



# Multidimensionale Risks in the XXI Century

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The sounds of the African metropolis.  
A Janus-faced experience of the *Risikogesellschaft*.  
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Kama Laaandan (Just like London!)

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African urban spaces and subjects has emerged with its social topographies, economic energies, and political machineries, and, is once again, on the theoretical and policy agenda. This time the interest lies in the frontiers that trail into the horizon, and in the vast blotches of sprawl that defy census boundaries and categories. Of course, this is a resurgent rather than wholly new interest and this is a significant segment embedded inside the global risk society. Most of the future growth of population in the world is expected to take place in cities of developing countries. There are major threats to the future success of such cities, including those related to governance, provision of water, sanitation and housing, as well as the emergence of stark inequalities in income, wealth, and health.

From Nairobi to Kinshasa, from Cairo to Capetown, the first mandate is to understand post-colonial capitalism in African cities not simply as social relations of production but as forms-in-circulation. A circulation of racialized bodies, of migrant bodies, of value, of commodities, of superstitions, of rumours, of bribes, of used goods, creates a dizzying sense of the urban sustainability. The second mandate is to link such forms-in-circulation to African post-modernities. Of course *Africa* as a name, as an idea, and as an object of academic and public discourse has been, and remains, fraught. It is fraught in ways that go beyond even the paradigm of orientalism first introduced by Edward Said<sup>2</sup> to speak to the staging of the difference of the non-West from the West. Indeed, Africa is not only perpetually caught and imagined within a web of difference and absolute otherness<sup>3</sup>. The obstinacy with which scholars in particular continue to describe Africa as an object apart from the world, or as a failed and incomplete example of something else, perpetually underplays embedding in multiple elsewhere of which the continent actually speaks. Most of the African metropolis are in the sense used by Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, and others, that is, a capitalist formation closely tied to the money economy and individuality, to calculability and fortuitousness. Metropolitan existence here is “displayed” not necessarily through exhibitions or parks, but via an enticing array of consumer labels and products, highways and luminous flows, store windows and huge advertising billboards, new architecture and, more generally, technophilia. To a large extent, this is what Simmel meant by a culture of things. From this perspective, what passes in the eyes of Nairobi or Lagos fiercest critics as crass material trappings could very well be understood as an aesthetic of plentitude<sup>4</sup>. A plentitude of the *Risikogesellschaft* that could be observed through the kaleidoscopic sounds of the African music.

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<sup>2</sup> E. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> G. Simmel, *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, in, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. and trans. Kurt Wolff, Glencoe: Free Press, 1950.