

Cosmopolitan Gazes, Envisioning the Township:
Local Agents and Contemporary Tourism Encounters
in Langa, Cape Town

A Master Thesis

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“The city always also operates as a site of fantasy, desire and imagination”.
(Mbembe and Nuttall 2004, 357)

Introduction

South African township spaces have become popular destinations among international tourists, seeking to encounter social, spatial and economic legacies of the apartheid or colonial period. The ‘township tour’ is frequently the format of choice for this endeavor. Most often, local guides pick up visitors at their picturesque hotels and ship them to the township in small buses or cars, in order to venture on short guided neighborhood walks for a physical immersion into township contexts, such as challenging housing situations, Shebeens¹, local businesses and communal spaces. This form of tourism is often conceived of and understood as stage-managed by tourist businesses and local guides, designed explicitly for the explorative eye of the tourist. Township-tourism interactions, however, entail a variety of contemporary forms of engagement, often overlooked in the narrow notions of tour-driven tourism. Local entrepreneurs become involved in tourism in various ways and themselves represent the township, as well as interact with visitors. These encounters may be connected to, but also reach beyond the setting of the tour. Through digital technologies, such as Social Media or Uber and Airbnb, these actors create multiple spheres of engagement, which adds layers to the geographies and mechanisms at work in the ‘township tour’.

Nonetheless, a rich literature on tourism in South Africa’s townships intensely focuses on the ‘township tour’ as a seeming figurehead of all tourism practices therein. This literature reflects on its spatial, economic, and socio-cultural or moral implications. Building on John Urry’s seminal work on ‘the tourist gaze’ (1990), this work tends to get stuck in unidirectional notions of Othering and gazing, and the asymmetries that arise between tourists and local communities on township tours in segregated, deeply unequal South African cities. Witz et al.’s (2001) research, for instance, part of the early body of work on township tours, has highlighted this singular notion of a tourist gaze on townships. They argue, amongst other points raised, that township residents can barely escape the gaze of voyeuristic tourists. While this type of work helps us be critical of the power relations at work in any tourism encounter, they are also partial. They present a narrow notion of tourist-local interactions in the township and deny players other than the privileged visitors and the tour guide any agency. As the ‘township tour’ profits from a discourse of the white explorer in colonial settings (Witz et al. 2001), not least since it is marketed as an exploration of ‘traditional culture’ (Rolfes et al. 2009), we need to be careful not to reproduce this narrative in the stories we tell as researches (often white, privileged and European ourselves).

¹ The Shebeen originated as an alternative to pubs or bars, which black Africans were barred from during the apartheid era. On several tours I undertook in January 2019, I was taken to Shebeens in Langa, to taste local beer and encounter local residents.

Here, I build on more recent research, which helps address this issue and offers alternative modes that bring the tourism-township intersections and, especially, the gaze into view in fuller ways. With her notion of an ‘exhibition’, Ruth Butler (2012), for instance, regards the encounters on township tours as unlikely assemblages of people, materials, media and objects, which are curated by the local guide. Thereby, she opens up a space for discussing the reciprocity of gazing and ‘Othering’, as well as agency in the tourism-township spheres. Meghan Muldoon (2018), similarly, interrogates ‘township tourism’² from the perspective of local community members and proposes to ‘reverse’ the gaze by giving local residents cameras to explore what tourism is and should be doing in the township.

What surfaces in Butler (2012) and Muldoon (2018) is an awareness that local agents may not be treated as – and are not – passive objects in tourist-linked processes that traverse township terrain. Nonetheless, Muldoon and Butler still are limited to binary conceptualizations of the gaze, implicit in their notion of merely ‘reversing’, rather than diversifying it.

Therefore, I build on and critically extend their approach through my thesis research on township-tourist encounters in Langa, Cape Town. To analyze the complex ways in which tourism encounters unfold, and to draw attention to the diverse ways local township actors participate in tourism-linked processes, I based myself at a tourist destination and community space in Cape Town’s oldest township, Langa. iKhaya Le Langa, as it is called, is both, a community space and a tourist destination, where a range of local actors, from tour operators, Airbnb hosts, tour guides, community members, entrepreneurs and researchers, to tourism officials and artists congregate. In its involvement with tourism, this site has also been increasingly entangled with a variety of digital technologies, including Uber, Airbnb, a digital currency and a range of Social Media. For this research, iKhaya Le Langa offered an opportunity to anchor my research spatially in a place where multiple actors work with tourism, including the township tour. Drawing on a range of approaches in and through this site – from first-hand visits to discussion sessions and engaging with the technologies myself, I interacted with a range of agents gathering at iKhaya Le Langa who are involved with the mentioned digital technologies. I spent time with those specific agents to track the ways in which this involvement shaped and infiltrated intersections with tourists or tourism and the township space. Through these experiences, I interrogated the imaginaries which underpinned their engagement with the technologies, and what social and spatial relationships they thereby enact or envision. To share these complex forms of encounter, I articulate this data as a set of narratives which focus on six different agents and share the (re)imagination and envisioning of Langa in the cityscapes, in tourism spheres, and in a world connected through leisure travel. These narratives follow the logics of my empirical journey in Langa, first as a

² When I use the notion of township tourism henceforth, I acknowledge its vitality in a large body of scholarly work, which is foundational for my theorizing and research. I do not regard it, however, a comprehensive and unambiguous notion. I therefore propose the notion of ‘tourism in a township’, in alignment with entrepreneurs I worked with in this research or ‘tourism-township encounters’.

tourist and then as a researcher, and sometimes as a participant. They work in a twofold manner: First, they allow me to reflect on the various spheres of engagement which open up in these digitally entangled encounters. In doing so, I build the foundation elaborate on the way in which these rich interactions diversify concepts of gazing and Othering. Thereby, the agents featuring in the stories provide multiple ways of transcending the binaries which have tended to inform our theorizing in tourism studies. To get a fuller grasp of them, I draw on a critical cosmopolitan lens in the process of writing and to reading them. Recent cosmopolitan theory, as it infiltrates tourism-discourses, helps us embrace the richness of our increasingly interconnected life worlds. The narratives I build, secondly, help me reflect on my own positionality as a white European researcher in a Black township in a mode which transcends this tourist/township binary. The stories not least lay bare the way in which I come to understand the complex mix of activities shaping the spheres of engagement in tourism-township intersections. In undertaking my research within the realms of tourism in a South African township, I insert this work into more than two decades of scholarly debate, as well as into an overarching, rich body of tourism studies. After a review of this work with a specific focus on the notions of the gaze and Othering, as well as the mobility and local-global paradigms that inform them, I elaborate on critical cosmopolitan theory as a substantive theoretical framework which has underpinned my work. I then share the productive toolset this literature offers for understanding the methodologies I employed in my data collection and the multiple layers entailed in the narratives I tell on contemporary tourism encounters. In the analysis section following the narratives, I elaborate on the rich modes in which these local agents challenge our unidirectional notions of gazing and Othering in tourism encounters in the township, as well as the modes in which they manifest themselves and the township as inherently cosmopolitan. I draw on these narratives to demonstrate contemporary tourism encounters as vital sites – and the agents therein as ‘key figures³’ – for confronting difference and inequality, as well as for manifesting the role of the township in the post-Apartheid urban project of envisioning and imagining the cityscape.

³ When I use the notion of ‘key figures’ I do so referring to Salazar’s work on “key figures of mobility” (2017).

Tourism, Digital Technologies and the Complications of the Gaze

In the title of this thesis, I speak of ‘contemporary tourism encounters’. I thus want to be clear what I mean by this notion. I construct it by drawing on a rich body of literature which has theorized the various ‘contact zones’ (Butler 2010) in tourism and more recent research on the digitalization thereof. The latter thereby complicates the scholarly discourse on the former, which has intensely engaged with the visual politics at work, drawing on John Urry’s seminal work, ‘the tourist gaze’ (1990). Although increasingly acknowledged as a complex practice, the concept of ‘the gaze’ has tended to create a binary between the host and the visitor in tourism literature. Raoul Bianchi says that, when talking about the issue of gazing, we tend to underplay the agency of subjects (2009). It is not least for that reason that I intend to carve out space for them in this work as digital technologies render the visual notion in tourism more complex not least through a range of agencies entangled with them.

However, the notion of the gaze itself might be misleading. When Tim Edensor says that in the moments of encounter in tourism, “there is a wealth of more-than-visual experiences” (2018: 913) we need to be aware that the notion of the ‘gaze’ already entails not only the mere practice of ‘looking at’. John Urry’s notion, drawing on Foucault, is rooted in power relations and asymmetries, notions of mobility and Otherness, and the modes in which people can become understood (Cheong and Miller 2000, Butler 2010, Muldoon 2018). This work is founded on the understanding that the visual practices in tourism, as they become entangled in digital technologies, go deep and reach beyond the immediate ‘eyesight’. Crystal Powell holds that digitalization comes along with “re-negotiation of social relations and spaces”, whereby power relations may undergo change (2014, 15).

Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui (2016) points to opportunities for the formation of networks for active participation, across the perceived or physically manifested boundaries of class, ethnicity, race, and geopolitics. Thereby, technologies may manifest a sense of belonging, not least as a way of “mitigating marginalities”, Powell has found (2014, 11). Yet, as these technologies become entangled with tourism, their engagement, especially that of Social Media, inevitably stands in conversation with ‘the gaze’.

Sean Smith argues that “consistent visual motifs on Instagram echo a colonial iconography that sees tourist destinations as available for possession and consumption”. He goes on to say that the “visual tropes” we may find on Social Media “prefigure the tourist as the rightful occupant and user of local spaces in a way that echoes the colonial seizure of foreign lands” (2018, 173). Without questioning these insights per se, I would like to point out that these arguments build on the binaries and asymmetries which are prevalent in the notion of ‘gazing’, which strongly orients at the privileged tourist as ‘agent’ in the moments of encounter.

What has received little focus to date, however, is how such digital technologies, including Social Media, have been engaged by local agents, rather than visitors. As Margaret Swain (2009) holds that the engagement of digital technologies bears the potential to both transcend and create boundaries, we need to take their case particularly seriously when we find ourselves in a fragmented cityscape and a space which has historically been faced with social, spatial and economic boundaries, such as the South African township (Jürgens et al. 2013). The specific intersection of digital technologies and tourism in a township has not been interrogated to date. The idea of studying such ‘contemporary tourism encounters’ thus points to the need for a careful review of the modes in which we have come to understand the ‘contact zones’ of tourism, both empirically and conceptually, in the post-Apartheid township spaces. In the following section, I therefore intend to revisit the knowledge production on what has become commonly denominated as ‘township tourism’.

There is one thing to be clear about: Contrary to what the notion of ‘township tourism’ might imply, townships are not homogenous spaces, neither internally, nor in comparison with each other. What they have in common, is that they were created under colonial and apartheid city planning, informed by racist and segregationist ideologies - which are often still physically and economically manifested today. This points to the latent controversy of tourism encounters in the township space, creating intersections of privileged travelers gazing at local residents, many of whom have experienced continuous marginalization. While townships have not evolved the same post-Apartheid, what is somewhat homogenous is the gaze employed in study of tourism therein, oriented toward the format of the ‘township tour’.

What is at Stake in Gazing at and from within the Township Tour?

