UHURU

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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.

Editorial Board

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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 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 postcolonial futures*."

Exerpt 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

Alexia Santoro
Charlotte Jean-Gilles
Harerta Abraha
Hiba Babiker
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Artistic Contributions

Andi Lin
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Evelyn Rogan
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Jade Laurent–Le Bras
Rebeca Guevara Castillo

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.

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
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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 & Lhassa Le Gall Di Rienzo

Senior & Junior Graphic Design Editors

‘Europe is Not My Center’: Traditional Art Forms as a Means of Narrative Reappropriation in Africa Through Decoloniality

Zahra Hassan Doualeh

Edited by : Mohammed Abdulganiyu & Isabelle Lim

Art has long been a central element of African tradition and culture, serving as a tool of expression and transmission. It can be used to reflect on popular sentiments and relive historical events. Many African societies and cultures prioritize visual or oral art forms such as poetry, film, and music. This can be attributed to longstanding oral traditions that precede modern times and to artists like Ousmane Sembène, who vowed to democratize art and present it in a way all Africans could consume, regardless of literacy. Sembène was not the only one, as Schumann highlights a similar trend in South Africa: "Oral communication also has been much more accessible to a large part of the South African population than the printed press due to lack of literacy and economic means (for which the apartheid system was of course partly responsible)." (2008, p.18).

Colonial efforts decentralized and de-legitimized oral culture, traditions, and knowledge by imposing Eurocentric forms of teaching and controlling the material taught at colonial schools (Eizadirad & Wane, 2023). In a way, the practice of oral traditions and visual art represents a decolonial approach to knowledge by centering indigenous methods.

African artists have been using their art as a tool to combat colonial forces and oppression throughout history. Whether it be Somali oral poetry used to express grievances against the British and Italian colonization or Miriam Makeba, also known as Mama Africa, denouncing the apartheid regime in South Africa, the use of cultural media to convey political messages is present across the continent.

This essay will argue that African oral and visual arts mobilize political resistance, renew cultural pride, and envision postcolonial futures, reshaping African identities in a globalized world. Activism through African art will be analyzed on the continent and within the diaspora through a decolonial lens, as such promotes the centering of narratives around Africa and the rewriting of history in a more representative manner (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). I will be referencing various artists, their philosophies and work and how they relate to art as a tool for resistance, the reappropriation of narrative and the reshaping of identity in a globalized world.

Poetry And Oral Tradition As Tools For Resistance

Somalia has been referred to as the "nation poets" because of its rich tradition of oral poetry. Poetry is used to convey messages and communicate discourses on morality, society, and cultural identity. According to Samatar, Somali poets can be political manipulators as their words have the power to discredit or support politicians, making them central to political life. Sayyid Mohammed Abdille Hassan is a prominent example of this. His oral performance of

poetry in the late 20th century sought to target French, British and Italian forces occupying Somali territory in line with Dervish efforts, the resistance movement Sayyid founded. Most notably, Sayyid used gabay, a traditional style of poem, to convey complex ideas through short lines packed with meaning that form a big picture once assembled (Samatar 85). He touched on topics ranging from faith to anti-colonial struggle (Ba 107). In this manner, he built an aura of charisma, which solidified his role as a resistance movement leader against colonial forces. Sayyid's work exemplifies the power of oral tradition as a tool to channel popular discontent, public persuasion, and mobilization.

In parallel to the gabay style exists buraanbur, a specific type of Somali poetry reserved for women (Aidid, 2020). Poems in that style are often performed in groups, with one woman usually in charge of the drums, another woman reciting or singing the verses, and other women congregating in the center. It is a communal performance allowing Somali women to express their grievances, anger, and frustrations associated with living in a patriarchal society. It is notable for being a gendered kind of art form, allowing women to articulate their experiences and works as a tool for resistance and healing (Aidid, 2020). Somali poetry is not functionally limited to being a passively consumed art form; rather, its role transcends the public and private spheres. Buraanbur provides an example of how women's decolonial activism is embedded in oral tradition as a cultural expression of public discourse.

Similarly, on the other side of the continent, artists such as the South African Mazisi Kunene produced work deeply embedded in their oral tradition. Kunene's poetry was deeply embedded in Zulu tradition, as observable through his characteristic style of praise songs common in Zulu prose and oral poetry (Okoro, 2023). According to him, African identity can be reaffirmed and reconstructed through poetry, encouraging African poets to "go back to the source" and turn towards the ancestral wisdom contained in their traditions. Kunene draws on fables and myths to elevate African knowledge, centering his own culture in his art (Okoro, 2023). This decolonial practice takes the spotlight away from colonially transmitted knowledge and the colonial tendency to denigrate African belief systems. Mazisi Kunene was known for discussing the realities and struggles of his people, both past and present, thus positioning himself as a socially engaged artist. Kunene's commitment to social justice was not just limited to his art; in fact, he was also involved in the African National Congress (ANC) before his forced exile from South Africa due to his political activism (Okoro 36). The poet's persistence in writing in African languages and revisiting his oral traditions elevated African cultures and reclaimed the richness and complexity of African identity, therefore challenging

colonial denigration.

Léopold Sédar Senghor embodied the same concepts of rejuvenated African identity and cultural pride through his advancement of the idea of Negritude. This philosophy serves as a critique of colonial domination and a powerful celebration of African identity. Mustapha Bal highlighted the relevance of the concept of Negritude by qualifying it as a "childhood of black poetry" (Ba 159). Negritude is also described as a style of literature characterized not by words but the emotion and the cultural nuances utilized by the author (Ba 166). Léopold Sédar Senghor viewed the creative arts of the Black world, as expressed through Negritude, as a means to both address global challenges and showcase African ingenuity. He believed that embracing Negritude ideals—rooted in cultural identity and humanistic values—could foster a reconciliation between human nature and modern civilization.

He also maintained that interacting with African cultural paradigms could help the West regain its humanity and promote intercultural harmony (Ba 157). This concept promotes cultural regeneration and global understanding via an African lens, placing African artistic expression—including poetry and oral traditions—at the center of the decolonial movement.

In the work Nocturnes, the poet emphasizes his commitment to African activism by stating that he would "die for [his] people's cause" and urging his people to name him their ambassador (Ba 152). This figure of speech conveys Senghor's deep sense of responsibility to speak on behalf of his people. Despite his goal to write for his community, his position as a writer rendered his work inaccessible for the illiterate peasant he claimed to represent. However, his literary work exemplifies a desire for all-encompassing solidarity, including that with the French colonizing force of his native Senegal.

Reclaiming The Narrative Through Film And Music

Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembène was a key figure in African cinema, choosing only to make films on Africa and its people. He infamously said, "Europe is not my center," when asked if he thought his films were well received in Europe. According to Sembène, Europe is a periphery of Africa, the same way it was conceived by colonial powers. His body of work is therefore representative of a typically decolonial style. Ousmane Sembène's 1996 movie, entitled La Noire De... [The Black Girl] contains all the characteristics of an African-centered piece.

The audience follows a young Senegalese lady, Diouana, from a first-person point of view as she follows her employers, a white married couple and their three children, when they return back to France after

living in Dakar (Sembène). Diouana feels betrayed by her employer (only referred to as 'Madame') as Diouana was initially only hired to take care of the children, but was instead forced to take on additional roles like cleaning, cooking, doing the laundry and serving as an exotic attraction for the couple's guests. Sembène depicts a character who is aware of her oppression and actively fights it through little acts of rebellion. The story is narrated through Diouana's internal monologue as she questions her purpose in France and critiques the couple she lives with, feeling like a prisoner away from her family. Although her thoughts are simple in the beginning, she becomes increasingly angry as the story evolves as a result of her mistreatment, which affects her psychologically and emotionally. When the husband, 'Monsieur,' offers to help her write to her mother, he starts writing the response by himself, literally taking control of Diouana's narrative and writing about her life in France from his perspective, pretending to be her (Sembène).

Here, the filmmaker makes a parallel between his protagonist's story and the colonial erasure of the realities of the colonial era and atrocities committed by Europeans in Africa; in other words, the rewriting of history. Ousmane Sembène, through his art, deals with themes of African resistance in the diaspora, overt rebellion, the whitewashing of history, and deep diasporic self-awareness, all while centring African identity in his narrative.

The call for resistance against oppression reverberated across the continent, as Anti-apartheid artist Miriam Makeba also denounced the apartheid regime in her native South Africa. Mama Africa, as she was nicknamed, sang in Zulu, Arabic, and Xhosa, centering African languages as a key feature of her art and her performance (Nicholls, 2018). The song Jolinkomo, released in 1967, hints at the singer's protective attitude towards her people's grievances (Nicholls 52). The introduction is done in English, and then Makeba slowly introduces lyrics in the vernacular of IsiXhosa, seemingly reserving the song's true meaning for her African audience. Makeba stages Jolinkomo as a war song, praising warriors about to go into combat through her lyrics (Nicholls, 2018). This traditional style of Xhosa oral culture with a modern twist represents a blend of old and new, representing the realities of black Africans under the apartheid regime. For that, Jolinkomo is considered an anti-apartheid mobilization song, exemplifying the power of art as a tool for activism and political mobilization. By blending traditional Xhosa oral culture with modern performance, Makeba crafted a song that resonated as both a rallying cry against apartheid and a celebration of African identity. Through her use of African languages and cultural symbolism, she reclaimed the narrative of resistance, empowering her people and asserting the enduring relevance of African traditions in the fight for liberation.

Reshaping African Identities in a Globalized World

Warsan Shire is a British Somali poet known to skillfully blend modern and traditional techniques in her performance and writing. Her poems reflect the diasporic realities of those perpetually living in exile. Shire sets herself apart by foregoing the taboos and limits of the diasporic narrative and exploiting themes of sexuality and ambivalence in her poems (Souny 11). The African diasporic discourse replicates itself across the world, and Shire is not exempt from it. She knows Somalia only through her parents, yet paints it in an idealized manner. When interviewed on the topic, Warsan Shire admits to picturing herself in the golden age of Somalia when writing. This follows a decolonial movement of reclaiming Africa's image for oneself by consciously straying away from the mainstream colonial perception of Africa as a barren land.

Through imagery, Warsan Shire evokes the discomfort of refugees in seeing their experiences mirrored on a global scale. The line "All of my children are in the water. I thought the sea was safer than the land" expresses the harshness of a world consumed by ever-raging wars (Souny 178). Here, Shire expresses the African diasporic identity as affected by a globalized world. The author reaffirms her own Somalinimo, or the essence of being Somali, using the vivid metaphor of her narrator swallowing their own passport (Souny 180). Africanness, Somalinimo in her case, has become greater than symbolic document, but rather a place one knows. The definition of African identity is expanded by including experiences, language, feelings, and backgrounds over legal status. Warsan Shire's poetry reflects a greater concept of African diaspora and their intersecting national identities, between home country and motherland.

Diasporic awareness is also explored in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel Americanah, where modern and traditional modes of self-perception are reaffirmed through their locality. The story follows a protagonist who immigrates to America from Nigeria. Her journey of cultural adaptation and acceptance of her new Black identity in America is expressed through her relationship with her hair. Hair and hairstyles are a significant part of African cultures; since the 15th century, West African tribal groups have used hair to convey sex, tribe affiliation, age, or vocation (Cruz-Guttierez .67). As such, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah highlights art and literature as powerful tools for activism by exploring diasporic awareness and the reclamation of African identity. The protagonist's relationship with her hair serves as a symbol of rejecting Eurocentric beauty standards and embracing cultural authenticity. By weaving themes of decoloniality into narratives of migration and self-perception, Adichie uses storytelling

to challenge oppression and foster pride in African heritage within a globalized world.

In conclusion, 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 postcolonial futures. This ongoing decolonial movement emphasizes the importance of thought, image, narrative, and language as integral tools for reshaping African identities in a globalized world. The decolonial impact of African cultural production is significantly amplified through intersections of various art forms.

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Jade Laurent--Le Bras

Tewodros

Hagos

France's Dirty Secret: First Coup d'état and Assassination in Postcolonial Africa

Sylvio-Jonathan Richard

Edited by : Kirit Ghumman

Introduction

On the morning of 13 January 1963, the president of Togo, Sylvanus Olympio, was assassinated in the first post-independence military coup staged in Africa. The coup began on the night of 12 January, when mutinous soldiers broke into Olympio's house and crowded the first floor (Togo Death at Gate, 1963). With no means of escape, the president was forced to jump out of a window and seek refuge in the US embassy next door (Togo Death at Gate, 1963). Olympio hid inside a vehicle belonging to the embassy, as he could not enter the locked building (Boisbouvier, 2021). Testimony from Gilchrist Olympio, the son of Sylvanus Olympio, revealed that Ambassador Leon Poullada had gone to the embassy in search of the president after being informed by Henri Mayozer that a coup was underway (Boisbouvier, 2021). When Poullada arrived at the embassy, Olympio immediately requested his assistance, and the American advised him to stay hidden inside the vehicle until he returned with the key to open the building (Boisbouvier, 2021). However, frightened about the ongoing situation, Poullada never returned (Boisbouvier, 2021). The rebel soldiers later entered the embassy, found the president, and shot him dead.

Although Olympio's assassination shocked the world, as it marked the first coup d'état in post-colonial Africa, there has yet to be a definitive answer as to who carried out the murder and why (Pigeaud, 2021). Approximately 61 years after the crime, Olympio's family is still seeking to know the truth and have requested official archives from France (Pigeaud, 2021). Nevertheless, the use of plausible deniability has enabled France to remain silent about the issue and denounce any possible implications.

In this essay, I investigate the 1963 military coup in Togo to identify the actor or actors who would have benefited the most from Sylvanus Olympio's assassination, thereby determining who was most likely to carry it out. This essay contends that France and the Togolese military conspired to eliminate Olympio, given that they stood to gain the most from his demise. The president threatened both parties' interests as he pursued 'real' independence from France and sought to achieve this goal by limiting military spending to promote economic growth. This argument will be supported through a four-step analysis: firstly, by theorizing political assassination to comprehend their underlying causes; secondly, by examining Olympio's objectives for Togo during his presidency; thirdly,

by identifying motives of potential suspects; and finally, by reviewing all of the available evidence.

Theorizing political assassinations

Assassination could be defined as the deliberate killing of a political figure for political reasons (Khatchadourian, 1974). Although the act is committed against an individual, the motives for assassinations are political (Khatchadourian, 1974). The murder of a head of state often occurs either to bring about large-scale political change or to prevent such change from occurring (Iqbal & Zorn, 2008). Consequently, according to Andra Serban and colleagues (2018), assassinations should not be viewed as random events; on the contrary, they should be perceived as instrumental behaviour. In the political theory of classical antiquity, assassinations were a means of removing an illegitimate ruler or terminating the rule of a tyrant (Iqbal & Zorn, 2008). However, in modern society, assassinations are generally viewed as unjustifiable acts of political violence, rather than legitimate means of pursuing political reform. (Iqbal & Zorn, 2008). Similar to other acts of political violence—such as coups—assassinations have the effect of destabilizing a society and are detrimental to the sociopolitical system (Iqbal & Zorn, 2008).

Scholars have proposed various theories to explain the causes of political assassinations; one of the common factors among these theories is that assassinations occur because of societal divides (Serban et al., 2018). The Vertical Dyad Linkage Theory highlights this notion, as it states that the same leader can and will act differently towards in-groups and out-groups (Yammarino et al., 2013). As such, leaders will not command universal support, regardless of whether they are elected, appointed, or anointed (Serban et al., 2018). These leadership principles, while often centred on direct or close leader-follower relationships, also apply to indirect or distant leader-follower relationships (Serban et al., 2018). According to Yammarino and colleagues (2013), in extreme cases, some followers—regardless of their relationship to the leader—may develop such intense admiration that it borders on fanaticism, while some non-followers may harbor such deep resentment that it leads to acts as extreme as assassination.This idea is reflected in the case of Togo, where Sylvanus Olympio was perceived as a hero by some Togolese, yet despised enough by others that they conspired to assassinate him.

Colonial powers contributed to the increased likelihood of political assassinations in African countries by creating societal divisions through their 'divide-and-rule' strategy (Morrock, 1973). This approach involves utilizing ethnic, cultural, tribal, or religious differences within colonial populations as tools to foster instability and conflict, thereby making the region easier to dominate and control (Morrock, 1973). Politicizing differences was a fundamental tactic of 'divide-and-rule', as it ensured that divisions continued into the post-colonial era (Morrock, 1973). This strategy was implemented in various ways, with one notable method being the open support of tribalist political parties by colonial powers (Morrock, 1973). For example, in the case of Togo, France openly supported Gnassingbé Eyadéma by providing emergency military assistance when requested, despite Eyadéma enacting corrupt policies that favoured his own ethnic group (Dobbs, 1986). Conversely, Olympio was assassinated because of his Pan-Africanist ideals, which aimed to unify African people. Nevertheless, to fully understand the motives behind Olympio's murder, it is crucial to analyze his background.

Who was Sylvanus Olympio, and what did he do for Togo?

Sylvanus Olympio's legacy extends far beyond his role as Togo's first president; he is regarded as a leader who fought for Togo's freedom from French colonial rule. Raised in a wealthy family, Olympio attended prestigious schools in England and France, where he pursued studies in economics and international law (Spanos, 2023). Being a bright and ambitious young man, Olympio sought to use his education to make a difference in Togo (Spanos, 2023). Between 1927 and 1930, he worked as a lawyer in London and then returned to West Africa to start a career in business economics with a company in Lagos, Nigeria (Sylvanus Olympio, 2019). Olympio climbed up the ranks and eventually became the Director General of the United Africa Company (Sylvanus Olympio, 2019).

Despite his successful career in business economics, Olympio felt unsettled because Togo had recently been ceded to France, and it was common knowledge that the French colonial administration intended to exploit the land and its people (Spanos, 2023). Olympio's firsthand observations of French policies aiming to keep the country in a state of dependency fue-

led his desire for change (Spanos, 2023). As a result of his growing political convictions, Olympio left his corporate career in the early 1940s and joined the Comité pour l'Unité Togolaise (CUT), a political party engaged in the struggle for Togo's self-rule (Sylvanus Olympio, 2019). About a decade later, Olympio became the prime minister of Togo after his party emerged victorious in the French Togoland parliamentary election of 1958 (Sylvanus Olympio, 2019). Upon assuming the role of prime minister, Olympio declared a clear mandate to refuse the limited autonomy attributed by France in 1956, advocating instead for a fuller measure of self-government (Skinner, 2015). His efforts proved fruitful, as Togo formally gained independence on 27 April 1960, leading to Olympio's inauguration as the country's first president in 1961 (Skinner, 2015).

As President, Olympio's primary objective was to secure Togo's economic future to ensure the country would no longer depend on the French colonial administration (Skinner, 2015). Drawing on his expertise in economics, he implemented policies aimed at fostering economic growth and independence.. For example, Olympio argued that maintaining a large military for Togo's small population would only increase the country's reliance on French colonial rule (Skinner, 2019). As a result, he chose to have a modest armed force of 250 men to limit governmental expenditure and, therefore, decrease the country's dependence on France (Skinner, 2019). Another policy Olympio pursued to break Togo's economic chains and move closer to true independence was the removal of the CFA Franc from Togo, which was a currency imposed on French colonies (Spanos, 2023). Yet, just two days before Togo was scheduled to withdraw from the CFA Franc, Olympio was assassinated.. This event has led scholars to speculate that France's anger at Olympio's intention to take Togo out of the Franc zone was the primary factor in his assassination (Skinner, 2015).

