SAUTI

The word *sauti*—Swahili for voice—captures the spirit of the Stanford Journal of African Studies. SAUTI is committed to ensuring that student and faculty voices are heard both within and without the Stanford community, as long as what they proclaim is of relevance to Africa. Through the reproduction of research compilations and personal narratives interspersed with special interest pieces, we seek to highlight critical African issues, to ignite meaningful discussions, and to invoke calls to action. Although Africa gains most of its global attention by virtue of its “problems” and “needs,” the continent possesses troves of opportunity and signposts of success. It is our aim to present a balanced view of the continent, juxtaposing the ills that bedevil Africa with the awe-inspiring events and developments that are primed to propel the continent into an era where its troubles are but relics of history.
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Letter from the Editor

I was excited to become Sauti’s editor because I wanted to ensure that student work on Africa was heard on Stanford’s campus. What I’ve discovered is that student research, academic and personal writing about African issues is incredibly diverse, creating a great need for a medium that assembles work across disciplines to provoke a truly valuable conversation. Hopefully, this year’s issue contributes something to that conversation.

Furthermore, what’s clear from this issue is that the community of those interested in the study of Africa spans across ages, majors, and backgrounds – just imagine what ideas would be produced if these authors had a concrete space in which to interact. Over the next year, I want to see Sauti become a more useful tool by which students of Africa learn from one another. Stanford needs an African Studies community that is more united in exploring subjects of major significance like the uprisings in Sudan or conservation in Tanzania. I want Sauti – through more issues, a more interactive website, or group meetings – to be a forum where anyone interested in Africa can feel comfortable expressing their views. What never ceases to amaze me, reading through student work on Africa, is just how many people on this campus have a passion for something related to the continent. In 2012-13, let’s channel that passion into changing how Stanford thinks about Africa by talking more often with one another, giving more notice to the great guest speakers brought to campus by the Center for African Studies and other groups, and writing more frequently in different campus media about African issues that matter to us. The community of Africanists on campus may be small, but let’s make our voices – sauti zetu – heard even louder next year.

Sincerely,

Nina Papachristou
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When we arrived at the Serengeti Plains, the sky was heavy and opaque. The dark shadow of rain stretched over desiccated brown grass to a distant, flat horizon. At first, the landscape seemed empty, devoid of the famous herds and predators, and even of trees. But as we got deeper into the park, the abundance of life became apparent. Besides the typical safari animals, birds abounded, verdant foliage overshadowed hippo pools, kopjes hid small stands of trees, and the plains hummed with the noise of insects, wind, and water.

About two weeks before the start of the 2011-2012 school year, my Sophomore College class “Parks and Peoples: Dilemmas of Protected Area Conservation in East Africa”, led by Professor Bill Durham and Dr. Susan Charnley, traveled to Tanzania with a group of Stanford alumni. The basic purpose of the course was to explore how western conservation non-profits, tourism, and the creation of National Parks have impacted the government, culture, and experience of Tanzanians. The trip offered a remarkable opportunity to observe these effects firsthand. We traveled along the Northern Safari Route of the country, visiting famous natural sites such as the Serengeti Plains, Ngorongoro Crater, Lake Manyara, and the Olduvai Gorge amongst others. The group was guided by a luxury safari company, Hoopoe Safaris, and we stayed at luxurious eco-lodges. Several of the students had never traveled abroad before. Our trip offered an incredible opportunity to explore a different culture and visit some of the world’s most spectacular landscapes and diverse wildlife with expert professors as well as intriguing Stanford alumni.

The trip was fascinating and beautiful, but for me it was also permeated with a sense of profound discomfort that accompanies many people who are fortunate enough to vacation in distant locales. Our readings and discussions had undermined my comforting preconception that by traveling to Tanzania, we were somehow benefitting the poor and that the beautiful National Parks we visited created jobs and income in rural areas. Some of the books described the impoverishment that followed the establishment of protected areas we visited, where local people were forced to leave their fertile regions that they had inhabited for generations and were forced to make a living in cities or more inhospitable landscapes. These spectacular protected areas that comprise about a third of Tanzania are the products of colonialism and mass evictions.

Learning about the troubled histories of these stunning landscapes changed what I saw. The physical splendor and diversity of wildlife were still captivating, but the traffic jams of safari vehicles, the fences and small villages just outside them, also came into focus. While watching twenty jeeps circle a lonely cheetah, it was hard to justify the history of evictions for the protection of so-called natural places.

While watching twenty jeeps circle a lonely cheetah, it was hard to justify the history of evictions for the protection of so-called natural places.

Claire is from Brooklyn, New York. She is a sophomore majoring in Earth Systems, in the Biosphere track. Recently, she has become especially interested in the interaction between conservation and ethics.
Learning About Determination: Ten Weeks in South Africa

BY ABENA BRUCE

I arrived in Cape Town in late March of 2011 ready to learn. I had spent the previous summer in Ghana, the country in which my parents had grown up. Going into Ghana, I did not think that I knew very much about the country—I had grown up entirely in the United States, spending only one two-week visit in the place my parents called home. South Africa was a different story. My thoughts of South Africa were filled with pictures of beautiful beaches and stories from previous students who had visited. My mind was also clouded with negative accounts. I had heard basics about horrific apartheid. I had read a little about the history of the country’s colonization. I knew that the country had one of the highest HIV rates in the world. I had even been warned of the alleged dangers of the country. But I was very conscious of the fact that there was much that I did not yet know. So, when entering South Africa, an area in which I had no history, I was prepared only to learn. That is exactly what I did over my ten weeks in the country.

At first glance, Cape Town reminded me of San Francisco. There was both a beautiful bay and a mountainside. In a city that superficially looked much like the United States, the first things that I learned were about the city and its people. I traveled to Cape Town with Stanford University’s Study Abroad program, so our first few days were filled with tours to orient ourselves. I felt very uneasy participating in a “Township Tour.” It did not seem right to walk into a community, confirm the negative state of living there, take pictures, and then leave on a large, air-conditioned, tour bus. Most people in the community probably do not enjoy the intrusion of a group of foreign college students for almost no benefit to the community. But on the “Township Tour,” I was impressed with the number of people living in poor areas who had started community-based businesses to improve their economic situation.

On the “Township Tour”, I was impressed with the number of people living in poor areas who had started community-based businesses to improve their economic situation.

While doing work at EFAR, I created an individual project to adapt the emergency management curriculum to one that could be taught to students in the seventh grade, and then proceeded to implement it. I had never before created a curriculum or even taught. I chose the seventh grade because I thought that would be the easiest age to teach, but I still did not know where to begin. The EFAR program gave me a freedom to do whatever I chose. I was glad not to be micromanaged, but the vast power was still a bit daunting. I spent hours reviewing the adult curriculum and searching the Internet for advice about teaching first aid to youth. I then contacted the woman who had taught me first aid in the fifth grade through the American Red Cross in my hometown. I also solicited help from many of the students in my program to make materials for my first course.

My first class came and I was nervous. The founder of the program joked that I needed to drink coffee because my anxiety showed as I tried to teach. The class went decently, but it was clear changes needed to be made to make the class more exciting. With feedback from my supervisor, more advice from my friend at the Red Cross, and suggestions from my friends studying abroad with me, I was able to improve the course. The second class went much more smoothly, and each class only got better from there. Additionally, EFAR will continue to teach my curriculum, even though I have left. I was really happy to have been able to complete a project in the short amount of time I worked at the organization, and better yet, a project worthwhile maintaining.

Taking on such a project has encouraged me to try new things. I learned that, even when there is very little direction, I can figure out solutions on my own. I do not need a lot of background in a particular area or fancy degrees, but rather just support for my ideas. I saw in Cape Town that there are people who are making positive changes with very little training or resources. I can do the same with all of the opportunities with which I have been provided. I will continue to use this mentality to structure the accomplishment of my goals. My experience in Cape Town allowed me to learn from a real life adventure, a break from my usual book schooling. I hope one day to be as determined to make change as the people I met in Cape Town.

Abena Bruce is a senior studying Human Biology.
A Name I Will Never Know

BY EMMA MAKOBA

I can distinctly recall the emotions I felt on August 13, 2011. That day, I experienced an anger I had never known before in my life, when I met a fatally wounded child while volunteering in Kagondo Hospital, located in the middle of remote northwest Tanzania.

I recall feeling the anger bubbling up within me, emanating from my core as it spread to every limb, to the end of every fingertip. It consumed and blinded me. This was not an anger of hatred or disdain for another person. No, this anger could most accurately be described as one of veritable hopelessness, of sheer frustration at having witnessed the full extent of human suffering and misery – and being powerless against it.