Ever since the tourist industry has gained heightened interest⁴ in the township space, it has become a popular format among tourists. Thereby, townships tours have manifested the township as a center stage for encountering public history, cultural heritage, tradition, and authenticity derived from tangible dilapidation and poverty (Booyens 2010, Frenzel and Koens 2012). A quick internet research results in promises of “eye-opening” tours through the “infamous” urban areas, offering revelations of the “true face” of the city, and led by guides who are “dedicated to driving the townships forward and away from their Apartheid history” (Siviwe Tours, 2019 and iMzu Tours, 2019). In the course of its popularity, the ‘township tour’ has thus not remained a key notion for tourists only. Considering the large body of work, the ‘township tour’ seems to have become the

⁴ An estimated third of all tourists coming to the Western Cape each year visit some of the townships in the Cape Flats (Frenzel 2012). Popular destinations are Langa, as the oldest township, Khayelitsha, Gugulethu and Philippi or Imizamo Yethu. There is still a lack of research on how exactly these choices are made. The inclusion of particular townships in tourism activities might be dependent on an array of factors, ranging from potential partnerships, existing infrastructures, safety, as well as accessibility or availability of cultural heritage and historical sites. This question, however, would deserve research of its own and shall not be the focus of this work.

figurehead of tourism activities in the township space and the preferred format through which scholars have described and theorized them. They have interrogated its spatial, economic, and socio-cultural or moral implications (Witz et al. 2001, Butler 2010, Booyens 2010, Frenzel et al. 2012, Muldoon 2018). I am focusing on the latter two in this review, as they build the very foundation for my work, not least because they intensely engage notions of Othering and ‘gazing’. Butler regards the latter as particularly controversial in ‘township tourism’ since there are “far-reaching asymmetries between privileged tourists and local residents”, deriving from the fact that local residents are conceived of as “rather immobile” (Butler 2010, 24), opposed to the tourist as a ‘key figure’ of mobility (Salazar 2017). Thus, Leslie Witz et al. find that local residents can hardly escape the ‘tourist gaze’ when living spaces are invaded, and when the township livelihoods are put “on show for the eyes of whites”, nourishing a voyeuristic endeavor of postulating poverty as attraction (2001, 284). I hold that conceiving of local residents as immobile bears the risk of conceptualizing tourism encounters in a binary, and highly unequal, way. This is not to say that we should stay silent on the fact that mobility is one of the ways in which asymmetries in power and privilege in tourism surface. Yet, we should also be clear that it may pose a trap for the study of tourism in the township. Mobility is one of the ways in which scholars have attributed agency to the gaze. In short: in scholarly work, the physically mobile person is the one who gazes, the physically immobile, often the local residents, is the one who is exposed. Irma Booyens has illustrated, however, that we may find conscious mechanisms of attracting the gaze. However, the economic incentives they are driven by further complicate problems of power, as township dwellers become financially dependent on the visual desires of the tourist. The perverseness thereof culminates in the fact that township tourism builds on the truthfulness and authenticity which tends to be associated with poverty (Booyens 2010, Ellapen 2007). Ironically, these are desirable aspects especially for those visitors who engage with the moral implications of their presence, says Kellee Caton (2012). Thus, if we understand the township tour as feeding on the desire to explore the spatial and socio-cultural Other, we need to be aware that when people “embody difference for each other”, contexts of uneven power relations may lead to “misunderstanding, ambivalence, or hostility” (Radice 2017, 56). Muldoon illustrated that this is taken to an extreme in ‘township tourism’, where local residents are “represented as the marginalized pole in the us-versus-them binary” (Muldoon 2018, 30). What she addresses here is a practice of Othering, which perpetuates prejudice, discrimination, and injustice (McQuarrie in Mills et al. 2010, 635). Increasingly aware of this problem, tours have therefore sought to allow for more proximity, taking visitors to local social spaces, such as a Shebeen. Yet despite these close encounters, the interaction between tourists and local residents remains minimal (Booyens 2010). Thus, when Chris Gibson holds tourism encounters to be “potentially productive” due to a range of “possibilities to learn, address wrongs and demonstrate commitment to equality” (2010, 62), we need to critically interrogate the settings in which this is made possible, who is in charge, and what exactly we are able to discover within them.

Who Tells Stories of the post-Apartheid Township in Tourism?

Butler regards the encounters in ‘township tourism’ as a particular mode of telling a story (2012), as well as an opportunity to “enact a different relationship with urban space” (Butler 2010, 26). Thereby, she conceives of the ‘township tour’ as part of “a larger post-apartheid project of re-imagining the townships and public discourses on them” (2010, 26). Similarly, Laura Wright, in her postcolonial, ecofeminist approach, emphasizes the crucial role for the tours for the representation of a ‘new’ South Africa.

Thus, tourism becomes a resource for narrating the township in the post-Apartheid cityscape. What is unclear in Butler’s hopeful view of ‘township tourism’, however, is how exactly the relationship with urban space is enacted and how it features in or is instilled by the narratives produced. If we produce them through asymmetrical contact zones, such as the ones created on the ‘township tour’, it is well worth questioning the grounds our storytelling is built on. In other words, we need to ask what kind of relationship with urban space we enact in different tourism settings, whose narratives surface therein and how they might influence the knowledge produced and the voices featuring in our work. What we are facing here, then, is an issue of agency: If there is a lack of engagement of the communities visited on township tours, as Booyens argues (2010), the study of tourism is prone to reproduce this exclusion in their work. This might be particularly the case as township tourism becomes ever more popular. Muldoon says that, since the voices of the “subaltern” are always “filtered through the perspective of mainstream”, they are not able to speak (2018, 30). We might be facing a similar case with township tourism as it becomes a part of mass tourism (Frenzel 2012) where ‘subaltern’ agents in these orchestrated encounters remain unheard. Thus, it is not only ‘township tourism’ which poses “a morally fraught experience”, as Muldoon says, but also, the study thereof (2018, 1). To put this more straight-forwardly: The format of the township tour only allows for a partial understanding of the multiple modes of reflecting on the city through tourism, and agency is only attributed asymmetrically.

The critical study of ‘township tourism’ has been faced with a conundrum in this regard: As scholars criticize the mode in which tourism takes place in South Africa’s townships, they tend to be informed by and move within the limiting format they seek to study. In other words, the problem of ‘township tourism’ can only be described to the extent which the format of the township tour has allowed, and that means that a range of ‘gazes’ is overlooked in the tourism encounters it entails, especially those of the host community. Several scholars (Cheong and Miller 2000, Butler 2012, Muldoon 2018) have sought to address this issue, turning towards the gaze of the community and providing a fuller conceptualization of the visual practices at work in the tourism encounter. I draw on Butler and Muldoon especially, re-visiting their interventions to ‘reverse the gaze’. Thereby, I carve out space for my work drawing on both, the approach they propose as well as the shortcomings their notion of ‘gazing’ entails.

Reversing the Gaze, Embracing the Agent: Transitions in the Study of 'Township Tourism'

Both Butler and Muldoon works nibble at the asymmetrical framework of the 'township tour' and the problems it may entail due to the visual practices involved. Acknowledging the gaze as "a highly powerful social force" (2018, 42), both Butler and Muldoon challenge its mechanisms. Butler proposes to re-think the tour as an "exhibition", which entails "unlikely assemblages" of people, objects, spaces and media (2012, 215). If we do so, there is an opportunity to acknowledge the curatorship, and thus, responsibility, of the tour guide and to regard the tourists not only as 'voyeurs', but also as being exhibited themselves. The notion of the Other is thereby not necessarily ascribed to the local residents, but to any agent involved in the sphere of encounter. The way in which we conceptualize 'gazing' in these 'exhibitions', however, needs to be reviewed carefully because there is not much at stake for the visitors. Therefore, Butler proposes a series of "curatorial interventions", through which she may not be directly addressing the inequalities and problems at work on township tours, but in which she makes them "visible and difficult to accept" (2012, 219). Amongst else, she proposes for residents to turn the camera towards the visitors and to interview them, contrary to the converse procedure of the tours. Thereby, she does not per se reject the idea of touring the townships, but rather, intends to shift perspectives and roles. What Butler points to is the necessity for tourism to be practiced, but also studied, as a mutual exploration of difference, of 'gazing' at each other. Furthermore, I regard her acknowledgement of the curatorship of the guide a crucial step towards an awareness of the agencies at work in tourism encounters beyond the moving body of the traveler.

From within the same stream of thought, Muldoon pursues to "learn about how hosts gaze back at the tourists" (2018, 1). In this endeavor, she gives cameras to township residents and asks them to take pictures of how they perceive tourism and how they would like it to be.

There are two insights that emerge out of her work which are particularly foundational for my work: First, she finds that "hosts are capable of resisting or even rebuffing the tourists' gaze if they perceive that the costs of tourism will outweigh the benefits". Secondly, she says that, "tourists may be particularly vulnerable to the gaze of the hosts due to their heightened visibility in the tourism locale as well as their unfamiliarity" with it (2018, 180). What is particularly important to take further, for me, is the notion that the local agents she focuses on in her work are asked to reflect on and negotiate the 'tourist gaze' very consciously. This points to the productivity of focusing more intensely on the multiple orchestrations which are at work in any given tourism encounter. In addition to that, I would like to raise attention to the ways in which the tourist can be postulated as the exposed Other due to their illiteracy of the visited environment. I intend to pay attention to both in my work.

However, the gaze is not a binary problem which can be addressed simply by "reversing" it. It is the result of a particular way of orchestrating, but also, of conceptualizing tourism

encounters, and it is deeply entangled with notions of agency. As I have pointed out earlier, the concept of the gaze relates to more than purely visual aspects and entails modes of understanding, reading, conceptualizing and constructing the Other (Urry 1990). The insight that I hold most vital to Butler's and Muldoon's work, then, is that "the host is not a un-agentic object" (Muldoon 2018, 47) when the problem on township tours is that "those in the Majority World are understood to have little or no agency in resisting the demands of the tourist gaze" (Muldoon 2018, 43). I wonder, then, under what circumstances the tourist gaze might be not resisted at all and whether it might even be regarded a resource. Once we acknowledge that local actors have the agency and the desire to attract and engage with the gaze, we need to find a mode of understanding both in a mode that transcends merely economic reasoning and grabs the complexity at work. It is what I intend to pave the way for with this work.

As we try to make sense of for whom and how the tourist gaze can constitute a powerful tool, this question is complicated in a twofold manner: First, through scholars' own moralities and their assumptions about the disruptive forces of the gaze and secondly, through the very position from which scholars attempt to 'gaze' at the whole situation. In recognizing that the researchers are involved in the process of gazing as well, we can fully address the stakes at work in the study of the 'township tour', which is the inability to escape the asymmetries of the very format which they challenge. In short: The way in which agencies, responsibilities, hopes and stakes of the contested case of tourism in the South African township can be understood, is already pre-defined by the boundaries set by the township tour. Muldoon herself says that "representations are embedded within relationships of power and become problem when they reinforce stereotypes that privilege dominant groups at the expense of others" (2018, 34). I hold that it is right there where we can find the true blind spots of 'township tourism' studies.

What does not surface in Butler's notion of an 'exhibition', then, is how the gaze is pre-constructed, reflected, negotiated, and engaged with, as well as how it stands in conversation with other gazes. There is a need to understand how the politics of gazing reach beyond the immediate tourism encounter, including the formation of perceptions, imaginaries, modes of envisioning and re-evaluating the cityscapes it takes place in. This work then, pursues an account of the multiple layers of the gaze in the face of its complex entanglement with notions of mobility, our relationships with the environment – and with digital technologies.

This is not to say that this project – in pursuing an alternative mode of doing tourism research in the township through the focus on a multiplicity of contemporary encounters – is exempt from the risks of 'overlooking' or silencing agents. Rather, it roots in the conviction that we need to diversify the study of tourism encounters in the township and the stories we tell about them. As scholars have carved out a space where we can direct our focus toward agency involved in the practices of tourism in the township, we need a more complex and fuller account of tourism encounters, which moves away from the binaries of explorer-versus-Other. Consequently, we need a theoretical framework which embraces complexity.

To do so, I intensely draw on Critical Cosmopolitan Theory as it has started to increasingly infiltrate Tourism Studies in recent years and as it transcends the dichotomies which have underpinned theorizing therein. In the next section, I therefore extensively elaborate on the notion of the Cosmopolitan and the modes in which it informs my methodology as well as theorizing. I thereby equip us with the very toolset understand the spheres of engagement which local agents create through digital technologies.

Through the Cosmopolitan Lens: Local Agents and Contemporary Tourism Encounters in the Township

The review of the rich body of scholarly work on tourism encounters in the township has illustrated that dealing with mechanisms of Othering and visual practices in the study of ‘township tourism’, also means re-visiting mobility paradigms, notions of difference and understandings of local and global. These are notions which have been at the very center of Critical Cosmopolitan discourse in Tourism Studies. Talking about cosmopolitanism, I therefore insert myself into a network of discourses in which the notion has been understood in various ways, wherefore it is crucial to be clear about the mode in which I employ it. We will therefore first explore general definitions of what the cosmopolitan entails, before we move on to have a look at the ways in which it challenges binary notions of Othering, mobilities, and local-global relations.

For Swain, in her work on the “cosmopolitan hope of tourism”, cosmopolitanism is, simply, “a way of being in the world” (2009, 505). Radice offers a more specific notion, which I hold particularly productive for this project and its strong focus on agents in an urban context: She holds that the cosmopolitan entails “encounters between people who embody ‘cultural difference’ for each other”, and which arises in the ‘microcosm’ of the multi ethnic city” (2017, 5). I would like to add that these encounters arise even more so as this multi-ethnic city is infiltrated by masses of foreign visitors and as it becomes entangled in digital practices. In the face of the problem of Othering carved out earlier, however, we need to be clear about what the notion of the Other entails exactly in Critical Cosmopolitan Theory. I suggest that a cosmopolitan notion of ‘Otherness’ needs to be read differently from the concept, or actual practice, of Othering. While Othering entails a demarcation, distancing and, often, value judgement of a socio-cultural Other, a cosmopolitan attitude entails openness and desire to engage with perceived difference, rather than to establish a hierarchy. Thereby, it “emphasizes human unity” at the same time as it acknowledges “cultural particularities”, and entails “respect for legitimate difference”. In short, cosmopolitanism is, says Vincenzo Cicchelli, “an attitude of openness and responsibility towards the plurality of humanity” (2014, 221).