The Motives of the Military

Instead of hastily attributing Olympio's assassination to the French, it is essential to investigate all potential actors who may have had a motive to kill the president in order to determine the most logical suspect. Approximately a week following Olympio's murder, West Africa magazine published an article suggesting that Togolese soldiers were responsible for the president's death (Skinner, 2015). The magazine argued that Olympio's murder was not an as-

sassination and instead happened in the heat of the moment (Skinner, 2015). The proposed narrative was that the coup occurred due to discontent over pay and unemployment, among ex-servicemen, which ultimately resulted in the 'unplanned' death of President Olympio (Skinner, 2015). The premise of this argument was supported by Sergent Etienne (Gnassingbé) Eyadéma, stating to have personally shot Olympio after he tried to escape (Landrey, 2003). Later, US embassy records revealed that Eyadéma's statement was false, as Vice Consul Richard Storch saw Olympio standing near the US embassy gate accompanied by rebel soldiers from whom he was not attempting to escape (Skinner, 2015). Furthermore, medical reports confirmed that Olympio had been bayoneted and shot, a combination of wounds that strongly suggest deliberate intent (Skinner, 2015). Consequently, articles that described Olympio's death as an 'accident' were called into question and eventually discredited (Skinner, 2015).

Even though the media's explanation of Olympio's 'accidental' murder was debunked, many still hold the belief that the military was responsible. Some scholars have argued that the assassination was motivated by the soldiers' impatience in waiting for their pensions from France and their frustration over unemployment, exacerbated by Olympio's refusal to integrate them into the Togolese military (Skinner, 2015). In addition to financial hardship, the ex-servicemen's anger was fueled by the stigmas they faced for their involvement in suppressing anti-colonial movements in other parts of Africa (Skinner, 2015). For these reasons, West Africans believed that the ex-servicemen were responsible as they had both the means and motives to act against Olympio (Skinner, 2015). Nevertheless, while West African correspondents favoured this non-ideological military narrative, not all were convinced that soldiers acted independently (Kitchen, 1963). For example, President Sékou Touré of Guinea appealed to the UN for a more thorough investigation of the assassination, as he believed it was a plot planned by exterior actors (Kitchen, 1963).

The Motives of the French Colonial Power

Several decades after Olympio's assassination, François-Xavier Verschave (1998) presented evidence linking military interests and ambitions in Togo to a broader pattern of French neo-colonial intervention across Africa, as well as to Jacques Foccart — a French businessman and

politician best known as a chief adviser to French presidents on African affairs. Verschave's (1998) investigation into Foccart's connection between Paris and Lomé revealed that both the French ambassador, Henri Mazoyer, and the security adviser, Georges Maîtrier, were selected as part of a broader strategy aimed at monitoring and containing Olympio's efforts to steer Togo on a 'too independent' course. Worried about losing control over Togo, Mayozer and Maîtrier opted to replace Olympio with Grunitzky, viewing him as a more moderate leader aligned with French interests (Verschave, 1998). Therefore, the French men had the motive to conspire with Eyadéma and the Togolese soldiers in the assassination of Olympio, as the president was increasingly viewed as a threat to colonial interests (Skinner, 2015). While the soldiers may have perceived the assassination as aligning with their personal interests, they were, in fact, being manipulated by Mayozer and Maîtrier to further French geopolitical objectives.(Skinner, 2015).

Togolese historian Têtêvi Godwin Tété-Adjalogo (2002) expanded on Verschave's analysis by arguing that the French motive behind Olympio's murder stemmed from his efforts to decrease dependence on France's economic influence. These efforts positioned Togo towards economic independence, which ran counter to French interests (Tété-Adjalogo, 2002). Had Olympio lived long enough to succeed, his example would further threaten the very basis of French involvement with its former African colonies (Tété-Adjalogo, 2002). While these factors motivated France, according to Tété-Adjalogo (2002), Olympio's public declaration of his intention to withdraw Togo from the CFA Franc served as the final straw, further driving France to eliminate the president. France recognized that without its African colonies, its economy would suffer, and the country would gradually lose international relevance (Sylla, 2020). France used the CFA Franc as a colonial mechanism that would allow them to retain power and control over its former colonies (Sylla, 2020). Fears emerged that Togo's withdrawal from the CFA franc would establish a precedent, potentially initiating a ripple effect across the region as other countries considered similar moves. Thus, France may have felt compelled to take action, leveraging opportunistic actors and the tools available at the time — namely, the rebel armed forces — to prevent this outcome.

The Motives of Ghana

Former Nigerian minister Jaja Wachuku opposed arguments of French involvement and instead insisted that Kwame Nkrumah, president of Ghana, was responsible for Olympio's death (Skinner, 2015). This proposition was deemed plausible for three reasons. Firstly, Nkrumah had publicly and repeatedly stated that Togo's future lay not in independent nationhood but in a political and economic union with Ghana (Welch, 1966). Nkrumah saw a Ghana-Togo union as an opportunity to demonstrate his devotion to the cause of African Unity (Skinner, 2015). Secondly, there was an increased tension between Togo and Ghana because Olympio's party declared itself committed to reopening the Ghana-Togo border question (Skinner, 2015). The CUT had denounced the process by which the future of British Togoland had been decided and argued that the disputed territory should be reunited with Togo (Skinner, 2015). Nkrumah opposed this idea, as Ghana's economy hinged on the generation of power from a hydroelectric dam on the river Volta; thus, the government could not afford to lose control of the territory (Skinner, 2015). Finally, Nkrumah accused Olympio of harbouring dangerous political exiles and assisting them in plotting against the Ghanaian government (Skinner, 2015). For instance, the Ghanaian government accused the Togolese government of conspiring in the assassination attempt of Nkrumah at Kulungugu in 1962 (Skinner, 2015). While Nkrumah's involvement in the coup cannot be completely ruled out, West Africans have not taken seriously the possibility of the president's involvement in the assassination of Olympio (Skinner, 2015). One of the primary reasons is that there is no logical connection between Nkrumah's agenda and the outcomes in Togo post-Olympio's death (Skinner, 2015). Moreover, even if Nkrumah had a motive to act against Olympio, there was no apparent reason for him to favor Grunitzky as a replacement (Skinner, 2015).. If there was any actor who wished to see Grunitzky restored to power in the events that followed in 1963, it was the French, not Nkrumah (Skinner, 2015). A more logical explanation is that the French disliked Olympio and favoured Grunitzky; consequently, when soldiers' dissatisfaction provided them with an opportunity to reorganize matters more in line with their interests, they seized it and benefited from it thereafter (Skinner, 2015). While Ghana's possible involvement cannot be entirely ruled out, it remains crucial to review the available evidence surrounding the

assassination to determine the most probable hypothesis.

The evidence

Although definitive proof of France's involvement in Olympio's assassination remains elusive, the accumulation of circumstantial evidence and striking coincidences raises compelling questions and points to possible French involvement.. One such coincidence is the timing of Olympio's murder. In this case, there are only two facts that stand with absolute certainty: first, the assault on the Togolese president's residence began at 11:00 pm on January 12; and second, Olympio was assassinated the next day at 7:15 am, right outside the gates of the US embassy, after being forcibly removed by Togolese soldiers (Boisbouvier, 2021). The timing of Olympio's death raises questions, as he was assassinated two days before he was scheduled to meet with the Bank of France to sign Togo's withdrawal from the Franc zone (Lome, 2019). Although the timing of the incident does not directly implicate France, it certainly raises doubts, since France stood to benefit from Togo remaining in the Franc zone.

Another piece of evidence linking France to the murder of Olympio is the numerous testimonies stating that the rebel soldiers were in contact with Mazoyer on the day of the coup. After breaking into the house, the assailant shot at Dina Olympio, his wife, and the servants to pressure them into revealing the president's location (Boisbouvier, 2021). However, Dina and the servants did not know Sylvanus Olympio's whereabouts, as he had just escaped through a window (Boisbouvier, 2021). According to their testimony, after failing to retrieve the president's location, the soldiers called Mazoyer to inform him that Olympio was not home (Skinner, 2015). This testimony corroborates the accounts provided by Ambassador Poullada's daughter, Sofia, who stated that Mazoyer contacted her father on the night of the assassination to inform him about the ongoing coup (Boisbouvier, 2021). Sofia also mentioned that Mazoyer had requested that Ambassador Poullada go to the embassy to search for the president (Boisbouvier, 2021). Sofia's testimony raises a valuable question: How did Mazoyer —not present at the location— learn about the ongoing coup, which he then informed Poullada about? The only two plausible explanations are that Mazoyer either had prior knowledge of the coup because he was involved in orchestrating it or that the soldiers contacted him on the day of. Regardless of whether he planned

the assassination or not, there is no doubt that he was aware of the situation before it completely unfolded, and thus could be considered an accessory before the fact.

One final important question to consider that seems to implicate not only France but the United States, is: Who told the assailants where Olympio was hiding, and why did the soldiers wait so long before entering the United States embassy? Earlier in this paper, it was mentioned that Gilchrist Olympio's testimony affirmed that Ambassador Poullada had communicated with Sylvanus Olympio at the embassy, advising him to remain hidden inside the vehicle while he retrieved the key to the building (Boisbouvier, 2021). According to Sofia, her father did not open the embassy building because he was worried that the soldiers waiting in front of the gates would ransack the premises (Boisbouvier, 2021). Poullada instead returned to his residence and informed his counterpart, Mazoyer, that Olympio was hiding inside the embassy (Boisbouvier, 2021).

At 11:30 pm, when the president took refuge in the American embassy, the soldiers refrained from entering the diplomatic compound (Boisbouvier, 2021). However, seven hours later, after the telephone exchange between Poullada and Mazoyer, the assailants did not hesitate to enter the embassy to forcibly remove the president and kill him (Boisbouvier, 2021). Once more, there are two plausible explanations for this scenario: either the soldiers entered the building out of impatience and disregard for consequences, or they were authorized to enter by a higher authority, potentially French actors, especially considering that the soldiers only entered after Poullada called Mazoyer to confirm that Olympio was on the premises. Although the latter explanation may sound more logical, the current evidence cannot prove that Mazoyer was the one calling the shots. Nonetheless, the evidence does suggest that France was involved in the coup that resulted in the death of Sylvanus Olympio.

Conclusion

In conclusion, after investigating the coup d'état in Togo, it becomes evident that France and the Togolese military were the most probable culprits behind the assassination of President Olympio. France's refusal to release official archives to Olympio's family, denying them the opportunity for closure, indicates that they may have information about the events that they are reluctant to disclose to the public. However, due

to plausible deniability, it is unlikely that conclusive evidence will ever surface, to prove France or other external actors' involvement in Olympio's death. Consequently, akin to numerous instances of political assassination in Africa, the perpetrators will never be held accountable for their actions. Sylvanus Olympio's assassination had a profound impact not only on Togo but also on the broader African continent. It set the stage for an authoritarian regime to take control of Togo, resulting in a period of political instability and repression. Moreover, his death served as a trigger for a wave of political assassinations across Africa, highlighting the fragility of newly independent states and the challenges they faced in establishing stable governments. Though his life was taken before his vision could be realized, Olympio's unwavering fight for Togo's true independence ensures he will be remembered not just as a fallen leader, but as a symbol of resistance and hope for the entire continent.

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The Blacker The Berry is a collage inspired by the phrase " The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice" by Wallace Thurman. This collage celebrates Black Pride and resilience.

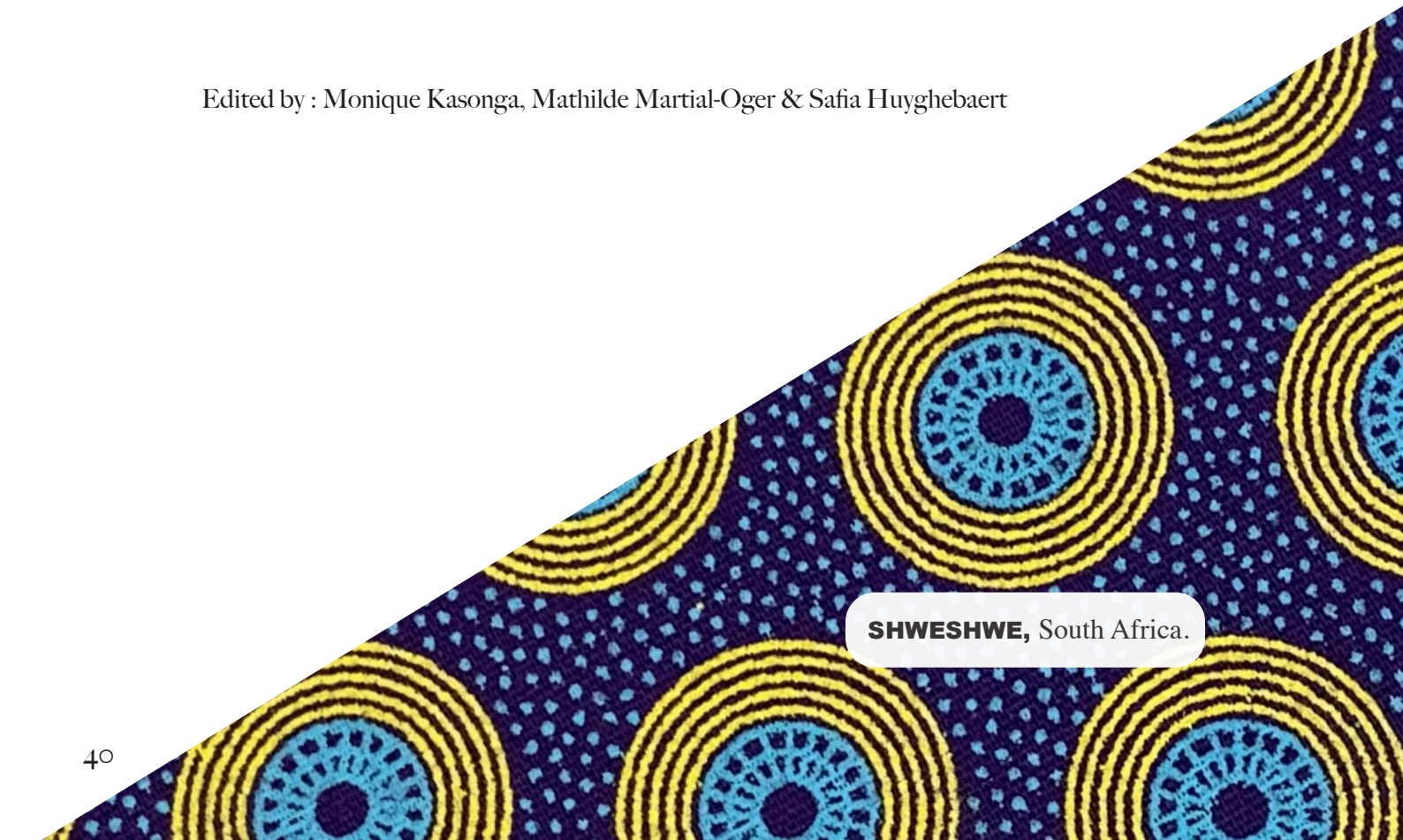
Daylen Conserve


"GET
JIM
Age 8
JOHN
Age 13

Disney, Orientalism, and African Pride: Becoming Conscious of African Identity

Lea Shime

Edited by : Monique Kasonga, Mathilde Martial-Oger & Safia Huyghebaert



SHWESHWE, South Africa.

"*In Africa, dinner theater is a lion gnawing on a gazelle carcass in front of a bus load of horrified tourists*" (Eells et al., 2014).

Years ago, my sisters and I were watching the Disney Channel's Jessie, a supposedly family-friendly comedy about a small-town Southern girl–the titular Jessie– who moves to New York City to work as a nanny for a wealthy family. In this episode, "There Goes the Bride," Jessie is about to get married to her long-term boyfriend–until he receives a job offer and decides to move to Africa (no specific country–simply "Africa.") Jessie, whose dream is to be a big-time Hollywood star, is forced to break up with him, because according to Disney, the only things in Africa are "ostrich burgers," "heat strokes," and "huge mosquitoes" (Eells et al., 2014). At this specific line my mother made us pause the show. "Africa's not like that," she said. "We have cities and highways. And there are over 50 countries in Africa. It's not just a big safari with lions and cheetahs." Until that moment, it had never previously occurred to me that my mother was African. I had always known of her African identity in a peripheral sense: I knew she had grown up in Sierra Leone; I knew my middle name, Maagenda, was in honour of my Sierra Leonean great-grandmother; I knew my skin–as pale as it was–was darker than that of my classmates, and my hair, as much as I straightened it, would curl and frizz in the humidity. I knew the taste of perfectly ripe mangoes, which I didn't realize was unusual until I went to my white friend's house and had to politely eat a mango, so green and sour, it was practically inedible. At the same time, I did not know what it meant to be African. My sisters and I were the only kids of African heritage in our elementary school, and possibly also in our very traditional, very upper-class, and very white neighborhood; as a result, we were, in some sense, denied our culture and our connection to our African and Mende roots.

Growing up in that environment, Africa was not seen as a continent but as a distant safari destination—an exotic place where my friends imagined "lots of cool animals," while their parents described it as "underdeveloped" and home to "millions

of starving children." The media I consumed in my childhood only validated the plot of Jessie: the UNICEF ads of skin-and-bone African children who have to walk miles to get clean water, the digital camera pictures of my friends in jeeps with safari hats pointing excitedly at elephants and hippos. I accepted these "facts" about Africa at face value simply because I was aware of no others. I only knew what I was told, and the media I consumed told me that Africa, and by extension, Africans, were to be pitied.

Bonsu (2009) writes of the media's portrayal of Africans as "primitive enough to merit exclusion from popular culture, except as objectified entertainment that reinforce[s] stereotypical African inferiority." Jessie, a show with a target demographic of American pre-teens, capitalizes on this pattern for shock value and cheap humour, blissfully unaware– or, perhaps, fully aware–of the impression of Africa being shaped in the developing minds of its audience. Jessie, however, is just one example of the media that informed my childhood understanding of Africa, or lack thereof. Western media willfully plays into the colonial narrative of the "savage" African, the "other." According to Luig and von Oppen (1997, pp. 23-31), Africa has historically been painted by its colonizers as "a landscape of extreme ugliness, of discomfort, loneliness, want, and poverty," whilst simultaneously being romanticized as a "wild… opaque, dark, and dangerous" land, populated by "fabulous men and beasts"–otherwise known as "dark Africa." It was my mother, turning off the television and declaring herself to be African, declaring Africa something to be proud of, that first made me question the idea of Africa I had internalized since birth. Africa was no longer so foreign and alien to me: Africa was present in my home. Africa was my mother. Africa was part of me.

After becoming cognizant of my own African identity, I began trying to reframe the very Eurocentric and disturbingly inaccurate perception of Africa fed to me since birth. I had never once questioned the way my peers and the media around me consistently and shamelessly generalize a continent that "constitutes a kaleidoscope of diversity" – a continent

comprised of 54 countries, thousands of ethnic groups and languages, and countless and varied cultures, traditions, and experiences (Schraeder, 2020, pp. 2-3). I had grown up complicit in that generalization. I never truly understood the country my mother came from—the land of my ancestors—until what seemed like a simple moment of watching TV with my family, followed by our conversation, pushed me to rethink everything I thought I knew.

The foundation of my knowledge about Africa comes from my mother. She proudly displayed Mende Sowei masks in our home, braided my hair into cornrows, and fried plantain on the stove. She made us jollof rice and told me stories about her childhood in Sierra Leone—stories that I eventually came to understand in a new way. My mother told us about her heritage with pride. She recalled her father, who had endless degrees and had traveled across the world, speaking flawless English, Mende, and Krio. She told me about her step-grandfather, Siaka Stevens, the President of Sierra Leone, and how he would let her sit on his lap as he rode in his limousine through the streets of Freetown. At the same time, she spoke of the lasting trauma and violence in Sierra Leone, from colonization to the civil war it fueled—how Charles Taylor's Revolutionary United Front burned down my grandfather's house and how he had to push his elderly mother in a wheelbarrow from our rural hometown of Njala to safety in Bo.

My mother humanized Africa for me. She contrasted what I had learned from the media–a fantastical, one-dimensional mirage–with the truth of what Africa was, at least to her: the beauty of Beach No.2, the bustling markets of Freetown, the brilliant, highly-educated Africans working in politics and diplomacy who had raised her, alongside the blood and brutality of the Sierra Leonean Civil War, the lack of adequate healthcare facilities and educational institutions, and the struggling economy widely exploited by international superpowers.

