

“Cover the Fire” or Live in the Dusk

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Article abstract

Informed by recent fieldwork with “Muslim youth” in Aarhus, Denmark, West African migrants in Lisbon, Portugal and personal experiences of mobility in both cities, I deploy dusk as a sensorial epistemology and fiction as a complementary aesthetic methodology as I attempt to write the city (creatively) back into the (critical) urban. Forays into fiction are pertinent, because it is through imagination and the creativity of textual expression that many find their voice and emerge from (daily) routine when confronted with the night. The image-texts presented are intended not as momentous highlights but as provocative suggestions of the nocturnal banal in terms of urban presences, borders and human-environment relationships. The overarching premise is that the difference of dusk is not a loss or necessarily a waning, but rather a generative force of meaning and belonging.

“COVER THE FIRE” OR LIVE IN THE DUSK

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This essay is an ethnographic interpretation and a performative reflection on dusk. It blends the empirical qualities of the time-space with the metaphorical force of the term. Rather than employ “dusk” as a suspicious falling, withering or demise from the significance of “day,” I advocate for a sense of dusk that is generative of meaning through affect, movement and mobility.

From this position, I explore the potentialities of dusk as a way to rewrite the *city as a migrant production*. For it is the migrant whose place in the city is most questioned. *We/they* are suspect and consequently seek openings to escape the social dynamics of the office, the marketplace, the precarity of family and that crushing scrutiny of the bus driver who seems always ready to give one more lesson in transportation etiquette. The dusk provides an opportunity, an other sensorial setting. Citing the enigmatic

Brazilian novelist Clarice Lispector, as she pondered through one of her protagonists, “darkness cannot be illuminated; it is a way of life...a vital knot” (1977: 16).

I was inspired to write this text as part of a reflection on my own migrant experiences over the last several years – Aarhus, Denmark – and compare my observations with those in a place I have a longer relationship, albeit not as steady – Lisbon, Portugal. In Scandinavia, there are many hours in the summer months when darkness remains on the brink. Total darkness hesitates and one feels an excitement, a wondrous anxiety looking for the edges of light.

I gesture toward these borders of being, in the light and in the dark, through photography, a quotidian practice using a commonplace Android cellphone. The image-texts that constitute this essay are intended not as momentous highlights but as provocative suggestions of nocturnal ubiquities in terms of presences, borders and human-environment relationships. Nightly occurrences. There are no captions to denote details. I project the image-text relationship as contingent and concomitant, their juxtaposition evocative as it connotes (Pardue 2019).

Horizons change as darkness approaches and thus relations to otherness recalibrate. As a nightwalker and dusk-time cyclist, I find the brink of darkness to be an anthropological opening that helps me gauge the relationship between shifts in sensorial experience and social knowledge. This essay moves in between the aesthetics and poetics of dusk and ethnographic interpretation based on current fieldwork with “Muslim youth” in Aarhus, Denmark, West African migrants in Lisbon, Portugal and personal experiences of mobility in both cities. In the following, I suggest that a reengagement with dusk may afford new, qualitatively different approaches to understand how marginalized migrant communities navigate the city at night. Informed by this experience, I came to appreciate dusk as a sensorial epistemology and employ fiction as a complementary aesthetic methodology in an attempt, following geographer Pushpa Arabindoo, “to write the city (creatively) back into the (critical) urban” (2020: 407). The overarching premise is that the difference of dusk is not a loss or necessarily a waning, but rather a generative force, a potentiality of “color.”¹

1. See Shapiro’s interpretation of German poetic and philosophical treatment of the night. In particular, he discusses the distinction of the poet Trakl’s use of “blue” in contrast to Hegel and others’ depiction of the night as absent of color, “gray in gray.” (288)



“Cover the fire” is a literal translation of *couvrir feu*, an Old French expression originally used to protect the city by ordering dwellers not to leave the source of light unattended as sleep encroached. It is the root of the English word “curfew,” which has maintained a sense of authority and control over the city at night. The ongoing pandemic reminds us of the various intersections between nocturnality and the state.