Despite or possibly because of these hopeful notions, the concept of cosmopolitanism has been confronted with conceptual obscurities in the course of being taken to practical realms. Stefanie Plage et al. point to the “‘fuzzy’ understandings thereof revolving in scholarly work, wherefore we “need to pinpoint differences between individuals’ pragmatic strategies and performances to outlooks that make encounters cosmopolitan”

(2017, 8). They attempt to provide a framework for the latter and argue that “the fine line between cosmopolitan and chance encounters is congruent with individuals’ capacity to reflect on their positionality” (2017, 5). It is precisely the reflections of local agents on their positionality in the contemporary tourism encounters which constitutes the material for the narratives I curate in this work. Whether or not we read an encounter as cosmopolitan, then, is also largely connected to our ability to get to the core of agents’ aspirations, imaginaries, or literacies at work. Do we regard it as entailing a pragmatic, yet not specifically aspired to, readiness to engage with the Other, or do we root it in an active pursuit of doing so? I here propose the latter for this work and the agents I portray: In the imaginaries that inform their engagement with digital technologies in tours, we will discover a desire to address and debate difference and inequality as well as an intra-urban and global consciousness and “concomitant sense of belonging” (Salazar 2015, 51). When Jon Binnie et al. invite scholars to explore the “kinds of spaces and places within cities where the cosmopolitan is located” (2006, 14), I reply that cosmopolitanism is deeply rooted in individuals’ attitudes and practices. I say so not only drawing on the insights above, but also on the modes in which mobility, and local-global relations have been conceptualized in Critical Cosmopolitan Theory, whereby the two are deeply intertwined. When Swain says that tourism leads to a “re-evaluation of local places”, then we might, in return, need ask how the local place, in the course of becoming part global discourses, re-evaluates that which is considered global (2009, 521). Salazar has intensely engaged with the notion of glocalization to talk about the reciprocity of the local and the global flows and practices. In his study of tour guides in Indonesia, he has found that “the global and the local are intimately intertwined” (2005, 628). However, the global is often assumed to be dominating, changing, and manipulating the local, says Salazar (2005). More precisely: There is a “tendency to perceive globalization as involving only large-scale macro-sociological processes, to the neglect of how they are localized”. However, globalization “always takes place in some locality, while at the same time, the local is (re)produced in discourses of globalization”. Thus, the local contains much that is global, while the latter is increasingly penetrated and reshaped by many locals” (2005, 630). Drawing on this earlier operationalization of glocalization proves particularly productive with regards to the recent, complex notions of cosmopolitanism as well. Ulf Hannerz, in his political approach to the notion of the cosmopolitan, says that “if the term ‘globalization’ had to a remarkable extent been appropriated to refer to the triumphant march of capitalism, ‘cosmopolitanism’ suggested that human beings could relate to the world not only as consumers but also as citizens” (2004, 71). In that sense, however, the understanding of cosmopolitanism seems to have been reduced to a sense of ‘being at home in the world’ (Hannerz 2004, 69), in which ‘the local’ tends to be described as the opposite of ‘the cosmopolitan’, which is more often equated with global processes. Black, however, has beautifully flipped this notion around and proposes a way to acknowledge modes of “recognizing the world through the home” (2006, 46). In her reading of Amitav Ghosh's fiction *The Shadow Lines* (1988), she sheds light on “the intimacy between the familial and the foreign” and understands “the home and the world as collaborative, rather than

competing realities” and that “modern cosmopolitanism might paradoxically emerge through an embrace of domesticity and kinship” (2006, 45). I find Black’s analysis particularly compelling because it situates the cosmopolitan in the hyperlocal and familiar space, the home, and thereby challenges theorizing which treats the global and the local as oppositional. Favoring a static and exclusionary vision of cultures and localities, this model does not fully address the complex interactions between people and their environments. Black’s analysis stands in direct conversation with recent notions of cosmopolitanism in Tourism Studies, which challenge the rigid idea of mobilities and break with the modes in which local residents have been regarded as “immobile” and, thus, ‘non-cosmopolitan’.

Salazar, who holds that “one not only becomes cosmopolitan through travel, but also through exposure to the rapid circulation of global signs and images” (2015, 54). Practices of tourism, especially when entangled in digital technologies, provide such a regular flow of “global signs and images”. I take from this that cosmopolitan aspirations, a notion which Radice uses extensively (2017), as well as their enactment, are not reserved for the traveler alone. Mobility paradigms have played a crucial role in tourism studies in the post-Apartheid township (Salazar 2017), and I hold that Critical Cosmopolitan Theory offers us an opportunity to rework them. Radice, thus, proposes the notion of ‘personal micro-cosmopolitanism’ as “a relation between persons that does not require travel”. In other words: People can be “spatially local but socially cosmopolitan” (2017, 46). She further elaborates that it may be the “mobility of the imagination, rather than mobility of the physical person” which is vital to the development of “cosmopolitan competencies” (2017, 53). Simply put, the ‘cosmopolitan condition’ is not reserved to those who physically move through space. Mobility, thus might need to be treated more as resource than as prerequisite for becoming cosmopolitan. In return, being cosmopolitan embodies a rich set of mobilities which are strongly connected to imaginaries, as well as knowledges and understandings.

Salazar therefore concludes that cosmopolites are “expert users of cross-cultural frames” (2015, 53). Johnson proposes the idea of ‘cultural literacy’, which “as cosmopolitan capital, provides agency to negotiate cultures” (2014, 259). Similarly, Radice understands cosmopolitanism as a skill set of cross-cultural understanding which is ever refined in the course of a “willingness to engage with the ‘Other’” (2017, 46). It is the idea of a skill set, an expertise, entailed in the notion of the cosmopolitan which I suggest to keep in mind especially as we begin to focus on agencies. What is implicit in these ideas is that tourism has the potential to be a journey of exploration and opportunity to accumulate cosmopolitan capital - visually, physically and socio-culturally - for everyone involved in the spheres it opens up, like Butler has pointed to with her notion of an ‘exhibition’. It is on this foundation that I have formed the premise that contemporary tourism encounters are a cosmopolitan resource. Salazar has addressed this possibility in his study on local tour guides in Indonesia, where he has found that “the tourism encounter is the liminal setting par excellence in which they [the tour guides] can build up their cosmopolitan capital” (Salazar 2015, 53). Consequently, an “analysis of embodied cosmopolitanism”

leads us to an acknowledgement of ‘cosmopolites’ in the environments we base our research in. The recognition of them is a long necessary step toward what Cichelli’s “ordinary cosmopolitanism” (2014, 218), away from the bourgeois stereotype of privileged globetrotters. In short: Cosmopolites are key agents in project of imagining and negotiating the city.

However, in contexts where tourism activities do not bear out lightly, such as the post-Apartheid township spaces, we must be cautious not to overlook the friction created in cosmopolitan endeavors. Thus, when Szerszynski and Urry suggest “to explore the kinds of cosmopolitanism in which this tension is avoided or overcome” (2006, 113), I wonder, if we should not, rather, acknowledge situations where tension is actually created - especially in settings where a desire to engage with difference is also entangled with unequal power relations? In fact, creating that tension might be necessary to address those debates that are crucial to have on the trajectory to an equal cityscape in the first place. The “mediating vision between peoples and places”, which both tourism and cosmopolitanism provide according to Patricia Johnson might necessarily entail friction (2014, 257). I consider this friction through my research where it surfaces not only in the narratives I write but also, in entering and gazing at spheres of engagements as a hybrid of tourist and researcher. I intend to elaborate on these roles and positionalities more deeply in the context of locating and defining my research.

A Place of Tourism-Township Intersections: iKhaya Le Langa

iKhaya Le Langa, as both tourist destination and community space in Langa, Cape Town, constituted the anchor for my empirical journey. Having encountered it, in fact, on one of the tours I ventured on in January 2019, it provided a compelling environment for the study of tourism practices from within a tourism destination and also, in a contemporary manner. The multiple digital technologies – a digital currency, Uber, Airbnb and various Social Media – which are entangled with this space constituted the hook for my data collection: I pursued to interrogate the multiplicity of agents who engage them and the imaginaries that underpin this engagement. I here first characterize iKhaya Le Langa more precisely, before I delve into my methodology and packaging of my data.

iKhaya Le Langa is at the heart of an endeavor to, in collaboration with the local community, re-vitalize the Langa Quarter, an area of five hundred homes and seven thousand inhabitants - as opposed to the approximately 52'000 living in the whole of Langa – into a greener, cleaner and safer space, at the same time as Langa is re-imagined as the actual center of post-Apartheid Cape Town⁵. It consists of a vast community space, a diner and coffee shop, art store, workshop, office and conference rooms. Registered as NPO (not-for-profit organization), iKhaya Le Langa is probably best described as urban think-tank: A hub for skill and idea development and for gathering a range of local agents; especially local youth, artists, entrepreneurs, or those in the making, as well as tourism officials and tour operators, interns and students. It is not least for that reason that it posed a fruitful ground for my field work. In the course of postulating itself as a tourist space, iKhaya Le Langa has become increasingly involved with digital technologies. It partnered with Airbnb, made use of several Social Media channels to make its activities and the community seen and it started to introduce a digital currency system in Langa, called UBU. At the same time, Uber has emerged as a means of transportation, opposing the tour buses which have dominated the view in the course of a growing tourist influx. The digital technologies are thereby intended for use in the whole of Langa and are not restricted to the spatialities of iKhaya Le Langa or the Langa Quarter, but they are surely deeply rooted in it.

Acknowledging iKhaya Le Langa as both, a place of community engagement and tourism practices, it is a haven for my endeavor to embrace contemporary developments in tourism from within the township and one of its tourism spaces, rather than limited by a particular format – the township tour. What I hold extraordinary for iKhaya Le Langa as a tourist space is that, through its involvement with digital technologies, it is not simply part of an “exhibition” to be gazed at by foreign visitors, but a space of engagement for both visitors and community members. The digital technologies thereby knit together a range of local

⁵ This information is gathered from an interview with the director of iKhaya Le Langa, Tony Elvin, in January 2019.

agents moving on the intersection of tourism and everyday lives. Hence, the scope of this research project was to explore the modes in which local agents engage digital technologies on the intersection of tourism and everyday lives, what imaginaries and aspirations inform this engagement, and how it reflects on the township space in the cityscapes at large.

Although I agree with Keith Hollinshead et al.'s (2009) notion that everyone working in or alongside tourism is an agent, be it consciously or unconsciously, I decided for an interrogation consciously chosen agencies – not least in order to understand the imaginaries which inform their engagement with digital technologies in tourism. Aware that the attribution of agency might be prone to over-interpretation, I focused on local agents who both, engage with digital technologies and with iKhaya le Langa as a community and tourism space. This ensures that they are aware that their activities and practices are deeply entangled with tourism. This might be more obvious for Airbnb, but less so for Uber, Social Media and the digital currency. Furthermore, I hold that, as we interrogate the spheres which local agents create through digital technologies in tourism, we need to be aware of the ways in which they are anchored in physical and social – in short: tangible – landscapes as well.

By following this principle, I have inevitably excluded a range of voices, which surely would have had something to say about tourism in Langa or the city of Cape Town at large. This does not foreclose that anyone who enters contact zones of tourism unconsciously or unplanned is not a local agent or has nothing to offer for understanding the role of tourism in and for (re)imagining Langa. The aim of this research was, however, to carve out space for the imaginaries, desires, hopes and visions which inform the conscious engagement with tourism in the urban social and physical environment through digital technologies and this was granted by working with local agents who both, get involved with a place that clearly declares itself to be a tourist destination, and who decide to engage with digital technologies in the tourist industry. These agents were community members, as well as artists, tour guides, travelers, visitors, tour operators, or local guides and entrepreneurs – or those in the making.

What this work will not do, thereby, is to argue for any particular, measurable benefit of the digital technologies or to suggest the possibility of a 'spill-over' effect to the whole of Langa and the diverse neighborhoods it entails. This would not only deny the heterogeneity and socio-spatial diversity of Langa itself, but also, it would require me to wear an economic or developmental lens, which I do not hold adequate or comprehensive in the particular case of tourism in Langa – although one might easily slip into that kind of reading, since digital technologies are generally conflated in a notion of progress and development. However, an increase of digital technologies in tourism and beyond may well bear friction, as they are entangled in discourses of affordability, know-how and accessibility. Thus, this work will rather carve out a space where multiple and emergent agencies can be acknowledged, explored, and interrogated, and where their imaginaries, aspirations, knowledges and desires stand in conversation with each other, the cityscapes, and with ways of conceptualizing tourism encounters. I thus aim to contribute to a growing body of literature outlining the multiple ways in which digital technologies are engaged in tourism

and I do so in a context where I see a need for a consideration thereof in the first place: A post-apartheid township.

