VOL. 5

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THE MCGILL JOURNAL OF AFRICAN STUDIES

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letter from the cover artist

Figures stand and move in composed stillness, time no longer distant but brought into the same physical space, held, carried, and confronted. Clocks appear not as background objects, but as presences placed directly within reach, no longer abstract, but tangible.

Reclaiming Time began from a growing awareness of how often time, and by extension progress, is defined through external systems. In many contexts, development is measured through speed, productivity, and distance from tradition. These frameworks rarely account for lived experience, memory, or the ways people exist within time differently.

I became interested in what it would mean to interrupt that structure, to make time something that could be engaged with, rather than something that silently governs. The decision to bring clocks into direct relationship with the body emerged from this questioning. What happens when time is no longer something we move through, but something we hold?

At the same time, the work responds to the way cultural identity is often positioned in opposition to modernity. There is an underlying expectation that moving forward requires leaving something behind. Through this series, I wanted to resist that idea. The presence of cultural textiles, adornment, and gesture is not symbolic of the past, it exists fully within the present.

Rather than rejecting time, the work questions who defines it, and for whom it is measured. It reflects a desire to move through the world on self-determined terms, where the past is not abandoned, but carried forward, and where the future is shaped through that continuity.

Michel Assouka
Wildlenz

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What the Soil Holds: A Land Acknowledgement

McGill University is located on the unceded territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation in Tio'tia:ke, part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, also known as Mooniyaang (Anishnaabe), and today called Montréal. This territory was not a gift to colonial settlers: it was seized through violent dispossession, the genocide of Indigenous Peoples, and the systematic discrediting of their knowledge systems. Additionally, acknowledging that in 1847, the Canadian government issued a loan without consulting the Six Nations of the Grand River trust fund to salvage McGill University from bankruptcy.

Although we judge these misdeeds with the advantage of hindsight, they must still be named and confronted. As a settler, my capacity to fully know and appreciate this territory is just as limited today. In the presence of unresolved injustice, Indigenous Peoples in Turtle Island (North America) have been far from silent – emphasizing collective action, asserting self-determination, and forging paths to healing.

It is equally vital to recognize the experiences of Afro-descended peoples who endured enslavement, discrimination, and other forms of oppression on these lands. Black Canadians have shared oppression with other Black communities under colonial rule in Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean. They, too, have made notable efforts for justice and continue to do so, battling systemic issues.

Familiarity with land acknowledgements can diminish one's reverence and awareness of their gravity. I urge you not to exemplify this assumption. Viewing these moments as critical disruptions, forward momentum requires reflection before creating resolutions that will affect future generations.

In light of these disruptions, UHURU – the McGill Journal of African Studies

– commits to conscious world-building: restructuring and orienting conversations concerning the futures of Indigenous Peoples and Black communities (Sabah Quao). This present-tense agency is expressed through the work you are about to read, by presenting diverse ways of thinking and through its sharing with the McGill community as an available literary and creative source for reflection. Yet, this is far from complete. Complete agency engages shared authorship of futures. In this, the futures we want must remain open to revision, allowing any member of the community to pause and call for a needed rewrite at any point.

Subira Atieno Okundi, Junior Editor
UHURU Editorial Team

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this volume's theme

AFROFUTURISM
envisioning the futures we create.

Last year, UHURU journeyed beyond the single story, unraveling stereotypes and reclaiming Africa's multidimensional pasts and presents. This year, we look ahead.

Afrofuturism invites contributors to imagine the futures that emerge when African diasporic resilience, ingenuity, and hope converge. Across the continent and its global diasporas, Black and African communities have always been future-makers, dreaming and innovating to create worlds where liberation is not deferred, but lived. This volume asks: what does it mean to build futures on our own terms? How can our unique knowledge, art, technology, and youth movements shape the horizons we are reaching toward? It calls upon decolonial imagination to challenge who gets to define progress, innovation, and sustainability, and insists that African people are at the helm of their own realities. Africa is not a continent waiting to be developed; it is at the forefront of technological advancement, economic projection, and cultural transformation.

To that end, this volume unfolds across six interconnected conversations, each one a thread in the larger tapestry of an Afrofuturist vision.

Decolonial Imagination begins by inviting us to interrogate the very foundations of what we call "progress", to ask who gets to define advancement, and whose futures have been quietly erased in its name. From that unsettling of the familiar, we turn to the tools of creation. Technology & Innovation explores what becomes possible when artificial intelligence, digital media, engineering, and design are wrested from the hands of extraction and placed in the service of liberation. When technology stops being something done to African communities and becomes something built by and for them. But no future

is sustainable without roots. Sustainable Ecological Futures grounds this vision in indigenous knowledge, land stewardship, and climate justice, asking how diasporic communities might build lives in genuine harmony with the Earth. And running through all of this is youth: the restless, insistent energy of a generation that refuses to wait. Youth Agency & Advocacy uplifts those who are already mobilizing, resisting, and rewriting what liberation can look like in their lifetimes. These visions, of course, do not flourish in isolation. Regional Multilateralism and Good Governance imagines political futures in which cooperation and transparency are architectures for delivering justice and accountability. And at the heart of it all are Black women. Women Empowerment centers the artists, leaders, thinkers, and activists whose visions have always stretched across generations, insisting that gender justice is not a footnote to liberation but its very core. Finally, this volume holds space for the beautiful, complex plurality that defines Africa and its global diasporas. Ethnic and Religious Solidarity dares to imagine futures where linguistic, ethnic, and religious differences are not wounds to be tended to, but sources of extraordinary strength, where solidarity is the choice to build together in spite of our differences.

Together, these threads form a living, breathing vision of what it means to create the futures we create — on our own terms, in our own voices, and rooted in our own power.

Henry Maidoh, Director of the UHURU Journal & Vice-President of Academics
The African Studies Students' Association

DECOLONIAL IMAGINATION

SOUDAN FRANÇAIS

A. DELZERS

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ANGOLA

CASA DA MOEDA

TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION.

SUSTAINABLE & ECOLOGICAL FUTURES

YOUTH AGENCY
& ADVOCACY

MEHDI BERRADA

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS SOLIDARITY

REGIONAL MULTILATERALISM AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

UHURU
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opening statement

As the Chair of the African Studies Program at McGill University, it is my great honor to once again introduce readers to Uhuru: The McGill Undergraduate Journal of African Studies. Uhuru, now in its fifth 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. Grounded in this year's theme of Africanfuturism, this issue centers on the diverse visions of African futures, whether these be in the form of exploring the intersection of technology and African traditions and myths or speculative narratives expertly deployed as a formidable decolonial tool upending Euro-centric linear temporalities. Eschewing false and divisive narratives associated with "Afro-Pessimism," the contributions in this volume break new ground: they do so by directing our attention towards a more optimistic and hope-ful focus; challenging readers to imagine sustainable global possibilities root-ed in, what the editors and authors insist, are African rooted futures wherein Africanfuturism generatively compliments rather than contradicts works of Afrofuturism and that genre's understandable focus on the African diaspora. These rigorously researched and edited submissions include works on the re-lationship between digital media and new forms of racial oppression in ways that "imagine different futures related to race and technology;" a deeply re-searched analysis that explains African authoritarianism as rooted in colonial-ism presented here so as to encourage a new decolonial imagination based on "Afrofuturist sentiment;" an essay calling on African youth to reject imposed notions of victimhood and transform the "brain drain" into an avenue of so-cial responsibility and collection action; and a compelling account of what constitutes the "Perfect Africanfuturist Manifesto" for contemporary and fu-ture generations. Taken together these works celebrate a wide range of African accomplishments reflecting the truly inter-disciplinary thrust and contribu-tions of African Studies worldwide

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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 that, 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 takes seriously 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 and about 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 Africans and African descendant communities worldwide are crucially and foundationally determined by how we imagine, research and write about the continent of Africa.

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

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a word from ASSA

African Studies Student Association

The African Studies Students' Association is proud to present the fifth edition of the African Studies Program's esteemed academic journal, UHURU. This edition is tangible proof of the talent, resilience, and hard work of the editorial team, the McGill student body, and our larger community.

As an Association, we could not be prouder of the dedication and creative vision shown by our editorial team, whose passion ensures that this journal remains true to what we stand for and emboldens our mission of fostering thoughtful discourse and 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 sincerest gratitude to its students, contributors, faculty advisors, and mentors, for without them, this volume would never have left the drawing board. Thank you for contributing to the vitality of our community.

It is your commitment to fostering dialogue and amplifying voices too often left at the margins that has shaped UHURU into a site of resistance, imagination, and collective action. The McGill African Studies Students' Association is proud to carry forward the legacy of those who came before us — not only by amplifying critical and thought-provoking perspectives on Africa and its diasporas, but by reimagining the futures they make possible.

We hope that UHURU resonates deeply; that it makes you feel seen, heard, and connected. More than a publication, it is a call to reflect, to question, and to dream beyond imposed limits. Rooted in the spirit of Afrofuturism, we move between memory and possibility, honoring the voices, histories, and futures that continue to shape Africa and its global diasporas.

In solidarity,

Zahra Hassan Doualeh, President
The African Studies Students' Association

Henry Maidoh, Director of the UHURU Journal & Vice-President of Academics
The African Studies Students' Association

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contributors

Literary Contributors

Guy Carmel Hakizimana
Vanessa Cuiuri
Elise Grymonprez-Delannoy
Liam Murphy
Nianga Lucau
Malcom David
Ingara Maidou
Lea Shime
William Sweeney
Kanny Diane
Nikechukwu Evuleocha
Thaïs Lorka--Navaud
Anderson Peguero II
Evelyn Logan

Artistic Contributors

Armen Erzingatzian
Anick Jasmin, Bastik
Austin Maidoh
Doria Rafolisisoa
Zoë Anum
Niara Van Gaalen
Michel Assouka
Mehdi Berrada

Spotlight Series Contributors

Black Psychology Students' Association (BSPA)
Black Students in Political Science (BSPS)
National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE)
Desautels African Business Initiative (DABI)

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letter from the editors

This volume was not built in a straight line.
It came together through conversations — some deliberate, others unfolding quietly — about how ideas emerge, how they travel, and how they find form.

What you hold here is not a single voice. It is a symphony.
Pieces that move differently, think differently, speak in their own rhythms. Some are precise, analytical; others reflective, creative. All of them, in their own way, reach toward something; questioning, exploring, insisting on being said.

Afrofuturism weaves through this issue as a thread.
A way of thinking, imagining, and positioning oneself in relation to time, possibility and creation. It appears differently in each piece, shaped by each voice, each perspective, each approach.

Our role as editors was not to narrow that movement, but to hold it.
To listen closely. To shape without flattening.
To work alongside each author so that their voice remained intact, while the work itself became sharper, clearer, more intentional.

The journal above all, is a process made visible.
Behind every page is an exchange: between drafts and revisions, questions and responses, and what was imagined and what was realized. It is in those spaces between versions that something collective began to take form.

We invite you to read not just for what each individual piece says, but for how they sit beside one another.
Where they align. Where they diverge.
Where a thought lingers a little longer than expected.

What emerges here is a collection of works in dialogue, a conversation still in motion.

Shanna Coulanges, Editor-In-Chief
The Editorial Team 2025 - 2026

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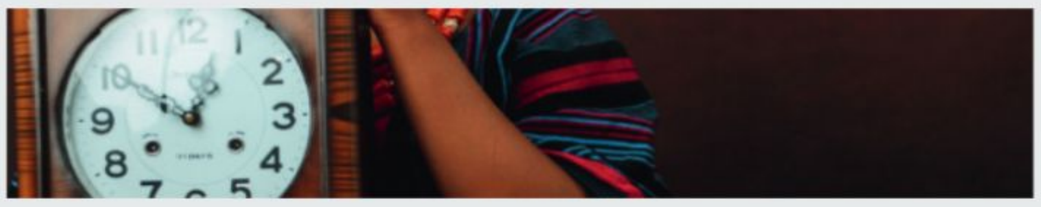
86 

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LIBERATION IS EARNED, NOT GIVEN:

DECOLONIAL IMAGINATION, YOUTH AGENCY

& THE RESPONSIBILITY OF AFRICA'S EDUCATED GENERATION

Written by Guy Carmel Hakizimana

PICTURE BY MICHEL ASSOUKA

There comes a moment in the life of every generation when history ceases to be merely a memory and instead becomes a teacher, a tool, and a mandate. For African youth, that moment is not located in some distant future, it is now. The destiny of the African continent will not be decided solely in state houses, international summits, or party conferences, but in the daily decisions young Africans make. Those decisions may involve surrendering to feelings of powerlessness, accepting only colonial explanations for current circumstances and avoiding to take accountability for the roles we have played or they may involve mobilizing, educating ourselves, confronting the continent's painful historical experiences, and honoring the sacrifices of previous generations who fought for freedom. That hard-won freedom has enabled access to education, mobility, and dignity. Learning from these lessons provides the foundation for building societies that reflect the aspirations of those who struggled before us.

If Africa's future is to be stable, prosperous, and sovereign, its youth must claim ownership of that future. Political liberation and economic freedom, as history repeatedly demonstrates, are not granted, they are earned. They have never been freely given, and this reality is unlikely to change. The continent's demographic profile makes this responsibility unavoidable. With the youngest population in the world, African youth represent the largest political, economic, and intellectual force on the continent. Yet this potential remains underutilized and, if neglected, may become an obstacle to stability and growth rather than a catalyst for progress. Colonial legacies, governance deficits, economic dependency, and internal divisions continue to impede development. The challenge facing this generation is therefore not simply to critique these constraints but to transcend them by cultivating a decolonial imagination, assuming accountability, and taking active responsibility in nation-building. This article argues that African youth must move beyond narratives of inherited victimhood and instead embrace agency, responsibility, and solidarity through education, participation, and collective action.

The Unfinished Struggle of Liberation

The political independence achieved across Africa in the mid-twentieth century represented a monumental victory against colonial domination. Leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Thomas Sankara, and Nelson

Mandela articulated visions of dignity, unity, and political and economic self-reliance. Their struggles were not merely about replacing colonial flags with national ones; they were about restoring African agency and sovereignty.

However, independence did not automatically produce freedom. Colonial economic structures persisted, new elites sometimes replicated old hierarchies, and external dependencies remained deeply entrenched. In many contexts, resources continued to flow outward while instability and poverty persisted domestically. Although the form of control changed, the logic of dependency endured. Consequently, Africa's liberation remains incomplete. The current generation inherits not only the victories of the past but also the unfinished responsibility of transforming inherited systems into institutions that genuinely serve African peoples. The struggle has shifted from anti-colonial resistance to internal reform, accountability, and structural renewal.

Decolonizing the Mind and Reclaiming Agency

True decolonization is not solely territorial or political; it is also psychological and intellectual. Colonial rule imposed not only foreign governance but also foreign epistemologies, ways of thinking that positioned Africa as dependent, inferior, or perpetually behind. These mental frameworks continue to shape how problems are diagnosed and how solutions are imagined. Decolonizing the mind, therefore, becomes a prerequisite for meaningful development.

This process requires rejecting the assumption that progress must be imported, that governance models must be copied uncritically, or that Africa's challenges are inherent rather than structural. It calls for valuing indigenous knowledge, local innovation, and African histories as legitimate sources of guidance. At the same time, decolonization demands introspection. It is insufficient to attribute all contemporary difficulties solely to colonialism or external interference. While these forces undeniably shaped present realities, internal failures such as corruption, weak institutions, ethnic manipulation, and civic disengagement also contribute to stagnation. A persistent victim mentality risks absolving societies of responsibility. Liberation requires accountability. Youth agency, therefore, begins with a shift in perspective: from asking what has been done to us to asking what we can build together.

Youth as Builders of Stability and Governance

African youth are often portrayed as a problem to be managed, unemployed, restless, or politically volatile. This framing obscures a more accurate reality: youth are the continent's greatest resource. Across Africa, young people are organizing for electoral transparency, launching entrepreneurial ventures, using technology to address local challenges, promoting peacebuilding initiatives, and demanding government accountability. These efforts demonstrate that youth are not passive observers of history but active agents of change.

Nevertheless, potential alone does not produce transformation; participation does. Good governance does not emerge spontaneously but is cultivated by citizens who vote, organize, volunteer, question authority, and insist on transparency. Stability is not accidental; it is the outcome of collective effort. Each instance of civic disengagement leaves space for mismanagement and exploitation, while every act of engagement strengthens democracy and accountability. Nation-building cannot be outsourced. It belongs to all sons and daughters of Africa, especially its youth.

From Brain Drain to Brain Responsibility

One of the most visible symptoms of frustration across the continent is the persistent "brain drain," whereby talented young Africans seek opportunities abroad. While mobility and global exchange can be valuable, the mass departure of skilled citizens often weakens the domestic institutions that most need their expertise. The deeper issue is not migration itself but the belief that success can only be found elsewhere. No society develops sustainably when its brightest minds feel detached from local progress.

Development requires commitment to building at home rather than merely escaping constraints. This does not mean that every young African must remain geographically rooted. Rather, it means that wherever education and skills are acquired, they should ultimately serve African communities. Knowledge without responsibility becomes another form of extraction.

The Ethical Responsibility of the Educated Generation

A particularly urgent responsibility falls on Africans who have had access to higher education. Education is not merely a personal achievement; it is a

social investment. Families, communities, and public institutions often make significant sacrifices so that one individual may study. Such privilege carries an obligation.

To be educated is to possess tools for transformation. If degrees serve only individual advancement, inequality deepens. However, when knowledge is shared, mentorship is offered, and skills are transferred, education becomes a collective asset. Educated citizens must therefore commit to mentoring younger generations, sharing technical expertise, supporting local initiatives, and ensuring that progress is not confined to elite spaces. Nation-building is communal. When one person is educated, many should benefit.

Conclusion: Liberation as Responsibility

The task before African youth is neither symbolic nor optional, it is historical. Apathy, cynicism, and fatalism must be rejected. Meaningful change requires active and deliberate participation: joining civic organizations, creating businesses, strengthening schools, promoting
peace, voting, questioning authority, and building institutions. Those privileged with education
must reach back and uplift others, ensuring that progress is shared rather than isolated.

Africa does not need a savior. No external organization will grant the prosperity the continent seeks. What Africa requires is the collective commitment of its sons and daughters. History will not remember what was lamented but what was built. Previous generations earned political independence through sacrifice; the present generation must earn intellectual, economic, and institutional independence through responsibility and action. Liberation is earned, not given, and the future of Africa will be written by those who choose to claim it.

Armen Erzingatzian

Scans from a photoshoot directed and shot with model Rahim, a Computer Science student at McGill. The photos were taken on medium format film: Portra 800 (Color) and Delta 3200 (B&W).

BEYOND THE COLONIAL HANGOVER:

REIMAGINING ZIMBABWE'S POLITICAL FUTURE

Written by Vanessa Cuiuri

I. Introduction

Central to Afrofuturism is the agency of Black people to control their own destinies, founded upon autonomy and self-rule, emphasizing resilience and the reclamation of the past to build a better future (Toussaint, 2025). As a political lens, Afrofuturism seeks to recover futures that have been stolen, foreclosed, or rendered unimaginable by colonialism and its afterlives, including racial hierarchies, economic dependency, political authoritarianism, and epistemic domination. It insists that Black and African communities have always been future-makers, adapting, resisting, and building. Thus, Afrofuturism is inseparable from decolonial imagination, rooted in radical hope and the design of new futures (Hill-Jarret, 2023). Within this framework, the longue durée of Zimbabwe's resistance to colonialism and authoritarianism emerges as a compelling case study for the politics of foreclosed futures and Black liberation, resistance, and empowerment.

From 1890-1980, Zimbabwe was under British settler-colonial control, during which colonial governance systematically de-traditionalized and de-Africanized the population, generating cultural dissonance, uprootedness, and social alienation (Wuta, 2025). Although independence in 1980 promised democratic governance, land restitution, and pan-African sovereignty, these aspirations were gradually eroded by factionalism, power struggles, and recurrent political violence. Zimbabwe has thus been characterized as a postcolony, in which "the violent ghosts of colonialism are refusing to be put to burial," allowing colonial systems of exclusion and violence to be reproduced (Mbembe, 1992 as cited in Mpofu, 2021, p. 3). The Mugabe-era was characterized by startling human rights abuses, dysfunctional economic policies, and nearly four decades of uninterrupted single-party rule, providing an opportunity to analyze the challenges of decolonial transitions and the cascading of power within nationalist echo-chambers. Zimbabwe's trajectory captures a paradox observable across many postcolonial contexts: a liberation movement forged in anti-colonial resistance gradually adopted and intensified the very techniques of coercion and conclusion it once sought to dismantle. This transformation reflects the enduring material and ideational legacies of colonial rule. These legacies continue to constrain postcolonial sovereignty within a global order structured by racial capitalism and geopolitical hierarchies.

Therefore, this paper adopts decolonial and critical theoretical frameworks to foreground the often under-theorised

forces of neocolonialism in Zimbabwe's political milieu. It treats authoritarianism not only as a mode of rule, but as an outcome of historically produced constraints on future-building. It argues that Zimbabwe's authoritarian turn after 2000 emerged not from an inevitable failure of African political culture, but from the interaction between colonial state continuity, Cold War and post–Cold War geopolitical interventions, liberation-movement political culture, and structural economic crisis. Together, these forces entrenched a militarized and exclusionary political order in which violent authoritarian consolidation became both possible and politically rational for ZANU-PF. Without accounting for exogenous geopolitics, analyses risk neglecting the colonial infrastructures and epistemic conditions that foreclose genuine decolonisation, suppress indigenous, community-centered governance traditions, and constrain post-liberation governments. Finally, by centering moments of interrupted possibility, especially the Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPA) experiment and community-informed political ethics, this paper approaches Zimbabwe not as a closed story of failed transition, but as a site for possibility and building futures on Zimbabweans' terms.

II. A brief review of related literature

Existing literature offers a detailed portrait of Zimbabwe's internal dynamics, but tends to understate how colonial state continuity and international hierarchies structured the field in which authoritarianism unfolded. Political economy and historical accounts emphasize that Zimbabwe's authoritarian turn was deeply rooted in internal political culture, liberation war legacies, and the breakdown of state institutions under mounting socio-economic pressures. While these explanations provide important insights into regime formation, they frequently overlook the ways colonial legacies and global power structures constrained Zimbabwe's political transition and narrowed the range of post-independence political possibilities.

Alexander, McGregor, and Ranger (2000) challenge regime narratives surrounding the so-called dissident conflict of the 1980s, demonstrating that violence in Matabeleland was not the result of a coordinated ZAPU rebellion but rather emerged from mistrust within the newly formed Zimbabwe National Army and the marginalization of ZIPRA combatants. Drawing on interviews with former fighters, they show that many ZIPRA "dissidents" acted out of fear and survival rather than insurgent

intent. Their work reveals how failures of demobilization, unequal treatment within state security institutions, and early reliance on coercion normalized violence as a tool of governance, foreshadowing later authoritarian practices Political economy analyses situate Zimbabwe's authoritarian consolidation within the structural crises of the 1990s. Olukoshi (1998) argues that structural adjustment programs across Africa undermined state legitimacy by reducing social spending and intensifying popular hardship, often provoking state repression in response to protest. In the Zimbabwean context, Bond (2005) and Bracking (2005) document how the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) produced deindustrialization, unemployment, and fiscal collapse, eroding the regime's capacity to govern through consent. As economic legitimacy declined, the state increasingly relied on coercion and patronage, particularly through preferential treatment of war veterans and security elites, reinforcing authoritarian tendencies.

Complementary institutional analyses by Hulec (2019) and Sachikonye (2000) trace the emergence of a militarized party-state, where the Joint Operations Command functioned as the de facto center of political authority. These authors document how the opaqueness of the executive, hollowing out of judicial and parliamentary branches, rise of securocrats, and the politicization of the civil service created an architecture of rule that subordinated democratic processes to security imperatives. (Hulec, 2019; Sachikonye, 2009). This literature convincingly demonstrates how institutional decay enabled authoritarian consolidation, but it often treats these developments as primarily domestic pathologies rather than products of inherited colonial state structures.

Parallel scholarship focuses on ideology, nationalism and discursive power. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) conceptualizes Mugabeism as a populist and nativist ideological creature that mobilized anti-imperialist sentiment, patriotic history, and exclusionary autochthony. Mugabe's discourses framed politics around martyrdom and the legacy of the liberation struggle, legitimizing repression and exclusion. Mugabe would also strategically deploy anti-imperialist discourse to reframe economic failure and political dissent as external sabotage (Raftopoulos & Phimister, 2004). Mpofu (2021) extends this analysis through a postcolonial philosophical lens, arguing that Mugabe fused liberation ideology with a Nietzschean will to power, reproducing colonial technologies of domination while claiming revolutionary legitimacy.

Liberation-movement theory further contextualizes these dynamics. Neocosmos (1998) distinguishes between peo-

ple's politics and state politics. The former being horizontal, mass-based, and participatory, and the latter being centralized, hierarchical, and exclusionary. He argues that liberation movements often drift toward authoritarianism because they inherit centralized organizational cultures and treat dissent as treasonous. This framework illuminates ZANU-PF's conflation of party and nation, hostility to pluralism, and its normalization of coercion.

Despite the richness of this scholarship, one critical dimension remains underdeveloped: the role of Cold War geopolitics and international power relations in shaping Zimbabwe's political trajectory. Olukoshi (1998) notes that during the Cold War, both Western and Eastern bloc powers routinely overlooked domestic repression in allied states, prioritizing geopolitical stability over democratic accountability. Moore (2014) deepens this insight by demonstrating that the destruction of the Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPA), a socialist-leaning, potentially democratic alternative within the liberation movement, was not merely a ZANU oppression project, but the outcome of coordinated regional and international interventions. Here, Western governments pulled strings to project their grand strategies. Locating Zimbabwe's independence in the Cold War context challenges assumptions that authoritarianism was inevitable or purely endogenous (Moore, 2014).

By foregrounding external and historical forces, this paper contributes to the literature by situating Zimbabwe's post-2000 authoritarianism within a broader matrix of coloniality, Cold War intervention, and postcolonial constraint, offering a more holistic account of the country's democratic deficit. The next section outlines the decolonial framework used to analyze this case, chosen because it takes into account the forces of colonialism that are overlooked by the dominant literature.

III. Theoretical framework

Scholarship on democratic consolidation efforts and post-liberation governance offers valuable insights into regime formation in postcolonial contexts. Yet the Zimbabwe case demands an analytical framework that goes beyond institutional decline or liberation-movement excesses and instead interrogates the deeper structures that govern what kind of futures become politically possible.