I looked down at the four-year-old child, a patient with third-degree burns covering more than 80 percent of his body. The doctors were astonished that he was still alive. Bibian, a Dutch medical student also working in the hospital, had warned me that it might be difficult to see the child. She offered some consolation, saying if I had to excuse myself from the room she would understand. I naively thought I could cope. I was wrong – completely, utterly wrong.

As I rushed out of the room, the father’s eyes staring at his child’s gruesome body seared into my mind; the smell of charred flesh filled my nostrils. I began to breathe heavily. I could still hear the boy wailing in agony through the open window next to me. I could barely keep it together. I stayed there, immobilized for what seemed like hours, but must have been only minutes as I felt everything inside me breaking.

I couldn’t help but think of what this child’s life would be like if he were to survive. Everything this boy knew, and everything his family knew, was gone in a matter of seconds. Now this was his existence at the age of four. Could he even comprehend what had happened to him? He had no way of knowing that his injuries would have been a challenge to treat even in a developed country with all the technological advantages of Western medicine. He’d never understand the innate injustice of being born in Kagondo, Tanzania, near a hospital with few resources to treat him. He was incapable of realizing the unfairness in which his family barely had the money to pay for his immediate treatment, let alone the dozens of surgeries he would need throughout his life to be able to function normally if he did not succumb to infection.

I stood there, outside the doors of the pediatric ward, until my body couldn’t take it anymore. I went home and I cried. I remember thinking, I wish I had asked for his name and had been able to speak to him, because he impacted my life in a way that I cannot adequately articulate.

This one child—this single encounter—has forever changed the direction of my life. I wish I could thank him; I wish I could hold his hand; I wish I had the clinical skills to help him. I wish, more than anything, that I knew his name, and that I could whisper lovingly into his ear, and tell him everything would be all right. Yet, the reality is that I never could have done this, none of it, and it is likely that I never will be able to. The pangs of anger still linger on; the psychological wounds have yet to heal; and a deep, desperate sadness always washes over me each time I realize...that I do not even know if he is still alive.

Emma Makoba is a sophomore from Reno, Nevada majoring in anthropology. She will attend Mount Sinai School of Medicine as part of an Humanities and Medicine Early Acceptance Program after she graduates to obtain an M.D. and hopefully a master’s degree in public health. She hopes to use her skills and degrees to return to sub-Saharan African, given her Ugandan background and her interest in the field of public health in the region.
First Impressions

Of Songs, Stories, and Summer in Liberia
BY GILLIE COLLINS

This summer, I walked to work along Tubman Boulevard, the primary artery linking Monrovia, Liberia to surrounding counties. Every day, “Da Ma Area-o,” Liberia’s number one “Hip-co” hit, played across the horizon. Sounding from markets, businesses, and schools, “Hip-Co,” or hip-hop performed in Liberian “colloquial English,” serves as a microphone for Liberian masses.

For two months last summer, I lived to the tune of this soundtrack. I heard motorcycle drivers—mostly ex-combatants from the country’s fifteen year civil war—whistle and hum the tune from behind sunglasses. I walked past cohorts of teenagers, beat-boxing overtures around neighborhood radios. Women seem to dance as they prepared dinner, pounding fufu to the rhythm. The song’s lyrics, which espouse the dignity of personal and collective ownership, echoed throughout the country.

Every day this summer, I had the privilege of hearing Liberian voices—whether singing, writing, or speaking. As a Haas Summer Project Fellow, I worked at the Hope Community Center, leading a “Story Society” for teenage girls. Harnessing storytelling as a tool for personal and collective empowerment, I tried to cultivate a safe space—an “area-o,” if you will—for girls to own their opinions and histories. We read novels as a group, and used this literature curriculum as a point of departure for journal writing and oral communication exercises.

In preparation for my summer project, I read a library of middle school books with strong female protagonists. I highlighted key passages in Lois Lowry’s Number the Stars and color-coded associated lesson plans. I anticipated questions and drafted sample responses. From my vantage point in Meyer Library, I thought the girls’ stories would fit cleanly into my lesson plans, conform to daily objectives, and submit to weekly themes. I packed a 3-inch binder—Bible of expectations and wanted to believe that I could predict my summer—and generalize my middle school experiences across the Atlantic.

Needless to say, the girls’ creativity could not be confined to any rubric I designed from Stanford’s campus. I learned quickly to trust tangents and dialogue, to let go of my longstanding plans. When I opened the classroom to free writing, I heard stories about family, friendship, love, violence, and death. Then we laughed about boyfriends and hairstyles. During lunch (and sometimes during our meetings), the girls would erupt in song. The music exploded suddenly, as if pumped and tumbling from the pits of their stomachs. I was always caught surprised and slightly uncomfortable, then self-conscious that I wasn’t more comfortable hearing the rawness of their sounds. Klubo Harris talked about the day she lost her mother. Melina Cooper spoke about her pet dog, Princess Bordello shared an original fairy tale, and Jerrylyn Garpe sang about her family’s experience during the war. I learned how to dance. Sort of.

Listening to stories in the classroom and walking down Monrovia’s streets, I heard the same melody over and over. Liberians everywhere called for dignity and autonomy. The “Story Society” girls, my host family, marketplace entrepreneurs, preschool teachers, and motorcycle drivers seemed

The key to Liberia’s future, however, is the spirit, capacity, and cultural vitality of the Liberians themselves. Every day, Liberians choose peace—rain or shine.

Klubo Harris, a sixteen year old, composes a journal entry during a “Story Society” meeting. (Photo provided by Gillie Collins)
to sing for the chance to define their own sociopolitical community and future. To my ears, the girls’ journal entries and street-side “Hip-co” rhythms sounded like the emergent sinews of Liberia’s cultural revolution, authored by the nation’s politically and economically disenfranchised youth. “Da Ma Area-o” is the country’s de facto national anthem—a call for dignity and autonomy.

Unfortunately, the international aid community and Liberia’s political elite—including Africa’s first woman head of state, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf—are not in the business of listening. Tubman Boulevard is littered with offices of foreign non-governmental organizations (NGO’s), carefully gated, guarded, and painted white. Building projects are underway, but the construction workers are Chinese. So long as domestic leaders, international organizations, and NGO’s interpret post-conflict nation-building as an externally driven process, Liberia’s nascent song will fall on deaf ears. Incentivized by the prospect of international aid and investment, Liberia’s democratic government is primarily accountable to an international audience, campaigning for international, rather than domestic, support. Feeding resources to a corrupt, unrepresentative Liberian bureaucracy, the international community exacerbates the accountability gap between representatives and the populace. The net result is lots of traffic, but little progress: U.S. Agency for International Development vans and NGO cars clog Tubman Boulevard during rush hour, while popular sovereignty remains elusive.

To be sure, Liberia has made tremendous progress—and the international community has played a role in ensuring a new era of peace for the country. The key to Liberia’s future, however, is the spirit, capacity, and cultural vitality of Liberians themselves. Every day, Liberians choose peace—rain or shine. This summer was an exceptionally rainy, “rainy season.” Despite the weather (to say nothing of this year’s election campaign season and regional instability in Cote d’Ivoire and Guinea), I experienced genuine “peace-building” and “reconciliation” inside and outside the classroom.

One day, on the way to work, I sought shelter from thunder and lightning. I opted to hail a shared taxi and squeezed into a vehicle with eight strangers, who presumably represented different tribal, religious, and political affiliations. In all likelihood, I carpooleed to work with people who fought and killed as enemies a few years earlier. As the car lurched and sputtered forward, we were literally forced together. Our bodies together absorbed the bumps of an unpaid road. The car was our “area-o,” and we were safe.

As Liberians own and share taxis, they must also begin to share their country. The international community has a role to play in creating spaces for homegrown conflict resolution and rehabilitation. To this end, we need to reframe development aid as a conversation—a two-way exchange of songs, stories, values, resources, beauty. Any healthy dialogue begins with listening. Now, back at Stanford, I find myself again in Meyer Library, studying international relations—still listening to Liberian songs and stories.