It is crucial to note that the digital technologies which local agents engage with are themselves worthy of intense study, interrogation and critical reflection, as they may cause controversy on multiple levels. None of them are exempt from the debates which shape our everyday lives and (urban) environments. The focus here, however, shall be on individuals' agencies, wherefore I regard the digital technologies more of a resource for the pursuit and realization of particular visions and imaginaries through tourism, rather than to treat them as debates in themselves. Furthermore, not all of the digital technologies involved in my study in Langa emerged in our world in an endeavor to shape tourism (such as Airbnb did), or it has not remained their only scope at least. However, in the course of their development, they have all become entangled with practices of tourism at iKhaya Le Langa, through multiple agents pursuing a range of scopes for themselves and for Langa, as we shall explore.

Data Collection: Networks of Technologies and Local Agents

To analyze the complex ways in which contemporary tourism encounters unfold in the township, and to draw attention to the diverse ways local township actors participate in them, I started my data collection with field observations in iKhaya Le Langa, to gain an overview on the agents who gather in this space. After a week of observations and note-keeping, I drew on a range of approaches – from first-hand visits to discussion sessions and engaging with the technologies myself – to engage with the agents who are involved with the several digital technologies. I spent time with them to track and interrogate the ways in which this engagement shaped and infiltrated encounters with tourists and tourism. Through these experiences, I then asked them to reflect on the modes in which they get involved in tourism encounters, the imaginaries which underpinned their engagement and what social and spatial relationships they thereby enact or envision. Most of the participants I worked with were born in Langa. With two exceptions: Iain, the manager of a tour operator which regularly schedules tours to iKhaya Le Langa, and Tony, its founder. All agents are thereby inter-connected through iKhaya Le Langa as a tourist destination and community space, as well as the engagement with various digital technologies entangled with tourism.

In semi-structured, narrative interviews I interrogated the agents' incentives, aims, aspirations, and imaginaries informing this engagement, the experiences they gathered, challenges they came across, impacts on their perception of Langa, their practices and the physical environment they move in, the resources needed to put in place, as well as the skills and knowledge required. In many ways, I thereby took a participatory approach, to add a richer understanding to the interviews I undertook. This had me balance out several roles in the spaces I entered during my field work: The one of a visitor or tourist, as well as a researcher, observer, participant and also, as a friend or temporary family member, i.e. when I stayed at an Airbnb, went on neighborhood walks through Langa, shared many

coffees and conversations with some of the agents, participated in meetings regarding the establishment of the digital currency, or when I was part of a brainstorming for a marketing campaign on Airbnb and organized a meeting to discuss the next steps to be taken with regards to the digital currency, UBU. I thereby collected nearly twelve hours of recorded interview material, as well as ten pages of analogous and digital diary entries and field notes taken daily when recording was impossible, pictures and, once I returned, several emails and Whatsapp messages exchanged with the participants. The methods were often chosen situationally and they reflected the encounter and relationship with the respective local agents. As the Airbnb host I stayed with is a very busy woman, taking care of her entrepreneurial activities as well as her husband, she did not have time for a lengthy interview. In this situation, I decided to do participant observation and complement the interview with extensive notes. The observation of the most suitable research method for the different agents I interrogated required flexibility, yet it was a vital component of my methodology.

Writing Contemporary Tourism Encounters: Narratives as a Research Product

Paying attention to the multiple modes of engaging with tourism through digital technologies entails an opportunity to listen to the many ways in which local agents desire to represent and imagine the urban spaces they inhabit and the identity they want to create for them. If “every township tour tells a story”, as Butler says, then so does every engagement with a digital technology. I thus package my data as stories on the modes in which local agents engage the digital technologies in and through iKhaya Le Langa. Each narrative, thereby, takes us one step further on our journey across multiple contemporary modes of engaging with tourism, envisioning the township and across the imaginaries informing it. Not all narratives of local agents will be featured in this work, for reasons of focus developed for making my argument, as well as limitations in its extent. These narratives work in a twofold manner: First, they allow me to reflect back on the concepts of gazing and Othering, wearing both a personal lens and a Critical Cosmopolitan one to write and read them in a rich way. Secondly, they help me reflect on my own positionality as a white European researcher in a Black township in a way that transcends the tourist/township binary and lays bare the way in which I come to understand the spheres of engagement. Writing these narratives, I respond to Tina Koch’s earlier call for incorporating a “reflexive account into the research product by sign-posting to readers what is going on while researching”, as well as the retrospection thereafter (1998, 1189). The narratives thereby accompany not only my theorizing, but also, reflect the physical journey and the encounters with local agents. When story-telling work has often been “described as unscientific, full of bias or entirely personal” (Koch 1998, 1187), this work suggests to regard the narrative an upright and rigorous way of dealing with the data collected, for it holds the possibility to enact and reflect relationships with the people and places encountered as well with the self. They thus speak of and are, themselves, a cosmopolitan endeavor, an explorative work across boundaries which I undertake.

Situating Myself in the Narratives: Navigating Positionalities

Given that my research product consists of multiple short stories, my subjectivities and positionalities shall never be underestimated in the course of the exploration and analysis of my data. There is ambiguity in the notion of agency all throughout this work. In interrogating the agencies, knowledge, and multiple imaginaries of local agents, I become myself an agent. Even more controversially, I take the authority to let other agencies surface through my writing and by that, I put into words what is, in fact, usually practiced and not narrated. In David Herman's sense, then, I map "words onto worlds", the narratives simultaneously speak of and are a way of worldmaking (in Heinen and Sommer 2009, 71). While I was doing my field work in Cape Town, thus, I challenged on several occasions, to explain why it should be me, of all people, who gets to tell these stories. It is the one question I have, in fact, been failing to answer all throughout my research phase. Why should it be me? A white person, educated in a Western context, young, and highly privileged. There are two convictions I have been able to form in the course of not only doing field work, but writing it up and seeing it in conversation with other work in contested realms, inspired by Johnson's analysis of her own risk-taking in research and Richa Nagar's reflections on feminist scholarship and 'boundary-crossings'. First and foremost, I came to acknowledge that my "writing is not just used to learn about those under investigation" but, and maybe even more so, about myself as investigator (Johnson 2009, 484), or as I propose for this work: A curator. Secondly, I continuously keep in mind Johnson's reflections on "the beliefs that have brought her to the realm" from which she speaks. They encourage her full participation "not in the creation of an objective truth but in a contribution toward understanding" the nature of the topic she investigates. Nagar says that it is "critical to ask what borders we cross" and "in whose interests" we do so (2014, 86). Did I have an interest in carving out particularly inspiring and positive narratives of local agents in an industry which has, in fact, perversely profited from the racist ideologies this city still speaks of, loud and clear? I did for sure. Thus, despite the curatorship or authorship I claim in this work, it is inevitable to ignore the literacies I lack as I enter, exit and reflect the field I have chosen for this research and the discourses that I was and am surrounded by which are difficult to stay silent on – but at the same time are not for me to be part of. I thus write this work, too, in an endeavor to occupy space for the agents yet to be seen, acknowledged and empowered, the imaginaries yet to be pursued, and the stories yet to be told. As a research product, they lay bare my empirical journey, and present a multiplicity of (emergent) agents who engage with digital technologies. Then, they allow me to analyze and elaborate on their conceptual implications for Critical Tourism Studies, re-visiting the notion of the gaze, local and global and mobility paradigms.

"With new plots come new lives", says Laurel Richardson in her call to reject "entrenched cultural stories" and to write, instead "collective-stories which both resist and alter the accepted norm" (2001, 37). The narratives that follow respond to this in that they propose an alternative mode of doing research: Flexible, situational, and guided through a

continuous conversation with the encountered and a recalibration of the path taken. The stories follow my journey to iKhaya Le Langa, meeting a wide variety of individuals engaged in tourism and thereby discovering a rich set of encounters with, in and through tourism. I write them in present tense, to cut right into the sphere of engagement, created by local agents as they get involved with digital technologies, as well as through my interrogation thereof. I link the different narratives through short reflections and complementary notes on that which is narrated.

The first story takes us right to a key moment in my research, on the last of a set of guided tours I undertook in January 2019.

PART **1**

NARRATIVES

Encountering iKhaya Le Langa: A Key Moment

Sabelo awaits me with a bottle of cold water and a warm handshake. I catch a glimpse of the tiny pin showing his name next to an even tinier South African flag. We take a seat on a worn-out sofa at a hostel which is surrounded by non-indigenous trees in Gardens, Cape Town. Or somewhere near Gardens, at least. After months spent in the Mother City, I am still never quite sure where neighborhoods end, here, in the City Bowl. The screen on Sabelo's phone asks: "Where to?" offering a selection of drivers nearby. "Are you ready for your tour today?" I am startled. Although Uber generally poses a comfortable way to navigate the vast cityscapes, especially for tourists who are illiterate of them, it is rather unusual to encounter it as a means of transportation for a guided tour to townships in the Cape Flats. Especially so when having spent several days in the back of tour buses. Only two days earlier, I had hardly left the red coach, which the guide, with a matching red shirt, was maneuvering through the narrow, bumpy roads of an informal settlement. As our driver arrives, Sabelo takes a seat in the front and turns towards me the whole ride. Along the fenced railway lines, our car cuts through Pinelands and Langa - an originally white neighborhood on the right, a black township on the left - before we come to a halt at a bright orange wall. "iKhaya le Langa" is written there, in big white letters. "Let's meet Tony", says Sabelo. The tour I am on is called "City Futures" and it is supposed to take me to people and places in the townships that are shaping a different future for the city of Cape Town. What is, in fact, remarkable, is that it was not advertised as 'township tour' although it did take me exclusively to townships, more specifically Langa and Khayelitsha. Tony, manager of iKhaya Le Langa, is my first encounter today. Tony came to Cape Town in 2004. Having celebrated successes with Jamie Oliver's social enterprise restaurants. Passionate about South Africa. In the back of his head this notion, which had been stuck there ever since watching television in early 1994: Mandelaesque - being like Mandela. In Cape Town, Tony was working with local youth. Most of them had challenging histories and all of them were not living in beautiful mountain estates like him. "When I got here, the advice I was given was 'don't drive at night, don't look people in the eye at traffic lights, and certainly never go to the townships'". But then there is the odor, he says, that creeps in slowly: An awareness that there is a Cape Town beyond polished, ornamented facades. Tony begins to discover life beyond what he had considered the city center at the time. Langa, in particular: The oldest Black township in the South Africa's Western Cape. He recalls standing on Harlem Avenue, where a many celebrated sportsman and jazz musician has lived, thinking "this is a gem". Fast forward January 2019. Tony has founded iKhaya le Langa almost a decade ago: A not-for-profit organization, hub for skill- and business development and job training, a platform for local artists, community members and entrepreneurs – or those in the making. "Tourism was an opportunity", says Tony. "People just started to reach out to us". Tour operators,

mostly. But also Brian Chesky, CEO of Airbnb. There is still a picture on the wall witnessing his visit in 2017 to welcome nine female entrepreneurs living in Langa aboard his worldwide home-sharing endeavor. And then, there is Peter, marketing manager for UBU - the Universal Basic Unit. Another digital currency, joining the bitcoin-fertilized grounds of block chain technology. But this time, its center stage is not an electricity-rich Northern European country, it is Langa. The currency is intended as both, an attraction for visitors and a solution for local liquidity issues. There is something beautiful about all these digital technologies infiltrating tourism in Langa, says Tony, as Sabelo already requests our next ride: “You can do ‘tourism in a township’, rather than ‘township tourism’”.



Figure 1: Photograph of the front gate of iKhaya Le Langa (January 2019)

My tour with Sabelo and my first encounter with Tony marks the departure point of my empirical journey. It was the last one of a set of guided tours I undertook to some townships in the Cape Flats – specifically Khayelitsha, Gugulethu, and Langa – in January 2019. All of them were undertaken in private cars or small buses. What stroke me about the tour with

Sabelo was, thus, the Uber ride. In fact, it entails the very link between an original endeavor to interrogate the format of the ‘township tour’ and the empirical journey I pursued thereafter: Engaging with contemporary tourism encounters orchestrated by local agents in and through their involvement with digital technologies. Regarding the digital technologies I encountered at iKhaya Le Langa (see Figure 1) as entry points into interrogating ‘tourism in a township’ as opposed to ‘township tourism’ has henceforth become the engine of this work. For Tony, Uber and Airbnb are a way to be “all over the community”. If we can be all over the community through digital technologies in tourism, that means that there is an opportunity to encounter a range of agents in tourism beyond the local guide and the tourist. To fully understand the use of Uber in the context of tourism, I went back to where my research project had changed directions: To the hostel in Gardens. Meeting with Iain Harris, manager of the tour operator where I booked my tour with Sabelo, I intended to interrogate more closely the idea behind using this online ride-sharing service for his guided tours.

