

z o n g o

c a r a v a n s   o f   h o p e



**z o n g o**

c a r a v a n s   o f   h o p e

HMJokinen



HMJokinen

## Interventions in the Third Space

This email interview was made by Nora Sdun in December 2011.

The entire interview is published under [www.away-is-a-place.de/interview\\_hmj01.html](http://www.away-is-a-place.de/interview_hmj01.html)

Die vollständige Version dieses E-Mail-Interviews findet sich in Deutsch unter

[www.away-is-a-place.de/interview\\_hmj02.html](http://www.away-is-a-place.de/interview_hmj02.html)

**Your space installation in the Kunsthau Hamburg is titled *zongo. caravans of hope*. This year you once again travelled to Ghana where you met people who live in zongo neighbourhoods. What is a zongo?**

When Muslim traders in the past moved with their caravans from Northern Africa to Ghana, they settled down bit by bit on the outskirts of the cities in shack settlements they called zongo. “Zongo” is the Hausa word for “caravan”. Today the zongo residents are rather marginalized by the majority society. Negative ascriptions circulate in the media. However, sociological surveys describe the inhabitants as seeing their own living environments in a much more positive light. They feel free and independent despite all the problems that everyday life brings.

The African cities are growing rapidly, and today many shack settlements are centrally located within cities. In many cases, for example in the Ghanaian capital Accra, they become victims of gentrification pursued by foreign investors, but the residents are now standing up against forced evictions.

We began our research in two neighbourhoods: in Old Fadama in Accra and in Ayigya-Zongo in the city of Kumasi.

In Kumasi we were invited by the Center for African and Cultural Studies at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and were offered a workshop space on the campus where we could work with art students and postgraduates. In the first phase of our urban art workshop AWAY IS A PLACE we were occupied with the mind mapping themes “nature” and “right to the city”. Subsequently we approached the people in the nearby Ayigya-Zongo. The council of elders gave us the permission to work together with the residents. The warm welcome we were given became an unforgettable experience.

**What were the topics of your art work in the neighbourhood? And what do you judge the sustainability impact of your workshop to be?**

*Ayigya Voices* shows images of and interviews with six women. It is especially the women who are engaged in pursuing the interests of the community. I was permitted to hang the portraits and interviews on posters in the public space. Soon passers-by suggested that the women should become candidates in the upcoming communal elections since their program was already well outlined on these posters. To this day the communal administration has been firmly in the hands of men.

My work *Scorched Pastures* presents views and findings from Old Fadama where an enormous amount of toxins is set free when children and young people burn plastic coated computer cables to salvage small amounts of copper, and where people without any tools take apart the scrap imported from our consumer societies in order to retrieve small pieces of recyclable and resellable metals. This area, previously a garden and a pasture, has now become refuse-covered and desolate. Additional photographs pertinent to the routes of e-waste exports I took in scrap dealers' shops in Hamburg and in its harbour.

*Troubled Waters* started with water samples from three memorable places. Water analyses and microscopic photography, mixed with poem fragments as well as paintings by the commercial painter Ayasco were merged to form an installation. Together with Dr. Kodwo Edusei of the KNUST I produced theme relevant modifications of the traditional Fante Asafo flags<sup>1</sup>.

Yes, we did ask ourselves how such a short-run workshop could come up with a sustainability impact. In addition to art, disciplines such as urban planning, architecture, sociology, social work and similar subjects may be studied at the KNUST, so we informed them that the Ayigya-Zongo residents wished to be supported. Our request became an incentive for fund-raising for bore holes for clean drinking water wells in several locations in Ayigya. The artist Ralitsa Diana Debrah is planning, together with the women, a community garden with the aim of inviting the many unemployed young people to participate as well as of improving the local food sources.

Translation: Dr. Philipp Lange

<sup>1</sup> Asafo companies were warrior associations in the Fante land in Southern Ghana. Even today they still are active in organising religious celebrations. The most spectacular moment of these festivities is the skilful dance with one of the association's flags which illustrate historical events.