Gillie Collins is a sophomore, considering majoring in International Relations and Science, Technology, and Society. She is interested in the intersection of history, media, and politics, especially the effects of technology on cultural memory and transmission. She enjoys reading outside, visiting museums, and exploring thrift stores.
What al-Shabab’s Twitter Account Tells Us About the Organization, Somalia, and the Changing Face of Terrorism

BY RACHEL QUINT

In December 2011, the Somali militant group al-Shabab surprised the Western media by opening a Twitter account. Al-Shabab, the al-Qaeda affiliate organization that controls the majority of Somalia, made headlines in September of 2011 when they blocked food aid to Somalia’s famine-stricken population. In recent months, al-Shabab reportedly gave AK-47s and hand grenades to children as awards in Koran-reciting competitions. In December of 2011, a fact the Ethiopian government requested that the American government allow the Twitters account to continue, stating, “The US is considering closing al-Shabab's feed. The U.S. is likely most concerned with al-Shabab's ability to radicalize Somalis or Islamist extremists in the West. But General Chirchir has requested that the American government allow the Twitter account to continue, stating, “The US is considering closing Al-Shabab’s Twitter account. Al-Shabab needs to be engaged positively and the account suggests new interest in a global audience. As of May 2012, they have 12,634 followers.

The Twitter account appears to be a way for al-Shabab to rationalize their actions and disseminate propaganda.

Al-Shabab is clearly interested in the attention of the Western media, referring directly to articles in publications such as The New York Times. In some cases, al-Shabab responds directly to other tweeters, including journalists. When a journalist from Europe wrote to a fellow journalist (and tagged @HSMPress) “It is good when extremists or perceived extremists come out and talk. Can we have a coffee with them too?” HSM immediately responded, “A caramel macchiato would do!”

The U.S. State Department has reacted with overt concern, exploring legal options to shut down al-Shabab’s feed. The U.S. is likely most concerned with al-Shabab’s ability to radicalize Somalis or Islamist extremists in the West. But General Chirchir has requested that the American government allow the Twitter account to continue, stating, “The US is considering closing Al-Shabab’s Twitter account. Al-Shabab needs to be engaged positively and Twitter is the only avenue.” Indeed, their presence on Twitter is clearly a new phase in al-Shabab’s development. These activities indicate a level of coordination and sophistication that was otherwise considered out of reach for al-Shabab. While historically interested only in Somalia, the account suggests new interest in a global audience. As of May 2012, they have 12,634 followers.

Rachel Quint (MA African Studies ’11) currently works at the UN World Food Programme as a communications consultant in the Liaison Office to the African Union and the Economic Commission for Africa. Previously, Rachel was a Program Fellow at the International Rescue Committee’s Ethiopia office through the Princeton in Africa fellowship program. She lives in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
trying to define the term ‘tribe’ has not been easy to accomplish. It can carry with it historical information dating back centuries or muddied implications about the pretexts of modernity. In the most objective sense it refers to the organization of peoples typically with a common ancestor who share cultural values and practices. It is often employed to describe specifically pre-modern organizations and thus, in retrospect, for those biased towards the organization of nation-states, an implied backwardness. In a post-colonial context it is related, arguably nearly synonymous, to ethnicity, a term whose implications do not necessarily dispute modernity. All that can be said for sure is that the term ‘tribe’ lives in complexity, is constantly undergoing change, and most importantly, in the colonial and post-colonial context, is informed by an indigenous or grass-rooted agency.

By 1914, the countries of Western Europe claimed the land of Africa, its resources and the labor of its inhabitants as part of their respective empires. The Europeans, already with their formal, indoctrinated forms of government and societies, often misunderstood the structure of the African societies they encountered. There were over a thousand different tribes, whose identities did not necessarily correspond with the white conception of identity or livelihood. From language to seemingly mysterious and dark systems of belief to orally-carried histories and matriarchal societies, the Europeans struggled to understand the ways of their new conquests. In its failure to comprehend, colonial sociology deemed them savages of stateless societies, living in a ‘primitive’ existence. These misconstructions tell how colonialism understood tribalism. The infrastructures of colonialism explain to what extent tribalism can be considered as a colonial legacy.

In a post-colonial world, this is a question intellectuals constantly play with. Four common approaches have been taken. The first approach argues that ethnicity is a colonial byproduct or invention. Colonial powers played off of the differences among tribes in order to prevent them from uniting—a strategy of divide and conquer. When prompted, collective constituencies formed and came forth in order to reap the benefits, such as access to fertile land and natural resources, from the colonial powers that refused to acknowledge them otherwise. There is truth to this claim, yet it somehow romanticizes the interactions of tribes prior to the European arrival, which the pre-colonial conflicts between the Hausa and Yoruba of West Africa easily disprove. Even though notions of group membership and group exclusion existed before colonialism, specific practices of imperial rule solidified them. Historian David Welsch argues that the Europeans had difficulty moving past the concept of chieftaincy established amongst some tribes, and so even where societies had shown no indigenous chieftainship, believing all Africans must have chiefs, colonizers created them and granted them minimal bureaucratic responsibilities. These chiefs, rivaling for colonial attention with other one another, sought to strengthen the identities of the communities they were in charge of—a competitive tactic.[1] In these instances, the consolidation and appropriation of the ‘tribe’ was most certainly a colonial construct.

The second approach is rooted in Marxism and views tribalism as a ‘false consciousness’ set up during the onslaught of colonial capitalism by the then emerging African bourgeoisie. Tribalism served as a distraction to the masses from mobilizing along socio-economic class lines, and thereby posing a threat to their wealth. The famous political scientist Archie Mafeje writes, “There is a difference between the man who, on behalf of his tribe, strives to maintain its traditional integrity and autonomy, and the man who invokes tribal ideology in order to maintain a power position, not in the tribal area, but in the modern capital city, and whose ultimate aim is to undermine and exploit [his] supposed tribesmen. The fact that it works... is no proof that ‘tribes’ or ‘tribalism’ exist in an objective sense. If anything, it is a mark of false consciousness on the part of the supposed tribesmen, who subscribe to an ideology that is inconsistent with their material base and therefore unwittingly respond to the call for their own exploitation.”[2]

Mafeje’s claim is correct to evaluate the economic relations between members of colonial societies, yet is rather one-sided on two regards. It does not take a position on whether tribalism actually objectively exists outside of class relations and it simply reduces colonialism to capitalist exploitation, thereby ignoring all other forces that might bring about tribal-consciousness.

The third approach, based in the dependency theories of the 1960s and 1970s, is the only one that gives tribalism the agency of near full information. It claims that ethnicity developed as a mechanism of self-defense from the capitalist exploitation and oppression by the colonial state. It sees the tribe as a reinvented ‘tribalism’ exist in an objective sense. If anything, it is a mark of false consciousness on the part of the supposed tribesmen, who subscribe to an ideology that is inconsistent with their material base and therefore unwittingly respond to the call for their own exploitation.”[3] This explanation, for the active role it does give tribes in the formation of its own existence, holds the greatest legitimacy of the four approaches in a post-colonial context.

The most flawed approach derives from modernization theory. It rather ignorantly suggests that the tribe is a primordial organization of society and will become irrelevant and futile once modernity arrives. This approach has questionable intentions and sounds strangely reminiscent of neo-imperial dogma where the Western image of modernity is both the only credible and the inevitable image that all societies should be aiming to reach.

The argument of political scientist John Lonsdale, whose misconceptions of the pre-colonial African situation exemplify how tribalism can be misconstrued, is too often quoted. Prior to colonialism, he holds, Africa was a continent of sovereignties
comprised of stateless societies. As colonial capitalism facilitated the transition from a moral economy, a system in which people pursue their self-interests based on reputation, to moral ethnicity, a standard of civic virtue against which people measure their personal esteem, ethnicity for the first time, required patriotism, “a distinctively modern consciousness.”[4] Already, his assumption that African societies were stateless tells of the primordial characteristics he assigns to them, which are only expanded upon when he assumes that the inherent modernity of patriotism never before found itself on the continent until the colonialists came. Essentially, modernity, in the examples of statehood and patriotism, is not inherent to traditional African tribes. Herein lies the discourse bias often found when discussing the colonial legacy of tribalism. According to Lonsdale, colonialism is responsible, at least to some degree, for giving it a ‘modern’ consciousness.

Any student of pre-colonial African history can argue otherwise. Consider the Mandingo or Mali Empire of 1230 to 1600 CE, which, supported by revenue generated from gold, copper and salt exports to Europe, Asia-minor and India, is particularly known for its successful governance. Originally three allied states of Mali, Mema and Wagadou, the Empire expanded to include twelve province-tribes who still managed to maintain aspects of their individual autonomy. The empire, home to a famous university at Timbuktu, was run by a deliberative body of 29 tribal representatives and instituted reforms such as fixed exchanges rates for common goods and prohibitions on the mistreatment of slaves and prisoners. Consider also the secular government of the Bakuba Empire that ruled the Congo region in the sixteenth century. The Bakuba system of government held many democratic traits, including political and professional representations for each tribe. Shamba Bolongongo, one of its most esteemed rulers, is still remembered today for prohibiting the use of traditional weaponry and promoting pacifism. Nevertheless, these examples of modernity in ‘tribal’ Africa, have often been excluded from scholarly discussions—to the effect that the subtle and often misguided biases found in colonial sociology are hardly questioned until over time they help to misconstrue pictures of reality.[5]

Rather than viewing tribalism as ‘saved’ from its ‘pre-modern’ backwardness by colonialism, it is best understood as, referring to the third approach offered, a structure of collective action. It is a social phenomenon, that like all others in any culture, is constantly undergoing change.