A Talk about Uber: Changing Relationships with Township Tourism

Iain pours more honey into his coffee; a shared habit I cling onto as I scroll through the interview questions I had prepared the night before. Although, you could never be sure if it was real honey in those tubes, he says. One sip into the caffeinated syrup, then, Iain gathers his words: “It is great that you noted the Uber-thing. Not everybody is that brave. And you know, it is ridiculous that bravery should even come into this”. Years ago, Iain wrote an article on responsible tourism. How everyone needed to do more discover each other across real and imagined boundaries. Trained in journalism and theatre, tourism was not quite part of his plans back then - until it became apparent to him that tourism was a canvas. A canvas to tell stories, just like journalism and theatre could. But the stories that got told in tourism, he recalls, they were often very few and they were not contemporary. That is why he founded ‘Coffeebeansroutes’, by now a popular tour operator in Cape Town and Johannesburg. City Futures was the name of the trip I had ventured on exactly one week ago with Sabelo, including three Uber rides and guided walks to places of entrepreneurship in Langa and Khayelitsha. “Our question was: what are the stories in this city that are really shaping a different future?” Iain explains. The tour is a response to how township tourism has operated in recent years and the way in which it has gotten popular. Using Uber instead of buses is part of Iain’s scope to shift the paradigms of this city, how it is perceived and how it functions: “It gives you a way of moving in the city that does not corset you, that gives you a way of thinking you could do this on your own”. Tour operators do not, usually. “They give tourists a safety reason. They sell them a lie. Yet, sometimes, Uber comes with pitfalls. “In certain areas there are signal issues or trips get cancelled because people go like ‘oh it is 11 at night, better not go there’. But if you imagine Langa as the center of Cape Town, then you actually just go there, you take an Uber. It changes the relationship with the township, especially in South Africa, where the center has meant a white, powerful, economically strong area”.

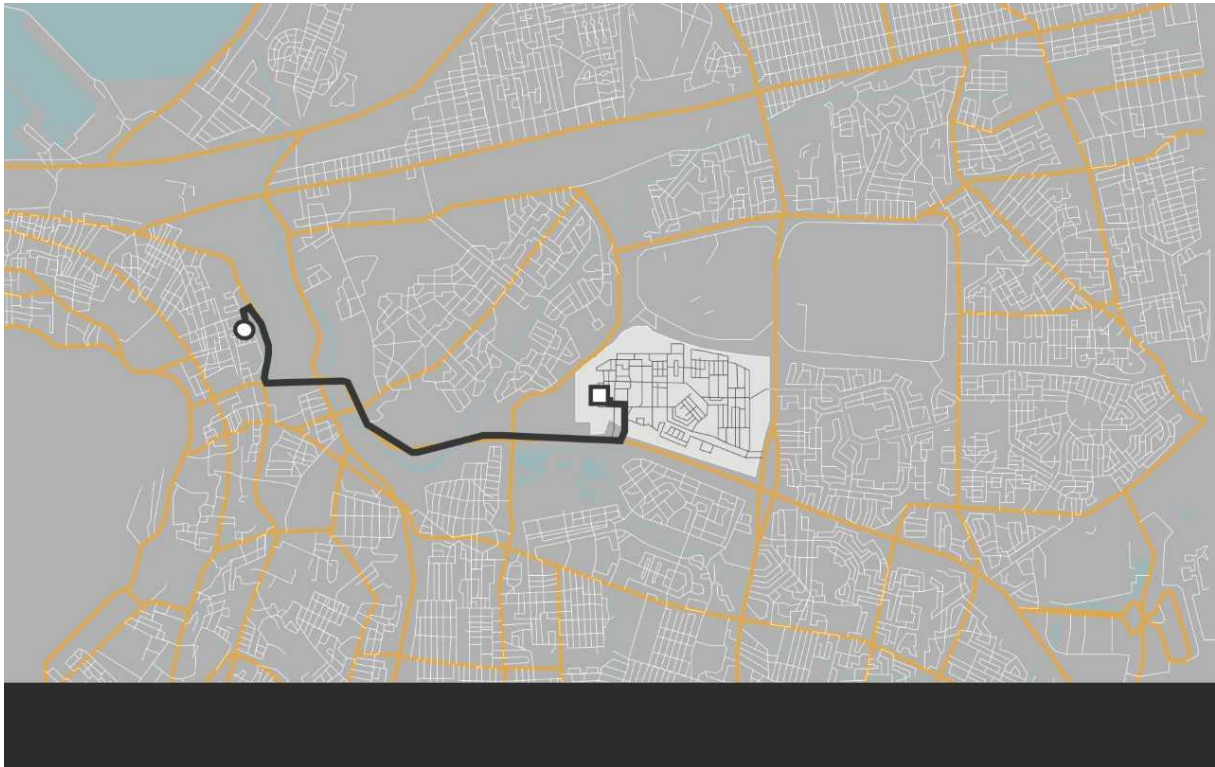


Figure 2: Map displaying an Uber ride from Observatory to Langa (January 2019)

What my conversation with Iain does is to set the groundwork for an understanding of Uber⁶ beyond a particularly convenient mode of moving from one point to another. My very first encounter with Uber on a tour, and my conversation with Iain thereafter, sharpened my awareness for the rich modes in which agents in the tourist industry use technologies very consciously to pursue their own (urban) imaginaries and to reflect on the cityscapes in and through tourism encounters. Iain, as an agent in the tourist industry, aims to change the possibilities which tourists see to move and be in the city through a means of transportation, pursuing the idea of Langa as the center of Cape Town (see Figure 2) displaying Langa as the center on the Uber-map).

Yet this endeavor does not bear out lightly in the post-Apartheid cityscapes. Iain himself concedes that “not everyone is that brave”. I did not say it out loud right then, in our conversation, but I had actually felt that way. Mostly because of leaving a comfort zone which I had established almost unconsciously, or which the city had established for me with its fragmentations, walls and fences. By choosing Uber to go to Langa henceforth, I inevitably became part of the debates embodied in this cityscape which Uber traverses. I came to realize that many Uber drivers tend to be highly cautious, to say the least, when called to Langa or other townships, unless they live in the area themselves. Some of them

⁶ Uber is an on-demand transportation technology which enables its customers to request rides on demand, from their precise starting point to the desired end point. This system has become particularly popular amongst tourists in South Africa – as Henama and Sifolo have demonstrated (2017) – not only due to its convenience, but also for ongoing debates on safety issues of walking longer distances.

even cancel requested trips. In one of the encounters on the ten minute rides from Observatory to Langa, the driver asked me if I knew where I was going and if I was sure I wanted to go to such a “bad and dangerous place”, Langa. He told me that he would not have taken me there at a different hour or had I been male. I would like to emphasize that on none of my Uber rides to the Waterfront or Gardens, both popular places among tourists and situated in the City Bowl⁷, was I asked whether I ‘knew where I was going’. Sometimes when I arrived, the gate at iKhaya Le Langa was still locked. Then I would stand there, with the Uber driver watching me from the car, half-protective, half-curious.

This points to the possibility that the Uber driver asking me where I was going does not only point to his skepticism towards Langa in general, but also to the specifics of the destination where he is supposed to drop me off. Uber is deeply connected with the development of specific locations where customers, mostly illiterate to the further surrounding environment of the chose destination, can be dropped off safely. It is crucial to be aware of this interplay of spatiality and technology in contemporary tourism endeavors in the township.

Similarly to iKhaya Le Langa, Airbnb homestays become such ‘punctures’ in the cityscapes which respond to Uber’s flexible, point-to-point connection system. In 2017, iKhaya Le Langa partnered with Airbnb, offering a training for homeowners in Langa to become entrepreneurs who to share their homes with visitors coming to Langa. One of them is Elli, who I encountered at iKhaya Le Langa, where she is doing an internship. For her stay, she was accommodated at one of the nine Airbnbs in Langa. I decided to stay there, too, in order to not only find out how the host, Linda, reflects on the home sharing platform in general, but also to find out more about the interpersonal encounters between her and her guests which spring from her entrepreneurial endeavor.

⁷ I consciously use the notion of ‘City Bowl’ to refer to what is usually conceived of as the center of Cape Town, acknowledging local agents’ strives to oppose this view and re-imagine Langa as its actual center.

An Airbnb on Harlem Avenue, Langa – Immersion into a Family

It is a late Sunday afternoon and there is music in the streets. People are dancing and start to wave at me as I pass by to walk to the house with the little patio and the number 62.

“Molo, white lady!”

After weeks of field work at iKhaya Le Langa, this is the first night I spend in the neighborhood – at Linda’s and David’s Airbnb homestay. The gate to Linda’s house is open. So is her door. “I am a friendly person, there are always people coming in and out of my house”, she says. In her kitchen, there is an ice box with all sorts of popsicles. “For the kids, I sell them to add to the household budget”. Linda takes me to my room in the backyard. There are neatly folded towels, soap and a bottle of water on my bed.

Linda and her husband David moved to Langa from the Eastern Cape. They have lived in their little house since 1968. Back then, there was no bright orange restaurant across the street - Mzansi’s. There was no music on Sunday afternoons and their house, it only had three rooms for them and their five kids. “I broke down my walls”, says Linda, as she takes me by the hand. “All by myself I expanded the house”. Now she rents out two of the rooms. The third one still belongs to her daughter Bulelwo.

Linda used to work as a domestic worker in Pinelands. That is when the idea to offer homestays started to grow. “The lady where I was working as a domestic worker in Pinelands, she had also invited people over to her house: from Holland, England, or Durban. I wanted to do that, too. I like having a busy house.”

In order to be able to offer homestays, Linda had to make a range of adjustments in her home. First, she had to make sure her house matches the smart standards defined by the cooperation between Airbnb and iKhaya Le Langa, such as controlling the electricity and water use and waste management. Secondly, Linda had to gain an understanding of the technology used by Airbnb: Check her phone, accept bookings, stay on top of them, and keep track of the online feedbacks. Before joining Airbnb, Linda had been offering homestays already. Back then, Tony would organize it, mostly. That was easier, she says. Now, she has to juggle multiple tasks: That of a mother, homeowner, a local vendor, entrepreneur, and a host. Linda has to check her phone regularly, make sure she has enough data. She has to keep up with her bookings, more than fifty have come in by now, and she needs to organize her helpers, cleaners, and the electricity herself. “Most guests stay one nights, or two nights. Sometimes I have guests every day”.

The room adjacent to mine is rented out to Elli, who is staying longer than me and most guests of Linda’s: Eight months, for an internship on intercultural understanding. “She is like a daughter now. A mother of six, I must thank God for that. Everyone who comes to my house is like a child for the time they stay” says Linda. Dinner is ready. “Elli, you must get the good glasses, the ones from the other cupboard”, she orders.

There is meat, pumpkin, spinach, sweet potato, chicken, gravy and rice. Juice and ice cream for dessert. David is napping, but Linda sits down with us, at the end of the table, each of us by her side. She always has dinner with her guests. “Did you see my books? Everyone is in there!” She opens the rightmost door of her cupboard in her calm and neatly manner. Everything has its place. “I have almost filled three of them already”, she says, as she takes out her guest books. Every visitor is asked to write a short note, together with the date, their home country and names.

After dinner, Elli follows her usual evening program: Watching soaps on TV. Often, Linda would join her, wildly gesturing and commenting on what is happening, says Elli. As we watch TV, Linda’s daughter gets home. “Come, get up, get up, we’re going out”, she says to Elli. Yet, as Elli is almost out of the door, Linda holds her back. “Where are you going? It is not right to go the Shebeens late at night, you better stay at home.” And so Elli returns to her spot in front of the TV. Back to the soap we have been watching from the safe space of the sofa.

