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A *CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY* OPEN BOOK

TOWARDS REFUGE AS METHOD: Creative Practices in Dakar's Terrain of Infrastructural Renewal

AÏCHA DIALLO
University of Sheffield
https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0133-2531

Refuge is within me—I have a knowing of it without knowing it. As my parents, along with my brother, fled Conakry, Guinea, due to political persecution, I never directly experienced the actual physical movement of exile. I was born and raised in Berlin, Germany; I inherited refuge. At the same time, it is a lens—a way of seeing and knowing, a lived reality—that I carry with me from one shore to another. In German, the verb *übersetzen* carries the dual meaning of (1) translating and (2) crossing over to another shore by ferry. I propose this analogy to capture not only linguistic and cultural borrowings and movements, but also the inherent crossings between places, spaces, and ways of knowing. In this way, it connects to Stuart Hall's description of diasporic identities as "routes" rather than "roots" (Hall 1990).

While this inheritance is profoundly personal, the question of refuge also constitutes what Ian Buchanan (2021) terms a problematic field: one that is rooted in historical, cultural, political, and collective processes. Refuge is not fixed; it is continuously reconfigured by people, forces, and movements. It must therefore be rethought through theoretical and creative encounters. With this

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in mind, I propose that the notion of inherited refuge resonates with the spatial formation of Dakar. The Wolof term for Senegal's capital city, *Ndakaaru*, means refuge (Ndiaye 2016; Diop and Ricou 2024). Rooted in their specific relationship to land and community, the Lebu population established the city as a space of refuge (Ndiaye 2016) in response to external oppressive forces[1]—a meaning culturally revitalized by contemporary artists and foundational to my conceptualization of *refuge as method*. Over time, one may say that Dakar has continued to serve as one, particularly for cultural producers who engage with both the city's interwoven histories and contemporary urban conditions (Simone 2004).

Against this backdrop, I ask: How can cultural producers locate, imagine, and create refuge within Dakar's urban landscape? This question stems from a long-term interest in exploring how creative and socially engaged art practices engage with urban histories while generating new imaginaries of refuge in the context of the city's ongoing infrastructural renewal. To investigate this, I introduce *refuge as method* as a conceptual and methodological tool that I am developing through my research on Dakar's creative terrain. I illuminate how creative practices in Dakar act as forms of refuge, extending endurance and transformation within the city's evolving urban landscape.

I argue that refuge as method offers an epistemic space, a way of seeing, knowing, and inhabiting the city. Dakar has long functioned as a refuge for artists and creative practitioners, who, in turn, actively transform it into spaces of refuge through their artistic and social engagements. In this essay, I draw on AbdouMaliq Simone's (2022) concept of *surrounds* and Seloua Luste Boulbina's (2019) notion of *interworld* to position refuge as method as unfolding in sites of transition, negotiation, and creative possibility. These three concepts form a triangulation: refuge as method serves as the epistemic and methodological entry point; surrounds account for the hidden, improvisational dimensions of refuge in the city; and interworld encapsulates the layered, entangled legacies shaping contemporary urban imaginaries. This framework allows for a nuanced analysis of how cultural producers and artists in Dakar materialize refuge through creative practices. Through this lens, I examine the works of two Dakarois artists, Muhsana Ali and Ibrahima Thiam, whose visual and performative practices engage with Dakar as a space of contestation, reclamation, and refuge.

SANCTUARY, SLAVERY, COLONIALISM, AND INDEPENDENCE: DAKAR'S URBAN HISTORIES

Dakar has emerged as one of the most vibrant creative cities across the globe (Grabski 2017; Mbaye and Iossifidis 2020; Ren 2021). To situate Dakar's

urban space and cultural imaginaries, it is essential to provide some historical context. Located on the Cap-Vert Peninsula along the Atlantic coast, it is a liminal space where land, ocean lives, and people intersect. Dakar is shaped by four strands of historiography: the Lebu villages, the transatlantic slave trade, colonial impositions, and Senegal's independence. As a coastal city, Dakar mirrors Édouard Glissant's (1997) concept of the *archipelago* where histories, geographies, and transformations are inherently interconnected. Dakar is a city of juxtapositions: continuous and discontinuous, local and global, as well as past, present, and future.

