

MIRROR, MIRROR, ON THE WALL

URBAN PRODUCTION AT ECONOMIC CROSSROADS

// MARC ANGÉLIL AND CARY SIRESS

Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who in this land is fairest of all? Grimm Brothers 1

What could be read as a fairytale was in fact nothing less than a plan motivated by self-interests. In the early 1930s, the French Natural History Museum and the Institute of Ethnology at the University of Paris organized a research expedition to Africa: the ethnographic and linguistic Dakar-Djibouti mission of 1931–33. A group set off with a youthful, gung-ho spirit of conquest. The young writer Michel Leiris was commissioned as both secretary and archivist, being given the mandate to meticulously document findings based on systematic criteria. While political, economic, and territorial motives were at the heart of the journey, it was nevertheless declared a matter of cultural and scientific investigation. The purported goal was to gain firsthand insight into the societal structures, local traditions, rituals, languages, artifacts, and building practices of ethnic groups in those African provinces under French rule.

Instead of adopting the scientific method of objective and distanced analysis, Leiris took the liberty to frame his observations with more subjective and intimate modes of engagement. His notes were recorded in the form of a travel log, and subsequently published under the title *L'Afrique fantôme* in 1934.² The book reads like a personal diary that mirrors the reality of sampled material, conflating self-reflexive bias with fact. What was plausibly undertaken in good faith and with a certain degree of naïveté abroad, erupted in scandal, outraging those in expert circles back home. For Leiris flaunted academic conventions of the time, changing, as it were, the rules of the game – a phrase he later used to title his autobiography.³ His report laid bare a number of things that many had thought, but never dared to say: the unrivaled arrogance of the West vis-à-vis indigenous cultures, the reserved point of view of the scientist vis-à-vis the object of study, and the exploitative ethos of the colonial political economy vis-à-vis annexed nations.



According to Leiris, Africa could not be observed from a removed vantage point. On the contrary, one could only encounter another culture, and do it justice, when one is willing to research his own position and question his own assumptions. In other words, what is investigated must be understood simultaneously as a surface for both reflection and projection – a process of identity formation that mutually defines both the one who sees and what is seen. This marked a veritable ‘mirror-stage’ for Leiris and the field of ethnography. Africa performs as a mirror, so to say, as referred to by the title of the recently published collection of Leiris’s work: *Miroir de l’Afrique*.⁴ When viewed with Western eyes, “black Africa,” as he called it, revealed uncanny and phantom-like traits that threatened to shatter the already fragile relationship between ethnologist and object of study.⁵ Yet things were more complicated, in that Africa no longer represented a virgin, archaic condition as conventionally assumed – the land of so-called ‘primitive tribes’ – but rather a place that had by then been contaminated by Western norms; a place torn by the conflict between traditional customs and modern values.



a //

1 // Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, “Little Snow-White,” trans. D. L. Ashliman, *The Grimm Brothers’ Children’s and Household Tales*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm053.html> (accessed May 5 2009).

2 // Michel Leiris, “L’Afrique fantôme (1934),” in *Miroir de l’Afrique*, ed. Jean Jami (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 1996).

3 // Michel Leiris, *The Rules of the Game*, trans. Lydia Davis (New York: Paragon House, 1991).

4 // Leiris 1996 (see note 2).

5 // Michel Leiris, *Afrique Noire: La Création Plastique (1957–1967)*, 1119–1367.

b //

a // Alice through the African mirror [original illustration by John Tenniel, montage by Anne-Charlotte Malterre Barthes]

b // Photographs taken by Michel Leiris during the expedition to Africa (1931–33)

6 // UN-Habitat, *Situation Analysis of Informal Settlements in Addis Ababa* (Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlement Programme, 2007), 22, 26. Although called “informal settlements,” these areas are actually the result of a much more formalized system of urban governance.