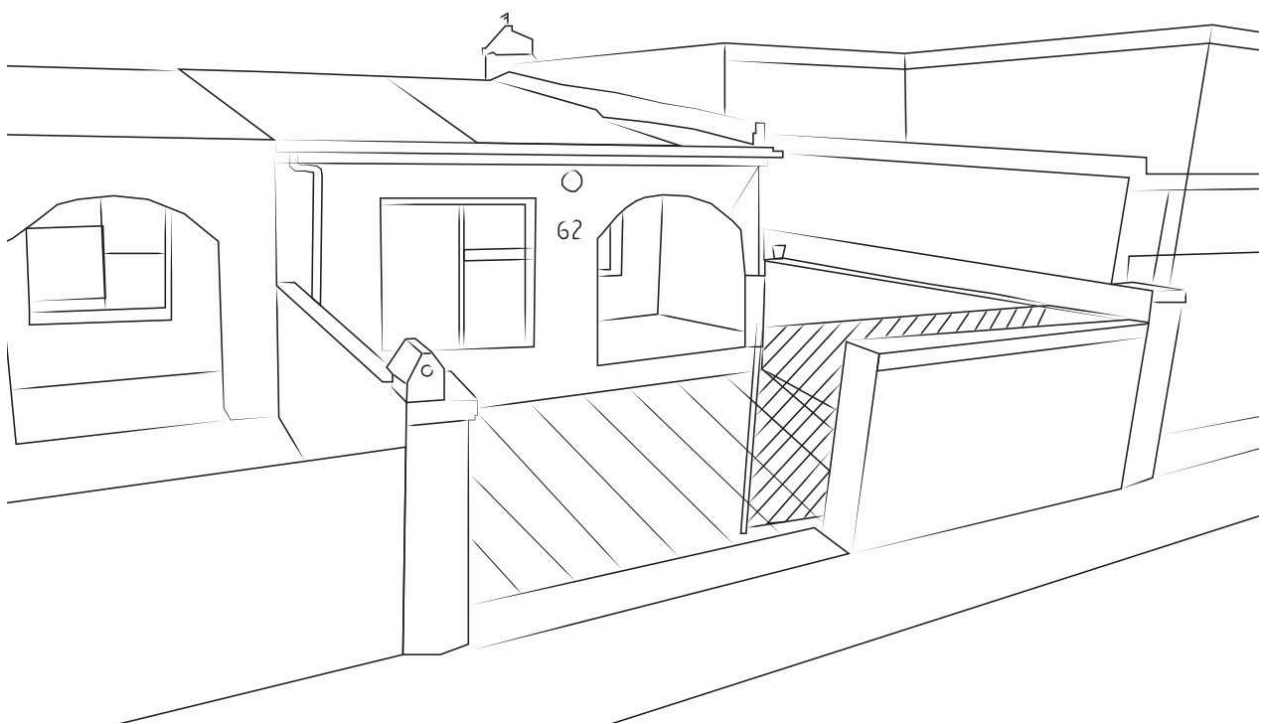


Figure 3: Sketch of Linda’s Airbnb home in Langa, Cape Town

Linda’s entrepreneurial journey began with her intra-urban, work-related mobility, the glimpses into another home in Pinelands, a white neighborhood adjacent to Langa, which instilled the desire to offer homestays. By now, her home (see as sketch in Figure 3) has indeed been regularly frequented by temporary visitors. Being on Airbnb, for Linda, thus

entails a constant adjustment of her home's infrastructures and a constant refinement of her own capabilities - ranging from technological to interpersonal and organizational skills. During my stay, I witnessed several interactions between Linda and Elli. Many of them reflect not only the guest's (Elli's) and the host's (Linda's) understanding of their roles, imaginaries, and scopes, but also, the very debates that arise out of the social and spatial environment in which the Airbnb is situated: Langa. Elli often thought that Linda was being overly protective at the same time as she felt like she should obey – as did I – not least because Linda immersed us deeply into her home and family, displaying a motherly authority which neither Elli nor I dared to challenge.

Long after I had left Cape Town, I would regularly get messages from Linda. One time, she reminded me of Mother's Day, another time she advised me to pray before going to bed. Linda's digital punctures of my daily life back home relate to one mode in which, in digitized tourism experiences, people's life worlds are and stay interconnected. Sharing an office space with Siya, marketing and communication intern at iKhaya Le Langa, I came to interrogate another set of technologies which works through this interconnectivity across perceived, physical and national boundaries and which, by now nearly ordinary and deeply integrated into my day to day practices, I almost overlooked: Social Media.

Right when I had arrived for my field work, Siya was just getting started with his internship which requires him, amongst else, to promote the Langa Quarter and iKhaya Le Langa as a tourist destination. Having worked in content management myself, I would often find myself introducing him to hashtags, filters, and captions. And having grown up in Langa, Siya would take me around for neighborhood walks in return. On one of our strolls through the streetscapes, I asked Siya to reflect on both, his and tourist's use of Social Media as we targeted his favorite places in Langa.

Posts and Hashtags on Langa: Reflections on Instagram

“Langa is like a village, it is frowned upon not to greet on the streets”, says Siya. And so I do greet, as I had already been taught before: “Molo”, when there is one person.

“Molweni”, when there are several. It is a small thing, and still, my tension fades, as I come to accept myself in the spaces I traverse.

Siya was born in 1993 - on the verge of South Africa transitioning into a democracy. As we walk past the graffiti-decorated walls witnessing the last art contest, Siya tells me that he would love for tourists to come to Langa for other reasons than confronting Apartheid legacies and poverty. “Today, there are all these great things happening here in the Langa-township, sports, arts, which people need to see”. That is where we are going now: To all the things he would love tourists to see of Langa – to post them on Instagram. We come to a halt at a vast, bright blue sports field⁸. He is a passionate hockey player and he regularly posts about his sports activities. “I should post a picture of this, too. Maybe tourists also want to come and see a game. It’s where we all come together”. As I raise my camera to catch the infrastructures with Table Mountain in the back, I pause. What does Siya think of all the tourists coming here, taking pictures of living spaces, posting them in an often aestheticized manner? “I think it’s good when they post pictures”, he says. “I want the whole world to know we’re here!” For him, communication technologies can be both, a way of being seen as well as a link between what is and what can be. “You know, when you grow up in a township, you get used to it. So, digital technologies and Social Media, they play an important role: There is suddenly a possibility to look at Langa with someone else’s eyes.” One afternoon, long after that walk, Siya and I are sitting in the office as the wind is howling through the streets. Siya is about to create a hashtag which iKhaya Le Langa can be associated with on Instagram. In the beginning, he used to insert hashtags quite randomly into his posts. Now he looks up and he says “I have found out something about those hashtags. In the beginning, I was a bit off with them. But they quite like the local Xhosa slang.” I look at him curiously. “You know, here in this

⁸ It is worth pointing out that, as Siya and I roamed the neighborhoods of the Langa Quarter, in an endeavor to visit some of the sites worth capturing for Social Media, we made ourselves be visible, too - and laughed at by his friends. Through this, Siya and I became entangled in a complex web of visual practices, pointing to the complexities at work in any moment of visual encounter, exploration and representation which are not visible on the Instagram post I made myself of the sports field after our walk. Although Siya reassured me that he did not mind the incidence at all, I mention it also to point out the vulnerabilities we can create as researchers without necessarily being aware of them. Ironically, I had thought that taking Siya on a walk would change the hierarchies that might be created by sitting him down for an interview.

township, we have our own language that only local people who interact with each other regularly would understand. With the hashtags, I realized that they are like a code for groups. Only people who use them regularly will be able to understand”.



Figure 4: Screenshot of a post on iKhaya Le Langa’s Instagram account (July 2019)

Almost on a daily basis, my Instagram feed is spiked with Siya’s posts from the Langa Quarter and iKhaya Le Langa (see Figure 4). They remind of his role as producer of imagery at the same time as his likes and comments on other posts manifest him as a consumer thereof. My conversations with Siya on Social Media highlighted the levels of mutual exploration, the reflections and challenges behind the engagement with Social Media within the realms of tourism in Langa. Using Instagram and other Social Media at iKhaya Le Langa, Siya reconciles a number scopes: Not only is he asked to depict an environment he traverses every day and market it to people who have never seen it before, but also, he has to respond to Tony’s visions for the tourist destination as its director and align them with his own ideas of what he would like people to see of iKhaya le Langa and Langa. In short: Merged in his Instagram posts are his own aspirations for and understandings of the technology as well as the tasks that come along with his internship at iKhaya Le Langa and the Langa Quarter.

Such complex interfaces of the township environment, deeply personal reflections and knowledges, tourism encounters and cross-boundary interconnectivities did not only surface in my interrogation of Siya's reflections on Social Media, but also, in the exploration of a digital currency established at iKhaya Le Langa. I got acquainted with it from within the same office space where Siya pursued his daily chores. Together with Jerry, who has been supporting Tony at iKhaya le Langa for several years now, I investigated the engagements with the technology and became a participant myself. In the course of following the traces it had left, I discovered a whole network of agents engaging with it in multiple ways and for different reasons.

Bold Stories, Invisible Money: Envisioning Urban Futures in Langa

Jerry gathers the boys around a small table in the backyard of iKhaya Le Langa. Most mornings, I bump into them as they are sweeping the floors, taking care of the many chili and basil pots all around the patio, doing laundry, or preparing lunch. “So that everything looks nice and the tourists can come”, some would then tell me. The ambassador program: Tony had initiated it to tackle youth unemployment in Langa by offering job trainings and have the young people become ‘community ambassadors’. Now, Jerry oversees it - as Tony is running from one meeting to another. Those who are punctual and complete their tasks correctly get a bonus on top of their stipend at the end of the week. “The Rand is what they are interested in, usually”. But since recently, there has also been UBU: The Universal Basic Unit. It was recently launched and is based on the ideas of a universal basic income, engaging volunteer work, and circulating under-accessed goods. “We are using UBU for our ambassador program”, Jerry says. On top of their stipend, they get some of the digital tokens every week and they can already use it get some basic things they need: Fruit and vegetables, a haircut, or airtime and data bundles. It offers a solution to liquidity issues for jobs which cannot be paid in Rand, such as community work. “The invisible money”, some of the ambassadors call it. Not all of them actively use the digital tokens. Others, however, collect them assiduously, like Nadia. I meet him at the tables between the many basil and chili pots and he says: “I have a lot of UBUs already. You never know, see what happened to bitcoin”, as he points up far into the sunny sky. Yet some ambassadors and most community members do not know how to use the technology yet. Some do not even own a phone number, which is needed for registration. “Maybe I could explain to them how it works”, says Nadia. “I could go to different households and do a little presentation of it”.

Iain, at the same time, has started to build UBU into his tour. “The fact that it’s a digital currency launched in Langa – launched in a township? That photograph is crazy!” It sounds like a bold story indeed: Langa, Cape Town’s oldest township, offering the newest technology for trading with locals and tourists alike. For Iain, the digital currency is an incentive to re-configure common thinking patterns: “Suddenly, it’s not: ‘Shame, look at these people’. Suddenly it’s: ‘These guys are trading with digital coins? What are we missing out on?’”.

Meanwhile, Jerry is still in the process of understanding how UBU works exactly, especially within the specific spatialities and socialities of iKhaya le Langa, the Langa Quarter and the community. He has grown up in Langa, just like most of the boys surrounding him this morning. Soft-spoken, sometimes, the heavy winds would almost swallow his words. Even now, as he reprimands a bunch of young men in their late teenage-hood he stays calm. After his speech, the boys disperse to complete their tasks of the day and we, Jerry and I, try to navigate the economic notions thrown at us in the

currency's white paper I had downloaded the other day: Trapped asset-values. Exponentially great fungibility. An in-built inflationary dissipation. "I feel like there is lack of understanding, so it's a bit limiting at the moment" Jerry says. "There are some things that are just not in place yet. So, we can first see how UBU works with the ambassadors and solve things internally. And then, when everything is in place, we can spread the word and make it big."

One of the people who has started to support him in this endeavor is Andile. We meet him at the office space, where Siya and Jerry work, too. He is as well-dressed as ever. A dark-blue blazer, hat, and brown boots. Andile had started coming to iKhaya Le Langa for internet access. To write his job applications after having finished his studies in economy and finances. That is when he heard about the digital currency. And when he wanted to get involved. Andile has not found a job yet, and if there is one thing he does not like, it is to sit around and do nothing. A member of the local running club, he is always on the move. And he is fascinated by the speed with which digital technologies have developed in recent years, especially in Langa. "It excites me: It requires people to interact and that makes the whole community become active and build connections", he explains. Similarly, Jerry is sure of the potential of the technology: "Imagine it can grow and spread through our ambassador program. It will be something that the youth can get involved in and it can really put us on the map." What, then, is Andile's goal for the currency? He thinks for a while. He has a way of choosing his words well. Then he looks at me: "We can envision our community, how we can develop and become an urban community." An urban community, for Andile, is one where the challenges of poverty and unemployment are successfully addressed. Where kids do not drop out of school and take drugs on the streets. Where there is a low crime rate, or none at all. Where people do not live in shacks, and where the sewage system works. It is, above all, a community that is equal. And in the trajectory towards achieving all of this, there is one important thing that the digital currency does: "It makes Langa become visible."