Historically, Dakar emerged from small Lebu fishing villages in the fifteenth century as a sanctuary—scholarly interpretations suggest its name *Ndakaaru*, evoking refuge in Lebu cosmology (Ndiaye 2016; Diop and Ricou 2024). The Gorée-Dakar zone then became a significant center of the transatlantic slave trade under Portuguese and later French influence (Diouf 1996a).[2] After its abolition (1848), France aggressively reconfigured Dakar into a colonial city, superimposing European urban grids atop existing coastal settlements and displacing Lebu communities (Betts 1985; Bigon 2009). In 1902, it became the capital of French West Africa, a position reinforced by colonial infrastructure like railroads and ports. The city's layout was systematically engineered in such an enduring way to facilitate and operationalize extractive interests, with a segregated urban structure that prioritized the needs of European settlers over the Lebu population—enforcing the spatial exclusion and dichotomy of Plateau (European administrative enclave) versus Médina (Indigenous containment zone) (Górny and Górna 2020; Betts 1985; Simone 2004; Bigon 2009; Diop and Ricou 2024). The French colonial administration sought to impose a Eurocentric vision of modernity on Dakar, constructing roads, ports, and administrative buildings to serve the dual purposes of controlling the population and enabling the extraction of resources in the West African territories (Bigon 2009).

With Senegal's independence in 1960, Dakar underwent a process of reconfiguration. Its urban landscape became a contested site navigating between nationalist erasure, informal reclaiming, and neoliberal restructuring (Simone 2004; Diop and Ricou 2024). Under President Léopold Sédar Senghor, the state sought to redefine itself through an emphasis on African modernity. Senghor's vision for Dakar foregrounded the architectural principle of asymmetrical parallelism (Diop and Ricou 2024), a departure from Eurocentric urban models. This vision was deeply tied to Négritude, a cultural and intellectual movement centered on Black and African ontologies and epistemologies (Senghor 1964; Diagne 2018). Yet, Senghor's cultural policies and political alliances were critiqued for

consolidating power among urban Francophone elites and perpetuating neocolonial dependency on France—a continuity of economic, military, and cultural influence (Diouf 2013).

The contestations of Senghor's politics shaped Dakar's urban identity. For instance, the scholar and public intellectual Cheikh Anta Diop challenged colonial narratives through his forensic research and seminal work on African knowledge systems and sciences from precolonial to modern times (Diop 1981; Mbaye 2016), while movements such as the prominent art collective Laboratoire Agit'Art redefined cultural expression in the 1960s and 1970s (Dixon 2015; Mbaye and Iossifidis 2020). Artist Cheikh Ndiaye recognizes these crossroads of past and present, where Western imperatives meet local meanings, needs, and interests in his reflection on Dakar's transformation after its independence. He argues:

> With independence came the freedom to once again fully inhabit this city, the imperative to inscribe in our new urban designs the ancient pact between our ancestors and the spirits that had guided them here, to this benevolent green cape embraced by a blue Atlantic. Dakar. Ndakaaru. Denatured by more than a hundred years of foreign rule, our Dëkk Raw had always meant to serve as a refuge for the oppressed of all origins. (Ndiaye 2016)

Artists like Cheikh Ndiaye reactivate Dakar's identity as a refuge, deeply rooted in spiritual and historical genealogies. Yet, the city's contemporary urban renewal and the afterlives of slavery and colonialism (Hartman 2021; Pierre 2013) bring forth a spectrum of complexities.