Therefore, a decolonial framework, particularly a focus on the coloniality of power and the postcolony, is essential to understand the hierarchical world system that continues to constrain developmental autonomy and political stability. The violence inherent to imposing a colonial order leaves a deep imprint on

the political culture of newly independent states (Fanon, 1963). This indoctrination into a culture of violence is internalized by the postcolonial elite and bolstered by their newfound social and material capital (Cabral, 1974; Fanon, 1963). Indulgence is at the core of the new national bourgeoisie who have been conditioned and socialized by the Western bourgeoisie (Fanon, 1963).

Similarly, cultural domination is a foundational component of imperialism (Cabral, 1974). Through the repression and distortion of indigenous cultural systems, colonialism produces a population alienated from its own cultural values and inclined to assimilation into and reverence of the colonizer's worldview. This paper also draws on the notion of the coloniality of power, which posits that global modernity is structured by racial, economic, and epistemic hierarchies forged through European imperial expansion (Quijano, 2000). Despite formal independence, the hegemonic influence of Western capitalism and political norms continues to limit the sovereignty of states in the Global South. Zimbabwe's postcolonial trajectory cannot be separated from this global matrix: the consolidation of centralized power, the securitization of politics, and the capturing of colonial political technologies reflect the enduring grip of colonialism.

Integrating African philosophy further grounds this paper's analytical approach. In particular, the Southern African concept of ubuntu, which conceives of personhood as fundamentally relational and community-based, counters essentialist claims about African political culture (Wuta, 2025). Rather, ubuntu represents a radically different political ethic of consensus building, communal accountability, and relational governance that colonial rule sought to suppress (Wuta, 2025). The epistemicide of uniquely African and traditional modes of thinking and the pressures of an ever-modernizing global system based on capitalism rendered post-colonial Africa debilitated to pursue authentic decolonization and return to original political functions. Taken together, these theories allow Zimbabwe to be digested not as the inevitable outcome of African political culture or liberation movement governance, but as the product of deeply entrenched colonial legacies and global hierarchies.

IV. Historical context

The political landscape that produced Zimbabwe's post-2000 crisis was rooted in political and economic fragmentation that began long before independence. The colonial state entrenched racial, regional, and ethnic divisions that structured both governance and

resistance. These divisions shaped the emergence of the two dominant nationalist movements, ZANU and ZAPU, whose rivalry would continue to influence post-independence politics (Alexander, McGregor, & Ranger, 2000). ZANU drew its primary support from Shona-speaking regions and developed its armed wing, ZANLA, with backing from China and Tanzania, while ZAPU, rooted largely in Ndebele-speaking constituencies, formed ZIPRA with Soviet support (Moore, 2014). These divergent ideological orientations and external alliances produced competing visions of political order even within the shared objective of liberation.

These differing visions for national order produced military and political rivalry during the liberation movement. Yet, beneath the binaries of this rivalry was another fomenting faction of dissatisfaction with the old guard style politics. Thus, the ZIPA coalition of young combatants from ZIPRA and ZANLA united to challenge the older nationalist leadership with a youthful spirit (Moore, 2014). ZIPA posited potential for successful democratic transition, but its strength was quickly decapitated by the West, the Frontline States, and South Africa (Moore, 2014). This episode underscored how international and regional power dynamics intersected with internal factionalism to shape Zimbabwe's political future. In this sense, ZIPA represents more than a historical footnote. It embodies what Afrofuturism might label a suppressed future. Its brief existence reveals that Zimbabwe's postcolonial state was not inherently destined for authoritarian oppression and inequity. Rather, alternative configurations of political authority; specifically, youth-led ideologically reformative, were imaginable and temporarily within reach.

Zimbabwe's transition from war to independence would crystallize many of these unresolved colonial-era tensions (Mpofu, 2025). The Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 ended the liberation war but entrenched a strong executive branch, protected settler property relations, and preserved much of the colonial state apparatus (Phimister & Raftopoulos, 2004). While the settlement enabled a relatively peaceful transition, it constrained redistributive reform and embedded centralized authority within the new state. Following ZANU's electoral victory in 1980, efforts to integrate former ZIPRA and ZANLA combatants into the Zimbabwe National Army were plagued by mistrust, uneven treatment, and lingering Rhodesian influence within security institutions (Alexander, McGregor, & Ranger, 2000).

These tensions escalated in the early 1980s. Allegations of arms caches discovered on ZAPU properties in 1982,

followed by the arrest and dismissal of senior ZIPRA commanders, deepened divisions and marginalized ZAPU politically and militarily (Alexander, McGregor, & Ranger, 2000). The subsequent Gukurahundi campaign in Matabeleland, carried out by the Fifth Brigade under direct executive control, marked a decisive moment in the consolidation of authoritarian rule. Violence was deployed not merely as a response to insurgency, but as a strategy to eliminate political opposition and discipline perceived internal enemies, institutionalizing coercion as a legitimate tool of governance (Alexander, McGregor, & Ranger, 2000).

The 1987 Unity Accord formally merged ZANU and ZAPU into ZANU-PF, consolidating a dominant-party system. While the accord ended large-scale violence, it did so by neutralizing opposition rather than fostering pluralism. The 1990s introduced new pressures that further destabilized Zimbabwe's political order. Economic liberalization under ESAP, combined with declining state capacity and the costly 1997 war veterans' payouts, eroded the regime's economic legitimacy (Bond, 2005; Bracking, 2005). These crises intensified reliance on patronage, securitization, and coercive control.

The emergence of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 represented the first credible electoral challenge to ZANU-PF since independence (Raftopoulos & Phimister, 2004). By the turn of the millennium, Zimbabwe had a centralized ruling party, a militarized state architecture inherited from the colonial era, and growing social and economic instability, fortifying its authoritarianism and political violence.

V. Discussion

Zimbabwe's authoritarian consolidation after 2000 did not emerge from a single causal rupture, nor can it be reduced to leadership pathology or institutional decay alone. Rather, Zimbabwe's authoritarian turn was produced through interacting structural, ideological, and geopolitical forces that rendered violent authoritarianism both feasible and politically rational for ZANU-PF.

Building on this argument, four interrelated dynamics are particularly salient: 1) the militarized political culture inherited from the liberation struggle, 2) the structural and economic crises of the 1990s, 3) the continuity of colonial state architectures, and 4) and shifting international alignments that reshaped the regime's incentives and discursive strategies.

By the late 1990s, these dynamics crystallized into a political environment in which ZANU-PF's hold on power depended increasingly on coercion,

militarization, and the mobilization of anti-imperialist nationalism, culminating in the authoritarian extremism of 2000 and onwards. These forces were co-constructed and mutually operative under a global system structured by colonialism. From an Afrofuturist perspective, these dynamics did more than consolidate authoritarian rule; they systematically narrowed the horizon of political imagination by rendering alternative modes of government, rooted in pluralism, community authority, and radical redistribution, politically unviable. Authoritarianism and foreign intervention thus functioned not only as mechanisms of coercion, but as structural constraints that foreclosed the emergence of alternative postcolonial futures that had briefly surfaced during the liberation struggle.

V.I. On the political culture of liberation movements and the militarization of the state

The origins of authoritarian political practice in Zimbabwe lie partly in the liberation struggle itself. The very characteristics that are necessary for a united and successful liberation front, including centralized-decision making, demand for absolute loyalty, secrecy, and militarization, are inherent to authoritarianism (Gumede, 2017). Drawing on Neocosmos' (1998) distinction between "people's politics" and "state politics," ZANU-PF increasingly equated political authority with liberation credentials, framing dissent as betrayal rather than democratic contestation. This logic normalized coercion as a legitimate instrument of rule and fused party, state, and nation into a singular political identity. This fusion process made authoritarian governance appear not as a deviation from liberation ideals, but as their continuation, thereby narrowing the political space for democratic contestation.

At the heart of liberal theories on democracy is the entitlement to vote in or out the highest officials of government, with options of distinct and autonomous opposition (Olukoshim, 1998). However, the phenomenon of developing a one-party state and crushing opposition state has been rich across Africa, with cases including Mozambique, Tanzania, Angola, among others.This is often rooted in the desire to resolve ethnic tensions but ultimately drives further fractionalism that has been already established by the colonial regime (Gumede, 2017; Olukoshu, 1998).

The weaponization of patriotic history, repression of civil society, policing of identity, and justifications of violence mirror Cabral's (1974) warnings about liberation elites who substitute

domination for popular empowerment. More so, the excessive violence and militarization that was necessitated by ZANU during the liberation war indoctrinated the idea that the military should be guarantor of political order (Mpofu, 2021). The hard-fought win against the colonial regime endowed ZANU-PF with a superiority complex, convincing itself of its exclusive right to rule and classifying any opposition as treasonous.

Early tensions emerged after Zimbabwe's independence which was formally established with a ceasefire in December 1979. The ceasefire required guerilla fighters to report to Assembly Points for demobilization and integration in the new ZNA. This period was marked by suspicious and traumatized guerillas suddenly expected to submit to the state, long-clandestine political cadres emerging into public view, and a need to stabilize the country and prepare for national elections (Alexander, McGregor, & Ranger, 2000). The escalation of violence, later exposed to be a deliberate machination of the regime, hardened ethnic polarization in the country and demonized an internal other, reminiscent of colonial tactics of division. The Fifth Brigade, a faction of North Korean combatants that answered directly to the executive, launched Operation Gukurahundi, a genocide campaign in Matebeland against ZAPU/ZIPRA members and supporters and its Ndebele ethno-linguistic base. This period institutionalized the idea that opposition, real or imagined, was an existential threat that required coercive elimination (Alexander, McGregor, & Ranger 2000). In summary, the 1970s featured a won struggle against colonialism and racism, but quickly the 1980s would feature a racialized and tribalized conflict (Alexander, McGregor, & Ranger 2000).

These tendencies resurfaced in the 2000s. By this time, the Joint Operations Command had become the central node of political authority, subordinating electoral processes, civil administration, and the judiciary to a militarized political order (Hulec, 2019; Sachikoyne, 2009). Mugabe fused liberation-war ideology, anti-imperialist discourse, and a rigid conception of sovereignty into a political philosophy in which legitimacy flowed not from democratic consent but from the liberation struggle itself (Mpofu, 2021). Through his personal political philosophy, ZANU-PF's rule was deemed permanent and sacrosanct.

In this way, the liberation movement's internal logics did not simply persist in the post-independence period, they structured a political order in which authoritarian rule was both legitimate and

necessary, while simultaneously foreclosing the emergence of pluralist or participatory alternatives to ZANU-PF dominance.

V.II. On structural economic crises and coercion

While a repressive and exclusive political culture was being curated, Zimbabwe's authoritarianism was intensified by the acute economic crises of the 1990s. The failures of the ESAP reshaped the political economy of the state (Bond, 2005; Bracking, 2005). ESAP would produce deindustrialization, rising poverty, and massive urban unemployment. Pressurized by the government's 1997 veterans payout, which awarded an unbudgeted payout of Z$4.2 billion, the economy would descend into failure from 1997-1998, marked by collapsed currency, withdrawal of international financial institution's support, and fiscal crisis (Bracking, 2005). This episode demonstrates ZANU-PF's survivalist political logic allocating state resources and preferential treatment among key constituencies, particularly war veterans, making coercive redistribution and authoritarian consolidation both politically rational and materially necessary for regime survival. Importantly, the payouts empowered war veterans as a political constituency, which would incite the later state-organized land invasions from 2000-2002 (Bracking, 2005; Raftopolous & Phimister, 2004).

The chronic economic crisis destroyed ZANU-PF's legitimacy and capacities, shifting the party toward survivalist authoritarianism. The state increasingly relied on coercion to manage urban dissent, culminating in the extreme tactics like Operation Murambatsvina in 2005, which forcibly cleared slum areas of the country with an unstated motivation to punish the urban poor
for voting for the opposition during the March parliamentary elections (Bracking, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009; Phimister, 2005). The operation also sought to reassert territorial control of the regions sympathetic and privy to MDC leadership. The retreat from democratic norms ensued. Across the early 2000s, elections showed escalating manipulation relying on gerrymandering, fear, coercion, and food withholding punishments (Bracking, 2005). As the ruling party's social base eroded, ZANU-PF repackaged economic grievances as political instruments, mobilizing youth militias and veterans to violently reclaim land and discipline dissent.

The rise of the MDC in 1999 fundamentally threatened the ruling party's monopoly on power. ZANU-PF responded by mobilizing liberation war symbolism, anti-Western rhetoric, and patriotic nationalism (Raftopoulos & Phimister, 2004; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). The

regime relied on propaganda to claim the MDC was a British puppet, again weaving in various layers of national grievances and trauma to legitimize repression (Bracking, 2005; Phimister & Raftopolous, 2004). Any semblance of opposition to the party state was reframed as foreign subversion, morally justifying repression in the name of sovereignty.

As economic crises eroded the regime's legitimacy, authoritarianism emerged not as an aberration but as a strategic response to declining consent, further narrowing the political field and obviating democratic capacities of the population.

V.III. On colonial state continuity and Cold War geopolitics

A third crucial dimension is the role of colonial institutional continuities and Cold War engineerings in shaping Zimbabwe's political landscape. Although the origins of Zimbabwean frictions were and continue to be internally exacerbated, it would be narrow to not assess its politics as inextricably tied to regional and international tensions, most notably the Cold War (Moore, 2015). Accordingly, it is also necessary to accept that the coloniality of power transcends temporal borders of de jure colonial rule and pervades all geographic boundaries. This underscores the conduits through which postcolonial states inherit centralized, racialized, and militarized governance structures designed for control, not democratic participation. Zimbabwe's post-1980 state did not dismantle the Rhodesian apparatus; it repurposed it. An Afrofuturist lens seeks to ask what could have ensued if governance structures were redesigned through indigenous epistemologies and communitarian political ethics. The long legacy of the colonial state is not only material, but also epistemic, including the colonization of the imagination, which limits the scope and terms through which political liberation via indigenous or communal political traditions could be conceived (Hill-Jarrett, 2023).

Foreign eyes were on southern Africa as decolonial liberation movements swept the region in the 1960s and 1970s, signalling a shake-up of the current world order and ushering in the potential for sovereign statehood for those historically marginalized and oppressed. Akin to many other flashpoints across the Global South, Zimbabwe was the recipient of concerted superpower observation and involvement. In the early 1960s, ZAPU began developing relations with the Soviet Union, encouraging the US to enter and counterbalance Soviet influence. Concurrently, Angola and Mozambique were flirting with the possibility of establishing new Marx-

ist-Leninist regimes, which accentuated the strategic importance of Zimbabwe in not being the next domino to fall toward the East (Moore, 2015).

The ideological location of Zimbabwe in the world system was contentious following the rise of ZIPA, a short-lived, socialist-leaning coalition of young, frustrated ZANLA and ZIPRA fighters. This democratic experiment was characterized as a third force, with the means to usurp the old brand of Zimbabwean nationalists (Moore, 2015). Though often treated as a mere footnote in Zimbabwean political history, the covert and intersecting efforts by the West, the Frontline States, South Africa, and Mugabe to deal with ZIPA affirm the sincerity of its threat to the elite leadership and Western foreign policymakers (Moore, 2015).

To elaborate, in 1977, just two years after ZIPA was formed, key leaders were imprisoned in Mozambique, a Frontline State under Samora Machel's leadership. They were detained until Zimbabwe's first democratic election in 1980. Despite Machel's key commitment to the cause of the Frontline States, which sought to liberate their neighbours from apartheid and white minority rule, he was characteristically pragmatic and unideological, making ZIPA threaten his vision of predictable, controlled transition across the region, encouraging his support of its multilateral suppression (Moore, 2015).

On the part of Western powers, ZIPA's radicalism was a threat to their hasty efforts to find moderate leaders in the Global South who would be capable of restraining revolutionary sprouts and Soviet influence. In fact, a Special National Intelligence Estimate by American intelligence services developed that the prospect for a moderate Zimbabwe government was inversely proportional to ZIPA's strength (Moore, 2015). South Africa also viewed ZIPA's radicalism as a possible existential threat to apartheid, fearing the movement would energize the liberation movements brewing at home. The West subsumed a regional coalition against ZIPA by wielding financial and material incentives. British interest-free loans of 15 million pounds to Machel and a large shipment of grain from the USA to Mozambique are speculated to have been the West's coercive tools to influence Mozambican resistance against ZIPA (Moore, 2015).

Aside from finding common grounds to deal with the radical ZIPA problem, the West bolstered Mugabe's rise to power in other ways. Britain ensured it cultivated early diplomatic relations with Mugabe, working closely with him under the Lancaster House Agreement, which developed the new constitution for independent Zimbabwe and baked

in ZANU supremacy and ZAPU marginalization (Phimister & Raftoploulos, 2004). Continually, Western financial institutions poured money into Zimbabwe, with Mugabe's regime characterized as a "successful protégé of Washington financiers" (Bond, p. 609 2005). As established at Lancaster House, Britain would provide substantial funding and assistance for land reform through a willing buyer, willing seller framework (Phimister & Raftoploulos, 2004). This design ensured security over white property rights and protected settler economic interests. During this era, international financial institutions gladly turned a blind eye to Mugabe's peaking authoritarianism and human rights abuses, asserting that Zimbabwe was a neoliberal exemplar (Bond, 2005). In effect, Western governments overlooked or downplayed escalating authoritarian behaviour so long as Zimbabwe remained compliant with geopolitical and economic expectations.

Overall, the suppression of leadership alternatives such as ZIPA demonstrates that both domestic elites and international actors actively constrained more radical political possibilities, ensuring that Zimbabwe's transition unfolded within a narrow scope of acceptable futures compatible with extant global power hierarchies.

V.IV. On the anti-Mugabe turn in the West and more foreign meddling

Mugabe quickly moved from being the desired moderate who would champion Western hegemony in Southern Africa to a rogue-nationalist dictator. The rupture after 2000 must not be understood as the beginning of authoritarianism but as the moment when Mugabe stopped serving Western strategic interests and the fomenting internal and external variables swelled. Following these external pressures, Zimbabwe's existing authoritarian tendencies were rearticulated within a shifting geopolitical context that made coercion, nationalist mobilization, and anti-imperialist discourse increasingly necessary for regime survival.

Corporations began to fray in the 1990s as the ESAP produced protracted economic decline, deindustrialization, and mass unemployment (Bond, 2005; Bracking, 2005). The rupture provided fertile ground for London to reassess its relationship with Harare as the nation's position within the global system began to erode. As Zimbabwe was increasingly cast as fiscally irresponsible and politically unstable by international financial institutions, external pressure intensified, narrowing the regime's available policy options (Bracking, 2005).

The fracture came to a head in 1997

when Britain's Labour Party government, under Tony Blair, announced it would no longer support Zimbabwe's land redistribution program. Mugabe asserted that the British had reneged on the agreement reached at Lancaster House and the compensation they agreed to pay to enable the land to be bought back from their 'kith and kin,' or rather the extant white settlers (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009).

Britain classified Zimbabwe as a country in crisis, accusing ZANU-PF of human rights violations, electoral manipulation, and violent repression of the opposition (Phimister & Raftopoulos, 2004). In turn, Mugabe intensified anti-colonial rhetoric, framing Britain as a neo-imperial force attempting to restore settler domination via the MDC and international sanctions (Phimister & Raftopoulos, 2004). This discursive shift became central to Mugabeism. The retreat of the West empowered Mugabe's anti-imperialist discourse as political weaponry through which repression could be reframed as sovereignty and political opposition could be reframed as sovereign subversion: Britain was relentlessly portrayed as the enemy and the historic importance of African land was re-invoked as the symbolic terrain of anti-imperialism.

Diplomatic ruptures were followed by targeted sanctions, visa bans, and the withdrawal of development assistance from the UK, EU, and the U.S justified by the undercut of violence in the 2000 and 2002 elections (Hulec, 2019; Phimister, 2005). Mugabe exploited this rupture to cast the MDC as Western puppets, delegitimize pluralism, and justify militarization of elections. Britain's critical shift against the regime provided an ideological and political reservoir for ZANU-PF to mobilize around, pulling the emotive strings of Africans that still felt the oppressive pressure of neocolonial and neoimperial projects.

This paper argues that Zimbabwe's historical arc should be approached through frameworks of coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) and postcolonial political psychology (Cabral, 1974; Fanon, 1963). Zimbabwe's authoritarian turn unfolded within a global system shaped by colonial hierarchies that reward compliant elites and suppress radical decolonial alternatives. From a decolonial and Afrofuturist perspective, these dynamics reveal how global power structures actively shape state behavior and the horizon of popular political imagination. The confrontation between Zimbabwe and Western powers reinforced a binary political field in which the only viable options appeared to be authoritarian nationalism or externally dictated liberal reform.

Zimbabwe's political fate must therefore be understood as co-produced by internal liberation-movement log-

ics and external geopolitical interventions. Using a decolonial lens to locate the motivations for a democratic deficit in the country asserts that Zimbabwe's authoritarian consolidation was not simply the triumph of one political project over another; it was the containment of a more radical reimagining of sovereignty that threatened domestic elites and international power brokers. This analysis shows that authoritarianism was not an isolated outcome, but a structurally conditioned and politically rational response within a global order shaped by colonial hierarchies. Zimbabwe's trajectory reveals that authoritarianism did not merely suppress opposition, it actively narrowed the space in which alternative postcolonial futures could emerge.

VI. Conclusion

Zimbabwe's authoritarian turn after 2000 was not an abrupt deviation from an otherwise predictable democratic trajectory. Rather, it was a culminating set of forces across the liberation struggle, the early post-independence era, and the structural crises of the 1990s weaved through the changing landscape of global politics.

This paper does not attempt to diminish the internal causal factors of the country's turn to authoritarianism or deliberate fascist state practices, rather, this paper emphasizes that Zimbabwe's crisis unfolded within an international and historical system shaped by coloniality. Liberation movement political culture, economic collapse, and militarized governance were central, yet they evolved within a hypocritical world-system that first empowered ZANU-PF as the preferred custodian of Western interests and later condemned it when those interests diverged.

Afrofuturism insists that critique is incomplete without imagination. This means confronting the coloniality of power not only as a material project, but as an epistemic order that defines what governance is supposed to look like, who counts as legitimate political actors, and what ideologies are deemed unmodern or invalid. In this vein, Zimbabwe's crisis is also a crisis of political imagination, for the colonization of the imagination enforced a narrowing of futures. At its core, this paper sees Zimbabwe's post-2000 authoritarianism as a colonial hangover, with political order haunted by inherited debts and structures, internalized divisions, and reliance on violence, which constrained possibilities of genuine decolonization. The governing logics of Rhodesia have remained so deeply inscribed in the national psyche and state apparatus that purging the body politic of coloniality has proved exceedingly difficult, but nevertheless, not impossible.

ZIPA's attempt at promising a genuine long-run alternative to the post-liberation demise of Zimbabwe and its people should not remain relegated to the sidelines of history (Saul, 2016). ZIPA must be regarded as an immensely promising innovation, positing another chance for radicalization and an emergence of a new kind of Zimbabwean leadership less anchored in elite command, and more oriented toward collective participation.

This paper seeks to resist fatalist attitudes toward Zimbabwe's future. Drawing from ubuntu philosophy, authoritarianism must not be assumed as intrinsic to African political culture, nor the inevitable fate of liberation movements. In bringing this edge to the conversation, the purpose of this paper is to restore historical significance and theoretical nuance to the Zimbabwe case, inviting a balance of condemnation against deliberate authoritarian tendencies with a more humane understanding of how states marred by colonialism struggle to imagine and build political futures beyond a vacuum of domination. Through civic networks, youth movements, and diasporic communities that refuse the foreclosure of their possibilities, there is hope for a new and fully liberated Zimbabwe as defined by their own terms, not Westernized, standardized metrics of development. To imagine Zimbabwe beyond coloniality is to understand that liberation was not a punctuated event in 1980, but is an ongoing praxis of living and orientation to building a different world.

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INTERPRETING SUFFERING:

THEOLOGICAL RUPTURE AND DEMOCRATIC ADVANCEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA AND RWANDA

WRITTEN BY ELISE GRYMONPREZ-DELANNOY

In 1994, Rwanda and South Africa each emerged from prolonged periods of violence and political upheaval: Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide against the Tutsi, and South Africa through its first multiracial general election, which formally ended apartheid (Nelson, 2002-2003, p. 69; Schliesser, 2018, p. 1). Despite these parallel moments of rupture, the role played by Christian churches in advancing democracy by supporting popular movements and opposing authoritarian governments diverged sharply. In South Africa, prominent Christian actors, especially youth movements such as the National Catholic Federation of Students (NCFS), the Catholic Students Association (CASA), and the YCS, increasingly opposed apartheid and became central participants in the democratic transition (Bate, 1999, pp. 7-8). In Rwanda, by contrast, churches largely supported the Hutu elites' government and became complicit in genocidal violence (Aguilar, 2009, p. 25). Although colonial rule had structurally embedded Christianity within systems of political authority in both countries, the churches' behavior toward democracy during moments of crisis cannot be understood solely through institutional incentives or strategic adaptation to political regimes. In contexts of extreme political violence, the church's stance on democracy is inseparable from how it interprets collective suffering, negotiates its relationship to state power, and situates salvation within periods of mass atrocity and political upheaval (Aguilar, 2009, p. 25).

Comparative studies of religion and democracy often explain church behavior in terms of its institutional alignment with or opposition to the state. In "Rendering unto Caesar," Anthony Gill offers one of the most influential articulations of this approach, stating that churches support or resist democracy primarily based on rational calculations within a competitive religious marketplace, rather than on moral or theological commitments such as social justice (Gill, 1998, pp. 12-13). Gill's framework captures important institutional dynamics, such as the strategic negotiation of church–state relations and the preservation of ecclesiastical authority, but it fails to explain why churches shaped by similar colonial legacies, operating under divinely justified authority, and facing comparable political constraints responded so differently to democratic transitions and episodes of mass violence.

By foregrounding competing scriptural interpretations and the theological narratives used to legitimize or challenge democratic values, I argue that church–state relations surrounding democracy must be examined theologically, not solely institutionally. That divergence

and convergence between church and state cannot be explained primarily by rational-choice incentives, as Gill suggests, but must instead be understood through the church's theological interpretation of suffering and historical responsibility (Aguilar, 2009, p. 15). Comparing South Africa and Rwanda, the analysis shows that where Christianity interpreted suffering as a call to historical responsibility and critically re-evaluated its relationship to state power on moral-theological grounds rather than instrumental ones, churches emerged as democratic actors (Borer, 2014, p. 126). Suffering was theologically abstracted into obedience and deferred salvation, thereby grounding ecclesial authority in structural power, churches aligned with authority and undermined democracy (Safari, 2020, pp. 885-886).