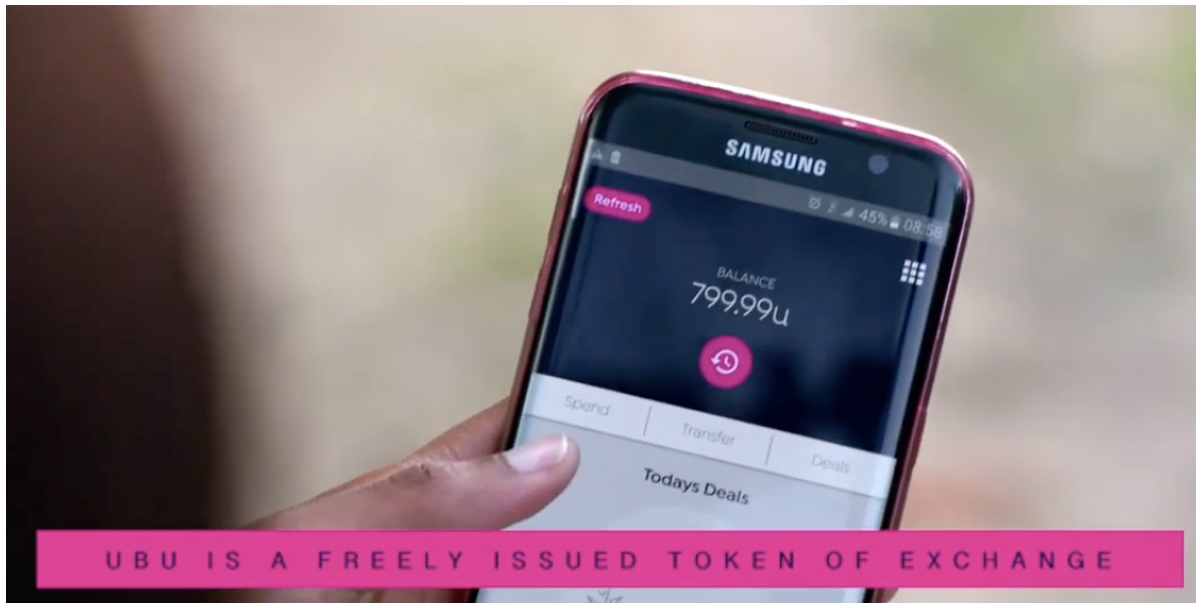


Figure 5: Screenshot from the Youtube-video “UBU & Langa” (June 2018)

The agents that stand in conversation in this narrative reflect only some of the many voices involved in its establishment at iKhaya Le Langa and its introduction to the community. I here juxtapose those which are taking place on the very intersection of tourism encounters and the community of Langa. Iain’s engagement is thereby more tourism-driven, as Jerry’s is more destination-bound and Nadia or Andile’s account tell of a deeply personal and community-driven involvement with UBU (see a picture of the app in Figure 5). It is important to be clear about the fact that the digital currency was neither specifically created for iKhaya Le Langa, nor any intersections with tourism. Vendors accepting the currency can be found all over the city. There are not many yet: a couple of telephone companies, coffee shops, small stores and hairdressers. One might thus well argue that UBU is, in fact, only peripherally involved with tourism. However, iKhaya Le Langa has acted as the very hub for introducing UBU, inviting participation across spatial, social, and economic boundaries, which includes the tourism industry especially through Iain’s tours. It is right there that the crucial role of iKhaya Le Langa surfaces as a linkage and intersection, engaging entrepreneurs, agents, community members, tourists – and researchers: Throughout my interrogation of UBU and how local agents employed it, I got involved with it, too. Right before I left Cape Town, I gathered all agents involved with UBU at one table. In this discussion, we aimed to address the issues and possibilities for its further development. It is a difficult endeavor not least because the technology itself is in its infancy. I remember how, at the end of the discussion, Elli, who had joined to learn more about UBU, turned to me and said: “After all, when you are spreading new technologies, you always have these pioneers and then you get the flow going”. This idea stuck with me till today and I propose not only to regard Andile, Jerry and Iain pioneers, but all agents emerging in these narratives.

PART *2*

ANALYSIS

Making Tourism-Township Encounters Visible, Reassembling a Cosmopolitan Gaze

Curating these stories and setting them in conversation both with each other and with the case of tourism in the post-Apartheid township, I demonstrate varied positions and forms of engagement. In the narratives, they might appear as equal, yet on a daily basis, the agents portrayed do not all have the same possibilities to be heard or to make their imaginaries material. Nonetheless, these varied encounters and digital technologies share a productive and diverse set of images and imaginaries of Langa that draw attention to the complex encounters in township tourism in practice. The agents featured in this work all move on interfaces of their own imaginaries, knowledges, desires, the social and spatial environment they inhabit and traverse, the digital technologies they engage and the contemporary tourism encounters that are invited thereby. While the perspectives from which they speak as well as the natures of their participation are inherently different from each other, what they have in common is that they all create spheres of encounter which entail multi-layered, interwoven visual politics of gazing and gazing back, seeing, making and being seen, as well as envisioning, which render the idea of tourism in the township as ‘exhibition’ (Butler 2012) more tangible and more complex.

In this analysis, I bring the narratives I wrote to the realms of cosmopolitanism wherein we may begin to transcend the binary notions of the gaze which have underpinned the study of ‘township tourism’. I do so by re-visiting each of the narratives in the chronology in which they are arranged in the previous section, to provide an agent- as well as technology-specific analysis of the debates which surface and which should be taken to the conceptual realms of tourism studies.

Uber and the Township: Navigating Urban Debates

At the heart of Iain’s account is the idea that the ways in which we move through social and physical landscapes have a considerable impact on the modes in which we get to see, perceive, reflect on and interact them. Thus, Iain’s endeavor in the tourist industry, using a contemporary mode of navigating, entails acts of gazing at the city and at the township. As I shall elaborate in this analysis, this includes reflections on and contestations of its belonging to the cityscapes of tourist navigations.

It is crucial to point out that there are multiple debates worthy of having on Uber, crucial even, but I am not going to have them here. This discussion is not exempt from the Uber sphere and might have its intersections with it, but it is here taken to the realm of the conceptual to add to our understanding of contemporary encounters in tourism – and the way in which they define our notions of mobilities and the geographies of gazing.

At first glance, then, using Uber for a guided tour to Langa might seem like a small, even negligible, step away from the buses which have been widely criticized as creating a ‘safari-like’ and ‘exhibitionist’ experience. After all, Uber, too, poses a privileged mode of navigating the city, which many local residents cannot afford on a regular basis or at all. Yet, I do not interrogate Uber in terms of what it is, but in terms of how it is instrumentalized. As a vital term in and for Critical Tourism Studies, we need to re-think mobilities as not just as entailing the prerequisites to travel, but also, to orchestrate travel in a particular way. Thus, Uber becomes a tool for Iain to re-imagine the cityscapes and the township space by the mode in which he invites tourists to navigate them.

Radice suggests that it is through mobilities that “cosmopolitan practices are cultivated”. In Iain’s narrative, at the heart of his choice of Uber is his endeavor to think of Langa as the center of Cape Town. This, I suggest, makes Uber not a mode of cultivating a cosmopolitan practice, but a mode of manifesting Langa as a cosmopolitan place: Part of the many circulations created in the course of ‘Uber-ing’ the city. Iain says that if we imagined Langa as the center of Cape Town, we would not even question our navigation with Uber, we would “just go there”. This illustrates the complex interconnections of spatial perceptions and mobilities. If the ways in which we see spaces defines the modes in which we navigate them, then Iain’s narrative proposes that the modes in which we navigate them might nudge our perceptions in a different direction, or change them completely.

Additionally to re-defining the conception of the township amidst the cityscapes, Iain uses Uber as part of the controlled setting of a guided tour to raise questions about the predominant modes of navigating the townships in tourism – specifically the use of buses to maneuver tourists to and through their neighborhoods. It is vital to acknowledge, at this point, that there are tour operators which offer to go to the townships by train. The reason why I highlight Iain’s mobility-choice of Uber specifically does not mean that I deny the train ride to be a step away from the tour bus as well. Rather, I would like to suggest that the encounters with Uber open up a whole new sphere for debates and imaginaries which tell an important story about how we ‘gaze’ at the township in the city – that reaches beyond the one-time incision of a paid-for guided tour. Through Uber, as a means of transportation that is not restricted to the settings of ‘township tourism’, Iain postulates Langa as a place that can be visited outside the guided experience - as opposed to being manifested as a place to be usually avoided on an everyday basis. Inserting Langa into the maps of a globally popular practice of mobility, Iain manifests it as equal to any other destination the tourist may potentially choose to roam.

If we think of mobility as a mode of belonging to today’s world (Salazar 2017), then it is precisely in the cancellations of the rides, in the refusals and the skepticisms of the Uber drivers that we must acknowledge the ways in which the township is postulated as both outside and inside of the navigable city maps: It is part of a popular mode of getting around among visitors (Henama and Sifolo 2017), yet in several encounters, it may be manifested as incongruent with the place which are expected to be visited through this navigation: Mostly the City Bowl or Waterfront – in short: former white and rich areas of

the city. A particular way of moving through spaces and communities, through the encounters and debates it bears, can thus be a mode of manifesting their belonging as well as of questioning it. Using Uber for tourism-township encounters, thus, entails a constant engagement with the multiple experiences, knowledges and perceptions which spring from our modes of navigating. The visual politics at work therein, I hold, are implicit: If we understand the notion of gazing as a multi-layered process, which entails our judgement and perceptions of a place (Muldoon 2018), then local agents like Iain enrich the gaze on the township through Uber and the debates which surface in these encounters.

At the same time, however, it is precisely in the proposal of this popular means of transportation where Langa is manifested as different from other places in the city. As I have come to realize during my research, car rides often get cancelled or my destination-choice was questioned while in the car. Drivers frequently experience violence, which they associate with particular urban areas. This understanding, and highly individual categorization of the cityscapes into good and bad, into navigable and non-navigable places, thereby affects not only their readiness to accept certain trips, but also, when they do end up accepting the trip, the spheres of engagement created thereby. The driver and I, then, become agents, too. We evaluate each other and the urban destinations we target and traverse. In the course of the close encounter in the car, we carry out the debates which are partly constructed from our knowledge and our experience, from our expectations, ideas, aspirations and our immediate reflection on the cityscapes.

We might ask, then: What is the difference between using a tour bus and using Uber, given that they both potentially entail a project of stigmatizing the township? I hold that it is precisely the friction surfacing in these Uber-encounters that holds an opportunity to truly address the ongoing stigmatization Langa and other townships experience as opposed to other places in the city – such as economically strong areas, polished for visitors illiterate of the vast city. Thus, by using Uber on his tours to Langa, Iain opens up a sphere of engagement, which is in constant negotiation, depending on the people who meet within the confines of the shared car. In these tourist-driver encounters, there is a potential to have more rich and complicated exchanges a bus full of visitors and a guide would allow for.

While Iain's endeavor adds and shifts perspectives, he does not, however, change the asymmetries of privilege at work in the tourism encounter. The notion of privilege is a challenging one in tourism, especially within the realms of a township, and it is deeply connected to the power relations of the gaze (Muldoon 2018). Usually, in tourism literature, the more privileged is described as the one who gazes, and thus, the one who has power. However, the spheres which Linda opens up in her engagement with Airbnb ask us to add more dimensions to the notion of power relations in contemporary tourism encounters and the modes in which notions of Otherness and difference are re-distributed, addressed and handled (Muldoon 2018, Butler 2012).

The Familiar Other: Negotiating Difference through the Home in Airbnb-Encounters

In expanding her house long before Airbnb even existed, Linda did not only make space for her family of seven, she also pathed the way for her entrepreneurial activities on the home-sharing platform today. Her endeavor thereby reminds me of Black's notion of "the home and the world as collaborative" and that cosmopolitanism might, in fact, "emerge through an embrace of domesticity and kinship" (2006, 45), as she now regularly welcomes international guests in the two neatly arranged rooms in the backyard of her house.

I regard Linda's homebound entrepreneurship thus, a cosmopolitan practice of "recognizing the world through the home" (Black 2006, 46). This recognition is materialized in Linda's collection of dozens of entries from her guests in the books she keeps in her cupboard – all of them carefully dated. When she could also simply be reading the feedback on her Airbnb account, she has by now filled almost three albums by now and she insisted Elli and I skim through all of them after we had dinner. Collecting these short notes from every single guest she hosts, Linda archives the multiplicity of encounters which have taken place in the realms of her home. Thereby, the albums postulate not only a mode of memorizing, but also, a small exhibition of that which remains of the many visitors who stayed at her place.