## AWAY IS A PLACE

*We must know that "away" is in fact a place ... where people and environments will suffer from our carelessness, our ignorance or indifference.*

Jim Puckett, environmental activist<sup>1</sup>

Globalized capitalism and neoliberal economies bring serious social and environmental problems. Large divides are created by rich countries through the looting of natural resources and the excessive consumption and the disposal of waste in poor countries, where pollution and poverty grow. In the course of this unsound development in contested urban spaces, how can nature, cultural difference, local homes and local culture be sustained? What is the role of art in approaching problems that effect people and environment? In what ways can we use art work to research, intervene and speak out? Where and how can artists join local communities, transdisciplinary teams and international networks to address global affairs affecting local issues?

## Caravans of Hope: Zongo Encounters

*Amid the squalor and sprawl of Ghana's overcrowded cities you will find the Muslim zongos. Where a cruel history meets an uncertain future and where caravans of hope collide with convoys of despair.<sup>2</sup>*

Transsaharan traders travelling from the northern Sahel region to Ghanaian cities found places in the suburbs where they could rest. These places became known as „zongos“. From the late 1800's on zongos have developed into permanent multiethnic settlements. For the British colonial rule these peri-urban communities were convenient out-of-sight territories to contain the northern migrants who were exploited as soldiers or cocoa plantation workers.

Today, an increasing number of indigent farmers - the majority of them Hausa speaking Muslims - come to cities to settle down for „greener pastures“, i.e. in hope of employment and better living conditions. A worldwide phenomenon hits African cities as well: their urban space becomes object of gentrification. In Accra, Kumasi and other Ghanaian cities housing rights have become a severe issue.

The majority society and the media often reject the zongos as slums associated with poverty, unemployment and crime. The self-image of the residents sounds quite different: „Zongo people are more or less free people - free, independent, but also deprived of the resources and services of the state. To migrants from different tribes and ethnic groups with uncertain residency permit status a zongo provides acceptance, tolerance, security and freedom of movement.“<sup>3</sup> Thus a zongo has become less a physical space, more a construct for various projections.

## Our first research spot:

### Old Fadama, the sad place for globalized e-waste

Old Fadama in Accra holds the reputation of being „one of the most polluted places on earth“. Accompanied by Haruna and Karim, members of the NGO “People’s Dialogue on Human Settlements”, we visited the Agbogbloshie compound where huge amounts of broken cars and electronic waste, illegally imported from rich Western countries, including from Hamburg’s harbour, are manually taken apart by the poorest of Ghana’s poor. Extremely poisonous fumes are emitted when children and young people burn plastic coated computer cables to salvage metals. The hard foam removed from old refrigerators is used to kindle the fires. The air as well the nearby Korle Lagoon and sea water are significantly polluted with heavy metals. The health of people living in proximity is put in danger, while on the coast of Accra high levels of toxins are killing off the fish which has been an important food supply and source of income.

Old Fadama with 80.000 inhabitants is situated in the center of Accra. The residents make a living mainly through small businesses in nearby market places. Currently foreign investors have become attracted to this centrally located land. Their plans to build a recreational park are supported by local politicians and accompanied by the Korle Lagoon Ecological Restoration Project KLERP - at first view a reasonable solution. However, the area would fall victim to gentrification, all the while the Old Fadama residents would be forced to the outskirts of the city where they would lose their very means of subsistence. International NGOs have presented substantial alternative models for recycling e-waste which would avoid the environmental damage currently happening but these proposals seem to have fallen on deaf ears of the decision makers. The Old Fadama people are presently organising protests and strikes against the forced evictions.

## Urban Art Workshop in Ayigya-Zongo

In July/August 2011 we held the AWAY IS A PLACE workshop on the campus of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi. Together with the participants we looked at art history and nature’s past, at early and contemporary forms of environmental destruction and social injustice. We discussed forms of artistic action and public intervention. We researched myths and narratives of the essence of nature, air and water, of gods and spirits, exchanging between Ghanaian/African, European and American cultures. Together we read texts on urban space, social practice, artistic forms of activism through symbolic and aesthetic means.

Just across the street from the gated university campus we found the Ayigya district with a zongo community. Most of the women we met day by day on campus selling bananas, peanuts, kenkey, water sachets and tilapia from the tops of their heads, live in Ayigya-Zongo.

On our first walk through Ayigya we saw problems we assumed the people could be facing in their daily life. We decided to approach the residents, ask them to tell us about aspects of their community life and then try to visualize these issues with them. The first meeting was with the assembly man and the tribal chiefs. Soon we were accepted and given free admittance to the community.