Dakar's evolving urban fabric also reflects broader dynamics of colonial racial capitalism (Davis 2022; Koshy et al. 2022). The afterlives of slavery and colonialism (Hartman 2021; Pierre 2013; Matlon 2015) continue to regulate who benefits from Dakar's economic growth and who remains dispossessed. While the city has experienced economic expansion, particularly with fishing, and recently with the discovery of offshore oil and gas reserves, the benefits of this growth have largely accrued to a small elite, including foreign investors and the ruling class from the colonial era and beyond (Diouf 1996b). Furthermore, since the early 2000s, under the administration of former President Abdoulaye Wade, Dakar's coastline has become increasingly vulnerable to land speculation (Lesourd 2012; Cissé 2022), leading to significant environmental challenges such as rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and flooding (Mbow et al. 2008).

Within this framework, I argue that these ongoing dynamics—the juxtaposition of urban histories, spatial reappropriation, and creative production—position Dakar as both a creative and spectral city (Gordon 2008; Best and Ramírez 2021). This positioning raises key questions: How do the spatial and temporal dimensions of these dynamics generate Dakar's contemporary urban experience? In what ways do they challenge conventional understandings of urban governance and cultural, creative practices (Mbaye and Pratt 2020)? Furthermore, how might these processes of reappropriation and spectrality inform broader discussions on postcolonial urban futures? It is within this context that the notions of the surrounds (Simone 2022) and the interworld (Boulbina 2019) offer analytical tools for advancing the idea of refuge as method.

REFUGE AS INFRASTRUCTURE OF POSSIBILITY

AbdouMaliq Simone's concept of the *surrounds* and Seloua Luste Boulbina's notion of the *interworld* offer profound insights into how historical genealogies and contemporary realities coalesce into complex urban landscapes. Both theorists explore how urban spaces and their inhabitants resist full absorption into hegemonic structures, enacting what Édouard Glissant describes as *opacity* (Glissant 2009; Edjabe, interviewed in März 2011; Edjabe, interviewed in Morris 2019). This notion refers to ways of living, narrating,[3] and knowing that elude dominant frameworks.

Simone defines the *surrounds* as "the form of an untranslatable specificity but yet remain always in the multiple, of many specificities, and thus not simply reducible to 'one thing'" (Simone 2022, 5). The surrounds are beyond capture. They enact a "possibility of propositions and the rehearsal of experimental ways of living that circumvent debilitating particular way of knowing what has happened and is happening" (Simone 2022, 5). With this in mind, I posit that they also alter the experience of being in place. The surrounds signify social and spatial dynamics that elude fixed categories, creating hidden infrastructures of life and possibility. Through this lens, I reflect on how the experience of being in place can be informed by the practices of refuge.

Simone's concept of the surrounds highlights spaces that exist outside formal systems of governance and technical regulation. These are not merely abandoned or derelict spaces; rather, they are dynamic zones of life and experimentation, where urban residents claim and reclaim their own infrastructures. These infrastructures emerge from the necessity to survive and adapt to forces of dispossession and collective trauma. The surrounds represent a space of refuge as they operate under the radar. Most importantly, in these spaces, urban residents

create what Simone calls infrastructural effects—relational, fugitive, and temporal phenomena (Simone 2022, 11). Street economies, local spiritual practices, and community-based artistic endeavors thriving in these spaces represent an affirmation of agency in the face of displacement, exclusion, and marginalization. The infrastructures within the surrounds are sustained through cyclical rhythms, improvisation, and endurance over time.

