

Walking as Psychogeographical Inquiry: In-Between the Railway Line and the Lived Path

A Reflective Accompaniment to the Keteke Art Installation.

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Introduction

This evolving document is an extended conversation and reflection between the authors on a journey of inquiry undertaken on foot along the full length of *Keteke* — the Ewe name for Togo's colonial railway, and the name we use for both the wider project and its resulting art installation. Rather than treating walking simply as a means of moving through or documenting the landscape, we approach it as an artistic and contemplative practice and, more specifically, as a collaborative, sensory and decolonially oriented method of inquiry.

Our reflections are developed in dialogue with work on walking as wayfaring, sensory place-making, psychogeography and critical artistic inquiry (e.g. Ingold, 2016; Pink, 2008; Bridger, 2010; Lasczik et al., 2023), alongside scholarship on coloniality, infrastructure and ruination (e.g. Stoler, 2008). *Keteke* began, more than a decade ago, as something closer to a drift than a consciously formulated research practice. Over time, it developed into a series of more deliberately organised journeys, while retaining an interest in disrupting habitual and often unreflective ways of moving through and relating to the wider environment (Bridger, 2010).

This document therefore does not attempt to retrospectively impose a neat methodological coherence on the project. Instead, it makes the evolving practice itself available for reflection: how we walked, what walking made perceptible, how collaboration shaped what could be

encountered and known, and how the railway's colonial histories entered into those encounters. In this sense, it responds to calls for greater explicitness about walking practices and for researchers to expose more fully what they actually do when walking becomes part of their inquiry (Pierce and Lawhon, 2015).

We try to advance three very much related arguments. First, the railway constitutes simultaneously *charted and uncharted territory*. It was surveyed, mapped and constructed as a colonial line (Hoogakker and Ametébé, 2026), yet we will demonstrate that the social, spiritual and imaginative lives gathered around it exceed what this cartographic representation can record. "Uncharted" therefore does not describe territory that was previously unknown to its inhabitants. It refers to the limits of colonial mapping - and obviously of our own knowledge - when confronted with lived paths, memories, ancestral presences, emotions and relationships, still present today.

Second, walking allows us to encounter this inherited infrastructure – and place – differently. Following the railway gave our journey a direction while leaving open what we might learn along it – the in between of the (former) stations. Drawing on Ingold's distinction between *transport* and *wayfaring*, we understand walking as a form of knowledge produced through movement: through bodily experience, changing and syncing rhythms, spontaneous conversations, interruptions and attention to the changing terrain underfoot (Ingold, 2016). The railway connected our journey, but it could not determine all of its meanings.

Third, we argue that the railway is not merely a reminder of a completed colonial period. Following Stoler (2008), we approach its remains as imperial debris through which processes of ruination continue to shape the present and its uneven futures. *Keteke* therefore concerns both an inherited infrastructure and the social, economic, political and spiritual realities encountered around it.

What becomes observable and perceptible when we follow a colonial railway at walking pace? How might the people we meet along it change the questions with which we began? And under what conditions might walking contribute to a decolonial inquiry into a history that remains materially and affectively present?

Inspired by the theme of the Fifth World Congress of Psychogeography 'Uncharted Territory', the relationship between *charted* and *uncharted territory* runs through this reflection. Both terms depend on one's point of view: a place unfamiliar to a visitor may be intimately known to those who inhabit it. A railway map makes certain routes, connections and destinations visible, but it cannot contain all the relationships through which a landscape is lived. We are interested in the 'distance' between these forms of knowledge and in what happens when a mapped line becomes what we call an 'itinerary for inquiry'.

Ingold's (2015) distinction between *lines of occupation* and a *meshwork* of inhabited trails helps us think through this 'distance'. He describes imperial infrastructure as lines surveyed and constructed across landscapes already shaped by movement and habitation. Designed to enable settlement and extraction, these lines cut across existing human and more-than-human paths (Ingold, 2015). In the case of Keteke, they also carry histories of inhumane colonial violence. Infrastructure therefore organises visibility: certain destinations and forms of movement have become prominent, while other paths, relationships and histories remain outside the map.

This distinction allows us to approach Keteke as a colonial line running through a landscape whose meanings far exceed its infrastructural function. Stories of forced labour, family histories and the spiritual presence of ancestors showed us that its colonial past remains part of the present. Following Stoler (2008), we therefore understand the railway not as a passive remnant of a finished colonial period, but as an infrastructure whose effects continue to shape movement, memory and everyday life. What might conventionally be called a "colonial legacy" (e.g. Infante-Amate and Krausmann, 2019) emerged through our encounters as something more immediate: a lived ancestral inheritance.