HMJokinen was introduced to Adiza Bukari, her first interview partner who then quickly invited friends to join the project *Ayigya Voices*. On walking tours Adiza Bukari, Adiba Bukari and Mariatu Yusuf showed us the neighbourhood area.

The artists Rex Akinruntan, Epilogue Annku, Ralitsa Diana Debrah and Dankwa Kwabena Ampadu worked at several topics introduced by the community residents, such as gentrification and forced evictions, dirty drinking water, e-waste and household garbage, the dangerous high tension tower erected in the middle of the community, aggressive visual brandings of international companies.

Charlie Michaels gave photography lessons to children who took hundreds of photos which show personal and often surprising views of their surroundings.

For one week during the workshop we were able to work in this wonderful neighbourhood researching, mapping, photographing, interviewing, installing, filming, painting signs on houses or simply playing with children or sitting under a tree and chatting with the residents. As we became closer to the people, we experienced openness and encountered generous hospitality. At the end of our week there we created a series of public exhibitions in urban space as well as an exhibition in our workshop space on the university campus where we could welcome many curious visitors from Ayigya-Zongo.

September 2011

HMJokinen, Finland/Hamburg, Germany  
Charlie Michaels, Ann Arbor/Detroit, USA

AWAY IS A PLACE  
[www.away-is-a-place.de](http://www.away-is-a-place.de)

- <sup>1</sup> Puckett, Jim, 2011. *A Place Called Away*, In: Hugo, Pieter: *Permanent Error*. Lakewood: Prestel
- <sup>2</sup> Bradford, Abdullah, 2006. *Life in the Zongo*, In: *Q-News, The Muslim Magazine*, Issue 367
- <sup>3</sup> Muratbayeva, Bakyt, 2009. *Zongo and the community of work and life in Accra, Ghana*. University of Bielefeld, Research Report *Modes of Mobility in Africa*, p.15