Anthony Gill's comparative analysis in "Rendering unto Caesar" offers valuable insights to understand church-state relations under authoritarian rule. By framing churches as rational actors within a competitive religious marketplace, Gill accounts for their historical alignment with political authority when state backing ensured monopoly status, financial security, and social influence (Gill, 1998, p. 55). Under colonialism, when religious privilege and political authority were mutually reinforcing, churches had strong incentives to support authoritarian regimes and discourage democratic participation (Gill, 1998, pp. 22-23).

Both South Africa and Rwanda conform closely to this logic during the colonial period. In South Africa, the Dutch Reformed Church sacralized racial hierarchy and political exclusion, rejecting egalitarian democracy as contrary to divinely ordained social order (Vosloo, 2023, p. 406). Political authority was presented as ordained by God rather than derived from the will of the people, which framed obedience to the state as a religious duty rather than a democratic choice (Tirykian, 1957, p. 393-394). Tiryakian explains that voting was not seen as a political right but as a spiritual responsibility given by God. Only those considered spiritually mature could vote. Because spiritual maturity was defined by white Christian standards, Africans were excluded from political participation.

Similarly, in Rwanda, Catholicism became an extension of Belgian colonial governance (Schliesser, 2018, pp. 3-4). The church in Rwanda engaged in ethnic politics. Ethnicity became a central element of missionary strategy, used to identify and target elite groups for conversion (Schliesser, 2018, p. 4). Therefore, missionaries could exert significant influence over political leadership, privilege elite rule, and denounce mass participation as dangerous and social-

ly destabilizing. In both cases, Christianity functioned as a pillar of colonial authority, legitimating hierarchical and explicitly anti-democratic political orders. In this colonial context, Gill's rational-choice framework is not only plausible but also persuasive. Under colonial rule, churches benefited from legal privileges, educational monopolies, and close institutional ties to state power, which positioned them as key intermediaries in governance. Alignment with authoritarian regimes was therefore a rational institutional strategy: it ensured access to resources, social influence, and political protection, while discouraging mass political participation that could threaten both colonial authority and ecclesial dominance. If Gill's theory were sufficient, however, similar post-colonial pressures should have produced comparable church behavior in both cases, given that countries experienced authoritarian rule, political instability, and the erosion of colonial religious privilege.

In the post-colonial period, South Africa and Rwanda faced intense political violence, contested state legitimacy, and the erosion of religious monopoly. Churches in both contexts confronted growing moral and political pressure, alongside uncertainty about their institutional position in rapidly changing societies (Safari, 2010, pp. 880-881; Vosloo, 2023, pp. 408-409). From a rational-choice perspective, these conditions should have encouraged similar strategic adaptations for preserving ecclesial influence and institutional survival. In South Africa, the Church opposed the apartheid regime and emerged as a central actor in the democratic struggle, risking fierce repression (Bate, 1999, p. 2). In Rwanda, by contrast, the Church remained closely aligned with political authority and, in many cases, became complicit in mass violence, with churches themselves serving as sites of genocide (Longman, 2001, p. 163). This divergence, therefore, cannot be explained solely by institutional incentives. Comparable structural pressures existed in both cases, yet they generated opposite ecclesiastical responses, suggesting that deeper theological and ideological factors influenced how churches interpreted their political obligations.

The divergence between South Africa and Rwanda emerges most clearly in how Christian churches theologically interpreted suffering: either as a call to historical responsibility requiring action within the world, or as obedience within a divinely sanctioned order that deferred justice beyond history. As Aguilar argues, abstract approaches to church-state relations that focus exclusively on institutional structures and political incentives obscure this distinction (Aguilar, 2009, p. 15). By

treating suffering as a contextual by-product rather than as a source of moral action or inaction, such approaches risk banalizing violence and overlooking theology's capacity to shape political imagination (Aguilar, 2009, p. 17).

In Rwanda, this theological failure manifested in the normalization of obedience, hierarchy, and political accommodation (Longman, 2001, p. 181). As Longman demonstrates, Christian churches were implicated in the 1994 genocide not only through silence or inaction, but through longstanding practices that legitimized authority, ethnic hierarchy, and political maneuvering (Longman, 2001, p. 182). Moreover, as Gill would argue, religious competition in Rwanda did not push the church toward democratic reform. Instead, it reinforced the church's alliance with the state. Faced with internal dissent and competing voices, church leaders prioritized protecting their institutional authority and preserving their vision of the church. In doing so, they aligned themselves with the state, even as it pursued genocidal policies. Although Hutu and Tutsi worshipped within the same churches, which suggests no obvious institutional incentive to support mass violence, churches remained embedded in colonial patterns of authority that prioritized regime alignment over moral rupture (Longman, 2001, pp. 166-167). From a rational-choice perspective, Gill would interpret this behavior as a strategic response in which churches sought to preserve institutional privilege by aligning with the Hutu-led regime engaged in mass violence. The loss of moral authority and of Tutsi church members would thus be understood as less costly than breaking with authority. Yet this explanation remains inconsistent for three related reasons. First, by translating mass killing into a matter of institutional costs and benefits, it analytically neutralizes the moral and theological significance of violence. Second, it insufficiently accounts for the historical continuity between colonial regimes of violence and post-independence legacies of grievance, which shaped the Hutu-Tutsi conflict and structured the moral authority of the Church within it. Finally, by treating alignment with power as institutionally rational whenever it sustains authority, even if that implies violence, it cannot explain how and why churches might rupture with inherited forms of structural violence rather than reproduce them.

The Rwandan churches' reproduction of colonial modes of authority after independence needs to be socially and historically situated to avoid minimizing violence. Rather than abolishing the colonial racial framework separating Hutu and Tutsi, post-independence politics reversed its hierarchy. The co-

lonial privileging of Tutsi elites was replaced by the political dominance of Hutu, reproducing the same ethnic logic of exclusion and providing the ideological foundation of new grievances (Longman, 2001, p. 169). Because both ethnic groups continued to participate in church life, and Christianity was the predominant religion, ecclesial authority was not socially challenged but rather socially reinforced. The church's incapacity to oppose violence was not rational but theological. Obedience remained a theological virtue, merely redirected from one ethnic elite to another (Schliesser, 2018, p. 5). The fact that churches became a site of mass killing despite their moral authority highlights the complex role that church institutions and discourse played in the events leading up to and during the genocide. Rather than challenging the violence, many church authorities failed to mobilize their moral influence to condemn the killings, reinforcing existing structures of obedience and authority. In this sense, the Church's responsibility lies less in directly instigating violence than in its inability to confront it through its moral and institutional authority.

In South Africa, by contrast, churches gradually came to recognize the inseparability of history and salvation. Taira explains how, grounded in Christ's apparent failure on the cross, the Church can find, in faithfulness to the Gospel, the need to risk for failure rather than prioritize success of limited moral significance (Taira, 2018, p. 26). Christian commitment becomes grounded in faithfulness, even when it demands sacrifice, loss, or suffering. Drawing on a theological reading of Jesus' crucifixion, Aguilar explains how a tragic death, caused by political and religious authorities, can become salvific insofar as it reveals a life given for others within history (Aguilar 2009, p. 17). Christian leaders in South Africa came to understand that deferring justice to the afterlife was theologically inconsistent with this interpretation of suffering (Tutu, 1983, p. 6). Instead, suffering was reinterpreted as a demand for solidarity, resistance, and historical responsibility (Borer, 2014, p. 126). Given that over seventy percent of South Africans identified as Christian, church organizations became central actors in the anti-apartheid struggle.

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) were gradually politicized through sustained engagement in civil society and escalating confrontation with the apartheid state. Initially limited to cautious statements condemning human rights violations, both organizations developed a pattern of overt political action aimed at the dismantling

of apartheid and the establishment of a democratic South Africa, which they came to view as inseparable from their Christian mission. By the late 1890s, Christian activists were leading protest marches, boycotting elections, and coordinating with banned liberation movements. This shift was decisive: it grounded the agency's role in finding salvation in present action rather than passive endurance, transforming political engagement into a theological obligation rather than a strategic choice.

The points where the white settler church and the mission church intersected inevitably gave rise to theological conflict. These encounters exposed the moral contradictions of apartheid and of the church silencer. The church was forced to confront apartheid more directly.

As South African churches progressively disentangled themselves from state authority, they assumed significant risks, including repression and the loss of privilege (Nelson, 2002-2003, p. 68). At the same time, they encouraged the oppressed to claim political agency, reframing democracy as part of Christian responsibility. This development cannot be explained solely by rational-choice logic. Black Catholics already constituted the majority of church membership, meaning that democratization did not promise greater institutional dominance (Bate, 1999, p.2). Instead, as Bate shows, the Church underwent internal contestation and democratization, challenging its own hierarchical structures and redefining legitimacy in terms of participation and accountability (Ibid, 1999, p.3). Such transformations directly contradict Gill's assumption of the Church as a unitary, stable institution pursuing institutional survival. In South Africa, opposition to the state was not irrational in light of the eventual sanctions, but theologically necessary for the Church to remain morally coherent within its historical context.

Ultimately, by comparing South Africa and Rwanda, it has been demonstrated that institutional incentives and strategic adaptation alone cannot account for the divergent trajectories of church-state relations. While Anthony Gill's rational-choice framework convincingly explains church behavior under colonial rule Though, Anthony Gill's rational-choice framework remains useful in defining the Christian church's role in the context of racialized colonial rule, with religious privilege, educational monopoly, and political authority at play, his arguments can do little in explaining unique post-colonial trajectories. The South African and Rwandan cases reveal that the decisive factor shaping church behavior towards democracy was not institutional competition, but theology: specifically, how

suffering, authority, and salvation were interpreted within the context of history. Under colonialism, Christian churches in both countries functioned as pillars of political authority. The Dutch Reformed Church, in South Africa, sacralized racial hierarchy and framed obedience to the state as divinely ordained, while in Rwanda, Catholicism became an extension of Belgian rule, legitimating elite governance and discouraging mass political participation. One of Gill's arguments, asserting that churches act as rational institutional actors to preserve their monopoly, is persuasive, in this regard.

However, the post-colonial period presents a theoretical puzzle that Gill's framework cannot resolve. Following independence, both South Africa and Rwanda experienced authoritarian governance, political instability, escalating violence, and internal moral reflections. From a rational-choice perspective, such conditions should have produced comparable strategic adaptations aimed at preserving institutional survival. Yet, in South Africa, churches increasingly broke with the apartheid regime and emerged as central actors in the democratic struggle, despite risks of repression and loss of privilege. By contrast, in Rwanda, churches remained aligned with political authority and, in many cases, became complicit in genocidal violence. This divergence cannot be explained through institutional incentives.

The analysis reveals that the divergence between Rwanda and South Africa is most pronounced in the theological interpretation of suffering by Christian churches. In Rwanda, suffering was abstracted into obedience within a divinely sanctioned social order, with salvation deferred to a future beyond history. This framework normalized hierarchy, ethnic exclusion, and political accommodation, rendering violence morally unintelligible rather than morally disruptive. As Longman and Aguilar demonstrate, the Church's failure was therefore theological rather than merely political: scripture was mobilized to confirm social order rather than to interrogate it. The Church did not rupture with colonial structures of authority after independence but reproduced them.

In South Africa, by contrast, churches gradually came to recognize the inseparability of history and salvation. Drawing on the Gospels and Christ's crucifixion as a death caused by political and religious authorities and meaningful as a life given for others, Christian leaders rejected the deferral of justice to the afterlife. Suffering was reinterpreted as a demand for solidarity, resistance, and historical responsibility, grounding salvation in present action rather than passive endurance.

Crucially, this transformation involved

internal ecclesial change through which authoritative church power was challenged, and political action was re-grounded in scripture and belief. Both cases demonstrate that the Church does not operate as a stable or unitary actor, but rather as one that is sensitive to social context and civil mobilization in its pursuit of theological coherence when interpreting this reality through God's values. Church survival, in this sense, becomes less dependent on state support than on the Church's capacity to act in ways that are theologically consistent and morally credible to ensure present agency.

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"My practice centres around Haitian spiralism, a literary, philosophical, and artistic movement which was founded by René Philoctète, Jean-Claude Fignolé, and Frankétienne around the late 1960s. Spiralism defines the relationships between chaos, creativity, and resistance. The title for this painting was borrowed from a line in Frankétienne's "Fleurs D'insomnies" (1986): "Comment massacrer le vide?" How do we massacre the void? Can we fill a bottomless hole with love?

Haitian visual cultures and Vodou spirituality also infuse my works. In Vodou rituals, "jete dlo" is to throw water to invoke the lwas. I embodied this motion as I began painting with watered down paints and oils. Free gestures allowed me to layer texture and pigment intuitively. Just as spiralism teaches us that disorder and unpredictability can give rise to prophecy and endurance, I approach art as a chance to turn and turn and turn between what I know and what could be.

Massacrer le vide

Bastik

Anick Jasmin

AMERICAN RACIAL STRATIFICATION AND ONLINE ECOSYSTEMS:

a reflection on

SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION & DIGITAL DREAMS

WRITTEN BY LIAM MURPHY

Grounding Personal Reflections

One January morning in 2018, a 13 year-old version of myself logged onto YouTube to check my favorite creator's channel, Shoe0nHead. Shoe, now sitting at 2.4 million subscribers, toed the line between American culture critique and media analysis that a younger version of me found soothing on some level. In an era of neoliberal feminisms, her videos came across as a negotiation of left-wing discourses with much of the edge associated with the online American right. In this video, she downs shots of alcohol, cringing at a compilation of 'woke' clips. One such video features Victoria Powell on the BBC, introducing the concept of digital blackface—which I was primed to find laughable. Shoe argues the video does a disservice to real, physical instances of racism by extending real concerns about racism and appropriation 'too far.' To a young white teenager, there is something appealing about indulging in this form of reactionary rejection of 'cringe' leftist expressions, failing to examine how race interacts in digital spaces. I was unwilling to recognize how the Internet is directly implicated in the constructions of all American realities, creating new structures which incorporate material associations attached to race, class, and gender.

I had left behind this period of my life until reading Lewis's (2020) "Alternative Influence" last year, where I recognized several usernames in association with Shoe0nHead's channel. He explains how YouTube enables the endearment of fringe yet palatable personalities to increasingly radical figures, informing an ecosystem of 'underdog' self-perceptions that entrap pliable users and promise belonging. Researching media and politics, it struck me how close I was to being one of these young men. I use this basis of digital feminist discourse to ground an analysis of how online space entrenches old modes of racial stratification while creating new mechanisms that maintain inequality. These same networks that limit the critiques of gendered disparities also reproduce racial inequality in American society.

In line with Michelle Alexander's (2010) The New Jim Crow, I argue the architecture of digital information ecosystems, similar to modern criminal justice predation, deserves attention as a present and future avenue for maintaining the American color line. Further study must be given regarding digital infrastructure's potential to reinforce and challenge racial stratification. I problematize the conception of a shared, singular Internet as a democratic zone, locating how structural racism

is embedded in its design and thrives on individualization and factionalism. I highlight how users interact, cultivating oppressive and liberatory futures. I examine the Internet's role in social movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), finding promise for localized connectivity despite enduring structural hostilities to Black life. For the ease of discussion, these inhabitants of digital space will henceforth be referred to as 'netizens.'

Digital Ecosystems and Racist Reproductions

It is worth pondering the purpose of the Internet. Is it a network for mass connection, the ordering of data? An interface augmenting our physical realities? Is it an implicit public good? It is a mistake to assume that digital space is separate from legacies of inequity. Rather than my naive perception of an insulated, inconsequential space, the Internet is a capricious environment centered on unequal footing. Supposed anonymity—and therefore equality—does not stymie the interplay between new digital structures and inherited racist norms of deprivation and exploitation. The Internet is a multipurpose platform run on capitalist modes of production and accumulation. Fuchs (2020) presents digital ecosystems as directing the flow of attention and profit. This lends to the "asymmetric distribution" of power and control over netizen autonomy; users are flung to fragmented and algorithmically sorted communities that monopolize their interests, implicated in the dissemination of misinformation, disinformation and scandal (p. 12). Noble (2016) notes that the perspectives of racialized minorities are often left out of the proverbial drawing room where digital domains are workshopped; the Internet functions as a neoliberal space where Black voices, silenced in the past, may be included in digital ecosystems to appease "global capital's thirst for expansion."

Noble expands in Algorithms of Oppression (2018) how exclusions inherited from physical racist superstructures reiterate white supremacist perspectives online. She demonstrates how entities like Google experience 'cracks' such as Michelle Obama's association with gorillas in images searches, or Google Maps displaying the White House when "'N*gger House'" is typed in the search bar (pp. 4-6). This elucidates Eberhardt's (2019) conception of implicit bias, in how the unconscious associations we make between character and appearance inform our perceptions of the world and the institutions we make—including the Internet. Machine learning and search engines aggregate

racist tropes and associations from their creators, riddling the digital landscape. This influences netizen behavior, remaining imbricated in white supremacist economic orderings. The connotations are troubling when paired with the notion that the World Wide Web is at its default a democratic exercise. Franks (2021) explains these enterprises, legally, are private citizens. They have authority within their domains "to counter, ignore, or exclude speech as they see fit." Rather than social media like Twitter or Instagram fulfilling the utopian function of a 'digital town square,' these environments incentivize netizens to act in undemocratic yet lucrative ways. The disinhibiting factor of anonymity, the rapid rate at which messages can be disseminated, and the temporally unmoored nature of online discourse engender riskier, radical, uncivil speech (p. 432). Capitalist logics shape who is valued and included in the digital citizenry.

Taylor (2019) elaborates upon the Internet's exclusionary tendencies. When digital spaces are designed as unwelcome, fostering behavior that profits off the suffering of Black netizens, it privileges the online demos as a presumed-white locale (p. 81). She complicates this matter by highlighting ignorance to how these spaces are maintained. Unawareness of the machinations of algorithmic content, its delivery, and how personal data is accumulated obfuscates the ways Blackness is constructed as undesirable and hostile—to the point of plausible deniability one is being discriminated against at all (p. 121). Users engage in curated spaces with the impression they were made 'for them' when truly acting as sites of extractive ordering. Online terrain claims the mantle of 'colorblindness' (Kilgore, 2015, p. 285). Terms of service and community guidelines give the false impression discrimination is solely incident-based. Hiding behind neutrality, the Internet diverts accusations of racism onto anonymized individuals, disguising structural deference to white supremacist logics. Race is digitally left behind, with whiteness filling in the vacuum, unless someone inserts it into discussion.

This paradox sees race in America as both defining and void online, where disparities and insecurities inherited from the material world are left at best truncated, and at worst unacknowledged. In her book Reckoning, Woodly (2022) mobilizes theories of racial capitalism to describe how race is instituted as a form of economic ordering exploiting Black bodies and labor, specifically in the shadow of Michael Brown's murder (pp. 29-30). Through lessened wages, predatory police tick-

eting, asset forfeiture, and extraction through the justice predation system, perceptions of Black inferiority are structurally legitimized (Soss & Page, 2025). Hannah-Jones (2019) compounds upon this, mentioning how the sabotaging of Reconstruction after the Civil War—the failure to deliver the reparative promise of '40 acres and a mule'—resulted in a "centuries-long economic head start" for white Americans (p. 457). The digital dispossession seen through marginalizing conversations about race is therefore inevitably a continuation of historical material systems of deprivation that facilitate racial discrimination. As I had done as a child, the Internet entices netizens to engage with structural issues on superficial levels. Digital space relegates enduring racism to a footnote; one should not bother considering one's own place in larger structures.

Netizen Behavior and Culpability

It is evident that netizens are habituated by the interlocking structures of digital and racial capitalism to act in manners retrenching racist foundations. I argue that the fragmentary and individuated nature of digital ecosystems, delivering highly customized content, accentuates W.E.B. Du Bois's observation of 'Life Worlds' and 'Black Double Consciousness'. Olson (2004) uses Du Bois to demonstrate how American citizenship is predicated upon the constructed category of whiteness, the polar opposite of Blackness (p. 17). Black double consciousness highlights the friction between Blackness and Americanness—the need to understand the white social order in a manner white citizens do not, or cannot, care to see Black life (p. 22). As America maintains a large hegemony over online space through ownership of its physical infrastructure in data centers and fashions close ties to architects like Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Zuckerberg, one can privilege this racialized view of space as 'exported' to a shared digital environment, regardless of nationality. Online communities align through shared interests and experience, creating identitarian Life Worlds that operate in an overall environment of whiteness. While this has opportunities to produce meaningful organization and community connections for marginalized groups, it signifies how insulation from diverging perspectives is weaponized to reassert white supremacy.

This is why Lewis's (2020) Alternative Influence Network remains so poignant. By framing any Black expression in digital space as threatening, these influencers reap the economic benefits of a presumed-white Internet while claim-

ing imperilment, given license to act in opposition to Blackness uncritically. Noble (2014) and Coates (2017) identify Black cultural commodification in the aftermath of Trayvon Martin's murder through the digital phenomenon of media trends where children bought Skittles and mimed being shot—to the extreme of purchasing Halloween costumes bearing Martin's visage. Powered by news framing of Martin as liable for his own death, for looking like a 'thug,' pantomiming criminality becomes a form of social currency entrenching assumptions of an innate Black pathology (Coates, 2017, p. 5). Signaling belonging through dehumanizing Martin displays how white netizens choose to perform the "wages of whiteness" for the digital masses (Olson, 2004, p. 13). In taking Martin 'on and off,' white netizens affirm they exist above him and outside his world. The Internet, in such a case, serves as a stage that makes a spectacle of Black marginalization, eschewing calls for compassionate reflection.

Digital spectacle rears its head at any premise of Black advancement as well. Haslett (2018) sees this in how the reputation of Martin Luther King's civil disobedience is diluted to non-violence "with the power of a fetish," used to tone-police BLM protestors (p. 6). Riots are framed as unjust, petulant, and unproductive. Hooker's (2017) analysis suggests that spectacle is a tactic of grievance politics; through dissemination online, coverage of protest and Black suffering bows to white discomfort and turns Black rage into fodder for accusations of criminality. BLM, challenging the digital frame that advancement must derive from "respectability," reveals how the spectacles of the Internet provide an avenue to confirm the white political mastery that the War on Drugs and justice predation system previously maintained (pp. 490-91). I wonder to myself how much of my early Internet consumption consisted of reactionary, self-congratulatory content that affirmed my place as a rightful member of (white) digital society. The arbiters of the Internet have simply found a new way to ask white Americans to perform dominance.

Material Consequences

Racially colored media has disproportionate impacts on the lived experiences of Black Americans. Lyon (2017) warns how digital ecosystems habituate netizens to cultures of surveillance and sousveillance, where not only do we expect to be seen by the government and the companies they partner with, but to see and be seen by one another. Exploiting the human desire for connec-

tion, digital infrastructure encourages us to share data regarding our lives and self-censor (p. 831). This generates an unspoken cultural code of what can be discussed, where, and in what manner, unbound to digital space. Strategies of invasive spying recall past government experiments, such as COINTELPRO, who infiltrated the Black Panther Party to sow division and discord (Throughline, "The Real Black Panthers," 2023). Digital securitization offers increased vantage for the government to destroy civic trust, quashing alternative futures before they can form.

Aside from enforcing white supremacist modes of dehumanization, lampshading, and shaming Black netizens, these environments increase state-corporate reach into the personal: One will be exploited through observation. This demonstrates further leakages of the carceral state into quotidian life noted by Soss & Page (2025), mirroring how those suspected of breaking the law become the playthings of public-private partnerships (p. 98). Be it awaiting trial or living under community supervision, race-class subjugated (RCS) Americans are sites where economic elites test their ability to surveil, portending future "e-carceration" where the prison is not a physical constraint on the state's ability to control Black bodies (Remnick, 2020, p. 8). The Internet is yet another tendril of the state's biopolitical impulses. Further, Asare (2025) writes in Forbes that, before the federal suspension of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), AI-generated content flooded TikTok, showing Black mothers struggling to take care of their children, demanding American tax dollars to assist them. This is reminiscent of the Reagan and Bush administrations' framing of Black mothers as "welfare queens," subsisting lazily off government aid, to justify state retreat from such programs (Kilgore, 2015, pp. 286-88). The uncritical reproduction of Black bodies vindicates BBC News 's (2017) concerns about digital blackface. It remains difficult to draw lines between digital blackface as a form of expression, the pursuit of entertainment, or the explicit intention of spreading race-based stereotyped hatred. Existing within an environment of presupposed racial hierarchies, it can be enacted by a range of digital personalities towards multifaceted ends. It is foolish to think, simply because this content is fabricated, that it does not impact how one of America's most vulnerable populations is perceived. Compounded by the fact that AI data centers have been disproportionately located in RCS communities like Mansfield, Georgia, affecting the quality of air, water, and physical wellbeing, it is clear that digitized struc-

tures beget racism that buttresses physical inequity (Bush, 2025). The Internet manufactures how the world is seen. It entrenches racist associations and emboldens racialized reactions in manners that, on the surface, can be difficult to predict and perceive.

Digital Black Futurity

In Jamil Smith's (2020) interview with Philip Goff on the prevalence of police in American society, they discuss the American 'yearning for safety.' Yet, Owens et al. (2025) demonstrates how police discipline disproportionately targets RCS communities, suffering from heightened violent crime statistics as police investment increases (pp. 203-04). If the American policing systems' pursuit of order persecutes Black Americans, it must be acknowledged they do not truly seek universal safety.

Digital infrastructure must be viewed similarly; though it provides netizens with a surplus of information and community networks, this cannot distract from directives of biopolitical organization. Relating to Fred Moten's conception of the undercommons at the university, perhaps it is possible to "steal what one can," in the pursuit of equality (Kelley, 2016, p. 8). Woodly (2022) highlights the politics of care as a central tenet of Radical Black Feminist Pragmatism (RBFP), where affording dignity to the "individual-in-context" produces actions that challenge the social mores of society (p. 84). Navigating digital landscapes through pragmatic, compassionate creeds reveals structural inequities and develops alternate ways of being. In recognizing "shared ends and a shared life" (p. 99), the Internet exhibits latent potential to connect people to material resources, organizing for mutual aid, and social change. It cannot be ignored that the advent of BLM owes much of its success to digital infrastructure. Woodly (2022) emphasizes the movement's reliance on the spread of firsthand accounts through social media, the wealth of reporting on protestors and Black Americans, and the consequent exposure of more people to the ideas of RBFP (pp. 171-75). Aside from narrative empowerment, these social movements create linkages between causes that interpret their struggles as interconnected.