7 // Elmer Atwater, *Das Ende des Kapitalismus, wie wir ihn kennen: Eine radikale Kapitalismuskritik* (Münster: Verlag Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2005), 15, 203–09. The title translates as: “The end of capitalism as we know it: A radical critique of capitalism.”

But what is the current condition of Africa? Today, the continent seems hardly capable of freeing itself from its past; the wounds run deep. After the colonial powers – Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Portugal, and Spain – had descended like a proverbial swarm of locusts upon the earth and plundered all there was to take, they ultimately abandoned ship, leaving behind what is often referred to as “the lost continent.” As reported daily in the press, conditions are bleak: widespread starvation, battles for resources masked as civil war, pervasive corruption, tainted elections, the AIDS epidemic, poverty, and insufficient sanitation all contribute to a growing catastrophic ecology. These circumstances leave perceptible marks on the formation of the urban environment at large, with consequences even more dire in those territories labeled as slums.

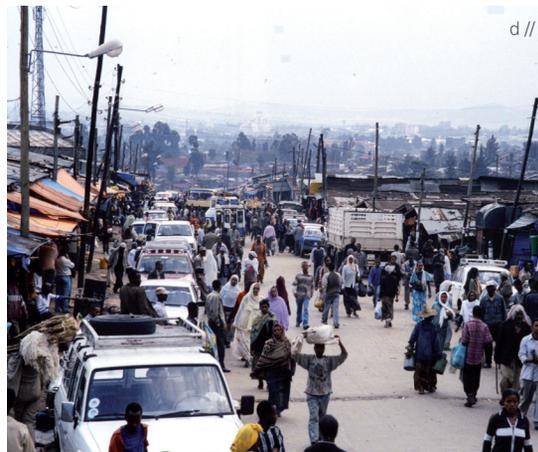
Known as the “roof of Africa,” Ethiopia is no exception. Although this country was nearly able to maintain its autonomy during the age of colonization, it has more than its own share of difficulties. Here, one encounters a situation offering few prospects that would serve to dignify the human condition. Misery prevails. A UN-Habitat study reports that close to 45 percent of the population subsists below the poverty line and nearly 80 percent of urban inhabitants live in impoverished settlements.⁶ Low on the list of rankings compiled using the United Nations human development index (HDI), a global measure of country performance, Ethiopia is repeatedly cast as one of the poorest nations in the world. Nonetheless, there is another side to Ethiopia that seldom draws attention. Current developments on the fringes of this culture could be seen as a prospective model for success throughout Africa. While they are tenuous, measures undertaken to promote communal solidarity and self-empowerment could be considered an alternative to dominant socio-economic orders that sustain the status quo of despair. Of significance in this context are efforts made to formalize the informal sector, for informality – as history has shown throughout the world – often provides the grounds for exploitation. As the term informal implies, one operates outside the formal system of civic norms, and is left without the attendant network of social security.

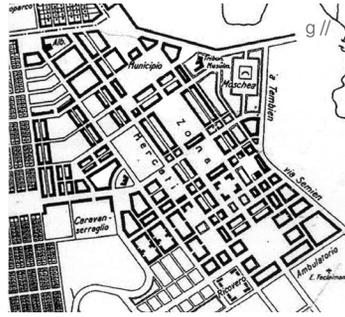
The nascent attempts in Ethiopia to enable other means of community-driven governance capable of resisting the predatory dynamic of global capital take root in the priority given to local forms of organization. Rather than alienating local culture by advancing top-down modes of market economy from the outside, the initial steps taken pursue the integration of shared resources from within communities, a move that encourages bottom-up participation. But this operation is far from smooth. Although constantly thwarted, such attempts have much to do with the vision of the collective appropriation of territory serving to link identity with one’s physical environment. Should the vision succeed, Ethiopia would become a testing ground for “a socio-territorial movement,” to borrow an expression from Elmar Atwater, that builds on the idea of a mutual correspondence between social and spatial structures.⁷ With that said, couldn’t such a movement become a central theme for contemporary ethnology? For, just as Leiris suggests, a look in the mirror of another culture might reframe reflections upon our own, as contradictory and disheartening as those reflections may be.