Curfews have historically played not only a role in statecraft but also in epistemological development. Even phenomenologists have felt the need to cover the fire and shut out darkness as a distinction in favor of attaching knowledge to light (e.g., Handelman 2005: 249; Edensor 2015). Our species' limitations in darkness with regard to the faculty of sight has resulted in a rush to control the night through technology and those who occupy public space at night through robust measures of security (Liempt and Aals 2012; Sjøgaard 2017). Yet, the taboo of darkness has also created an oppositional feeling of liberation, risk and pleasure. The night as death and danger; darkness as cool and bohemian.



This essay builds on the ongoing scholarship of transdisciplinary writers who have critically pondered the role of darkness in the human condition and increasingly as constitutive of inter-species relationships (e.g., Beaumont 2016; Dunn and Edensor 2020; Gwiazdzinski 2005). “Nightology” began in earnest in the 1990s and has recently gained momentum from the publication of several book-length texts. Nevertheless, advocates face challenges from commonsense notions that find their roots in Greek philosophers, such as Homer, who once wrote that the night was a “daily death.”² More contemporary writers have reinforced such a perspective. To take one example, W. G. Sebald uses “the night” as a counter to humanity. In his acclaimed novel, *Rings of Saturn*, he describes

2. See Galinier *et al.* (2010).

a dream in which "the stars came out from the depths of space. Night, the astonishing, the stranger to all that is human, over the mountaintops mournful and gleaming draws on" (2002: 173–174).

While that may be melodramatic in tone, there is no doubt that humans have invested great technological and ideological efforts to control the night by dismissing darkness. Again, to draw from Sebald and his penchant for science-based fiction to weave together the historical and psychological experiences of humans, landscapes and non-human animals, he ponders the particular qualities of herrings.

An idiosyncrasy peculiar to the herring is that, when dead, it begins to glow; this property, which resembles phosphorescence is yet altogether different, peaks a few days after death and then ebbs away as the fish decays. For a long time, no one could account for this glowing of the lifeless herring, and indeed I believe that it still remains unexplained. Around 1870, when projects for the total illumination of our cities were everywhere afoot, two English scientists with the apt names of Herrington and Lightbown investigated the unusual phenomenon and the hope that the luminous substance exuded by dead herrings would lead to a formula for an organic source of light that had the capacity to regenerate itself. The failure of this eccentric undertaking, as I read some time ago in a history of artificial light, constituted no more than a negligible setback in the relentless conquest of darkness (2002: 58–59).



As Sebald intimates, the city stands at the vanguard of the human ability to condition the spatiotemporal surroundings, including the night. The bulk of scholarship on "nocturnity" unsurprisingly falls into one or more of the following themes: night economies or marginality, explored as fear or liberation or even cosmology (Dunn 2016; Edensor 2017; Galinier *et al.*

2010; Shaw 2018).³ In her queer novel, *Paul takes the form of a mortal girl*, Andrea Lawlor refers to all of these, at least implicitly, as the protagonist Paul, a young shape-shifter who hooks up with a series of individuals and occasionally considers moonlighting as a sex worker, reflects as he kisses a crush/client: “his lipstick tasted rough, chemical like nighttime” (2017: 144). Paul comes out at night, experiments with his body and self at night and pragmatically pays the bills from his nighttime employment at a local gay bar. In essence, then, Lawlor demonstrates through Paul the paradigm of nocturnality.

Such forays into fiction are pertinent, because it is through imagination and creativity that many find their voice and emerge from (daily) routine when confronted with the night (Beaumont 2016). Some writers, such as Nick Dunn, mix genres in an effort to prod scholars to put aside our disciplinary blinders and entertain the idea that “by venturing into the urban night it is possible to experience the materiality of the city as distinct from its character in the daytime. It appears somehow more porous; the shadow-play across its edifices is rich, deep and gelatinous. In addition, and perhaps of greater significance, it fosters a different way of *thinking*.” (Dunn 2016: 9, my emphasis).

The fire is light but it is also importantly energy, a fuel for human thought, a call for a stroll to consider one’s self and surroundings. The night makes us nervous and we are awed by its stillness that seems to take over space as darkness looms and *falls* onto the city.