This temporal dimension is central. Marina Vishmidt's (2017) notion of time as infrastructure leads to a process of awareness and a call for action. Infrastructure, in turn, operates based on time, sustained through repetition. This repetition becomes embedded in the everyday, and when disrupted, it reveals underlying power relations as well as historical and present-day conditions. Highlighting infrastructural patterns across spatialities and temporalities, Vishmidt gives examples such as the global financial crisis of 2008 and the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, in 2014:

> Think of the global financial crisis; think of the water disasters in Flint or Detroit. The transcendental repetition is abstract (capitalism, class contempt, anti-Black racism) and the infrastructural repetition is found in the material conditions of possibility (captive regulations, lead pipes, privatized governance) that sustain social relations in a particular shape over time. (Vishmidt 2017, 265)

In this sense, when infrastructure repeats, it systemically carries specific activities by functioning in the dark—unnoticed and unquestioned (Vishmidt 2017). While infrastructure is based on repetition, this repetition can extend in different directions: it may reproduce patterns of collective violence and social inequalities, or it can hold the potential to (re)create an arrangement of "a wholly different form of social life over time" (Vishmidt 2017, 266). In this regard, refuge is not just a material space but also a temporal pattern that shifts and repeats itself in response to urban conditions, potentially crafting alternative futures.

Furthermore, Seloua Luste Boulbina's (2019) idea of *interworld* provides a crucial lens for understanding the spatio-temporal complexities of postcolonial urban spaces like Dakar. Boulbina argues we inhabit a postcolonial presence that continues to shape the spatial and cultural infrastructures of cities like Dakar. This interworld manifests itself through "the suspended time of the crossing, the "devenir" (Boulbina 2019, 292). It is a mediated space, both physical and temporal. The interworld is expressed through the persistence of colonial architecture,

the lingering economic disparities rooted in colonial racial capitalism, and, at the same time, through embodied and relational practices and desires. She elaborates on this through a maritime metaphor:

> In our representation, earth is to sea as certitude is to uncertainty, safety to danger—as theory, in sum, to experience. Floating suggests hesitation, doubt, indecision, the loss of bearings. Is being down-to-earth, terre-à-terre, tantamount to being prosaic? Actually, the dictionary reminds us that terre-à-terre was originally a maritime expression used to designate the act of sailing along the coast—that is, close to firm land. It's either that or the open sea. Maritime space, the open sea or ocean, is a figure for interworlds that coincide neither with a starting point nor with the end point. (Boulbina 2019, 289)

The historical legacies of refuge, slavery, colonialism, and Senegal's independence inform both the interworld and the surrounds, creating a dynamic where past and present realities co-exist in Dakar's urban landscape. Moving between these two concepts, refuge as method emerges as an epistemic practice where spatial and temporal elements are inherently entangled. While the surrounds contain fugitive infrastructures that are continuously shifting and being remade, the interworld creates a liminal space where imaginaries come into being. At this conceptual interface, refuge as method operates as a way of orienting within these shifting spaces.

CREATIVE PRACTICES AS REFUGE

Expanding on Simone's and Boulbina's theoretical frameworks, the artistic practices of Muhsana Ali and Ibrahima Thiam demonstrate how creative urban practices in Dakar function as acts of reclamation. In doing so, they perform a double motion between fugitive lines and opening as well as in the sense of sanctuary and protection. The concept of refuge as method is central here, as it highlights how art transforms spaces of exclusion into spatial praxis and maneuvering (Simone 2010). Ali and Thiam's work engages deeply with urban environments, offering new possibilities for imagining and creating spaces of refuge.

Muhsana Ali's artistic practice spans various mediums, including painting, mosaic, and public art installations. Her work is deeply rooted in themes of memory, history, spirituality, and socially engaged art practices, particularly as they relate to Africa and its diaspora. Through her art, Ali explores the complex

juncture between the past and the present, between the visible and the invisible, and between the personal and the collective.