My knowledge of Africa is still limited in many ways. It revolves mainly around the country of my ancestors, Sierra Leone, and the few Krio words and Mende traditions my mother still

remembers decades after immigrating to Canada. Thus, my notion of Africa and African identity is intrinsically personal and pertinent to my own experience; I imagine scholars, or even other Africans would have very different perceptions of African history, society, peoplehood, and of Africa itself.

As restricted as my knowledge of Africa is, I have been conscious of my African heritage since that highly-condescending sitcom comment when I was 10 or 11. I take pride in my African heritage.A gold pendant, in the shape of the continent – with my middle name engraved on it – always sits around my neck. At the same time, I am conscious of my removal from Africa, the fact that, as open as I may be to learning, my perception of Africa was molded in my formative years by the deeply Orientalist media and discourse that surrounds the majority of those who grow up within North America, and who lack meaningful exposure to the true wealth, diversity, and beauty of Africa.

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Walk in the Usambara Mountains in Lushuto, Tanzania. Beautiful backyards with small scale farms and gardens.

Evelyn Rogan

UHURU JOURNAL

Reconceptualizing African Epistemological Relationship with More-than-Human Natures: Exploring Diasporic Unity.

Alexia Santoro

Edited by: Miah Sears & Kadiata Kaba

Kuba textiles, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

D'Avignon argues that the history of mining capitalism has often studied African miners solely as laborers, ignoring their role as intellectual actors (D'Avignon 3). This reflects a broader colonial tendency to commodify and dehumanize both African bodies and the resources they engaged with, severing plants and minerals from the knowledge systems of their cultivators and miners. This alienation obscures the rich epistemological relationships Africans maintained with more-than-human entities grounded in intellectual traditions distinct from colonial exploitation. This understanding becomes particularly evident when viewed through the trans-Atlantic slave trade, in which Africans adapted their embodied epistemologies to reassemble and innovate their relationships with plants and minerals in lowland South America.

Bright Gyamfi's analysis of intellectual activists Afesi, Nketsia, and Dzidzienyo underscores their efforts to position Africa as central to African-American political education and mobilization, moving beyond notions of Africa as mere heritage or inspiration (Gyamfi 684). They emphasized shared struggles, showing African liberation as intertwined with African-American activism. Building on this diasporic unity, I argue that African epistemologies of more-than-human natures can be reimagined through the lens of African experiences in the lowlands of South America. More-than-human natures-emerge as vital mediums connecting these regions, functioning as a lens for expressing the African worldview while directly rejecting colonial and capitalist systems of commodification and control. More so, this study redefines intellectuality beyond traditional settings, emphasizing how such knowledge fosters resilience and emancipation. By engaging deeply with their environments, enslaved Africans in Latin America developed distinct political imaginations that not only enabled survival but inspired visions of liberation within oppressive colonial systems—insights that also illuminate West African experiences.

This essay weaves together D'Avignon and Osseo-Asare's chapters with Leal's account of African enslaved peoples in what is now known as Colombia's Chocó region. Ana Luisa's oral history of her experiences as an African descendant in Chocó provides a contemporary perspective on these historical narratives. Additionally, the theoretical frameworks of Offen and Voeks further illuminate African epistemologies of more-than-human nature in the "New World".

Rooted in Relation: More-Than-Human Natures in African Communal Life

D'Avignon draws a compelling connection to Osseo-Asare's work, highlighting how both healing plants and knowledge of gold arise from collective and collaborative efforts (D'Avignon 15). Indeed, the transmission of knowledge is deeply rooted in African oral traditions. Illustrating this, Osseo-Asare notes how therapies were inherited within families and shared through commercial interactions and friendly conversations (Osseo-Asare 90). Similarly, Maninka people transmitted gold prospecting techniques to their children by embedding them in narratives tied to the landscape and family genealogies (D'Avignon 11). These bits of knowledge not only exist in collective and communal contexts, but also become embedded in the individual. As individuals move, their knowledge travels with them. Exemplary to this are the ships of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which carried epistemologies embodied in young women and men who still remembered the uses of the plant (Osseo-Asare 83). It is through this embodied knowledge that Africans were able to adapt anew to the cultural, natural, and political landscapes of low-land South America. Indeed, the embeddedness of knowledge is central to understanding its mobility too. However, both D'Avignon and Osseo-Asare illustrate how knowledge moves not only geographically but also evolves through the inclusion of new actors in its space. For instance, Mandem or Mande people are recognized for disseminating technological innovations during their migration (D'Avignon 49). The role of nature is fundamental in this exchange: landscapes familiar to migrants, such as the Birimian rocks, acted as touchstones for transferring mining knowledge to regions like Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. These landscapes fostered a sense of connection, offering spaces that felt familiar and supportive, allowing established practices to thrive in new settings. Migration dynamics further underscore how knowledge of nature serves as a key element in fostering exchange and integration. As Osseo-Asare notes, sharing seeds and cultivation techniques was a means of building community in unfamiliar landscapes (Osseo-Asare 70).

Admittedly, knowledge of plants, gold, and more-than-human natures plays a crucial role in shaping communal identities, practices, and connections. Osseo-Asare highlights how knowledge production on grains of paradise, although widespread, varies across regions and social

groups (Osseo-Asare 96), reflecting African innovation and experimentation. Communities adapted inherited recipes to create localized formulas that were centered around their community needs and practices. Subsequently, Leal asserts how environments actively contribute to the types of societies they build. In Nueva Granada's Pacific Coast, the influx of enslaved Africans, alongside the decimation of Indigenous populations, led to the formation of predominantly Black communities, as white masters' presence was weak. This was due both because they physically couldn't endure the harsh environment, and because they could not establish their haciendas in these terrains (Leal 55). Therefore, African experience and knowledge of similar terrains helped them build a society in which they were exclusively surrounded by their kin. On the other hand, despite what Leal notes, Amerindian and Black communities coexisted in the Colombian Choco (Voeks 286), which resulted in the transfer of ethnomedical techniques. These collaborations were an integral part of the building of solidarity networks that challenged colonial oppression. This is further illustrated in how Amerindian and African women, despite facing different cultural and language backgrounds, shared their knowledge on abortifacients to overcome common hardships (Voeks 284). These healing traditions earned respect and became central to the social and cultural life of these communities. In contemporary Choco, this collaboration and coexistence foster a sense of pride. Ana Luisa proudly states how here in Choco "we recognize ourselves as Afro-descendants, and to this day, ninety-five percent of the people in Choco are Afro-Indigenous"(Ramírez Flórez 3:15-25). This identity further extends to the more-than-human natures. She notes: "We are riverain people, the towns and villages that are built are located next to the river, and more often than not, the towns take the name of the rivers they are located next to. "We belong to a river, more than a town" (Ramírez Flórez 2:50-3:06). Hence, the role of nature is conceptualized as central to their communal identity. On another note, D'Avignon emphasizes the "hospitality" of the mines, where gold was accessible to anyone willing to mine, and where "strangers are welcome" (D'Avignon 49), during times of hardship. This communal ethos extended beyond social interaction, influencing the formation of mining camps that integrated with local villages. The boundary between the camp and the village is fluid. Women come to wash laundry for a wage and return home to nurse children, and exploration teams work to

insert themselves into the social fabric of the villages surrounding their camp (D'Avignon 35). However, as capitalist firms took over, they introduced rigid politics and divisions, disrupting the fluid, communal relationships fostered by more-than-human interactions. Finally, drawing on Catherine Bell's understanding of ritual, D'Avignon suggests that mining practices are not merely economic or technical but culturally and symbolically rich (D'Avignon 11). Rituals in the goldfields involve organized expressions, gestures, and codes of communication that tie activities to cultural practices, human interactions, and shared sacred symbolism. In this context, "digging for gold" was not just an interaction with humans and material nature but with the "unseen world."

The links to the divine and subaltern ways of relating to the natural material are embedded in African epistemological relationships with more-than-human natures. Offen notes that Afro-Latin American ideas of "Neotropical" nature were guided by religious beliefs and cosmologies, suggesting a worldview where earthly events were closely tied to the divine (Offen 499). For Africans, this connection involved a hierarchy of deities, ancestors, territorial and lesser entities who influenced life on Earth, offering explanations, predictions, and control over worldly events. These natural elements were central to broader religious ceremonies. For instance, in Northeast Brazil, grains of paradise were used in animist religious practices; during Candomblé ceremonies, priests and priestesses would sprinkle powdered grains of paradise, pimenta da costa, during their intercessions with spirits (Osseo-Asare 84). More so, each of the Yoruba deities that survived in Candomblé temples was associated with a specific natural and cultural environment, and knowledge of this god–leaf correspondence was critical to solving health difficulties in this community (Voeks 288). Additionally, Igbo communities also used grains of paradise in healing rituals, chewed with kola nuts, and spat onto the ground around statues of gods and ancestors (Osse-Asare 90). These examples demonstrate how more-than-human natures serve as integral actors in the relationships between Africans, African descendants, and their respective divinities. Furthermore, as seen in D'Avignon's account, these spirits are seen as the "real autochthones of the land" (D'Avignon 77). Since the medieval period, there is evidence that orpaillage has been based on a sacrificial exchange between miners and territorial spirits, regarded as guardians

of gold (D'Avignon 17). Engaging in orpaillage not only requires knowledge application, but one must also engage with the desires of the subaltern spirit (D'Avignon 39). Hence, mining gold is embedded in an exchange relationship fostered with these spirits.

Gold, contrary to the Arab or Western fascination with it, was seen as "malignant". The establishment of meaningful cultural relationships with their environments deeply influences various aspects of African life. In examining African relationships to more-than-human natures, we see that it is not merely the retention of knowledge but an ongoing, epistemological relationship that sustains and shapes these connections. This relationship lies in sharp contrast to the Western colonial and neo-colonial exploitation of these natural materials. The upcoming section of my essay seeks to examine this contrast. Osseo-Asare notes how, although with little historical attention, the search for new drugs was a central component of colonial expansion in Africa during the late nineteenth century (Osseo-Asare 109). This same dynamic persists in contemporary West Africa, where, as D'Avignon emphasizes, control over knowledge, particularly mineral exploration, structures the relationships between villages and corporate capital (D'Avignon 39). By examining how more-than-human natures are not simply subjects of commodification in the African worldview, this section will highlight how these elements serve as mediums for emancipation, actively rejecting both external control over nature and the people themselves.

The Emancipatory Potential of More-Than-Human Relations

A central theme in D'Avignon's book is how corporate enclosures threaten West Africa's Indigenous mining tradition, two ways of mining that intricately oppose themselves. He notes how the critique of mining capitalist dynamics is rooted in their symbolism of gold (D'Avignon 69), which in West African cultures is viewed as an occult substance associated with malevolent spirits, raising questions on the moral implications of gold-derived wealth (D'Avignon 24). This view lies in stark contrast to its European symbolism tied to greed and luxury. Comparing these two perspectives reveals how more-than-human natures are not simply seen as resources but as integral elements for interpreting the world. D'Avignon emphasizes that gold in West Africa was not monopolized but was part of a decentralized system. It was incorporated into the aesthetics and

cosmologies of diverse West African societies (D'Avignon 13), becoming more than just a tangible resource—it was a key element in their worldview. Conversely, in Europe, aromatic sources were valued as commodities and aphrodisiacs (Osseo Asare 80), emphasizing their tangible and profitable aspects. Ana Luisa explains how the river is not only a transport method but also the heart of her community's life: "Women go there to wash clothes and kitchen utensils, that is where they converse, they give and receive advice, and sing. Children there play, and men fish" (Ramírez Flórez 3:45-54). This is contrasted to when she explains how, "since the sixteenth century, Spanish colonizers and missionaries, English pirates, and European merchants have employed the paths of the Atrato River. What compelled them to come was the gold, platinum, animal fur, wood, and other natural resources from here to produce riches in other parts" (Ramírez Flórez 5:04-37). The contrasting ways in which these natural elements are cultivated further highlight the differences between African and capitalist approaches to the environment. While capitalist extractive economies tend to be intensive and exploitative, West African practices are marked by patience and respect. For instance, farmers in the region cultivate land for several years, but leave it fallow for extended periods, allowing it to regenerate its fertility (D'Avignon 11). D'Avignon also describes the "ritual life of luck" involved in washing rocks during mining (D'Avignon 44). This key aspect of gold extraction proves that one relies on patience, almost giving gold a "free" characteristic, rather than a controlled one. Within these capitalist frameworks, the use and control of natural resources also reveal broader racial and socio-political dynamics. Leal's account portrays how colonial agents were solely interested in the profits that could be gained from gold. Enslaved people were discouraged from cultivating crops because it was seen as unprofitable. The gold removed from the subsoil enriched slave owners who managed their wealth from the Andean region, investing their profits into further exploitation. Mines, on their own, were of little value; it was the labor of enslaved Black people that made them profitable, thereby securing the elites' economic and social positions (Leal 37). D'Avignon further highlights the racialized dynamics within these extractive economies, noting how the camps in Sabodala were stratified by racial and national groups. Senior management was primarily composed of itinerant white workers, illustrating the entrenched racial hierarchies. Historically, mining was

also shaped by socio-political dynamics: elite and Muslims opted out of mining, while it was predominantly 'the poor', practitioners of African religions and formerly enslaved who dominated orpaillage (D'Avignon 11). These dynamics are echoed in Osseo-Asare's account, where the Cameroonian government sought to promote scientific collaboration between traditional healers and conventional medical scientists to develop standardized and quality-controlled medicines from local plants. However, despite the economic potential of this collaboration, the healers—the "holders" of the knowledge—were excluded from receiving the benefits of these efforts (Osseo-Asare 93).

Colonial and neo-colonial forces have disrupted the epistemological relationship between Africans and more-than-human natures. Through colonial policies, or as Osseo-Asare describes them, "paternalistic laws," these colonial authorities sought to legitimize, appropriate, and control these bits of knowledge (Osseo-Asare 129). The introduction of corporate gold mines, foreign to the region, ruptured the "hospitable" and ubiquitous nature of gold in West Africa. D'Avignon highlights how competing historical claims to gold discovery sparked expectations in rural communities about the returns they and their children should receive from these mines (D'Avignon 24). Similarly, Osseo-Asare observes how the longstanding use of local plants in weaponry and healing was disrupted by colonial occupation (Osseo-Asare 27). Strophanthus, used in these poisonous weapons, was outlawed (Osseo-Asare 115), and therefore the very people who might have built on existing knowledge to accurately identify Strophanthus were banned from using it (Osseo-Asare 123). As Europeans violently occupied Africa, European scientists also transferred epistemological authority to the colonial state. Furthermore, in low-land South America, Africans practicing their traditional medical knowledge were described by Bahia's colonial governor in the nineteenth century as "impostors, criminals, using false medicine, uttering fanatical prayers and blessings; they used to rejoice, to eat and indulge themselves, violating all rights, laws, orders, and the public peace" (Offen 483). On another note, linguistics also arises as a tool for colonial epistemological control and legitimation. Ossseo-Asare highlights: "lines of ownership and rights to both plants and related traditional medicines continues to represent a political dilemma that often sacrifices those with less access to the language of the laboratory" (Osseo-Asare 110). D'Avignon il-

lustrates this point by noting that the category of the "artisanal miner" was created through colonial-era laws regulating "customary mining," a racialized legal framework applied exclusively to the extractive activities of African subjects (D'Avignon 7). Colonial law is surpassed not by its complete disappearance but through its transformation and adaptation within contemporary systems of governance that blend Indigenous, corporate, and state authority. The dynamics of Tinkoto, as illustrated by D'Avignon, reveal a legal and social order where colonial frameworks are both present and circumvented. The guest recliner of Bambo Cissokho serves as a space where licit and illicit economies, artisanal and industrial extraction, and communal and corporate interests blur together, defying rigid legal categories established under colonial rule (D'Avignon 46). This fluidity reflects a form of legal pluralism that transcends the boundaries of colonial epistemology.

On a final note, Osseo-Asare highlights how outlawing poisonous arrows also served the interests of colonial officers and local chiefs who sought to suppress resistance (Osseo-Asare 116). This raises the question of how we can reinterpret the role of these more-than-human natures. Rather than simply viewing them as materials that demanded African labor for colonial, capitalist exploitation, these natural elements can be seen as mediums through which Africans in lowland South America found paths to revolt and emancipate themselves. Offen underscores how this epistemological relationship provoked fear among Anglo-American colonies, who saw it as a potential challenge to colonial power. These anxieties fueled the development of systemic and virulent racist policies aimed at suppressing and controlling Afrodescendant populations and their practice, use, and knowledge of these plants (Offen 497). Similarly, members of the Inquisition interpreted Brujería, which relied heavily on natural materials, as more than mere superstition, seeing it as "el cimarronaje simbólico" (symbolic flight–a unique form of resistance to slavery (Offen 500). Slave traders and planters lived in constant anxiety regarding Africans and their diaspora's expertise with poisonous plants. For people with negligible power over their own lives, magic, centered in their knowledge of more-than-human natures, represented one of the fiercest tools of resistance. This theme is also evident in D'Avignon's exploration of the goldfields, as he notes that resistance to Islam was considered grounds for enslavement (D'Avignon 67). The goldfields

became places where Africans could practice their ancestral religious traditions, offering a natural refuge from both slave raiders and Muslim states. (D'Avignon 51). Leal notes that the existence of gold in the Pacific lowlands, which led to slavery in the first place, opened the possibility for slaves to buy their own freedom (Leal 55). Enslaved people had one free day in which they could mine for themselves and save up enough to buy themselves freedom. (Leal 52). Hence, from 1720 through 1800, freedom was paid for rather than granted (Leal 51). For example, one enslaved man, Santa Gertrudis, mined enough gold to purchase freedom for his entire family, choosing to free himself last (Leal 53). Gold, in its paradoxical alchemy, was both the reason for their enslavement and the means by which they attained freedom, transforming from a tool of exploitation into a vessel of liberation, turning the very substance that shackled them into the key to their autonomy. From there on out, free communities of African descendants in the region began to sprout. Ana Luisa states how in the mid-nineteenth century her ancestors recollected natural resources to sustain themselves through trade, but they were also used to build houses and for medical purposes. They became reliant on their knowledge of the jungle, and indeed Ana Luisa powerfully states how the jungle gave them this autonomy. "In my childhood, I lived the freedom that the jungle gifted to us, and there were no whites and mestizos that came to compete with us" (Ramírez Flórez 14:49).

To conclude, through this study, I propose to redefine the conceptual map of African and African-descended knowledge flows, moving away from unidirectional heritage models to a more interactive and reciprocal historical framework that values the contributions of Afro-Latin America to global and African contexts. Through this lens, we see that African knowledge and the application of knowledge on more-than-human natures can be rather reconceptualized as an "epistemological relationship". It foregrounds how embodied and experiential forms of knowledge shape collective identities, solidarity, ecological relations, and even resistance and emancipation. This intellectual understanding extends beyond textual and institutional confines, challenging dominant narratives that often marginalize these forms of knowing. This approach advocates for an expanded understanding of intellectual activity that bridges the natural and the cultural, the human and the non-human. However, as Offen notes, this contribution is not limited

to Afro-Latin American experiences with nature in the hemisphere but also to broader intellectual currents in the Atlantic world (Offen 498), some of which are worth exploring through this lens.

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Jade Laurent--Le Bras

Cityscape of Nairobi Kenya

School Children in Narok County Kenya

Rebeca Guevara's Photo Selection

From

McGill's East-Africa Field Study Semester

(AFSS, 2024)

A selection of images taken on film showcasing different livelihoods, portraits, landscapes and wildlife of East Africa - more specifically in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.