c // Aerial view of Mercato district [Photo: Noboru Kawagishi]

d // Mercato main street [Photo: Darius Karacsony]

e // Side alley in Mercato district [Photo: Darius Karacsony]





h //

f // Italian master plan for Addis Ababa, ca. 1939

g // Italian master plan for the relocated market quarter, ca. 1939

h // Mercato district, figure-ground plan, Addis Ababa 2008

MERCATO

Let us take a look at a specific case in Addis Ababa – Mercato. Here, the dynamics of transactions, the hustle and bustle of activities, the hodge-podge assortment of goods, as well as the colors and smells, are all simply breathtaking. Corrugated-metal roofs cover stalls that are piled with diverse products offered for sale: woven baskets, coffee, charcoal, manure, used tires, building materials of every sort, and wood coffins. Thousands of people crowd the streets and alleys, bartering along the way, in the hope of making a good deal where possible. As the popular saying goes: “Around here one can even bargain for a new soul.”⁸

While the atmosphere exudes an air of exoticism for any outside observer, a closer look at the everyday lives of the local population as they struggle to survive reveals the initial perception as deceptive, calling into question the allure of the place as seen by foreign eyes – a most curious place indeed. Actually, we are in the middle of one of the largest African markets, the Mercato district of the city. Accustomed to the proverbial good life, we wonder, in the face of this alien form of market economy, whether the principles of this market are indeed more sustainable than those promoted in the West. An unexpected mirror-effect comes into play. We might recall Alice’s astonished observation that “there’s the room you can see through the glass – that’s just the same as our drawing room, only the things go the other way.”⁹ Whereas the developed world is held up as a universal measure toward which all developing countries must strive, another standard drives the daily workings of this culture. Were we to look back at the world from the vantage point of Mercato, it would not be with a disposition of envy, but rather one of suspicion, for, here as well, history has provided a bitter lesson on the consequences of colonization.

The very fact that the name of the market is of Italian descent points to Africa’s troubled past, when European powers carved the continent into pieces. Although Ethiopia defiantly asserts to have never been a colony, the country was nonetheless under Mussolini’s rule from 1936 to 1941. During this short phase of Italian occupation, the fascist regime undertook an ambitious restructuring of the city to give it a new face – a declarative sign of territorial appropriation. Whereas Mussolini’s administration authorized the construction of large public works in an effort to pacify local resistance, racial separation was enforced as thoroughly as possible.¹⁰ Part of this strategy entailed relocating the indigenous market from the center to the outskirts. As a clear measure of urban segregation, the new European elite overtook the city’s core and the local population was removed and kept at safe distance. Laid out on a grid, a new neighborhood arose straight from the drawing board, a matrix of sorts to be filled when needed by market stalls, booths, or shops. In keeping with the rules of good planning, public buildings and amenities – such as a mosque, a square with a bus station, a city hall, a cinema, a hotel, and a courthouse – were envisioned for the community, but only a few were ever realized.¹¹

Notwithstanding the politically motivated origins of its formation, Mercato emerged during the following decades as the central platform of urban commerce. According to official sources, the market today encompasses an area of approximately one hundred hectares and accommodates roughly one hundred thousand inhabitants, while its constituent activities spread far into adjacent districts.¹² On average five hundred thousand people use the market per day. Not merely a hub of trade, the quarter serves as a settlement in its own right, integrating a multitude of mutually supporting functions: it is a place where goods are sold and produced; it is likewise a place of residence, social encounter, and religious worship. This programmatic blending is mirrored directly in the structure of the built fabric: market stalls are oriented outward, facing

8 // Katrina Hilde Mann and Martin Fitzenreiter, *Äthiopien* (Bielefeld: Peter Rump Publishers, 1999), 199.