This "public intimacy" demonstrates that, given time, resources, and attention, the citizenry can be convinced to act 'as-if' Black life matters, even for a small moment (pp. 177-79). This is something to cherish, and can act as a proof-of-concept for the future. The crux of BLM hinges upon the necessity of recognizing that, as individuals, we cannot experience freedom until we

all do (Kaba, 2021). The Internet simply draws this into sharper perspective, where increased connectivity has not necessarily translated into sustained respect. I assert that online space should pivot to the local, serving as a conduit for mutual aid. Described by Kaba & Ritchie (2022) as "cooperation…rooted in understanding that our survival is tied to that of others," communal digital connections empower people to recognize their neighbors and pursue relations uncaptured by the state's purview (p. 252). This may take the form of community forums, communication channels, and public programs like Project NIA—reducing youth incarceration rates through a combination of community-based reconciliation, education, and occupational opportunity (p. 241-44).

Alcantara & Dick (2017) similarly examine the use of e-currencies by the Lakota to generate new forms of digital ownership. Localized seeds of connection can germinate to bolster collective action outside seasons of active protest, arming disadvantaged communities with ways to cope and enact social change. Digital access, training, and justice must be included when discussing investments needed for racial equality. This is not to argue that the mainstream Internet—rife with white supremacist structures—can simply be supplanted; rather, diversified internets can center care and autonomy—community sovereignty assured through digital architecture. Woodly (2022) emphasizes RBFP's ability to experiment, adapt, and dream. The use of the Internet should be no different. Imagining digitized Black futures is paramount in delegitimizing the online world's racist superstructures.

Conclusion

Digital ecosystems can be conceptualized as tools, rehabituating the racist policies pioneered by Jim Crow, the War on Drugs, and modern justice predation. New algorithmic forms of organization and surveillance compound material deprivation that maintains the American color line in invisible manners—and therefore remains difficult to challenge. As long as we continue to envision the World Wide Web as an aspirationally democratic space, it becomes imperative to abide by the praxis of RBFP online. We must move away from top-down conceptions of the digital citizenry and imagine stronger modes of relation. Digital continuity with past arbiters of structuralized racism can be revealed and questioned, but it requires us to throw away the cultural crutches of paranoia, cynicism, and doubt. In seeking technological parity

within our local communities, we can begin to craft internets capable of deconstruction and transformation.

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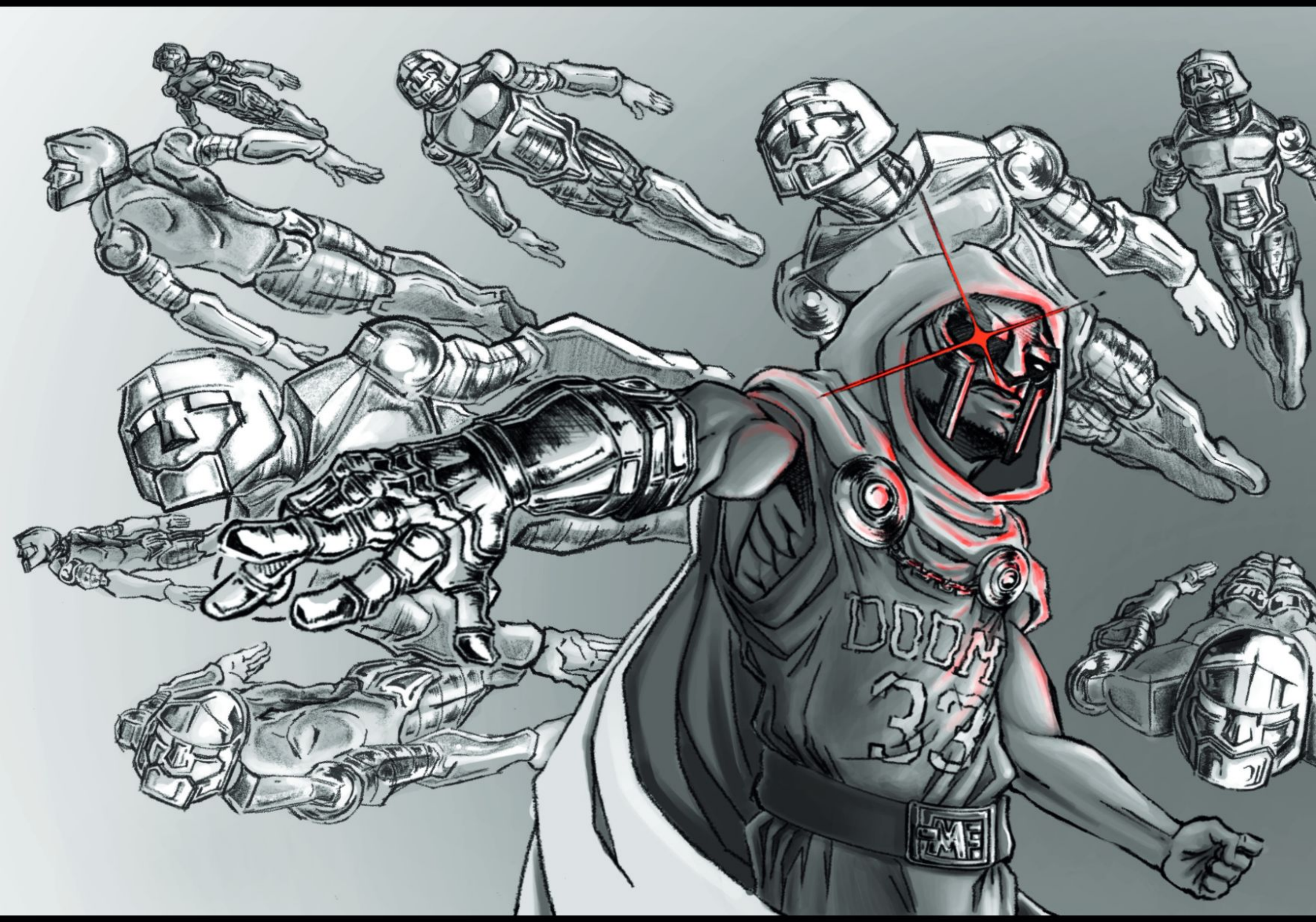

Austin Maidoh

From the theme, Afrofuuturism, my main goal was to capture Black culture and intertwine it with the supernatural. This led to me taking direct inspiration from MF Doom, an iconic Black voice, and reimagining him as the true villain he portrays himself as.

The combination of MF Doom with a legion of machines displays his control over technology, referencing his mastery of music production.

FUTURE CODES:

RUPTURE AND PIONEERING AT BRAZILIAN FASHION WEEK

Written by Nianga Lucau

PHOTO FROM ANGELA BRITO BRAND

UHURU
THE MCGILL JOURNAL OF AFRICAN STUDIES

ABSTRACT:

This article presents, from the perspective of the codes of the future, the trajectory of fashion designer and creative director Angela Brito, the first Black woman in the São Paulo Fashion Week line-up in 2019. The article explores how her work in the field of fashion represents practices of rupture and pioneering, challenging historically elitist aesthetic and institutional norms. Angela Brito's trajectory is positioned as a relevant contribution to the strengthening of African aesthetics in fashion and the contemporary scene. Her work values cultural references and proposes an aesthetic that dialogues between tradition and contemporaneity, expanding the visibility of these narratives in the fashion industry. Her work contributes to the deconstruction of stereotypes and proposes a more plural and contemporary vision of African aesthetics. Angela Brito's presence in the São Paulo Fashion Week line-up in 2019, as the first Black woman to participate in the event, is a historical milestone that reinforces the importance of her trajectory for representativeness and female empowerment in the field of fashion. In this sense, her work helps to challenge historically exclusionary structures and strengthens the presence of Black women in the sector. Through the analysis of fashion shows, collections, and media positioning, it is evident how Angela Brito created new visual and social forms, projected possible futures, and transformed the field of fashion in Brazil. The article dialogues with Afrofuturism and highlights the dimension of aesthetic practice, showing how fashion can constitute a space for change and movements that expand possibilities for Black women. This study integrates results from ethnographic research developed through the participant observation methodology.

Keywords: Angela Brito, fashion, rupture, pioneering, future, codes.

INTRODUCTION:

Fashion is a realm of symbolic and cultural power, historically structured by hierarchies of class, gender, and Eurocentric aesthetics. In this scenario, Angela Brito's trajectory marks a point of reconfiguration by consolidating herself as the first black woman in the line-up of Brazilian Fashion Week. Her career not only represents an individual milestone, but is an example of rupture and pioneering, opening paths to new possibilities in fashion in Brazil. Fashion as a language, cultural and social field operates as a phenomenon by negotiating identities and belongings. Not

just clothes, but the products of fashion. It contributes in an innovative way to the compression of the dynamics of life (Stocco, 2012). Fashion functions as a symbolic and social field where aesthetic values and power structures are reproduced and contested and they reflect and transform society through their practices. The history of fashion is intrinsically linked to the development of humanity, reflecting social, cultural, and economic transformations over time. As society evolves, habits, customs, and forms of expression also change, and fashion emerges as a mirror of these changes, revealing values, identities, and aesthetic ideals of each era. In this way, to study fashion is to understand not only aesthetic trends, but also the trajectory of humanity and of its constant adaptations (Fegahli and Dwyer,2020). Although following the process of Brazilian fashion is to observe small advances of rupture and aesthetic innovation, especially when headed by historically marginalized actors, transform the field and expand possibilities for future generations. Therefore, there is still a big setback in relation to the fashion industry and diversity. Historical and cultural context São Paulo Fashion Week The SPFW Brazilian Fashion Week is the main institutional space for fashion in the country, historically marked by Eurocentric and elitist standards. According to Braga and Pereira (2024), São Paulo Fashion Week is the most important fashion event in Latin America and the largest in Brazil, bringing together in its line-up some of the main national brands and brands throughout its history. São Paulo Fashion Week , completed 30 years in 2025, is the main fashion event in Brazil and a national creative thermometer. Since its first edition in 1996, the event has been visible to Brazilian designers and showcases the country's fashion to the world. According to Braga and Pereira (2024), the first edition of Morumbi Fashion Brasil (MFB) took place in 1996, sponsored by Morumbi Shopping, and in 2001, in the 10th edition, the event was renamed São Paulo Fashion Week. Over the decades, SPFW has consolidated itself as a creative stage, innovation and cultural debates. It incorporated discussions on diversity, gender representation, inclusion of different ethnicities, and sustainability. Even facing criticism about restrictive beauty standards and elitism, the fashion week remains a strategic space, connecting designers, brands, media and the public, and reflects modest advances in terms of the challenges of the Brazilian fashion industry. According to Barreto (2025), in 2009 a Conduct Adjustment Agreement (TAC) was signed between São Paulo Fashion Week and the Pub-

lic Prosecutor's Office of the State of São Paulo, suggesting that brands include at least 10% of black models in their fashion shows, as a way to promote greater representation in Brazilian fashion. For decades, the presence of black women in central positions in the line-up was non-existent. Only in 2019, after approximately more than 20 years, Ângela Brito entered the São Paulo fashion week scene as a pioneer. Its inclusion in the line-up represented an institutional rupture, challenging aesthetic and social norms that limited representation in the Brazilian fashion space. This historical milestone should be read not only as an individual achievement, but as a transformative action capable of reconfiguring visual and social codes. According to Barreto (2025), artistic and cultural creation plays a fundamental role in the deconstruction of images and narratives that historically define who holds power and influence in decisions. By producing new representations, established hierarchies are questioned and more inclusive perspectives are promoted, opening space for different voices and identities to be recognized in society. Ângela Brito and the codes of the future.

Ângela Brito, fashion designer and creative director of the Angela Brito Brand brand, is a reference in the field of Brazilian fashion. Cape Verdean-Brazilian and resident in Rio de Janeiro for more than three decades, she was the first black woman to join the line-up of São Paulo Fashion Week in 2019, consolidating her pioneering role in the sector. Collections and fashion shows: her pieces incorporate elements of the past, present and future, dialogue, design, craftsmanship, craftsmanship, innovation and with technology, futuristic aesthetics and Afrofuturism. The fusion of avant-garde and tradition creates an innovative visual narrative that challenges established standards of beauty and fashion. The brand deconstructs Eurocentric views that tend to define African and Afro-descendant cultural and aesthetic productions only based on stereotypes or exoticisms" (Lucau, 2025, p. 90). The codes of the future represent aesthetic and cultural practices and open up new possibilities, destabilizing hegemonic paradigms. In the case of Ângela Brito, these codes manifest themselves in different ways. Visual narrative: in the modeling of the pieces, textures and shapes are used to communicate the identity, consolidating its own and disruptive aesthetic. In addition to the creation of clothes, Ângela establishes an intimate dialogue between memory, history, culture and identity, which materializes in collections loaded with meanings" (Lucau, 2025, p. 90). Media and cultural positioning:Its presence at São Paulo Fashion Week engages in a

critical discourse, expanding the meaning of pioneering and giving visibility to historically marginalized perspectives in the field of fashion. However, these codes function as instruments of rupture. By creating new aesthetic languages, Ângela Brito redefines what is allowed, building a space and opening paths for futures. Her aesthetic practice demonstrates how it is possible, simultaneously,to be a disruptive and innovative force, establishing new paradigms in a historically elitist field.

Contributions.

Understanding Angela Brito's trajectory, through her aesthetic practices and her presence at SPFW, allows us to recognize how she acts as a transforming agent of Brazilian fashion, redefining visual codes for the sphere.

Afrofuturism is a movement which puts black women at the center of the imagination of the future, recognizing them as artists, thinkers, and leaders whose visions span generations. They transform historical experiences of marginalization into creative force, lead movements in which they expand possibilities and redefine power. By connecting history, culture, technology, and gender justice.Afrofuturism makes visible the importance of female and black leadership in building more inclusive, equitable, and visionary worlds, shows that social and cultural transformation is only complete when black and female voices occupy the protagonism that rightfully belongs to them.

DISCUSSION:

Black women play central roles in the construction of spaces for social and cultural transformation, opening paths that collectively benefit different generations. Their actions and leadership often set precedents that go beyond their own trajectories, creating opportunities and references for other individuals and groups. By occupying positions of protagonism in different areas, whether artistic, political, academic or community, these women not only challenge historical structures of exclusion, but also strengthen practices of equity and collaboration. Thus, their contributions work as paths of legitimacy and inspiration, consolidating models of action that expand possibilities and foster networks of lasting impact. "It is evident that the field of representation remains a place of struggle." (HOOKS, 2019).

Afrofuturism connects past, present, future, technology, and futuristic imagination to create alternatives to colonial and hegemonic narratives. It is both an aesthetic and a practice of projecting possible futures, to challenge power structures and create new codes of existence. When discussing the symbolic

mechanisms of racism, Hooks (2019) states that "images are central to the maintenance of any system of racial domination", showing that the dispute for representation is not only aesthetic, but political. Disruption refers to actions which destabilize established norms, making room for change and transformation. Pioneering is the action of opening unprecedented paths in the cultural, social or institutional field. Angela Brito incorporates both by occupying the SPFW line-up, instituting new aesthetic and institutional paradigms. Hall (2011, p. 123) states that "what matters are the significant ruptures in which old currents of thought are broken."Angela Brito's work demonstrates that rupture and pioneering are not just individual actions, but practices of structural transformation. By occupying the SPFW line-up, she creates new aesthetic and social codes, which dialogue with Afrofuturism, a projection of possible futures for Brazilian fashion and culture. In addition, her practice reveals how fashion can function as an instrument of new contexts of representations and social criticism. "Changes in a problem significantly transform the nature of the questions proposed, the ways in which they are proposed, and the way in which they can be adequately answered" (HALL, 2011, p. 123). Angela Brito's presence at SPFW opened space not only for future generations, it shows that traditionally elite spaces can be transformed through the action of actors who break with historical paradigms.

CONCLUSION:

Angela Brito represents a historical and aesthetic milestone in Brazilian fashion. Her pioneering spirit and performance as an agent of rupture not only challenge established standards, but project codes for the future that redefined the field of fashion in Brazil.

The study shows that fashion is not only aesthetic, but also a social and political practice: it allows individuals like Angela Brito to create new possibilities and establish references for future generations. By analyzing her trajectory, the article reinforces the importance of projecting possible futures as a tool for new dialogues and institutional transformation.

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ANGELA BRITO

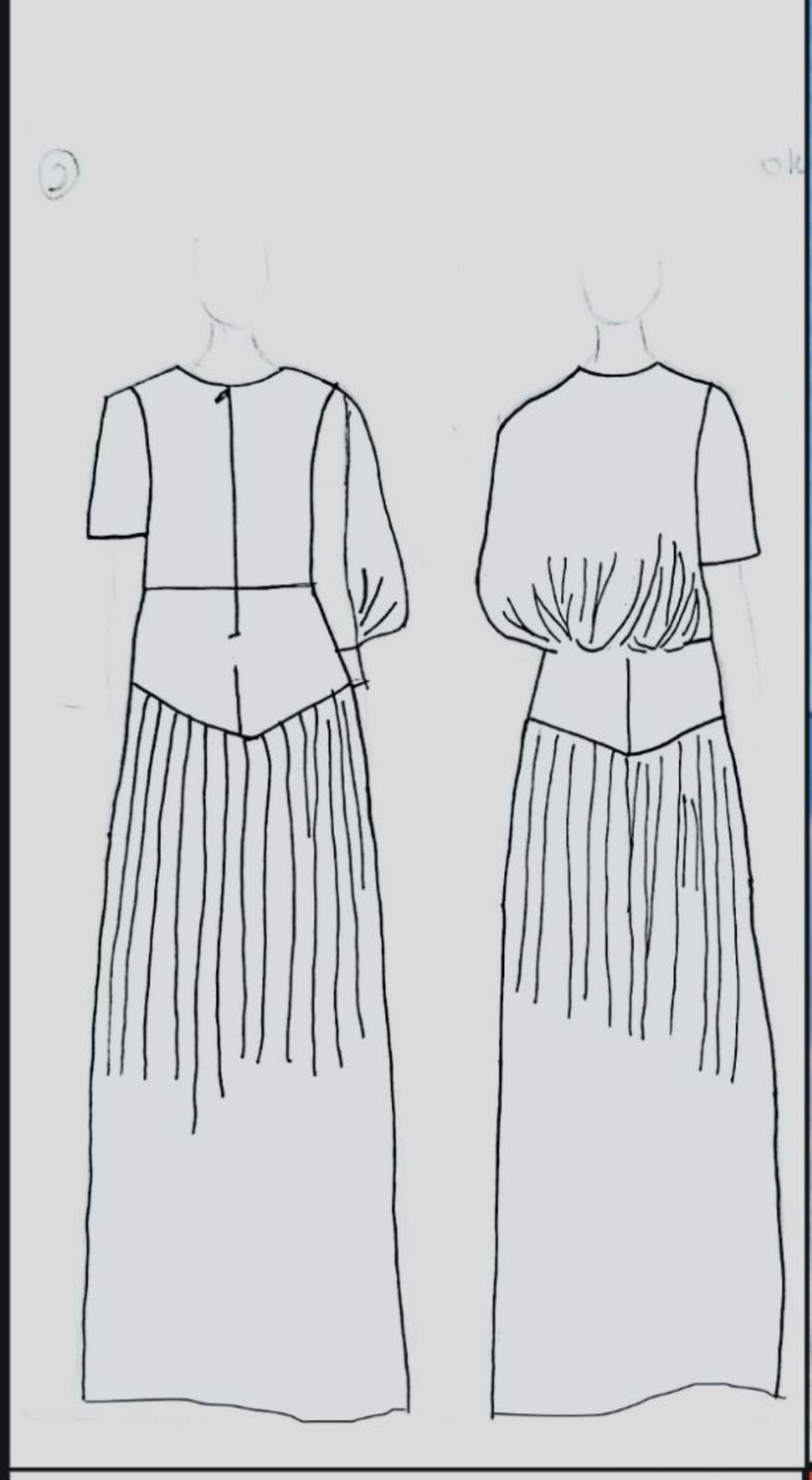
SPOTLIGHT.

PHOTOS BY MAIA SANTOS MALLARD 2024

Angela Brito Brand, in dialogue with both avant-garde and tradition, creates garments that are deeply integrated with design, identity, craftsmanship, and innovation— elements that constitute part of our very essence.

Angela Brito Brand, em diálogo com vanguarda e tradição, cria peças integradas ao design, à identidade, à artesania e à inovação, parte da nossa essência.

PHOTOS BY MAIA SANTOS MALLARD 2024 & ANGELA BRITO BRAND



Criola Collection, Top Bombu Mininu, inspired by the traditional tying techniques of Cape Verde, historically used to carry children.

The Raia long skirt, constructed in layered volumes, features an attached pocket in the form of a clutch, based on the customary wrapping methods employed by Cape Verdean women to transport various essential items.

Coleção Criola Top Bombu Mininu, inspirada nas técnicas tradicionais de amarração de Cabo Verde, utilizadas para carregar crianças.
E a saia longa Raia, em camadas e com volume, possui bolso acoplado em formato de clutch, baseado na amarração típica das mulheres cabo-verdianas para transportar diversos itens essenciais.

Pangeia Collection, comprising a vest and long skirt ensemble. Entirely handcrafted, the traditional Panu di Téra textile is combined with pleating techniques, reflecting a synthesis between heritage and contemporary form.

Coleção Pangeia, conjunto de colete e saia longa. Confeccionado de forma totalmente artesanal, o tecido tradicional Panu di terá combina a técnica de plissado.

A composition of overlapping layers and pleats, referencing the traditional attire of Cape Verdean women.

Combina camadas sobrepostas e pregas em referência à vestimenta das mulheres cabo-verdianas.

PHOTOS FROM ANGELA BRITO BRAND

PICTURE BY MICHEL ASSOUKA

1926 100 YEARS OF CANADIAN BLACK HISTORY 2026

A TIMELINE

WRITTEN BY MALCOM DAVID

Every February, Black communities around North America celebrate Black History Month. The history and legacy of Black people is often an ignored chapter of Canadian history. While figures like Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks are revered for their advocacy within the American civil rights movement, seldom mentioned are the strides of Viola Desmond, Stanley Grizzle, or Carrie Best in the Canadian Black struggle.

In 1995, Canada nationally recognized February as Black History Month, 19 years after the U.S did in 1976. Despite this discrepancy, the origins of the month-long celebration of Black history and excellence stem from the same seeds planted by Dr. Carter G. Woodson.

1926 - Dr. Carter G. Woodson, recognized as the "Father of Black History" launches Negro History week to recognize the achievements of the black population in North America. Dr. Woodson was born in in 1875 in New Canton, Virginia. He was the son of a slave and became the second black person to receive a PhD from Harvard. After years of educating himself about black scholarship and history, he believed that a celebration of black history would have a significant impact on future generations of black leaders (Chambers, 2026).
In his words ""If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated." (Chambers, 2026)
He chose February because it was the month that both Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln were born. Douglass and Lincoln were two of the most influential figures in the emancipation movement. Lincoln was the U.S president who issued the Emancipation Proclamation that freed slaves in the Confederate states and Frederick Douglass was an abolitionist leader who escaped slavery to become a prominent voice for the freedom of African Americans.

1937- A Sunday school in Winnipeg holds a program to honor "Negro History and Education Week". This is one of the first dedicated celebrations of Black history in Canada

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1946- Viola Desmond, a Black businesswoman in Halifax, Nova Scotia, refuses to leave the "whites-only" section of a theatre. She is arrested and fined for her defiance.

Her act becomes a landmark in Canada's civil rights history.
1958- Willie O'Ree becomes the first Black Canadian player in the NHL with the Boston Bruins. This is a barrier-breaking moment for Black people in North American sports.

1969 - Canada's first major student-led protest, known as The Sir George Williams Affair, is sparked by accusations of academic racism from Black and Caribbean students at Sir George Williams University (now known as Concordia) against Biology professor Perry Anderson.

1979- Toronto becomes Canada's first municipality to recognize Black History Month after pushes from the Ontario Black History Society's two founders: Dr. Daniel G. Hill and Wilson O. Brooks.

1995 - The House of Commons officially recognizes February as Black History Month in Canada as a result of a motion introduced by Dr. Jean Augustine, the first Black woman elected to Parliament.

2005- Michaelle Jean becomes the first Black person and Haitian Canadian to become the Governor General of Canada (2005-2010).

2015- The United Nations declares the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024). Canada recognizes the proclamation.
2018- Viola Desmond becomes the first Canadian woman to appear on a Canadian bank note.

2020- The Black Lives Matter Movement erupts in North America and globally after the death of George Floyd. The protests in Canada bring widespread public attention to systemic racism.

2026- The 100-year anniversary of "Negro Week", recognizing black excellence and achievements, is celebrated.

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GARDEN OF WOMEN

Doria Havelomana Rafolisisoa

"Garden of Women" is inspired by the overarching theme of solidarity and resilience. Growth rarely happens alone. In the "Garden of Women" each flower carries its own colour, strength, and story. When they come together, the landscape truly blooms. Expanding its beauty and emerging side by side. Our presence together as Black women and women of colour becomes a garden of rebirth, where diversity deepens the beauty and every bloom awakens a richer future. Combining the theme of Afro-futurism with the significance of the colour Purple, my graphically edited work symbolizes Women Empowerment. The colour purple has ties to Feminism. Purple depicts dignity, sovereignty, solidarity, resistance, and intersectional empowerment. In the early 1900s during the suffragette movement, it was linked to the concept of "Royal Blood that flows in the veins of every suffragette". Black Women are powerful, yet also the most marginalized.

My work refers to Alice Walker's “The Color Purple", a prize winning novel that solidifies purple as a symbol of Womanism. A term coined by Walker to describe Black Feminism. "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" - Alice Walker. Womanism refers to a theory rooted in the experiences of Black women and women of colour. The theory focuses on the intersection between gender, race, and class. Emphasizing empowerment of all people, while still spotlighting the unique struggles of Black women.

EMANCIPATION SERVED HOT:

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GRASSROOTS FEMINIST ACTIVISM IN INDIAN AND KENYAN TEA PLANTATIONS

WRITTEN BY INGARA MAIDOU

Illustrated by Oona Aiken

Introduction

Despite the gradual erosion of its colonial empire following World War II, Britain still sought to maintain its control over foreign land and labour in its South Asian and African colonies (Rappaport 343). Thus, India and Kenya, two of the largest global tea exporters, became a centre for Indian and Kenyan nationalist movements as they attempted to reclaim the agricultural sector that the British East India Company and the Imperial British East Africa Company helped pioneer (Rappaport 336). Still, post-colonial theory has scarcely compared the historical similarities in India's and Kenya's post-colonial agricultural economies. More specifically, post-colonial theory has yet to employ a feminist lens recognizing the substantial role women's labour played in shaping the post-colonial Indian and Kenyan agricultural economy.

