



DECONFINING Arts, Culture, and Policies in Europe and Africa

Tony Ouedraogo

# Spatial deconfinement



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DECONFINING Arts, Culture, and Policies in Europe and Africa



Theatre

# Spatial deconfinement

**Tony Ouedraogo**

These fiction texts from the French language to the English language were translated by Asta Buckiūnaitė, UAB “Bella Verba” translator and edited by Alexander Samuel Hixson, UAB “Bella Verba” editor.





# PROLOGUE

Today.

Today, the whole planet is under attack.

So, we should move as little as we can.

At the risk of saying what we already know.

It is worth repeating: Wash your  
hands frequently with soap.

It doesn't cost a thing to wash your hands.

Tell me, how much is it not shaking my hand?

Evil is quite real.

And it needs to be taken seriously.

Without panic or zeal

We need to act rigorously.

From now on the watchword

is to stay at home

And call the emergency if  
you feel any symptoms.

No need to clutter the line.

There are lives at stake, you are a  
Burkinabe, so don't be undignified.

This time we're all together  
and God is urging us

It is good to have faith.

But now it's in the crease of  
your elbow that you cough.

A quick aside: this might be a  
good time to quit smoking

Or don't buy retail anymore, no longer  
sharing fags between ten people in the building.

You can always take the beer to go

To be home by 7 pm otherwise...  
should I carry on?

Together we can take the  
crown off this coronavirus.

Every day the numbers increase.

Evil is real so let's beware  
of the fake news spiral.

If it is not official, they are making it up.

All those videos that they are spicing up.

It has nothing to do with the sun.

Whether you are Togolese, Gabonese,  
Japanese, German, or Russian

You are not software either.

So, don't think you're an anti-virus.

It's all of us together and with some discipline,  
we can take the crown off this coronavirus.





— My love, can you put the phone on your belly?  
I can hear her heartbeat, yes! It's beating fast! I am far away, I am cold. Mum says you've started kicking her, is that true? That's good. It means that you're fine where you are. Maybe your kicks are also a way of asking her where daddy is. I'll be joining you soon, I just have a bit more work to do. As soon as I finish, I'll jump on the first plane to join you. It's true, I'm not joking. By the way, this morning I went to Düsseldorf, which is in the west of Germany. I went there so that they could take my fingerprints. Yes, I must do all this to get to you, but it's nothing, nothing is hard enough for a father who wants to witness the birth of his child, his firstborn. Don't worry, it is not difficult. The first thing that I must do is to log on to the Canadian immigration website and create an account with a password, put in the name that your mother and I plan to give you, random numbers, upper and lower case letters, and an exclamation mark. I enter my surname, first name, age, gender, date of birth, place of birth, city of birth, country of birth, citizenship, address, address from which I am applying, marital status, single, married, spouse present, spouse absent, in a common-law relationship, divorced, widowed, telephone number, mailing address, street, building, spoken languages, language preference, passport number, do I hold an Israeli passport, national identity card number, dates of issue and expiry, countries of issue. No, it is not difficult. I just need to add the purpose of the visit, if I am related to a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident, friends, their names, phone, and address, I need to add a letter of invitation, proof of financial means from my bank, all the places and people I plan to visit, the history of all my travels in the last ten years, my school and university background, where I have worked in the last ten years, fill in a form to give information about your grandfather and grandmother, your uncles and aunts, their names, age, sex, date of birth, place of birth, city of birth, country of birth, citizenship, address, marital status, single, married, in a common-law relationship, divorced, widowed, working, retired or dead. It can't stop me from coming to you and being the first one to hug you. I forgot, the last form is to fill in information on my legal situation, for example:

have I ever committed a crime, and do I intend to commit one once in Canada? On top of this, have I ever been arrested by the police, have I ever participated in political demonstrations, am I a member of a political party? If I answered yes to any of these questions, there would be other forms to be filled in. I add two recent photos of myself, upload, pay one hundred dollars and then go to the nearest Canadian immigration centre to provide the data, fingerprints, and signatures. As I was in Bonn, all of it wasn't difficult, the nearest immigration centre was in Düsseldorf. That is why I was in Düsseldorf this morning. No more kicking, you must be asleep.

**Frankfurt Airport. Panic. Masks over the noses. A young man stands in line. It's his turn to have his luggage screened. The alarm sounds in the hall.**

- Whose bag is it?
- It is mine.
- Come this way, sir.
- In English, please.
- Your bag contains a computer.
- I am deeply sorry. I have completely forgotten.
- Come with me.