9 // Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 125–26. 10 // Thomas P. Ofcansky and Laverle Berry, *Ethiopia: A Country Study* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 158–60.

11 // Heyaw Terefe, *Contested Space. Transformation of Inner-city Market Areas and Users’ Reaction in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia* (Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2005), 126.

12 // “Mercato Local Development Plan,” Addis Ababa Development Plan (Addis Ababa: City Planning Commission, 2002), 73. See also Thomas Veer, “Masterplan for the Mercato,” in *Accented. Urban Management* (Eschborn, Germany: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, GTZ, 2005), 14–17.

the streets, with workshops and living spaces commonly located to the rear – a socio-material diagram reflecting a spontaneous mode of bottom-up land appropriation.

This ostensibly simple spatial scheme is underwritten by a complex social network that ensures the performance of the overall urban system. The collective web is reinforced by craftsmen associations and trade unions housed in low-rise clusters, market halls, or, more recently, multi-story buildings. In turn, the neighborhood is zoned according to specific categories of services and products. One encounters, for example, a sector for spices, another for agricultural produce, and still others for light metalwork, textiles, plastics, or imported electronic equipment. Although ordered, the boundaries between various subdivisions are blurred by the casual unfolding of events, simply by the way things go, for the quasi-formal market organization is persistently thrown off balance by informal market practices.

With respect to the coexistence of formal and informal frameworks, Mercato takes on the role of a key relay between rural and urban communities. It provides an arena for the sale of agricultural goods and serves as a landing pad for ever-increasing hordes of migrant farmers hoping to earn a better living in the city. As the majority of these migrants are not legally registered, they stand little chance of getting a commercial license. Their presence is nevertheless tolerated; they occupy temporarily unclaimed spots wherever possible, peddling their products in the middle of the street if necessary. Here one encounters yet another level of land appropriation, only this time in the form of a roaming proprietorship.

Within this machinery of sorts, not only people are on the move, but also the city's material resources. Goods no longer wanted by their original owners are salvaged and reconditioned for sale in the market, a type of recycling *avant la lettre*: a literal and opportunistic mining of the city that involves reprocessing whatever is at hand. What is typically considered in the West to be waste, and thus worthless, is re-appropriated in Addis Ababa through modest means and on-the-spot ingenuity: old tires are converted into satchels for pack-mules; soft-drink bottles are turned into toys; scrap metal is transformed into household utensils.¹³ Other products, from discarded plastic sheets to recovered copper pipes, reinforcing rods, or beverage crates, need only be cleaned before being recirculated as building materials. When the interplay of supply and demand is constrained by an economy of scarcity, there is no limit to improvisation; bottom-up resourcing is the rule. When set into motion, such a principle gives rise to a self-fueling system operating across multiple scales – a trickle-up urban ecology that reframes the very discourse on sustainability.

13 // Lukas Küng and Dirk Hebel, "Lernen von Addis Abeba," *archithese* (Zurich: Niggli Publishers, March/April 2007), 26, 31.

14 // The authors were informed of the unfolding of events in a series of discussions in Addis Ababa with representatives from the Association of Ethiopian Architects in May 2007.



i // Recycled scrap metal for kitchen utensils [Photo: Theano Mazurka]

j // Recycled metal drums for coffee filters [Photo: Noboru Kawagishi]

k // Ship containers integrated into a building facade [Photo: Lukas Küng]

Despite dire conditions, such makeshift processing of resources engenders a special form of market economy, namely that of small-scale measures of subsistence empowered through the thousand-fold repetition of minute elements; an undertaking carried out by the masses and organized from below. And yet, this frail economy recently faced an existential threat when the livelihood of local stakeholders was directly confronted by the interests of a global consortium seeking a takeover of the quarter. What sparked the crisis was an offer by a Malaysian investment firm to buy all the rights for use of the area, with the intention of turning Mercato into a business and shopping district, an infringement from the outside hinting at a new form of domination. Followed scrupulously by the local media, the affair set off a public debate on the future development of the city. While politicians were occupied with the question of whether partaking in the global game would be both desirable and feasible, it was finally the cost of mass relocation that brought the entire venture to a grinding halt.¹⁴

