

## GHETTO

by Sophie Wright

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Trolley's latest publication, *Ghetto*, sets out to document 12 obscure communities on the margins of society. Photographers Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, creative directors at Colours, Benetton's documentary magazine between 2000 and 2002, explore worlds beyond the range of Current reportage, their project taking them from Lukole Refugee Camp in Tanzania to a forest in Patagonia.

Life in each destination is recorded in photographs, recollections and anecdotes from the authors, contextual information and firsthand observations from the inhabitants themselves. In many of these artificially constructed communities, society's traditional structures are absent or eroded. Inhabitants fill the void with routine, ritual and new relationships to reinforce their sense of identity and belonging. Lukole Refugee Camp, situated in a valley high in the mountains near the Tanzanian border with Burundi and Rwanda, is a makeshift city of 120,000 people. Having fled from the tribal genocide of Hutus by Tutsis in 1994, many without family and with just the clothes on their backs, its inhabitants survive on international food aid. The authors photographed men, women and children staring intensely into the camera in their threadbare clothes, their portraits reproduced in tandem with poignant quotes about muchloved favourite possessions—a hat, an umbrella or a blanket—and discussions about life in the Refugee Camp.

The contented smiles of the perma-tanned residents of Leisure 'World Gated Retirement Community tell another story. They have chosen, and invested in, their isolation. Separated from the younger generation, they feel empowered; one need only look at the photos of the proud "aquadettes", posing in their sequined red swimsuits. This landscaped complex of condominiums, with its almost exclusively white population of Southern Californians, is a Never-Never Land of sleep and pjsy, an artificial world maintained by a team of badly paid Hispanic workers. There is a gentle humour in their portraits of girlish grannies and brash old men, the story ending with one lady's surreal demonstration of what to do in the event of an earthquake: a wry comment on a community that despite an average age of 77.5 years, displays a distinct lack of engagement with the process of death itself. Star City, Russia, is a portrait of a Shangri-La gone sour. In a forest of silver birch trees outside Moscow, this complex, built in 1960, housed the clandestine beginnings of Russia's space programme. Now with the collapse of the Soviet Union and a lack of government funding, a once proud community has become an unwitting memorial to former glories. The camera lovingly records the dated machinery alongside portraits of its residents. For some, it is still a haven—if you were born within its walls you have the right to die there an unusually supportive environment for young families and the old, considering Russia's economic

fragility. However, many of the young adults questioned express feelings of claustrophobia. As a result of their debunking of his out-dated fantasy, Chanarin and Bronnberg's Russian guide became increasingly hostile and censorious-denying them access to as much as possible. The restrictions of officialdom were present also on their visit to Cuba, but for the photographers the most pressing issue when working in Rene Vallejo Psychiatric Hospital, outside Havana, was the morality of photographing heavily medicated inmates. The authors' decision to hand over control of the portraiture to the patients, through use of a trigger-and-cable release, is rewarded by a series of wonderfully frank images. Mario, 60, his skinny frame draped in regulation pyjamas, stands against the backdrop of an institutional aquamarine wall. In the first frame he turns his back to us, his shoulders hunched, negating the very purpose of the portrait by hiding himself from the camera's probing eye. In the second image he faces us, arms aloft, ready for a close-up. His story is perhaps the most eloquent example of Bronnberg and Chanarin's enquiring but noninvasive reportage, which maintains the dignity of their subjects by giving them a voice.

Ghetto is an engrossing book. The individual stories, both harrowing and enchanting, recounted alongside portraiture and contextual text and images from each destination, create illuminating reportage. We share the photographers' encounters and gain insight, through the inhabitants' words, into daily life within these ghettos. Through recounting the obstacles and issues encountered on their travels, Bronnberg and Chanarin instruct us in the process and the problems of creating honest and effective reportage.