One transformation worth noting is its eventual alignment with the conditions later identified under ethnicity. Jean and John Comaroff contend that ethnicity, an economic and aesthetic construction, has its origins in inequality.[6] It is in such a condition that the union of tribalism and ethnicity exists as the former linked with the latter in the face of inequality. Colonialism, suspended on inequality, runs on inequality. The resulting inequality is exactly what led to ethnic-consciousness, and the persistence of inequality after colonialism would only further perpetuate ethnic identities, thereby merging them with notions of tribes.

Psychology teaches us that the oppressed is always trying to cope, whether physically, mentally, and/or culturally. The same came be said for the oppression found under colonialism. In the absence of monetary capital, which would enable them to at least compete with capitalist antics of colonialism, colonized peoples sought out other forms of capital. Ethnicity, and by association tribe, have functioned in this regard as a form of capital.

As a form of capital, it has provided certainty and stability when old regimes, including imperial constructions collapse or reveal their impotencies. It provides a network of agency—which can be especially fruitful when oppression tries to work against it. In many ways mobilization along ethnic lines can be a reconstitution of collective action, regardless of how the tribe’s traditionally authentic characteristics have changed. For example, the Tsonga of southern Africa alone adopted their ethnic identity in the 1900s, when it seemed that ethnicity, as a result of the new economic infrastructure introduced by capitalist development, had become politicized with benefits to gain.[8] Today, ethnicity continues to be a strong means of identity because it serves political ends and can result in powerful social and political ties.

Tabatha hails from Brooklyn, NY but has her roots in the Caribbean. She is an IR major having specialized in development and through off-campus means, neo-imperialism. She is graduating this June and looking forward to the great adventures ahead. In the long-run, she intends to be a attorney of international law or at least a conscientious problem-solver of some sort.

Endnotes:
[9] Lonsdale, supra no. 3, at p. 136
The Very Young, Very Bold Spark of Sudan’s Revolution

BY SHADI BUSHRA

One of the most disappointing aspects of going to an “elite” university was how politically apathetic many of the students were. It is significantly more disappointing when those same students are some of the most brilliant and motivated individuals I know. I’ve often softened my judgment and moderated my criticism of these students, many of whom are not only peers but close friends. But after three weeks back in Sudan, where I was doing fieldwork for research and filming interviews for a documentary, I find it much less impressive for one to be intelligent than I do for one to be bold and principled. During that short time, I met some of the most courageous and inspiring young people I’ve had the opportunity to work with.

I was fortunate to be in the country during the protests that broke out at Khartoum University in late December. It certainly helped with my research, as students were anxious to get their stories out. Ultimately, they were the stories of how friendships turned into activist ties that withstood the tests of hardship, imprisonment, and even torture.

Some have gone from partners-in-protest to comrades-in-arms (usually figuratively; on occasion literally). Others were able to form an even deeper bond. One pair, Majdi and Sara, took turns telling how they met within the youth group Sharara, meaning “spark,” and how that working relationship led to a sharara between them.

At a Sharara demonstration they both attended, police rushed through the gates of Khartoum University, wielding brochettes. Majdi attracted their attention by hitting one officer, giving Sara and others, time to escape. In addition to the beating he received on the spot, the police took him in for days of torture.

The two are now married and expecting their first child. Their union has, if anything, intensified their passion for activism — the two cut their honeymoon short just to come back to Khartoum when a fellow Sharara activist was jailed.

A large number of those I interviewed were directly tied to the December and January protests at Khartoum University. A thorough account of how students recount the saga was posted on my blog last month. The shortened version is as follows: The government promised a tribe, Al Manasir, compensation for land lost to flooding because of a dam built on their territory. When that compensation did not materialize, members of the tribe organized protests throughout the country. The demonstrations at Khartoum University, Sudan’s oldest institution of higher learning and at one point one of Africa’s best universities, became the focal point of
One of the anecdotes from the KU saga that stuck with me was how angry police officers were at non-Manasir students who were protesting. It made sense for one to stand up for their rights and the rights of their people. But these foot soldiers of authoritarianism were bewildered as to why one would risk their education and freedom to participate in protests that, even if successful, would have no impact on the lives of Darfuris or South Sudanese.

Higher up the chain of command, I’m sure that these acts of unity terrified more than confused those ordering the police raids. Dividing ethnicities has been a staple of the central government’s policies for decades. This newfound solidarity threatened all that years of meticulous planning and political maneuvering had accomplished.

In ways, the recent and ongoing protests made my time in Khartoum very exciting. After spending years studying the country’s politics and months planning this research, it was refreshing to actually be there and witness what I was reading and writing about.

The newfound solidarity threatened all that years of meticulous planning and political maneuvering had accomplished.

The flip side of the charged political atmosphere was that I was constantly afraid for the safety of those I was meeting, and on several occasions, afraid for my own safety as well. The interview process is nothing novel, but previous interviews were, generally speaking, legal and legitimate activities. Some of the topics broached in past interviews in Khartoum and Juba were certainly touchy, and some statements could land interviewees in trouble if they were quoted publicly. But the interview itself was not an illicit activity.

In this latest batch, the very fact that we were meeting at all could get the interviewees in trouble, regardless of the topic. There was a lack of ethical clarity as to how much I should ask or how much I should divulge about myself. On several occasions I cancelled interviews and meetings at the last minute because of a bad gut feeling on the part of my fixer (who is also a close friend and confidant and deserves more credit, but again I’m wary about giving more details). I trusted her instincts much more than I did my own, and as bad as I felt about canceling meetings, I knew that a few good quotes weren’t worth compromising the safety of those I’d spoken to so far (if my notes were confiscated) or myself (if I let slip my own allegiances).

It was sad to leave behind the activists from Girifna, Sharara, and other organizations founded and run by young Sudanese to push for social and political change. It was even more difficult knowing that when I come back some of these same activists may be imprisoned or worse. However, I am glad that, if nothing else, I can help get their stories out to a broader audience. What that audience chooses to do with that information once it’s out there is up to them.

Shadi was born in Sudan and raised in Minnesota before coming to Stanford to study International Relations. He is the Business Manager and Editor Emeritus of the Stanford Progressive and a blogger for the Huffington Post. [This piece was written while he was in Sudan in January 2012 conducting research for his honors thesis on youth movements in Sudan.] Shadi will be attending Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism next year to earn his M.S. in digital media and investigative journalism. Follow him on Twitter @ShadiBushra for updates on his writing and work.
Every Drop Counts: Rural Water and Sanitation in Sub-Saharan Africa

BY KORY RUSSEL AND NICK CARIELLO

Turning on the tap to find clean water is a luxury that many of us in the “developed world” rarely appreciate. Yet, for nearly one-seventh of the world’s population, there is no home tap and even the process of finding water is difficult and time-consuming. For one community in rural Mozambique, the task of collecting water for household use involves a journey of more than 12 kilometers one way. Long queue lines at the shallow well and rugged terrain make the task of fetching water a multiple-day endeavor. Talking with individuals in this community as part of our research last summer, it became readily apparent that water access defines their livelihoods and consumes an enormous amount of their energy, time and resources.

Globally, almost 900 million people lack access to a safe and reliable water source, and more than 2.5 billion people live without access to an improved latrine or basic sewer system (WHO/UNICEF, 2010). Poor water quality and a lack of proper sanitation often leads to illness, lost productivity, and degradation of the overall social, political and economic health of communities. In fact, it is estimated that five percent of sub-Saharan Africa’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is lost due to decreased productivity from water-related diseases and time spent fetching water (UNDP, 2006). Approximately 4,000 children die every day due to diarrheal diseases that could be prevented through proper sanitary practices and access to improved water sources (UNDP, 2006). Fortunately, water, sanitation, and hygiene (or WASH) interventions are receiving increased attention and support worldwide. This is in large part due to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) established by the United Nations that aim to cut the percentage of people without improved water and sanitation in half between 1990 and 2015.