Fisherman of lake Naivasha Kenya

Mdagota Blacksmith and His Craft in Lake Eyasi Tanzania

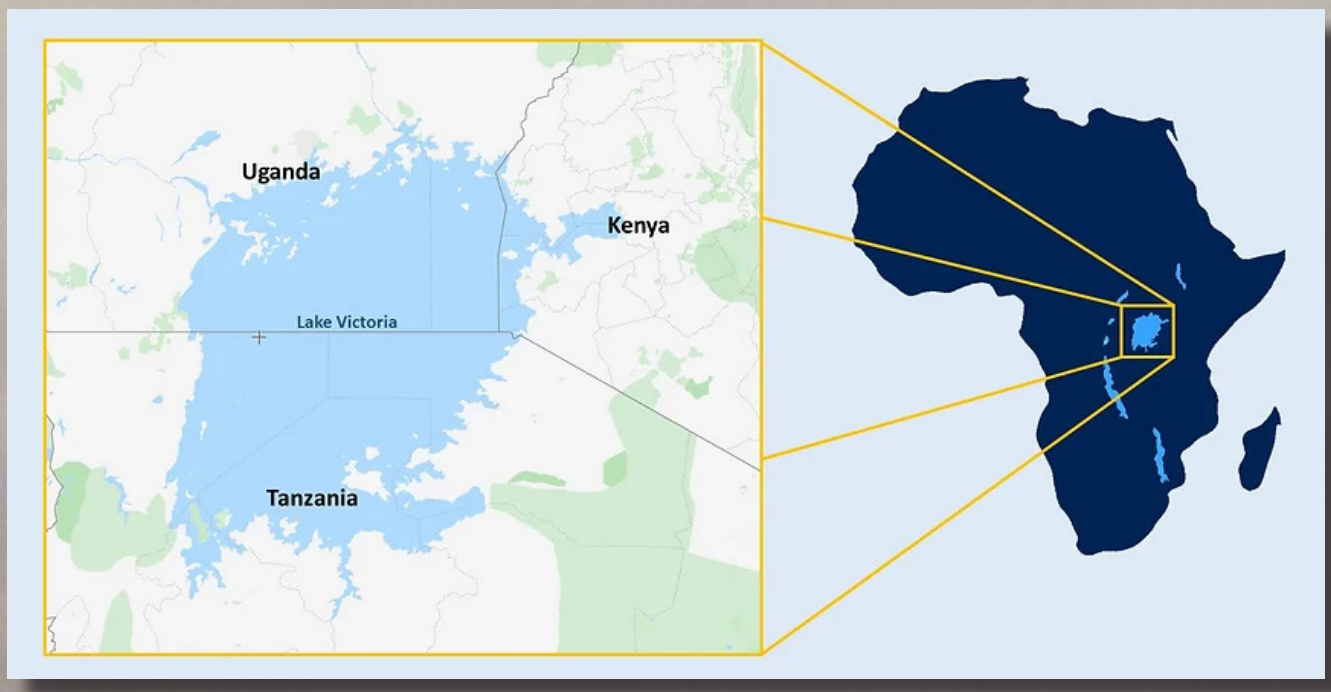
Basket maker of Lake Nabugabo, Uganda

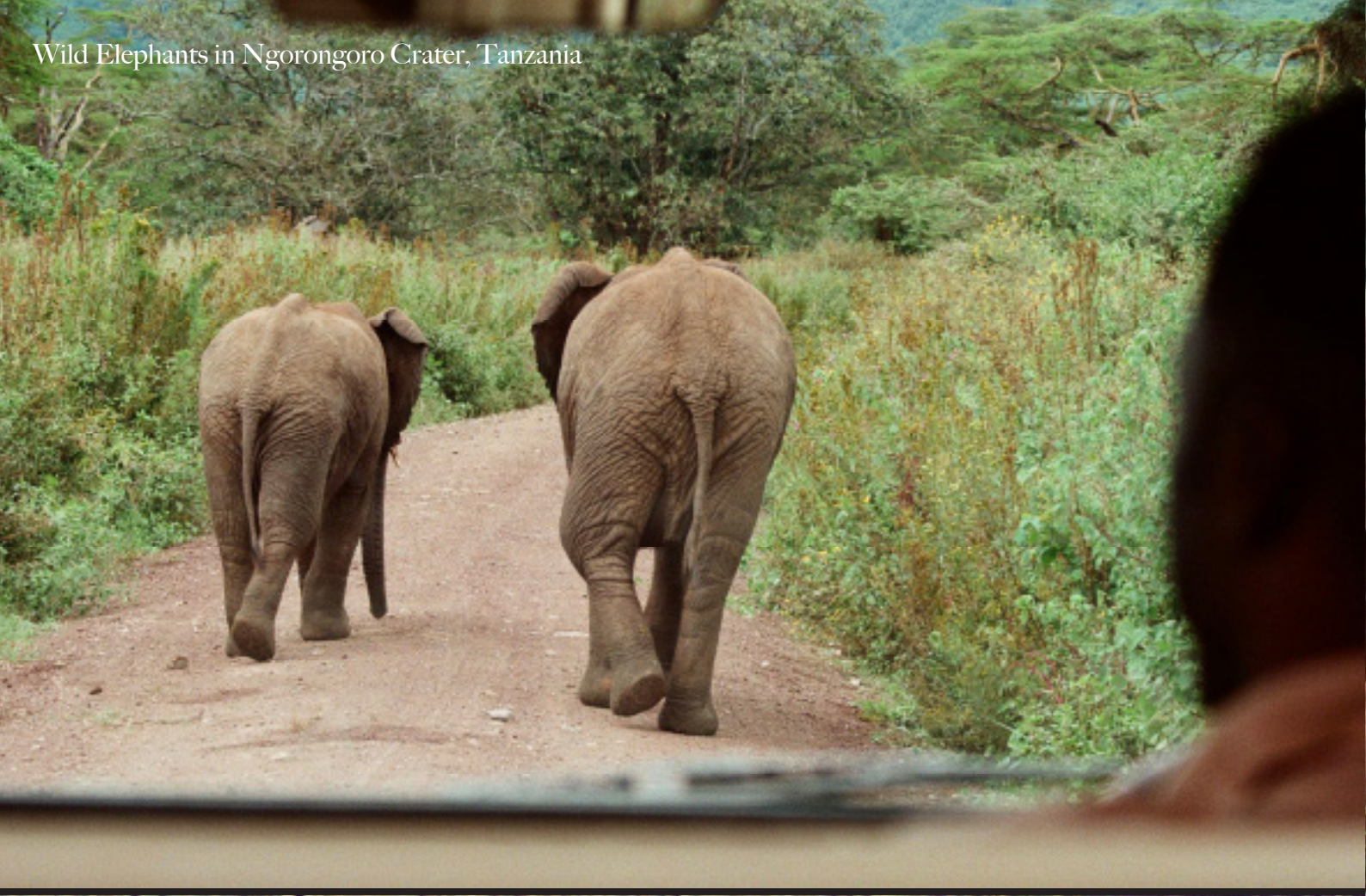
Boy playing drums, Lake Nabugabo, Uganda

Wahadzabe Bushmen making fire in Lake, Eyasi Tanzania

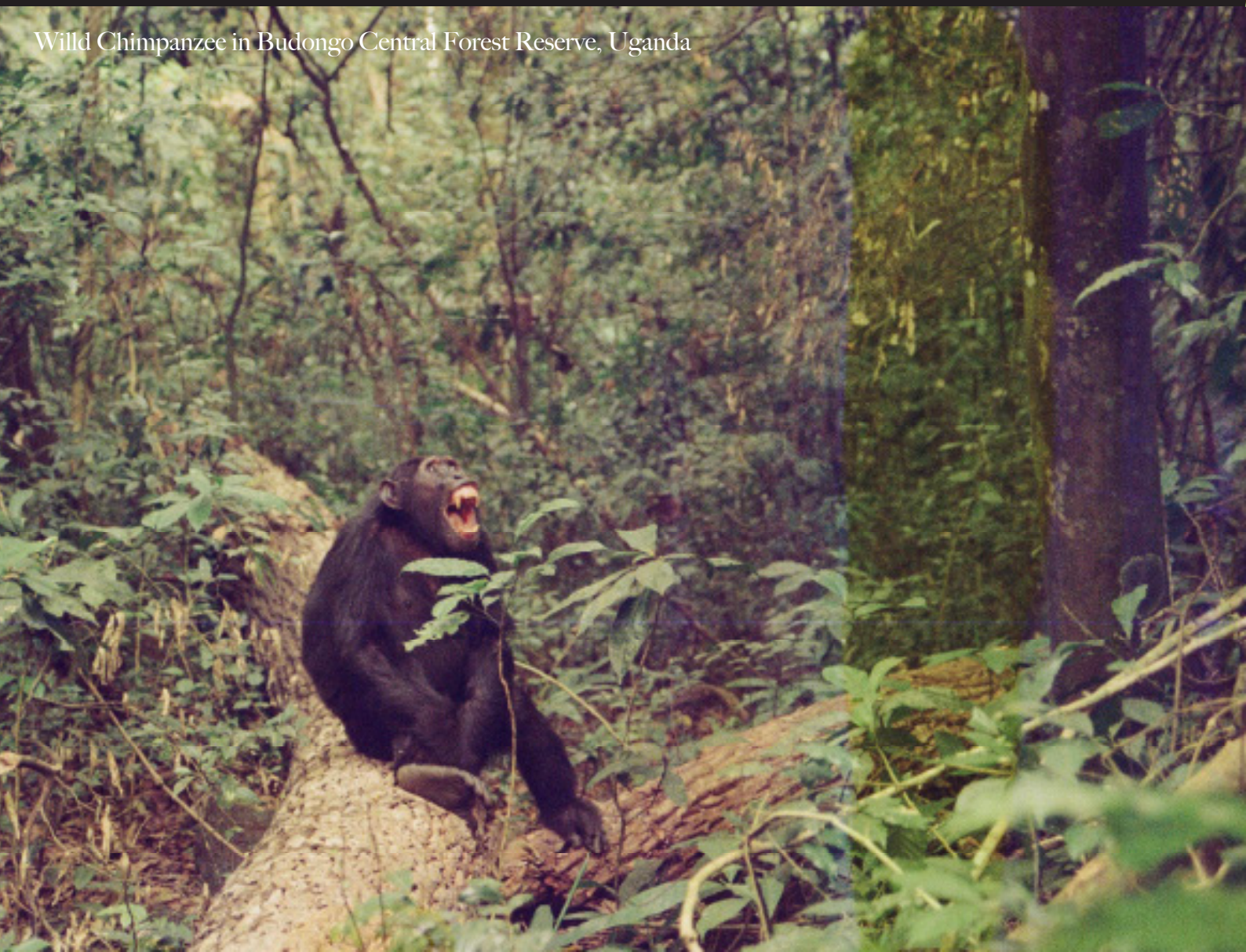
Lake

VICTORIA





Wild Elephants in Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania



Willd Chimpanzee in Budongo Central Forest Reserve, Uganda

Wild lionesses with wildeebest prey in Serengeti National Park, Tanzania

UHURU JOURNAL

Relaiming Africa: Art as a Tool for Decolonization

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Introduction

In recent years, scholars have increasingly looked at the damages done to African art in a colonial context. The historian Victor Onibere contextualized that the Scramble for Africa "distorted the perception of African cultures and identities, impacting both traditional and broader African artistic expressions", and "challenged traditional African artists' artistic autonomy" (Onibere 88). African artists have experienced incredible limitations to work within their own cultural frame, which led to a movement that started to use art as a tool for decolonization. The place of visual representations in the continued effort to decolonize spaces in Africa is of essence for it addresses decolonization frameworks that can be overlooked but are nonetheless effective. The term Decolonization is used to refer to "the process of addressing and dismantling that history and its effect in the present and future" (Becker 4). It is also a response to the dilemma of what can be done by artists in Africa or the diaspora to contribute to the effort through innovative approaches. By arguing that art can be an effective means to continue the long process of decolonizing Africa, this paper examines three ways in which art can be an effective tool against colonization; its ability to change narratives, art as a method of advocacy and using Afrofuturism in the artistic sphere.

Changing Narratives

Historical Perspectives of Visual Art

Following many years of Eurocentric framing that categorized the African art scene as primitive, artists have increasingly worked to reclaim their authority. Victor Onibere explains that materials have played an important role in the evolution of African art. Historically, the imposition of European mediums influenced the traditional forms to create new expressions "that reflected the dynamic interplay between traditional African aesthetics and external influences" (Onibere 88). To reclaim their authority in the contemporary African art scene, and dispel the myth of practicing "neo-primitive art," different art forms are increasingly being used to create stories that reflect the diversity and complexity of modern Africa, eg. painting, sculpture, photography, and digital media. These interpretations

have affected contemporary African art and play a role in the full significance and complexity of the chosen materials and subjects who work to change such discourses of primitivity. It highlights how African artists today work to break down various myths and stereotypical narratives using different mediums.

The Power of Recycling

One of the recurrent ways in which African artists have used their creations as tools against colonization is by recycling materials to represent rebirth. It delves into the idea of the cycle of life that is theoretically joined with a rebirth. Ibrahim Mahama, a Ghanaian artist born in 1987 and Goncalo Mabunda, an artist from Mozambique born in 1975, are both recognized for their work with recycled materials. Mahama used coal sacks, old clothing fabric, fishing nets and much more to create beautiful pieces. His work is also characterized by connections to indigenous art forms, "which is another level of viewing the objects as a rebirth" (Baskett 39). On the other hand, Mabunda uses wax-print fabric that was produced and sent by the Dutch when the Netherlands and West Africa had colonial relations (Basket 39). The reason for Mabunda's use of wax print fabric is not specified but can be interpreted in many ways, it could be a reminder of a dark past or a claim that they can use western materials to express their own cultural stories. It leaves the interpretation up to the viewer and allows them to find their own meaning and create a narrative that corresponds with their personal background. Additionally, Mabunda is known for the inclusion of thrones in his work. Western collectors have desired to possess African thrones for many years because they saw it as "coveted fine art". However, the significance of thrones for Africans is different as it represents a worshiped part of the regalia and kingship. His thrones themselves are what represents his indigenous origins, and his rebirth of the concept serves to reclaim these origins (Basket 39). By doing so, Mabunda directly confronts the loss of cultural meaning and attempts to regain authority over colonial stories. Through the work of Ibrahim Mahama and Goncalo Mabunda, it can be seen that some African artists use their art to recycle materials, symbols and narratives in order to create something that is new and their own.

Art as Advocacy

The Intersection of Art and Advocacy

Even in other contexts than in Africa, Art has always been known as a powerful vessel for messages of advocacy. Artists are able to use emotive power to highlight injustices and create an empathetic and solidarity movement (Iqbal 27). In South Africa, artists were crucial in the movement of resistance against oppression during the Apartheid. Dr. Farah Iqbal reminds us that in an effort of cultural boycott, international artists stopped performing in the country and national artists like playwright Athol Fugard and musician Miriam Makeba. Both have shed light on the injustices of apartheid, hoping to stimulate resistance (28).

Through his playwriting, Athol Fugard used visual imagery and narratives that put the audience face-to-face with a reality of injustice, whereas Miriam Makeba offered a musical experience that cut across cultural, linguistic and geographical groups to convey the inequitable reality (Iqbal 2023). Moreover, art can effectively mobilize communities and create collective efforts. Artistic experiences such as plays, large scale festivals and exhibitions bring people together and allow new connections and dialogues towards social change and the reappropriation of Africa. Since individuals are often welcome to bring their own perspective to creative expression, it was empowering for people to feel that they are part of a bigger movement (Iqbal 2023). Therefore art was a common but popular method of advocacy against colonialism, one historically proven to have made a difference in Africa.

Notable African Artists and their Impact on Activism

There has been a growing global movement by African artists who doubled as activists to call for the repatriation of the Benin Bronzes to Nigeria. The Benin Bronzes is a term employed to refer to the thousands of works of art stolen by the British army when they invaded Benin city in 1897. They were mainly pieces made from brass, wood, ivory, leather and bone that different museums in the Global North acquired during the 20th century (Britannica 2024). The call to return African artworks to their places of origins can be dis-

cussed at great lengths, but the aspect that is relevant to this paper is the role that notable artists have played to shed light on the importance of the situation and movement. They have used their platform of creativity to advocate for decolonisation and cultural repatriation, which contributed to the creation of discussions on ethics and the need to address the legacy of colonization on African art. Along with activists and scholars, artists have been at the "forefront of this movement, challenging the status quo and advocating for the rightful return of the Benin Bronzes to Nigeria, where they can once again be a source of pride and cultural heritage" (Onibrere 94). A notable actor in the movement is the film maker from Ghana, Nii Kwater Owoo. He directed and filmed a short documentary with a global reach named You Hide Me in 1971, which was the story of a Black couple who ventured in the basement of the British Museum and found looted African artifacts highlighting the irony of Western museums possessing marauded African artworks. Artists have thus continued to use their creative expressions to mobilize their audience towards challenging the impacts of colonization and reclamation of what was lost to it.

Yinka Shonibare is a prominent artist of Nigerian heritage known for his provocative pieces around themes such as identity, power relations and colonialism. Shonibare used Dutch wax-printed fabric to create his most famous piece Scramble in Africa (2003) – headless mannequins dressed in bright Victorian style clothing (Britannica). Presumably dead bodies of slaves in Victorian clothing personifies the colonial era and its power dynamics of imitation, forceful assimilation and cultural loss. Similarly, Isheanesu Dondo, a Zimbabwean artist did a renowned series of ink and acrylic paintings representing the complex history of colonialism in Zimbabwe through Harare's freemasonry architecture. To encourage action and reflection from the public he superimposed shapes and lines found in these buildings with characteristics of traditional Bantu architecture (Wong 2024). These artists all challenged their audience and tried to initiate change as part of a broader movement.

Afrofuturism

What is Afrofuturism in the Arts

In 1994, Mark Dery introduced the term "Afrofuturism" to situate the relationship of black people with science fiction and technology in the future. Since then, the meaning of the term expanded and many scholars offered different modifications that overall centered Africa as a "foundational site for futuristic interventions that impact political and social powers" (Acuff 14). Afrofuturism has served to show that communities that have been subject to attempts of erasure in their past can still imagine possibilities for their future. The goal is to disrupt the present in order to generate a reconceptualization of the future (Acuff 14). Various artists who partake in literacy, musical and visual work have been centering the reality of the African diaspora in the future by imagining roles that were unattainable to them in the past (Acuff 14).

The painter Jean-Michel Basquiat has greatly contributed to the Afrofuturism movement, his most explicit expression was his piece Molasses, 1983. Joni Boyd Acuff citing Cui and Wiswell's commented:
Michel Basquiat's work, "Molasses," features a derelict-looking robot resigned at the foot of a uniformed human figure driving a vehicle with bars, a jail on wheels. "Molasses" is a likely reference to the slave trade, which produced sugar (and molasses as a marketable byproduct). Slaves, considered property rather than human beings, are made analogous to the robot, suffering at the hands of an authoritative "higher" being. In this way, Basquiat reinvents events of the past through a lens from the future, exemplifying a core tenet of Afrofuturism (14).

Basquiat's work shows an example of how Afrofuturistic painters have attempted to reclaim their history to increase their autonomy for their future.

Other scholars have identified the movement as a way to reject the static and holistic perception of the past, and through that, the narrowly defined place given to distant African history by colonial narratives (Becker 3). In that way, Afrofuturism allows African people to decide what they want to highlight in their own history. Overall, the work of Artists who fall under the ambit of Afrofuturism show a movement that seeks to put the future of Africa in the hands of Africans as a way to reject

past colonial discourses.

