

Eckson Khambule

Field site: Corner of East 128th and Madison.

It is Monday around 11am. I start teaching my Elementary Zulu class. While teaching I am constantly thinking about my field trip that is not going to take place until 2pm. At 1pm I finish teaching Zulu and transition into my French class, the one I take. This is a usual routine for me as I have to switch from teaching Zulu to being taught French every Monday at the Language Resource Center. My French class ends at 2pm. I run home (500 Riverside Dr) to get my field equipment: camera, field recorder and my notebook.

I leave International house at 2:15pm and walk up on 125th. Hunger pangs suddenly remind me that I haven't had a single meal today. In the conversation with myself I decide that it would be best to have a meal nearer to my intended destination. Finally, I have lunch at Manas' Soul Food and Salad Bar on Lenox and 125th. Just as I was having lunch a tall black man walks in with his food and some belongings. He drops his stuff down and puts his food on the table. He stares at me. I cast my eyes to the opposite direction. I then realize that he wants to go to the bathroom, but he is not sure he can trust me with his stuff left behind. He finally decides to proceed to the bathroom, of course, without his stuff. I am sure he is excited as he returns and finds all his belongings where he had left them!

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I am running over my food and just a little bit worried that I will not be able to directly observe the interactions that Thenji talks about between school kids and the

“patients” because I was not going to get there until, at most, 3pm. I do not allow this feeling to dampen my spirit. After all I am feeling bolder today!

I “officially” enter the field around 2:55. I walk on Lenox Ave toward 128th. Just as I cross over to walk straight toward 128th, I am intrigued by a seemingly homeless person begging the police officer for a cigarette near a grocery store. I stop to observe. In the beginning I did not know what they were talking about until the officer happily pulls out one cigarette and hands it over to the happy recipient who doesn’t waste time to set it alight. As he puffs I walk away.

Between 126 and 127 I meet two white men, well-dressed with stickers written “The Church of Jesus Christ Latter-Day Saints” on their jackets. I suddenly realize that the church is within the vicinity (125th Columbus Avenue). I notice a lot of white people heading in my direction, some with kids. I make a right-turn on 128th and walk down toward 5th Avenue. I walk pass Olive Baptist Church and I am suddenly taken back to our website where the picture of the church is posted. I admire a beautifully renovated house next to the church sign. I cannot keep my eyes off the house, I just like it! I see two more churches that I am pretty much familiar with: Christ Temple of the Apostolic Faith (on my left) and the Shiloh Church of Christ: Disciples of Christ. I walk pass 5th Ave.

Now I am at the corner of East 128th and Madison. Ahead of me I see Schomburg School, Adult Rehabilitation Center, Palladia on my left, and I can’t see All Saints yet, but it is in mind. I am happy to be here and suddenly I position myself to be able to systematically observe what is happening in my surroundings. It is almost 3:10 already therefore I am not surprised not to see too many school kids around. At Schomburg some

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kids are playing basket ball (they played until I left). Generally, the area is quite. By now I am leaning on the wall fence of Schomburg School paying less attention to it. I am directly facing the rehab and the Deli that is supposed to be the meeting place between school children and the “patients” from the rehab.

The people walk in and out of the rehab facility. I observe some male people (I assume patients) sweeping the yard in the facility. They take turns as they do the sweeping. They talk amongst themselves as they clean up the place. [I suddenly make a distinction between the facility personnel based, subjectively, on how they addressed and behave as they walk in, walk out, or hang out around the building. All the people (men and women) hanging outside the building, supposedly patients, can be categorized as the “people of color.” They are all dressed in baggy pants. The people who seem to me to be rehab personnel are “properly dressed in work outfits” and always get out of the building and walk purposely instead of hanging around or going to the grocery store]. The “patients constantly walk to the corner grocery store. This when I decide to walk into the store myself.

I walk in and I buy a Daily Sun newspaper. I think to myself, “this will conceal little notebook!” I give the teller \$1 he asks if I have 50 cents instead. The paper is 50c. I tell him that I only have 30 cents worth of change and offer to give it to him if he is interested. He is not prepared to lose profit and takes my dollar and gives me 50 cents, my change. I walk outside and station myself right at the door of the store. Two white men walk to the East. First group of four men from the rehab facility walk into the grocery store. They all return with packets of cigarettes. They smoke right outside the store. I notice three black men walking from the north to the south with a white girl that

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seems “structurally black” to me. She is wearing baggy pants, a bandana, she walks like “them” and she is smoking a cigarette. I curiously observe them as they disappear from my sight.

I notice, again, that the place is quiet. I am surprised as I see two Japanese males, one with dreadlocks. They walk pass the deli market chatting to each other. Virtually no one comes to the market except people from the rehab. They come in groups of 2, 3 and four. Again, I observe nothing else as they walk out of the shop, but cigarettes. At 4pm I walk toward All Saints School which is on the west from where I am standing. I notice some kids with school uniform. Also, a parent with three kids is out playing with them. I look around; decide to return to my “place.” Upon my return nothing really catches my fancy, but I am excited that no one is noticing my presence.

I decide that I am going to leave. I go back to 129th and start walking toward Lenox. I see the Corinthian Baptist Church; I take the number and call but in vain. The phone puts me on voicemail. I do not leave the message. I do the same with Mount Holiness Pentecostal Church. No response, just the voicemail. I walk to Lenox and on 125th there I am walking home. I am till concerned that I was unable to get there during normal school hours. I realize that there so many churches within the neighborhood. I am wondering how possible it would be to knock on each one of them at some point.