Alienation, Abjection and the Mobile Postcolonial City: Public Transport in Ousmane Sembène's "Niiwam" and Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name*

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This chapter discusses urban mobilities by analyzing the representation and formal functions of travel on public transport in two African literary texts, the short story "Niiwam" (1987), by the Senegalese author Ousmane Sembène, and the novel *Without a Name* (1994), by the Zimbabwean writer Yvonne Vera. Both texts are centered on an image that combines public transportation with abjection and alienation: the protagonists travel in a bus while secretly carrying the corpse of their dead child. Sembène's protagonist, a poor peasant who has come to Dakar to take his sick son to hospital, travels by bus from the morgue to a cemetery to bury the child, who has died. In Vera's novel, the main character catches a bus from Harare back to her home village, which has been ravaged by the guerilla war, to

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bury her baby, born out of rape and whom she herself has strangled. Public transport entails encounters with others (Wilson 2011; Rink 2022). In the texts under discussion there arises a particularly threatening experience of copresence and interaction or "shared travel-ness" (Pettinger 2012, 129, 132) as a result of the protagonists' fear of being exposed. Both texts attest simultaneously to "the everyday and the extraordinary experiences of mobility" (Adey 2010, 31). While the trivial aspects of public transport are articulated through the presence of the other passengers, the drivers, and allusions to the system of public mobility, the protagonists' alienated perspectives and motives for traveling move the texts from the banal and mundane meanings of mobility (see Binnie et al. 2007, 165) toward the extraordinary. In so doing, the texts stress the "the difference and singularity of lived experience of being in passage" (Adey et al. 2012, 173). It is, indeed, the contrast with the banality of the environment of public transport itself that makes the protagonists' distress so palpable.

As the author of novels such as *Le Docker noir* (1956), *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (1960), and *Xala* (1973), Ousmane Sembène (1923–2007) is one of the key writers of his generation. A director and filmmaker, he is often also called the "father of African film", having turned many of his own literary texts into films—including "Niiwam". "Niiwam" appears in a volume of Sembène's that also includes the short story "Taaw". Mobility is not a key theme of the latter story, which focuses on poverty in rural Senegal. Representative of a more recent writerly generation, Yvonne Vera (1964–2005) has published a short story collection and five novels, including the acclaimed works *Butterfly Burning* (1998) and *The Stone Virgins* (2002). Vera's oeuvre focuses primarily on the violence of Zimbabwe's freedom struggle as seen from the perspective of Zimbabwean women. Her production attests to her interest in black women's place in the colonial city and to their limited mobilities in moving between the rural and the urban. With regard to the contexts of the texts discussed here, Vera's novel, whose physical settings repeatedly shift between the rural and the urban, is set against the backdrop of Zimbabwe's anticolonial freedom struggle in the late 1970s. In contrast, Sembène's short story is a portrayal of urban life in post-independence Senegal. Given the prominent role played by motorized transport and its associated infrastructure in the processes of "kinetic modernity" and urbanization (Giucci 2007, xii; Larkin 2013, 333; Green-Simms 2017, 5), public transportation in "Niiwam" and *Without a Name* can be read as a mobile chronotope that embodies

ideas of (post)colonial urban modernity, producing a "moving spatio-temporal structure" in the texts (Peterle 2016, 289). In effect, the depiction of travel by public transport structures the narratives of both Sembène's and Vera's texts. "Niiwam" produces a far-reaching poetics of public transport mobilities: the bus functions as the main setting, bringing disparate characters together, in addition to which the bus route and the motion of the vehicle move the plot forward, while changes in the narrative perspective generate spatial movements inside and outside of the vehicle. In *Without a Name*, the bus ride is a narrative turning-point since it represents the protagonist's attempt to come to terms with the trauma she has gone through. Beyond the tragedies and feelings of alienation experienced by the protagonists and the banal experiences of public transport mobilities undergone by the other passengers, the bus rides capture the idea of a postcolonial society in transit between the colonial era and post-independence modernization.

Mobilities and mobility networks are key elements of modern cities (Freudendal-Pedersen and Kesselring 2017, 2, 5). By focusing on the representation and formal functions of travel by public transport and the abject and alienated aspects of the bus journeys in Sembène's and Vera's texts, this chapter will contribute to discussions of the literary postcolonial city from a perspective that understands the urban space as inherently mobile (see, e.g., Cumpsty 2019; Morgan 2022; Nuttall 2004). In line with Marian Aguiar's, Charlotte Mathieson's and Lynne Pearce's description that "mobility studies works towards a rigorous assessment of the social and spatial aspects of mobile practices within their cultural milieu" (2019, 2), my approach stresses the importance of reading literary cities in a way that acknowledges the connectedness of mobility and space. Such an approach not only highlights the notion that space shapes mobility but also that mobility frees "space from static representation" (Murray and Upstone 2014, 5). Furthermore, my reading draws attention to the importance of the spaces of mobility and transit in literature and the role played by representations of motorized mobilities and, in particular, travel by public transport in conveying the meanings of (urban) mobilities in African literatures.[1] Questions of spatiality—including literary cities—have