Decolonization in Fashion through Afrofuturism

Another artistic sphere of influence in this movement is fashion. Walé Oyéjidé, one of the two designers of the menswear label Ikiré Jones explained that they purposefully mixed elements of the past and of the future in their designs. Unlike imposing European elements, they combine African aesthetics with Neapolitan tailoring to create "a new perspective through an old lens; a new dialect for an old tongue" (Eismann 69). This concept works to rethink the perception of bourgeoisie, since dandies are always associated with white bohemian males. He hearkens back to the history of black dandyism that surged centuries ago through the initial contract of the slave trade between Africans and Europeans. Black Dandy styles were erased from popular history because of their disruption of social order and cultural superiority (Eismann 70). Ikiré Jones therefore conceptualizes a future that incorporates African aesthetics at the forefront of the fashion sphere.

Critique

An important critique on the movement was brought up by Paul Gilroy who wrote the famous book The Black Atlantic in 19993: "There are things that must be said about Africa as a place where there are neo-imperialist or neo-colonialist conflicts. [...] I find the idea of Afrofuturism intriguing, but Africa has got to play a bigger role in this scenario" (Eismann 2019) He highlights that the continent should hold a bigger role in the movement as a tangible place rather than as a concept. Although, as seen in the label Ikiré Jones, the use of Afrofuturism in fashion is still a step towards diminishing the impacts of colonial history in the present.

Conclusion

Overall, this research paper attempted to demonstrate important ways in which art can be used as a powerful tool to contribute to the process of decolonization in Africa. This refers to the deconstruction of the long-lasting effects of the colonial era on the populations of Africa as well as the African diaspora. The historical perspectives of African visual art are challenged today by the use of dif-

ferent materials, including Dutch wax paper, which challenges the past restrictions imposed by the West on what mediums African artists were allowed to use. Furthermore, various artists have used the power of recycling to symbolize their rebirth, away from the past colonial narratives. Next, the paper analyzed different ways in which art can be used as an effective method of advocacy. It was seen that it had historically been efficient in creating public mobilization against the Apartheid in South Africa and is still used today to stimulate action and engagement from the public. Artists have been particularly crucial in the ongoing movement to repatriate the Benin Bronzes. It mentioned a few notable artists that doubled as activists such as Nii Kwater Owoo, Yinka Shonibare and Isheanesu Dondo. The last movement that was addressed is Afrofuturism which has been emerging in the African art scene, especially in the diaspora. The collective effort of the movement has shown a focus on reevaluating the past to increase the future autonomy of Africans in their own culture. Individuals such as Jean-Michel Basquiat and labels like Ikiré Jones mixed African and Neapolitan elements to create a message. Although, the critique from Paul Gilroy that was mentioned highlights that the movement can still improve by increasing the place given to the actual continent. In sum, this paper attempts to demonstrate that artists' creative expressions contribute to the issue of decolonization and cultural exploration. It highlights that even though there is still room for improvement, art is a tool that would benefit from being increasingly used and valued in the future.

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Jackfruit tree, Jade Laurent-Le Bras

My drawing is a caricature that englobes the false notion of independance that Africa and its people had acquired despite the continuity of a post colonial system bound within political and social economical frame of the west.

My narrative is straight forward.

I focus on the micro and macro scales. On one hand an African American man and his family newly freed from Slavery, uncertain about the way he will lead his story yet constrained to continue to work for his former master in exchange of a salary.

On the other hand, despite the human values and ethics of the west in aboloshing slavery. Colonialism holds firm until a hundred years later. At this time in the 1960s we observe a wave of countries acquiring independance but somehow uncertain again in defining themselves in the way they should manage their economy political legislations law values ethics.

It may pause a controversial topic but I am hopeful that this drawing creates a reaction in maybe questioning about our identity through our economy political frames our medias design even.

Areeba Khan

Ironic Terms of Independance

Current Colonization in Africa : Is Western Sahara Really a Colony?

Charlotte Jean-Gilles
Edited by : Miah Sears & Malika Logossou

Introduction

In January 2023, the African Nations Championship, commonly known as "CHAN" took place. This event is exclusively open to soccer players who play within Africa's borders, with the main goal of spotlighting African players who may not receive much global recognition (McAllister). That year, the championship was held in Algeria at the newly built Mandela Stadium. For the occasion, Mandela's grandson, Zwelivelile Mandela, was invited to open the championship with a speech (CAF). He spoke of the importance of freedom in Africa's history and highlighted the continent's common fight against foreign dominance, which he marks as a value that African nations should aim to protect at home and overseas. He continued by stating that the struggle was not over and pointed to Western Sahara as "the last colony of Africa" (Berban Sport). This sparked controversy, as Morocco, the accused colonizer, took offense. The Moroccan Football Federation lodged a complaint against the speaker for "political speech" (McDonald). This interaction begged the question: Is Western Sahara truly a Moroccan colonial project? This text will address this interrogation, arguing that Morocco engages in colonialism in Western Sahara through control of the political system by using settlers, the economy by exploiting Sahrawi natural resources, and social control through oppression. First, this article will discuss the aggregation of historical events that culminated in the current situation in Western Sahara by providing each party's perspective on the matter. The second part will analyze how the actions taken in Western Sahara can indeed be defined as colonization.

Section I: Historical Account of the Conflict

In the pre-colonial era, Western Sahara was inhabited by many tribes that could be qualified as pastoral nomads (Hodges 75). Pastoral nomadism refers to a mobile lifestyle adopted by individuals who move frequently to meet their animals' needs and themselves (Britannica).

Politically, the Sahrawi tribes were independent and lacked a centralized government, as none of the tribes could overpower the other and gain full control of the territory (Hodges 77-78). Instead, governance rested upon "djemaa"— assemblies of men from elite tribal families who elected a chief, or "Sheikh". These assemblies also created their legal framework which they would implement alongside the Sharia (Hodges 77).

Although the tribes did not answer to outside higher hierarchical power, they maintained political ties with external powers, including the Moroccan monarchy. Certain tribes had political affiliations with the Moroccan King through alliances based on personal loyalty rather than territorial control (Weiner 21). These relationships bound individuals to individuals – there was no mention of territory (Weinstein 111). These political interactions are key to understanding Morocco's modern claim over Western Sahara because they were how rulers displayed their authority within the Islamic tradition (Weiner 21). As argued by Joffé, a modern way of understanding political legitimacy is based on the assumption that it is not an inherent quality of the state, but rather a contract between individuals and the state, in which each has its area of power. According to this Western perspective, states have to prove their legitimacy to their population (Joffé 379). However, one must consider how Eurocentric this understanding is.

Culturally and ethnically, the Sahrawi people had many similarities with the Mauritanians, such as their shared use of a dialect of the Arabic language called Hassaniya (Weinstein 113). In contrast, Moroccans spoke a language called "Derija" which was also part of the Arabic family but included words of locally spoken languages, notably, Tamazigh (Porter and Malka). These linguistic distinctions further highlight the differences between Sahrawis and Moroccans, complicating Morocco's claim that Western Sahara is a part of its national identity.

Colonization began for Western Saharians with the arrival of the Spaniards in 1884 (BBC). Following its independence, Morocco began to argue for the integration of Western Sahara into its territory. In 1973, the Polisario, a political group that fought for the independence of Western Sahara, was formed. Although the international court had decided that Western Sahara was to be an autonomous nation, the Moroccan government staged a protest in which settlers entered the Sahrawi territory (BBC). This ended with Spain leaving Western Sahara (BBC) because of Spain's tempestuous transition from a dictatorship to a monarchy. (Joffé 375). Spain managed to reach an agreement with Morrocan and Mauritanian officials in which the Spaniards agreed to give up Western Sahara (Weinstein 114). However, before leaving, the Spaniards had committed to holding a referendum on the topic of auto-determination for the Sahrawis (Weinstein 113), leav-

ing this task to the Moroccans, who, to this day, still have not done it. Finally, Western Sahara was forced to integrate into the Moroccan territory in 1975. In reaction to this, during the following years and until 1991, a war erupted between the Polisario and Morocco, the former still advocating for the freedom of the region. The war ended in a cease-fire, which lasted until 2000 (BBC). Although a more hidden political facet of the Morocco-Western Sahara relationship, the involvement of Algeria is crucial to the understanding of the power dynamics in the conflict. In reality, both Algeria and Morocco aspire to lead the North African bloc (Joffé 375), and Western Sahara serves as a point of conflict in their relationship (377). Although initially supporting Morocco's claims to the disputed region, Algeria seemed to have done so out of strategic intentions: they were in a territorial dispute with Morocco and, in hopes of appeasement, supported them in their quest in the desert (Weinstein 113). However, following the recognition of Algerian sovereignty over its entire territory, the country formally pledged support to its Sahrawi neighbours (114).

The incentives that lay behind the annexation of Western Sahara also have geographic considerations because the occupied country acts as a door for Morocco to the remainder of the African continent. If the Polisario wins, Morocco expects to be blocked because of their mutual animosity (110). Sovereignty is at the heart of this issue (Joffé 376). Naturally, it cannot be solved by both parties partitioning the territory. It is a zero-sum game because both countries' goal is reunification, which loses all its meaning if the territory is cut in half (376). There is also a disconnect between their perspectives of sovereignty, which allows for contestation (376). Morocco looks at it from a top-down perspective, where legitimacy is exerted by the state itself, meanwhile, the Polisario believes it comes from the people, the Sahrawi nation (376). To summarize, Morocco's claims stem from the era of recreating their pre-colonial empire (Weinstein 112). However, at that time and place, the most decisive factors of sovereignty were individuals: the King exercised power over individuals, not the territory (Joffé 379). It has been verified by the international court that Morocco did indeed have political links with certain tribes, but it disagrees that the modern interpretation of this translates into the sovereignty being given to Morocco (Joffé 376).

Section 2: Analysis

In political science, colonialism is first and foremost considered a power

dynamic which can translate into the political, social and territorial realms (Horvath 46). It is the relationship between two countries where one, the colonized, does not have full agency over its territory, due to the occupation of another, the colonizer. Colonialism started as a way for countries to enrich themselves by forcefully taking the resources of another country. It can be linked with the concept of mercantilism (National Geographic). This definition is incomplete, as it could define two different concepts: imperialism and colonialism. To this effect, Ronald F. Horvath has argued for a theoretical framework of colonialism that allows for a definition that draws a clear distinction between imperialism and colonialism. Indeed, the main difference between them is whether a considerable number of people from the metropole (settlers) have decided to live in the colony for good. In a colonialist project, settlers are prevalent; in an imperialist project, they are not (Horvath 47). He further divides each concept into categories which pertain to the nature of the interaction between the colonized and the colonizer. They include "extermination, assimilation, and a relative equilibrium" components (47). This article argues that Morocco engages in colonialism in Western Sahara through the use of politics through the instrumentalization of settlers to gain legitimacy, of economics with the total control it has on the extraction and exportation of Sahrawi natural resources, and of social domination by oppressing the population into complying with the regime.

First, Morocco colonized Western Sahara by sending settlers to gain political control and legitimacy. The legitimation of a political system can be done in numerous ways. For example, democracy derives legitimacy from the popular vote (Merriam-Webster), and, in contrast, monarchy achieves legitimacy through spiritual authority, often viewing a ruler as chosen by God (Wills). In Western Sahara, legitimacy could be achieved through the results of the referendum, which will reveal the nation's choice (Lovatt and Mundy). As mentioned previously, this is a bottom-up approach to legitimacy where the people are the sole guardians of legitimacy (Joffé 376). A solution to this is, from the Moroccan side, to have individuals favouring the Moroccan King voting in the referendum (Lovatt and Mundy). To this effect, a military invasion of Western Sahara took place in 1975 (Vasquez). It was called the Green March (Weiner 31) and counted 350,000 Moroccans (BBC). Studies of demographics reveal that regions that provided the most soldiers

to the cause were from places that endorsed the King the most (Weiner 27). By sending many settlers, Morocco sought to divert the result of a referendum to come (Smith 270). Indeed, some settlers could be "mistakenly" made to vote when they do not have the right to engage in this issue reserved to the Sahrawi (Smith 270). Of course, the settlers would act in the interest of Morocco. First, they are directly sent by the government as part of a reunification campaign, with the ultimate goal of making the region part of the Moroccan state (Vasquez). Second, they benefit from the occupation by being paid for activities rooted in the occupation (Smith 269). Furthermore, the occupation and march into the contested region led to the exodus of much of the population to avoid the expected brutality of the Moroccan government (Vasquez), which decreased the amount of Sahrawis present in the event of a referendum. Overall, by sending large numbers of Moroccan citizens into the Western Sahara region, the government aims to attain legitimacy of the region through the individuals (Vasquez). This will be done by creating uncertainty about the targeted demographic with the possible inclusion of the settlers in the referendum (Smith 270). Naturally, the settlers will vote to remain with the Moroccan state because of their allegiance to the King and the personal benefits they enjoy from the occupation (Vasquez). This argument looked at Moroccan colonialism through a political lens. The following one will look at the phenomenon from an economist's perspective.

Second, Morocco engages in colonialism in Western Sahara by extracting its natural resources and creating a monopoly on the Sahrawi economy. Naturally, the relationship between colonialism and economics is a very strong one (Dell 1). Mercantilism, as mentioned previously, was a compelling part of the interest of European countries in their colonies (National Geographic). Gottheil describes the economic component of colonialism as the domination of a metropole over a colony's economy, which helps the metropole gain more power globally. Intrinsic to this, he argues, is the notion of privilege. Internationally, privilege manifests itself in the economic power a metropole derives from its colony. Since the colonizer can profit from its colony's natural resources, it enriches itself, increasing its economic power on the world stage and impoverishing the colony (Gottheil 85). Moreover, inside the colony, economic privileges are used to maintain the colonial apparatus in place (87). In Western Sahara, the main prized resources are phosphates

and fish (Smith 263). Phosphates are used for fertilizer (Oulfakir). In his articles, Oulfakir points out the world's reliance on fertilizers because of their crucial role in the food industry. This is important to understand because it explains Morocco's incentive to keep the colonization going and the silence of the international community who are gaining from this colonization (Schalk). Estimates have shown that Morocco is one of the leaders in phosphate production. As pointed out by Weiner, Morocco had already achieved this recognition prior to the annexation; however, the exploitation of that resource by the Sahrawi would have made for some unwanted competition (Weiner 21). Therefore, in this regard, the occupation could serve two purposes: the elimination of a potential competitor and the expansion of the amount of available phosphate. Moreover, the companies involved in the extraction of sulphate are state-owned (Oulfakir), meaning that profits made from the economic activity of the occupation are directly given to the state. The Moroccan citizens settled in the occupied land are being rewarded through the jobs provided by these companies (Smith 269). This is in perfect contrast to the economic situation of the Sahrawi, who are not partaking in the job industry generated by the occupation, as many of them are refugees in Algeria because of the occupation (Western Sahara Resource Watch). Furthermore, they are blocked from coming back to their homes by the Berm Wall, and their properties have been given to the settlers during their absence (Betteridge-Moes). The Sahrawi people have spoken openly against the extraction of phosphate by Moroccan companies (Smith 263). Under an article of international law, a country is not allowed to extract natural resources without the population's consent. Of course, this is ignored by Moroccan authorities (Smith 273). To summarize, Morocco conducts colonialism through the extraction of resources. It exercises clear domination over Western Sahara's phosphate with the help of the settlers and state-owned companies. It blatantly ignores Sahrawi's call to end these economic activities. Lastly, it favours the welfare of its own citizens over that of the Indigenous population by providing the former with stable revenue, which is intrinsic to the economic perspective of colonialism.

Third, Morocco achieves colonialism in Western Sahara through the social control of the Sahrawi. Social control methods in colonies can be used to keep the indigenous population from protesting against the system and to facilitate the exploita-

tion of a territory, such as was the case in America (Waxman). In this regard, the situation in Western Sahara can be understood through the lens of Robert Blauner's thesis on internal colonialism. In his article, he studies the phenomenon which closely resembles traditional colonialism but focuses on the economic, social, and political framework it establishes instead of its procedural application (Blauner 943). The cases of Western Sahara and America can be compared because of certain key similarities. First, from a geographical standpoint, in both cases, individuals interact in the same space. In other words, the mainstream population of the colonized and the colonizers are not separated by different states, their interactions both occur in the same country (Blauner 395) (in Western Sahara's case because it was annexed) (BBC). Second, from a demographic perspective, settlers have the upper hand. In America, the white population constitutes the larger part of the population, compared to its black counterpart (USA Census Bureau). In Western Sahara, the settlers' population is twice that of the Sahrawi (Smith 280). Third, both colonized populations are being policed by their colonizers (Blauner 404). This leads to the abuse of the colonized people by law enforcement agents of the oppressive system (Blauner 404). This is reflected in Western Sahara by the population's interaction with the military (Lourenço 10). In recountings, children and women recall violent incidents with the officers that were inherent to their condition as Sahrawis (Lourenço 7). Fourth, services provided to the colonized population are provided by individuals or systems that are part of the colonizing force (Blauner 397). In America, the author mentions that teachers in black ghettos are white and are not familiar with the locals (Blauner 397). In Western Sahara, an educational curriculum is a tool of Moroccan propaganda. Examples of this are the daily mandatory recitation of the Moroccan national anthem and the allusion to Western Sahara as an integral part of the pre-colonization Moroccan state (Lourenço 12), a narrative that supports the claims of the sovereignty of the Moroccan officials (Weinstein 112). These comparisons are important because they show the social domination that is exerted on colonized populations. However, there is one notable difference to note between Morocco and the United States, aside from the way the colonized population came into being subjugated to the colonizing power. This distinction pertains to the cultural integration of each group into the wider settler population. In America, slaves were forced to re-

nounce their cultural traditions and language to survive (Blauner 396). Pinkey argues that the assimilation of an enslaved person through assimilation was indispensable to the inner workings of slavery (38). However, the Moroccan state seemed to aim more for a multiculturalist approach to align with its legitimacy claims. Indeed, as a way to promote the idea that the Sahrawi people and the Moroccans are to be seen as one unit, they included Hassaniya, the language used by the Sahrawi, in the official Moroccan National languages in 2011 (Vasquez). Overall, Morocco is engaging in the social domination of the Sahrawi people, which is a form of colonization.

To conclude, based on a definition of colonialism that defines the phenomenon through the superiority or domination of one group (state or settlers) over another through politics, economics, and social interactions, Western Sahara does qualify as a colonial project. In the political sphere, one can observe the active use of settlers as a way to mitigate the political influence of the Sahrawi people. The main goal is to obtain political legitimacy through a favourable outcome in a referendum on Western Sahara's auto-determination (Lovatt and Mundy). Economically, the Moroccan government's monopoly on the extraction of natural resources such as phosphate shows its domination over the Sahrawi economy (Smith 273). Socially, Sahrawis, much like Afro-Americans are forced to live in a society where their colonizer's interests and superiority are an integral part of their lives. This goes from formal interactions with military officers to children's classrooms where they are constantly reminded of their inferior status (Lourenço 12). The occupation and colonization of Western Sahara is not a hidden reality. The international community seems well aware of the situation but chooses to ignore it (Sansanwal and Kamath 112). One can suspect the considerable benefits that many countries reap from the occupation as a cause of this passivity (Smith 274). The most obvious of them is the trade of fertilizer made possible by the extracted phosphate (Oulfakir). One wonders, faced with the display of this deafening silence from the international community, if the legitimacy of supra-governmental organizations that claim to protect human rights globally has credibility.

