the city works we could extend our works.



FESTAC Housing project

In *Building the New World* Valerie Frazer points out that modernist architecture and urban planning played an important role in the building of the nation-state of Brazil. This nation-building through urbanism and architecture also occurred in African countries as a gesture of progress during the period of Independence.

Several times we visited the **Tafawa Balewa Square**, which sometimes is referred to as Independence Square.

The expressive and symbolic architecture of these buildings impressively reflect the ideology and optimism of the moment of independence; yet these buildings are also shaped by national



Tafawa Beleswa square

politics, realized on a local scale, and were related to international interests in the global world system. Similarly, the emerging (Neo-) Pentecostalism and Islamist movements operate and inscribe themselves in urban territories on a local, regional, national and global scale.

Despite the common narrative that much of modernist architecture and its symbolic meaning is considered to have failed and, in some cases, buildings and urban areas were abandoned, in our research in Lagos we searched for unique cases and urban situations where this architecture and situations are appropriated and eventually re-used by (Neo-) Pentecostalism and Islamist movements today. In searching for these eventual appropriations and use of secular modernist spaces by Pentecostalism or the Islamist movements, we planned to elaborate on the role of architecture and its symbolic meaning both in the historic process of modernization (both international and local modernism) and in recent emergent forms of "religious" urbanism.

However, we could not locate any of these expected situations during our stay in Lagos. Therefore we shifted the focus within the 20 days of our research towards phenomena, which are unique to the city of Lagos: One of the most remarkable phenomena is the expansion of churches along the Expressway from Lagos to Ibadan. These emerging camps of Pentecostal Churches and only few Islamist churches are not embedded any more in the core area of the city, but are in the process of establishing new cities on the periphery of Lagos.

## Chapter 1: The Lagos Strip



strip

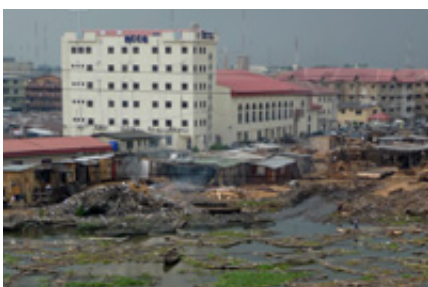
This new urban geographies of religion raise questions of how these new areas are marked and made visible through signs, gates, or architectural and planning concepts.

The Lagos Ibadan expressway was constructed between 1976 and 1979. Over the last thirty years Pentecostal churches increased their presence along the interstate highway by property acquisition, the road is now home to mainly Pentecostal prayer camps and one Islamic camp. In reference to Robert Venturi and Scott Brown *Learning from Las Vegas* we started to elaborate our research on this "strip" through a **first series of studies** on entrances and gates of these religious camps and "new cities". In a next step we will specify, through **architectural drawings**, the "signature" function of architectural elements.



Nasfat entrance

## Chapter 2: Cities of God



RCCG headquarter

### RCCG, the Redeemed Christian Church of God

In this research chapter we focus on the phenomena of prayer camps and how these new developments fulfill their proposed function as "new cities". The structure of these new cities include social services like clinics, schools and housing, but many of these services are not accessible for people who work in these camps. We heard from pastors who could not send their children to the universities owned by the church.

In his studies "Conquering the Earth to Make Heaven: Pentecostalism, Prayer Camps and Development in Nigeria" Asonzeh Ukah points out "that even in the Redemption City wealth and respect are concentrated in the hands of a few who now also appropriate sacred power to reinforce their grip on scarce material resources." The RCCG, the Redeemed Christian Church of God is the largest property



RCGG camp



RCGG Holy Ghost congress

owner in Lagos.

We visited the **RCGG headquarter in Mainland** Lagos and the RCGG Redemption City on the strip 42 kilometres outside of Lagos.

The **RCGG Camp** was initiated in 1983 and today the estimated population is about 30,000 inhabitants. Including four RCGG parishes and The Redeemer's University (RUN), which opened in 2005, the Redemption City is serviced by banks, supermarkets, electricity generating plants, 792 units of chalets (in 2005), a police station, and specially trained security groups of the church such as the Redemption Army and the Redemption Guard.

According to Asonzeh Uka, "The purchase several thousands of acres of land and the development of infrastructure within the Camp initially started with financial and material resources mobilised only from church members. However, this internal sourcing of resources soon expanded to include funds raised from anyone willing to give to the church's project, including corporate Nigeria." Gated housing estates within the camp repeat and replicate on a model-like scale the social fragmentation and segregation, which are generally related to the fragmentation in "real" cities by low-income areas or public housing, and well situated gated communities.

We also attended the annual **RCGG Holy Ghost Congress** with the theme "ALL WILL BE WELL", which gathered several hundred thousand people for 6 days of intense praise and worship (13-18, December 2010).