Ali's socially engaged art practice first materialized in Abidjan. Her early project there laid the foundation for her later interventions and evolving work in Dakar, where she developed further ideas through community-based artistic infrastructures. In 1997, Ali gravitated to Côte d'Ivoire's former capital city, where she began working with street youth living in an abandoned hospital ruin and created an art exhibition in the building. The two-year project marked a significant shift in her practice, moving from traditional studio work to a long-standing socially engaged art practice that directly involved the surrounding community. The forty young boys and men she worked with had occupied a squatted, three-story building—the size of a city block—in the heart of Abidjan's downtown district. This building, abandoned and left to decay, became a temporary home and a site of social and spatial formation for these individuals, who granted Ali the permission to use the space. They allowed her into their space of refuge. Their presence greatly influenced her project. In other words, it was a presence based on reciprocity. Over two years all of the young boys and men—most of whom had experienced incarceration or addiction—became involved in the project, learning artistic skills and contributing to the space's transformation. Meanwhile the street youth exhibited the works they had developed under her supervision and served as tour guides, maintenance and security for the exhibition. At the same time, Ali had chosen a space that disrupted conventional gallery settings.

Tania Bruguera's concept of *useful art* is reflected in Ali's exhibition project, "Doors and Passageways of Return" (Bruguera, interviewed in Nobles 2012), where she transformed this derelict building into a space for artistic expression as a communal act. Drawing inspiration from her travels across Africa and studies of historical slave ports—particularly the Door of No Return at Elmina and Cape Coast Castles in Ghana, as well as on Gorée Island in Senegal—Ali's work embodies both her artistic vision and her commitment to community-based art practices. Through this project, she engages deeply with the complexities of history, memory, and identity. Inspired by her visits to historical slave ports in Ghana and Senegal, as well as Dogon architectural motifs in Mali, Ali sought to reimagine the "Door of No Return" as a portal of symbolic return.

Following her time in Côte d'Ivoire, Ali relocated to Dakar, where she continued her commitment to using art as a tool for community engagement. In Dakar, she co-founded the association Portes et Passage du Retour with her husband, artist Amadou Kane Sy. This organization focuses on exploring the

intersections between art, spirituality, and community building, particularly within the context of Dakar's rapidly changing urban landscape and its extensions in the rural area of Joal-Fadiouth (Ali, interview, 2024). Another key aspect of Ali's work is her focus on the symbolic and spiritual dimensions of space. In her projects, she often draws on Senegal's ancestral legacies, using symbols and motifs that resonate with the community's cultural and religious practices. This is evident in her work on the Doors and Passageways of Return exhibition project, where she explored themes of memory, spirituality, and history through the lens of the African diaspora and the afterlives of slavery (Hartman 2021). Ali seeks to reimagine and give material form to historical narratives of loss, turning them into spaces of presence, memory, and collective rehabilitation:

> I already knew I wanted to do, something about doors but then when I went to visit the slave ports and encountered that door of no return, it all came together. I knew that it had to be something representing my making the return through these . . . I saw myself as this symbolic return. I came with the title Doors and Passageways of Return and produced a series of 10 interactive large-scale sculptures and installations symbolizing doors and passageways for the people who were separated through slavery. (Ali, interview, 2024)

One of Ali's most recent interventions in Dakar's public sphere is her work in the Mermoz neighborhood, where she has led the creation of the Kersa Project. This mosaic mural, which has been created in collaboration with residents, emphasizes traditional Senegalese values such as *Kersa*, which idiomatically signifies the combined concept of modesty, respect, and decency. Through this specific public art project, Ali seeks to transform neglected urban spaces into a communal site. By engaging the community, she reclaims the space from marginalization, turning it into a space of both physical and cultural refuge:

> There are multiple levels of meaning. What am I actually placing there? Then they start to analyze: What is this? What is *Kersa*? Why is she putting that word here? Then, the repetition . . . Every element of a work of art, of anything, has meaning to it. The actual repetition of the word from the voices of the people has meaning. It's actually putting the word out in the atmosphere. (Ali, interview, 2024)

Ali's approach to art is deeply participatory. She involves local residents in the design and creation of her projects, ensuring that the work reflects their voices and perspectives. By involving the community, Ali creates a sense of ownership and refuge among the communities she engages with:

> We were living right across from the mosque. I think I was much more sensitive about being a foreigner here and producing work in the public space. I asked for permission from my father-in-law and the family to do this work on the facade of the building, of our home. We all agreed that it should be a theme that the community would welcome. Since it's in front of the mosque, it had to be Islam. It was something that everyone welcomed and participated in. It was a form of activism in the sense that I was trying to bring to light something that we all shared. That also brought more beauty to the community. (Ali, interview, 2024)

Community members actively engage with the project, questioning and reflecting on the meanings of *Kersa*. Through her community-based projects, Ali creates refuge in both physical and metaphorical terms. Ali's Kersa Project is emblematic of how artistic practice generates the surrounds. In other words, it concerns urban spaces that exist beyond formal governance but alternatively thrive through relational networks of care and collective meaning-making. In this sense, Ali's practice embodies refuge as method wherein the community actively shapes its surroundings through artistic practices, turning a neglected site into a space that holds cultural and spiritual meaning. In turn, Ali's participatory art and community collaborations frame it as a method of refuge-building (Murrani 2024).

While Ali's work brings the community into dialogue with its surroundings, Ibrahima Thiam's photography offers a profound exploration of Dakar's spiritual and cultural landscapes. Thiam's images capture the subtle, often overlooked intersections of history, spiritual realms, and quotidian experiences. By delving into Senegal's coastline, his work is deeply rooted in the oral legacies and mythologies of the Lebu population, which have significantly influenced Dakar's identity. Through his photographic lens, he captures the spectral presence of sacred sites and the ways they persist amid urban transformation:

> Many of these heritage elements are recent and modern. We were neither taught nor told these traditional, spiritual, and sacred stories in school. I find it important that all these narratives be integrated into the preservation of

> both nature and culture. I use photography as a means to tell these missing stories within both local and universal heritage. (Thiam, interview, 2024)

Thiam's exploration of Dakar's sacred sites is a key aspect of his work. Localities such as the waters of the ancestral figure of Mame Coumba Bang in Saint-Louis and the coastal areas of Yoff are central to the spiritual life of the Lebu population. Thiam's photographs reproduce the quiet, almost ethereal atmosphere of these spaces, where the boundaries between the material and the spiritual, the visible and the invisible, are blurred. In representing these sacred spaces, Thiam's work serves as a form of cultural reclamation. Thiam's photography acts as a visual archive, documenting these spaces and the practices that take place within them. This archival function is crucial in a rapidly changing city like Dakar, where the past is often at risk of being overshadowed by the push for development. Thiam's photographs also challenge the viewer to reconsider the city's urban spaces. His work invites us to see Dakar not just as a collection of buildings and streets, but as a living, breathing entity where social infrastructures of care, memory, and spirituality are constantly in dialogue:

> Among the Lebu community, women serve as the primary custodians of tradition, ensuring the continuity of spiritual and healing practices such as the Ndëpp ceremony. This therapeutic dance ritual functions as a process of purification, dispossession, and communal reconnection. Rather than framing psychological distress as individual pathology, Lebu traditions recognize it as an encounter with unseen forces, requiring collective intervention. (Thiam, Interview, 2024)

Through his lens, Thiam makes visible the surrounds by highlighting those spectral and sacred spaces that persist despite urban erasure, providing unseen infrastructures of memory, power, and land. In capturing the city's sacred spaces, he highlights the ways in which these locations provide refuge—not just physical refuge, but also those that are spiritual and cultural. These spaces offer a sense of continuity as well as disruptions. His photography itself becomes a method of restoring and re-imagining refuge.

Similarly, Thiam's photography engages the concept of interworld, capturing the intersections of sacred and urban spaces in Dakar. Thiam's photographs function as a living archive of cultural memory, preserving the legacies of these sites and illuminating the often-overlooked histories that continue to shape Dakar's identity. Reflecting on these interwoven histories, Thiam explains,

"Dakar means *Ndakaaru* and *Dëkk Raw* in Wolof, which means 'place of refuge.' With French colonization, it was renamed Dakar" (Thiam, interview, 2024). By emphasizing this multilayered meaning, Thiam highlights how Dakar's urban and sacred spaces are not separate but deeply entangled, forming a continuum where Dakar's historiographies of the Lebu legacies and colonial impositions converge.