Our work in the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering suggests that the increase in resources directed towards WASH interventions does not necessarily equate to improved community conditions. The World Health Organization’s (WHO)/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program (JMP) is tasked with monitoring progress towards the MDGs for water and sanitation. The JMP defines “improved” sources of drinking water as borewells (deep, mechanically drilled and sealed wells), public taps, protected dug wells and springs, rainwater harvesting and household taps (MDG, 2011). Given these current definitions, borewells and public taps in theory provide a great return on development investments because a single point source can provide improved water to a large population.

Unfortunately, both published literature and our own research in Mozambique suggest that borewells with handpumps and public taps are not providing the service that proponents often extol. While water quality at the source is often potable, it often has unacceptably high levels of contamination by the time it is consumed in the household. Water contamination between the source and the point of consumption can make the health benefits from borewells much less than what was envisioned by project architects. As the MDG deadline approaches in 2015, it is important to note that the world has already met the target for access to improved water supplies in March of 2012. While the completion of this milestone marks significant global progress, the challenges for water delivery and infrastructure maintenance remain immense. Rural water systems in particular have a history of breakdowns and poor sustainability. While exact figures vary by country, approximately one third of all rural systems have failed or underperformed (Triple S, 2009). In light of this information, it becomes necessary to ask two important questions when examining international WASH development projects. First, is the project providing the intended service effectively and efficiently? And second, will the project
continue to operate properly for years to come? These questions drive at principles of efficiency and sustainability, and ultimately determine the success of any development intervention.

Our research during the summer of 2011 focused on eleven rural communities in Nampula Province, Mozambique. The eleven selected communities are scheduled to receive new borewells within the next two years as part of a larger Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) funded rural water program, which is to be completed by the end of 2013. Although we were entering these communities prior to the MCC installation of water points, several communities already had previously-installed borewells with handpumps.

We worked with students from Lúrio University, a local medical school, to collect water samples from stored drinking water containers in 259 separate households across the eleven communities, as well as from 37 community water sources. These samples were then tested for the presence of the fecal indicator bacteria (FIB) E. coli, which indicates the presence of feces and associated pathogens in the water. We found that nearly one-third of the stored water in households was drawn from handpumps with no detectable E. coli but still had unsafe levels of E. coli contamination in the home. This water quality degradation could be a combination of factors that range from limited sanitation facilities among study households to open water storage containers. Research on probable pathways of contamination is ongoing. Regardless of the cause, one-third of individuals in these rural villages in Nampula who are supposedly benefitting from improved drinking water sources, according to the JMP definition, are in fact living with unacceptable levels of contamination. These findings add to a mounting body of literature that suggests that point sources such as borewells are not always providing desired long-term health benefits (Wright et al., 2004).

Even if borewells are serving their purpose at the time of installation, they may be underused for a variety of reasons that range from political affiliations to ease of access. Research is currently being conducted to try and parse out the exact reasons for underuse of improved sources in our study area. The assumption that all individuals within a half-kilometer radius will fully utilize a new water point as their sole source of clean drinking water is both naïve and misleading. Nevertheless, many governmental and non-governmental organizations are often surprised to find that not all community households are using their new water points.

The reality of rural water and sanitation development in Mozambique, along with much of sub-Saharan Africa, is that current development programs are not always functioning sustainably. Despite years of donor funding for rural water infrastructure in Mozambique, more than 57 percent of the total population – and 71 percent of the rural population - lives without access to an improved water source (JMP, 2010).

So why are the current development programs not fully reaching their potential? The answer is not always straightforward, but often it is a lack of long term planning, poor supply chain for spare parts, negligible post-construction management support, and weak local water committees. These issues have contributed to the persistent failure of over one-third of all rural water systems installed worldwide (Triple S, 2009).

Historically, improved water points have been installed

The assumption that all individuals within a half-kilometer radius will fully utilize a new water point as their sole source of clean drinking water is both naïve and misleading.
as part of supply-driven, centrally managed intervention programs in government and donor chosen locations (Triple S, 2009). In these programs contractors often drilled wells and then promptly left the communities without any established long-term support plan. This paradigm began to shift in the mid-nineties to demand oriented, community-managed systems with more positive results (Whittington et. al, 2008). Despite these improvements, borewells continue to receive little sustained support or follow-up because there are no incentives for large donors or governments to revisit their projects and report on their failures. Some of our colleagues in Mozambique are fond of saying that we need to “start inaugurating sustainability, not more borewells.”

To truly generate sustainable improvements, water intervention programs must be far-sighted and include funding for training, maintenance, and spare parts. Small piped water systems (SPWS) are another alternative for delivering clean water that address some of these issues but are often bypassed in favor of less expensive borewells.

Thus, it is time to reassess the old development practice of providing WASH interventions that are chiefly concerned with reaching the greatest number of individuals for the least “first cost” investment. By providing larger upfront capital investments, strong business strategies, and increased user involvement and feedback, water supply and sanitation solutions can more effectively deliver the outcomes that they promise.

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Is Africa Emerging?
Economic Growth, Business Opportunities and Challenges in the 21st Century
BY LANDRY SIGNE

From Hopeless to Hopeful African Economies

Over a decade ago, The Economist published an article entitled “Hopeless Africa” (May, 2000), which provided several reasons to despair for the future of the continent: dreadful wars, disease, misery, floods, famine, thuggery, despotism, corruption, rape, cannibalism, and poor economic performance despite abundance of natural resources. However, The Economist (December, 2011) has recently changed its tone, expressed regrets, and published an article entitled “Hopeful Continent: Africa Rising”, stating that “Africa’s progress is a reminder of the transformative promise of growth.” These changes are not just rhetorical but substantive, as many African economic and political developments have demonstrated.

In fact, the International Monetary Fund (2011) estimates that seven out of ten of the world’s fastest growing markets for 2011-2015 will be in Africa (Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Congo, Ghana, Zambia, and Nigeria). For the period between 2001 and 2010, six out of ten of the fastest growing markets were in Africa (Angola, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Chad, Mozambique, and Rwanda). Several experts consider that numerous African countries are emerging or rising (Radelet, 2010; Mahajan, 2009). The continent is “home to many of the world’s biggest opportunities” (Harvard Business Review (HBR), p. 118, May 2011), and is “one of the world’s fastest-growing regions” (The Economist, par. 1, January 2011). It is also “rising rapidly up the agenda for global investment managers” (The Financial Times, par. 3, May 18, 2011) and offering “a higher return on investment than any other emerging market” (United Nations data as quoted in HBR, p. 118, May 2011).

The Potential of African Economies

Africa’s growth is more than a simple consequence of a commodity boom (Radelet, 2010; McKinsey Global Institute, 2010; Mahajan, 2009; Beckett and Sudarkasa, 2000). It is also the result of several economic, business and political reforms that have created conditions for sustainable economic growth and development. Africa represents 1.6 trillion dollars of collective gross domestic products, and is expected to reach about 2.3 trillion dollars of collective gross domestic products by 2020 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2010).

Entrepreneurs and international corporations are contributing to the dynamic African economy, with several international corporations already successfully operating on the continent including Unilever, Google, Nestlé, McDonalds, Oracle, IBM, Dell, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, JP Morgan, and McKinsey. Unilever has a presence in over eighteen African countries, and generates revenues of about 3 billion dollars a year (IFC, 2011), and the Coca-Cola company sold 5 billion dollars worth of products in Africa in 2006. African entrepreneurs have also been highly successful. In 1998, the Sudanese-born Mo Ibrahim founded Celtel International, a telecommunication company in Sudan which he later sold in 2005 for 3.4 billion dollars (Makura, 2009). Nigerian-born Aliko Dangote founded the Dangote Group, which specializes in cement manufacturing and food processing, and in 2011 Forbes estimated his net worth at 13.8 billion dollars.

Overview of Some Business Opportunities

Opportunities seem to be flourishing in all sectors in Africa. The customer markets, namely agriculture, food industries, and information, along with communication technologies and clean-tech, are particularly noteworthy as they are accessible to most small- and medium-scale firms, entrepreneurs and investors.

Consumer Markets: Africa produced over 860 billion dollars in combined consumer spending in 2008 and will have increased this amount to an estimated 1.6 trillion dollars by 2020 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2010). Ironically, the continent is currently contending with various problems that represent multiple, potential opportunities for creative entrepreneurs. Many individuals are presently in need of food, clean water, clothes, medical services, electricity, education, communication technologies, transportation, and financial services. Governments and cities need to construct the necessary infrastructure to accommodate these improvements including: power generators, transportation organizations, and sanitation systems. Transportation options are particularly important and include a variety of additions, such as railways, new and renovated roads, and airports. With the growing urban population, entrepreneurs are investing in real estate projects, delivering prefabricated houses, and partnering with the public sector towards the development of the necessary framework to support these improvements.