The increasing social and political importance of RCGG, and its proximity to leading politicians, was made obvious by a cover page image of *The Guardian*, which showed Enoch Adeboye, General Overseer of RCGG, praying for Goodluck Jonathan, the president of Nigeria who visited the camp on the occasion of the Congress.



MFM Prayer City, Strip



MFM Prayer City, Strip

### Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries

The **MFM Prayer City** is located at Km 12 of the Lagos Ibadan Expressway and includes different halls for services and the International Office Business Centre amongst others. The forceful use of media for distribution and commerce is represented by the Battle Cry Christian Ministries which was established in June 1999 and publishes all books by Dr. Daniel Olukoya, the founder and General Overseer of MFM. The MFM Tape Ministry was established in 1989 and produces and sells the messages of Dr. Daniel Olukoya. When we visited the camp, the new university building was still under construction, but its opening is planned for 2011.

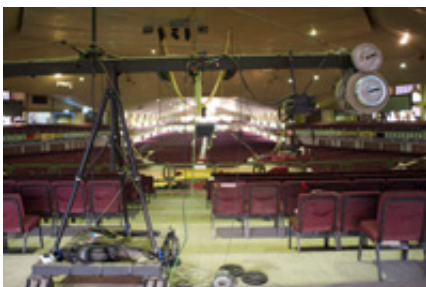
We have chosen MFM as a further site of our research because it underlines the observation of Ukah, that "The competitive spirit that has animated much of the Pentecostal economy has led inexorably to schisms and a proliferation of divisions - which in turn give rise to the multiplication of worship places - creativity and innovation in search of competitive advantage, and more importantly, an expansion of sacred geography."

The church of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries started in the Yaba district in mainland Lagos in 1989. The prayer group purchased an abandoned slum located at 13 Olasimbo Street, Onike, Yaba, a quite large stretch of land near the second gate of the University of Lagos. The former slum area has now been transformed into the International Headquarters of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries.

### Winners Chapel

Winners Chapel, also known as Living Faith Church, was founded by Bishop David Oyedepo in 1981 after a visionary encounter. Our specific interest to include the site of Winners Chapel in our research was driven by the fact that the architectural concept and planning aspect differ from camps like RCGG and Mountain of Fire.

During our visit it was stated several times that, in contrast to the more accidentally growing camps on the strip, Winners Chapel has been designed and carefully planned by David Oyedepo. Trained as an architect, Oyedepo got divine inspirations for planning the Tabernacle, which is claimed to be the largest building in the world. Despite the explanation of a divine inspiration and the miracle of the column less structure of the tabernacle - the buildings at the camp are all individually designed and show the ambition of a symbolic representational architectural concept.



Winners Chapel, Canaanland





Winners Chapel, Canaanland

The international headquarters of **Winners Chapel** in Canaanland includes not only the large Tabernacle, but also the Covenant University and different structured housing estates as well.

### Chapter 3: Religion as Industry



MFM, Industrial Hall

In many discussions about the impact of religion and churches on the urban conditions of the city, people addressed the increasing economic factor that the churches play in the development of the city. Asonzeh Ukah put it this way: "In Nigeria, religion generally, and Pentecostalism specifically, is an industry."

From this perspective, and as another aspect of our research, we approached the built spaces of churches less in terms of the symbolic function of architecture, but instead looked at them as sites of production in order to find similarities between forms and functions of industrial or commercial zones.

Because many of the newly constructed church-buildings are designed similarly to the shape of industrial architecture, we searched for examples of churches which appropriated existing industrial buildings or are embedded in building complexes with other industries. The example of a **branch of Mountain of Fire and Miracle** shows in detail the use of a former warehouse space, the possible expansion within the building, and how the various functions of the church are contextualized by the industrial neighborhood of the religious space.

### Chapter 4: Camp versus Campus



State University of Lagos

To investigate further linkages between an increasingly ineffective state and the increased economic power of the religious sector, we focused our research on educational institutions such as schools and universities.

We visited the **State University of Lagos** and talked with people about the new spatial relations and implications between the above-mentioned MFM headquarter and UNILAG. Several people expressed the concern that this new spatial politics was undermining the public University.

While in Europe and Northern America, corporate and private universities are challenging the public state-run educational institutions, for Nigeria there remains the question if the religious or church-run prestigious universities, such as **Covenant University**, **RUN University or Mountain Top University** also challenge the public University.

Several people expressed the view that the international expansion of Nigerian (Neo-) Pentecostalist churches can be understood as answer to old churches missionary politics during colonialism. In this way, the Nigerian (Neo-) Pentecostalist churches are practicing a form of reverse colonialism, expanding to Europe and North America.

The spatial strategy of the RCCG for the next years was laid out for us at a visit by a bishop: there should be a pentecostal church within a 5 minute walk, and for North America and Europe it will be a 5 minute drive.

sabine bitter/helmut weber / january 2011