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[1] For studies on motorized mobilities and public transport in African literary texts, see, for instance, Anyinefa 2003; Green-Simms 2017; Savonick 2015; Steiner 2014; Toivanen 2022, 2023; Tunca 2008.

become popular subjects of inquiry in African literary studies. Much less attention, however, has been given to representations of mobility practices, especially everyday mobilities: in mobilities, the focus tends to be on global migratory displacements, often on a metaphorical level (Toivanen 2021, 2). Given the key role of mobilities in the construction of the urban space, postcolonial city novels have great potential for moving beyond the fixation of postcolonial studies on global migratory mobilities and metaphors thereof. The fascination of postcolonial studies with large-scale, life-changing mobilities echoes the way in which mobilities research has foregrounded hypermobility (Jensen 2009, xvi) and "the extraordinary voyages of international travellers" (Binnie et al. 2007, 166) at the expense of everyday mobility practices—a feature for which some mobilities scholarship has been criticized over the years. In general, however, mobility studies promotes a holistic understanding of different modes and modalities of mobilities (Adey 2010, 18), and "banal or mundane mobilities" (Binnie et al. 2007, 165) are acknowledged as being just as relevant subjects of inquiry as global mobilities. In the study of African literatures such a holistic understanding is helpful in establishing links between the journey motif (in local, everyday settings) and a wider "history of migrations, explorations, and conquest" (Mortimer 1990, 15).

This chapter's focus on the connections between urban spatiality, a specific mode of transportation, and the tangible mobilities that it enables contributes to the ongoing discussions in literary mobility studies that regard fictional texts as "vital constituents of the ways in which mobility itself is experienced as an embodied, subjective act that is informed by, and through, the cultural context in which it occurs" (Aguiar et al. 2019, 17). Through their portrayals of the bus journey, "Niiwam" and *Without a Name* enable insights not only into the alienating, abject aspects of travel but also into the exclusionary aspects of (post)colonial urban modernity. Further, by paying attention to the narrative roles played by the space within the vehicle and the bus ride itself, this chapter explores how mobility affects literary form (see Davidson 2017; Toivanen 2021). In so doing, my analysis moves beyond sociological readings of mobility and stresses the specific contribution of literary analysis in making sense of mobilities and the urban space.

Urban Alienation and the Poetics of Public Transport Mobilities in "Niiwam"

Sembène's short story opens with a portrayal of a landscape "'d'une Afrique nouvelle" (10) ["of a new Africa" (1)][2]: a rocky cliff; the sea; a sky with vultures; "Hôpital indigène" (9) ["Native Hospital" (1)] with its morgue; people wearing European and traditional clothes. To convey the modernity of this urban landscape, the text keeps alluding to the presence of motorized vehicles—hearses, passenger cars and buses, and the omnipresent noise of motors. These elements capture the key themes of the short story: postcolonial African urbanity, the co-existence of local and imported colonial culture, modern motorized mobility, and death. The introduction of the poorly dressed protagonist, Thierno, carrying the corpse of his child, adds to the narrative the alienated perspective of someone who is "un 'nouveau débarqué du village' " (13) ["fresh from the village" (3)]. The text underlines Thierno's marginalization as he follows the orders of an elderly *chiffonier*, a ragman he has become acquainted with in the hospital premises. The ragman is "accoutumé […] aux choses de la ville" (11) ["more accustomed to the city" (2)], whereas Thierno is clearly lost in it, both concretely and symbolically: his socio-economic position makes him an outsider with no fixed points of reference in the "depersonalized and hostile" urban space (N'gom 1999, 297). The protagonist's helplessness is conveyed by the way in which the ragman assists him in crossing the busy street, advising him about how to travel by bus to the cemetery, and even paying the fare for the penniless passenger. The protagonist's marginalization is, then, conveyed through mobility-related imagery that underlines his inability to 'handle' the urban environment that would enable him to orient himself within it (see Buhr 2018). More precisely, his helplessness relates to motorized mobilities: before the ragman accompanies him to the bus stop, Thierno has asked him how far the cemetery is and what the shortest way is for him to get there on foot. The ragman's rude reply, "D'où sors-tu?" (13) ["Where are you from?" (3)], positions the protagonist outside urban kinetic modernity. Significantly enough, at the bus stop the two stand "silencieux à distance des autres" (12) ["silent […], a good distance away from the others" (2)], which conveys both Thierno's marginalization in the city and the ragman's reluctance to be associated with the rural newcomer.

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[2] Translations from the published English version of "Niiwam".