Of course, we reckon that walking alone cannot establish the full extent of these effects. It can, however, bring us into situations in which they become questions worth pursuing. We therefore use "uncharted" cautiously. It describes the limits of a particular map - and obviously that of our own understanding - rather than an absence of knowledge among those who live along the route. "Charted" and "uncharted" are therefore situated terms and never neutral: our walk entered ground already known, even where we were encountering it for the first time.

Here, Ingold's (2016) distinction between *transport* and *wayfaring* helps us articulate this experience. For example, where *transport* connects predetermined destinations, *wayfaring* develops through perceptual and material engagement along a path. Crucially here is that the distinction concerns the coupling of movement and perception, rather than simply the difference between mechanical travel and walking (ibid). Following the railway on foot made that relationship a practical matter: what we encountered helped shape how we proceeded and also that what became (in)significant.

Attuning Rhythms of the Present and Past

To walk the railway today therefore means moving through several overlapping histories of mobility. Walking recalls, without reproducing (!) the bodily labour through which the railway was first surveyed, constructed and maintained and especially felt during longer slightly monotonous walks when shade was absent. Therefore we would argue with Bartholomee (in Laszcek et al. 2023: 60) that walking helped ourselves to attune to the environment "with childlike wonder" at times.

It also reverses the speed and directionality for which the railway was designed. Where the colonial train sought to compress space and move resources efficiently from hinterland to coast, walking slows the line down. At walking pace, the railway ceases to be merely a corridor between predetermined points and becomes part of the landscape itself: encountered step by step, through bodies, memories, conversations, ruins and interruptions. The most consequential change in our inquiry came through these conversations. We found the colonial past vividly present in stories and oral histories, and our attention shifted increasingly towards these accounts.

While chronology could locate colonial rule in an earlier period, the conversations brought its temporal proximity much clearer into view. Through the presence of ancestors in these accounts, historical time acquired a different character. An event placed several generations away could remain close through family memory and continuing hurt. We came to question the assumption that elapsed time necessarily produces 'distance'. The railway's material remains and the histories told along it invited different ways of understanding what it means for something to belong to the past. Chen's (2017) *rhythmanalysis* offers here a useful sensitivity to such differences in temporality.

Her account examines how time and space take shape through material relations and describes rhythm as a “meta-sense” connecting bodily and surrounding impressions (Chen, 2017). We understand this as a process and responsibility of attunement: adjusting our pace, movement and attention to the existing rhythms, knowledges and realities of the places through which we walked. Moving slowly, quietly and respectfully created a shared space in which encounters and conversations were able to unfold – of course with its own limitations.

This did not mean that our different rhythms or experiences became identical, but that walking gave us - and others equally - the time to notice, respond and remain present. Our encounters suggest that walking's methodological value involves the time and availability it can create for others, trying to distance from more extractive methodologies. A pause to listen and ‘lean-in’ belongs to the inquiry as much as movement along the track – if not more. There is good reason for Pickerill's (2024) call to embrace “multiple rhythms” while doing research.

Pink's concept of *sensory sociality* helps us further to understand inquiry as something that develops through relations. For Pink, ethnographic knowledge emerges through embodied activity and attunement to other people's practices. The researcher also participates in *place-making*, as each encounter contributes to the place subsequently described (Pink, 2008). This became especially tangible when an exchanged greeting turned into a conversation or in our encounter with Victor; a walk became part of a spiritual blessing and a stay over.

This encounter brought questions of inheritance, religion, spirituality and identity into our inquiry. Victor's education and spiritual responsibilities belonged together within the life he presented to us within an apparent “densely populated ecology of powerful deities and spirits” (Agboada, 2024: 1028). His account prompted us to consider how spirituality - and vodu particularly - is understood and represented, including the severe oppression and elimination efforts during subsequent colonial rule (Vannier, 2020; Allman and Parker, 2005) which still continues in people's perception and reception today. *Sensory sociality* helps explain the significance of such encounters (Pink, 2008); the ceremony became part of how we encountered ‘the line’, bringing us into a situation that following the railway alone could not have anticipated.

These early encounters also opened up questions about our temporal experience and the historical chronology in relation to memory, ancestry and everyday life and actually changed what we wanted from the walk. We became less concerned with following the railway as a historical

object in isolation and became more attentive to the relationships through which its colonial context was remembered and interpreted. Walking created opportunities for this shift because its duration included stopping, listening and remaining in conversation across space and time. The route was made not only by our feet, but perhaps more importantly by the people who invited us to stop, rather than by us imposing ourselves upon them.