Acknowledging her home as a key site of cosmopolitanism, however, also requires an engagement with the debates and tensions that arise out of these close – and often fast-paced – encounters. While a homestay surely allows for a deeper immersion into the socialities and spatialities of Langa, Linda's house is thereby not only treated as a home-base, but also as a visited site itself. This is not least indicated by the short amount of time visitors spend at her place. Thereby, Linda's home becomes part of the 'exhibition' which tourism provides in the township spaces. Yet, the domestic sphere in which the encounters take place, where Linda is in charge and in control, requires a more multi-layered understanding thereof, especially the power relations at work. This is exemplified by the ways in which she enacts her notions of motherhood with Elli. She thereby displays her authority in restricting her activities and mobilities at night, but also in small acts such as the one of being very particular about the kind of glasses Elli is meant to dish up.

Within the confines of Linda's home, then, it is, in fact, Elli and I who pose the socio-cultural Other. Linda negotiates Elli's Otherness by incorporating her deeply into her family. The extension of her motherhood onto her guest, thereby, incorporates a conundrum: Elli, despite being in her mid-twenties, is denied a great deal of mobility by Linda, especially at nighttime. In the authority Linda displays towards Elli, she treats her both as equal and as different from her own kids. In the maxims of taking good care of her guest, Linda inevitably has to acknowledge the difference, in terms of her socio-cultural literacy and her looks – Elli embodies as opposed to her own daughter Bulewo: She is white, foreign and, at the time I did my field work, mostly unfamiliar with Langa's

streetscapes. In this regard, Linda has to treat her differently from Bulelwo at the same time as she enacts her notions of motherhood with both of them. Her home, thereby, becomes not simply an exhibited object, but a sphere where difference is both, made visible and deeply embedded into the familiar.

This illustrates the complex interfaces and spheres of engagement which root in digitally mitigated tourism encounters. Linda does not only welcome international travelers like me and Elli into her home, she also reaches out to them through communication technologies like Whatsapp after the stay at her house. As I regard this a mode of extending her motherhood across the world, these global interconnections become visible in Siya's involvement with Instagram, too. Thereby, he does not only engage with modes of 'recognizing the world', but also, with modes of 'being recognized by the world', as I intend to establish in depth in the next section.

The 'Glocal' Spheres of Instagram: Multidirectional Gazing in Posts on the Township

For Siya, pictures posted on Instagram hold the potential for "the whole world" to learn about Langa and its community, as they simultaneously entail a mode of gazing back at the environment he inhabits. I propose to review closely the multiple visual mechanisms that surface in Siya's account. I emphasize Instagram especially in this analysis, due to the strong visual focus developed both by this particular Social Media platform and in Siya's narrative. Furthermore, Instagram was the platform which Siya engaged with most frequently during my stay at iKhaya Le Langa, whereby he is both, a consumer and a producer of images. I here suggest to think of Instagram as a 'cosmopolitan capital' for both Siya and for me. For Siya, it entails an awareness and literacy of a globally connected visual culture, for me, it bears an opportunity to understand the complexity of the gaze at work in the tourism practices Siya is involved in.

When Salazar (2015) argues that becoming cosmopolitan roots in the literacy of a variety of cultural frames, I suggest to expand this notion to the frames created by a global culture of digital interconnectivity, sharing and representing, such as the one on Instagram, which Siya becomes acquainted with. While I did my field work in and through iKhaya Le Langa, Siya was still in the process of making sense of hashtags and discovered that "they are quite like the local Xhosa-slang". I would like to dwell on this link Siya establishes between the Xhosa language and the use of hashtags. He compares a hyperlocal practice, the slang, to a global, digital practice of sharing experiences and of categorizing them. That which is commonly seen as unique to Langa – the local Xhosa slang – becomes Siya's asset to understand a global practice which connects groups of people across borders in a digital sphere and through shared interests, aspirations or ideas. Through his engagement with Instagram, then, Siya not only becomes a participant in a global digital culture but also, he continuously refines his understanding and reading of the environment he inhabits, as he sees it "through someone else's eyes" in the multiple posts on Langa. Instagram thereby becomes a key site where Siya incorporates David

Ley's notion of the "intersecting realities" of local and global (2004, 151). I therefore propose to think of Siya as a 'glocal' cosmopolite, a navigator of the multiplicity of visual practices at work on the intersections of township spaces, global Social Media practices and representations of tourism encounters. Doing so is the premise for recognizing the complex politics of gazing incorporated in his involvement with Social Media.

Instagram offers a sphere for Siya where he can both, pursue his imaginary of creating an image of Langa's which reaches beyond the grand narratives of apartheid legacies, and in which he can learn about other people's projects of gazing. His desire to both, make Langa seen and seeing Langa, ultimately, challenges the mode in which the "tourist gaze" has become understood in scholarly work: When in the study of 'township tourism' the tourist gaze tends to be regarded as voyeuristic and directed at the local environment, contemporary encounters, as they surface in Social Media, ask for more layers and vantage points in its conceptualization.

They do so not least because that which is seen, reflected, shaped and represented through them is re-seen by locals like Siya, who then employ this vision to the township environment they inhabit. Of course, we need to be aware that the kinds of images that are taken, posted and shared by tourists only depict a small part of the encounter in which the picture was taken, and a possibly distorted one, too. However, the visual representations on Instagram might be productive for Siya precisely because of a mismatch with the reality Siya perceives. In fact, Siya regards Instagram an imaginative project of establishing a link between "what is and what can be", a mode of envisioning the spaces inhabited through the different modes in which they are represented. Siya's engagement with Instagram thus entails the refinement not only of a cross-cultural understanding, but also, of his imaginary capacities.

Therefore, we need a space in scholarship, where we can acknowledge the richness of the „visual economy of tourism" not only circulating among tourists, "but also those who work in tourism" (Chio in Hall 2011, 211). The multiple dimensions created through this circulation ask for a more complex notion of gazing, as well as an acknowledgment of the cosmopolitan practices at work in the visual project of tourism. Siya's engagement with Instagram entails a multi-sited and multi-dimensional engagement with contemporary visual culture, whereby being seen and seeing play major roles.

Visibility is, however, not only a recurring theme in the imaginaries formed through the engagement with Instagram, which inherently builds on acts of gazing, but also in local agents' engagement with a digital currency established in iKhaya Le Langa and circulating in the whole of Langa and parts of the city. The manifold actors who get involved with it thereby transcend the realms of the actually visible and enter the realms of envisioning both, their own roles in Langa as well as the role of Langa in the cityscapes.

Township Transactions, City Visions: Picturing Intra-Urban Belonging through a Digital Currency

As we have encountered several modes in which local agents enact a notion of global belonging by inserting themselves and the township into the worldwide flows and circulation of digital technologies, Andile's reflections on the digital currency imply that the same notion of belonging is not necessarily reproduced on an urban scale. In fact, he does not regard Langa as an urban community yet, and it is something he aspires to by engaging with UBU.

He regards this technology not least a way of addressing some of the substantial issues the community of Langa faces, including poverty, lack of infrastructures or employment. In this regard, Andile sees the digital technology as part of a developmental trajectory for his community: As a possibility for manifesting its urban status and thus, being equal to the different neighborhoods of Cape Town. He holds that the foundation therefore is laid by an increased visibility of Langa's. Andile's perspective thus provides a notion of visibility which is not associated with a notion of voyeurism, but with a notion of recognition of the very issues that need to be addressed.

In this regard, Andile enacts an imaginary capacity which enables him to project his desires for Langa onto the present. This visionary aspect connects him with Iain's scope to challenge common perceptions of the township as underdeveloped. Yet this endeavor entails ambivalence. In his reflections on UBU, two perceptions of the township space, or Langa specifically, oppose each other: That of a challenged urban area and that of a place which is at the forefront of innovation. The friction of the two leads to a "crazy photograph", an unlikely depiction of Langa's. The technology thereby, becomes a mode of playing with what Urry (1990) would describe as a mode of 'pre-seeing' the environment: The expectations and preconceived notions of the township space which tourists bring into his tour. Engaging with the technology, for Iain, thus becomes a mode of negotiating the tourist gaze, an endeavor to confront and to shift the perceptions and understandings that spring from it, at the same time as he caters to and satisfies it through this unexpected disruption.

Yet, rather than reproducing the binary narrative of the 'privileged tourist' taking pictures in poverty-ridden township spaces, his story further pursues to have the visitors reflect what they are, in fact, "missing out on". This changes the developmental narrative in which the visitor tends to be placed a step ahead of the places visited on township tourism. Rather than reproducing this hierarchy, the local community uses a technology unknown to the visitors, which they then are invited to engage with as well. In the course of aspiring to this shift in the discourse on tourism-township encounters, a lot is at stake. First and foremost, at the time I did my research, there were challenges to use the digital currency inclusively and productively. Not everyone has a phone number or a basic understanding of how to use such technologies in the first place. Both are pre-requisites for successful participation. Some community members, thus, have difficulties to get acquainted with the technology.

Meanwhile, however, the young people gathering at iKhaya Le Langa for Tony's job training program learn to engage the technology effectively. They receive it in return for keeping iKhaya Le Langa appealing as a tourist destination and some of them, such as Nadia, aspire to an imagined future potential of the currency, based on what they have heard about Bitcoin. I regard agents like him become a social and economic asset: They spread and circulate the currency in the spheres that iKhaya Le Langa creates for contemporary tourism encounters and community engagement. Thereby, they can support other community members as well as tourists in a successful employment of the currency.

In this assemblage, Jerry might be described as a navigator for these emergent agents: He becomes a link between community actors in the making and with tourism encounters with and through the digital currency, UBU. This requires him not only to understand the needs, desires, and challenges of the local youth and the community, but also the structure, purpose and functions of a digital technology and iKhaya Le Langa's role in this web of inter- and transactions. For Jerry, the ambassador-program poses an opportunity to try out the technology before it is particularly promoted for tourism. Thereby, the transactions between the ambassadors and the few users that currently exist in the community become somewhat a rehearsal for the encounters with visitors, for Jerry does not want the latter to encounter problems with the technology. This continuous rehearsal lays the groundwork for the technology to put Langa and its community "on the map". Similar to Andile's notion of becoming visible through the currency, I hold that being put "on the map" reaches to a deep level of being seen, beyond the notion of being merely exhibited. It entails a desire for Langa to be both, recognized individually, as well as to be acknowledged as a part of the Capetonian cityscapes. Andile's and Jerry's reflections on their engagement with UBU exemplify the complex mechanisms, assessments, infrastructural, economic, and social challenges, as well as imaginaries and visions that are at work behind the photographs which can be taken in contemporary encounters. I regard it our task as researchers to unveil them, both, through our modes of doing research, as well as packaging and analyzing our data.

The digital currency might be the technology which seems the least linked to tourism in comparison with the other ones – Airbnb, Uber, Social Media – featuring in this work and engaged at and through iKhaya Le Langa. Yet this analysis of UBU exemplifies how the stories told in and through tourism, such as the ones Iain tells on his 'City Futures' tour, are deeply entangled with livelihoods, enacting interpersonal and spatial relationships and infrastructures.

Conclusion

To pursue alternative modes of doing research on and representing tourism-township encounters, I have built my arguments around narratives. They make visible the multi-layered encounters and representations, a critical step in re-assembling a cosmopolitan gaze, one that embraces the richness of interpersonal and spatial entanglements, and the knowledges, experiences, desires and aspirations they entail. I hold that these vital arguments need increasingly be rendered more tangible through our research and it is what I hope I was able to do. I understand cosmopolitanism as entailing both, a mode of describing people and places as well as a mode of producing knowledge on them. This means not only embracing the complexity at work in the spheres we interrogate, but also, choosing wisely the ways in which we present our research.

In telling these stories about contemporary tourism encounters in the township, I have emphasized the productivity of the cosmopolitan gaze in a ‘contact zone’ of tourism where visual practices and notions of Otherness have a long and painful history in the past and present. Township tourism is a contested field: One in which leisure travel and persistent inequalities intersect, and where tourism practices have often marketed the latter successfully. A move away from a focus on studying tourism through the format of the ‘township tour’ avoids reproduction of neo-colonial narratives of white tourists in indigenous South African spaces. My focus on a variety of Langa actors engaged with digital technologies linked to tourism shows many possibilities to break with the norms established both by the practice and the study of ‘township tourism’.

In embracing a multiplicity of agents, we can make visible the vital things they have to say about the post-Apartheid urban project as well as our complexly entangled life worlds in and beyond the space of tourism. They are “key figures” who venture to see the township “through someone else’s eyes” and to “envision” its community as part of the urban landscape, who imagine it as “the center” of Cape Town, and, last but not least, who expand their motherhood, rooted in the township, across the globe.

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