Hegel’s use of “dusk,” while articulated with different interests, reinforces the notion that the state of dusk reveals truth or affords an opportunity to reflect on an event in terms of its significance. The oft-quoted passage, “...the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk” has been generally interpreted as Hegel’s poetic manner of articulating the value of hindsight. The key idea for my purposes is the notion that dusk is a transitional phase towards revelation and consequently knowledge. This certainly was anthropologist James Carrier’s intention when he stated

3. In the Danish context, nightology has generated only a few expressions. Notably, the special issue dedicated to “the night and darkness” of the Danish journal *Jorden Folk*, a small journal of ethnographic forays. Most pertinent to this essay is perhaps Vinni Bøgelund and Thomas Fibiger’s essay on the significance of certain nights, such as the Laylat Al-Qadr that occurs towards the end of Ramadan, among Shia Muslims (Fibiger 2014). The belief that the night occasionally holds special power and spiritual insight is certainly not unique to Islam but it does demonstrate the cultural relativity of the temporality of night and its accompanying darkness.



that the “crisis” of anthropology of the late 2000s (one of many to be sure) mirrored the wider realization of the failures of neoliberalism. That the paradigm of socio-cultural anthropology was formed, in great part, by neoliberal ideologies and hierarchies emerged as a spot of wisdom, now located “at the falling of the dusk” (2012: 117).

In psychology and philosophy one can find more generative notions of dusk, even when the tone remains somber. For example, in *The Courage to Suffer: A New Clinical Framework for Life’s Greatest Crises*, Daryl and Sara Van Tongeren employ “dusk” as a phase in the existential process of grieving and suffering. More specifically, dusk represents an “acceptance” towards an “active questioning” at midnight.

We must drive to push further, beyond the idea that dusk induces mere reflection, which perhaps becomes knowledge or may be simply a rumination or a dwindling thought on what has already happened. This push comes from fiction. Dusk can be generative *and* transgressive. Korean author Kim Bi offers the following apropos statement on queer writing:

Since, in the end, writing fiction is a process of melting down your personal perspective to create a world, there’s no avoiding the things that have caused me pain, but one day I’d very much like to write a story that breaks free of all of that...Even so, ‘queerness’ in my work is not a light or enjoyable exploration of the personal, but rather a place where horror exists. The two works of mine that have been translated into English, ‘Tree of Kisses’ and ‘Transgender Basketball Club,’ are works that look out of that well and therefore show some scenes of light, but my other novels are mostly dark.⁴



4. <https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/dispatches/article/the-wellspring-that-relieves-my-thirst-kim-bi-on-writing-queer-literature>. Accessed on August 1, 2021

"Dusk," as a form of metaphoric language can conjure, incite and prefigure human engagement with ecologies and each other. Fiction writers and storytellers know this all too well. Dusk, then, becomes a position, a time-space to be occupied. One that nervously invites interlocutors. For example, Shapiro reads the German poet Trakl as someone who doesn't simply write *about* night but *speaks* from it. "The idea is that language, liberated from our wilful attempts to impose sense and purpose on it, will reveal deep and unexpected connections of things if we will only listen to it" (Shapiro 1977: 288). The fire is social and holds philosophical insights; it is both an aesthetic and political process.



These musings on dusk, identification, fiction and the city are not solely personal; they are rooted in and inspired by ethnographic fieldwork. An increasing cadre of scholars have documented the impact of migrants on the city through nighttime activities. Occasionally, such activities are themselves diasporic transcriptions, an emplacement of "home" culture in the "host" city (see Kibbee forthcoming; Pottie-Sherman and Hiebert 2015). This scholarship helps us visualize the contours of inclusion and exclusion in a given society. In Denmark, the sociological literature on the night features the "metropolitan paradox." On the one hand, the inner-city nightlife of Aarhus is a globalized urban domain characterized by regular inter-ethnic encounters and cosmopolitan hopes. On the other

hand, Aarhus nightlife is also characterized by “post-colonial melancholia” (Gilroy 2006) manifested in cultural racism and the exclusion of visible minority youth from public spaces.

In the following, I move in between anthropological prose and ethnographic fiction in an attempt to represent two extreme locales of “Europe.” The scare quotes denote a precarity in the term and an uneasy fit for countries like Portugal and Denmark, even after considering the work of Eric Wolf, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Fatima El-Tayeb and other scholarship that importantly “provincializes” or reconstitutes Europe in one way or another. Both countries, for quite different reasons, have been perceived as marginal to Europe. Buttressed by colonial histories of uneven empires and variant ideologies of whiteness and white supremacy, Portugal and Denmark bring unique perspectives to the theorization and performance of urban dusk as part of migrancy.