**The police officer searches the young man and his luggage. A few minutes later...**

- Sir, you are not allowed to keep your computer for the screening. We will have to reboot the whole system.
- I'm very sorry, I thought I had taken it out of my bag. My apologies.
- Your passport, please.
- Here you go.
- Burkina Faso
- Yes, this is my country, I'm going home.
- I did not find anything wrong, but I will ask you to be vigilant next time. I'll take a last look if you'll allow me.
- Yes, of course, go ahead. This has never happened to me before, you know. I am a bit lost amid this madness. What's happening is absolutely crazy, I was supposed to be on stage at this time. The tour had started well, we had a lot of people every night, and then bam! Hospitals are filling up, people are dying, schools are





closed, then the theatres... I'm a comedian. I make my living on stage, the theatres are closed sir, I have to go home. I was due back in a month. But suddenly everything closed. On TV they talk about a lockdown, everyone having to stay home, and for how long, no one knows. Sir, I had thirty minutes to decide where I prefer to be confined, at home but away from my family who are in Canada, my wife is pregnant, or to stay here, in the cold which is not so unbearable for me but away from my family without knowing when all this madness will end! I called my wife, she asked if I couldn't come directly to Canada, but I applied for a visa only a week ago, to join them, but now I have to leave, do you understand why I forgot my computer in the backpack when I went through the detector? I'm a mess sir, I'm sorry.

— I did not find anything wrong, but I will ask you to be vigilant next time.

#### **Addis Ababa airport, at night.**

I am waiting. I'm halfway down a road that leads nowhere. I am waiting. There's a café, a tea shop next door, I don't know. On the screens, the flights are cancelled one by one. Two, then three, then four. I am going to Ouagadougou, via Lomé. Do I need to run? To where? No one answers, and no one asks questions, but I do. What are borders? The dictionary says: the limit of a state's territory and the exercise of territorial jurisdiction. Who decided, one day, that from here on, this is my home? who gave them this right? behind this river, this mountain, from this valley, it is not my home anymore. You can only enter under certain conditions. It's absurd, especially for me, an African, that some men met in Germany, where I was a few hours ago, and they agreed, from here to here, it's Burkina Faso, and the limit of these hills is Burundi. And to this day, I am halfway down a road that leads nowhere, confined to myself, on land that takes me away from myself. I am waiting. It's almost time to board, I'm going home, but not to leave again. It's crazy! A virus, invisible, that doesn't care about borders, doesn't need a visa. It doesn't make appointments at the embassy; it just gave them the finger! All your barriers, appointments, and procedures, you can stick wherever you wish! From now on, I'm the one in charge.

— Sir, adjust your mask properly, over your nose.

— Okay. Here you go. I'll take my computer out of my backpack...

#### **Lomé airport, at night.**

A stopover before dawn, the day will rise with us at home, questioning "what's waiting for me there?" I feel waves of doubt, fear, joy, and anger. What is this virus? I think, maybe I wish for one thing and its opposite. Wishing that all these borders would fall, so I could go wherever I wanted, wherever duty called me, wherever the world was waiting for me. Leave my home, leave me to go and meet the world, go back to my home, invite the world, and the whole world can stay. Yet. Yet isn't that how the virus spreads? Isn't it because of the multiplication of cultural relationships that infect every part of the globe, as if all continents were sleeping together without protecting themselves? Yet what does nature intend to teach us? What does it have to tell us at this precise moment when bats are diurnal, felines vegetarian, and humans hibernate like marmots? My flight is not cancelled, so I go home, pale yet smiling. Yet what do they mean by confinement? No more going out, no more travelling, no more drinks, no more, no more? No more, until all the blind governments see a bit more clearly. What is waiting for me at home? what is it like seeing my mother again without her being able to hold me in her arms? I will have to live with her. She's not so young anymore, and from what I've heard, this disease is taking its toll on the elderly. What is it to live in Ouaga without being able to go to Gambidi, sit in a cafeteria, and rebuild the world with apprentice children? What is it like to live in Zone 1 without being able to enjoy pieces of pork bites roasted by D.G., drinking litres of beer while cursing at the government? What is living when you have to stay at home? Oh, I can hear them, already, "as an artist, we expect you to raise awareness through your art!"

**Passengers travelling to Ouagadougou are invited to gate 2 for boarding.**

**Ouagadougou.**

**The President in his speech.**

...I have therefore decided to introduce a curfew from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m., until further notice...