Agriculture and Food Industries: Sixty percent of the world’s unused arable land, or land that can be used for growing crops, is located in Africa (Grosskurth, 2010). Thus, it is a paradox that the continent represents only three percent of global agricultural exports and is home to millions of undernourished people. European, Chinese, Saudi Arabian, North Korean, and Indian companies are presently investing funds ranging from several million to billions of dollars to buy or lease mass hectares of land in order to promote various agricultural projects. Currently, countries such as Cameroon, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Madagascar, Senegal, and Mozambique are growing a variety of marketable produce including flowers, lentils, palm oil, rice, sugar cane, bananas, and corn.

Information, Communication Technologies and Clean-Tech: Africa is the fastest growing mobile phone market region in the world, with a more than sixty percent annual growth rate from 2005 to 2010 (International Telecommunication Union, 2011).
The continent has acquired more than 433 million mobile phone subscribers since 2000 (International Telecommunication Union, 2011). Entrepreneurial developments include SMS applications (TxtEagles/Jana), mobile payments solutions (M-Pesa, K-Kesho), SMS marketing solutions (Mocality), and wireless tablets with Internet access (Way C). Internet connectivity is still growing, offering opportunities to small wireless internet providers, suppliers of basic infrastructures for Internet access (including modems, wireless keys, infrastructures for public institutions and universities), and social media constructs including video platforms, music platforms, and social networks (Google, YouTube, Facebook, Whive, and MXit).

Electricity is the greatest challenge for many countries, as more than half of their populations do not have access to power. This presents opportunities for Clean-Tech developments including: solar electricity generators, hydropower, bio-fuels, geothermal resources, and wind-power. Yet to seize these opportunities, entrepreneurs must innovate to overcome market constraints.

**Overcoming Challenges of Doing Business in Africa**

Conducting business in Africa requires unique skills and expertise in risk management so that one might capitalize on entrepreneurial opportunities. The most obvious obstacles to economic success on the continent include governance, political and legal risks (e.g., instability, conflict, corruption, expropriation, destruction, and theft), currency devaluation and payment delays. Selective solutions must therefore be tailored to each individual problem according to context.

**Governance, political, and legal risks:** Despite significant improvement during the last decade, the risk of political and social instability is still an important concern in Africa (see Economist Intelligence Unit). Recent conflicts in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya demonstrate how seemingly stable nations are still susceptible to dramatic change. Thus, it is important to first become familiar with the business-oriented, legal, and regulatory conditions of a country in order to limit associated risk. It is also important to initially select politically stable and economically viable nations as sites of investment, particularly when implementing a first-time investment plan. Although politically unstable countries may sometimes be the most economically profitable, investors should nonetheless steer clear unless they have excellent risk insurance.

**Payment and currency devaluation risks:** Imagine a corporation that invests in a country just before a fifty percent devaluation of the currency. This corporation will lose fifty percent of the value of their investment. Thus, before investing, it is important to consider the currency risk by consulting with experts and diversifying one’s portfolio with multiple currencies while purchasing investment insurance. Also, to avoid payment misadventures, investors should manage the payment risk by choosing irrevocable payment through letter of credit issued by established banking organizations, as well as subscribing to payment protection insurance and political risk insurance.

**Bureaucracy and corruption risk:** Bureaucracy on the African continent has historically been time consuming, inefficient, and corrupt. The problem with corruption is not just ethical and moral; it also significantly increases the cost of doing business by increasing penetration costs and production or operation costs, which results in lower return on investment (ROI). It is important to hire local partners or international consulting firms that are familiar with the local business environment to manage the bureaucracy and corruption risk.

**Trust and scam risk:** When doing business in Africa, one should exercise the same critical thinking as elsewhere when solicited with an offer that seems too good to be true. If entrepreneurs are not familiar with the person who has contacted them, they must be very prudent, particularly if the opportunity is time-sensitive. More importantly, entrepreneurs need to be in touch with local or international experts as well as the embassy and foreign affairs offices that may be able to further evaluate these opportunities.

**Conclusion**

At the beginning of the 21st century, Africa was perceived as a dark, hopeless and disease-ridden continent. Yet it has become one of the world fastest-growing regions drawing the enthusiasm of scholars, leaders, investors, and entrepreneurs throughout the world. Given the fact that the last decade of economic growth in Africa is mainly fueled by better governance, dynamic entrepreneurs, new technologies, abundant investments and domestic expansion of economies, Africa’s growth is likely to be more sustainable unlike the commodity booms and busts of years past. Current trends show hopeful transformational changes in both political and economic spheres that are likely to generate sustainable economic growth and development, and plenty of opportunities for creative entrepreneurs and investors.

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**Landry Signé is a Banting Fellow at the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. Prior to joining the CDDRL, Dr. Signé was a visiting scholar at the Stanford Center of African Studies, and lecturer on Emerging African Markets: Strategies, Investments and Government Affairs at Stanford Continuing Studies. He has received numerous grants, distinctions and awards, including the Award for the Best International PhD Dissertation.**

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txt for sexual health: Using Mobile Technology to Combat HIV/AIDS in Mathare, Kenya

BY RISA KITAGAWA

Evelyn Ajing’s morning begins with checking her mobile phone for text messages from complete strangers. One message might ask, “Does hiv/aids kill ppl?” Another might read, “I suspect tht i hav s.t.i.s wat shld i do.” Her fingers working rapidly over the worn keypad, she texts back carefully crafted messages to people she will probably never meet. And if things go the way she hopes, they will never have to text her again.

Evelyn is a community health counselor who volunteers much of her time to Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), a sports-for-development NGO based in Nairobi, Kenya. With over 25 years of experience working with youth in the community, 25,000 members, and an active league of soccer teams, the organization enjoys much local renown. One of MYSA’s major activities is the HIV/AIDS prevention program, which includes the operation of voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) centers, where individuals can receive confidential HIV screening and counseling from peer counselors, who have been trained in areas of sexual and reproductive health.

Since July 2011, the counselors have been participating in a pilot for a mobile health counseling project called Nishauri, which means “Please advise me” in Swahili. Through use of Short Message Service (SMS) – or texting, plain and simple – counselors respond to anonymous queries from Mathare residents about HIV/AIDS, safe sex, relationships, and other matters related to sexual and reproductive health. When a user texts in a question to the advertised Nishauri number, the message is forwarded to one of the health counselors on duty, who then delivers a response in a safe and private setting—directly to the user’s mobile phone.

One thing stands out when walking around Mathare: the ubiquity of cell phone charging stations, with colorful hand-painted signs. This is the key insight that Evelyn and others at MYSA are capitalizing on with the Nishauri project. A majority of the young men and women that MYSA interacts with in Mathare have regular access to mobile phones, and both texting and calling rates have dropped dramatically in recent years. Sending a text message could cost as little as one Kenyan shilling (KSH), approximately a U.S. penny.

In recent years, the potential of mobile technology for socioeconomic development has received increasing attention from practitioners and researchers alike. The successful use of information and communication technologies (ICT) has been documented in areas of disaster relief, agricultural and fishery information systems, and mobile-banking. Health practitioners in Africa have mobilized applications that monitor measles outbreaks, support diagnoses, and provide information-sharing platforms for community health workers [1]. Since its inception following the 2008 post-electoral violence in Kenya, the now well-known crowdsourcing platform Ushahidi has been put to a broad range of uses, from elections monitoring in Mexico and tracking unrest in the Democratic Republic of Congo, to even the most banal function of mapping snow clean-up efforts on the east coast of the United States. A small but growing literature suggests ICTs can significantly lower barriers to obtaining information or overcoming collective action problems [2]. Is theory beginning to match practice?

Mobile penetration has come a long way since 1999, when less than 10 percent of rural Africans lived in areas with mobile phone coverage, compared to more than 60 percent today. According to the Communications Commission of Kenya, mobile penetration stood at 67.2% for the period July-September 2011, and the average Kenyan was sending approximately 19 text messages per month with a prepaid subscription. But should these statistics tell us anything? Some point to the presence of an “intra-African digital divide” [3] due to significant disparities in the geographic rollout of coverage, a reality which evades the striking big-picture statistics. The specific conditions under which mobile phone use will be effective, particularly in such non-market situ-
atations as health education, remain little more than a mystery, at least for now. Part of the difficulty lies in devising an appropriate evaluation metric, and this may be a compelling avenue for future research at the intersection of multiple disciplines.