In Denmark “Muslim” works as a broad term of stigma conflating Shia, Sunni and non-practicing Muslims as well as broadly “Arab-looking” people into one racial category. Integration is poorly defined and currently perceived as a steep if not impossible challenge for Danish society (Rytter 2019). My initial fieldwork suggests that there is a significant difference in understanding “the night” and “the city,” which underpins an operative “rights to the city” feeling and activism among some residents. Living in the dusk is to hang out in a local shisha bar or to repurpose a state-sponsored youth club into a rap music studio or a “girls night” Youtube chat session (Pardue 2022). The dusk is a potential opportunity to explore empowering articulations between self and city, e.g., urban agency.



Rachid had been into theater as a teenager in the West Bank and later in Lebanon. While his smile opened doors with directors and other actors, his gaze often turned to matters behind the scenes. Rachid admired the lighting crews and their ability to create scenes and draw attention without emitting a sound. And not with the obvious spotlight, but with gradual shifts and small adjustments that inspired audiences to imagine a reality complementary to the script. Rachid remembered the moments right before the opening scene and nervous energy revolving around the official start to "the show." He often found these transitions revealing in and of themselves. He wasn't just waiting or nervous in a bout to control stage fright. Now with a small business in Aarhus, Denmark, he invests as much as resources allow in product design and remains committed to the idea of the show before "the show."

The serviceable Ikea knife twirled in Rachid's right hand as he steadied an assortment of fruits and vegetables with his left. Apples, bananas, carrots, beets, pears and even apricots and tamarind found their way to the cutting board. Displayed as a box set of small, cylindrical containers were the "boosters" to be added to the juice. Açai, a range of vitamin supplements, ginseng, chia and hemp seeds. Rachid had it all covered. His brother and sister helped occasionally and Rachid had recruited Abdel to man the juice cart on a regular basis. And, while the pandemic had certainly taken a toll on business, small windows of opportunity were open. Rachid understood that food and drink would never be an all-or-nothing proposition.

There were no official curfews in Denmark during the pandemic. Well, it still goes on, doesn't it? Extraneous commerce remained closed for months but there were no impositions. Danes follow rules; they believe in "the system." Spared most of the globalized graphic horror, we, migrants of all sorts, carry a trauma of our loved ones elsewhere. We start to think of them more often than normal. The sun begins a long pose, held up in the sky, exerting little warmth but a comforting light. I venture out on my bike, a migrant treated like an ex-pat based on my anglicized French name and my white skin. There is tolerance but no belonging. I still am fooled by the light and lulled into a belief that a hat is unnecessary for my ride. As I focus on pedaling and assess the surrounding rhythms of mobility, I consider "long-Covid" and the aging process. I notice the progression of alopecia, as the chill penetrates my increasingly thin skin layers with little effort. I become cold immediately and instinctively crane my neck up so that my face might soak up the weak rays of an impotent sunshine. The self-imposed curfew takes on a deeper metaphorical value somehow. I pull over to the curb and text Rachid.

Hey man, you got time to walk and talk?

As I wait for a reply, I peer through a fence and see an elderly man with cavernous creases in his ruddy forehead look up at the sky. He pauses and wonders where the day has gone and continues to trudge along the sidewalk towards the bus stop. He looks at his wristwatch several times seeming to question the accuracy of the damned timepiece. He mutters to himself. Concern and anxiety make more inroads on his face.

Just behind the bus stop glass casing a group of young bearded men dressed in tight-fitting black athletic gear, donning multi-colored socks, occasionally kick a football while they yell back and forth. The local euphemism that comes to mind is “of immigrant background” or less euphemistic, more honest and usually more false, simply “Muslim.” Pairs and threesomes assemble, dissipate and reassemble. A revolving game. Some of them, too, gaze up at the sky momentarily and tilt their heads back down with wider eyes now. They readjust and continue the banter.

Yo, bro.