**A young man enters a family courtyard. The family is sitting down.**

**A WOMAN**

Oh, Mom, you know that he's coming from Europe. You brought us the virus.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

Usually, you ask me if I've brought you a phone, shoes, or a handbag.

**THE WOMAN**

Yes, but this time it's not the same thing, the disease is killing many people in Europe. Don't get too close.

**ANOTHER LADY.**

Leave him alone. Are you all right, son?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

Yes, everything is fine. I came back two weeks ago. Is he there? I need to see him urgently.

**THE WOMAN**

He went out, but they said everyone had to stay at home. He's out and so are you.

**THE LADY**

He is the one who has just arrived.

**THE WOMAN**

It's better if you meet each other outside. Go away from here, you better contaminate yourselves there!

**THE YOUNG MAN**

You will never change. I'll meet my friend outside. Be well!

**With his friend.**

**THE FRIEND**

Hi bro, how are you?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

I'm choking, brother!

**THE FRIEND**

I understand. Let's go to the bar for a drink.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

What bar is open in this town?

**THE FRIEND**

Well, this isn't Germany, there's always a way to... you know. The small bar near the bridge is always open, well, open is a bit of an overstatement, it remains closed but when you are inside you are served. **(Laughter).**

**THE YOUNG MAN**

At this point, I wouldn't say no.

**THE FRIEND**

Even after curfew, it remains closed but open inside.

**They sit down.**

**THE YOUNG MAN**

I'm going crazy... This situation is not getting any better.

**THE FRIEND**

What do you expect, the world is going crazy.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

I feel like I'm personally targeted by this virus, this confinement and all. I'm racing against time; I'm racing against this world, all I wish is to join my wife who is pregnant, and is due in a month, maybe a bit sooner. Every day, I check my mailbox as if I were waiting for the last train. Nothing. They say nothing.

**THE FRIEND**

You didn't go there?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

A poster: We inform the public that our offices remain closed until further notice. Please call or email us in case of emergency only. I call every day to talk to the same machine that tells me the same thing that is written on the poster on the door of the immigration office.

**THE FRIEND**

Trust life, you can't change anything.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

It is precisely to life that I go. I go to life, take it in my arms, and cut its umbilical cord. I go to life to provide it with the warmth of a father. I will provide it with the clumsiness of a brand-new father





to a newborn. I go to life so that it comes to me so that it does not come without me.

**THE FRIEND**

I read this morning that the Malagasy have found a remedy for this damned virus. Who knows, we will soon be deconfined.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

Madagascar? Do you really think that WHO and the rest will certify this remedy? Nothing good comes from Africa my brother, that's how it is.

**THE FRIEND**

The president of the Republic of Madagascar himself drank the potion in front of the media, everyone is using it and it apparently works. Last night my aunt brought us some bitter herbs, a remedy from the nuns in my village, I drink some and tell myself that nothing can harm my lungs, not even this disease discovered in far away in China.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

Created or discovered?

**THE FRIEND**

Look, I'm not into these conspiracy theories.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

At the moment I'm into everything! I don't know what to do...

**THE FRIEND**

There is nothing to be done. Apart from waiting for the storm to pass. Another beer?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

Perhaps there is nothing else to be done.

**Video. WhatsApp. Police officers beat passers-by on their motorbikes with their cords because they do not respect the curfew of confinement.**

||

— Put the phone on your stomach,  
I want to hear her.

Do you recognise my voice? It's amazing. I'm scared, you know. I'm afraid I won't see you for ages. I'm afraid your mother is too angry with me. Yes, I can hear your heart beating. It is beating fast. It's fighting with me already. I'm at the border, in the line of fire where everyone wears a mask. You too are at the border, that of your mother's womb. She is probably angry with me for not being there when her sciatica grips her, for not being there to satisfy her almost hormonally-induced fantasies. We're both at the border, you'll be out soon but I'm not sure I'll be able to get in. I logged into my account again today. They say that there are opportunities for flights to Canada. Only for Canadian citizens and permanent residents. If I had the visa, I could have taken a flight costing 3000 dollars. It's a small price to pay for paradise. The paradise of your first cry, the paradise of the remains of your placenta that I will keep to bury them at home, in your country. It's a small price to pay to play the best role in my life. But you see, I'm afraid. Yes, you do well to kick, it encourages me a lot. As I said, I finally sent an email this morning, they said it was possible. I could write to them directly to find out what stage my application was at and whether I wanted to change it. I changed it; I told them, I must join you for your birth, it is the first event of your life, and I must not miss it. I told them I would not come for tourism, I don't want to visit the country, I don't want to walk around, I just want to witness your birth. I told them I'll do all the tests they want me to do, I'll take all the necessary precautions, I just want to come and be with you at home. I want to come and experience the sleeplessness, the peeing, the pooping, the drooling, the bottle-feeding, and the teething. Against all odds, I want to experience that moment when that little tag is attached to your toe. There are oceans that separate us, thousands of places that separate us, but it's a tiny beast that keeps me from you, that keeps me from this moment. I do not despair. A father does not lose. A father does not cry. I will listen to your heartbeat every night, each beat will give me more motivation to pick you up from your mother's breast. Sleep, sleep tight, for the moment we are all confined: you in