The debate was accompanied by two occurrences that facilitated resolution of the conflict. First, the standoff reinforced social ties within the community while galvanizing its political



l // New workers' cooperative in Mercato district [Photo: Kathrin Gimmel]
 m // Micro and small enterprises, site of vocational training program for construction

representation within the city at large. The workers' associations were proactive in demanding an equal voice in shaping their environment; new trade unions and building cooperatives were formed, which further strengthened communal bonds. Second, at the time of the clash, the municipal administration was in the process of revising the existing zoning ordinance, the Addis Ababa Development Plan, and an entire chapter of building regulations was then drafted for the Mercato area. To those responsible, it became clear that planning neither from the outside nor exclusively top-down would serve the cause of appeasing stakeholders; their involvement in decision-making processes was paramount. ¹⁵

What is referred to as participatory (or discursive) planning was legally ratified. Rather than succumbing to the demands of potential investors who aimed at securing provisions for a high-rise business district, the city government sought consultation with citizens. ¹⁶ Self-empowerment in place of dictated power became the maxim for all planning matters. Notable from the perspective of urban discourse is that the mandate in Addis Ababa to move from informal to formal structures is only possible under the condition of dialogue – between public interests framed from above and those determined, by the needs of the local population, from below.

If we were to take another look in the mirror, another image of Africa would surface. Whereas the purported 'dark continent' displayed ghostly traits to Leiris in its sheer otherness and invisibility – a phantom Africa, so to speak – it becomes apparent that what today indeed harbors phantomlike features is that strain of a market economy that is engulfing the planet. ¹⁷ Reflecting on the case of Addis Ababa shows us that what appears to be backward is actually a forward-looking tactic of how to effectively circumvent the dictates of global capital through the implementation of communicative action in planning.

15 // Addis Ababa Development Plan, 5, 43, 73, 74.

16 // See Jürgen Habermas's thesis pertaining to communicative action in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981).

17 // Leiris 1996 (see note 2), 581, 855.

CROSSROADS

The case of Mercato is not an isolated one. Other cooperatives and unions are being formed throughout various sectors of the economy, whether in the textile industry, the coffee business, or the flower trade. Of specific relevance in this regard are those policies underwriting micro and small enterprises, as well as vocational training programs in construction. Such measures were initiated, for example, to implement the Grand Housing Program, launched by the Addis Ababa Housing Administration in 2004 with the goal of providing affordable places to live for low- and middle-income families. Other public works that contribute to a consolidation of social capital in the buildup of urban identities are likewise underway. Still, such modest success stories cannot be taken for granted as they are constantly on the verge of being sidetracked by pressures from both domestic and international investors whose presence is felt all over the city. And, just as any mirror can be shattered, so too can fragile, grassroots visions such as these.

Commercial developments spring up here and there in Addis Ababa, leaving spotty traces of a foreign form of economy. Often in close proximity to poor neighborhoods, yet remaining isolated from the surrounding context, these multi-story buildings with their curtain walls of glass rise above a sea of corrugated-metal shacks. What is at stake here with these new high-rise structures is less an issue of postmodern motifs applied to International Style architecture than that of an ideology premised on the need to wear the badge of modernity as proof of not having missed the global economic game. Similarly, entire tracts of land are being developed on the outskirts of the city with countless suburban homes stamped out at cookie-cutter pace. Emulating American real estate ventures, well-rehearsed building typologies are appropriated to again affirm that at least some have not been left behind.



