URBAN ASSEMBLAGE: THE CITY AS ARCHITECTURE, MEDIA, AI AND BIG DATA.

- Paper / Proposal Title:
Platform Dominance in sub-Saharan Africa: A Digital Divide defined by the Reproduction of Colonial Capitalism

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- Abstract (300 words):
The average cost in 2019 of one (1) gigabyte (GB) of mobile data in Zimbabwe was seventy-two dollars and twenty cents (USD 75.20) resulting in the most expensive digital connection worldwide. Comparatively, India’s average cost of 1GB of data is cheapest at only twenty-six cents (USD 0.26). Of the two hundred and thirty (230) countries surveyed by comparison website Cable, many of the predominantly low-income and lower-middle income nations in sub-Saharan Africa occupy the bottom of the list with an average cost in the region of USD 10.69. The advent of mobile telephony was particularly important in sub-Saharan Africa because digital communications infrastructure developed where access to landline phones was previously scarce or non-existent. In this regard, as the Internet of Things (IoT) proliferates on the African continent at an inflated cost it perpetuates a pattern of historic misappropriation, discrimination, displacement and containment common within postcolonial urban geographies, thereby reproducing the structural violence of colonial capitalism. The augmented tariff of mobile data is
particularly evident in the digital platform economies that are redefining the choreography of daily life and labour geographies of platform urbanism. Inadvertently or not, digital platforms create structures of displacement: low wage, non-standard workers are segregated digitally to virtual nether realms and physically to the ill-considered interstitial spaces within the built environment. The division characteristic of capitalist urbanites is reflected in the asymmetrical access to digital space. As such this paper considers how a lack of what Lefebvre called the right to the city is reproduced on the Internet in sub-Saharan Africa. In this regard, the paper will analyse the social and economic inequality of the burgeoning spatial practices of digital platform-based ride sharing and delivery services, which flourish in sub-Saharan Africa as a result, rather than in spite, of a legacy of discriminatory imaginative geographies.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Maxwell Mutanda is a pluridisciplinary researcher, designer and visual artist whose data visualisation and architectural practice investigates the role of globalisation, climate and technology within the built environment. He is a co-founder of Studio [D] Tale, a multidisciplinary design research firm.

His achievements include the 2018 AFRICA’SOUT! Artist-in-Residence at Denniston Hill, New York; as well as fellowships at The New Museum’s IdeasCity New Orleans; and at Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart (2020). Maxwell studied Architecture at the Bartlett, University College London and is the 2020 MSc in Sustainable Urban Development Sheehan Scholarship awardee at the University of Oxford.

His work has been featured at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen; Arc en Rêve Centre d'Architecture, Bordeaux; the 2014 and 2016 Venice Architecture Biennales; the 2015 Chicago Architecture Biennial; the National Gallery of Zimbabwe and the Oslo Architecture Triennale 2019.

Maxwell was a guest lecturer and visiting critic at the University of Cape Town and the University of Johannesburg respectively, 2016/2017. He was a speaker at the 2016 Design Indaba conference and in 2017 he participated at the International Conference on African Cultures at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe as well as the London School of Economics (LSE) Africa Summit.