s c o r c h e d   p a s t u r e s

t r o u b l e d   w a t e r s

a y i g y a   v o i c e s













**EGUR A ODZIEWIEYI**



**NSU A JWC JHAWMU**

**EDZIDZIE A ODZIENWIEYI**

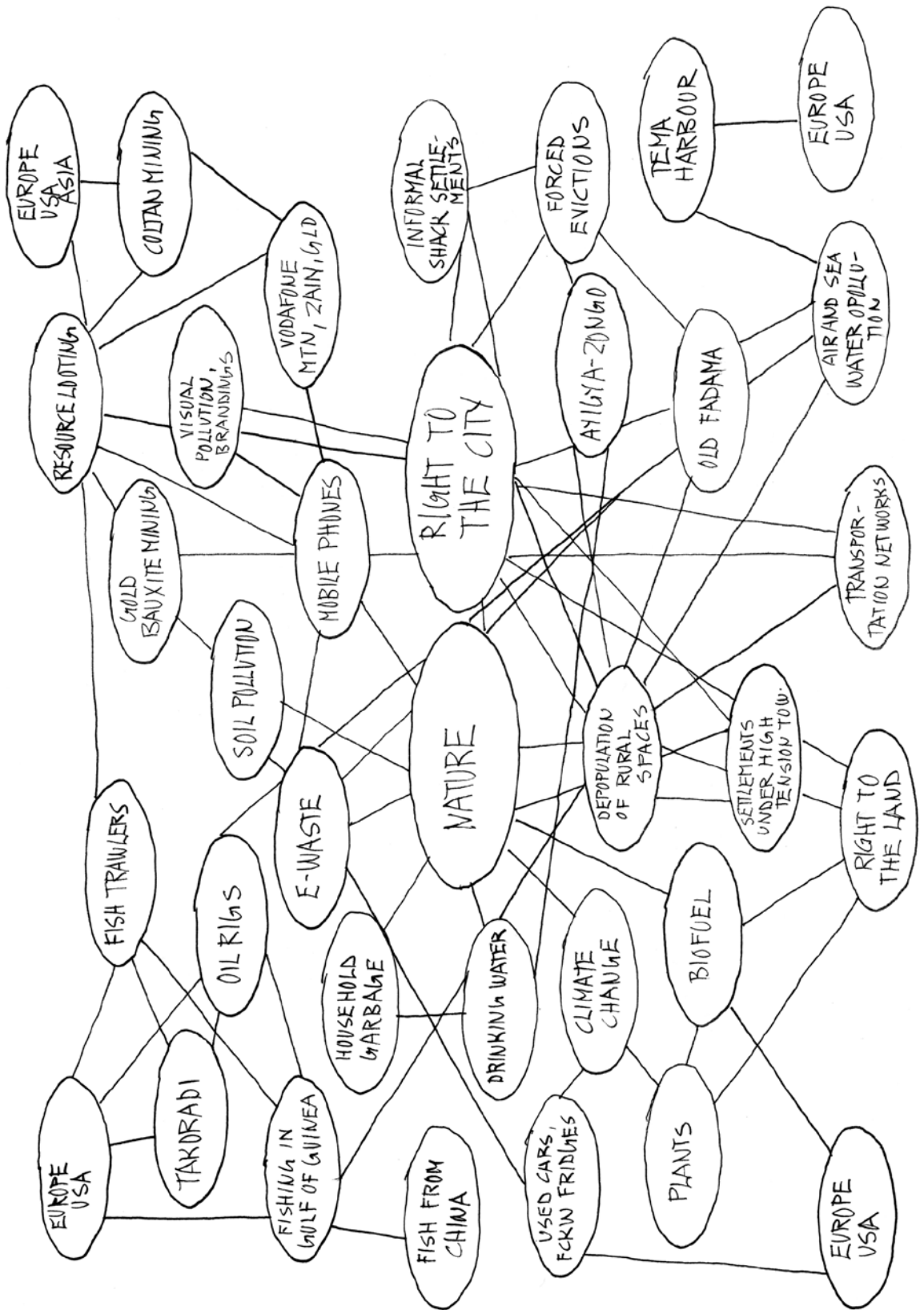


**NSU A JWC JHAWMU**













	$\mu\text{g/l}$
Al	15
As	2,1
Cd	<0,05
Cr	5,2
Cu	6,9
Fe	94
Ni	4,1
Pb	1,2
Zn	4,5



	$\mu\text{g/l}$
Al	9,7
As	0,28
Cd	0,10
Cr	1,6
Cu	4,2
Fe	121
Ni	0,60
Pb	0,38
Zn	<1



	$\mu\text{g/l}$
Al	16
As	<0,2
Cd	<0,05
Cr	0,97
Cu	2,8
Fe	<10
Ni	0,85
Pb	<0,1
Zn	8,0



hold  
as they, bread as breath  
is held and spent, disgarding  
weights of time  
in clutching and possessing  
- yokes of death