Most of the events in "Niiwam" are set inside the bus, a mobile public space (Rink 2022, 2). The bus entails two separate yet interrelated forms of spatiality: the insulated space of the vehicle and the urban space outside. In his reading of "Niiwam", N'gom (1999, 301) acknowledges this "interlocking of spaces", arguing that the bus line is a mobile space and Dakar "static but dynamic". Rather than seeing the urban space as a static 'container', I understand it as inherently mobile in the sense that its meanings in the text are produced through and in movement, or as Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman (2013, 7) formulate it, "Practices of mobility […] co-produce spaces, places and landscapes". For those inside the vehicle, the urban space is accessed visually through the windows of the moving bus, which produces a dynamic image of the city. The protagonist, however, is not that interested in the urban environment. As the bus starts off, the narrative briefly refers to an external view—"le véhicule gravissait le raidillon vers le château d'eau" (19) ["the vehicle climbed the slope towards the water tower" (7)]. After making this observation, the protagonist becomes less concerned with the urban landscape than with the encounters and events onboard, as dictated by his condition of traveling with the dead child. His observations of the space inside the vehicle capture his fear of getting caught: "Les arrêts se succédaient. Les gens marchaient d'un pas alerte, se parlant à peine. […] Tout lui était étranger, les gens avec leurs réactions … Il évitait les yeux des autres usagers, craignant d'être trahi par ses propres regards" (20) ["The stops went by, one after another. […] Everything was strange to him, these people with their own particular reactions to things. He avoided meeting the eyes of the other passengers, afraid that he would betray himself" (7)].

The most 'extraordinary' manifestation of the protagonist's alienation in the city is, of course, the body of the child he carries. As Amade Faye (2009, 194) argues, traveling with the corpse makes Thierno's relationship with the urban space one of trial and uncovering. The centrality of the corpse in the narrative is underlined in the title, which in Wolof means "his cadaver" (N'gom 1999, 293; Faye 2009, 194). Combined with the protagonist's socio-economic marginalization, "his cadaver" seals his relegation to the realm of the abject vis-à-vis the postcolonial city. The abject, writes Julia Kristeva (1982, 1), is "beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable". Yet, the abject and the subject are constructed dialogically so that the identity of the subject relies on the partial rejection of the abject. Consequently, the abject poses a threat to the boundaries of the subject by being both revolting to the self *and* also part of it (Kristeva

1982, 4). Abjection is, therefore, not merely a feature that qualifies the abject but also the system that wishes to exclude it. In "Niiwam", the abjection of the protagonist in the eyes of the city dwellers is telling of the self-identity of the modern African city in terms of whom it excludes.

The protagonist's experience of "passengering" (Laurier et al. 2008) palpably conveys how "being in passage implicates confinement, restraint, even incarceration" (Adey et al. 2012, 172). Thierno's distress caused by his trying to keep his secret causes him to become preoccupied by "ses pensées [qui] se bousculaient dans sa tête" (19) ["his thoughts […] whirling in his head" (7)] and "bondissaient dans le désordre (19) ["ran wild" (7)]. These rapid movements of the protagonist's thoughts are contrasted with a sense of immobility as he enters the bus: the fear of getting caught "paralyzes" him, and after taking a few steps in the aisle, he asks himself, "Mais avait-il vraiment bougé?" (16) ["But had he really moved?" (5)]. This contrast between the speed of his thoughts and the feeling of physical immobility is illustrative of Thierno's panicky, paralyzing fear of being exposed. Thus, in addition to the movement of the vehicle there is constant narrative movement between different mobile spaces: the protagonist's perceptions of what happens inside the vehicle, outside in the urban environment, and finally, the panicky mobilities of thoughts in the space of his mind. According to Andrew Thacker (2003, 7), such swift narrative movements across various spaces are inherently linked to the emergence of modern mobility systems. In effect, the mode of transport clearly informs the literary form of "Niiwam".

In addition to the narrative mobilities across internal (vehicle), external (urban landscape), and mental spaces, the "mobilities of form" (Davidson 2017) or "poetics of mobility" (Toivanen 2021) in "Niiwam" consist of changes in the focalizer. While the first passages of the bus ride are narrated from the perspective of Thierno, his viewpoint is eventually complemented by that of Wellé, the driver. This strategy generates further narrative movement inside the vehicle—away from the passenger's seat and toward that of the driver, producing a shift from the protagonist's extraordinary (alienated, distressed) experience of mobility to the banal, pragmatic concerns of the driver. The first shift in the narrative perspective follows a lengthy passage of Thierno's anxious train of thought after a passenger occupies the seat next to him. The transition from Thierno's panicky musings—"criait-il en dedans de lui?" (22) ["was he screaming inside himself?" (8)]—to the narrator's laconic, practical description of the itinerary—"La course de la ligne numéro huit s'étend sur vingt-six

kilomètres" (23) ["The route of the number eight bus is twenty-six kilometres" (9)]—is rather abrupt. Passages focalized by Wellé focus on his worries about compensating for the delay in the service, minute descriptions of driving, and mentions of street and place names along the bus route. In brief, Wellé's perspective permits insights into the banalities of motorized urban mobilities experienced by someone who drives for his living, attesting to his ease of metaphorically 'working' the city (see Buhr 2018, 340). While the driver's position can be seen as more powerful than that of the passenger, allusions to the schedule and the route place the driver in a wider mobility system as part of an 'assemblage' of other people, infrastructure and rules (see Adey et al. 2012, 172), thus accentuating a "hybrid and networked character of mobile agency" (Manderscheid 2017, 124). The changes in the focalizer are synchronized with the stops and restarts of the bus. For example, when the doors open to let a passenger out, the viewpoint moves from the driver observing the urban space through the windshield and the rear-view mirror to the distressed Thierno. This narrative strategy based on the stops and restarts of the bus produces a literary mobile map of the urban space along the bus line 8 in Dakar. Moreover, it translates the theme of urban public transport mobility in the literary form by producing a poetics of mobility that captures the pauses characterizing motorized urban mobilities in general (traffic jams; red lights)[3] and travel by public transport in particular (picking up passengers; dropping them off).