I snap and turn around. The streetlights illuminate an approaching figure from the side and create a shadow that hides partially the man’s face. The remaining natural light is not enough for me. I say nothing and wait.

Dude, you know how I knew it was you?

Uh, cuz you could see me.

Nah, it’s because of your posture. The way you stand. I don’t need the light. Let’s walk.

Rachid waves at the young men. They return the favor and fake a powerful kick towards us. Rachid maintains his step without pause. Oldest gag in the book.

Yeah, I mean, let’s walk. What about these curfews? Can your juice cart biz survive? How are you holding up?

Well, as you know, they’re not actual curfews, but, it has been tough to keep the business afloat. I am still able to sell some. Abdel is at the station right now and he can deliver by foot or bike if necessary. You know, because actually it’s this time that creates a little buzz of activity. People gravitate over to the juice cart and chat.

The sun was no longer visible and we naturally turned our bodies experimenting with their newly found shadows and those of the shrubbery



lining the avenue. The nearby block of social housing beckoned and we circled around again.

We took the bend in the road and veered off on a trail that cut diagonally, essentially tracing the hypotenuse of a triangle complemented by two intersecting avenues. We saved a bit of time but it was not really about that. The footpath was well worn and even as the darkness had now filled in any hesitant gaps of dusk, we continued smiling, gesturing... knowing, or at least getting to know one another.

The small forest opened onto a clearing and Abdel's face came into view. He was chatting with an assorted group of older men and a couple of the young, goofy footballers. Abdel offered me a spot of carrot-ginger juice as an invitation. I offered a cigarette. We both nodded and turned our bodies to give attention to the others. I had forgotten about the chill on my skin somehow.

A discussion was in progress.

The night is when we Muslims get started...we need to take care of elders and go out and buy stuff, we are very active...

Yeah, you know if Bilka were open 24 hours, we'd all be out there. Late!

That's right, brother. We hang out, stay up late, snack, drink tea, have snacks. I think this comes from the fact that in the Middle East, most functions, events, etc. don't start until the nighttime. In part, this is because it is simply too hot. We might not sleep for that many hours during the night, maybe 3 hours, but will sleep again in the afternoon.

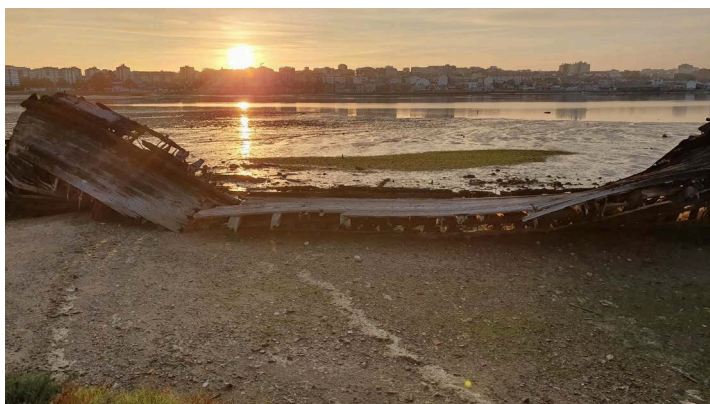
Yeah, it's just different. Abdel, give me a little tamarind juice. For here, not to go.



Dusk as discourse, as a narrative position, allows us to consider darkness as not only a temporality but also a spatiality. For example, Danish sociologist Sjøgaard has conducted fieldwork with nightclub bouncers in Aarhus and concluded that these individuals play an important role in “the (re)production of ethnic divisions and inequalities in Danish nightlife” (Sjøgaard 2017: 257). Abshir, a fieldwork consultant and 2nd generation man whose parents migrated from Somalia to Aarhus in the early 1990s, recounted to me several stories of his experiences that confirm much of Sjøgaard’s findings. When asked about his encounters with bouncers, Abshir listed the typical responses they used to justify barring him from entering the establishment. “You know, these guys (bouncers), they say a lot of things, like the ‘place is full,’ or ‘there are too many boys in there already,’ or ‘you can’t wear sneakers,’ even you see several people wearing sneakers who enter directly.”

