

Letter From the Cover Artist

Exhausted faces, framed by bright orange life jackets, gaze out at the viewer, their eyes filled with emotion while other figures are huddled together in groups, their bodies wrapped in shimmering golden blankets as they watch distant boats on stormy seas. These poignant paintings are a continuation of Ethiopian artist Tewodros Hagos' series *The Desperate Journey* that aims to not only raise awareness of the global migrant crisis, but also address the dehumanising effect of journalistic imagery and footage. For his solo exhibition entitled *The Desperate Journey II* at Kristin.

Hjellegjerde Gallery, London Bridge, Hagos presents exquisite new works that elevate not just the tragedy of the situation, but also the emotional experience of each of his subjects.

The series initially began as a response to the artist's increasing realisation of the ineffectiveness of news stories and imagery to convey lived experience or complex truths. While many of the images that we are fed by the media may provoke an immediate emotional response, they are often deliberately sensational in order to shock the viewer and over time, the bombardment of such imagery risks normalisation of what "remains one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time." "People don't realise that the migrant crisis is ongoing". The media focus switches from one direction to another, and at the moment, it's on coronavirus, while here in Ethiopia and Africa more generally, millions of people continue to be displaced as a result of conflict, says Hagos. Through the classical, static medium of painting, the artist invites a slower, deeper kind of contemplation that counters the fast-paced consumption of digital media.

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The McGill Journal of African Studies

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Tewodros Hagos

Watered-Down Land Acknowledgments, So Let It Flow Continuously

“McGill University is situated on the unceded territories and waters of the Kanien’kehá:ka Nation in Tio’tia:ke (Haudenosaunee) or Mooniyaang (Anishnaabe), commonly referred to as Montreal. Moreover, acknowledges that the government of Upper Canada withdrew funds from the Six Nations Trust Fund of Grand River to finance a loan to McGill that kept the university from closing in 1847. The existence of Canada is rooted in land dispossession and the genocide of Indigenous Peoples, with settlers still profiting from these ongoing colonial injustices. The diversity, resistance, and revival of Indigenous Peoples and Nations throughout Turtle Island are vibrant and continuing.

In this regard, I also want to acknowledge that thousands of African-descent people have been enslaved, displaced and judicialized on this same territory. The presence of Black Canadian communities is directly linked to the colonization of the Caribbean, African and American nations.

I encourage you to take the time to learn and expand your understanding of the truths of this country’s history as well as decolonization efforts.”

Land acknowledgments have become routine, often losing their intended impact. Many mispronounce Indigenous names, skim through the words, or disregard their purpose. Yet, instead of dismissing them, we must reclaim their true purpose—fostering understanding, respect, and the honouring of their true meaning.

UHURU JOURNAL

UHURU recognizes, honors, and stands in solidarity with Indigenous communities in their pursuit of decolonization, reparations, land reclamation, and healing. Our name, meaning “freedom,” embodies a commitment to resisting oppression and amplifying intergenerational struggles and resilience. Decolonization is not a singular path but a collective one. As we pour into each other, we create cycles of healing. True liberation is shared liberation.

“Nobody is free until everybody’s free.”

— Fannie Lou Hamer

Jaiden John Nelson

This Volume's Theme:

Beyond The Single Story: Embracing Africa's Diverse Realities

For too long, Africa has been confined to a single story — a narrow, incomplete narrative that overlooks its vast histories, thriving cultures, and boundless ingenuity. *UHURU* seeks to dismantle this one-dimensional lens by amplifying student voices that bring depth, nuance, and authenticity to the conversation.

Inspired by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Danger of a Single Story*, this volume is a tapestry of perspectives—woven with scholarship, storytelling, and creative expression—that illuminate the lived experiences of African and Afro-diasporic communities. Through these pages, we invite readers to journey beyond misconceptions and discover the richness, resilience, and global impact of Africa's diverse realities.

“African cultural production through traditional art forms serves as a powerful mechanism for decolonial activism. These forms—poetry, oral traditions, film, and music—mobilize resistance, renew cultural pride, and strengthen attachments to identity. They address contemporary challenges such as globalization and identity crises by reaffirming the transformative power of art to reclaim African histories, challenge colonial legacies, and envision post-colonial futures.”

Excerpt from Zahra Hassan Doualeh

‘Europe is Not My Center’: Traditional Art Forms as a Means of Narrative

Contributors

We extend our gratitude to the talented writers, artists, photographers, and poets who contributed to this issue of *UHURU* Journal. Your work has made this edition a bold and vibrant celebration of African and diasporic creativity, imagination, and resistance.

Literary Contributions

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McGill's African Studies Students' Association (ASSA)

Opening Statement

As the Chair of the African Studies Program at McGill University, it is my great honor to introduce readers to *UHURU: The McGill Undergraduate Journal of African Studies*. *UHURU*, now in its fourth volume, is one of the very first undergraduate journals of its kind. In the following pages readers will be treated to, and rewarded with, peer-reviewed articles on a wide range of topics. These include rigorously researched and edited works on the relationship between a critique of orientalism and the formation of African consciousness and identity; traditional African art forms as a means of narrative; and inspiring artworks of the prideful Maasai pastoralists; the unique and world-renowned wildlife of Africa; and African craftwork reimagined for our contemporary World. Taken together, these works celebrate a wide range of African accomplishments reflecting the truly inter-disciplinary thrust and contributions of African Studies worldwide.