It is noteworthy that the urban space becomes more meaningful in passages focalized by Wellé than in those adopting Thierno's viewpoint. Visual perceptions of the urban space accumulate, generating as sense of movement in the literary form and stressing how the city comes into being in motion:

> The bus left the Presidential palace behind, and rumbled along the Boulevard de la République, turning into President Lamine-Gueye Avenue. It was a major thoroughfare, lined with mosques, shops well-stocked with imported fabrics and beauty products, a cinema, restaurants, pharmacies, cobblers' stalls, hairdressers and Asian bazaars. (10)[4]

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[3] In addition to the rhythms of urban mobilities, the stops and restarts of the bus evoke the pauses that punctuate the procession that accompanies the burial of a significant person in some West African funeral cultures (Faye 2009, 205).

[4] L'autobus laissait derrière lui le palais présidentiel, roulait sur le boulevard de la République et s'engageait dans l'avenue du Président-Lamine-Gueye. Une grande artère, avec ses mosquées, ses boutiques bien achalandées de tissus importés, de produits de beauté, une salle de cinéma, des restaurants, des pharmacies, des échoppes de cordonnier, des coiffeurs, des bazars asiatiques (24).

In addition to a sense of movement, the quotation attests to the co-existence of wealth and power and the popular in the postcolonial city and highlights its transcultural aspects. Later, a similar dynamic scene produces a peripheral, suburban view of the city:

> The bus started up Dial-Diop Boulevard, then took Bourguiba Avenue, hurtling down the gentle slope to the by-pass onto the Puits road. It passed the Xar Yalla police barracks and was swallowed up in the Grand-Yoff district.
>
> The scenery was suburban: another densely populated area of Dakar. Women, together with dirty sheep and naked or half-naked urchins with bloated bellies and scrawny legs were congregated around the public taps; people were selling water, and carts, ducks, chickens and dogs wandered around. (17–18)[5]

This suburban view contrasts with the 'modern' urban landscapes described in the previous quotation and attests to the co-existence of the 'rural' and the urban in the fringes of Dakar. While this passage captures what could be referred to as the 'failures of modernity' in the postcolonial city, it nevertheless conveys a sense of movement and the idea of the city as mobile.

As several scholars have stated, the bus in "Niiwam" functions as a microcosm and a stage where different segments of society meet (N'gom 1999, 303; Fendler 2008, 77; Faye 2009, 197). What should be underlined here is that the bus is not just any form of microcosm but a *mobile* (public) space in which space and temporality collide with mobility. For Bakhtin (1981, 84, 250), the chronotope captures the unity of time and space in a narrative, where it also has a central organizational function. With regard to a text's link with the extratextual world, Bakhtin (1981, 243) states that "a literary work's artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality is defined by its chronotope". For Bakhtin, the road is the chronotope of encounter: it is 'on the road' that "the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people […] intersect at one spatial and temporal point" (Bakhtin 1981, 243), making the road chronotope particularly

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[5] Le bus remonta le boulevard Dial-Diop, emprunta l'avenue Bourguiba en dévalant la pente douce vers la rocade de la route des Puits. Il passa devant la caserne de la gendarmerie de Xar Yalla, pour s'engouffrer dans le quartier de Grand-Yoff.

Le paysage était suburbain: un autre quartier populeux de Dakar. Des moutons au pelage sale, des gamins nus ou à moitié nus, ventre gonflé, jambes maigrelettes, des femmes s'agglutinaient autour des bornes-fontaines; des vendeurs d'eau, des charrettes, des canards, des poulets et des chiens déambulaient (37).

"appropriate for portraying events governed by chance" (244). In a reading of Don Delillo's *Cosmopolis*, Giada Peterle (2016, 289) introduces a mobilities research-oriented reinterpretation of Bakhtin's chronotope by suggesting that "moving elements and practices, such as the car, the underground, or the driving, walking, and running practices" are mobile chronotopes. The notion of the mobile chronotope is relevant for my reading of "Niiwam" because it resonates with current conceptualizations of the urban space as dynamic and mobile. The mobile chronotope also makes it possible for the reader to appreciate the space of the vehicle as a mobile setting that structures plot development, generates encounters between fictional characters, and produces a sense of movement through both pauses and restarts and also shifts in the focalizer.