Back in Nairobi, Evelyn, Joseph and Kennedy are enthusiastic about the prospects of SMS health counseling. The Nishauri pilot service “helps us a lot,” Evelyn says, “because it de-congests the people coming to the [VCT] center for counseling alone, and we can give more HIV screenings to other people.” The counselors also believe that the pilot is providing tangible benefits for the youth it is meant to service. “Some cannot even afford the transportation costs to come up to the office for counseling.” Traveling from Mathare to MYSA could cost up to 40-50 KSH, and 70 KSH for a roundtrip, if you are lucky enough to avoid rush hour. “It’s just a shilling to text and receive the same information,” Evelyn notes.

Counselors are handpicked by MYSA through a rigorous selection process, based on the experience of the individual as a peer educator, participation in community-based activities, several rounds of interviews, and successful training. They are, in a way, the crème de la crème of MYSA alumni. Even then, counselors sometimes struggle to establish a rapport with people who come to seek their help at VCT sites. The counselors were quick to notice differences between in-person and SMS counseling when the pilot service began last year: “In person, you are continually assessing the risks, coming up with ways to keep them talking. But on the phone, they open up. They go straight to the point, which is a bit different from what we’re used to.”

Does this make counseling work easier for them? Evelyn broke into a resounding, “Ahhh, yes! I was telling them,” – nodding to Joseph and Kennedy – “I’m almost addicted to this now. I’m feeling attached to this phone.” She was wearing a white and blue soccer shirt, matching the calm robin’s egg blue of the wall, and her laughter was infectious. We were sitting in a circle inside one of the counseling rooms at MYSA. The laminated sign on the door read, in friendly green letters, “The Counselor is FREE.”

“What I have realized is that they are more trusting,” Kennedy chimed in, referring to the texters. The counselors speculated that the anonymity of text messaging was fostering, perhaps counter-intuitively, an increased sense of trust and security. “They are opening up because they know that you don’t know them, and they don’t know me.”

Anonymity also ensures that gender and age differences do not hamper the interaction. With face-to-face counseling, older men are hesitant to speak to Evelyn, a younger woman. The reverse is also true. If a young mother comes knocking at the door, a female counselor is sought out to make her feel more comfortable. “Sometimes, religion matters too,” Evelyn says. While anonymity may dissolve most visible differences, it has not diminished a sense of connectedness to the community. “I feel like I’m a person who is so connected with the youth, because I have gone through the same challenges they’ve been facing,” Evelyn speaks of counseling. “But what interests me the most is that, now, I’m part of solving the problems that are affecting young people in the community.”

Nishauri began in early 2011 as a mess of Post-its on a whiteboard at Stanford’s Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, affectionately referred to as the “d.school.” The project was conceived by a team of four Stanford graduate students, myself included, in a course called “Designing Liberation Technologies,” co-taught by Joshua Cohen, from political science, philosophy and law; Terry Winograd, from computer science; and Zia Yusuf, CEO of Streetline Inc. The course teaches students to find creative, substantive ways of applying ICTs to areas of health, education and economic development. After an initial needs assessment in Nairobi, students form small interdisciplinary teams and begin to devise potential strategies for addressing a particular problem.

The thought that Stanford students are sitting in a sunlit classroom to brainstorm a Solution to a Problem in faraway Nairobi may strike some as presumptuous or naïve. Remote design—or design that aims to meet the need of a geographically remote user—poses a number of challenges, both ethical and practical,
including the implicit power asymmetry between designer and user [4]. It risks a “kind of benevolent paternalistic attitude of the center to these [peripheral] countries,” and reminds us that design problems should not be resolved “by outsiders coming in for a stopover visit” [5].

If remote design is ultimately second-best to a home-grown solution, there are nonetheless certain elements that emerge across sustainable ICT-for-development projects: a granular understanding of local context and needs, strong local partnerships, and interventions that build on existing capacities. For Nishauri, the inspiration was to provide a technology-based service that leveraged the existing expertise of MYSA’s counselors. The needs assessment phase revealed that one potential source of problems related to STDs was the lack of good information about sexual behavior and its consequences. Inaccurate advice and rumors passed among young people can quickly lead to risky behavior. Moreover, many are either unable to afford, or otherwise too shy, to travel to VCT sites. What if SMS could match the demand for reliable information with the counselors’ knowledge?

The d.school philosophy itself was integral to meeting the demands of remote design. First, the students in the course represent a broad range of disciplines, including business, computer science, human biology, management science and engineering, law and the social sciences. The interdisciplinary nature of each team allows a well-rounded design process. The “product” is not merely about its aesthetics and functionality, or its market viability, or the impact it has on the broader sociopolitical environment; all of them important, these elements cannot be considered in isolation.

Second, the teaching corps facilitates a close relationship with local partner organizations and the University of Nairobi, which act as crucial focal points between Stanford students and users. The user-centered approach emphasizes the specific needs and experience of the user, from the early moments of identifying a problem to shaping a solution that addresses the problem in a substantive way. Finally, the approach also requires adaptability. Depending on the demands of the user, the solution need not necessarily involve mobile technology or even ICT per se. Nor is it constructive to assume that the “perfect design” will naturally emerge, because it won’t. Rather, the emphasis is on trying out innovative ideas, testing prototypes, and, based on the feedback, adapting the prototype or generating new ones.

The design process is in many ways like an ongoing dialogue, and sometimes a noisy one. Many of our nights were spent surrounded by coffee cups and candy as we video-conferenced with the health counselors, re-visited footage from the need-finding mission, or decided, well after midnight, to “start all over again.” Post-its and magic markers became a common fixture in our backpacks, alongside wallets and phones. Countless five-second sketches made their way onto whiteboards, notebooks and snapshots. There were heated debates – “SMS or USSD (Unstructured Supplementary Data)” “Text or voice input?” – as well as moments of deep misgivings. And then there are the moments of affirmation.

The health counselors may also be working afterhours. For Joseph, the experience has been “really fun.” When a text message came in while he was cooking dinner at home with a friend, he became so engrossed in responding to the query that “it reached a point where my food was almost overcooked! My friend was asking if this was my phone. I couldn’t know if he had texted me the question, and if he had, he might know I’m the one answering and maybe not feel comfortable.” With a sheepish smile, Joseph added, “So I tried not to tell him.”

Earlier this year, Evelyn was brainstorming with the staff on new ways of marketing Nishauri. Thus far, they have received very positive feedback from youth who have tried the service, she says, but they are interested in expanding its reach by advertising the pilot on local radio stations. MYSA may soon be launching a radio station of its own, Radio Kijiji. Asked what the future holds for SMS counseling and MYSA, Evelyn expressed hope “that giving information to youth will be very effective.” There may be a day when SMS counseling will no longer be needed. She is aware of the inherent limitations, however, of information provision alone and hastened to add, “If the youth are willing to change, then MYSA will continue to play a big role in mentoring them through behavioral change.

“So,” she concluded, with quiet resolve, “that is my view.”

Risa Kitagawa is a Ph.D. student of comparative politics and political theory in the Department of Political Science at Stanford University. Her research interests include transitional justice institutions in post-conflict countries and the role of information technology in human development. Visit the Nishauri project website at http://nishauri.wordpress.com

Endnotes:
An Intertwining of Cultures: The Missing Link in the African Diaspora

BY AMANDA MCFARLANE

When one travels throughout the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor in South Carolina and Georgia, the architecturally majestic plantation homes hint to a unique African American culture that dominates the Lowcountry area. It is evident that the African culture transferred over during the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade still lives as a reminder that the Gullah peoples’ ancestors can be traced to the geographically distant land. Through the cultural practices reminiscent of traditional African practices, the Gullah peoples’ connection to their ancestors is fortified creating an eternal bond that makes the Corridor and Africa seem closer than what geography permits. Even with the evident historical connections, the Caribbean’s role in detailing the landscape of the area is mentioned but never fully debriefed. Clearly, this underdeveloped bond between the Caribbean and the Gullah/Geechee Corridor reveals a missing link in this branch of the African Diaspora. My four-week experience in the Gullah region as a researcher allowed me to unravel this relationship and reconnect an important component of the formation of the Lowcountry’s landscape. When the concrete connections were revealed, I realized that the similarities between the Corridor and the Caribbean were undeniable.