Learning to Walk Together

At the same time, we wondered what our capacity to take the time to walk meant alongside the obligations, routines and constraints of those we encountered. Even where much of this work was voluntary and undertaken on little more than a cost-cover basis, the possibility of devoting such time to walking remained a real privilege: the freedom to move slowly is not equally distributed. Yet while its slowness is celebrated as a “generator of expanded thinking and making” (e.g. Aitken in Laszcik et al. 2023: 123) it is also increasingly difficult to accommodate within the neoliberal academic landscape, and arguably within artistic practice too, where time is organised around productivity, outputs and measurable returns (Troiani and Dutson, 2021; Thayer, 2021 in Appadurai et al., 2021).

Thereby, attunement did not mean that we were always in sync. Walking together under demanding conditions was, alongside being deeply enriching, also challenging - not least because we had only recently met. We brought different cultural backgrounds, expectations and understandings of the project, and had to discover our respective roles while already moving, together and alongside others. Those roles were never fixed; they shifted with the terrain, the encounters and the demands of each day.

Much writing on walking begins with the figure of the solitary walker, often historically imagined through the privileged male *flâneur*: someone afforded the time and freedom to wander, observe and linger. Black et al. (in Laszcik et al. 2023) explicitly position their own collaborative walking against this figure, reflecting on how gender, work, care and academic life shape who is able to walk, when, and under what conditions. Our situation was different again, but this made us attentive to our own positionalities. Much of the project was undertaken voluntarily and on a cost-cover basis, but it still required a considerable investment of time - a form of privilege in itself, and one not equally available to those we met along the way. As men, researchers, artists and visitors moving through places where others were working, travelling and living their everyday

lives, we carried forms of privilege that shaped how we were received and what kinds of mobility, safety and time were available to us. These privileges intersected with differences between us, including our racialised and socioeconomic positions.

Walking together therefore required more than finding a shared pace. It meant continually making time for one another: checking in, recognising when the other needed conversation or silence, negotiating when to stop, responding to unexpected situations, and dividing the weight we carried, both literally and figuratively. Precisely because this was not seamless, it became part of the inquiry. We came to understand shared rhythm not as something two people simply possess, but as something continually made, lost and found again. Sometimes the most respectful way of walking together was to give one another space - and then reconnect a little farther down *Keteke*, like an accordion, expanding and contracting as our needs, rhythms and surroundings changed.

Between the Stations: a Line that Dis/Appears

The railway's presence was uneven. In some places it disappeared; elsewhere it emerged again from the bush. Parts of the route ran alongside main roads, while others crossed extensive farmland and smaller settlements. Following it involved moving between these different surroundings and attending to the changing visibility of the track. This appearance and disappearance became a way of thinking about the limits of the mapped line. A map offers continuity, while the ground presents changing conditions. The route remained an orientation, but the landscape – and thermoscape – demanded continuous attention on its own terms.

Ingold's distinction between *transport* and *wayfaring* can further clarify what walking might offer here. Transport is organised around movement between predetermined destinations; wayfaring develops through ongoing perceptual and material engagement along a path. The distinction concerns the relationship between locomotion and perception: whether what we encounter participates in how we proceed (Ingold, 2016). For us, this makes the railway's *in-between* important. Following a defined route does therefore not equal producing a predetermined inquiry. A conversation can interrupt our attention to the line and draw us towards another concern. The significance of the journey develops through these changes of attention, as well as through the distance covered.

For example, our encounter with Sena, a young man who hopes to represent Togo internationally as a boxer while helping to support his household, complicated familiar stereotypes about African lives and labour. His story brought aspiration and obligation into the same frame: the pursuit of an individual ambition was inseparable from responsibility towards his family. Rather than simply confirming an idea we already held, the encounter asked us to attend to the particular conditions in which Sena was working towards his future.

Our encounter with Sena, a young man who hopes to represent Togo internationally as a boxer while also helping to support his household, complicated familiar stereotypes of African lives and labour. His aspirations were neither separate from nor displaced by economic responsibility: becoming a boxer, contributing to his household and imagining a different future existed alongside one another. In this sense, his story resonates with Honwana's (2012) notion of *waithood*, which describes the prolonged and uncertain transition through which many young Africans seek socially recognised adulthood amid constrained economic opportunities. Yet this waiting is neither passive nor politically neutral. As Esson et al. (2021) suggest, the pressures associated with achieving adulthood can also reproduce gendered expectations and patriarchal norms, including ideas about masculinity, work and the obligation to provide.