your mother's womb, I in the womb of our planet. Everything is done to keep me there, but you will soon come out, you will soon cry and laugh at life. I'm not going to lie to you, I'm a bit scared of it all. I am afraid.

### **Ouagadougou, 1993.**

#### **DANGO**

Burkina Faso is not immune. It's going to happen spontaneously, so fast that the human being will not have time to react, because we are not only at the end of a millennium, but also at the end of a century, and cycle 7 is a recurring cycle. I have personally studied the morphology of the AIDS virus and I am concerned, because the cosmic plan with the help of the chart, brings out another virus. The AIDS virus is therefore the second to last before the year 2000.

#### **TRAORÉ**

So, there is another virus?!

#### **DANGO**

There is another virus.

#### **TRAORÉ**

I can invite you to my show on the national channel. How should I introduce you?

#### **DANGO**

I am a scientist. I need to alert the world to what will happen in about 27 years.

#### **TRAORÉ**

Everyone would think you were a lunatic; you know that. Your fellow researchers will say that you want to scare the population.

#### **DANGO**

Let me explain this on your programme and we'll see. I dare to believe that I will finally have a laboratory to continue my research.

**Ouagadougou. In the bar. The young man is talking with friends. Gossip, thoughts, and official information intermingle.**

#### **FRIEND 1**

The curfew has been lifted as of today.

#### **FRIEND 2**

It's not a moment too soon, we are finally deconfined.

#### **THE YOUNG MAN**

Say it for yourself. I am still confined here.

#### **FRIEND 1**

What do you mean? The government says we still have to restrict movement, but the curfew is lifted.

#### **THE YOUNG MAN**

Are the borders open?

#### **FRIEND 1**

Not yet.

#### **THE YOUNG MAN**

That's what I say: confined! Confined to a space of 274,400 square kilometres. A prison just a little larger than the territory of the United Kingdom.

#### **FRIEND 3**

You have other problems.

#### **THE YOUNG MAN**

Some researchers have called it subjective sensitivity, but I'm not sure.

#### **FRIEND 2**

In any case, there are several kinds of confinement. Haven't you noticed that terrorist attacks have decreased lately?

#### **FRIEND 3**

Terrorists are also afraid of the virus. In the latest attack in the north of the country, they looted a pharmaceutical warehouse. If only this damn virus could decimate them all, these sons of bitches, there would at least be a positive side to all this.

#### **THE YOUNG MAN**

As there is no more movement, they cannot intercept food from traders, or loot markets, as these are closed. There may be a bright side to all this. A break, a respite for our soldiers before the general, and total deconfinement.

#### **FRIEND 1**

A break for them too.





**FRIEND 3**

There are reports of nests of terrorists being decimated by the virus, and as they cannot be treated in hospital they are trapped. It's crazy but maybe this virus will fight them for us.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

Don't dream either; not all terrorists live hidden in the desert or the bush. Many of them live with and among people, so they can contaminate. I wonder why these people can rebel against their country to the point of killing their brothers. Does it take a virus to remind us that we are all human?

**FRIEND 2**

I say that all this is because of the Europeans who supply them with weapons, that's all.

**FRIEND 1**

Terrorists are not Europeans, brother!

**FRIEND 2**

They are not European, but they don't make weapons either. It is weapons that are the main ingredient of terrorism. And what proof is there that this virus is not just another weapon they have invented to accomplish their evil purposes?

**FRIEND 3**

But the virus appeared in China! I don't think they'll invent a weapon that can destroy everyone including themselves.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

This is the case for all weapons.