18 // The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was formed in the early 1990s following the collapse of communist rule, which had lasted from 1974 to 1991. This transition was anything but smooth; the process took nearly four years to be implemented, resulting in a hybrid form of governance situated between a 'flawed democracy' and an 'authoritarian regime.'

19 // See Naomi Klein's play on the two years 1926 and 1962, in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 64–70.

20 // John Maynard Keynes, *Essays in Persuasion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963), 312–22.

21 // *Ibid.*, 312. "The world is not so governed from above that private and social interest always coincide. It is not so managed here below that in practice they coincide. It is not a correct deduction from the Principles of Economics that enlightened self-interest always operates in the public interest."

22 // See John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). See also *Allgemeine Theorie des Beschäftigung, des Zinses und des Geldes*, trans. Fritz Waeger, eds. Jürgen Kromphardt and Stephanie Schneider (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2006), 314.

23 // Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

24 // *Ibid.*, 30.

25 // *Ibid.*, 24, 26.

While the contrast between tradition and modernization is as great as it is ubiquitous, the country faces pressing questions of how to modernize while simultaneously cultivating its inherited culture. The bigger question, however, is which direction will Ethiopia take in doing so? Which political economy will be considered suitable for this relatively young democratic republic? 18 Opinions concerning such questions could not be more at odds. Whereas some argue for a state-regulated marketplace that would stimulate more local ventures and social participation in decision-making processes, others call for a globally connected, free-market economy that would increase foreign investment in national affairs. Marked by unresolved forms of governance, Ethiopia and its capital city of Addis Ababa are at the crossroads of their political, economic, and cultural development.

Zooming out for a moment from the specific case of Ethiopia, two years might stand as more general symbols for this debate: 1926 and 1962. 19 These years mark the respective publications of two texts that, likewise, could not be more opposed to one another in their ideological bearing on the coupling of state and market; a link having a direct impact on the organization of territory and the constitution of urban space. Two authors are pitted against each other across time: John Maynard Keynes and Milton Friedman.

The year 1926 is when the British economist Keynes published a pamphlet entitled The End of Laissez-Faire, in which he articulated the fundamental difference between the objectives of public institutions and those of the private sector. 20 The interests of the collective, according to Keynes, do not coincide with the interests of individual parties – whether understood in terms of a person, a business, or a company. The task of the state is to maintain the well-being of all by providing social and technical infrastructure while ensuring a distribution of wealth through a balanced system of taxes. Conversely, the private sector is primarily self-centered in its orientation, securing wealth through competition while pursuing financial supremacy. 21 An advocate of capitalism based on democratic principles, Keynes backed strong public institutions, and was skeptical of the privatization of collective resources. 22 He opposed any form of laissez-faire politics that granted absolute power to investors to exploit human, natural, or territorial resources. He anticipated, with acute analytical foresight, the fallout of the Great Depression in the 1930s: mass unemployment and widespread poverty, as well as the collapse of the economic system and its subsequent bailout with public funds. It comes as no surprise that U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was drawn to Keynes's model when drafting the New Deal, a public works program aimed at resolving the financial crisis through reforms that benefited the social body while keeping market liberalism in check.

The year 1962 is when Friedman released Capitalism and Freedom, still viewed today as a seminal text – the Bible – of neoliberal and neoconservative economics. 23 Here, laissez faire takes on a whole new meaning as it is now attributed with positive values. Elevated to the status of a fundamental principle, laissez faire becomes an engine of society fueled by market competition, where individual parties are free to act in accordance with their own interests. Economic freedom is thereby equated with political freedom. 24 Any form of state intervention is consequently viewed with suspicion and must be avoided at all costs; the government itself is portrayed as a Frankenstein-like monster that destroys liberty. 25 Friedman later turns to the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s to prove his point concerning the evils of state interventionism. This very tactic of making the government a scapegoat for the ills of society was embraced by none other than U.S. President Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, both vigorous proponents of tax cuts, reduced federal spending, privatiza-



p //



q //

n // Sino-Africa

o // New commercial buildings in Addis Ababa [Photos: Bisrat Kifle]

p // Ayat suburban real estate development on the outskirts of Addis Ababa

q // Proposed Chinese infrastructure project for "Confusion Square," Addis Ababa

tion of public institutions, market liberalization, and the elimination of trade unions. Thatcher even went so far as to lionize Friedman as an "intellectual freedom fighter."²⁶