Importantly, Sjøgaard argues that the rationale behind such gate-keeping stems from a complex mixture of “ethnic governance” and competitive masculine performativities. Such a sentiment underlined one of the encounters Abshir mentioned to me. The bouncer revealed his view on POC hyper-sexuality, when he stated “I can’t let you in, because, you know, if you have too many of you guys in one place, women will be in danger.” Khalil, a 2nd generation man who claims Palestinian heritage, as well as Abshir provided numerous examples of the diplomacy of masculinity as they worked to maintain friendships with male, white, ethnic Danes through the experiences of racial profiling at bars and their observation of Islam,

including the abstention from alcohol. The intersectionality of ethnicity and gender is fundamental to keep in mind as we move to Lisbon, Portugal.



We may fail at love, a relationship with our mothers. But when the city rejects us, when we are unable to penetrate the system, its mechanisms and we are always on the other side of the glass window, we become consumed with feelings of frustration and lack of worth, which can become an illness. Foreigner is a beautiful word, if no one is forced to be one; for the rest of the time, it is simply a synonym of mutilation and a gun shot that we give ourselves (Durastanti 2021, my translation).

The experience of otherness, a forever outsider, is relatively new in Denmark. The presence of “Muslims,” a field of representative contestation, is juxtaposed with an imagined tradition of Nordic, liberal whiteness. But, it only goes a couple of generations back in time. In Portugal, the story is quite different, as one feels a multi-layered history of empire and a professed multicultural exceptionalism as part of national ideology. There are no others in Portugal, so the story goes, since pre-modern history was based in Islamic, Moorish occupation, Jewish diaspora and Catholic minorities. Centuries of it, and with the expansive and durable colonial contact across what is now referred to as the Global South, Portugal boasts a pride of cordiality and a brand of “post-racial” ideology. In particular, the city of Lisbon is home to tens of thousands of individuals, whose family heritage is rooted in the complex mobility trajectories between Portugal and sub-Saharan African former colonies of Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Angola, São Tomé and Príncipe and Mozambique. Most residents are nominally Portuguese citizens; they were born in Portugal and speak continental Portuguese (often along with Cape Verdean Creole and perhaps French). And, yet, many confront daily and nightly stigmas and are limited in how

they can exercise citizenship. Dusk, again, can be an opening to explore alternative citizenships and other forms of belonging.

Aline fixes her bun. She crimps the edges of the blood orange head wrap. Looking herself up and down in the cracked and faded mirror, Aline fusses for several minutes before pausing and giving a slight nod of acceptance. "That's as good as I can be," she says to herself in a more modest version of the self-help mantras she listens to on the train into the city.

Aline knows that it's all a temporary fix. Her head wrap should make it through the morning rush on the Sintra train line and well into the work day. The company-issued hairnet and hairpins certainly don't hurt the cause either. It's one of the parts of her sous-chef assistant job at the Sofitel Lisbon Luxury Hotel restaurant that she genuinely doesn't mind. While Aline chops potatoes, kale and *chouriço* fennel sausage in prep for the standard fare of caldo verde soup, she enjoys remembering her three daughters when they were small children eager to impress her with their acrobatics and lip-syncing repertoire. Aline herself preferred Sara Tavares to Whitney Houston and Beyoncé but she smiled at her girls no matter what they sang. Her right wrist pivoted in a steady rhythm expertly using the contact point between the knife and cutting board as a fulcrum to chop uniformly the ingredients. The sound of the cutlery underscored and, in some sense, grounded the airy, impressionist melodies of early 20th century French composers wafting through the pretentious restaurant. Time was precisely measured. The day went by. Aline fixed her head wrap, as per routine, once during her break after the lunch rush.

Kuzé, mana? What's eating you? You done with work now.

Aline recognizes the voice immediately and looks up to see Nany with her boyfriend Edson tagging behind. They take up a standing position to the side of Aline, who was lucky enough to find a seat on the Linha Sintra train back to northwestern Lisbon suburb of Tapada das Mercês. The black faces multiply and crowd in, once again, for the train trip. The day shift. Aline looked down again into her lap and gave a faint smile knowing that, at least, she wasn't one of those black faces on the other side of the track. Arriving in the city to work at night. She couldn't do that again. Too much stress on her daughters. They needed her back at home or at least closerby.