The encounters enabled by the self-contained mobile space of the vehicle are ephemeral and marked by propinquity (Wilson 2011, 635). For Sembène's protagonist, this embodied closeness arouses fear of getting caught. For his fellow passengers, on the other hand, the closeness of the protagonist signifies an abject experience. Even before the other passengers become aware that Thierno is transporting a corpse, he is an abject figure in their eyes. An illustrative example of the workings of alienation and abjection is contained in a scene in which a man dressed in European clothes sits next to Thierno and starts to read a newspaper. This passenger's "aisance" (21) ["ease" (8)] as he reads the journal, his sizeable wristwatch, and his air of "le monde des chefs" (21) ["the world of chiefs" (8)] make Thierno "[perdre] toutes ses facultés" (22) ["completely unnerved" (9)]. Seen from Thierno's perspective, the man seems to be made of clothes, shoes, accessories, and his journal. This renders him almost non-human and 'disintegrated', which is telling of the protagonist's limited capacity to observe his environment in his distressed condition and his restricted experience of "shared travel-ness" (Pettinger 2012, 132). The 'eased', reading passenger stares at Thierno over the journal, making Thierno uncomfortably aware of his dead son on his lap. This simple scene is loaded with complex meanings. The other passenger's clothes and the act of reading a journal creates a gap between himself and Thierno: the former is an educated member of the post-independence elite and an accustomed, modern urbanite, while the latter, Thierno, is a poor, illiterate peasant rejected by the modernity of the urban environment (Ndong 2020, 98). For the man seated next to the protagonist, Thierno is repulsive even *without* the corpse of the child. What Thierno represents—illiterate, poor, peasant—poses a threat to the identity of the modern African

city. The two characters are also differentiated based on their positions as passengers: while the man is represented as a commuter whose habitual itineraries and knowledge of timetables give him a self-assurance that renders the experience of being in passage predictable, Thierno, in contrast, is not used to riding a bus in Dakar. Furthermore, Thierno is not only intimidated by the experience of traveling by bus and the man's impressive appearance and self-confident hostility but also by how the man's journal touches the feet of the child under the cloth, which is no longer perfectly in place. The tension that Thierno experiences lessens when the passenger leaves the bus. However, similar distressing situations keep repeating themselves whenever a new passenger takes the seat next to Thierno, when the bus suddenly breaks, or when flies land on the corpse. Such seemingly banal events keep up the narrative tension and are linked to the mobile rhythms of the bus following its route.

The storyline follows the bus line number 8, producing a literary or narrative equivalent of what Brian Larkin calls the poetics of infrastructure, namely that infrastructures are "concrete semiotic and aesthetic vehicles" that "also exist as forms separate from their purely technical functioning" (2013, 329). Toward the end of the story the bus finally reaches Yoff, where the cemetery is situated. This is also where the protagonist's journey ends and his secret is unveiled. Thierno, who up to this point has been more preoccupied with the events inside the bus and within the space of his distressed mind, becomes interested in the urban landscape. A new source of anxiety sets in, namely where the bus stop of the cemetery is located: "Thierno, perplexe, examinait le paysage. Le vieux chiffonnier lui avait fourni des indications bien détaillées sur la topographie de son itinéraire" (44) ["Thierno, feeling confused, looked carefully at the scenery. The old ragman had given him detailed descriptions of the places he would be passing through" (22)]. The shift in the protagonist's focus of interest from the inside of the vehicle to the urban space is conveyed through a long passage with detailed observations of the landscape. The urban space outside becomes meaningful to the protagonist only when he feels the need to situate himself in it so that he will be able to reach his planned destination. When he redirects his gaze to the interior of the vehicle, he looks around to see whom he could ask for help. He summons up his courage and poses a question to a woman who is seated next to him. The woman—like his previous fellow traveler, the man with the newspaper—seems to be composed of independent body parts and fashionable accessories that do not form a coherent entity. It is Thierno's

question about the bus stop that finally exposes him, causing chaos inside the vehicle, where "l'angoisse et la phobie emplissaient l'atmosphère" (47) ["the air was thick with anguish and phobia" (24)], which turns the banal bus ride into an extraordinary, abject experience.

Despite Thierno's tragedy, the climax of the story has a comic side to it. Thierno's distress and the other passengers' shock is contrasted with extremely banal, mundane elements—the ticket controller's concern over whether Thierno has traveled without a ticket, Wellé's worries about the delay and his pressing need to urinate, and, finally, one of the passengers realizing that her wallet has been stolen during the chaos. In the end, Thierno's experience of alienation is transformed into an unexpected sense of community: the passengers express their solidarity with him, and they ask Wellé to deviate from the usual route to decant Thierno and "his cadaver" at the cemetery gates (which he refuses), and some of them even accompany Thierno to the cemetery on foot. In so doing, they form an improvised funeral procession that evokes the funeral convoy "d'un grand fils du pays" (42) ["of one of the country's great sons" (21)] alluded to earlier in the text. The bus becomes "Niiwam's" hearse (N'gom 1999, 304), with the vehicle gaining a new metaphorical meaning that builds on the idea of interrelated mobilities and accentuates the differential access to mobility and to the urban space enjoyed by privileged city dwellers and marginalized subjects like Thierno. For the protagonist, the bus ride from the hospital to the cemetery becomes a sort of mourning rite and the vehicle a mobile space for grieving the loss of his child with others.