Korle Lagoon  
Old Fadama



Ayigya-Zongo

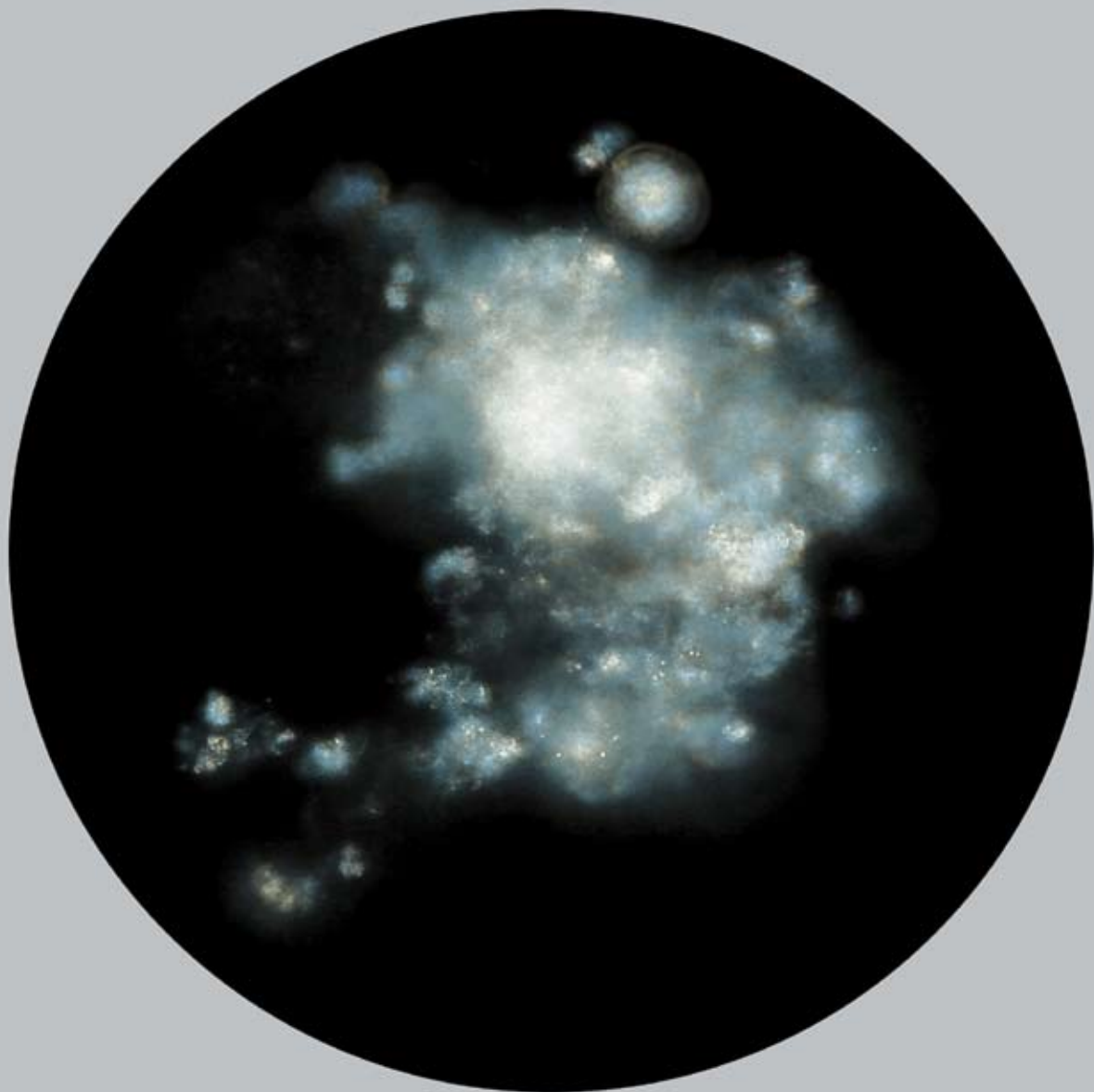
blue shimmers wasted waters  
blue writes lines in redred dust  
black feet  
small and fragile  
smoothly  
touch black oil  
on troubled soil





first you must  
walk among the faceless  
their feet are shod in earth  
and dung

Last Bath  
Assin Manso River



EGUAR A ODZI EWIEI

UNMAYH CMC Y NSN



**EDZIDZI A ODZI EWIEI**



**NSU A CWC HAWMU**





### Mariatu Yusif

My family comes from Zavelugu-Nantong in the Northern Region. My parents moved to Kumasi for better living conditions.

We wish that our children will have a chance in life. They visit the government school as well as the Arabic school in a shift system, so they will be well educated and learn good habits. But still we face the problem of youth crime, caused by the high unemployment.

Because the old school has become too small, now a new building is being erected. In order to protect the children, a wall should be built around the school.

Many families are living under the high tension tower. The health conditions there are very bad. My opinion is that the tower must go, and that we should ask the government for better housing as well.

We have organised meetings but there has been very little improvement. We need advocacy for our work and motivation for the young people.

I have at least three wishes: that we will have more jobs, that the school be protected by a wall and that the Arabic school can get computers.



### Hawa Yusif

My family comes originally from Bawku, Upper East Region, but I was born in Adanse Formina near here. My father was a policeman. He built the house in Ayigya-Zongo we are living in now.

In our community there is unfortunately youth unemployment, so many young boys are wandering around. Also women are without work. We do need better schools and education.

We do not have facilities for drinking and waste water. Garbage is left around, and this causes malaria. Our neighbours living under the high tension tower suffer from serious health risks. When it rains, you can even hear the electrical currents on the aluminum roofs.

So we are trying to solve these problems. We need water pipes, rubbish containers and better housing conditions. The roofs of the houses next to the high tension tower should be built with an isolating material. The young people should get jobs.



### Adisa Issah

My parents came from Bawku. I was born in Kumasi. Ayigya-Zongo is a poor Muslim neighbourhood. Our children get sick because there is no running water and pipes for toilets. Illegal garbage is a big problem. The big water puddles on our streets damage the basements of the mosque and the buildings.