**FRIEND 2**

Look, what do they always tell us? Terrorism is born out of bad governance, corruption, ethnic or religious problems, liberation movements of independence claims, etc. but these are secondary reasons, simply because these same problems exist all over the world even in Europe and the only difference is that at home nobody comes to arm these groups. There are problems with the Corsicans, in the Basque country, the autonomous community of Catalonia, between the Flemish and the Walloons, I could quote you all night long, no one arms these movements or stirs up the fire of these conflicts; but here, in Africa, they are armed to the teeth overnight and the blood starts to spill. Who

bombed Libya? Planes came that never even took the time to land in Sirte or Tripoli, Gaddafi the big bad dictator was lynched in the public square, by those just like the people who hanged Saddam. The result: warehouses full of money of all currencies and bunkers with incredible open-air arsenals, all went to help themselves as if to a satanic buffet from where, the Islamic State, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Iyag Ag Gali, Moktar Bel Moktar, Amadou Kouffa, all these hyenas found there their working capital to embark on their criminal adventure! I say it's all been well planned!

**THE YOUNG MAN**

It is clear that the relationship between Africa and Europe must change, if only for the sake of future generations.

**FRIEND 3**

If I have one piece of advice for future generations, it is not to come... this world is lost.

**FRIEND 1**

The world has been lost many times, but human being always finds a solution, I have faith in Mankind.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

I cannot afford to be pessimistic. The future generation for me will soon be here.

**FRIEND 2**

As a frequent visitor to Europe, do you really believe that there is a chance that these relationships of domination will change?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

I won't be able to tell you anything other than what everyone already knows, it's a small world and that's not a metaphor. For the time being, the spaces must be deconfined.

**FRIEND 3**

This is not the first nor the only confinement that is inflicted on us here. We black people can't get around as we want in this world. As you said, we are the face that the world wants to hide. We are beset by political unrest, diseases of all kinds, confined to 30 million square kilometres, and a granary of natural resources, which everyone comes to draw from. When we leave our countries, and





we are immigrants, Europeans are expatriates, we flee the war to seek asylum, but we are illegal immigrants. When doing paperwork on the required conditions; they tell us that we live in safe countries so we do not meet the criteria necessary for obtaining asylum. You've got to be kidding me!

**FRIEND 2**

Now we don't have to travel for a disease that doesn't even kill us.

**FRIEND 1**

Believe me, there are still deaths here.

**FRIEND 2**

300 people at most, all died of other things, diabetes, malaria, do you know how many people die every year from malaria here? This virus is just a new form of the cold, full stop.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

There are hundreds of thousands of deaths there. And every day it gets worse. I am somehow convinced that I will not get the visa. Even if I have it, where will I go? It's funny, planes fly empty, with no one in them, so that airlines can keep their air corridors. Meanwhile, I would just like to be a fly, a little insect to get into one of those planes. It's unbelievable how much space there is! I applied online, for biometric enrolment in Germany, the file has to be sent to the Senegal office and I have to receive an urgent answer from the Mexico office, to tell me if I can go to Canada and everything is suddenly blocked because of a virus in China.

**Ouagadougou, the same night.****Dango**

I admit that I did talk about a virus on this science show, but I couldn't name the virus, because it was through my work that I was able to determine a periodic cycle that came as a result of the physical expansion of the universe, and this physical expansion of the universe has an impact on living beings. Honestly, I couldn't name the virus because at a different time and under different circumstances I could have been guillotined as nobody would believe me. In any case, in 1993 they didn't believe me, I could have been accused of being crazy. It's cyclical, there will always be cycles.

There always will be. After this one, the next figure is 38, if you consider that it's 38 years since 1993, we're at 27 years, aren't we? We will see in 11 years what will follow...

The message of the Great Pyramid of Egypt is simple: it tells us about the past, it tells us about the present and unfortunately, it tells us about the future. I say unfortunately because it is not a pretty future that this monument indicates. It's not a pretty sight if even simple little micro-organisms are causing panic on the whole planet Earth. Governments put billions into making nuclear weapons, and this little organism called coronavirus manages to destroy them in front of their billion-dollar weapons. This means that the human being is not far-sighted, what is going to kill us now is not these weapons, it's the tiny beings that we didn't think of that will take us all away one day. The plan of the Great Pyramid is a plan which in itself holds power. Why? Because it is an exact reflection of the anatomical configuration of the human brain, which is inversely proportional to the physical configuration of space...

**Ouagadougou, in the bar.****FRIEND 2**

Do you remember everything they predicted? that here in Africa, millions of bodies of people infected with the virus will be littering the roadsides. You bet!

**FRIEND 3**

All our European friends want to stay here, they are going to stay here because the confinement here is not as severe as at home.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

They have the right passport, as we often say, they come and go as they please.