The idea for the aptly named *UHURU* (Freedom in Swahili) originated from the initiative, intellectual talent, and perseverance of the African Studies Students' Association (ASSA) and the many students here at McGill who, over the years, have been steadfast in promoting rigorous academic research on topics related to Africa and the African diaspora. Indeed, *UHURU* speaks poignantly to advancements in the scholarship on Africa (including African cultural and artistic production) in ways that would have defied expectations only a few years ago. A product of the tireless efforts of its editorial team, headed ably by Henry Maidoh, the Journal underscores issues associated with the historical (mis)representation of Africa, the importance of working towards decolonizing scholarship and art on the continent, the vital importance of including (and centering) research produced by student authors from Africa and those of African descent, and the encouragement of any and all contributions that address African topics from a critical analytical lens.

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Readers of *UHURU* will immediately recognize the Journal's overall sentiment of "Sharing?" That is, the ways in which cross-disciplinary work on Africa and the African diaspora contributes to our understanding of some of the most pressing issues not only in Africa but throughout the globe. Consequently, and taken together, the contributions to this volume not only center work on Africa in new, novel, and critical ways; they foreground the avenues through which scholarship on Africa and the African diaspora paves the way for academics, students, and the wider community alike to understand that efforts at combating misrepresentations of our communities worldwide.

Khalid Mustafa Medani, PhD
Associate Professor of Political Science and Islamic Studies
Chair, African Studies Program
Director, Institute of Islamic Studies

UHURU

The McGill Journal of African Studies



African Studies Students' Association (ASSA)
of McGill University

A Word from ASSA

The African Studies Students' Association is proud to present the fourth edition of the African Studies Program's esteemed academic journal, *UHURU*. This edition stands as a testament to the unwavering determination, resilience, and passion of the editorial team, McGill student body, and larger Montreal community.

We are immensely proud of our editorial team, whose dedication, adaptability, and vision ensured that this journal remains a beacon of thoughtful discourse and meaningful representation. They have worked tirelessly—navigating time constraints and overcoming obstacles—to craft a publication that embodies the spirit of *UHURU*: a space for nuanced perspectives, rich storytelling, and critical scholarship. This edition would not have been possible without the mobilization, participation, and engagement of the McGill community. We extend our deepest gratitude to the students, contributors, and faculty advisors for their continuous support and counsel throughout this creative process. Your commitment to fostering dialogue and amplifying the voices of Africa and its diaspora has shaped the making of *UHURU*, transforming it into more than just an academic journal but a tapestry of authenticity, resilience, and truth. The McGill African Studies Student Association is honored to continue the legacy of those who paved the way for us by bringing forward meaningful and thought-provoking content on Africa and its diasporas.

We hope that *UHURU* will make you feel seen, heard, and connected, inviting you to become part of this journey of storytelling, critical reflection, and celebration. Together, may we continue to honor the voices, histories, and futures that shape Africa and its global diasporas.

In solidarity,

Kellia Abisola Usanase, President
The African Studies Students' Association

Henry Maidoh, Vice-President of Academics
The African Studies Students' Association

Letter From The Editors

It is with deep pride and intention that we present this year's edition of the *UHURU* Journal of African Studies. As an Afrocentric undergraduate publication, *UHURU* exists to challenge reductive narratives and center the richness of African perspectives—intellectual, cultural, and lived. The theme of this publication is “*Beyond the Single Story: Africa's Diverse Realities*”.

UHURU serves as a call to liberate the ways Africa and its diaspora are studied, discussed, and understood. In these pages, you will find the work of passionate student scholars, artists, and storytellers who are reshaping what it means to study Africa—from within and beyond its borders. Whether through academic papers, poetry, or visual art, this edition reclaims the right to define, to question, and to reimagine.

Together, these pieces illuminate a powerful truth: Africa is not one story, but many. And each one deserves to be heard.

To our brilliant contributors, thank you for your vision and voice. To our readers, we hope these pages challenge your perceptions, deepen your understanding, and remind you that no single narrative can contain Africa.