By engaging with the city's past and present, Ali and Thiam's works not only document urban transformation but actively participate in shaping new imaginaries of refuge and belonging. Ali's mosaic murals situate and activate overlooked buildings that can be seen as an aesthetic infrastructure of refuge. It is an infrastructure that is maintained through collective participation and the interworld of artistic expression. This disrupts dominant narratives of urban marginalization by demonstrating that artistic interventions are not merely representational, but material and infrastructural in how they sustain alternative modes of belonging and agency. Similarly, Thiam's photography captures the spectral persistence of Dakar's sacred sites, resisting their epistemological voids and erasure through visual re-inscription. His repeated return to these spaces mirrors Simone's *infrastructural effect*, which is an ongoing, iterative practice that counters the disposability of certain urban spaces. By framing the city through creative repetition, both Ali and Thiam disrupt colonial and capitalist urban sense of temporalities, asserting that refuge is not simply a spatial retreat from the city but an active means of remaking and re-enacting it.

CONCLUSION

Muhsana Ali and Ibrahima Thiam's works do more than represent refuge; they enact it. Their practices materialize refuge as method, turning the city into a space of relentless, continual negotiation, where artistic interventions become tools of both endurance and transformation. In this way, creative practice emerges as a method of spatial maneuvering, one that reclaims urban dispossession as an opportunity for collective re-imagining. Their practices demonstrate how artistic practices generate the surrounds enacting spaces beyond dominant urban governance where fugitive infrastructures emerge. Their work also reveals the interworld where colonial legacies, spiritual meanings, and contemporary urban transformations intersect. Their creative practices enact refuge as method, not merely as a response to dispossession, but also as an active process of reclaiming space, memory, and collective futures. In doing so, they show that refuge is not only about spatial formation, but also about how refuge is inherited, embodied, and thus carried across temporalities. Thus, refuge as method becomes a critical lens for rethinking our urban presences within the contested terrain of infrastructural renewal.

ABSTRACT

*This essay examines the creative practices of cultural producers in Dakar, a city understood in the Lebu context as historically founded as a sanctuary (*Ndakaaru*), which continues to serve as a site of refuge for artists—actively reimagining and reclaiming its urban terrain. I introduce* refuge as method *as both a conceptual and methodological lens, developed through a dialogic process between theory and practice. The essay considers how urban histories and contemporary cultural expressions intersect in these spaces of refuge. By integrating concepts such as AbdouMaliq Simone's* surrounds *and Seloua Luste Boulbina's* interworld*, this essay demonstrates how two Dakarois artists Muhsana Ali and Ibrahima Thiam materialize refuge through iterative practices of sheltering, reclaiming, and re-imagining.* Refuge as method *unfolds not merely as a spatial and cultural formation, but also as an epistemic space that reconfigures space, memory, and collective futures amidst ongoing infrastructural renewal.* [Dakar; refuge; infrastructure; renewal; urban art; epistemics]

NOTES

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1. While etymologies of Dakar/*Ndakaaru* are contested (see Bigon 2009), I prioritize interpretations resonant with Lebu worldviews and artistic practices in my study. This aligns with my methodology of co-thinking with cultural producers to reactivate spatial epistemologies of care.
2. It is worth mentioning that Gorée Island (facing Dakar) was the primary slave trade epicenter in the region under Portuguese, Dutch, English, and French successive rule. Dakar (mainland) only became prominent after the slave trade declined (post-1800s), functioning as a colonial administrative and military center (UNESCO, n.d.).
3. In terms of creating imaginaries, narrating—*le récit*—is defined and redefined by way of connecting the historiography, narratives, and discourse through the collective, the political as well as the cultural realms, based on repetition and disruption.

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