Correspondingly, this research constructs a comparative analysis of the influence that British colonial rule had on the sexual division of labour in Indian and Kenyan tea plantations. More specifically, this paper argues that an analysis of the rural feminist activism that arose as a result of this marginalization is most conducive to addressing India and Kenya's gender rights development. To build this argument, a comparative analysis on the influence of colonialism on the sexual division of labour in each country's tea production will be undertaken. This will lead to an exploration of how marginalization lies at the basis of feminist organizations. Next, a comparison of the Indian and Kenyan legal frameworks addressing gender rights will connect to my analysis of rural women's political organization. This will reveal that it is rural women's mobilisation, rather than policy recommendations, that have actually impacted the development of India and Kenya's gender rights.

Literature review

Marxist feminists' examination of women's unrecognized labour is a major theoretical field that situates the first half of research. Nancy Hartsock's view of feminist standpoint theory significantly guides my analysis of the causal relationship between labour and socio-political mobilization. Hartstock posits that the structures that have defined women's activity should be at the basis of a feminist historical materialism (Hartsock 292). Furthermore, in the context of my research, Hartsock's terminology referring to a "sexual division of labour" rather than a "gendered division of labour" will be employed (293)[1]. This term more accurately encompass-

1 A separation of biological forms of labour compared to socially imposed ones is situational, and is less applicable in feminist analyses of topics including emotional labour, prostitution, and sexual harassment: topics which include both cisgender and transgender women.

es the additional work of childbearing that many rural women must perform without the accommodations (ie, paid maternity leave, daycares, nannies, etc) that many women in urban settings have access to.

Nonetheless, Marxist feminist theory struggles to address how feminist ideologies are adapted to the postcolonial era (Hartsock 294). The entrance of former colonial economies as autonomous actors in international politics has encouraged many states to address women's newfound roles in a globalized world. Yet despite India and Kenya participating in symbolic feminist conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Chhichhia 2), sexual inequality within the agricultural sector remains persistent in both countries. Therefore, this paper expands Hardstock's "feminist standpoint" to explore how the all-encompassing idea of "women's labour" actually depends on contextual circumstances, that being the agricultural labour in the post-colonial era, in this context. This research aims to shed light on these blind spots to outline how rural women's labour has been foundational in the development of the post-colonial Indian and Kenyan socio-economic and legal frameworks. To achieve this aim, a comparative analysis of the existing research done by Supurna Banerjee on women's roles in the Daahlia plantation in India, Rayah Feldman's study on women's socio-economic position in Kenyan agricultural production, and Bandini Chhichhia's comparison of India and Kenya's gender rights laws will be examined.

Women's introduction into the agricultural sector under colonial rule

In both the Indian and Kenyan cases, perceptions of "gendered work" heavily mirrored the British metropole's stark sexual inequalities in the workforce: women historically performed unpaid domestic labour, whereas men took on more "physically demanding" forms of paid labour. As many Marxist feminist theorists, such as Nancy Hartsock, have observed, this household labour in practice manifested twofold: women were responsible for reproducing human beings and thus labour power, while also bearing the responsibility of producing goods (Hartsock 295). British colonies extrapolated these multifaceted forms of labour, where the surplus of labour and goods was essential for the colonial empire's maintenance. Consequently, while sexual divisions of labour existed in pre-colonial India and Kenya, British colonial rule institutionalized this social structure in the agri-

cultural sectors. In colonial India, the British encouraged family recruitment in tea plantations, and women became an additional cheap labour force, subject to abuse and intimidation (Banerjee 7). In Kenya, however, while women in pre-colonial societies carried out the same tasks in the agricultural sector, the commercialization of the colonial tea enterprise has placed men alone as the key income earner in the household economy, pushing women into the roles of reproductive labour. While women still do participate in cash cropping, this form of labour is often not sufficient to support themselves independently (Feldman 71). In both countries, colonial rule solidified the family structure as a key component needed for women's survival. Hence, fixed family structures were ultimately entangled with women's economic activity, reducing their own financial independence.

The first example of the sexual division of labour in a former British colony can be seen in Indian tea plantations. Ethnographic research conducted by Supurna Banerjee in Daahlia, a tea plantation in Dooars, India, between 2010 and 2012, found that women on the tea farms occupied more hands-on tactile positions, such as plucking and pruning, where they directly interacted with tea crops in the garden. This sexual separation extended to other facets of daily life, as most women also tended to their families by cooking, cleaning, and undertaking house chores (Banerjee 92). Even though the domestic and agricultural work women performed required much precision, concentration, and patience, the women who performed this labour fell victim to two forms of marginalization explored in Hartsock's analysis. Firstly, women's labour was considered less demanding compared to the jobs reserved for men, such as wielding machinery, which was regarded as "specialized" (Banerjee 122). Moreover, many women in the Indian agricultural sector faced unequal access to land rights and struggled to obtain credit from financial institutions and agricultural co-operatives (Chhichhia 5). Although these women were waged labourers, they faced a double exploitation, where both their unpaid domestic labour and insufficient compensation for work in agricultural plantations went undervalued.

In Kenya, the lingering influence of the British-imposed sexual division of labour occurs through the increased dependence women have on male incomes, despite their active role in agricultural enterprises, such as tea farming. Although women have historically been involved in agricultural labour,

the colonial commercialization of the rural economy—Kenya's tea economy in particular—intensified the gendered inequality seen in rural plantations (Feldman 71). Following colonialism, the Kenyan government aimed to sustain its agricultural growth from the colonial era, and this was achieved by encouraging smallholder tea production; projects which eventually led to the state accounting for 11% of the world's exports by 1983 (Rappaport 344). However, while women play an increasingly significant role in both subsistence farming and farming cash crops such as tea, only 5% of Kenyan women in rural areas own land in their name (Feldman 71). Tea farming is also Additionally, most rural women do not receive material compensation for their work in commercial farming, and men are often the sole recipients of income from cash crop farming (Feldman 67).

How Women Challenge the Sexual Division of Labour in Indian and Kenyan Tea Production

When extending an analysis of the feminist standpoint to the post-colonial era, it becomes evident how the collective experience of sexual subjugation in tea plantations actually encouraged a new form of socio-political mobilization. As much of women's work in Daahlia was performed in open spaces such as the gardens, women were under close supervision from employers, and could only find moments of privacy during their breaks. During this time off, women would go to bushes where they could share food and discuss their lives (Banerjee 121). Most importantly, these spaces allowed women to share critical socio-economic information relating to job applications, before poverty line cards, and methods of resistance against unfair treatment (Banerjee 122). As women's pay was based on the weight of the leaves they plucked, Banerjee cites an example of women in the plantations refusing to weigh their leaves after a new manager arbitrarily deducted the weight from women's totals. This act of collective civil disobedience was central to the push for greater rights in Daahlia. As the state was viewed as a distant entity, women had to directly confront and challenge the managerial class in the plantations (Banerjee 160).

Similarly, in Kenya, many women's groups supported by the Kenyan Women's Bureau in 1976 arose from the recognition of women's common subaltern position in the agricultural sector Feldman outlines how these groups' objectives were, "(a) to achieve social welfare functions and (b) to implement [women's] commercial [farming] projects" (68). This distinct Bureau aimed at

addressing women's grievances and was crucial to the advancement of gender rights in the country. As Kenyan women faced difficult entry into governance, solidarity groups were the most prominent forums in which women could work towards achieving desired changes; with most rural women belonging to some sort of mutual aid society or communal agricultural group (Nzomo 238). Hence, in both India and Kenya, the neglect and denigration of women's labour stood at the basis of collective organizations aimed to reform their socio-economic conditions.

The self-improving goals of the Indian and Kenyan feminist mobilization in tea plantations could be linked to critiques of labour unionism, which stipulate that trade unions simply maintain the working-class' marginalised position within capitalist systems rather than undertaking revolutionary change. In the Indian and Kenyan cases, the benefit of women's organization was restricted to the spatial and material circumstances of the women who worked on certain plantations, rather than the position of female labourers within the wider Indian and Kenyan agricultural sectors. This was evident in India as the women in tea plantations primarily protested against their supervisors, and in Kenya, where Feldman argues that women's groups only target individual grievances rather than undergo structural change (Feldman 76).

Yet, while cognizant of the importance of structural change for women's subaltern roles in the agricultural sector, this critique still relies on two assumptions that do not align with the contexts of the Indian and Kenyan tea plantations. Firstly, this form of rural mobilization does not correspond to urban trade unionism, which attempts to negotiate workers' conditions with the capitalist class: the owners of the means of production. Contrarily, rural mobilization in India served to educate women on the methods to alter their disenfranchised positions in society, and in Kenya, it aimed to upturn societal structures that institutionalized women's subordination. Both of these divergent methods still converged in their goals, which were to provide women with the tools to redefine their positions in agriculture and strive for financial autonomy. Secondly, and most importantly, utilizing Marxist critiques of labour unionism—critiques which are often formulated in the contexts of a male, European urban proletariat—produces an epistemic violence, conceptualised by Gayatri Spivak, where "identifying with forms of resistance plausible in advanced capitalist countries [becomes] a piece with that elitist bent of bourgeois historiography." (Spivak 83). The assumption

that political projects in Global South countries should follow the same trajectory as their former colonial powers erases these countries' unique histories and fails to construct a meaningful political project informed by colonialism.

Comparative Case Studies: The development of legal gender rights in India and Kenya

To get a clearer picture of the need for grassroots organizations by rural women in India and Kenya, Bandini Chhichhia's legal case study comparing state initiatives for gender rights will be analyzed. To determine the status of gender rights in post-colonial societies, Chhichhia used primary sources and literature review comparing India and Kenya based on their shared British colonial history, common law and legal system, and current demographics, where 62 percent of Kenyan women lived in rural areas as of 2000 and 71 percent of Indian women as of 2012 (Chhichhia 1). Based on these similarities, Chhichhia compared and contrasted each state's gender rights framework in relation to India and Kenya's 2005-2006 reports to CEDAW (Chhichhia 2). In India, four key legal institutions address gender, namely: the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD), the National Commission for Women (NCW), the Parliamentary Committee on the Empowerment of Women (PCEW), and the Inter-Ministerial Committee (Chhichhia 3). Contrarily, in Kenya, the National Gender and Development Policy acts as a catch-all instrument that addresses economic, social, legal, and other gender-related problems (Chhichhia 3). As argued in Chhichhia's analysis, the decentralization and division of tasks in India's various gender institutions are more conducive to addressing specific gender rights. This result was compared to Kenya's overly burdened NGDP, which, through mainstreaming gender into other socio-economic and political causes, fails to address the complexities that exist within gender related causes (Chhichhia 5). This argument has been conceptualized by various scholars within gender and women's studies, such as Joan W. Scott's "Gender as Useful Category for Historical Analysis," where she claims that gender not being understood as its own distinct category but rather as a subset of other fields in critical theory, leads to universal and descriptive accounts of what gender is (Scott 1064). This use of gender fails to provide analytical accounts of the impacts of gender categorizations, and, in regard to the case study of Kenya, does not account for how "gender" has been instrumentalized in the post-colonial context to

deprive women of a means of income (Feldman 67).

However, despite the relevant analysis on how states can further comply with international norms to promote greater gender equity, Chhichhia's focus on the legal structures to determine the success of gender rights still relies on an external assessment of feminist issues, rather than centring the very women aimed to benefit from gender rights. Chhichhia mentions how CEDAW reports for the development of gender rights in both states, "have repeatedly cited anachronistic socio-cultural norms as the main hurdle to improving the status of women and securing compliance" (Chhichhia 5). Yet, the notion of jumping "the hurdle" of socio-cultural norms once again is another instance of epistemological violence where one-dimensional analyses of gender development and equality is determined by global hegemons. Here, "progress" is not context dependent, but rather a generalized amalgamation of international norms (Chhichhia 2). This issue is particularly relevant to the cases of rural women in India and Kenya, who, as previously mentioned, viewed the state and subsequently, its legal provisions, as a distant entity. Thus, Scott's perspective of gender as an aggregate of ideas that shape a society's views and not as a universal metaphysical concept (Scott 1067) becomes increasingly relevant to the case studies examined. Therefore, rather than ignore cultural contexts, legal norms outlining the "progress" of gender rights in rural areas are best addressed when determined by actual rural women, as seen with the women's organizations in Indian and Kenyan tea farms, which focused on the independence and agency of female tea farmers. Overall, while Chhichhia's argument commends India's various areas of gender sensitive institutions compared to Kenya's catch-all gender organisations, in both cases, rural women fail to be at the forefront of real structural change; an issue which has impeded these legal organisations' ability to actually introduce substantial material changes in the condition of women.

Conclusion

Gender rights in rural tea plantations in India and Kenya deconstruct the systematic categorization of women as subaltern in socio-economic change. In both countries, women's complete agency in political mobilization, the proliferation of financial information, and the development of agricultural initiatives by and for rural women have been at the forefront of improving rural women's conditions and access to income for their labour.

Through examinations of the relationship between labour, activism, and the dissonance these interlocking features have had with legal structure, this research emphasises why a bottom-up approach to socio-economic development is necessary in creating an equitable, post-colonial society. This focus on grassroots activism is additionally important when constructing a post-colonial feminist analysis on political economy. This research forms a distinct context-dependent analysis on labour and activism while being critical theories based on European stages of development, ones that are not easily transferable to other regions. This analysis is also cognizant and critical of legal theories which rely on international norms and customs rather than local contexts to address domestic conflicts.

Despite underscoring the importance of theoretical lenses prioritizing women's labour, agency, and epistemologies, the case studies in this research mostly utilized secondary sources and data. Correspondingly, ethnographic research conducted through interviews, observation, focus groups, and field studies in Indian and Kenyan plantations could reveal a more comprehensive analysis of the politics in contemporary tea plantations.

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AIN'T IT BORING?

Zoë Anum

Hair holds profound cultural and personal significance, weaving memories that can evoke discomfort at mere recollection. Reflecting on my journey with hair, I recall moments when comments and attitudes from others left me aspiring for nothing more than non-curly hair on my head. The theme of this piece is women's empowerment, which extends beyond physical dimensions; it dives into the internal boundaries we impose on ourselves, shaped by the complexities of existing within a racist society.

Acknowledging these boundaries isn't solely an individual responsibility; societal norms and influences play a pivotal role in shaping our beliefs and attitudes from an early age. Growing up in a predominantly white environment sculpted my perception entirely. However, I've realized that confronting and unlearning ingrained beliefs is essential in reclaiming the value of my hair – a journey that people without "white-passing" hair continuously have to embark on. Hair itself isn't problematic; the societal constructs, biases, and demeanour render it so. The notion that certain hair types are less valuable, unprofessional, or burdened with negative connotations is a testament to the pervasive influence of societal conditioning.

As a bi-racial, female, independent artist and fourth-year student at McGill University, I navigate the intersectionality of my identities. Each facet contributes to my evolving sense of self-expression. "Ain't It Boring?" – a two-part piece composed of an oil pastel art piece and a digitally crafted counterpart explores the vibrancy of diversity. Against a backdrop of bright purple hues and ethereal blues, a figure emerges with Bantu knots, symbolizing the beauty in our differences. This title serves as a poignant reminder that homogeneity would render life dull and devoid of purpose. Breaking these barriers is important to embark on a path of celebrating diversity and normalizing these physically beautiful, fundamental differences.

AGENDA

Written by Lea Shime

"MARILU" BY MAIA SANTOS MALLARD 2025

I carry your name in the grooves of my spine
In the curve of my hips and the swing of my thighs
In the taste of jollof rice and the sweetness of plantain frying on the hot stove

I have always pictured you: stately, dignified, queenly
The thickness of your hair wrapped in fabric wax-dyed glaring reds, golds, greens
Silhouetted against the sun, against the yellowing walls
A remnant of when we were Pharaohs and Gods

I know you
A 20th century Nefertiti with tyrants who claim to be kings
Who parade through Freetown a modern-day emperor
In your bed, at your feet, mesmerized
By the sway of your walk, the arch of your eyebrow, the righteousness of your cheek-bone,
By the Great Beauty of Taiama
And the way your bangles like streaks of sunlight
Dance across the umber of your skin

I can see you, hear you, feel you,
Ankles buried deep in the bone-white sands of Beach No. 2
The weathered creases of your palm greased with coconut oil and
cornrows pulling on my scalp
Mende lullabies on your tongue and gold at your ears

I can imagine you sifting rice, the deft movements of your hands, the grating sound
As the grains fall again and again and again
The way you call me child even though I know the English language never poisoned
The fullness of your lip

I am you
And I wonder what you felt as you lay on your deathbed in the motherland ravaged by diamonds
and blood
As your granddaughter's first daughter
In the sterility of a maternity ward,

cradled against bleached sheets and the comfort of universal healthcare,
Was christened with the weight of you, the mystery of you, the distance of you
With your name

Maagenda

WRITTEN BY
WILL SWEENEY

THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION OF 1974-1975:

STUDENT MOBILIZATION AND THE POLITICAL VOICE OF THE PEASANTRY

Introduction: Historical Narrative

Instrumentalizing the Feudal System: A Catalyst for Social and Class Division

Regional discontent regarding state elites in Ethiopia stemmed from the feudal land tenure systems in the Amharic-Tigre northern provinces and the conquest of Southern lands during the late 19th century through the mid-20th century (Chala, 2016, pp. 111-112). Throughout the reigns of Empress Zewditu and Haile Selassie, the land was commodified to expand and sustain a patronage network (Chege, 1979, p.362). This allowed elites to amass vast tracts of land without compensating Indigenous communities in the South, while simultaneously undermining peasant landownership in the north during the reign of Haile Selassie from 1930 to 1974 (Chala, 2016, p.112).

The southern region, predominantly inhabited by the Oromo and Somali, was subjected to the Gult system. A land tributary system held by the ruling class subordinated direct land ownership, which reduced the southern population to gabbar status, compelling them to provide unpaid labor to settlers: "cultivating land, supplying services, and constructing houses" (Chala, 2016, p.112). Under the Gult system, land taken from southern communities was redistributed to settlers through temporary grants, requiring southerners to pay rent, excessive taxes on cultivation gains, and providing military service when demanded by landlords (Chala, 2016, p.113). These burdens severely restricted freedoms, disrupted ethnic cohesion, and empowered ethnic entrepreneurs who amassed wealth by exploiting forced labor, predominantly leveraged against the Oromo ethnic population in the South (Chala, 2016, p.114). Till the end of the imperial regime, it led 80 percent of the rural population into poverty, leaving them with little to gain after fulfilling their indentured obligations (Chala, 2016, p.113).

Ethiopia's northern peasantry was governed by the Rist land system, which guaranteed communal access to land for rural communities (Crewett et al., 2008, pp. 8-9). It made land plots hereditary, prohibiting their commercial sale among peasants, yet not among elites (Crewett et al., 2008, pp. 8-9). Like the Gult system in the South, peasants were required to relinquish part of their land cultivation and subjected themselves to elite taxation and mandatory service, such as in the Southern region (Crewett et al., 2008, pp. 8-9). The tripartite of elites: the Church, the monarch, and the King represented 70 percent of all agrarian soil in the empire (Chala, 2016, p.112). Elite holdings represented

1 percent of the national population as the consequence of the enrichment of absent landlords thanks to the Gult system, marginalizing all regional ethnic groups as the demerit of the neopatrimonialism constituency (Chala, 2016, p.113).

This essay analyzes the fall of Haile Selassie's regime during the 1974–1975 revolution by examining Ethiopia's feudal system failure during agrarian commercialization and the role of the Ethiopian Student Movement in undermining Haile Selassie's legitimacy. The movement exposed state corruption, advocated for socialist state liberation, weakened U.S. support, and fostered cross-class mobilization. Symbolizing the voice of the voiceless, the movement represented the nationally oppressed peasant class at the demerit of the economically failing feudal system, paving the path for the creation of the military junta, Derg, to overthrow the imperial regime.

Ethiopia Economic Modernization

The Impact of Agrarian Commercialization on Tenants and the Intensification of Class Division

The enrichment of social division between the peasantry and the elites of the imperial regimes is particularly salient during the shift toward the capitalist commercialization of the agrarian economy. Following the framework of the feudal system, class divisions deepened as "the government had largely ignored reform of the peasantry sector, choosing not to tamper too vigorously with the feudal structure" (Keller, 1989, p.123). From the mid-1950s onwards, commercialization policies aimed at large-scale exportation to the global market further marginalized the peasantry, where the elite class monopolized fertile landholdings and governmental investments. Elites imposed significant financial burdens on the peasantry, demanding an average annual interest rate of 40 percent (Keller, 1989, p.123). Class divisions were further entrenched as only 25 percent of Ethiopia's soil was used for agrarian production, while absentee landowners represented a significant portion of uncultivated land (Keller, 1989, p.123).

The conceptual approach of the empire was to decentralize the economic state apparatus in the hands of the elites, which is further demonstrated by the state's lack of commitment to implementing land reform policies, rather than leaving power in the arbitrary hands of landlords. Such implementation is present following the aftermath of the Chilado Agricultural Development Unit (CADU), located in Ethiopia's geographical center near Chilalo Mountain (Keller, 1989, p.125). The

initiative was implemented in 1967 to create a commercialized farming system among the few small landowners (Keller, 1989, p.125). The implementation was so successful that after a few years, beneficiaries of the initiative were capable of "doubling their income" (Keller, 1989, p.125). The initiative's success led to drastic increases in land prices and ultimately led to the eviction of tenants who were contracting the land under the Gult system (Keller, 1989, p.126). The initiative of fostering economic growth for small landowners led to 25 percent of all tenants under the Gult system being evicted following the consequential increase in land payment (Keller, 1989, p.126). In pursuit of making land affordable, de facto state policies had a limited and significant impact in the long run as the monopolization of land was used to instrumentalize enriching elites and marginalize peasants.

Marginalizing peasants occurred at the demerit of negative state criticism. A perpetual occurrence was the instrumentalization of the land against peasants to suppress land reform outcries, such as alienating peasant tenants through elite manipulation of land prices (Chala, 2016, p.114). During the Weyane revolt in 1943, peasants who returned home were quickly evicted under suspicion that they participated (Chala, 2016, p.114). The harsh suppression caused a unification cascade of all ethnic groups following the socialist view by the student movement, liberation against the oppressed, which helped unify all ethnic groups for the sole purpose of eradicating the salient social division created by the feudal system.

Student Movement

The Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM), initiated in 1960, became the first organized body in the empire to criticize the state. The Newway brothers' coup against the state played an instrumental role in sparking the movement, as it created a cascade of information for postsecondary students, challenging the narrative of state resistance and ultimately leading to growing student opposition (Lemma, 1979, p.31). However, the seed that truly sparked the student movement concerning state oppression was the outcome of Haile Selassie's international student body that created a sense of "relative economic and political backwardness of their country" that truly sparked a change in the minds of youth for advocating against the regime (Lemma, 1979, p.31).

Anti-Imperialism: Marxist-Leninist Ideology

The movement launched its first an-

ti-imperial protest in 1965, involving 2000 students, at the discovery of the Shola camps reserve for those living under the poverty line. The camp was described in the report spread across Ethiopia as a "semi-Nazi concentration camp," aimed to conceal poverty under the guise of preserving state stability, leading to anti-westernized views: "Is Poverty a Crime?" (Lemma, 1979, p.31). The movement, at its inception, sought to represent the oppressed. However, in its later years, and in response to state resistance, it evolved into a politicized, ideologically driven force that aimed for the complete liberation of the oppressed, leaning towards a Marxist-Leninist ideology (Zewde, 2014, p.101).

The Marxist-Leninist ideology-driven student body condemned the U.S. for supporting the imperial regime through foreign monetary aid and a strong military resistance: "Many students say the American military presence at Kagnew has ensured the continuation of the autocratic regime" (Lemma, 1979, p.39). The student movement continuously fought back, and its greatest achievement was reducing the military presence of U.S. support in the Haile Selassie regime (Lemma, 1979, pp. 39-40). Legesse Lemma argues that the United States could have easily reinstated the monarchical regime and thwarted the coup had this not been the case (Lemma, 1979, pp. 39-40). The student body could do so through international recognition by invading embassies abroad, demanding imperial withdrawal of the Haile Selassie regime (Lemma, 1979, p.37). The student body did not singularly represent the voice of the voiceless. It did so at an international level with the help of its diaspora in pursuit of increasing international recognition of state oppressiveness. Their efforts also sought to cast doubt on U.S. state affairs, including the intentions behind programs like the Peace Corps. In 1969, students intensified their resistance by utilizing intimidation and violence, such as throwing "gasoline bombs" at the U.S. embassy, ultimately forcing the vast expulsion of U.S. state officials and expatriate personnel working in the private sector (Lemma, 1979, p.38).

Exposing Poverty and Corruption: Wollo Famine and Oil Prices

From 1960 to 1975, the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) emerged as a critical voice for the oppressed, exposing government mismanagement and corruption. In 1973, the students were the first to reveal the regime's failure during the Wollo famine (Keller, 1992, p.611). The government downplayed the drought in northern Ethiopia, restricted non-governmental ac-

tivity, and allowed only the Red Cross to operate in the affected areas (Keller, 1992, p.611). Leveraging their popularity, students distributed pictures of the famine, highlighting the regime's corruption, with much of its E$778 million budget allocated to elite salaries rather than relief efforts (Keller, 1989, p.102). These efforts galvanized public dissatisfaction, showcasing the state's neglect of the northern peasantry. The drought highlighted land inequality in the north, where 200,000 people died the following season, as large cultivation lands prioritized food exports over domestic relief (Keller, 1989, pp. 167-168). Conceptually, as literature concerning regional activism in the South following the 1973 drought is limited, the paper argues that the extensive effort of state inequality demonstrated by the ESM is in response to state censorship. It brought a sense of fear and hurry to the southern population as land inequalities were salient.

Additionally, corruption is a pluralistic variable that stagnated throughout the empire and was leveraged by ESM to gain popularity. In 1973, following the same year, drought in the north had caused the Wollo famine, and the OPEC (Persian Gulf Oil Supplier Council) oil embargo caused a hike in petroleum prices for all non-Arab states (Keller, 1989, p.171). As a response, the Ethiopian government increased prices by 270 percent in the year, doubling the rate imposed by the OPEC embargo (Keller, 1989, p.171). The goal of the drastic increase in gas prices was to increase the revenue of the monopolistic state-owned petroleum supplier (Keller, 1989, p.171). As a result, taxi drivers were forced to maintain their rate while bus fares had increased (Keller, 1989, p.171). Consequently, it led taxi drivers to embark upon the student protest, highlighting the demand for a decrease in oil prices. It led to severe discontent among the middle and lower classes, posing significant threats to one's financial budget of a twofold increase. Additionally, without ownership of an automobile, rural individuals relied heavily on access to taxis. The lack of accessibility of the public system significantly spread discontent and criticism of Haile Selassie's regime. However, with the participation of taxi drivers, both groups came together, mutually legitimizing each other's grievances. The student movement set the stage for mass protests, which had been unprecedented before this period. Their activism created a space for broader resistance, enabling groups like taxi drivers to organize and challenge authorities effectively, inflicting significant pressure on state power and ultimately reducing gas prices.