WITHOUT A NAME: A CIRCULAR RURAL-URBAN JOURNEY

While most of the events in "Niiwam" take place within the bus and the journey plays a pivotal role in the structuring of the narrative, in *Without a Name* the bus ride does not occupy an equally prominent position in the narrative. That said, it is significant that the novel opens with a scene set in a bus station and that, as scholars have argued, the journey itself is important for plot construction because it marks the protagonist's attempt to start the healing process following the traumas of rape and infanticide (Wilson-Tagoe 2002, 169; Palmer 2006, 41; Muchemwa 2012, 281). The novel's narrative structure is non-linear, reflecting the protagonist's trauma with its constant back-and-forth movement between the past and the present (Kopf 2012, 94, 104). The bus ride from the city to the rural areas is, therefore, not only a spatial journey but also a temporal one,

namely that of returning to where everything started (Muchemwa 2012, 281). In *Without a Name* the journey is, in effect, a *passage* with structural, spatial, temporal and existential meanings that "impl[ies] [a] journey […] of duration" and "processes of […] change" (Kovach, Kugele, and Nünning 2022, 2). The protagonist's bus journey, like that of Thierno in "Niiwam", can be read as an articulation of a rite of passage or 'grief in motion'. The poetics of mobility in *Without a Name* does not draw on the infrastructures and technicalities of public transport mobilities as in "Niiwam" but instead reflects the novel's overarching engagement with traumatic temporalities and the protagonist's alienation. Moreover, while "Niiwam" offers a focused account of one specific instance of bus travel in the postcolonial city, Vera's novel features portrayals of the protagonist's other urban (im)mobilities extending well beyond a singular bus journey, thus inviting a holistic reading of her mobilities.

The novel is set in the context of Zimbabwe's freedom struggle against colonial rule in 1977. The protagonist Mazvita is raped by a guerrilla soldier in her home village. She wants to forget the event and refuses to accept that she is pregnant with the rapist's child. Her urge to forget entails a fresh start in the capital city, Harare—a displacement that marks her physical dissociation from the rape and her home village, where it has occurred (Musila 2007, 56). Eventually, since she cannot deny that she is about to give birth, the past 'returns' and ruins her urge to "move on"—a movement verb that recurs in the text. It is in this context that she ends up strangling her baby and carrying it on her back, first in the city streets and then on the bus to Mubaira. Unlike "Niiwam", where the bus ride is firmly inscribed in the postcolonial city in order to explore Thierno's exclusion from its 'modernity', in *Without a Name* the bus ride is a circular journey that marks Mazvita's failure to claim the city as a place for a new start and also her failure to move away from the countryside associated with war, patriarchal/patriotic understandings of the land, and sexual violence.

The opening of the novel features a detailed description of the bus on which Mazvita travels to Mubaira. As metonymies of movement, the bus station and the stationed vehicle embody a *promise* of mobility, yet the scene articulates the protagonist's alienation and symbolizes the dead-end in which she finds herself as a result of her "mistak[ing] physical movement for change" (Primorac 2001, 90). The protagonist is portrayed waiting for the bus doors to open, standing still and separate from the other passengers, who are described as vague forms, body parts and voices, thus

conveying Mazvita's fragmented perception of reality and her "invisible inner suffering" (Kopf 2012, 94). This portrayal echoes Thierno's fragmented perceptions of his fellow passengers in "Niiwam" and suggests a similarly distorted form of shared travel-ness that undermines the aspects of copresence and interactivity characteristic of travel by public transport (Pettinger 2012, 129, 132). The repetition of the verb "stand" in sentences such as "She stood part", "She stood still", "She stood on the outside. She stood alone" (6) places her in physical and symbolic immobility and underlines her alienation, evoking Thierno's experiences of immobility and his standing apart from his fellow-passengers at the bus stop. Mazvita's immobility is further emphasized by means of a description of children playing at the bus station. The portrayal of the children features movement verbs such as running and journeying, and it also refers to the idea of escape (7)—something of which Mazvita has been deprived. The children's joyful movements also contrast with the immobility of the baby on her back. While the reader does not yet know that the baby is dead, the distressing atmosphere of the first chapter already suggests that the journey that the protagonist is about to undertake is not a trivial everyday trip.

Imagery juxtaposing Mazvita's immobility with her environment's movements recurs in chapters describing her repeated displacements in the streets of Harare with the dead baby on her back. In one such scene, Mazvita stands in an alley filled with garbage, untying the baby from the apron that she has used as a sling. The baby, referred to as "the stillness on her back" (25), has "quiet legs" (23). Mazvita's and the baby's immobility is contrasted with a banal scene of urban mobility in which Mazvita observes people passing by at the two ends of the alley in which she is hiding (22). "The people lasted only two quick steps before they disappeared" (22), states the narrator, capturing not only the hectic flow of urban mobilities but also Mazvita's limited access to the city and its unattainable promises of a new beginning. Harare is "busy and indifferent" (42) and embodies the "idea [of] go[ing] forward" (43). Mazvita's urge to move forward is linked to this general desire for postcolonial modernity after the end of colonial rule. Upon her arrival in Harare, the constant movement of the city amazes Mazvita. While at this point in the story she still believes in the promise of the city, it is worth noting that she observes the cars and feet moving past while sitting on the pavement of an alley, which is indicative of her marginalization and her inability to participate in the motion of the city. Mazvita's experiences of alienation are not uniquely related to the