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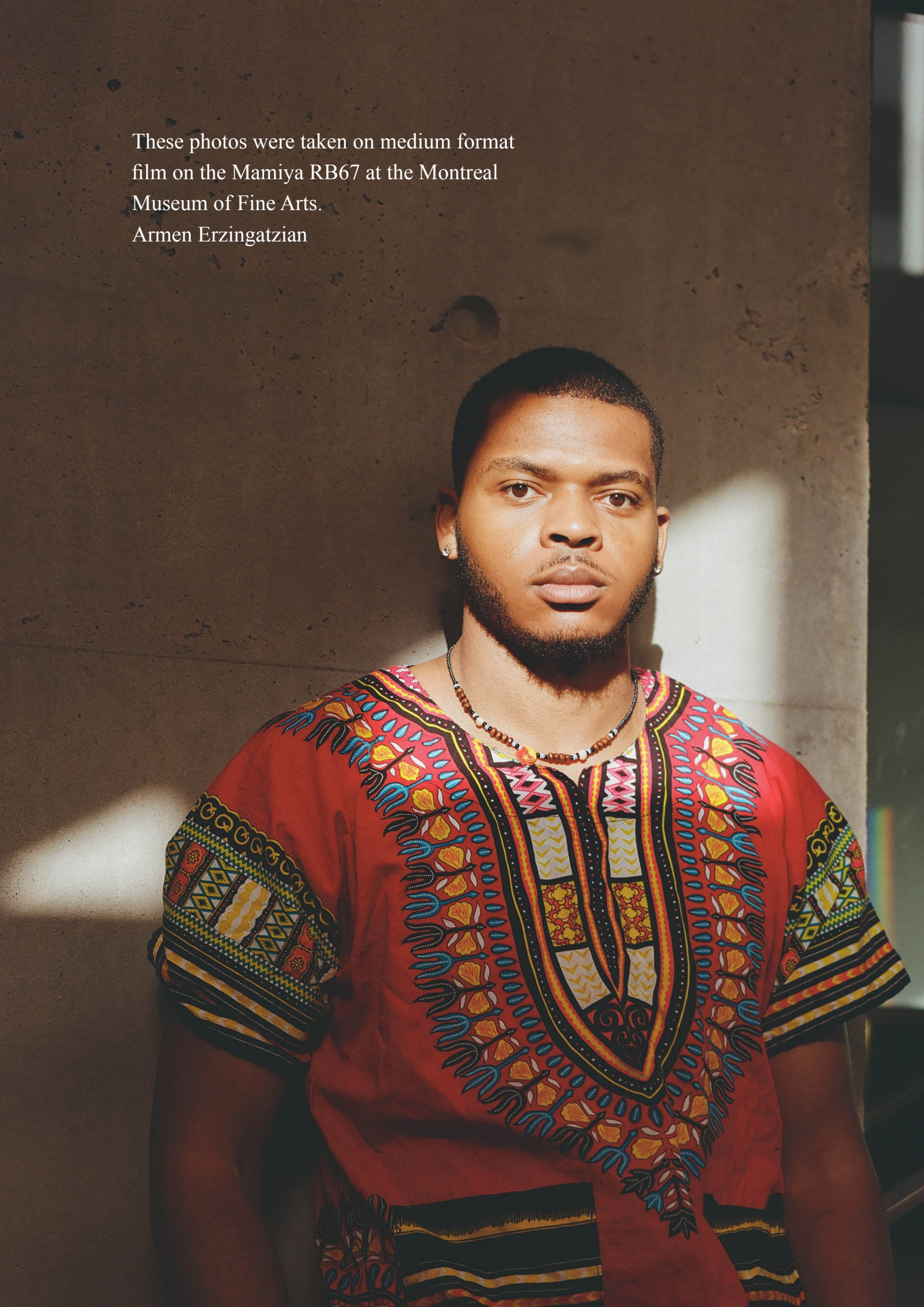

These photos were taken on medium format film on the Mamiya RB67 at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.
Armen Erzingatzian

Alternatives to the CFA franc

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SHWESHWE, South Africa.

Introduction

This case study is part of a broader reflection on the economic and monetary future of Africa. It is based on the work and ideas developed by Manssah, a think-tank dedicated to the development of Africa by Africans, of which I hold membership. This analysis is also enriched by personal reflections on the subject.

Manssah is a collective of committed individuals from diverse backgrounds, united by a common goal: to address the major challenges hindering Africa's development and unlocking its potential. As a think tank dedicated to African development, Manssah strives to contribute innovative ideas, pertinent analyses, and pragmatic solutions. One of the key issues in this effort is the CFA franc, the currency used by 14 African nations, which is the focus of ongoing economic, political, and social debates (Le Thermomètre Manssah 1). This case study, aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the CFA franc's origins, functioning, and controversies, while exploring potential solutions for a future that better aligns with the aspirations of African populations.

To gauge public opinion, Manssah conducted a survey of French-speaking African populations and the diaspora, examining their perceptions and concerns about the CFA franc. The results showed that 94.8% of the 3,084 respondents favored abandoning the currency, and 66.3% believed it hindered trade with the rest of the world (Le Thermomètre Manssah 8-9).

This case study does not take a position for or against the CFA franc, but instead seeks to explore viable strategies for the countries using it to achieve monetary autonomy. By presenting potential paths to ending its use, the study aims to stimulate public debate and help decision-makers identify the most effective options for transitioning to a currency that better meets Africa's economic needs.

The CFA franc was created in 1945 to stabilize the economies of French colonies in Africa after the economic disruptions caused by World War II (Manssah Conference, 2024). Today, it is used in two currency zones: the UEMOA (West African Economic and Monetary Union) and the CEMAC (Central African Economic and Monetary Community).

The CFA franc is pegged to the euro, guaranteeing a fixed parity which, in theory, fosters stability and economic predictability. Countries using the

CFA franc are required to deposit a significant portion of their foreign exchange reserves to the French Treasury, a condition widely criticized in terms of monetary sovereignty. Although this measure is presented to guarantee stability, it limits the ability of member countries to implement independent monetary policy, essential for responding to contextual economic needs.

Criticism focuses on the CFA francs colonial heritage and implications on sovereignty; symbolizing a french neo-colonial sphere of influence. On the economic front, some experts argue that fixed parity with the euro can be restrictive, preventing countries from adjusting their currencies to their specific economic conditions, which could harm their competitiveness and growth.

Furthermore, the monetary stability provided by the CFA franc comes at the expense of flexibility, needed to respond to external economic shocks. This situation leads to a wider debate on whether African countries should maintain a linked currency with former colonial power, or move towards monetary autonomy, reflective of their economic realities.

Manssah Conference: How to Put an End to CFA Franc

Speech by Fatouma Sidibe Diarra
Malian lawyer Fatoumata Sidibe Diarra, co-founder of Manssah and member of the Economy & Finance, Governance & Institutions, and Natural Resources commissions, spoke at the Comment en Finir avec le Franc CFA conference organized by Manssah on March 17, 2024. Diarra raised key questions about the complex relationship between monetary sovereignty and economic independence.

Question 1: The Symbolism of the Name "CFA franc" and Monetary Sovereignty

The persistence of the name "CFA franc," originally an acronym for "Franc des Colonies Françaises d'Afrique," raises significant questions about monetary sovereignty. While the name has been officially reinterpreted to mean "Communauté Financière Africaine" in West Africa and "Coopération Financière en Afrique" in Central Africa, the historical association remains (Borel 45) (Kako Nubukpo 40). The term "franc" itself is crucial, as it derives from the word "France." Even if the CFA's meaning changes, the use of "franc" continues to denote an asso-

ciation with the colonial past. Monetary sovereignty is a central pillar of a state's autonomy, and maintaining this nominal link can be seen as a symbol of continued dependence.

Question 2: Printing Banknotes

The issue of banknote printing in French-speaking African countries touches on logistics and trust. Banknote printing is often centralized for reasons of security, cost and efficiency. However, the fact that French-speaking African countries do not directly manage this printing raises questions about their ability to legitimately control their currency.

Question 3: France's Convertibility Guarantee

France's guarantee of the convertibility of the CFA franc is a legacy of the original monetary agreement. This guarantee is supposed to bring stability and trans**par**ency, but it also places African countries in a position where their currency is closely tied to the economy of another country. This limits their monetary flexibility and ability to respond independently to economic crises.

Question 4: Foreign Exchange Reserves and the French Treasury

Depositing a portion of foreign exchange reserves with the French Treasury is intended to support the CFA franc's fixed parity with the euro. The fact that these reserves are held outside the countries themselves limits their immediate access to funds in times of economic need, withdrawing monetary sovereignty and the ability to control monetary policy

Conclusion

The discussion of these issues highlight the gap between formal political independence and real economic and monetary independence. The situation of the CFA franc illustrates the challenges facing African countries in their quest for economic autonomy. Debate of the CFA franc is not just a question of monetary management, but also a question of the socio-economic implications in terms of sovereignty, identity and the economic future. Thus, the underlying question remains whether maintaining this monetary system is in alignment or contradiction with the objectives for development and autonomy of African countries.

Speech by Cheikh Travaly.

At the same conference, Cheikh Travaly, who has 32 years of experience in the banking and mining sector and is also co-founder of Manssah (member of the Economy & Finance, Science & Technology, and Education, Culture & Values commissions) proposed these four scenarios, which offer a range of perspectives for the future of the CFA franc, each with its own implications. Here is an exploration of these scenarios:

Scenario 1: The transition Eco

Since May 2020, the West African Monetary Union (UMOA) has transitioned to a new currency, the Eco. However, within this framework, France continues to guarantee the currency's convertibility rate, which de facto maintains the fixed parity to the euro.

Advantages

Reduced obligations to the French Treasury: Despite maintaining the convertibility rate, West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAMU) countries are no longer required to deposit 50% of their export earnings to the French Treasury (Manssah Conference, 2024). This represents a step towards greater financial autonomy.

Reducing France's visible role: The French presence is eliminated from several key bodies:

The Board of Directors of BCEAO (Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest) no longer includes French representatives (Manssah Conference, 2024).

France is no longer a member of the Monetary Policy Committee, which sets the zone's monetary guidelines.

The absence of French representation on the Banking Commission, the body that supervises and regulates commercial banks in the franc zone.

Maintaining the BCEAO's experience: The transition to Eco maintains the Central Bank's long experience in managing a common currency, which can ensure continuity and stability in monetary management.

Preserving regional unity through the adoption of the Eco monetary union between countries sharing a common history, culture and experience, which can foster regional integration and cooperation.

Disadvantages

Maintaining parity with euro and the impact on monetary sovereignty

Maintaining a fixed parity with the euro means that WAMU countries remain dependent on economic fluctuations in the eurozone. This situation considerably limits their ability to pursue independent monetary

policies, particularly in terms of exchange rates and inflation control.
The inability to adjust monetary policy in response to internal or external economic shocks can hamper the competitiveness of economies and their responsiveness to crises.
Ambiguity regarding the integration of non-CFA countries

The horizon and conditions for the integration of West African countries that do not use the CFA franc are not clearly defined. This uncertainty may foster tensions and hesitations among these countries, potentially slowing down or complicating regional integration.

The absence of clear criteria for integration raises questions about fairness and cohesion within the future monetary union, potentially jeopardizing the stability and viability of the Eco.

Superficial versus Substantial Changes

There is a perception that the changes brought about by transitioning to the Eco, whilst positive in terms of reducing France's visibility, could be superficial. The foundation of the system (i.e. dependence on an external power to guarantee the currency) remains unchanged.

This situation may give rise to criticism as to the true scope of monetary independence achieved through this transition. It is crucial that reforms go beyond cosmetic changes to address fundamental issues of sovereignty and economic control.

These drawbacks highlight the importance of a well thought-out transition to the Eco, where the countries involved must not only manage the technical aspects of the common currency, but also ensure that the changes genuinely contribute to greater economic autonomy and resilience.

Scenario 2: WAMU-CEMAC

The UMOA-CEMAC scenario envisages the creation of a common currency for the countries of West and Central Africa, replacing the CFA franc.This scenario proposes a radical break with the past by immediately ending the peg to the euro.

Advantages

Easy to implement on the basis of existing experience
The countries of the WAMU and CEMAC zones already have significant experience of managing a common currency, the CFA franc. This pre-existing experience can facilitate the transition to a new common cur-

rency, building on the structures, institutions and mechanisms already in place.

Central banks, financial institutions and regulatory frameworks in these regions have extensive knowledge of monetary coordination and cooperation. These assets can be capitalized on to implement the new currency
Monetary autonomy and flexibility
The creation of a new common currency, untied from the euro, would offer member countries greater monetary autonomy, enabling them to conduct monetary policies more in line with their specific economic realities and needs.

Flexibility in monetary policy management could improve the country's ability to respond to economic shocks and promote sustainable economic growth.

Alignment with business partners
Linking the new currency to a basket of currencies would better reflect the commercial realities of member countries, offering a fairer and more stable valuation of the currency in line with international trade.

Strengthening regional integration
The introduction of a common currency between WAMU and CEMAC countries would facilitate regional economic and monetary integration, intra-African trade and contribute to regional economic stability.

Preserving Economic Stability

Although the transition process can present challenges, the experience gained in managing a common currency can help preserve economic and financial stability during the transition.

In short, the WAMU-CEMAC scenario capitalizes on the experience and achievements of member countries in terms of common monetary management, while offering an opportunity for greater economic autonomy and better alignment with international trade, thus strengthening the foundations for sustained economic growth and increased regional integration.

Disadvantages

Political instability and the use of currency as a pressure tool

Recent coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have demonstrated the political challenges facing the region. In these situations, the common currency has sometimes been used as a means for political pressure by regional entities such as WAMU, exac-

erbating tensions (Manssah Conference, 2024).

The use of currency as an instrument of political pressure can have significant negative repercussions on the economy and population, contributing to increased economic instability and a deterioration in confidence between members of the monetary union.

Lack of Independent Money Management Expertise

Another major drawback is that franc zone countries have not developed substantial expertise in the independent management of their currencies, nor in the formulation of monetary policy tailored to their specific needs. This is partly due to historical dependence on monetary policy dictated by external interests, principally France.

This lack of experience could hamper countries' ability to effectively manage a new common currency and respond autonomously to monetary and economic challenges.

Fragile Intermetallic Trust

Trust between member countries, essential to the success of a monetary union, has been eroded by political tensions and the use of currency as leverage in crises. Restoring this trust will be a major challenge, and a necessary one to ensure the long-term viability of any new common currency.

Lack of trust can lead to difficulties in policy coordination and adherence to the principles of the union, compromising the effectiveness of the common currency.

Risk of polarization and conflicts of interest

Differences in economic capacity, political priorities, and stability may lead to conflicts of interest between member states. These divergences could make joint management of the currency more complex and conflict-ridden.

Mitigation strategies

To mitigate these drawbacks, it is crucial to establish robust economic and monetary governance mechanisms that guarantee fairness, transparency and inclusiveness in decision-making.

Training and capacity-building programs in monetary policy and economic management are also essential to prepare countries to effectively

manage a new common currency.

Building ongoing dialogue and enhanced cooperation between member countries can help restore and maintain the confidence needed for the success of monetary union.

These measures could help overcome the challenges posed by the WAMU-CEMAC scenario and maximize the benefits of a common currency for all members.

Scenario 3: Eco and ECOWAS

The Eco, envisaged as a common currency for the 15 member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), has been under discussion for over 15 years (Manssah Conference, 2024). This currency would be pegged to a variety of currencies reflecting member countries' trade with the rest of the world. This scenario proposes to liquidate the vestiges of Françafrique and includes Nigeria, the continent's leading economy, which would create an important market in terms of trade space and investment capital.

Benefits

Greater regional integration and economic diversification: The introduction of the Eco could facilitate regional trade and accelerate the economic integration and diversification of the region's economies.
Capacity to generate foreign exchange: With the inclusion of Nigeria and other diversified economies, ECOWAS would have a significant capacity for foreign exchange, supporting the value of the new currency.
Macroeconomic policy autonomy: Autonomous management of their currencies would give ECOWAS countries total leeway to implement macroeconomic policies tailored to their needs.

Disadvantages

Political Instability and Clumsy Responses

Recent crises and coups d'état in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have been met with clumsy responses from ECOWAS, affecting its credibility.
Loss of trust and risk of politicization: The possibility of ECOWAS being instrumentalized for political ends undermines trust between members, which is crucial to the success of a monetary union.

Leadership disputes and outside influences: Persistent leadership disputes, notably between Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, often exacerbated by

outside influences, have hampered progress towards this scenario.

Scenario 4: AES (Alliance of Sahel States)

The Alliance of Sahel States (AES), is a scenario being considered in the wake of political crises and coups d'état in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. These countries have expressed their intention to leave ECOWAS, and are discussing the creation of a common monetary zone that would be separate and independent.

Advantages

Breaking with the status quo and liquidating the vestiges of Françafrique: This scenario marks a clear break with existing structures and a determination that puts an end to France's residual influence on economic and monetary policies.

Increased monetary sovereignty: By creating their own currency, these states regain complete control over their monetary, fiscal, and exchange rate policies, enabling them to respond more directly to their specific economic needs.

Autonomy in economic policy: The independent management of their currencies gives these countries considerable leeway to implement economic policies that promote their development and meet their domestic challenges.

Protection against external economic pressures: By having their own currency, these countries are no longer subject to the economic pressures that could be exerted by supranational entities or foreign powers via monetary leverage.

Enhancing the value of natural resources: The presence of valuable natural resources, such as gold, in these countries can serve as a strong foundation for supporting the value of a new currency, using these resources as collateral or backing.

Disadvantages

Losses linked to economic integration By leaving ECOWAS, Sahelian countries would lose the benefits associated with regional economic integration, such as reduced tariff barriers and easier access to the markets of neighboring countries. This loss could hamper their economic growth and reduce trade opportunities

Trade and Logistics Barriers

Being landlocked and having no direct access to the sea, Sahelian countries depend on neighboring countries for trade. By leaving ECOWAS, they could face increased tariff and

non-tariff barriers when passing through ECOWAS member countries, which would negatively impact their exports and their ability to generate foreign currency.

Impact on Imports and Inflation

Increased tariff and non-tariff barriers could lead to higher import costs, resulting in price inflation for imported goods. This inflation could reduce people's purchasing power and worsen local economic conditions.

Lack of Experience in Money Management

Sahelian countries have little experience in independently managing their monetary policy. This shortcoming could pose significant challenges to the effective implementation and management of a new currency, increasing the risk of poor economic decisions that could further destabilize their economies.

Less Diversified and Integrated Economies

The economies of these countries are often poorly diversified and dependent on a few key sectors. The lack of economic diversification could limit their resilience to external economic and financial shocks, making the management of a new currency more complex and risky.

High Transition Costs

The costs associated with transitioning from a common currency (the CFA) to a new currency include printing new banknotes and coins, designing new currency symbols, securing the production of these physical items, and establishing new trade agreements. These costs can be prohibitive, especially for countries with limited financial resources. Financing these expenses is a key concern and may require international support or new debt, further straining public finances.

Mitigation Strategies

To mitigate the risks and challenges associated with the creation of a new common currency by Sahelian countries, it is crucial to adopt a holistic and coordinated approach:
Capacity-building and local expertise: Develop training and technical assistance programs to strengthen monetary and economic management skills. This includes training in monetary policy, banking operations, and financial regulation to prepare institutions to effectively manage a new currency.

Economic diversification: Encourage the diversification of economies to reduce dependency on restricted sectors and improve resilience to economic shocks. This can include supporting emerging sectors and promoting innovation and entrepreneurship.

Infrastructure and regional development: Investing in critical infrastructure that supports economic growth and facilitates trade and commerce, such as transport, energy, and information technology.

Regional and international cooperation: Maintain constructive diplomatic and economic relations with former ECOWAS members and other international partners to minimize the negative impacts of regional fragmentation. This includes negotiating trade agreements that foster an environment conducive to trade without creating prohibitive barriers.

Virtuous and transparent governance: Ensure transparent and accountable management of the new currency through independent institutions, led by ethical experts, free from political influence. This will help build confidence in the new currency on a national and international level.

Financial and technical support: Seek financial and technical support from international organizations and development partners to cover transition costs, stabilize the new currency, and support the necessary economic reforms.

By implementing these strategies, Sahelian countries can overcome the challenges of establishing a common currency and lay the foundations of a stable, prosperous monetary union that supports their long-term economic and social development.

Personal Conclusion and Outlook

The Analysis of different scenarios for emancipation from the CFA franc clearly shows that possible solutions can be adapted and implemented at different times and in different contexts within West and Central Africa. The scenarios proposed are not exclusive but can evolve dynamically as successes and lessons are learned over time.