Military Juntas: Derg

The Overthrow of the Imperial Regime: Feudalism Exiled

The economic crisis that occurred in 1973 was the result of the feudal system's limited economic state progression, which was reliant on an unachievable export quota for agricultural goods in the world market. Ultimately leading to reduced state investment in infrastructure, such as military institutions (Bellucci, 2016, p.2). The ESM movement bared the body of the empire, chanting in the capital, "Land to the Tiller," of Haile Selassie's corrupt bureaucracy and demanding representation of the people in view of its politicized ideology for state liberation (Zewde, 2014, p.101). The state was incapable of managing exogenous variables, such as the 1973 famine and increases in oil prices, leading to mass protests. Amidst social inequalities, the military in the southern region had experienced much of what the peasantry was experiencing: regional food shortages and undrinkable water (Keller, 1989, p.101).

In conjunction with the mass demand for change due to the empire's incapability, it led to the creation of a military junta in 1974 called Derg, and the overthrow of the regime in the same year (Bellucci, 2016, p.5). The student movement, representing social state oppression, legitimized the very much anticipated Guardian Coup by creating the Ethiopian Revolutionary Party (ERPR) (Bellucci, 2016, p.8). An underlying significance of the coup was the uncertainty surrounding its consequences. The military junta capitalized on the trust of the Ethiopian Student Movement by adopting a left-wing, antifeudal stance as part of their political agenda (Bellucci, 2016, pp. 5-7). Dissonance occurred within the EMS as many sought the coup to be a Guardian Coup rather than anything, delegating the political power to be chosen by the people. However, the coup was increasingly accepted as the Derg comprised low-ranking officers (Bellucci, 2016, pp. 5-7). It symbolized the lower-class individuals that the regime had oppressed. After disposing of the imperial regime, the Derg militia created the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC); the new state council head was Mengistu Haile Mariam (Bellucci, 2016, p.5).

The PMAC in 1975 brought left-wing social reforms, nationalizing the previous overwhelming feudal private sector, such as "banks, insurance companies, and most large private enterprises" (Bellucci, 2016, p.6). It eradicated all land owned by absentee landowners by nationalization (Bellucci, 2016, p.6). In less than a year, the Derg dismantled a significant portion of the previous feu-

dal system through an enormous land reform initiative, ultimately redistributing land to the long-marginalized peasant class, which had been oppressed under the Gult and Rist systems since Haile Selassie's rise to power in 1930 (Bellucci, 2016, p.6). All rural land fell in the hands of the Ethiopian people, under the socialist influence of Marxist ideology praised during the protests that led to the revolution (Chege, 1979, p.370). The reform created land dependency among peasants by granting them minimal land allocations in accordance with regional needs; the state retained administrative control over all land (Chege, 1979, p.370). A strong emphasis must be placed on utilizing rather than owning, as the reform did not provide a status of ownership to the peasantry class (Bellucci, 2016, p.7).

Socialist Regime: Turn Rogue

In 1966-67, the PMAC socialist constituency vetoed all other political parties wanting a piece of power (Bellucci, 2016, p.8). Following the Ethiopian coup, many, including the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), anticipated that it would function as a Guardian Coup, eventually transferring executive power to an elected body under a socialist or democratic framework chosen by the Ethiopian people. This expectation was fueled by Derg's slogan, "Ethiopia Tikdem," Ethiopia Above All, which was widely interpreted as a commitment to a unified and inclusive Ethiopia under a regime believed to embrace freedom (Chege, 1979, p.378). Suspicion of political discourse regarding regime criticism led to widespread killing, such as the complete eradication of the coopted student political party, the EPRP (Bellucci, 2016, p.8).

Conclusion

Ethiopia's economic modernization played an integral role in the degradation of the regime, as it prominently exposed the failure of state apparatuses to properly modernize due to the regime's resistance to reforming the feudal system. The feudal system intensified social divisions as elites manipulated land prices to evict tenants and exploit the peasantry through excessive taxation. As the Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit demonstrated, the de jure policy was null as the land policy instrumentation was used to enrich elites within the regime.

The Ethiopian student movement played an integral role in channeling the grievances of the oppressed peasantry by publicly criticizing the Ethiopian regime and exposing its corruption and illegitimacy. The movement was so successful that it counteracted the empire's ineffectiveness in censor-

ing information, which gave them even more popularity as it galvanized them as the voice of the voiceless peasantry class. The ESM was capable of highlighting weaknesses such as the government's inability to provide relief to the hundreds of thousands who died, while ministers' salaries consumed more than half of public expenditure that year. Additionally, the students successfully mobilized middle-class workers to protest and criticize the regime, as seen in the case of taxi drivers criticizing the regime for increasing gas prices. The students were the first to explicitly demand state liberation in the name of socialist political philosophers, leading to the influence of the Derg political ideology. The students played a significant role in raising international awareness through the efforts of the state diaspora, causing vast U.S. personnel and state officials to flee the empire after the subsequent violent vandalization of the U.S. embassy, which forced the United States to reconsider its involvement in Ethiopia.

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The Landbuilder

The Griot

Fragments

Niara van Gaalen.

"Histories and memories, like collages, are composed of fragments....They offer (re)collections and (re)constructions."pg 66 of Multiplicity: Blackness in Contemporary American Collage.

Collage is a medium that allows the artist to take fragments of imagery and stitch these together in creative ways to form a new visual narrative.

Collage lends itself well to expressing a hybrid identity, and contemporary Caribbean-descended artists such as the Haitian-American artists Didier William, M.Florine Démosthène, the Jamaican-American artist Paul Anthony Smith and the Carribbean-American artist Nyugen E. Smith have all explored collage in their respective practices.
My exploration for fragments builds on these precedents.

The midwife

A person who supports the passage between life and death, who is at the portal between generations.

Each one has spaces or spatial qualities that they gravitate towards.

Fragment uses deep blue hues, inspired by stained glass, which uses cobalt to pigment glass that illuminate churches worldwide.

The church is an institution that has played an important role in colonial expansion, and the stained glass windows in churches re-enforce Christian narratives.

Churches typically occupy important sites in cities, and the view out of the stained glass windows connects the Christian narrative to the surrounding landscape.

The narrative that my collages depict is about Black life that exists somewhere between Dystopia and Utopia. These collages of the archetypal figures focus on daily lives of Black people in the Americas, where magic is infused in every-day rituals for regular people. The archetypes are layered in between a Dystopia and Utopia that exist simultaneously within Polychronic time.

"The rituals and inconsistencies of daily life are compelling, dynamic, and utterly strange."
- The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto

This series approaches Afrofuturism through the quiet authority of African women. Rather than framing empowerment as spectacle, the work centers solidarity, composure, and shared presence as foundational to future-building. Strength is expressed not only in stance, but in connection.

The figures exist within cultural continuity, textiles, adornment, and lineage grounding them, while simultaneously occupying contemporary space with confidence and clarity. Power here is relational. It is built through community, partnership, and mutual visibility. Even within collective arrangements, the women remain the axis around which the scene stabilizes.

Afrofuturism in this body of work becomes a social reordering. The future is not imagined as a distant technological escape, but as a restructuring of who holds narrative, who carries dignity, and who defines progress. In this vision, African women are not peripheral to liberation—they are its architects.

Michel Assouka

HER TOMORROW

The halo-like lighting in the solo portrait positions ancestry as living energy rather than nostalgia. Afrofuturism here is not escape from the past but a restructuring of its meaning. The future is imagined as circular rather than linear, built through memory, autonomy, and collective presence. Progress is not measured by Western timelines, but by alignment with identity and self-definition.

The figures stand rooted in African textiles and adornment, grounding the work in ancestry. Yet they exist alongside symbols of mobility and innovation: a suitcase suggesting self-directed migration, a laptop representing knowledge production, instruments and books signaling cultural and intellectual continuity. Tradition and modernity are not in opposition; they coexist without hierarchy.

31 DAYS

This series reimagines the future through a decolonial lens by questioning who defines progress and how time is measured. Western narratives often frame development as linear, faster, higher, more productive. In these portraits, time is no longer abstract; it becomes physical. The clock is held, leaned upon, carried, and recontextualized. It is not an authority, it is an object reclaimed.

Michel Assouka

RECLAIMING TIME

"A SPEECH OF SUFFERING": JAMES BALDWIN'S LITERACY CHALLENGE TO BLACK NATIONALISM

Written by Kanny Diane

Building the Revolutionary Black Man

Construction of a collective identity is an intrinsic component of all collective action. Protest groups rely on this principle for communal strength, support, and survival (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2007). But the bounds of a common identity often preclude individuality to the point of destruction. In 20th century America, the singular male identity of the Black nationalist movement suppressed unique, queer perspectives into obscurity; ultimately characterizing the revolutionary Black man as an ideal, rather than a veritable brother. James Baldwin echoed in Notes of a Native Son (1955) that the "failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power [...]" (p.23). This critique, as political as it is literary, highlights the fundamental flaw of 20th century Black nationalism: Black futures designed with colonial imagery and its impossible identities cannot survive. In his own fiction, Baldwin seeks a realist alternative. His literary exploration of Black male homosexuality through the tragic romances of his 1962 novel, Another Country, exposes the low viability of the Black male ideal.

The charge to redefine the Black male identity was central to the Black nationalist movement from its inception, as centuries of dehumanization throughout slavery had shattered Black masculinity as a social concept (Shin & Judson, 1998; Armengol, 2012). Consequently, the language of 20th-century Black resistance often framed liberation with the restoration of manhood and oppression as castration, supporting a sexualized vocabulary of domination which inadvertently aligned Black freedom with white patriarchism (hooks, 2014). As such, the Black Nationalist movement propagated an image of Black American masculinity constructed around hypersexuality, virility, and social authority as evidence of manhood, asserting that the renascence of Black patriarchism was vital in establishing a balance of power between races (Armengol, 2012). But this framework excludes homosexuality from Blackness altogether. In direct contrast to the dominant view, Baldwin expanded the possibilities of Black liberation and "[...] resisted an uncritical embrace of black nationalism, developing a vision of the homosexual instead as the chief instrument of cultural renovation" (Shin & Judson, 1998). He realized this vision with protagonist Rufus Scott, a Black jazz musician surviving Harlem during the heat of the Civil Rights Movement.

Performing the Revolutionary Black Man

Throughout Another Country (1962), Rufus's insecure attachment to the sexual politics of the Black male identity results in endless personal anguish. The novel opens discontinuously with Leona, a white Southern divorcée, as Rufus's first observed paramour. Leona is immediately enticing to Rufus. She provides him with an opportunity to combat his oppression by exerting power over a white person. He confesses this in hindsight: "to remember Leona was also—somehow—to remember the eyes of his mother, the rage of his father […] the white policeman who taught him how to hate," (p.6). Even his younger sister, Ida, quickly recognizes "You'd never have even looked at that girl, Rufus, if she'd been black. But you'll pick up any white trash just because she's white. What's the matter—you ashamed of being black?" (p.28). Rufus performs the traditional masculinity expected of him and, as a result, the world identifies him as fierce, brash, and charming. He weaponizes this posture to dominate Leona, physically and mentally. He exerts his rage onto his white girlfriend as an attempt to feel power, but he cannot escape history. The inverted dynamic of Rufus and Leona's relationship is incredibly delicate. Despite his position as the abuser, Rufus feels beneath Leona as a Black man. This insecurity is reinforced by Leona's singular use of the word "boy" early in their relationship:

"'Don't call me boy,' he said.
'Well,' she said, looking startled, 'I didn't mean nothing by it, honey'" (p.30).

Concerning this term, Clive Baldwin explains that in the South, the diminutive usage of the term 'boy' infantilised African American men and, in turn, their response was the construction of a new male identity that was synonymous with the dominant expectations of masculinity (2020). Leona's word choice creates a tension visible only to Rufus. With one word, the masculine identity at the root of Rufus's perceived power becomes impugned, and his illusion of control begins to collapse. The inevitable truth is that, as a white woman, Leona holds social power over Rufus. However, while he fervently rejects this subjugation in relation to white women, he readily endures it with men.

The Queer Threat to the Black Male Ideal

Lost in Manhattan, following their breakup, Rufus retrieves his troublesome memories of Leona. He finds himself impoverished and alone in his

hometown. He considers having sex with an unfamiliar white man in exchange for dinner, after commenting that "[...] on a winter night, a boy can be bought for the price of beer and the promise of warm blankets" (p.41). Baldwin's choice to repeat the term "boy" in this context denotes Rufus's derogatory attitude towards homosexuality. He implies that a man who can be bought for sex by another man deserves a lesser title—they are not real men. In support of Baldwin's critiques on queer sexuality, Marc Lombardo writes that the fact that we must constantly ostracize the other—letting the "freak" know that they are a "freak"—suggests that the boundary between us and them is not nearly as sharp as we imagine it (2009). Rufus thus refers to men who sleep with men as 'boys' in order to distance them from the strong Black man he considers himself to be. But this perception shifts as he begins the transaction. As his apprehension culminates, he pleads, "'I'm not the boy you want, mister,'" (44). Baldwin's choice of appellation now finds Rufus turning the diminutive onto himself. He accepts the title automatically with his offer of sex. Rufus lacks the ability to exert power in gay interactions; he feels too vulnerable. He puts his entire identity as a Black man at risk in daring to embrace queerness. Black masculinity is defined as incompatible with homosexuality to such an extent that Rufus will willingly infantilise himself before associating the two states with one another. This mechanism places Rufus in a wretched position—inadvertently endorsing Black inferiority to a white man. He ultimately reinforces the very same emasculation that his community so desperately wishes to escape. Baldwin uses the character of Rufus, at his most desperate, to critique the proximity of the 'ideal' Black male identity to white supremacy. His dual analysis of race and sexuality is a literary challenge to Black expectations of masculinity, which punish a vulnerable class of Black men with no path to total liberation. Black, gay men remain burdened with little social power and multiple oppressors; they contradict the ubiquitous image of powerful Black men which Black nationalists have propagandized. Ironically, by mirroring the same structures of oppression which they seek to overthrow, the movement diminishes the potential of collective Black freedom. The liberation they offer is incomplete and, thus, cannot endure without reconstruction.

The Violence of Revolutionary Desire

Baldwin expounds upon the danger of the Black male identity in Rufus's complex relationship with Eric, a young

white man of Southern aristocracy. This innocent first love devolves into, but does not start with the same physical violence that Rufus threw at Leona. Instead, it carries a tenderness which Rufus does not extend to any other lover in the novel. Rufus finds his purest experience of romance in Eric. It is within the limits of this love that Baldwin continues to illustrate the threat of the Black male identity. At the dawn of their relationship, Rufus felt "[..] a flood of affection for Eric. And he felt his own power" (p.46). As with Leona, he enjoys feeling authority over a person whose social power exceeds his own. But this attraction is paradoxical. He goes on to describe that "[...] the hands that were meant to hold Eric at arm's length seemed to draw Eric to him; the current that had begun flowing he did not know how to stop" (p.46). Baldwin expresses Rufus's own view of his sexuality by implicating his hands, rather than his mind or heart, as the tools that form the connection. He personifies a part of his body as a separate entity to minimize his agency. This speaks further to the total incompatibility of homosexuality with the common Black male identity—Rufus cannot even take responsibility for his own emotions. Additionally, Baldwin's choice of the word "meant" in this phrase connotes a biological imperative with heterosexuality. This phrasing presents homosexuality as an inherent act of defiance to Rufus's own nature.

The deep conflict between his identity and desires is thus inevitable, and the conflict manifests as emotional violence, tormenting both parties far beyond the span of their relationship. Throughout their affair, Rufus "[...] despised Eric's manhood by treating him as a woman, by telling him how inferior he was to a woman, [...] with the same roaring in his head and the same intolerable pressure in his chest" (p.46). Rufus claims to abhor Eric's gender, but truly, his intolerance lies in his own same-sex attraction. Eric cannot be a man because this would implicate Rufus as a homosexual. Yet, the constant denigration Rufus casts upon Eric manifests as physical anguish. Rufus is continually distressed by the guilt and confusion of his violence. His masculinity corrupts the most loving relationship he will ever experience; the ensuing guilt torments him up until his death. In a taxing attempt to conform to his societal standard, Rufus creates and receives devastating violence for himself and all those near him.

Rufus reflects on his failed relationships in his final moments, while contemplating suicide. As he stands on the George Washington Bridge, "The wind tore at him, at his head and shoulders, while

something in him screamed, 'Why? Why?' He thought of Eric. His straining arms threatened to break. I can't make it this way" (p.87). Baldwin's juxtaposition of internal and external pressure in this scene stresses the direct bond between Rufus's environment and his hopelessness. The deep conflict between his heart and the expectations of his society builds the intolerable pressure which drives Rufus to the bridge. He just cannot cope with the ineludible racism of his environment. He cannot cope with the inevitable violence of his romantic relationships. He feels he has no alternative to the corrupted love he has given and received all his life. He believes he has no home in his Harlem community; therefore, he can no longer live.

At his funeral, Rufus's childhood reverend acknowledges that "He was a bright kid and he was full of the devil. [...] But that boy was one of the best men I ever met" (pp.120–121). Nearly every character comments casually on Rufus's beauty, despite his troubles. Baldwin characterizes Rufus with such appeal to emphasize the major flaw of Black masculinity—he humanizes the victims of the common identity. He subverts traditional morality by affirming that all categories of Black men hold value; they all merit empathy and grace. Rufus is loved by his community. Nonetheless, he succumbs to the terrible pressure which has suffocated him his whole life. The burden of oppression and its compensatory Black masculinity work to infect each of his relationships until they become unsustainable. Moreover, they ignite an identity crisis which cannot be solved. bell hooks explains in her 1989 framework, Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness, that "[...] when you hear the broken voice you also hear the pain contained within that brokenness—a speech of suffering; often it's that sound nobody wants to hear." Rufus's experience as a Black man in America is a dynamic speech of suffering. His environment holds no home for him: his Blackness is poorly accepted by his white peers while his queerness is prohibited by his community. Altogether, he is a taboo created by an ill-fated model of masculinity. Through Rufus's tormented perspective, Baldwin exposes a painful reality that his country seeks to bury.

The Human Cost of the Black Male Ideal

Another Country reflects the unsung pain of a social context wherein Black homosexual men are ostracized into silence. Rufus is an ordinary Black man in New York City. He yearns for power and control over his circumstances. He is weakened by the constant cruelty he en-

dures. But despite the many failings of his society, Baldwin asserts that a model of Black manhood which demands heterosexual authority is the true storm of Rufus's pain. The boundaries of the mid 20th-century Black male identity compelled men like Rufus to parade hypermasculinity despite the violence it incites, while forcing queer Black men to deny themselves in order to belong, ultimately reproducing the same oppressive logic which Black communities sought to escape. The toxicity of his identity isolates Rufus from his community and creates a violent internal conflict which ravages every romantic relationship in his life and, finally, his relationship with himself. Total Black liberation requires that we expand the social and emotional possibilities available to us, rather than continue to restrict them. In Another Country, Rufus is the broken voice through which Baldwin demands reconstruction of the Black male identity for a sustainable, revolutionary future, and the survival of the Black community altogether.

Rufus Scott jumps from George Washington Bridge in the first chapter of Another Country. He is mourned, not profoundly, and his loss is absorbed calmly by everyone who knew him. For the remainder of the novel, Baldwin continues to trace the faults of his society through his sister, his lovers, and his friends left behind. As a realist, Baldwin could not provide resolutions he never witnessed; his fiction affirms that deconstruction of the Black male ideal must unfold across generations. Beyond the pages of critique, change will come from active reimagining of power within Black communities. Central to this process is the elevation of Black women as community leaders independent of men, alongside sustained continued interrogation of rigid masculinity within institutions—from barbershops to the Black Church—where gender norms remain consecrated. The path forward hinges on collective accountability and the affirmation of a multiplicity of Black identities. In doing so, we reject colonial remnants of oppression to establish a fully free and self-determined Black future we can all belong to.

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as far as we can DREAM

WRITTEN BY NIKECHUKWU EVULEOCHA

We do not reach in vain. We reach because something in us remembers height.

They told us to be grateful for a corner and call that enough,
As if our hunger should be quiet, as if our hope should not be tough.

As if the sky was not a thing our hands were meant to learn,
As if the stars were not for us unless we asked the dark to burn.

But something in us knew before the world could make its claim,
That we were not born merely breathing, we were born to bear a flame.

Not for the simple spite of those who said that we would break,
But for the deeper truth within us that refused to live half awake.

Because Black is not a border where ambition goes to die,
It is a kind of ancient thunder teaching mountains how to rise.

It is the pulse beneath the wound, the will beneath the scar,
The voice that tells the child to look beyond the nearest star.

And I have seen us dream with backs against impossible walls,
Still making ladders out of language when the ceiling only falls.

I have seen brilliance wear exhaustion and still answer to its name,
Seen minds struck hard by doubt step forward trembling just the same.

That is the part they do not tell you when they speak of reaching high,
That sometimes greatness first appears as something breaking in the sky.

That sometimes to become the light your spirit knows it ought to be,
You have to walk through nights so long they almost make you doubt the sea.

You have to meet yourself in rooms where fear has learned your oldest face,
And still decide your life deserves more altitude, more depth, more space.

To be a star you must first burn, yes, not in waste but holy strain,
Not every fire is meant to kill, some come to call you by your name.

Some come to strip the borrowed voice, the shrinking shape, the lesser role,
And leave behind the truest thing, a sharpened will, an answered soul.

So no, I do not dream to make a mockery of those who doubted me,
I dream because there is a door inside my chest that asks what else I'll be.

I dream because the heart knows things the frightened mind cannot defend,
It sees a distant version of the self and begs the feet to not pretend.

It says there is still more in you than what survival had to prove,
More than merely making do, more than learning how not to lose.

It says your future is not waiting for permission to appear,
It is already calling softly, asking whether you can hear.

And maybe that is why ambition feels so intimate and bright,
Because the dream is not a stranger, it is your own name dressed in light.

It is the life your spirit sketches when the room has gone to sleep,
The promise that your deepest ache was never given just to keep.

We come from people who made beauty in the jaws of brutal days,
Who turned their grief into a bridge and still found language fit for praise.

We come from hands that held tomorrow with no evidence in sight,
And still said dawn was on its way, and still kept walking toward the light.

So when I speak of Black excellence, I do not mean some polished show,
I mean the sacred right to want, the sacred height to which we grow.

I mean the scientist, the poet, and the child with questions in his stare,
The woman building worlds from thought because she knows that she can dare.

I mean the ones who study hard while doubt sits heavy on the chest,
The ones who fail and rise again and learn that rising is the test.

I mean the beauty of becoming what your spirit asked of you,
Not for applause, not for revenge, but because the reaching itself is true.

Because what if the dream in you is not excessive, not too wide,
What if it is a map from God that fear has only tried to hide.

What if the heart that wants so much was never asked to want in vain,
What if desire is proof enough that you were built to bear the strain.

Then who are you to call impossible what your own soul has seen,
Who are you to fold your future small to fit another person's dream.

No, let it stretch.
Let it trouble your sleep.
Let it ask more of your hands.
Let it demand the kind of courage that can stand misunderstanding and still stand.

Let it make war with every lie that says your race should dream in parts,
Let it unteach the timid prayer that taught us how to ration hearts.

Let it remind you excellence is not some distant, borrowed thing,
It is the fruit of daily fire and what an honest soul can bring.

And when at last you start to rise, do not call it luck or chance,
Call it the meeting point of vision, will, and disciplined advance.

Call it the moment all your wounds stopped arguing against your worth,
Call it the proof that what is possible can still be brought to earth.

Call it the answer to the child in you who looked too far too soon,
The one who loved a higher life before the world could dim the moon.

For we were never meant to stand with our vastness unexplored,
Never meant to starve our longing just to make the small feel sure.

We were meant to be immense in ways no measure could contain,
To walk into the world so full of self that fear must learn our name.

So if I rise, let it be fully.
If I burn, let it make light.
If I dream, let it be wildly.
If I reach, let it be right.

Not right because the doubters watch.
Not right because the world approves.
But right because there is a greatness in me asking now to move.

And I would be unjust to me,
To all I carry, all I know,
If I let the limits placed upon my skin decide how far I go.

I will go as far as vision, as far as hunger, as far as grace,
As far as all the buried brilliance still unfolding in this race.

As far as every elder's prayer.
As far as every wound can heal.
As far as every hidden gift inside a living soul can feel.

As far as my heart can hold the fire.
As far as my hands can shape the dream.
As far as all that I can become dares to call itself by me.

And when I get there,
I will not stand as someone who was lucky just to survive.
I will stand as proof that Blackness never marked the edge of what is alive.

I will stand as one more witness that the ceiling was a lie,
That what we call impossible is often only height not tried.

So let me want with all I am.
Let me build with all I bear.

Let me become with all the force of one who knows there is more there.

Because I do not owe this dream to fear,
Or shame, or those who said I could not be.
I owe it to the infinite within,
And all the possible waiting in me.
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QUAND LIBÉRER LA FEMME IMPLIQUE AUSSI DE LIBÉRER L'HOMME : PERSPECTIVES AFRICAINES SUR LE PATRIARCAT

Written by Thaïs Lorka--Navaud

PICTURE BY: GORDON PARKS

Introduction

Je me souviens d'une discussion que j'ai eue avec mon cousin concernant les habitudes alimentaires d'un de ses amis, et le fait que je ne comprenais pas pourquoi il était si difficile pour certains de se nourrir de manière régulière et saine (en dehors de toute considération de troubles du comportement alimentaire). Je tiens à préciser au lecteur que mon cousin et son ami ont tous deux grandi en Côte d'Ivoire, puis ont pris leur envol vers le Canada. S'ensuivit une conversation sur l'éducation des jeunes garçons en Afrique de l'Ouest, plus particulièrement en Côte d'Ivoire, et du fait que, notamment lorsqu'ils viennent de milieux privilégiés, ces jeunes garçons n'étaient généralement pas autorisés à mettre un pied dans la cuisine et n'avaient également pas d'obligations à faire le ménage. Ce fut ce que vécurent mon père, mon cousin, et son ami. Mon cousin conclut notre conversation en m'expliquant qu'être élevé de la sorte dessert enfin de compte les hommes car, une fois arrivé le moment de prendre son envol, ils se retrouvaient livrés à eux-mêmes et avaient plus de mal à s'adapter à un nouveau train de vie plus exigeant car il leur fallait maintenant rajouter à leur quotidien le ménage et la cuisine. Cela explique donc pourquoi certains ont du mal à tenir une organisation alimentaire, notamment en ce qui concerne l'alimentation, la cuisine, et la fréquence des repas.