But what only few could have anticipated is that, when viewed from the vantage point of Friedman's model, developing countries appeared all too attractive to footloose investors. Such countries, due to their tenuous political structures and propensity for crisis, were ripe for unlimited business opportunities. Particularly enticing for multinational corporations were forms of social conditions labeled by the UN International Labor Organization in 1972 as "informal."²⁷ The term refers to people operating outside the normative framework that orders social relations of production, who are thus relegated to shadow economies devoid of state regulation and protection. Informality, in this respect, offers a surplus value to be exploited for profit. This explains why, today, Africa is again viewed by many as the final frontier for investment, a financial eldorado with vast untapped markets and a people eager for progress, as paraded, for example, in the Merrill Lynch Advisor, shamelessly subtitled *Cultivate Your Personal Wealth*.²⁸

Models of political economy have both a direct and an indirect impact on the formation of social and physical space. Zooming back into Ethiopia, indecisiveness reigns as to the choice of which path to take. Here, the respective models of Keynes and Friedman coexist in fragmented form despite their incompatibility. Some argue that Friedman's principles provide the only means to accelerate the local economy; others acknowledge that partaking in the global market will do little to alleviate rampant poverty. As in the fairytale of *Snow White*, Ethiopia now stands before the mirror and reflects upon its disposition. In this land, will it be Keynes or Friedman who is the fairest of all?

There is, however, a third figure looming in the mirror, who is currently advancing a new form of political economy that is strictly dictated from above and beyond – a brand of neocapitalism raised to the highest power. And with this, a new form of colonization is well underway. Because China, having spied lucrative trading prospects, has now stepped through the window of opportunity that Africa has opened up. Making the West ill at ease, an unexpected Sino-African dynamic is building, evoking memories of the European seizure of the continent. Notwithstanding complaints from Western companies that Chinese bids are impossible to match, the People's Republic has learned how to better play the game of coaxing African countries along the path of development. In marked contrast to Western investments that tie trade incentives to human rights, China's policy of "no-strings aid" is simply more seductive.

Ethiopia is not immune to this lure. Here, new infrastructures, schools, and factories are being built, favorable trade agreements signed, and vocational programs sponsored. On top of this, a gift of 150 million U.S. dollars was recently given by China for an annex to the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa. And this is just the start. Even larger urban developments, with ever grander visions of a fairytale skyline for the capital, include countless high-rise buildings. But all of this comes at a price: substandard wages, no retirement benefits, no customs revenue from imports, no income due to tax-free accords, and above all, general disregard for the rights of citizens. This stance is openly admitted by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its African policy statement, promising "to develop and exploit rationally Africa's resources."²⁹ Those browsing through Mercato today would not be surprised to discover artifacts bearing the omnipresent label "Made in China." In effect, exploitation remains the name of the game.

"Let's pretend" that we in the West are out in front, looking back at the rest of the world.³⁰ But a second glance in the rearview mirror reveals another player in the fast lane, ready to overtake us. One might well recall that objects in the mirror are closer than they appear. //

26 // Klein 2007 (see note 19), 18.

27 // International Labor Organization, *Employment, Incomes and Equality: A Study on the Labor Conditions in Kenya* (Geneva: United Nations, 1972).

28 // Merrill Lynch Advisor: *The New Africa*, December 2007, 6–11.

29 // Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "China's African Policy" (China: People's Republic of China, 2006).

30 // Carroll 1998 (see note 9), 124.