trauma that she has experienced but are also rooted in social power structures limiting the access of African women in the colonial city, where "both the colonial order and African patriarchy […] had an interest in controlling African women's mobility and sexuality" (Musila 2012, 11). Illustrative of these intersecting forms of control, Mazvita fails to find a job in the city, with the result that she has no option but to live with a man named Joel whom she has met on her arrival in the city. For his part, Joel, a "warped creation […] of the colonial city" and a "caricature […] of African manhood" (Muponde 2002, 121), takes Mazvita to his place on his bicycle, making "her sit with both her legs to one side of the road, and when he turned, she had to pull her weight back to regain her support" (57). Her mode of sitting with her legs 'chastely' together on the bicycle rack, along with her accommodation to the man's movements as he rides the streets, simultaneously captures the male control of female mobility and sexuality. Yet, in that moment, Mazvita mis-identifies being in the city as "a freedom divine" (58), which is illustrative of her overestimation of "the difference between country and city" (Primorac 2001, 90) and also of her unawareness of "the larger historical forces that constrict her potential" as an African woman in a colonial city (Wilson-Tagoe 2002, 172). Indeed, mobilities are "only rarely if at all decisions taken in complete social isolation by a socially and spatially independent subject" (Manderscheid 2017, 128).

The urban space of the colonial city is represented as inherently mobile. Its mobility is linked to discourses of modernity, progress, motorized movement, and infrastructure, as suggested by the novel's frequent portrayals of automobility in which "roads [are] four-wheeled, black-tarred and moving" (54) and in which "the cars screech […] to a stop, move […] on, screech […] again" (57). Here, the automobile infrastructure is not simply something that promotes movement but is clearly inscribed in the dream of modernity (Larkin 2013, 333). Unlike Harare, which seems determined in its striving for mobility toward progress, modernity, and a new era, Mazvita's movements in the urban space are "jerky and faltering" (42), so that instead of walking straight ahead she walks "sideways" (42). Mazvita's marginalized position vis-à-vis the promises of progress that the hectic, mobile urban space symbolizes is captured in such images of physical clumsiness: the rhythms of her embodied movements are in an arrhythmic relation to those of the city (see Edensor 2014, 167). As Kizito Muchemwa (2012, 299) puts it, "[t]he motion of the city in terminal

paroxysm of colonialism becomes so alienating that the protagonist leaves the city motion to re-orient herself". Having failed to claim the city as her own because of the burden of the past that is now embodied in the corpse of the baby on her back, the planned journey represents a "release" (25) and is illustrative of her acknowledgment that "she had mistaken [departures] for beginnings" (50).

If abjection, in "Niiwam", relates to the corpse of the child carried in the bus and to the ways in which Thierno is perceived by his fellow passengers, in *Without a Name* abjection defines Mazvita's relation with the dead baby. Closely attached to her with a sling, the corpse of the child embodies the abject as something that terrifies the subject but cannot be entirely separated from it (Kristeva 1982, 4). The child, a product of rape, represents the past that Mazvita wants to rid herself of, though ultimately without success. The child's cold, static body against Mazvita's skin is a constant, tangible reminder of the traumatic event; a memory that jeopardizes her striving for a new beginning in the city. While, like Thierno, Mazvita is afraid of being caught for traveling with the corpse—"She could not afford to be discovered" (77)—this fear is never realized. In consequence, the abject burden of the dead child remains solely as Mazvita's personal experience. This fact emphasizes her alienation and relegates her position to one that is outside *any* possible form of community, even those brought into being through the ephemeral encounters enabled by public transportation.

In the passages set on the bus, the body of the baby continues to be described in imagery revolving around stillness. The imagery of immobility stands in contrast to the motion of the vehicle, attesting yet again to the narrative tension between the protagonist's desire for symbolic onward movement and her inability to achieve it. Moreover, the vehicle's outward motion from Harare tangibly symbolizes Mazvita's exclusion from the colonial city and its empty promises of self-fashioning. The trope of (circular) travel between the city and the country destructs the simple binaries between the two and complicates the idea of the city as a place of freedom (Muchemwa 2012, 280). With regard to the dismantling of the binary linking the city and the country, the novel's recurring trope of the red dust that accumulates on the bus windows is not merely a symbol representing the country/land. Rather, the way in which the dust on the windows prevents passengers from seeing the landscape can be read as the attempt of the narrative to complicate 'transparent' meanings attached to both urban and rural spaces. Indeed, if the colonial city is a complex mobile space

permitting both potential personal transformation and structures of power (Wilson-Tagoe 2002, 172), the countryside is both a site of trauma and also of redemption.