**FRIEND 1**

I saw a report about Asians in Europe, they are discriminated against and rejected by people who think that they are the cause of the evil that is decimating them.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

It's the same everywhere, there's always someone to blame for everything; even in Asia, there's racism wrapped up in the pandemic, racism towards





black people, because people think we're more resistant to the disease when we're actually transmitting it...

**FRIEND 2**

They are not wrong; I mean they are right to think that but not to have racist attitudes. Where are the millions of deaths that the experts and the Western media had predicted in Africa? Some say that it is because we do not have enough means to carry out sufficient tests that we do not know, otherwise in reality there would be thousands of deaths per day, the joke of the century, and how do we hide a thousand deaths per day?

**FRIEND 3**

You see our leaders are doing everything to make the situation look worse, it attracts support funds to this, and humanitarian donations to that, and the vast majority will land in their bank accounts, well stashed in Switzerland.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

And the president who makes a speech to tell us that there will be subsidies granted by the state, he talks and talks but, in the end, nothing concerning the artists (**laughs**).

**FRIEND 1**

This is a general situation.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

It's true, in France, Belgium, etc. the arts professions are rising against the policies put in place without considering the field of culture, they say that it is not essential!



**The young man is standing in front of the door of the immigration service. He presses the doorbell.**

**THE YOUNG MAN**

Hello. Hello, I would like to inquire. Hello?

**THE INTERCOM**

Hello. Madam. Sir. Our. Services. Are. Closed. To. Avoid. The. Spread. Of. The virus. Please. For. The. Emergencies. Only. Contact. The. Number. 25.25.35.60. Do. Not. Forget. The. Safety. Instructions. Posted. At. the entrance. We. Thank. You. For. Contacting. Us.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

I want to talk to a human. This is unbelievable!

**He dials the number. Hello!**

**THE VOICE**

Please wait a moment, an agent will take your call shortly. **A pause.** If you wish to contact the legalization service of administrative documents, press 1. For visa service press 2. For "other information" press 3. **He presses.** This service is not available at the moment, please try again later.

**Discouraged, he sits down at the base of the building. A woman approaches. She is a security guard.**

**THE SECURITY GUARD**

Their offices have been closed for several months. You should call them or send an e-mail.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

I know ma'am, I only came, hoping that they have reopened. As some offices are starting to open again here.

**THE SECURITY GUARD**

Ah, at least they have not yet opened. Is it for studies? Aren't the universities closed there?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

No, it's not for studies.



**THE SECURITY GUARD**

If it's for work, it's better to do the job remotely, isn't it?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

Not for work, no, not anymore. I have to join my wife who is about to give birth.

**THE SECURITY GUARD**

Ooh! you know, there is a lady who comes by from time to time to pick up documents and take care of business. If you want, wait a bit, maybe you'll come across her if you're lucky. Good luck my son.

**She is leaving. After a while.****THE YOUNG MAN**

The mask is on my chin. A few drops of sweat mingle with the tears. I have a few pieces of paper in my hand and no one at the end of the line. I talk to the machines, I understand their language well now. They keep repeating the same thing in their metal voice. I wait in vain for a response from a mouth, from a living organism. All I ask for is an answer. I sit down, it says please wear your mask. But why wear a mask if I have no access to anyone? It's like the plague, smallpox, or AIDS, no one has anything to do with this. We're just waiting for it to pass; the survivors will continue the prank.

**Air France agency.****THE YOUNG MAN**

I would like to change these plane tickets, please.

**THE LADY**

Okay. For what date?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

Until what date are your tickets changeable?

**THE LADY**

What do you mean until when? When do you wish to change them for?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

I want to change them to a date when I am sure the trip will take place.

**THE LADY**

I don't know. You see the situation; how do you expect me to know that?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

So, you can see why I'm not sure which date to change these tickets for.

**THE LADY**

And what do I do in the end?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

Change them for next year.

**THE LADY**

Oh no, that's not possible. Where do you think you can change a ticket for next year?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

In a company, where agents understand the situation of their clients and propose alternatives.

**THE LADY**

Sir let's calm down. You don't have to be unpleasant.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

You have been very unpleasant since I came in here. Have I been disrespectful?

**THE LADY**

Look, what I can suggest is that you ask for a refund, as you are not sure you can travel.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

Do that.

**One moment.****THE LADY**

It's done. You will receive the refund within a maximum of one month.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

Thank you. Here is the second ticket.