The Editorial Team 2024 - 2025

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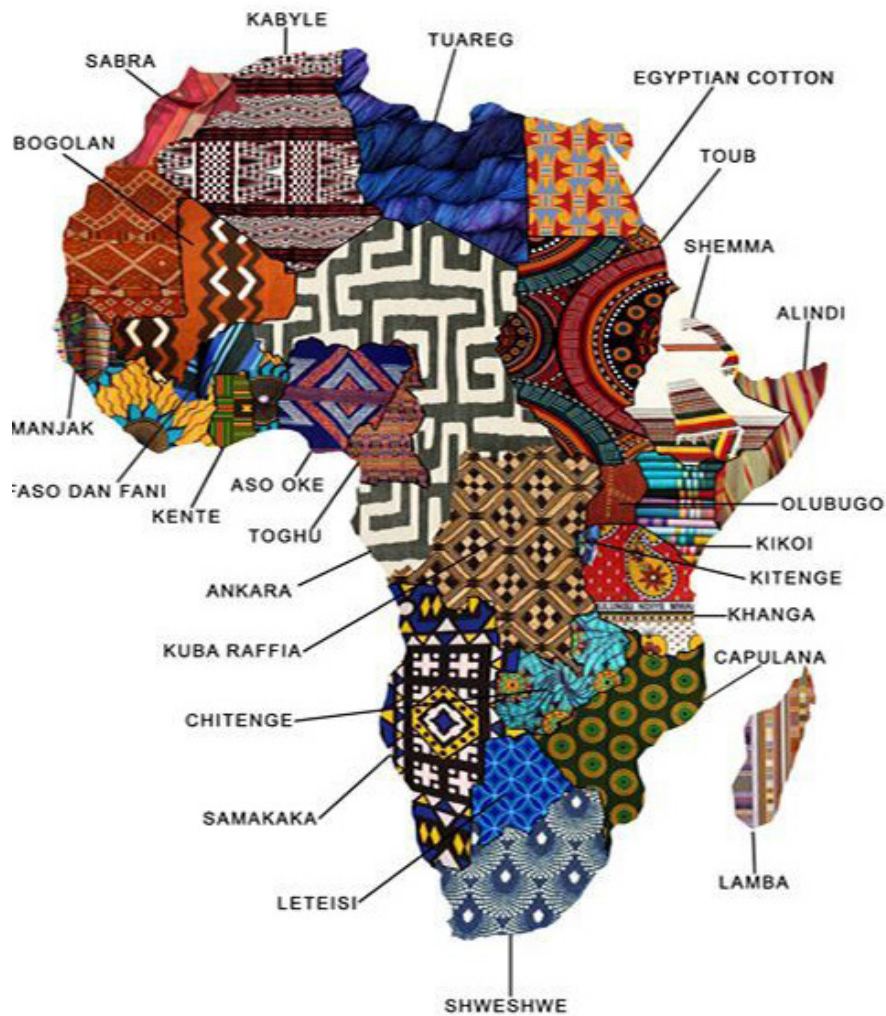
Evelyn Rogan

The use of African Fabrics and Patterns

The intentional use of fabrics and design elements throughout our work is a visual and thematic choice that reflects our commitment to challenging the “single story” of Africa. This story, too often marked by generalization, erasure, or reduction, is actively countered by the significance of African textiles. Across Africa, textiles are more than just clothing—they are woven expressions of identity, heritage, and symbolism. From East to West, North to South, each fabric carries its own meanings, rooted in the traditions and histories of the communities that create and wear them.

In Eastern and Central Africa, Kitenge is a wax-printed fabric widely worn in both everyday life and during ceremonies. Its vibrant patterns often reflect regional identities, social messages, and community values, making it a key part of personal and collective expression. Similarly, Shweshwe fabric, found in Southern Africa, is known for its distinctive geometric designs in indigo and earthy tones. These patterns symbolize unity and cultural cohesion and are often worn during traditional events, emphasizing a shared sense of belonging. In Ethiopia, Tibeb is a handwoven textile typically worn during religious and national celebrations. Its intricate borders feature motifs such as crosses, representing Christian faith, and diamond shapes, symbolizing strength and protection.

In West Africa, Kente cloth from Ghana is woven from silk and cotton, with colors and patterns that each carry symbolic meaning. Patterns like Eban (fence) signify protection and security, while different hues convey values such as wealth, power, and peace. Meanwhile, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kuba cloth is crafted from raffia palm fibers and decorated with striking checkerboard and maze-like patterns. These designs convey balance, continuity, and social harmony, and are often used in ceremonies and storytelling. Maasai shukas, worn by the Maasai people of Kenya and Tanzania, are primarily red, symbolizing courage and identity, while stripe patterns signify connections to the land and cosmology. Malagasy lamba, from Madagascar, incorporates sacred spirals, which hold cultural significance in marking life events and reinforcing ties to ancestral heritage.



Keep an eye out for these textiles throughout our journal to learn more about the regions and stories they represent. By incorporating these visual languages into our presentation, we anchor our work in Africa while resisting homogenized depictions of the continent. Each fabric serves as a thread—distinct in its pattern, origin, and meaning—woven with intention to form a textured reflection of African cultural life. The artwork, photography, and storytelling come from members of the wider McGill community who engage with, resonate with, and encompass African and African Diasporic experiences. These designs reflect the cultural contexts in which much of the work was created, allowing us to visually ground the stories in place and celebrate the continent’s diversity and creativity. Like thread pulled carefully through fabric, these elements come together to tell a story that is layered, grounded, rich in meaning, and colorful in their visual impact.

Samrawit Terrefe & Lhasa Le Gall Di Rienzo

Senior & Junior Graphic Design Editors

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