Yeah, that part of work IS done. You're right. But, you know, our work never really ends until we lay our heads down on that pillow and miraculously

close our eyes. And, even then, seems like we go on working in our dreams. How's your little girl, Patrícia?

Aline already knew how Nany would respond. It was fine. She let Nany's jokes and complaints wash over her. Aline willingly bent her ear. It was her gift. It was what she most enjoyed about the oncoming of night. The stories.

Most Cape Verdeans exit the train in one of the three stops in Amadora, like Nany and Edson, but Aline stays on for another 15 minutes. A smaller group of black faces looks up from their phones and recognizes the sign of Mercês. They lift their bodies up and trudge out of the train, leaving a scattered group of (white) tourists and other laborers to proceed on to the final destination of Sintra. The castles and palaces of early Portuguese modernity await them.

Up the broken escalator and another flight of stairs, Aline reaches street level and the main square of Mercês. She is early and her daughters are customarily late.

Aline drifts off a block to the north, behind the market knowing what she would find.



Ah, senhora. How is the city? Comment se vá?

Stop it, Flávio. I could smell those ganzas from the train platform. You been out here all day or what? What'd I tell you?

Flávio is not alone. A good 20 or so young men congregate in between two unfinished, abandoned residential buildings. When the weather is good,

they prefer to hang out near the mural of Lisandro, a ‘fallen soldier.’ As the orange fire of the sun deepens and burns brown, the mural itself seems to change. The hues of Lisandro’s stare sharpen in the dusk, beckoning a response. His look is provocative and Flávio and the others try to imagine what they might possibly say to Lisandro. How did they let his murder happen?

Come on, all day? It’s not like that. Maybe some of us start in the afternoon but it’s really only around now that we all come together. A little back and forth. We done with high school and no one want to hire us. We like to sit up in here and plan. We made some videos, they’re up on Youtube. I already sent you the links. But, yeah, your people over the cultural center don’t even respond. We did it; we pitched a project. But, nothing.

They’re not my people. You know that. I am here, ain’t I? Do they come around here? I’m just checking on you. They call you all the “lost generation.” I know you aren’t lost. I know you’ve got something to say.

Aline carries trauma with her. It is more than the abuse she endured from her former partner, the father of her three girls. It is more than her delicate relationship with Nany and many other Cape Verdeans living in Amadora, a place where she had resided for more than a decade. It is more than the uneasy feeling she has when Fula and Mandingo⁵ men express their “expectations” during community meetings. She calls her traumas a mix of “too much” and “too little.” The excess of abuse and hard feelings coupled with a lack of, well, almost everything related to infrastructure in Mercês. The name is apropos. A sequence of disingenuous “mercies” from the increasingly neoliberal state. There are buildings and streets, social housing. Isn’t that enough?

Smoke pours out of mouths and nostrils. The men are bulls playfully sparring, as the THC brings a relief to some and a provocative jab to others. Some men lean more fully against the wall, against the car, while others become more restless. They have schemes. They have jokes and they have bars. Lyrics, pick-up lines.

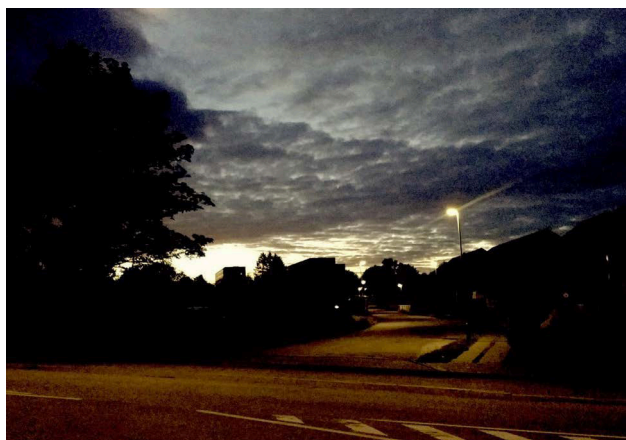
Be careful what you say, my son. No real girl gonna go for that. You corny. You need to come up with another story.

Who said I am looking for a real girl?

5. Fula and Mandingo are two of the main ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau and in Guinean communities inside Portugal. Their differing views on Islam and community at times cause conflict, as is the case in Mercês.

Hmm, I guess you're looking for any girl.