**THE LADY**

And what do you want me to do with this?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

You can do whatever you want with it. Madam, cancel it, throw it in the fire, do as you please. Do





you think it was a ticket I got for charity? So do what you want with it! It was a plane ticket for my mother. That's how it is at our house, it's my mother who gives the baby his first bath. This acrobatic bath gives you shivers, which probably is the reason for the expression sleeping like a baby. She is the one who attends the last few weeks of the pregnancy, she gives essential advice, and she is the manual from which we will take the knowledge we need to have with our first child and even others. This is how things are done in our country. It is the paternal grandmother, who heats some Shea butter in a shard of a clay pot, for the massage of the swelling navel and the still fragile joints of the child who is going to be born. It's just a plane ticket for you, but for me, it's a whole cultural construct that is falling apart. Who will show my wife and me the ancient techniques of the healing and invigorating bath of the newborn? And you, you want to know what you will do with this plane ticket today? I don't know. I am in no way responsible for your bad mood, let alone the education you received. But go ahead. Do as you please, madam.

**THE LADY**

I will start the refund procedure.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

As you wish.

**At home.****THE YOUNG MAN**

I finally have your plane ticket.

**THE MOTHER**

You started smoking again.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

I'm not talking about that. I would like to inform you that unfortunately, we will not be able to travel anymore.

**THE MOTHER**

You should think about quitting smoking. Your health is failing, your life is in danger. I don't even know why you are self-destructing. For the journey, it's no big deal, God knows what He's doing.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

I don't know what to do anymore. I haven't heard from the embassy or the immigration service either. They are not yet open. I won't be able to file your application and I don't even know where they are with processing mine.

**THE MOTHER**

Have you heard from your wife?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

Not yet, I'll call her later.

**THE MOTHER**

Do that, that's the most important, for the rest, God only knows.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

I don't know what to say to her either. She needs me so much...

**THE MOTHER**

I understand. You are lucky, now you can talk and see each other on the phone.

**THE YOUNG MAN**

WhatsApp is good, but being there is much better.

**THE MOTHER**

Did you send her any money?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

I gave her all my savings when we were in Cotonou. The theatres will soon reopen here, I'll be able to work a bit, I'll send her something. But what she really wants cannot be sent. It's me she's waiting for. She also does everything to ensure that I can travel despite the situation. She went to see the doctor who treats her, to take a certificate which I have to add to my application.

**THE MOTHER**

A certificate?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

Yes, a pregnancy certificate, a paper signed by the doctor showing that she is pregnant. I also need to add other documents, but I hesitate.

**THE MOTHER**

Why? Do it if that's what they ask.



**THE YOUNG MAN**

It's not that simple, Mum. I am afraid. If I amend the application to include these documents, it will certainly tip the scales in my favour; they would normally treat my case as special, as the birth is coming soon. On the other hand, if I change my application to include these documents, it may slow down the process and further delay the processing of the application. Therefore, I'm not sure. I have already sent emails, but I have not received any response, it is always a machine that answers. The machine has no feelings, it does and says what it has been programmed to do.

**THE MOTHER**

Is that why you went there early this morning? Did you find someone to talk to?

**THE YOUNG MAN**

No, I only heard that they don't plan to reopen for another two months. A guard asked me to wait just in case but ... so I went to cancel the plane tickets for fear of losing them.

**THE MOTHER**

Don't worry, time will take its course, and God's grace will always be with you. Pray much, let us pray for the safe deliverance of your wife. This is a crucial moment when in any case you are powerless. Keep praying, because she doesn't need a visa, she doesn't need to get on a plane. Listen to your wife and give her as much attention as you can. I understand that it is difficult but everything God does is good. But stop smoking, it's not good...

**Alone. Lying down. Night-time thoughts. Like a nightmare, as if talking in his disturbed sleep.**

**THE YOUNG MAN**

They are talking about a second wave. In the end, nothing is going to get better. They are now arguing over the gender of this virus. As if there was nothing better to do. Should we refer to the covid as him or her? God, I feel like my head is going to explode. I think of this phrase: all human beings are born free and equal. This is not really true. The freedom to move anywhere on this small blue planet, which is not even a grain of sand in the universe, is a utopia. I wouldn't be in all this trouble if we could; the visa was just a formality. No, around here it's the key, it even says so on the

website. "Getting a visa to enter our territory is a favour, not a right." Go figure that out. We say it is globalisation, we talk about this little global village, but in the end, we barricade ourselves behind big walls, made of tons and tons of paperwork to provide to enter a territory for which we pose no threat.