The government built a large housing settlement next to our neighbourhood, but the buildings were never finished. Now they have become empty ruins. I hope one day they will be nice apartments, and people can move in. We wish to have a secondary school and a Muslim hospital here, too.

The women in our community take care of the problems we are facing. Unfortunately, the elder women do not have any jobs. We would like to do some small trades like sewing and production of clothes for the market place – so we would be happy to get sewing machines.

We plan to create a saving system for communal improvement. Everybody should contribute, and we women will manage the money.

We pray for positive changes.







“When you migrate, you are in danger. When you come from a different place, you can easily settle in a zongo.”



Stella and Judi: “We are free here. Anytime nobody will ask you anything. You can do whatever you want.”

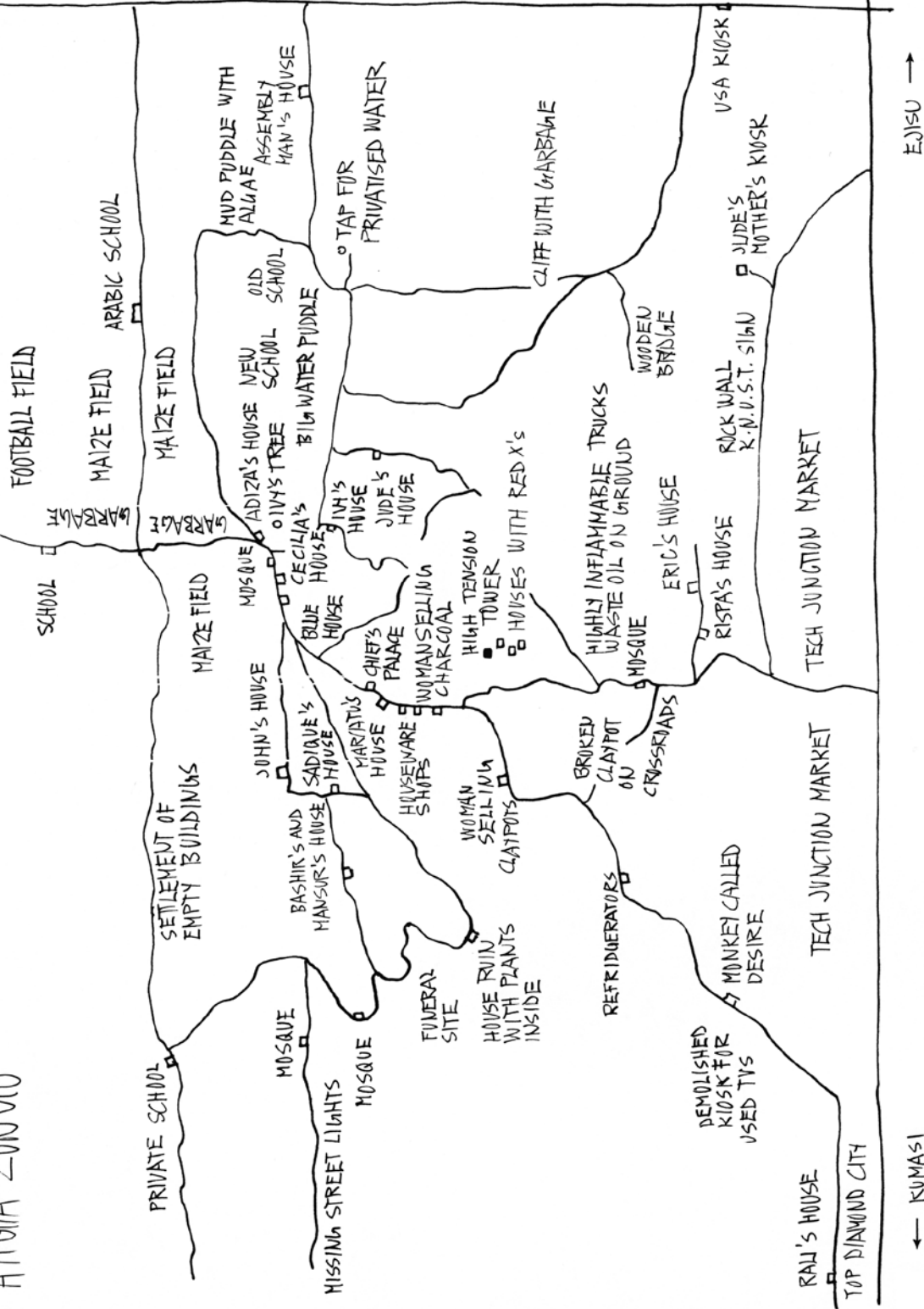


“Zongo people are everywhere in the world. They are in Germany, in Italy, in Afghanistan, in Russia.”