Flávio is used to the banter. Aline and he, or some other guy, went through some version of this every other day. With darkness approaching, the street lights independently decide upon a shade akin to white or yellow. They tend to change throughout the night. Shadows talk, buildings stoop and they all hunch together.



I offer the following as a tenuous conclusion. Dusk is like migrancy: liminal, a phase of natural anxiety, a transition with a potential for eventual transgression. And, both are conducive to storytelling. To fiction. Dusk is a visual nudge, once again, to reckon boundaries. Where is self and the rest, the other, the socio-natural horizon? In an interview, Deborah Eisenberg described writing in similar terms,

The truth is, I started writing because I stopped smoking and I had to do *something*. By which I mean that I had to find some serviceable, day-to-day way to make some sense of the big swamp that sloshes around in my head—the swamp that sloshes around in each head from birth. I suppose you could say that's the basic task of being alive—mapping the stuff inside your head, which itself I suppose is a constantly changing representation of you plus the whole rest of the world, and of how those things fit together.

Everybody's remaking that map all the time—some people like to do it by conversing, some by going to school, some by constructing digital avatars, some by painting, some by making music, and so on, but smoking

is an excellent method. In order to ascertain your spatial relationship to your environment, for example, all you have to do is exhale. In every way, smoking is a demonstration of what everyone now seems to call “agency”—you can choose to light up many, many times over the course of a day, and I did—but you have all those highly addictive narcotics to regulate your behavior and your temperament for you.⁶

Writing, like smoking, is an attempt to represent boundaries, and it is fleeting, like smoke. Ephemeral and addictive. Some refer to it as a “call,” which I personally find distastefully spiritual. Writing, like smoking, is obviously personal. Dusk reminds us of a need, to go or be somewhere. We need to move and co-create a new scenario with new characters under a potentially new or most probably a routinized plot. In any case, there is drama and tension. Resolution, or not.

While scholars have carefully considered environmental forces on the human condition, we have been slow to take seriously the sensorial and epistemological aspects of darkness.⁷ I suggest that an inquiry into this regular but dynamic force in human lives is productive in our search for the parameters and ecologies of knowledge.

I took these photographs to remind me not of particular moments or places in Aarhus or Lisbon but of an encroaching shift of knowing. The images are not denotative; there are no captions. Taken during fieldwork in 2019 and 2020, mostly during the height of the pandemic and urban lockdown measures, the photographs are connotative of a range of emotions on the brink of expectation. The juxtaposition of image and prose is ambiguous and, like dusk and darkness, lends itself to narration. To fiction. The essay, then, can be read/viewed as a series of image-texts, an intentionally multi-modal representation of a sensorial epistemology. The irony of using photography to gesture toward that which is barely visible does not take away its legitimacy. Rather, photography of dusk creates critical inquiry into the politics and aesthetics of the *everynight*.

The excerpts of fiction featuring Rachid and Aline describe the potential opening offered by dusk in the city. Despite starkly different immigration histories and cultural contexts, scenes of dusk in Aarhus and Lisbon facilitate revealing narration of individual and collective dreams and reconfigure constellations of intimacy, which ultimately have an impact

6. See the interview transcript here: <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2021/08/07/the-writers-mind/> Accessed on July 15, 2021.

7. One exception is Jacques Galinier *et al.* (2010).

on migrant presence in the city at night. The textual modality of fiction allows for a sharing of these anxious moments at the affective level of the senses. Moreover, fiction promotes a different, complementary engagement for the reader, an access to the time-space of urban dusk in the hopeful form of complicity.

I can come out now. I can disappear, though I still may have duties. I can be in the city differently now. I can sense that exact time matters less at night, in the dark. It's simply "dusk" or "dark" and circadian rhythms don't follow timeplaces in an absolute manner. Be that as it may, migrants know all too well that life is often lived in the fissures between control and creativity, between a drive to "cover the fire" and dusk. Dusk-as-epistemology and dusk-as-narration are thus useful to appreciate and represent the dynamic search among migrants for alternative frames of belonging in the city.

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8. <https://heranet.info/projects/public-spaces-culture-and-integration-in-europe/night-spaces-migration-culture-and-integration-in-europe/>
 9. <https://hanse-ias.de/>

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