Ces types d'éducation découlent d'une vision africaine voulant que le domaine domestique soit exclusivement féminin, ce qui amène les jeunes filles à être formées dès l'enfance à entreprendre les tâches domestiques pour toute la maisonnée. Ce fut le cas de mes tantes qui, comme mon père me l'a raconté, se retrouvèrent parfois à cuisiner bien que la maison ait des domestiques. De même, cela rejoint l'argument d'Olajubu selon lequel la sphère du privé, regroupant le domaine domestique et la maternité, était assignée aux femmes dans la plupart des cultures (Olajubu, 2003, 10). Au-delà de cela, avec l'arrivée et/ou le renforcement du patriarcat sur le continent africain dus aux systèmes coloniaux, il y a désormais cette impression que les tâches domestiques ne sont pas dignes d'un homme car même si l'on concevait que ce domaine est plutôt propre aux femmes, il serait dans l'intérêt de tout le monde, homme et femme, de maîtriser la cuisine et le ménage afin de pouvoir prendre son indépendance. Ce qui était au précédent une affaire de complémentarité semble s'être transformé en une affaire de hiérarchie entre les genres.

Ainsi, nous pouvons nous questionner sur les racines de ce schéma problémа-

tique ainsi que sur les solutions les plus pertinentes à envisager dans un contexte de respect des traditions africaines et de libération de la femme. En effet, ce problème semble découler du patriarcat, qui veut que les hommes, étant supérieurs aux femmes pour diverses raisons, soient socialement séparés de ces dernières et des sphères qui leur sont assignées. Comme solution, il nous faudrait revaloriser la femme (et donc indirectement la sphère du privé) à travers la religion, mettre en avant la notion de complémentarité et privilégier le womanism pour pouvoir aider à la fois homme et femme.

Développement

Tout d'abord, ce genre de systèmes patriarcaux a tendance à amener les hommes à considérer les femmes comme leurs aides et non l'inverse, ce qui crée une hiérarchie, et ce qui explique par ailleurs, pourquoi elles sont reléguées à la sphère du privé dont les tâches sont souvent considérées comme à la fois nécessaires mais insignifiantes, une basse besogne (Dabale, 2024). Or, en sachant que les sociétés d'Afrique de l'Ouest sont très impliquées dans les religions abrahamiques, dont le Christianisme, une façon de pouvoir rectifier ce problème serait de présenter la femme, non comme l'autrice de tous les maux ni comme une faible créature nécessitant un guide masculin, mais comme un être capable de recevoir la grâce divine et d'être un instrument au service de Dieu et cela, sans intervention d'un tiers masculin (Dabale, 2024). Revisiter les narratifs religieux très patriarcaux, en y incluant des figures féminines impactantes telles que les martyrs Perpetua et Felicity, permettrait de valoriser la femme (Dabale, 2024). De plus, il serait aussi essentiel d'y inclure des perspectives propres aux religions traditionnelles africaines qui valorisent la femme et sa spiritualité, et qui bousculent les conceptions de Dieu en tant qu'« homme » en mettant en avant des divinités et/ou déesses telles que Looa dans la tradition Iraqw (Mojola, 2002). Si Dieu est vu comme autant « homme » que « femme » (car Sa bonté et Son amour sont souvent vus comme des caractéristiques maternelles), cela renforcerait l'image de la femme et de l'homme comme deux faces d'une même pièce (Mojola, 2002). Ainsi, si cette dernière est valorisée, tout ce qui a trait à son domaine, celui du privé, ne sera plus vu avec dédain mais avec respect. Par conséquent, cela pourrait permettre à l'homme de devenir plus enclin à s'adonner aux activités du domaine privé.

Ensuite, dans beaucoup de peuples d'Afrique, tels que les Yoruba, la notion de complémentarité, et non de hiérarchie,

régit les relations hommes-femmes : « The existence of gender construct among the Yoruba does not translate to notions of oppression and the domination of women by men, because it is mediated by the philosophy of complementary gender relations, which is rooted in the people's cosmic experience. » (Olajubu, 2003, p. 9). Ainsi, la femme et l'homme ont chacun des domaines de prédilection, non par souci de hiérarchie mais plutôt afin de simplifier le bon fonctionnement de la communauté. Les attributs et forces de la femme sont autant reconnus que ceux des hommes. Cependant, il semble parfois difficile de différencier des contextes et situations qui relèvent d'une hiérarchie des sexes, de ceux qui sont seulement un exemple de complémentarité. En effet, dans le contexte social que j'ai présenté au début de cet écrit, il semblerait plutôt que cela soit abordé d'un point de vue hiérarchique, avec, d'un côté, le sexe masculin, considéré comme supérieur, n'ayant pas besoin de s'adonner aux basses tâches domestiques jugées subalternes, et de l'autre côté, le sexe féminin qui doit s'occuper de la sphère privée tout en devant aussi s'adapter aux réalités du monde actuel qui amènent les femmes à devoir travailler dans la sphère publique. En effet, parce que la société moderne capitaliste nécessite toujours plus de travail afin de subvenir aux besoins du foyer, il est de moins en moins possible de diviser les tâches de telle sorte à ce que l'un reste au foyer et l'autre soit employé. Ainsi, homme et femme se retrouvent tous deux dans la sphère publique. Par conséquent, la solution serait de voir les conceptions genrées des sphères publiques et privées, non pas d'un point de vue hiérarchique, mais d'un point de vue de complémentarité, comme le conceptualisent les Yoruba (entre autres). En effet, la complémentarité n'étant pas obligée de suivre des lignes prédéfinies (comme celles séparant sphère privée de sphère publique), son application peut faire en sorte que l'homme se retrouve lui aussi à partager la responsabilité de la sphère privée, ainsi allégeant la charge des femmes (celles-ci étant présentement impliquées dans les deux sphères).

Enfin, bien que le féminisme dit « occidental » travaille à recentrer l'importance de la femme dans la société, et à abolir la hiérarchie des genres ainsi que les barrières sexistes, le concept du womanism, mis au monde par Alice Walker, serait une solution plus pertinente à ce problème de hiérarchie des sexes dans un contexte culturel africain. En effet, « Feminism is female centered and revolves around the empowerment of the women in the patriarchal society. Womanism, on the other hand, is family – centered and focuses on the

liberation of the entire people, male as well as female. » (El-Shennawy, 2019, p. 377). Ainsi, la notion de womanism reconnaîtrait que le patriarcat est un contexte qui peut aussi nuire aux hommes dans certains cas et qu'au lieu d'exclure ces derniers, il nous faudrait travailler main dans la main pour l'abolir. Cela passerait par exemple, dans ce cas précis, par l'éducation des hommes en devenir sur les tâches domestiques, ce qui leur permettrait de pouvoir vivre sainement de manière indépendante, et ce qui permettrait aux femmes de délaisser une partie du poids de la sphère du privé chez leurs homologues masculins. Ce nouvel ajustement sera bénéfique à toute la communauté.

Conclusion

À travers ce court essai, nous pouvons observer le fait que la libération de la femme africaine, et par conséquent, le succès de l'égalité des genres, se devrait de reposer sur une approche non-occidentale qui recentre l'importance et la pertinence de nos traditions et concepts africains, et qui souligne les maux que le patriarcat afflige aux hommes dans certains contextes. En insistant sur la notion de complémentarité et sur la nécessité d'évoluer avec, et non contre nos pairs masculins, nous serons en mesure de construire un futur sous le signe de la coopération, de l'harmonie et de la prospérité.

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Mehdi Berrada

WRITTEN BY ANDERSON PEGUERO II

PICTURE BY MEHDI BERRADA

MOORISH MALACHITE

Fly with me through the throat of the night. I'm skipping across the sky. I'm choosing to tell you where my shadow has been only after I've already left. I crossed the pastel pinks of Lisbon to reach the baked red of Spanish clay. Time evaporated.

At the site of my transfer I adopted the song of Lisboa, hummed on the burgundy aura of the breeze, I danced in and out of conjugations, barely remembering to use USTEDES. The result being everyone is already familiar to me. And all of us are familiar with the inability of my faltering Spanish to fully infiltrate a Portuguese ear: a lover never truly knows the heart of the beloved. I can close my eyes and hear love expressed in so many different languages at once: German, Portuguese, and French; somehow I recognize every word of Italian. It is not lost on me that all of these variants were thrust upon my ancestors and I, replacing our stamped-out tongues, hammered into our wombal chambers before we even fully filled our vessels. Who were we and how did we sound before being conquered?

There must have been so many beautiful traditions and rituals that no one is alive anymore to remember, let alone practice or pass on. Trailing into my short flight destined for the eastern coast of Spain, glancing at all the different colored faces and configurations of noses, I wonder, am I the only one who resents having been born into assimilation, the script for a life written in the dried blood of cruel ones who came before us?

But what other choice do we have other than to keep speaking with whatever words we know, what other choice besides being silent?

There in the air, then in the streets of the Moorish city of yore I descend into, I swell hearing such a beautiful chattering all around!

Sheer golden light contrasts age-old ivory brick. Indigo light sparkles over peridot waves. My new jade ring shattered as soon as I landed: according to various traditions, this means it protected me from something.

In Barcelona I'm closer to myself than ever, nothing could possibly hurt me here, and I'm enjoying being blissfully ignorant: my phone does not work here and the WiFi is scarce. (In Spanish you pronounce it wee-fee.) What used to be my bedtime will now be when I wake. Before I gather the bravery to try and speak to anyone else, I'm in such good conversation with myself that I can be completely still on the outside. I'm seeing ahead into the world, and, simultaneously, I'm seeing clearly the aura of the past. My ancestors on my father's side came from these lands. Once, a past version of me had blue eyes and blond

hair. Would this older I approve of my pilgrimage, or command me into exile? Would they even have the strength?
Here, one can celebrate everything! Especially the life boiling hot in the loins! No one but us knows the fury and the fearlessness in the gusts of the wind. The heat makes a haze of everything extraneous. And when I sit on my haunches back on the shore and the tide comes up to meet my feet and the shyly emerging moon appears on the tops of the now-black waves and the fat scavenger dogs sit and gather with their backs to me, watching and waiting for danger and temptations, I am in my element. There's all the same essence coursing through all of us. Here on the Spanish sands I am leaping ahead into my past and talking back to the future. My grandfather lives again, renewed, with the free vigor of my father. I took my own advice and dropped everything for leisure in another part of the world. Magnificence isn't a strong enough word to describe how skin glistens and glows under the sun here. Saltwater seasons the curls of my dirty blonde hair. Streaks of sand heal wounds before skin even breaks. I'm spending too much and I'm still alive to sing about it. Scripture appropriate angels amble above. Be not afraid, they boom, and drunk off Estrella Galicia I listen. Eventually, I forget that they're there and watching.

All the buildings here in Barcelona have balconies. Everyone is watching from above and no one has to matter. Secrets whisper from the alleyways. Everyone wears linen, sandals, shorts, sunglasses on the crown of their heads. Few wear as much black as me. None are wearing as much jewelry. Many, many young people are about, they stay up and wake late. Most of them know multiple languages, and scores of them are covered in colored tattoos. Hips are wide, shoulders are broad and tanned. Motorcycles dart in and out of lanes on every road, even the major highway. The buildings are modern but already overgrown with ivy. The afternoon is the morning. The prices are low and the sales abundant. The beach breeze beckons by surprise, from an alley you pass by chance. Churches appear on corners with seemingly no rhyme or reason beyond devotion. What are the people here devoted to? Style? Leisure? Sensation?
Everything makes me think of New York, I compare, I contrast. We don't have public benches built into lamps and street corners like they do here. We don't give ashtrays at restaurants upon request. We don't pay fairly, we put the burden of tipping onto the customer. We don't smile at each other on the street. Here, mirrors are plentiful, naked feet are scarred and dried by sand. Plants are on every corner. Puerto Rican flags

hanging from windows and snatches of Bad Bunny surprise me! So some of us managed to lay roots and return here without being yet rallied!

Here I find an appeal of antiquity, a city that's stood on the same shore for almost a thousand years: life is lived, not traded as currency. There is always a home to return to, even if no one there recognizes you anymore. You can continue to be loved even if you don't answer immediately. Even if you forget the question. The earth doesn't forget.

As I wait to rendezvous with M., my companion for this leg of my grand tour, I can't help but notice how few others are craning up their necks to appreciate the surreal architecture, the verdancy juxtaposed with the wide modern streets, or the subtle little secret hints of bygone design surviving many wars: Baroque and Romanesque, neo-classical in the nude. I'm looking around and seeing silhouettes that resemble me and don't. I'm seeing and being seen in turn. A woman's cerulean eyes slowly stalk me leaving a bus, I can see her bite her lip out of hunger. I'll never see her again; none of us will ever be satisfied. Even though beauty is all abundant. Most of us seemed to have stitched our third eyes shut. The sun has bleached us ignorant.

I wasn't expecting this heat, which one can't escape; the air refuses to be conditioned; even following the crowds and sticking to sidewalk shadows, delirium approaches. In this addled state I remember my future. Once, far away and not yet, I was Caribbean royalty surveying Catalonia with my chin raised in the air. Treasures adorn me then and now. I wore the waves on my back in the form of an ever-shifting royal blue mantle, silk shot with sapphire and aquamarine. I left my wife behind and await the arrival of my mistress; their birthdays are one day apart.

What was I searching for then, I wonder, and why have I arrived again now? History whispers to me on every sea breeze, warning of vaingloriousness and another lifetime agreeing to assimilation. I feel called to this land though I know it isn't mine. But we were made for the sun, and all of my people deserve to know what Balearic daylight feels like on Black skin. As if golden light given flesh, we bloom best and rise in sweet succulent sunspots. All of the golden and luminescent palaces of the Moors were built for us, once belonged to us, no!

But time has eroded our kingdom as mercilessly as the trading of slaves. "TOURISTS GO HOME" is sprayed in huge colorful letters along a sea wall. I'm reminded of the tried and true slur spat at me in my adolescence in America, mine and countless others: "Go back

to where you came from." Why don't they believe me when I tell them that I'm trying?

I'd be remiss not to admit we are not the same us, some of our homes don't exist anymore, we didn't all descend from the same matriarchs and the same regions, and there was once a time we clashed and betrayed ourselves — but why was the world made so vast if we weren't meant to explore it? We arrange our homes in geometric forms and we carve living out of the sea and the sand; but it is the living that must be carved out of us. If we weren't supposed to dance, why is there so much music everywhere? Every balcony and twisting alley on the way to La Barceloneta sported song, fado and flamenco and snap-banging trap, in which I recognize snatches of my own soul. And there was also the laughter of children understandable in every language, and that seminal scripture written in body language: the wandering eyes of lovers and suitors. Didn't we all originate from the water of a womb, and weren't we related once, long ago, before we emerged from the primordial sea?

M. meets me on a vast provincial beach, now we are laid out amongst the searing endlessness. We are not thinking, we do not know, we only feel and savor and devour. 7PM and the emperor sun shows no sign of relenting its radiation. I am the color of history's shadow and M. has the paleness of an unwritten future. Some among us have skin the color of too-ripe tomatoes ready to burst with the slightest pressure. All of our differences are as stunning as the horizon that goes out further than the eye can see, hinting at something resembling eternity and a world unfamiliar with war.

I want to immerse myself in such a world. With M. wading behind I lead us deeper and deeper into the cyanic unknown, grinning and laughing as the waves overwhelm us. Yes, since I've landed I've been unable to stop smiling, my throat which has been itchy for days is finally clearing up, already, since I sat on the airplane and started to scrawl in my sketchbook, singing under my breath, channeling again, the stars speaking through me, and that's where my ancestors are, not below, not beneath the technomarble or the basalt. The city and all its annihilating lights stretch out on a black canvas behind us. In the cradle of the Mediterranean's hand I remember being the prince of the wasteland and the Caribbean sea.

It feels good to let go, to shrug your shoulders and ease all the unnecessary off, as good as the sun on the emerald and the tide, finally, shimmering, submerged, the way I wanted to be since last September. That was the last time I

was on a beach like this, the last time I saw into the shadow under the edge of the knife overhead. I stood in the water up to my knees and stared out into endlessness. A ranger walked behind me and called out from the dry: "I can tell that you're a writer." Stunned, seen, I said back: "Sí." I asked every local: have you always lived here? And they all answered, yes. This is paradise. In all there is a share of all. Why would we leave? It is the rest of the world that comes to us: we are not so foolish as to seek the taste of corruption that all others wish to cleanse from their tongue.

But what of those of us who were forced to leave?

Like wiping off makeup at the end of the night, I can't help but return to that essential question after an experience of inundation by all the beauty abound in Barcelona. Never mind where we came from — to where can we return? And when? There is nothing new under the sun but us. We are the mutating viruses under the all-seeing microscope harshly backlit by God's inquisitive gaze. What seems to matter, what's different about it all, isn't the structures around us, but what we do within them, how we change them and our understanding of them — and each other.

As we walk back to the city scattering sand from our sandals I look over at M. and realize I love her in a different way than I've felt for anyone before. Our eyes meet for an instant and my chest swells with the knowing that I'm looking at my reflection, essence recognizing essence, and that she must feel as I do, too. And that everyone around us can also easily love and be loved. And a new empire could be formed right here, on the bones of all who saved and doomed us before, an empire which would never fall, if only it were populated only by lovers. And I love everyone around us that I don't yet know, that don't recognize me, that might never consider me one of their brethren.

I'd like to fashion myself a royal here not to place myself in hierarchy but to lead a revolution in the hearts and minds of all melanated subjects. Call me vain if you wish. You would be right and wrong. Who could really know if in another life I really was Saladin the Second, who had no one to tell about how stingrays sing when the moon goes away? Could I call myself the Count of Barcelona, and couldn't I lay claim to a utopian rule with as much authority as any slavemaster dedicated to their tyrannies?

So be it. Someone has to shoot the first bullet, and strike or be struck. Maybe I was meant to be martyr. I could be destined or I could be drunk and already sunburnt. But I am in a better city now, and I've seen that a better world exists

somewhere on the shores of time too. And I would do anything to lead us into the cloistered garden of the dream world. The earth is waiting for our return to it. Eden can exist again, and the sowing and the reaping may be a titanic effort, but it can be done. If I could reach into your chest to pump the engine of your heart so that you don't have to, so that you don't feel any of the strain, so we all could experience what it's like to live and laugh under the Spanish sun without any effort or enemies, with ease even — I would.

THE PERFECT AFROFUTURIST MANIFESTO

2026, VERSION 1
[ABRIDGED]

BY EVELYN LOGAN

We, those who long for an alternative, radical lens to imagine and create Afrofuturist realities, require a broader manifesto. We seek to hack, hijack, and generally fuck up any framework that limits or in any way attempts to contain Black artistic production. Beyond artistic production, we Perfect Afrofuturists are seeking a guide (ever changing and thorough) which we can use to help create our Free State. We propose an idea of perfection that is inherently multiplicitious, non-singular, and anti-static. We choose not to burn the Mundane Afrofuturist manifesto, instead we build upon it to construct this new framework. The Perfect Afrofuturist Manifesto presents a continuum of collective ideation, creation, and imagination, from ancestor to progeny and between one Black person and another.

We Perfect Afrofuturists suggest:
An Afrofuturist aesthetic with its sights and specificities in the near-future, rather than a distant one, with a nonlinear way of viewing time. Time is shaped like a spiral with no end or beginning in sight.
An embrace of the abstract, oblique, confusing Black art. We invite Black art that is non specific and a bit off putting as well as Black art that is overtly representative of our experience. No matter what, we make space for any art made by any Black person. We examine who and what we view as desirable. Desire is informed by white supremacy if left unchecked (even still when we check it). We celebrate fat bodies, kinky hair, and dark skin. We embrace Blackness in every form that it comes, and in turn we accept ourselves.
We see how our struggle for liberation is interconnected with Indigenous peoples (in the case we aren't Indigenous ourselves), and all other oppressed people's struggles. We engage with texts that show Black people as magical, fantastical, inhuman, spectacular, or different. There is value in seeing ourselves outside of reality.
We resituate ourselves in relation to the environment. Our environment is trees and mountains and oceans, but it's also factories and mines and plantations. Black victims of the trans*atlantic slave trade were cruelly tied to the land during their time of bondage, and still many Black people perform labor akin to slavery in our environments. Part of repairing the harm done by colonization is reconnecting to the land and non-human beings on it. Where possible, we must attempt to change our relationship to Earth. It wasn't the fields of cotton or mineral mines that oppress(ed) us, it was people.
The oppressors, white people, have no place in the construction of this near Afrofu-

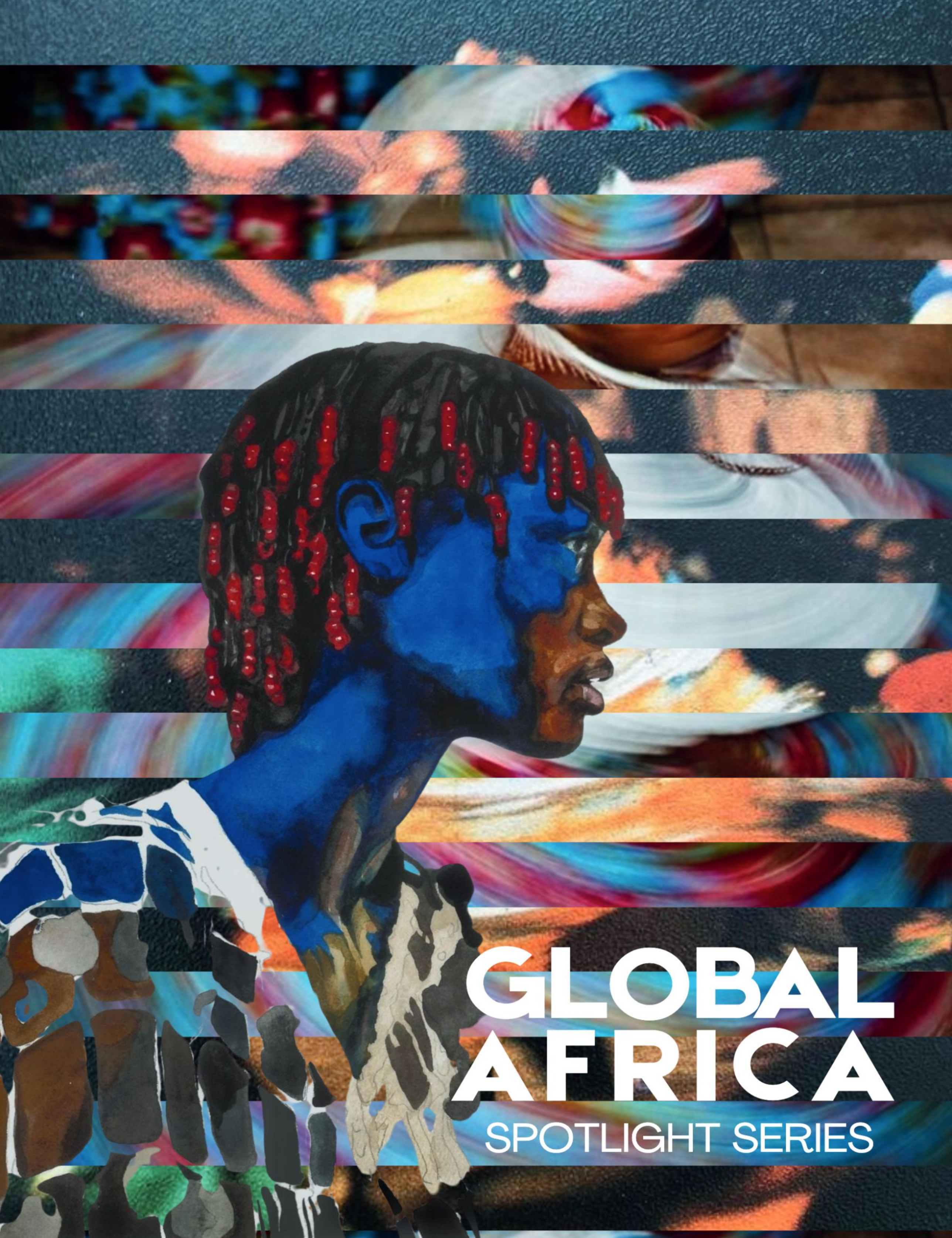
ture. White dollars are accepted, but not white presence, suggestions, and definitely not white supremacy. Moreso, in the constructed white capitalist colonial patriarchal society, anyone not Black has the potential to be overtly and/or subliminally anti-Black (Black people also can be anti-Black; we digress). We must be aware of this too as we set out building our near-futures.
We stop policing each other and ourselves. The oppressor is doing that already, so we don't need to do it for them.

We Perfect Afrofuturists know that:
We need Black people
Who are disabled,
Who are gay,
Who are queer,
Who are trans,
Who are different,
We need the yns, the young hos,
We need Black capitalists,
We need Black people who can't read or write,
We need the weird Black girls,
We need Black scholars and scientists,
And Black artists,
Black makers and crafters,
We need Black cosplayers,
We need Black sex workers,
We need Black people from every continent, every country who speak every language,
We need Black people who think they're from outer space,
We need Black descendants of the trans*atlantic slave trade,
We need Black victims of modern slavery,
We need the "whitewashed" Black people,
We need Black people who have decolonized their minds and those who have not.

We need all Black people, and we also need our Black baggage, Black trauma, Black joy, Black mistakes, Black laughter, Black excellence, Black exuberance, Black failures, Black shortcomings, and everything else Black, in order to achieve our goals of total liberation.

Liberation must be achieved intraracially and interracially, through education, violence, and care. We concur that our goal of liberation will not be achieved solely through imagination or theoretical work, we must be committed to action.
We Perfect Afrofuturists promise to:
Try something
Do something
Make something
Grow something
Learn something
Teach something
Notice something
Notice someone
Love someone
Love ourselves
Love everyone

even if we don't feel ready, capable, or like we're enough (we are). If this manifesto is backwards, if it's out of touch, or simply not making any damn sense, rewrite it. Have someone else read it, and make them add some things too.
-signed clearly by the Perfect Afrofuturists


GLOBAL
AFRICA
SPOTLIGHT SERIES

Global Africa Spotlight Series: Mission Statement

UHURU has always believed that the intellectual and creative lives of Black and African communities at McGill extend far beyond any single publication. It lives in the organizations students build, the spaces they carve out, and the communities they sustain. The Global Africa Spotlight Series is our way of honouring that.