BOG WATER PLACE







## Acknowledgements

### Thanking

Kulturbehörde Hamburg/Ministry of Culture of the City of Hamburg  
Center for African and Cultural Studies, Kumasi  
Institut für Hygiene und Umwelt, Hamburg  
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi  
People's Dialogue on Human Settlements, Accra  
the residents of Old Fadama, Accra and Ayigya-Zongo, Kumasi

Mawuli K. Amedofu, Dankwa Kwabena Ampadu, Epilogue Annku,  
Jan Breitenstein, Abiba Bukari, Adiza Bukari, Prof. Dr. Kofi Darkwah,  
James Mawuli Dogbatse, Dr. Kodwo Edusei, Haruna, Adisa Issah,  
Fati Issah, Karim, Dunyo Freeman Kwame, Dr. Philipp Lange,  
Luise Leisentritt, Bakyt Muratbayeva, S. Daniel Ohene, Theda Ohling,  
Emmanuel Osei-Tutu, Mensah Owusu, Michael Schmiedel,  
Dr. Susanne Sievers, Gordon Uhlmann, Hawa Yusif, Mariatu Yusif

For their persistent help and assistance I would like to embrace  
the artists Rex Akinruntan, Gilbert Amegatcher - and especially  
Ralitsa Diana Debrah whose organisational talent made everything  
possible - for the enriching cooperation in conceptualising and organising  
the workshop AWAY IS A PLACE my colleague, the artist Charlie Michaels.

## References

- p. 13                paintings: Ayasco, concept: HMJokinen
- p. 14                fourth row, second photo from the right: Gordon Uhlmann, 2009
- p. 15                mind map: the AWAY IS A PLACE workshop participants  
Rex Akinruntan, Mawuli K. Amedofu, Dankwa Kwabena Ampadu,  
Epilogue Annku, Ralitsa Diana Debrah, James Mawuli Dogbatse,  
HMJokinen, Dunyo Freeman Kwame, Charlie Michaels,  
S. Daniel Ohene, Emmanuel Osei-Tutu
- p. 17                heavy metals water analysis: Institut für Hygiene und Umwelt, Hamburg
- p. 18 and 20        poem fragments of Soyinka, Wole, 1975. Animistic Spells I-XIV,  
In: id. (ed.), Poems of Black Africa. London: Heinemann
- p. 21 and 22        flags design/realisation: Dr. Kodwo Edusei, concept: HMJokinen
- p. 27                text fragments from interviews, courtesy of Bakyt Muratbayeva,  
In: id., 2009. Zongo and the community of work and life in Accra,  
Ghana. University of Bielefeld
- Adinkra Update:*  
                      *House Adinkra:* S. Daniel Ohene,  
                      *Fihankra Mobile Phone Adinkra:* Charlie Michaels  
                      *Akwaaba Stool Adinkra:* Rex Akinruntan
- p. 29                Ayigya-Zongo map: the AWAY IS A PLACE workshop participants
- p. 33                *Adinkra Update:*  
Rex Akinruntan, Ralitsa Diana Debrah, James Mawuli Dogbatse,  
HMJokinen, Charlie Michaels, S. Daniel Ohene

HMJokinen  
*zongo.caravans of hope*, 2012 · [www.away-is-a-place.de/zongohope.html](http://www.away-is-a-place.de/zongohope.html)



HMJokinen and Charlie Michaels  
Urban Art Workshop AWAY IS A PLACE 2011 in Kumasi, Ghana · [www.away-is-a-place.de](http://www.away-is-a-place.de)

© 2012 for the photos, images and texts by the artists, authors and photographers

This catalogue has been published 2012 by  
Ministry of Culture of the City of Hamburg  
within the program which offers annual grants for visual artists.



Production: Druckerei in St. Pauli



