

Archives of the Present in Parselelo Kantai's Writing

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Parselelo Kantai is a Kenyan writer whose work dramatizes the slippages that mediate the boundaries between mainstream history and popular history in Kenyan public life, through an experimental interweaving of autobiography, social histories, fictional imagination and rumour as important fragments of Kenyan social imaginaries. In this paper, I trace Kantai's contribution to key debates in contemporary Kenyan public life through his writing. I am particularly interested in his use of the tonalities of everyday urban life, rumour, excess, humour and 'absurdia' and popular memory as core fibres in his imaginative canvas to offer important insights into the negotiations of ideas, identities and memory in contemporary Kenyan public life. I read Kantai's writing as thinking through the layered configurations of what may be termed 'archives of the present' by reflecting on the interface between history and narrative; rumour and 'official' history; and the public and the personal. Here, I focus on Kantai's short stories and essays including "The Story of Comrade Lemma and the Jerusalem Boys' Band" (2003), "The Redykyulass Generation" (2007), "You Wreck Her (2008) and "The Cock Thief" (2010).