This year, for the first time, UHURU opens its pages to the Black and African student associations that make McGill's community what it is — among them NSBE, DABI, BSPA, and BSPS. Each participating organization has been given two to three pages to curate a representation of their community entirely on their own terms. There are no prescribed formats, no required themes. Associations were invited to contribute whatever felt most true to who they are: artwork, photography, short articles, reflective pieces, creative writing, member spotlights, or anything else that captures their identity, their goals, and the spirit of the people behind them.

Once submissions were received, the UHURU editorial team took responsibility for formatting, designing, and integrating each contribution into the journal's overall aesthetic, ensuring that every spotlight feels both visually cohesive with the publication and unmistakably its own.

The Global Africa Spotlight Series is, at its core, a celebration. It is a platform built to bring visibility to the student-led work, creativity, and intellectual contributions that are actively shaping Black and African life at McGill. We are honoured to share these pages with them.

Henry Maidoh, Director of the UHURU Journal & Vice-President of Academics

The African Studies Students' Association

BLACK STUDENTS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

The BSPS (Black Students in Political Science) is an association which aims to promote Black politics and help Black students in political science during their time at McGill. BSPS brings representation, diversity, and inclusivity into the political science field of McGill, which would benefit from more professors or given courses interested in the topic. The association leads to the creation of an intellectual community, interested in Black people's rights, political thoughts, power, and political representation in each sphere. BSPS's other goal is to facilitate communication with other communities and field for academic and cooperation purposes, as well as answering McGill's vocation of inclusiveness.

BSPS works on two agendas: education and mutual aid. It must be noted that BSPS is an association that is not solely reserved for Black students; in line with its first agenda, the enrichment of people's knowledge and understanding remains a priority regardless of students' racial identity. As a result, BSPS centres certain types of politics such as anti-racism, decolonization, intersectional politics, Black radical thoughts, pan-African politics, institutional policy, community, care or epistemic justice; politics which are directly linked to the Black condition.

BSPS is intrinsically linked with Afrofuturism on an epistemic level. Indeed, by highlighting and discussing Black politics past and present, and by focusing on our history of activism, struggles and achievements, the club allows us to reflect on the future for Black people, and how we could conceive it in a coherent and successful way. As a result, BSPS is a space where students can learn about and discuss topics pertaining to the Black condition, building a world in which Black people will socially and politically thrive. Most importantly, by focusing on Black political thought and struggles, we are able to acknowledge the contributions of our people, beyond the common narratives of Western-focused thought and history. One such case is the struggle against racism. The notion that 'all people are equal' receives little resistance today. However, the equality of people regardless of race or gender is attributable to a series of struggles led by many Black and pan-Africanist movements globally, namely Garveyism. Recognizing the historical contributions of Black political movements to the world would allow us to realize how much we will be able to build in the future by staying true to ourselves and our roots. Afrofuturism reframes historical consciousness as a political resource, where past intellectual and political contributions inform alternative futures grounded in self-determined epistemologies.

AFROFUTURISM AS A PROJECT OF DISALIENATION

In a world where African and Black diasporic existences have been dehumanized and undermined, Afrofuturism is a disruptive concept on two levels.

First, Afrofuturism allows us on the path of dis-alienation. As presented by Frantz Fanon in Black skin, White Masks, in colonized societies where individuals internalized and associated whiteness as the standard of comparison, colonized subjects are alienated and disconnected from their heritage. Thus, reshaping our self-perception requires a struggle that must come from our societies. Afrofuturism here embodies an unprecedented opportunity, one that is emancipatory by imagining alternative realities, in which Blackness is not only normalized but also centred. It also holds a particular weight today, in our era where African and Black diasporic cultures are actively commodified, caricatured and co-opted in a manner that ends up erasing their very heirs. It is not only the centring of Black realities and futurities, but it is also a momentum of reflection upon the future, further liberating Black, Caribbean and African communities from the shackles of the past. When the narrative prefers the compelling struggles of slavery and colonialism, Black existences are reduced to resilience and struggle. Afrofuturism, in that sense, is also about taking control of our own narrative, as our stories were often told from an external vantage point.

Also, particularly in the African context, Afrofuturism challenges the supposed a-temporality of Africa. Since the 18th century, many major academic and public figures such as Hegel, Morgenthau, Fukuyama or more recently Sarkozy have depicted Africa as a pristine space frozen in time, without a History, a sort of blank page where Europeans could inscribe their own ambitions. Following that logic, from an afropessimistic perspective (defined by Ebere Onwudiwe as a perception of postcolonial Africa depicting the continent as too riddled to ever develop economically), the absence of past and historicity prevents Africans from shaping a prosperous Future, given that there is no basis to further build it. Consequently, Afro-futurism goes against the very stereotypes that have for a long time defined the way societies thought of Africa. In Senegal, there is a popular idiom stating, “If you do not know where you are going, go back to where you came from”. Not only are the past and future intertwined, but it is also impossible to build a prosperous future without being conscious about our heritage and the values upheld by those who preceded us.

Is it to say that we have to blindly glorify the pre-colonial path? Not necessarily. If Afrofuturism were to rely on exaggerated depictions of colonial Africa, it would produce inverted caricatured narratives that are nothing near liberating for African societies. Rather, looking back truthfully at our past gives us the opportunity to shape a future that is mindful of some destructive aspects of our cultures.

Afrofuturism, as a form of decolonial imagination, is not only here to envision African futurities without caricaturing our past, but also to demonstrate the alternative futures we could embrace once true liberation will avail.

SOKHNA DIALLO

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AFRO–FUTURISME : TOUT DÉBUTE PAR L'HISTOIRE ...

Afro et futurisme. Accepté ou non, pour certains, ces deux mots causent un certain malaise, un certain oxymore qu'ils ne peuvent expliquer sans mentionner les dichotomies avancées lors de l'ère du « développement ». Encore un mot que certains jugent difficile d'associer au continent africain et à ses populations diverses et innovatrices. Et pourtant, nous nous trouvons dans l'ère où nous nous questionnons encore sur la définition qui peut être attribuée à ce terme tant utilisé et tant décontextualisé. Le progrès n'a jamais été une course contre la montre. Le progrès s'avère être un processus sûr et adaptable, tout le contraire de la compréhension du développement.

Afro et futurisme. Et si tout débutait par une volonté ? Une volonté de décolonisation de l'histoire africaine et de plaidoirie de l'importance des connaissances situées.

Afro et futurisme. Tout peut commencer par une question bien articulée. L'histoire africaine semble-t-elle être écrite par l'Afrique elle-même ? En tant qu'étudiante en sciences politiques, je peux affirmer que la réponse à cette simple question est non. Et pourtant, c'est une évidence. Une histoire mal écrite, une histoire effacée et réécrite, ne peut faire de sens à des générations futures qui ne l'ont point vécue. C'est à travers les connaissances ancestrales, les mots rythmées d'émotions et de sentiments que l'on peut imaginer un futur reflétant une homogénéité. Alors que l'on dit que le futur est proche, je dis le futur est maintenant. Et qui dit « futur » dit « technologie », celle-ci ne représentant plus une force inquiétante mais un outil prêt à être utilisé pour la transmission. La transmission des récits africains, tels que l'Afrique les connaît. Pour cela, l'Afrique se doit de trouver une voix. Et non, ce n'est point en criant à une table dressée pour la faire taire qu'elle se fera attendre. L'Afrique a elle-même besoin de dresser sa table. C'est bien là que prendra le sens de l'afro-futurisme. Lorsque l'Afrique prendra la plume et la feuille, et réécrira ses perspectives selon ses vécues.

JEANNINE KOTA LENO

UN MOT À LA JEUNESSE

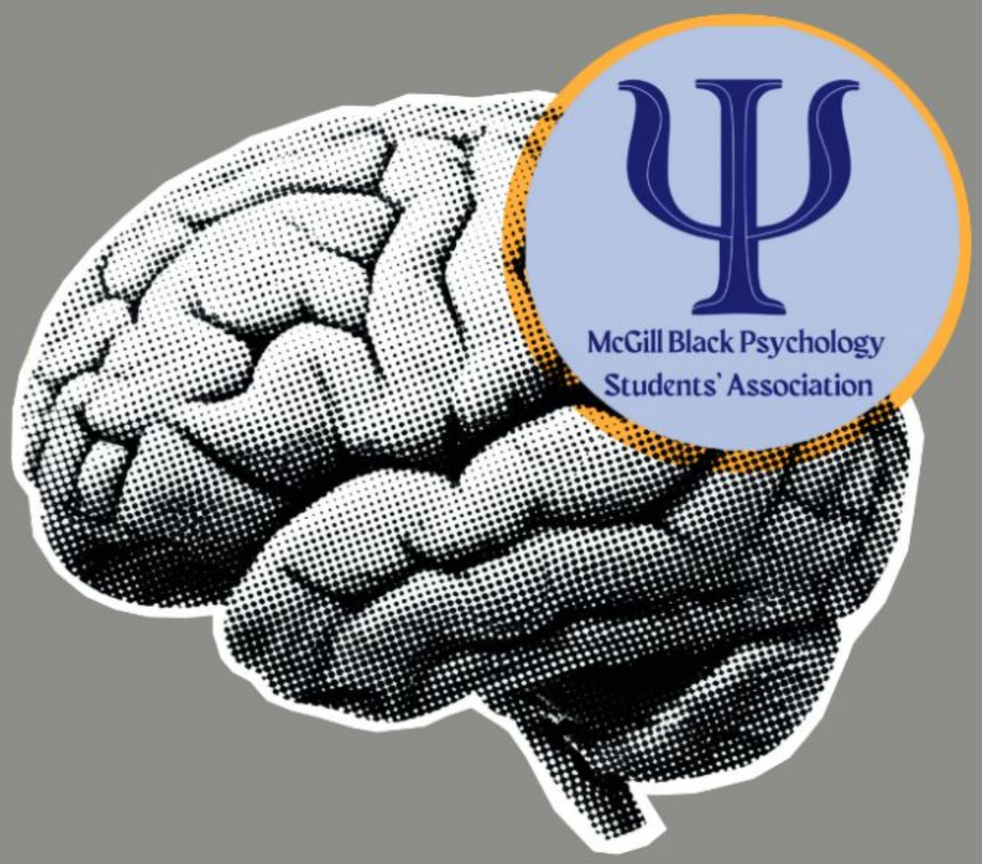
Dans le contexte diasporique, la culture africaine valorise la traditionalité ainsi que nos aînés qui la gardent en vie, et ce, à raison. Cependant, je pense que cette résilience, peut-être alimentée par l'oppression, compromet la modernité propre à l'influence de la jeunesse, et par conséquent, mène au détachement de celle-ci. Résultat : transmission unidirectionnelle alimentée par une hiérarchisation de l'âge. Notez que je ne critique pas nos ancêtres, ni leur importance, loin de là. Entendez-moi ainsi : nos cultures nous appartiennent déjà, la vieillesse n'y est point un critère d'admissibilité ni de responsabilité. Alors, il est primordial de s'impliquer dans cette effervescence culturelle, politique et intellectuelle, car nous en sommes des acteurs indispensables.

EZA IGOROLA

AMPLIFYING THE FUTURE

To fully harness this potential, we must acknowledge the invaluable insights and knowledge the African diaspora has accumulated while living abroad. [...] By fostering strong connections between those on the continent and those in the diaspora, we can create a dynamic exchange of ideas that paves the way for transformative change. Moreover, there is a vital need to focus on developing human capital. Investing in education, skills training, and mentorship for the upcoming generation is crucial. [...] Indeed, by empowering the youth, we can foster a new wave of thinkers, innovators, and leaders who are responsive to local needs and capable of engaging in global dialogues.

BRAYAN NGONGO



BLACK PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

The McGill Black Psychology Students' Association (BPSA) was founded to address the ongoing underrepresentation and isolation experienced by Black psychology students at McGill. The BPSA bridges this gap by providing a vibrant, supportive community that welcomes not only psychology students, but anyone passionate about Black mental health, regardless of their academic background. Our doors are open to all who are committed to advancing the conversation around Black mental wellness, fostering a space where diverse perspectives and disciplines unite in advocacy, healing, and growth. Together, we are more than a student group, we are a movement dedicated to transforming the landscape of Black mental health at McGill and beyond.

A SAFE SPACE

A haven and sanctuary in which one finds comfort and room to be one's self. A precursor to inviting healing within oneself and shared with others. There is vulnerability in expressing our thoughts, feelings and expressions of inner self. Embracing our rich heritage, we embark on a journey of healing and empowerment, recognizing the beauty in our vulnerability as we express our thoughts, feelings, and inner selves. Here, the echoes of the past inspire our visions for the future.

Brief Description for Art Piece

Chloe Nyiligira is a recent graduate from McGill and a multidisciplinary artist. Through various mediums, she explores the complexity of the Black experience, incorporating her own experience as part of the Rwandese diaspora. This piece celebrates the methods of various methods of healing, from religion to folk medicine, they have been an integral part of the strengthening and longevity of the Black community.

Reclaiming the Mind, Reclaiming Ourselves

Steve Biko once said, ***“The most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”*** These words are powerful because they remind us that control does not begin with chains. It begins with doubt. When people are taught to question their worth, their intelligence, or their value, they begin to limit themselves long before anyone else does. The greatest loss is not physical freedom, but the loss of belief in oneself.

Biko’s words challenge us to guard our minds. Our thoughts shape our confidence, our ambition, and our identity. If we allow negative narratives about who we are to settle in our minds, we unknowingly participate in our own limitations. But if we protect our minds, if we fill them with pride, knowledge, and self-respect, no external force can truly defeat us. The mind, once awakened, becomes a source of power rather than a site of control.

Aime Césaire deepens this idea when he says, ***“Culture is everything. Culture is the way we dress, the way we carry our heads, the way we walk, the way we tie our ties - it is not only the fact of writing books or building houses.”*** It is in our laughter, our food, our music, and our stories. Culture is not something that can be erased because it is embodied within us. It is inherited, lived, and expressed.

When we cherish our minds, we begin to see our culture not as something secondary, but as something sacred. We understand that our heritage is not a weakness to hide but a strength to celebrate. No one can take away what is already within us. Our culture shapes our identity, and our identity shapes our future.

To reflect on these two thinkers is to be reminded of our responsibility to protect our minds and to honor our culture. When we do so, we reclaim our worth. We realize that we are not defined by oppression, but by resilience, creativity, and dignity. And once we truly believe in our value, we walk differently, with confidence, with pride, and with the unshakable knowledge that who we are is enough.

Safia Ouedraogo

McGill DABI

MCGILL DESAUTELS AFRICAN BUSINESS INITIATIVE

McGill DABI is a student-run club at McGill University, known for its annual conference on growing business opportunities in Africa.

In this year's editions, the Desautels African Business Initiative (DABI) will explore the theme of "Innovating Africa: Sustainable Futures Through AI and Business". As Africa's economies grow, sustainability, technological advancement, and entrepreneurship are playing a central role in the continent's long-term growth and global competitiveness. The purpose of this newsletter is to explore how these elements are integrated in African businesses.

THE DABI JOURNAL

Issue Winter 2026

In this year's edition, the Desautels African Business Initiative (DABI) explores the theme of "Innovating Africa: Sustainable Futures Through AI and Business". As Africa's economies grow, sustainability, technological advancement, and entrepreneurship play a central role in the continent's long- term growth and global competitiveness. The purpose of this newsletter is to explore how these elements are integrated in African businesses. The first page contains three recent developments across different regions of the continent on AI innovations. The second page features African pioneers in sustainability. These stories collectively offer today's view of Africa's innovation landscape.

What's on the Map?

Source: guideoftheworld.com/africa-countries-map.html

Rwanda

On November 4th,2025, in partnership with Anthropic and the Government of Rwanda, ALX, a technology provider company in Africa, launched one of the largest AI education platforms, "Chidi". It is a learning assistant that is trained to recognize Kinyarwanda and local languages, which was never done before (Scala, 2025). This AI learning assistant helps educators identify learning gaps and provides personalized recommendations tailored to their specific learning goals. Additionally, it employs the Socratic approach to guide learners rather than simply providing answers. In two days, Chidi already had 1,100 conversations. Rwandan government sees AI tools, such as Chidi, as a way to decrease the inequalities between urban and rural schools, and early results are promising as the platform already registered 4,000 learning sessions within the first week of its launch (ALX, 2025) .

Ethiopia

Based in Ethiopia, Gebeya Inc. launched Gebeya Dala, an AI platform designed towith Matador Network's GuideGeek meet African needs. "We built Gebeya Dala to address the real challenges Africans face every day-localization, accessibility ... and the fundamental need to build in your own language", says Daffe, CEO of Gebeya. Gebeya Inc. is a digital platform that connects African tech talents with global companies using a multilingual search- based system. Their mission is to "make it easy for anyone in Africa to offer or find trusted services, easily" (Gebeya, 2026). Thanks to this new AI app- builder application, the company will make its services more accessible since it is designed for mobile devices. In addition, the platform tries to meet the local needs, for instance, by integrating local payments. Through the app, users will be able to create their own apps with no code because it translates natural languages into software.

South Africa

Inmid-December 2025, in partnership program, South Africa Tourism launched its first AI travel planner, named Siyanda, which translates to "We are growing, we are increasing" in Xhosa, the second language in South Africa (Patel, 2016). The name of the AI model reflects South Africa Tourism's current goal, to provide more information and facilitate planning for future tourists. This AI assistant provides personalized answers to tourists through the GuideGeek chat application. The answers are constantly updated to real-time changes in the country. Through this platform, tourists can personalize their trip to South Africa to fit their budget and preferences. According to Reinstein (2025), South Africa is the first African country to join GuideGeek AI travel guide, which makes it be a step ahead from of the rest of the continent.

THE DABI'S JOURNAL
Issue Winter 2026

Askema Engineering

Founded byBehailu Sebaku, Aksema Engineering is an Ethiopian company that produces brake pads from slaughterhouse waste. Now, it serves more than 6,400 customers and employs 228 workers (ADBG, 2025). Having spent his teenage years working in garages, Behailu Sebaku realized how expensive car components can be and dedicated his university projects to brake pad prototypes. Working alongside three other students, Sebaku found a method to create brake pads from animal bones by collecting, cleaning and crushing them. The residues were then baked in a chamber heated to 400 °C. In 2022, he raised funds from savings and a loan to start his company, Askema Engineering, with his friend, Bethlehem Ayele, to make eco-friendly brake pads with better equipment. They created brake pads for many kinds of vehicles, from trucks to electric cars. Within the first two years, they sold more than 2,400 pad brakes due to their lower price compared to the new pads from the market. At the 2024 Biruh Startup competition, Sebaku received an award of 150,000 birr, which is around 1,325 CAD (Metaferiya, 2024). Askena Engineering is an example of circular resource use that not only creates employment but also strengthens sustainable development in Ethiopian industries.

AquaMet Technologies

AquaMet Technologies is a Ghanaian company founded by Frank Owusu, who sought to address the challenges he observed during his national service in the aquaculture industry. In Ghana, fish is the main source of protein for 70% of the population (Royal Academy of Engineering). However, within the industry, many farmers are struggling due to high fish mortality and low yields. With his team, Owusu created AquaMet, a smart monitoring device that features three key sensors measuring the quality of water: pH level, dissolved oxygen, and water temperature (Kicreview). When an issue arises, the farmer receives an SMS notification on their phone to alert them and provide recommendations on their next steps. The messaging system allows people with no internet access to still use AquaMet. In 2025, 120 farmers in Ghana used AquaMet, which helped them achieve a 10% to 15% increase in yields while reducing losses (Royal Academy of Engineering). AquaMet plans to expand into neighbouring countries such as Nigeria in hopes of helping more than 20,000 farmers in the near future. This innovation is revolutionary in the aquaculture industry as it supports sustainable long-term fish farming, improves food security, and supports lower-income areas.

Written by Sara Ait Moumen
McGill-DABI Newsletter Director

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NATIONAL SOCIETY OF BLACK ENGINEERS

The National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) McGill is one of the longest-standing Black academic organizations at McGill University. Our chapter is dedicated to supporting Black students in engineering and STEM through academic enrichment, professional development, community outreach, and advocacy.

Carrying the Torch, Striking Change: The Legacy of NSBE McGill

Mission: More Than a Statement

At its core, the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) exists to affirm possibility—advancing culturally responsible Black engineers and STEM leaders through a mission rooted in belonging, confidence, and collective uplift. For generations of students navigating underrepresented spaces, it has been both a community and a pathway to professional growth. Founded in 1975 at Purdue University, NSBE has grown from a small student initiative into one of North America's largest student-governed technical organizations, with over 700 chapters worldwide, championing academic excellence, professional development, and community engagement.

From Early Foundations to Global Community: Black Engineers at McGill

Black engineers have been part of McGill's history since 1915–1916, when Jamaican-born brothers George and Albert Alberga became among the university's earliest Black civil engineering graduates, laying foundations for future generations (Morton, 2021). Building on this legacy, NSBE McGill was founded in 1991 as the first international chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers [2], creating a space for mentorship, advocacy, and community.

The Meaning Behind the Symbol

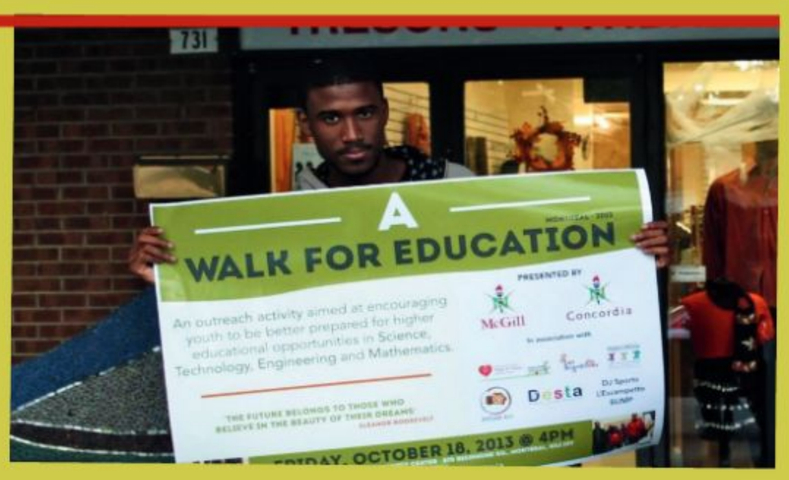
The NSBE torch represents an unextinguished desire for achievement, passed from generation to generation. The lightning bolt reflects the transformative impact of Black engineers on society and industry. Together, they embody both persistence and power: a reminder that progress is built through endurance, creativity, and collective strength.

NSBE Timeline

The history of NSBE is not only marked by conferences and awards, but by friendships formed, late nights spent event planning or studying, and collective dreams nurtured across decades. Each milestone reflects countless executive teams, just like our very own, woven into a shared legacy. Events informed by The History of NSBE National Society of Black Engineers (2009).

1971 - The Beginning of a Movement

The Black Society of Engineers (BSE) was founded at Purdue University by Purdue undergraduates Edward Barnette and Fred Cooper, laying the foundation for what would become a global network of Black engineers.

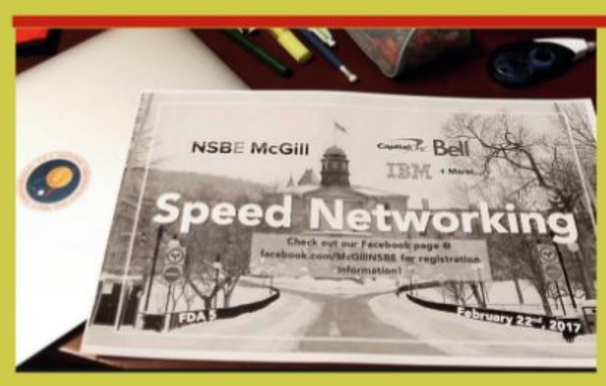


2013 - A Commitment to Community: A Walk for Education (AWFE)

NSBE McGill launched its first Walk for Education, strengthening ties with local communities and inspiring Black youth to pursue STEM pathways.

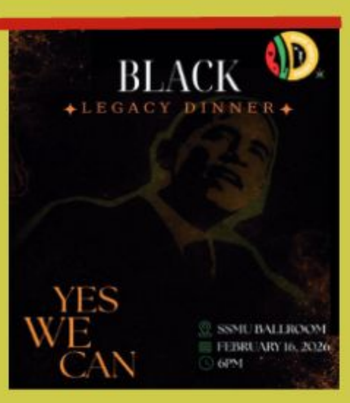
2016 - Five Years of Impact: A Walk for Education

The fifth annual Walk for Education marked sustained dedication to community engagement and educational outreach.



2025 - Investing in the Future: Mentorship Program Launch

NSBE McGill introduced its first formal mentorship program, strengthening academic and professional guidance for members.



2026 - Record-Breaking Engagement: "Yes, We Can!"

This year's 11th Black Legacy Dinner achieved the highest attendance in chapter history with nearly 150 attendees, highlighting NSBE's ever-growing community.

1975 - A National Vision Takes Shape

At the first National Conference in Purdue, the National Society of Black Engineers was formally established, uniting students under a shared mission of excellence and advocacy.

1991 - A National Vision Takes Shape

NSBE McGill became the first international chapter, signifying that Black engineering excellence would not be confined by borders.

2013 - The First Black Legacy Dinner

The start of the Annual Black Legacy Dinner created a space to celebrate Black achievement, mentorship, and intergenerational dialogue.

2014 - Innovation in Practice: McGill Glider Competition

NSBE McGill hosted its first engineering competition, encouraging hands-on learning and collaborative problem-solving.

2017 - Building Professional Networks

NSBE McGill hosted its FIRST Annual Speed Networking event, connecting students with industry professionals and career opportunities.

2024 - Celebrating 50 Years of NSBE

To celebrate 50 years of leadership, resilience, and commUNITY, NSBE members and the executive team attended the NSBE National Conference in Atlanta for the first time.

2025 - A Decade of Legacy: Tenth Black Legacy Dinner

The tenth anniversary of the Black Legacy Dinner, themed “Never be limited by other people’s limited imaginations,” celebrated ten years of storytelling, empowerment, and community building.

2025 - East Canada Zone Conference: Chapter of the Season

Executive teams and members attended the East Canada Zone Conference in Toronto for the first time, and NSBE McGill was recognized as Chapter of the Season, honouring years of consistent leadership and impact.

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