For the Alliance of the Sahel States (AES) countries, which have already initiated a process of separation from ECOWAS and are discussing the creation of a new common currency, a strategic partnership with Guinea Conakry could be beneficial. This would not only give them access

to the sea, but also enable them to benefit from Guinea's experience in monetary management. In addition, the expertise of countries that have successfully established robust monetary management, such as Rwanda, as well as the lessons learned from Southeast Asian nations that have successfully developed post-colonization, could be valuable models and inspiration.

For the other countries of West and Central Africa, scenarios 2 and 3 remain viable options. These countries could initially adopt one of these strategies, and could eventually join the AES, if this scenario proves successful. This would enable them to benefit from the advantages of greater regional integration, while retaining the flexibility needed to respond to the challenges specific to their regional context.

In the long term, if these countries succeed in uniting around a common currency, we could envisage a union built around a politico-economic union similar to the European Union. This ambitious vision could be the key to the African renaissance, a concept I explore in greater detail in my article entitled "The African Renaissance as an alternative to economic development", drawing on the work of José Do-Nascimento.

These prospects are not just theoretical hypotheses, but real possibilities that require ongoing commitment, extensive collaboration, and strong political will on the part of all the players involved. The road to true monetary and economic autonomy in Africa is fraught with pitfalls, but with a thoughtful and coordinated strategy, African countries can build a monetary future that supports their sustainable development and economic autonomy.

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Austin Maidoh

Portrait of a Maasai bartender, Nampayio, in Maji Moto, Kenya. By Jade Laurent-Le Bras.

Clan Relations, Political Fragmentation, and Elections Outcomes

Harerta Abraha

Edited by : Mohammed Abdulganiyu & Isabelle Lim

The Massai Shuka from Kenya

Somalia, frequently categorized as a failed state, has faced numerous challenges with power dynamics and clan-based tensions during its difficult transition from authoritarianism to democracy (Stremlau). Since 2016, Somalia's indirect electoral system has been a critical component of its federal democratic framework, designed to navigate the country's complex socio-political landscape (Menkhaus). Unlike direct elections, this system relies on clan elders and regional representatives to select members of parliament, who then elect the president (Wabwireh). Clientelism— clan-based loyalties, are significant features of the political system where clan elders, external actors, and intermediaries can contribute and sway election outcomes. This raises the question of the extent of the impact of these contributing factors upon election outcomes. This paper examines the impact that political fragmentation has had on elections, particularly because of the clan relations that are constantly changing and dynamic. Through evaluating the pre-existing landscape, current clan relations, and election outcomes, this paper intends to examine the extent of these factors' roles in election outcomes.

Somalia's Political Landscape

Despite centralized control and repression, the nation managed to maintain some stability under Siad Barre's authoritarian rule between 1969 and 1991 (Mohamed Farah). However, after Barre's government fell in 1991, Somalia was thrown into a long-lasting civil war, which exacerbated clan rivalries and caused the country to become divided, leaving it in a state of political fragmentation and disrepair (Mohamed Farah). Attempts to restore security and order were hampered by the emergence of the Islamist militant organization Al-Shabaab, which further destabilized the nation (Mohamed Farah). As a result of these difficulties, Somalia became increasingly dependent on foreign assistance from institutions like the United Nations and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) for state-building and peacekeeping missions(Alama et al.). Somalia combated this by making significant progress in creating a federal democratic system that is intended to decentralise authority and consider its heterogeneous clan structure. Despite these initiatives, the administration still faces many obstacles. Somalia's democratic transition is made more difficult by the fact that powerful clan leaders and political elites frequently manipulate

indirect elections, which are held through clan-based delegate systems and have become the main way political decisions are made. Leaders often use their positions to influence national policies and secure advantageous results. Clan identity plays a central role in Somalia's socio-political structure, shaping how power is distributed and exercised. For centuries, clans have provided means for social organization, security, and conflict resolution, especially in the absence of a strong central government. This influence is formalized through the 4.5 power-sharing system, which allocates political representation among the four major clans, with a smaller share reserved for minority groups (Wabwireh). Political inclusivity therefore is guaranteed by this system; however, it also strengthens clan-based politics, rendering it more difficult to ensure merit-based leadership and cultivate a sense of national identity as clan-based identity propagates. Clan dynamics as a result still have an impact on government and impede attempts to establish a democratic, stable state.

Contributions of Clan Relations to Candidate Selection

"It is necessary to understand the clan-based political system, where only a few clan delegates and clan elders decide which candidate wins the parliamentary election" —this statement effectively summarises the relevant events that go into the selection of a candidate for parliament (Bincof). In Somalia's indirect electoral system, parliamentary elections are not determined by the general populace but by a select group of clan elders and delegates, highlighting the deeply entrenched influence of clan dynamics on political outcomes. As Bincof explains, the process of candidate selection for parliamentary seats is largely controlled by these elite actors, who hold significant sway over the political landscape. The 4.5 power-sharing system accredits a representative from each of the clans to select the 275 members of the Lower House, "while federal state assemblies elect the 54 senators of the Upper House," who are then jointly responsible for electing the president (Ahmed). This strategy maintains a system of exclusivity by restricting political competition and filtering voices from outside the dominant clan. While it offers some stability by decreasing the likelihood of violence between the clans, the 4.5 system further reinforces the exclusive selection of candidates (Ahmed) When it came to choosing the candidates and funding their campaigns, the clan leadership was crucial, having a variety of reasons

for wanting to see their candidates elected, including improved access to government resources, employment opportunities, and services(Fadal). According to Fadal, clan sponsorship and selection of candidates is a mechanism of accessing political institutions by redirecting and swaying the outcomes of political procedures to their favour. Therefore, candidates for different positions in the federal government, especially presidential, can rely on the support and endorsement of the clans. However, this also fosters a system in which certain groups are inherently marginalised and not permitted equal say.

The clan-based framework of Somalia's indirect electoral process by default exacerbates political division and systematically sidelines particular groups. The preeminence of significant clans in distributing parliamentary positions and political power creates structural obstacles for smaller clans, minority communities, and women to engage meaningfully (Fadal). This marginalization is entrenched through the 4.5 power-sharing arrangement, which disproportionately benefits the four dominant clans while placing others in a subordinate position (Ahmed). Consequently, political representation is determined not by equitable participation but by established clan hierarchies, restricting broader democratic engagement and perpetuating a system where political clout is unevenly allocated. As a result, marginalized communities are excluded from having an equal voice in governance, thereby reinforcing social and political disparities.

Political Fragmentation and its Impact on Election Outcomes

Political fragmentation in Somalia, demonstrated in the strained relationship between the federal government and federal member states, has played a key role in shaping electoral outcomes since the 2016 presidential election. This has been a major source of tension in the contest for control over the electoral process and security apparatus (Kalmoy). Regional states such as Puntland and Jubaland, led by influential people with clan ties like Said Abdullahi Deni and Ahmed Mohamed Islam (better known as Madobe), have consistently repelled centralized governance from Mogadishu, specifically under the administration **of Presi**dent Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo (Kalmoy). According to Mohamed Farah, the leaders of Puntland and Jubaland accuse the Somali federal government of undermining their independence by trying to rig elections to centralise power and govern them from Mogadishu, consequently

causing friction between the federal government and the states. Disagreements over election procedures and the makeup of electoral management bodies caused substantial delays during the 2021–2022 electoral crisis, making the political impasse especially noticeable (Rage). Puntland and Jubaland refused to cooperate with Farmaajo's government, accusing it of stacking the Federal Electoral Implementation Team (FEIT) with loyalists to influence parliamentary selections (Mohamed Farah). This fragmentation delayed parliamentary elections by over a year, contributing to a constitutional crisis and heightening fears of political instability.

The influence of federal member states on election outcomes is substantial. By controlling local electoral processes and leveraging clan loyalties, regional leaders can sway the selection of parliamentarians who, in turn, vote for the president. This dynamic was evident in the 2022 presidential election, where alliances formed between regional leaders ultimately contributed to Farmaajo's defeat and the election of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (Ahmed). Thus, federal-state fragmentation not only disrupts the electoral timeline but also shifts the balance of power within Somalia's political landscape, with regional leaders emerging as key power brokers in national politics.

Internal Clan-based Fragmentation and Alliances

Clan-based fragmentation significantly influences Somalia's elections by altering political alliances, shaping voting patterns, and reinforcing instability in parliamentary and presidential contests. Internal divisions within major clans, particularly among dominant groups like the Hawiye, Darod, and Rahanweyn, create intense competition for political representation and access to state resources (Gundel). Because sub-clans prioritize their own interests over the larger interests that arise from clan unity, this inter-clan rivalry affects election results and frequently leads to divided parliamentary voting blocs (Rage). A clan's influence and bargaining power may be diminished in important electoral negotiations because of these divisions. Sub-clans trade votes and form temporary alliances to lessen this division and magnify their electoral bargaining power; these actions are frequently motivated by practical rather than ideological factors (Gundel). Often flexible and opportunity-reliant, these coalitions will vary according to the demands of the current election.
For instance, while the Hawiye sub-

clans first split over their support for various candidates in the 2022 presidential election, they later joined forces with other Darod and Rahanweyn sub-clans to form a coalition that helped the election of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (Ahmed). However, because these alliances are usually renegotiated after power is gained, they are inherently unstable and can result in short-term political gains but long-term governance issues. The transactional nature of these alliances undermines efforts to build stable, cohesive political institutions (Stremlau). By maintaining a cycle of conflicting loyalties and political schemes rather than encouraging lasting political coalitions or national cohesion, clan-based fragmentation adds to a fractured legislative climate(Gundel). As a result, this makes it harder to form effective governments, threatens the federal system, and exacerbates political instability.

The establishment of parallel electoral institutions within Somalia's Federal Member States (FMS), where regional administrations frequently operate independently of the federal government, exacerbates this fragmentation (Ahmed). The inclination of each Federal Member State to modify its electoral processes to benefit powerful local clans' results in a decentralized and capricious election system. Electoral commissions typically operate outside of federal authority in certain areas; for instance, Jubaland and Puntland allowed local elites to sway vote counting, voter eligibility, and candidate selection (Somali Public Agenda 2024). By prioritising localised clan interests over national unity, these parallel systems influence election results, frequently electing candidates who support local power structures rather than wider state interests. The federal government's failure to implement consistent electoral standards throughout different areas weakens its authority and contributes to disjointed election results (Gundel). Without centralized oversight, elections become a series of regional contests driven by clan rivalries, with little regard for national interests or democratic ideals.

The characteristics inherent in the nature of these alliances compromise the stability of cohesive political institutions. The existing system, instead of building strong political alliances or fostering national unity, focuses on envy-afflicted petty politics whose ubiquity guarantees disintegration of the parliamentary system. This in turn makes it difficult for effective governments to be established, saps the strength of the

federal system, and causes political instability as alliances tend to fall apart when elections are over because of the rivalry of the sub-clans. This lack of standardization affects the electoral process's credibility, as conflicts about vote manipulation, minority clan exclusion, and elected representative validity commonly occur. As a result, legislative seats are sometimes filled by individuals whose primary allegiance is to their clan or regional power brokers, rather than the federal government or the Somali electorate. This entrenches a cycle of weak, unstable governments that struggle to implement cohesive policies, exacerbating political fragmentation and prolonging Somalia's broader governance crisis.

Structural Limitations and Reforms

Somalia's indirect electoral system, deeply influenced by clan dynamics, has had a mixed impact on the country's political stability and governance. The 4.5 power-sharing formula, which allocates political power among Somalia's major clans, ensures no group is excluded from the political process (Ahmed). By integrating all major clans in the system, it develops a feeling of shared government, decreasing the likelihood of violent conflict. This strategy has, in many ways, avoided the exclusionary politics in other African countries where one group's dominance resulted in conflict and instability. Clan politics has played a significant role in maintaining relative stability through elections and government formation.

Moreover, while the indirect election system appears to be a compromise, it is a practical answer given Somalia's history of violence and state breakdown. Direct elections in a country still recovering from years of civil conflict could jeopardize the fragile peace that has been built. The role of clan elders as vote facilitators ensures that all groups are represented, resulting in a stabilizing effect that decreases the probability of bloodshed. This progressive strategy, which moves away from clan-based agreements and toward more democratic procedures, allows for the gradual establishment of institutions and governance structures, potentially leading to more inclusive and transparent elections in the future. Furthermore, clan-based division has often benefited the federal system rather than undermined it. The establishment of competing election systems in Puntland and Jubaland, two Federal Member States of Somalia, illustrates the adaptability of the federal system and the importance

of regional autonomy (Yimenu). To accommodate local preferences and guarantee representation, some regions have been permitted to design their own voting procedures while still taking part in national governance (Yimenu). This decentralization, which takes power away from a central authority, not only gives local people political representation but also significantly aids in maintaining peace. Additionally, foreign assistance is essential to Somalia's slow political development. Despite acknowledging the difficulties presented by clan-based politics, the UN and African Union have backed Somalia's election process because they believe these structures essential to preserving peace in the near future (Alama et al.).

Somalia's Democratic Future

Clan dynamics and political division have had significant influences in Somalia's indirect elections since 2016, affecting the outcomes of elections and the broader political environment. The 4.5 power-sharing arrangement, aimed at promoting inclusivity, has paradoxically bolstered clan-centric competition, hindering the development of national political structures (Gundel). While it has temporarily bolstered stability by averting outright conflict, it has simultaneously solidified clientelism and weakened governance frameworks. Political fragmentation, especially the conflicts between the federal government and federal member states, has further complicated the electoral landscape. Regional leaders are able to exploit clan affiliations to strengthen their hold on power, undermining national unity. Postponements of elections, disagreements regarding ongoing and future electoral processes, and the impact of local power brokers have all produced a divided and unstable political framework.

Moreover, internal strife within clans results in fluctuating alliances that compromise long-term political stability, creating a scenario where governance relies on transactional politics rather than institutional growth. Despite these obstacles, Somalia has avoided widespread electoral violence, and its indirect election framework has allowed for political engagement in a fragile context. Nevertheless, without significant reforms to diminish the sway of clan-based politics and improve electoral transparency, Somalia's democratic development will remain limited. Looking ahead, tackling political fragmentation and nurturing national political institutions will be essential for establishing a more stable and representative electoral framework.

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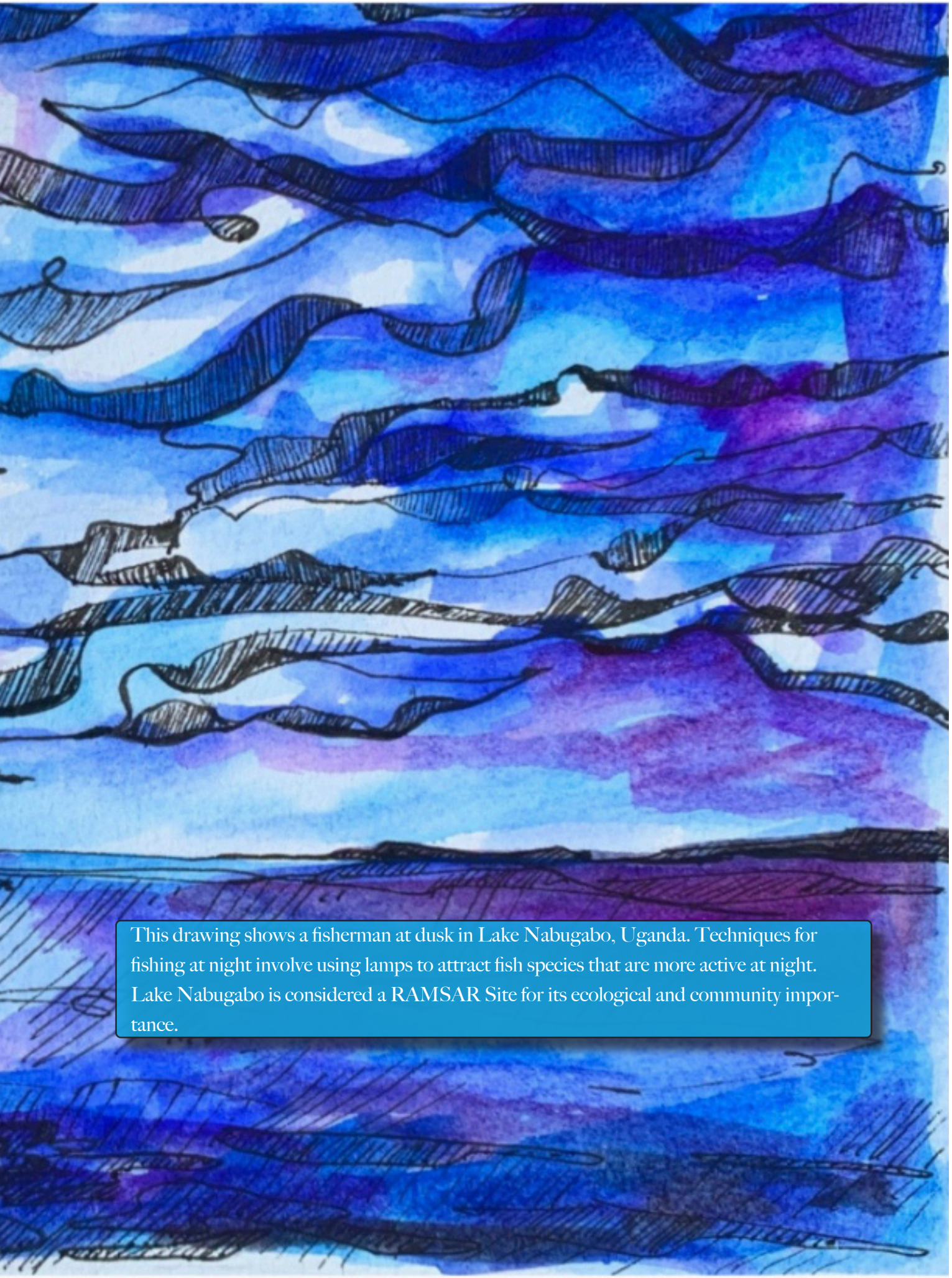
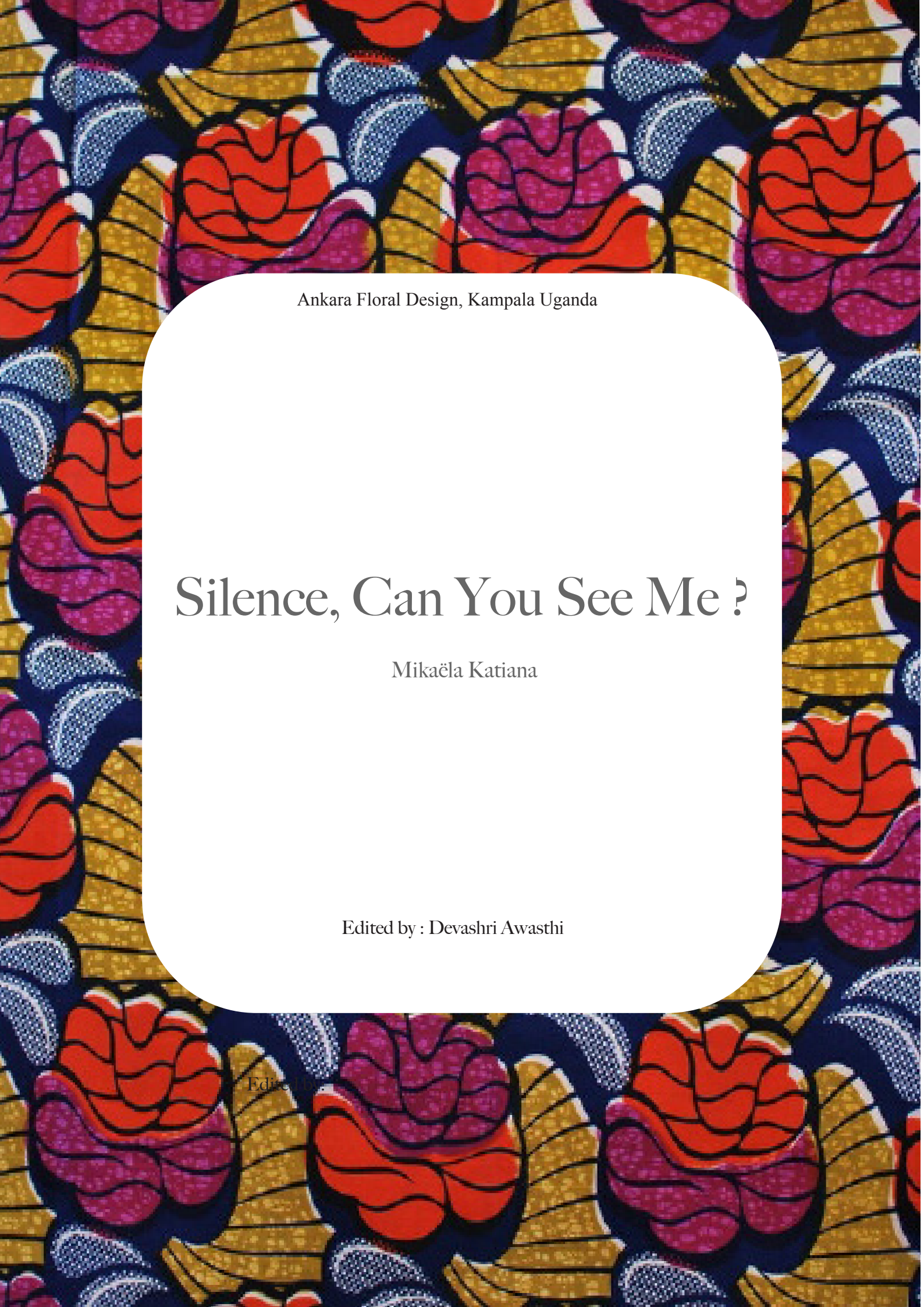
Evelyn Rogan



This drawing shows a fisherman at dusk in Lake Nabugabo, Uganda. Techniques for fishing at night involve using lamps to attract fish species that are more active at night. Lake Nabugabo is considered a RAMSAR Site for its ecological and community importance.