While the journey is invested with powerful symbolic meanings and marked by Mazvita's experience of alienation and abjection, the mode of transport also introduces an element of banality that counterbalances the 'extraordinariness' of the journey. Having taken the decision to leave Harare, Mazvita is preoccupied not only with her own suffering but with the practicalities of travel: "her main concern is to secure a seat on the bus" (51). The first chapter focusing on the journey represents it from the perspective of other passengers: their mundane discussions are about the destination and the weather, but there are also male passengers' ideas about how city life "corrupts" women, and how harvesting and carrying a baby shows that "a woman's back is strong as stone" (61). These words articulate stereotypical, patriarchal prejudices concerning city women and suggest that women's 'place' is in the country and in motherhood. Significantly, Mazvita's perspective in the chapter is not introduced until the final two paragraphs—yet another formal illustration of her separateness from the other passengers. While being a passenger on a bus is normally an experience of "moving in and with the bus in an assemblage of passengers and the materiality of the bus itself" (Rink 2022, 3), for Mazvita this assemblage aspect of bus travel appears only occasionally, so immersed she is in her internal world. In one stage of the description of her journey, she is briefly portrayed as seated in the back of the bus next to a pile of misshapen objects belonging to other passengers. She shares her seat with older women, who throw curious glances at her and the baby, and these threatening glances quickly distract her from her observing the physical environment of the vehicle and back to the private, internal space of her mind. The narrative perspective returns to the space of the vehicle only when Mazvita hears someone playing a *mbira*, or lamellaphone. For her, hearing this music in the bus is an overwhelmingly emotional and almost healing experience: "The tightness disappeared along her neck. The skin on her neck grew smooth. The mbira was a revelation, a necessary respite" (78). This intense experience of Mazvita's is contrasted with the banality of the bus journey for the other passengers: "The people in the bus continued their chatter, they laughed loud, told their children to sit still, coughed from the dust that fell in through the open windows" (78). It should be emphasized that, because of the armed struggle taking place largely in the rural areas, the journey from the city is not in fact strictly

banal for any of the passengers: "The people on the bus knew the truth about their own dying, but they had a capacity to evade uncomfortable realities" (87). The road that the bus follows is "another manifestation of death" (87)—a characterization that inscribes the urban-rural journey of all of the passengers within the realm of death. In *Without a Name*, the road and the mobile chronotope of the bus serve less as a time-space for an encounter with other passengers than with death itself—death that for Mazvita also implies the symbolic death of her hopes for a new beginning in the city and her exclusion from it.

For Mazvita, the bus ride is an exercise in hiding. She hides "from the sounds that surrounded her with a gay indifference, telling stories, free, unlike her who carried such a weight on her back" (113)—in other words, the trivial audial and personal aspects of travel by public transport that, for her, are disconnected from her alienating, abject experience. Simultaneously, hiding the condition of her baby from her fellow passengers necessitates at least some level of interaction with them: joining in with their laughter represents an occasion for her "to dispel suspicions regarding her apparent silence" (101). This distressing balancing act of remaining separate from the other passengers while engaging in the performance of being 'just like anyone else' leads to what Robert Muponde (2002, 123) calls "Mazvita's experience of schizophrenia on the bus". In this delirious moment, one of the women sitting next to Mazvita appears in Mazvita's dream, in which Mazvita tells the woman about the infanticide that she has committed, and the woman opens the sling. In this passage, which attests to the protagonist's mental distress, Mazvita "long[s] to be discovered, to be punished, to be thrown out of the bus" (104). The passage also underlines the importance of the setting: the bus exposes the protagonist to encounters with others, articulating a frail possibility for her to share her burden. Ultimately, none of this happens; Mazvita is not discovered and she even manages to laugh with the others. The novel ends with the bus arriving in her home village—a journey that is not only about spatial urban-rural mobility but also about temporal travel as the opening words of the final chapter suggest: "It is yesterday" (114). That the protagonist "walks in gentle footsteps […] to the place of her beginning" (116) attests to the complex meanings of the countryside not only as a site of trauma but also as a place of potential recovery, and even hints at the healing potential of mobility.

Conclusion

My reading of "Niiwam" and *Without a Name* in terms suggested by mobility studies highlights the inherently mobile character of the (post)colonial city. The focus on public transportation introduces the perspective of everyday mobilities into discussions centering on African literary cities. By underlining not only the necessity of acknowledging the inseparability of mobility and space but also the question of literary form in discerning meaning in (urban) mobilities, this chapter highlights the contribution of literary analysis to the current humanities turn in mobility studies. In the texts discussed here, the bus functions as a mobile chronotope that marks the texts' thematically and structures them formally. The bus is a space of encounter whose meanings are constructed on the contrast between the banality of the mode of transport as an everyday mobile practice and the main characters' estranged and even abject experiences of passengering. The journey motif structures the narratives and drives the plot. In "Niiwam", the organizational narrative function of the bus and its route, together with the narrative mobilities between spaces—inside the vehicle/urban space/mental space—and the changes in the focalizer, contribute to the text's wide-ranging poetics of public transport mobility. In *Without a Name*, the formal role of the bus journey lies in plot and character development as part of the protagonist's attempt to come to terms with a traumatic experience. As a setting, the bus also exposes her to encounters and potential discovery. In "Niiwam", this situation eventually leads to an ending in which other passengers show solidarity with the protagonist after their initial terrified reaction, but in *Without a Name*, the protagonist remains deprived of collective support. By inscribing the protagonists' bus journeys in the realm of alienation and abjection, the texts draw attention to the exclusions of the (post)colonial city and its kinetic modernity.

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