**Bursts of a sour laugh.** I am here, my mind wandering there near you. I am like the sparrowhawk who dreams of spreading its shadow over the entire ocean in full flight. I am sad about my laughter. I am Antigone. Yes, I am this Antigone in reverse. I brave the rows, the sleepless nights, and the endless logins to the immigration website. I am Antigone when she defies Creon, I am an Antigone with a pencil! Every box I fill in on every form makes me feel like I'm being accused. Accused of plotting against the government, accused of being a person at risk, accused of a family reunion. Alas, I am an Antigone in reverse. She, who simply wanted to give her blood a dignified burial. She, who wished only to attend the burial, the end of life, but was accused of plotting. I, who only want to witness the advent of life, what would I be accused of? I am Antigone in reverse, but our quests remain the same: to live this moment of humanity, these moments which are undoubtedly the reasons why we are alive.

I was left pending like her. Pending at the machine, until I finally received an e-mail:

Thank you for showing interest in visiting Canada. After carefully reviewing your application for a temporary resident visa and the supporting documents, I find that your application does not meet the requirements of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) and its Regulations. I reject your application for the following reasons:

- I am not convinced that you will leave Canada at the end of your period of stay as a temporary resident under section 179(b) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations, given the reason for your visit.
- I am not convinced that you will leave Canada at the end of your period of stay as a temporary resident under section 179(b) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations, given your personal assets and financial situation.
- I am not convinced that you will leave Canada at the end of your period of stay as a temporary resident under section 179 (b)





of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations, given the limited employment prospects in your country of residence.

- I am not convinced that you will leave Canada at the end of your period of stay as a temporary resident under section 179(b) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations, given your current employment situation.

You can reapply if you feel you can address these concerns and prove that your situation meets the requirements. In this case, you will have to pay the processing fee again. Yours sincerely,  
Visa services – Mexico.





# EPILOGUE

## Little light of mine

This is it, and I've been waiting for this moment for years

I can already see your little fingers on my chest  
And all the happiness they reflect.

It's been hard on your mommy, but she's robust.

You will inherit her sweetness and also her force.

She had already given me a golden life, and now you are the diamond in our trust.

I'll dedicate my whole life, I'll try to be your guide

You'll call me dad, but you'll teach me to be a parent at your side

You're not here yet, but your grandmas already have their pick of names

Your mother and I are still arguing about the same.

But there is much more than a chord, much more than a sound effect.

We're already dying to shower you with love.

So, you will carry more than names, you will carry meanings

You'll be called grace, you'll be called strength of God.

I'll call you a vision or a milestone,

I'll call you Anna or Ichema

I'll call you the light that shines from your eyes

I warn you I won't know how to make your hairstyles

So you'll be a guinea pig until you know what you desire

You are already teaching me humility because you come into the world quietly

You are coming into the world amid confinement.

I'd watch you suck your thumb for hours

Caress your body gently.

Despite the oceans that separate us

Dad will love you immensely.

**This little light of mine**

**I'm gonna let it shine**

You see daddy is a weak singer.

But you'll have to deal with it.

I'll sing during your bathing.

I'll sing while changing nappies.

I'll sing and read stories before you go to bed.

You will be born far from your home, far from your roots

But know that all of Africa is already in you

And even if you are born into a misogynistic world

Count always on your daddy to watch out for those who disrespect you.

I'll take you to the library.

I will show you the world, the great squares, the museums, the theatres and especially the cinematheques

I will also take you to the pool

But then your mother is somewhat concerned

She says you'll make me look too sexy; I'll look like a single dad with such a pretty girl

Which will appeal to everyone.

Despite the oceans that divide us, your parents love each other tremendously.

Mum and Dad do love you and will love you endlessly!

**This little light of mine**

**I'm gonna let it shine.**

**The end. Bonn, January 2023.**







## DECONFINING Arts, Culture, and Policies in Europe and Africa

**DECONFINING** is a large-scale collaborative project that aims to create improved and fairer cultural ties between Europe and Africa by developing a sustainable reference model of cooperation.

Building on the close collaboration between the two continents and the integration of their Capitals of Culture programmes, this project brings together cultural practitioners, policymakers, performing, media/visual artists, in-field universities, and audiences from both continents to explore and demonstrate new ways of intercontinental artistic and cultural (policy) cooperation, and to contribute to a better understanding of confinement patterns from different points of view from an intercontinental perspective.



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