Silence, Can You See Me ?

Mikaëla Katiana

Edited by : Devashri Awasthi

I have always loved silence.

Not the kind that traps or weighs you down, but the kind where nothing else matters—just imagination, thoughts, and dreams. Not the forced kind, the silence that binds you, where emotions stay unspoken, waiting for a voice that never comes.

In an African household, laughter fills the air, intelligence, strength, and courage surround. Siblings play, waiting for parents to return. But what remains is the wait, a silence that takes its place before the laughter, before the words.

Silence greets you, waiting for love, for recognition, but instead, it lingers, waiting for the right time to speak. But silence feels safer, a choice that becomes habit, even when the heart longs to break free. You were taught silence before you were taught to express. It crept in, a quiet companion before you even knew your own voice. Now, it's a defense, a shield, a way to survive, to hold the pieces together. But I wonder—how much of me has been lost in the silence I never chose?

In the past, it was a shield, a cloak worn by those too young for its weight. The expectation was to be "seen"—children were to behave, to fill the space with presence but not with their voices. The world listened only for their silence, not for their hearts.

In African homes, in many communities, it was never the thoughts nor the emotions that truly mattered. What mattered was being still, being quiet. Silence came first, before expression, before a voice could form.
They never raised their hands, but I can still feel the heaviness of their silence. The words that were never spoken still echo in my chest. But it's not their fault, nor mine—it is the weight they carried, the cycle of wounds passed down, unhealed, burdened with the scars of a history too heavy to mend without the tools.

History taught us silence—to bury our anger, our grief, our humanity. In the face of oppression, there were no words allowed, only quiet, only endurance.

To speak was to invite punishment, to question was to risk retaliation. So, we

became experts in silence. We became silent to protect ourselves. But in that silence, we buried our voices, our truth, our hearts.

And now, they call it resilience. A word so full of strength, yet forged in the fires of silence, in the flames of oppression. It is the gift we were given, the poison in our veins, passed down like a sacred curse.

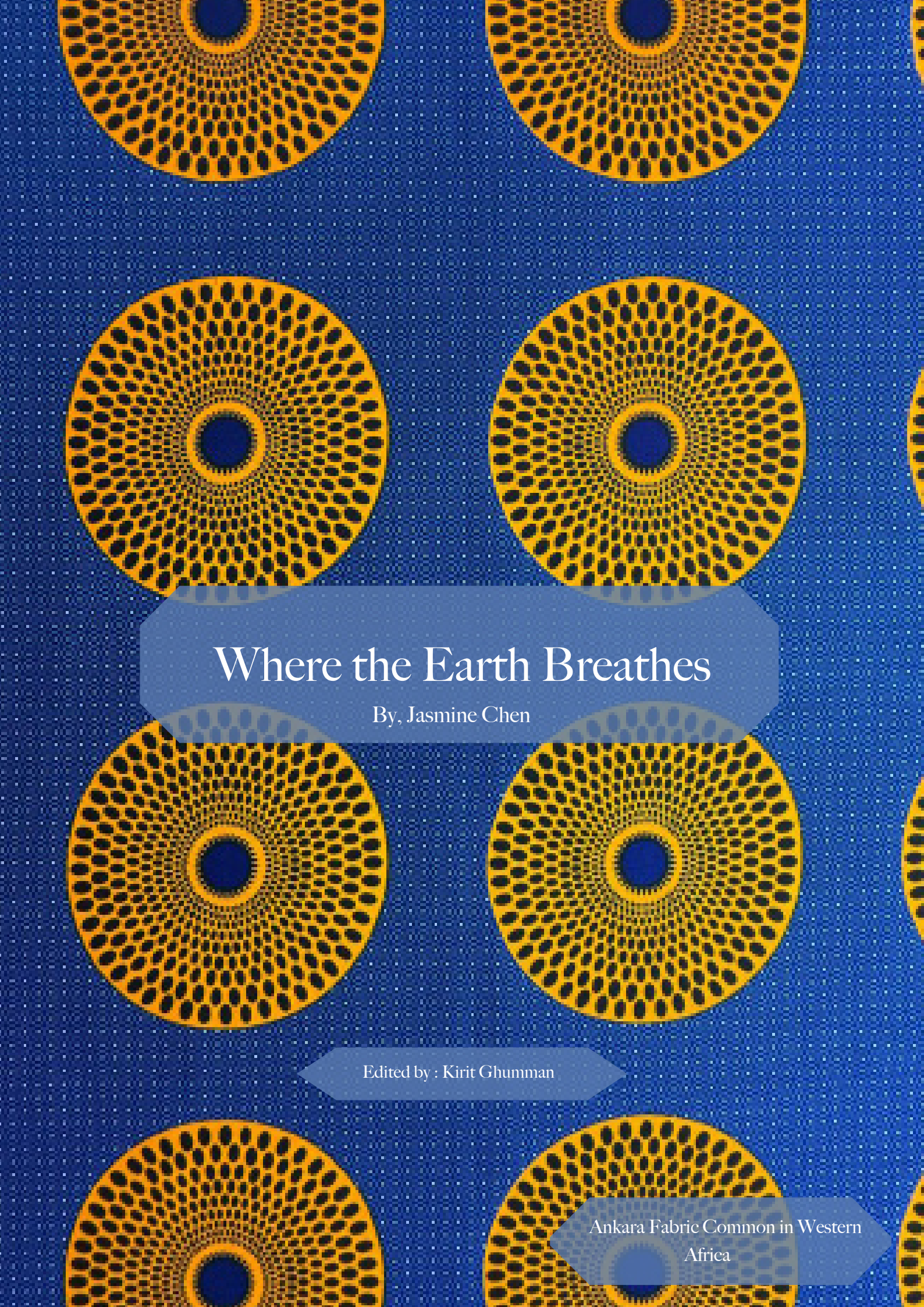
To endure, to survive, to stay strong—these are the expectations. To feel is weakness, to express is a luxury we were never taught to afford.

Today, I choose silence differently. Not as a shield, but as an act of worship. I choose to worship myself, to honor the silence that has carried me, and to transform it. I will use the silence that was forced upon me to rebuild, to heal, to rise

Silence, I can see you.

Evelyn Rogan

This drawing is inspired by women dancing with traditional peace baskets overlooking the Virunga Mountains, a mountain range of eight volcanoes in Rwanda. Peace baskets are woven with grass and palm and are an important symbol of peace and unity in Rwandan culture.


Where the Earth Breathes
By, Jasmine Chen
Edited by : Kirit Ghumman
Ankara Fabric Common in Western Africa

Abstract

This is a creative personal essay inspired by the lectures and readings from ARCH 355: Architectural History 4, taught by Professor Alan Avorgbedor, and the discussions led by TA Mehwish Abid, exploring vernacular African architecture. These are more than structures; these are memories moulded into clay, resilience etched in stone, and the cosmology of culture marked in space. While this story may not be based on a real experience, this essay envisions the cultural, spiritual, and communal significance of mud dwellings. I draw on the themes of resilience, creativity and harmony with nature which are central to Prof. Avorgbedor's class. This piece contributes to African studies by reimagining vernacular architecture as a reflection of cultural memory and resilience, emphasizing the deep relationship between built forms and community values. It highlights how African architectural tradition shapes spatial identities and preserves heritage.

When I first walked into a Northern Ghanaian village, I was shocked to see so many mud houses gathered together. They were so complex, yet looked simple. These structures which were created from the very earth beneath my feet seemed to emerge organically from the ground. As if they had always been there. I remember running my hand along the textured walls and feeling the cool, damp clay against my palm. It was at that moment that I understood that these structures, often viewed by outsiders as primitive or backwards, are much more than simple shelters. Much more than houses made of mud. They are homes.

To me, they became a symbol of resilience. They serve as a reminder that architecture is not just about grand designs or imported, standardized materials. Rather, it is about creating spaces which reflect the everyday values, beliefs, and practices of the people who inhabit them. As I spent more time in the village, I began to see the adobe homes as an expression of the relationship between the people and the earth that sustains them.

I remember watching a group of people mixing clay and straw together. Everyone's hands moved with ease as they prepared the material for a new home. The process was communal. Everyone in the village had a part to play in some way. For example, I saw men shaping the walls, children gathering the earth,

and elders offering them guidance. This was a ritual and a celebration of community and tradition.

As I helped mix the clay, I developed a profound connection with the land and the people around me. The earth, I learned, was not just a resource but it was a living entity, a source of fertility and life. It was to build with mud that in some ways I was engaging in a dialogue with the earth while honoring its gis and its spirit.

As I explored the village, something that stood out to me were the circular homes and their captivating shape. I was told that the circle represents unity, wholeness, and the cycle of life which I thought seemed like a simple and beautiful truth. But as I sat there, reflecting on it, a thought came to me. I began to think about how a circle, with the same exact perimeter as a square, actually offers a larger area. Less material for more space. I sat back, amazed.

As I continued to explore the beautiful village, I was mesmerized by the vibrant and intricate symbols that transformed the homes' walls into living works of art. I was told that these designs were more than mere decoration but that each pattern actually carried deep meanings. The Kassena people used these symbols as a way to express their values, showcase their beliefs and connect with their history. Each motif represented different values. Among them are Adinkra symbols like Aya which represents endurance and resilience; and Sankofa San (return), Ko (go), Fa (look, seek, take) which highlights the importance of learning from the past to move forward (Avorgbedor, personal communication). All these symbols were painted on the earth walls making each home a sacred space that honored tradition and wisdom.

I also realized that the arrangement of spaces in the village was quite different from what I was used to seeing in Montreal. As a matter of fact, each space was designated for specific roles and particular needs of a family. For example, some dwellings were designated for lovers, offering a space for intimacy and privacy, while others were set aside for pregnant women or those with newborns, providing comfort and safety during a significant time in life.

Unlike the grid-like, structured cities I was familiar with in Eurocentric urban planning, their village design was much more intuitive and fluid. In fact, the homes were clustered together, around a central space of a courtyard, a tree, or an assembly

point. This illustrated the communal nature of African societies, where the individual is always part of the collective. At first glance, the layout might seem disorganized, even chaotic, but it was, in fact, aligned with the concept of fractal patterns. Nature itself operates via fractals which are self-organizing systems that repeat at different scales. Thus, the Kassena village was a reflection of nature, where every element is connected and interdependent.

The village's organic layout, shaped by natural patterns, stood in sharp contrast to the structured, rational designs of colonial and modernist architecture. As I stood there, I couldn't help but notice the difference between the indigenous homes and the modern structures I had seen in tropical cities. Tropical modernism, as done by architects like Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, sought to solve the problems of living in hot, humid climates. Open, airy spaces, large windows for ventilation, and the use of local materials. But the more

I thought about it, I realized that tropical modernism was attempting to fix something that it had created.
Tropical modernism aimed to address the discomforts caused by traditional European building methods in tropical climates. However, the introduction of Western architectural ideals, with their focus on strict grids, rigid structures, and often non-local materials, disrupted the natural, organic flow of indigenous architecture.

The homes I observed were already perfectly attuned to their environment, open, flexible, and fluid, all designed to work with the land and climate, not against it. In fact, the thatched roof provided shelter from the sun and rain while the thick adobe walls kept the interior cool during the day and warm at night. Yet, the influence of tropical modernism, with its imported aesthetics, led to buildings that lacked the cultural and spiritual nuances embedded in the original homes.

As I left the village, I carried with me a newfound deep appreciation for African vernacular architecture and the culture it represents. The homes I visited were definitely anything but simple. They are a testament to the ingenuity and resilience of people who have learned to thrive in harmony with their environment.

In a world that often values the new over the old, these traditional homes stand as a quiet rebuke, challenging the Western notion that progress and innovation must always come in the form of new, standardized designs.

They remind us that beauty and meaning can be found in the simplest of forms. Today, these principles offer a timely reminder of the importance of sustainability and the need for spaces that foster connection to both people and place.

And in that, it is a story worth telling.

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This drawing is inspired by an old-growth Mahogany Tree growing in the Kakamega Forest National Reserve in Kakamega County, Kenya. The tree had a beautiful root system that remained at surface level, a characteristic of tropical rainforests, and the tree harboured a unique ecosystem of plants that have made themselves at home.

Our Plight

We are forgotten.
Unkown
Anonymous
Black and Brown Faces
Painted in Agony
Children Starving
Mothers crying in anguish
Women assaulted indiscriminately
Men's corpses litter the ground

What has changed?
Our suffering has never been surprising
The world is silent
We get a small section in the newspaper,
A footnote in the history of human suffering

Cities burn like wildfires,
Our cries of pain and dispair
Are the backdrop of bombs and bullets
Do you think we are bulletproof?
Or are you used to our pain?

We're just trauma porn
Pictures used to pretend you care,
My people deserve dignity
They have died with honour
Not for this-

We're not going to beg you to care
How could we?
Have we sunk so low?
Or did we just overestimate our place in the world?
I know we are nothing but a source of entertainment for some...

Or the poster board for tragedy in a third-world country,
One that had been through many wars
Genocide
Scheming Neighbors
And false friends

They want to exploit us,
Claim colonialism is a thing of the past
Then tell me why my people die for freedom;
Everyone stands in the way of what we want

Political stability?
Do we know that?
Foreign influence and interests not taking precedence over the people?
A bad joke
Unity?
Have we ever had that since you came to our land?

The birthplace of humanity
It is a graveyard,
Violated by atrocities
And people who claim they have morals

It's been two years-
No, it's been more
since 1956
What have we had for ourselves?

False borders
Civil war
Massacres
Genocide

We are strong
We have fallen
But we will rise up
With or without you

This belongs to us
Our plight.

By,
Hiba Babiker

Watercolor Paintings by Evelyn Rogan

I created these drawings during McGill's East Africa Field Study Semester (MEAFSS) and my personal travels. The drawings are inspired by experiences in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda.

We found a chimpanzee famlly during a forest walk at Budongo Conservation Field Station, locaed in Budongo Forest, a tropical rainforest at the top of the Albertine Rift in Western Uganda the family was grooming each other after spending the morning eating fruits from a large fig tree in the forest.

This drawing is inspired by a hike in the Usambara Mountains in Lushoto, Tanzania. The mountains were beautiful and lined with homes containing lush farms filled with diverse plants and trees.

This drawing is inspired by women tending to seaweed farms at low tide at Jambiani Beach in Unguja, Tanzania. The seaweed does not require land area or agricultural inputs, making it a climate resilient agricultural technique.

I was lucky to have the opportunity to stay with a Maasai family in Maji Moto, Kenya. We stayed with our homestay family in their traditional Manyatta home, which is designed to be semi-permanent so that they can move with their herd of cows to find grazing land and water. The blankets worn in the painting are called shukas and have patterns traditionally worn by Maasai people.

This drawing is inspired by fishing boats on a beach bordering Lake Victoria in Uganda. The boats line the beach during the day and are used at night for fishing.

This sketch is inspired by the kitenge fabric stores in Stone Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Zanzibar, Tanzania. This historic coastal trading town has a unique blend of Swahili, Arab, Persian, Indian, and European influences in its architecture, shown by its beautifully carved doors and maze of winding alleyways where you can find beautiful, vibrant stores, such as this one! Competent local tailors made beautiful clothes from the fabrics.

BLACK TIES by Harantxa Jean

"Dress code: Black-Tie."

To be invited under this condition is to be summoned into a space where presence alone is not enough.

One must arrive adorned in the **language of refinement**, draped in fabric that speaks before the wearer does.

The formal black-tie dress code is a tradition, a gesture of respect toward the host, and a quiet understanding that an occasion is of great importance.

But within the Black diaspora, to be well-dressed has never been about adherence.

It is assertion.

Defiance.

A command of presence that does not wait for permission.

Through fashion, Black people have challenged exclusionary norms and created a space for self-determination and cultural storytelling.

This ascension is symbolized in the “tie”, a seemingly simple accessory that, in this project, becomes a powerful metaphor.

Inspired by the layered meanings of the “black-tie” dress code, **BLACK TIES** explores how Black people, across time and continents, have used style to distinguish themselves, and to carve out identities beyond imposed limitations.

This project honors the invisible ties that unite Afro-descendant people globally, and the ties that bind the diaspora, both seen and unseen, stitched into every garment chosen with intention.

From the Congolese Sapeurs to the Harlem Renaissance gentlemen, and the opulence of the Caribbean Sunday's Best to the bold reimaginings of streetwear, **Black style has never been a monolith**.

Influenced by the legacies of Black dandyism, traditional African attire, and today's global fashion movements, **BLACK TIES** exist within hybridity, proving that our identities are various yet anchored, our aesthetics ever-evolving yet rooted in camaraderie.

The photoshoot accompanying this feature highlights this **ongoing evolution**, featuring Black McGill students as models who embody different eras and interpretations of Black style.

Each model channels a distinct persona, ranging from the dandy to the streetwear enthusiast, the preppy schoolgirl to the sporting figure, and the traditional African attire connoisseur.

The shoot, captured in black and white, emphasizes the timeless nature of Black fashion, showing how it continues to unite us, no matter where we come from.

Black ties cinch us together.

The invisible ones that thread our histories, like the literal knots resting against our skin.

We are stitched into one another, as living, breathing archives.

Black-Tie: A Dress Code Made For Us.

Casting, styling, creative direction, & story written by Harantxa Jean
Photographed by Ysabel Owusu @ysa.owu / @ysocele

Models :

Harantxa Jean	@harantzz
Nigel Odhiambo Ojuang	@oj.nigel
Doriane Ursot	@doriane_ursot
Lefika Noko	@lefika_lnk
Haregna Rafolisisoa	@justharegna

Andi Lin

"Africa was no longer so foreign and alien to me: Africa was present in my home. Africa was my mother. Africa was part of me."

Lea Shime

'Disney, Orientalism, and African Pride: Becoming Conscious of African Identity'