This is where psychogeography becomes useful. Bridger (2010) describes the *drift* as a practice that interrupts habitual movement and attends to how environments shape feelings and behaviour. Its critical force lies in questioning the organisation of everyday life (ibid.). Our railway itinerary differs from an unplanned drift, yet Bridger's formulation leaves room for a productive tension between following a fixed route and remaining open to encounter. As argued above, much depends on temporality: we can follow the line while allowing what happens along it to unsettle our interpretations.

Bridger (2010) however also cautions against psychogeographical practices becoming absorbed in nostalgia or in the impressions of the walker. Applied to *Keteke*, this raises a question for our own artistic practice: how can attention to a colonial railway remain responsive to lives unfolding in the present? The people we encountered along the route have concerns, ambitions and futures that cannot be contained within the railway's history. This prompted a gradual shift in our attention from the railway primarily as a colonial remnant towards the postcolonial futures being imagined and enacted around it: towards what Appadurai (2004) calls the *capacity to aspire*, while retaining space for uncertainty, contradiction and the in-between.

A reflection on coloniality also requires us to examine the claims we make for walking. Lasczik et al. (2023) rightfully question accounts of artistic walking that abstract it from political conditions and differences in bodily capacity. Their discussion reminds us that walking has different meanings under very different circumstances. Our chosen ‘itinerary of inquiry’ cannot stand in for other people’s everyday mobilities, or reproduce the historical experiences associated with the infrastructure. We therefore approach the decolonial possibilities of Keteke as a continuing question. These possibilities depend on how we listen, whose interpretations inform the work and how encounters are represented.

Blinne’s *a/r/tographic* inquiry suggests that walking and writing can remain connected through pauses, returns and changes of direction (2018). Such an approach leaves space for uncertainty within artistic reflection. Alongside this, Pierce and Lawhon’s call for *methodological forthrightness* asks researchers to make explicit the conditions under which knowledge develops. Their proposal to “End with Questions, Not Answers” similarly keeps the limits of situated observation in view (2015, p. 5).

Walking Keteke is, for us, an inquiry into how an inherited line is encountered through relationships in the present. Its value lies partly in the questions the route itself could not anticipate: questions brought into view through a conversation, a remembered story or a shift in attention. Such openness does not remove the limits of interpretation. A spontaneous encounter offers access to a moment in someone’s life; its significance for us does not mean that we fully understand its significance for them. This becomes particularly important when an encounter enters an artwork and is made available to audiences who were not themselves present.

The railway’s changing material presence also leaves us with questions of ruination. Rather than reading its deterioration simply as the remains of a colonial past, we are interested in whether the railway can help us think—at least symbolically—about relations of power and dependence that continue into the present. Where do the people we meet locate their capacity to make decisions about their own lives, and where do they encounter constraint? How, if at all, do they connect these experiences to colonial histories and their afterlives?

Keteke has changed the questions with which we began. The line led us towards relationships that extend beyond its route and beyond the duration of the journey. Returning would allow us to give those relationships more time, while creating greater space for the people we met to question, redirect and participate more fully in shaping what the project becomes.

From encounters to installation

Walking beside colonial remains does not resolve these questions. It gives them a material setting in which to be considered and comes with a responsibility. The movement from walk to installation makes this responsibility especially tangible. Selecting images, objects and words produces another account of the railway. We must ask how that account relates to the stories that emerged along the route. Which voices remain distinct? What becomes prominent through our selection, and what recedes?

The installation brings contemporary representations into relation with colonial images. Flags, stamps, clothes, bodily attitudes and religious symbolism form part of its visual language. We use stamps to suggest chronology, while other elements attend to identity and self-presentation. Our intention is to challenge the (neo)colonial depiction of people by giving space to contemporary lives and forms of expression. The juxtaposition asks viewers to consider how images establish authority over the people they depict, and how those depictions are unsettled by the lives encountered during the project.

Yet symbolism does not speak without mediation. We select and arrange these materials, shaping how they can be read. Clothing, a flag or a religious practice can open questions about identity, but each can also be reduced to a sign whose meaning appears settled. Our responsibility is to retain something of the specificity and complexity of the people involved. The installation therefore continues the methodological questions of the walk. Whose account guides the interpretation? What context accompanies an image? How can a person remain more than an illustration of our argument about colonialism?

While a first version was screened in Togo, we close our reflections by anticipating another stage of the project. Blinne's (2018) *a/r/tographic* inquiry connects walking and writing through pauses, changes of direction but also returns. We would like to return to particular places, but above all to people. Brief encounters raised questions that require more time: how colonial histories are

carried within specific families, how they are understood across generations, and how those histories relate to present circumstances. We understand the movement into installation in a similar spirit: as another stage of interpretation that should remain capable of revision. Therefore, we invite you to suggest, comment, co-write, co-research and share ideas.

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