The Caribbean’s influence on the birth of the Gullah culture is evident when evaluating the relation on a purely textual basis. Because 95 percent of all enslaved Africans went to the Caribbean and South America, the Caribbean was the first region where African traditions began to adapt to a foreign environment. [1] The first plantation system was developed and perfected in the Caribbean, specifically Barbados, prior to the system’s establishment in the US. Without the initial, failed use of Irish indentured servants as labor, the planters would not have realized that the African slave could survive such a severe tropical climate. This failed attempt ultimately led to the switch of the labor force.[2] The connection between Barbados and South Carolina is evident. As the plantation owners began to institute the system in the Southern US, they brought their African slaves and consequently the enslaved peoples’ culture as well. During the first twenty years of colonization, more than half of the black population came from the Caribbean.[3] Throughout my time in the Corridor, I was given the opportunity to visit some of the most historically prominent plantations that are still intact. Drayton Hall and Middleton plantation are both reminders of the relationship between the Caribbean and the Lowcountry, since the typical plantation system that is detailed with the master’s house and row of slave cabins resembles the systems in the Caribbean. The South was not the first destination for many of the first African slaves, and thus the Caribbean was the site for the beginning adaptations that led to the formation of the Gullah culture.

When tourists visit the Lowcountry, a popular item to buy is the famous baskets, known for their beautiful interwoven tex-
Clearly, this underdeveloped bond between the Caribbean and the Gullah/Geechee Corridor reveals a missing link in this branch of the African Diaspora.
Curbing Impunity in Africa and the Politics of the ICC  
BY KEN OPALO

In the recent past the harshest criticism of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has come from African leaders. Many have accused the court of an anti-Africa bias and point to the fact that all the ongoing investigations and prosecutions at the court involve crimes committed by African leaders. The court’s recent move to issue arrest warrants to sitting presidents has particularly angered the regional body, the African Union (AU). Thirty-one African states are parties to the Rome Statute that created the ICC. However many have, through the AU, voiced a call for “African solutions to African problems” and expressed opposition to the court’s involvement in several of the ICC’s cases, including in Sudan and Kenya.

That the AU is against the ICC is no surprise. One should not expect less from an organization that has in the past defended the actions of Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe and Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir. None other than the AU Commission chairman, Jean Ping, is on record as saying “What have we done to justify being an example to the world? Are there no worst countries, like Myanmar (Burma)?”[1] The AU’s criticism of the ICC includes charges of insensitivity to local politics; that the court impinges on African sovereignty and is a geopolitical tool for regime change; and that the court’s meddling has served to weaken local judicial institutions in African states. These criticisms are mostly ill-informed.

Certainly the timing of the ICC’s indictment of Omar al-Bashir, and rebel leaders of the Lord’s Resistance Army of Uganda, might have been politically insensitive and thus come in the way of progress towards a peace settlement in the Sudan.[2] It is also true that the court’s action against prominent politicians might detract from more lasting domestically negotiated settlements by local institutions (like for instance, in Kenya). Furthermore, it is no secret that the ICC has avoided implicating state leaders in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo in its investigations (by deliberating limiting the scope of charges) in order to secure these countries’ cooperation with regard to the active cases.

Lastly, no one doubts that both Washington and Brussels – the seat of the European Union - have had sway in the Hague. Indeed the fact that the UN Security Council can weigh in on the court’s investigations makes it impossible to have a completely apolitical judicial process at the Hague. But these arguments do not represent the full picture of ICC intervention in Africa. They mask the real motivation for ICC involvement in Africa, viz. the unwillingness and/or incapacity of African governments to prosecute those responsible for war crimes. Furthermore, as is shown above, the majority of the cases at the ICC were self-referrals. Its many faults aside, the ICC is a strong force against impunity in countries with little capacity or willingness to prosecute powerful perpetrators of crimes against humanity. It also provides important leverage for civil society organizations to get concessions from political elites. The Kenyan case is a good example.
Absent the ICC, the 2007-08 post election violence and its aftermath would have been swept under the rug, as had happened after every election since the resumption of multiparty politics in 1992. The same would have been true for crimes committed in the DRC, Cote d’Ivoire, Sudan, Uganda and in Central African Republic. Additionally, the regional court that might have dealt with these cases – The AU’s African Court on Human and People’s Rights – has so far proven to be utterly ineffectual in providing a deterrent against perpetrators of heinous crimes in the region; a fact that makes continued calls by the AU for “African solutions to Africa problems” seem absolutely ludicrous.

Furthermore, the ICC, as a neutral arbiter devoid of domestic political influence, can potentially serve as a critical institution for handling these oftentimes politically sensitive judicial matters. Since most countries in the region still lack independent judiciaries, a court like the ICC can provide much needed judicial independence as it prosecutes cases that involve high-level domestic political players in the affected states. This might reduce the likelihood of judicial battles spilling into the streets of these weakly institutionalized states.

The replacement of the court’s Argentinian prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, with his Gambian deputy, Fatou Bensouda, should also help dispel the notion that the court is a neo-colonial institution. The AU, after all, lobbied hard for Ms. Bensouda’s appointment.

All these factors call into doubt the benefits of the AU’s stated hostile policy toward the court. To further understand why this is so, we need to have a closer look at where the AU’s foreign policy position comes from.

As a regional bloc, the AU has sought to promote the idea that responses to crises should be dealt with first by regional organizations before being referred to the United Nations. This was the approach taken with regard to crises in the Congo in 1998-99, Darfur since 2003, and Cote d’Ivoire in 2011, among other cases. The mantra of “African solutions to African problems” might have been appealing as an aspiration; however, in reality it was a total failure. Cote d’Ivoire, Libya, and Sudan are illustrative cases. In all three situations the AU lacked a coherent approach, failed to act on time and when it finally acted, only did so halfheartedly, with disastrous consequences.

The idea of having the AU be the first line of attack against regional crises is not a bad one. It would reduce the rate of failure in international interventions due to a better understanding of local conditions. The problem with this, however, is that the AU insists on this approach without investing in the material and organizational capacities required to play this very important role. In addition, the claim to ownership of local problems by the AU has alienated the greater international community, which might have been more willing to be more hands-on in dealing with unfolding crises. Having an ineffectual AU as the first line of defense preserves Africa’s sovereignty but at the expense of capacity for a rapid and resolute response to crises.

There is a strong case to be made for continued vigilance by the ICC prosecutor with regard to war crimes in Africa. Despite the many internal and international conflicts that have plagued the region over the last 20 years, not a single high ranking individual has been convicted of war crimes by a domestic court in any African country. And this is not because of a lack of cases to prosecute. Evidence abounds that crimes against humanity were committed in several conflicts, ranging from the DRC to Liberia. Ending the culture of impunity that allows leaders to perpetrate war crimes will require sustained vigilance by the ICC, despite the AU’s expressed opposition to the Court’s activities. The recent conviction of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo (former warlord from the DRC) is a good start. In addition, the fact that the incoming Chief Prosecutor of the ICC is an African should serve to disabuse the court’s critics of the notion that the court is a neo-colonial institution out to fix Africa.

Ken is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science. He received his Bachelor’s degree in Political Science from Yale. Ken’s research interests include the political economy of development in eastern Africa, regional trade and cooperation in Sub-Saharan Africa, and political ethnicity and citizen-leadership accountability mechanisms in authoritarian states. In addition to his academic pursuits Ken enjoys traveling, reading and blogging.

Endnotes:

Table: Active Situations at the ICC

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Referrals</th>
<th>UN Security Council Referrals</th>
<th>Prosecutor Initiative</th>
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<tr>
<td>Uganda (2003)</td>
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These 7 situations represent 14 cases: Central African Republic (1), DRC (5), Kenya (2), Libya (1), Sudan (4), and Uganda (1). More information on the cases is available here: http://www.icc-cpi.int/Menus/ICC/Situations+and+Cases/. In both the Cote d’Ivoire and Kenyan cases the president and parliament, respectively, later officially endorsed ICC involved in the mentioned cases. (Table provided by Ken Opalo)
The African Leadership Academy is a two-year, pan-African secondary school in Johannesburg, South Africa that aims to develop future leaders for Africa through a rigorous curriculum centered around leadership, entrepreneurship, African Studies, and community service. Founders Chris Bradford (MBA ’05, MA ’06) and Fred Swaniker (MBA ’04) believe that ethical leadership is the key to transforming the African continent. They hope their school will produce 6000 African leaders in fields such as politics, business, and education over the next 50 years.

Jonathan Jansen is rector of the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa. He received his PhD in Education from Stanford in 1991, and was a visiting Fulbright scholar from 2007-08. He is the author of the 2009 Stanford University Press book Knowledge in the Blood: Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past, which tells the story of the integration of the University of Pretoria after the end of apartheid.

SAUTI asked Mr. Swaniker, Mr. Bradford, and Professor Jansen to answer a few questions about the current state of education in Africa, and their perspectives on its future.

SAUTI: What role will technology play in improving education across the continent? Technology may include the availability of computers, the availability of the Internet, or the spread of e-learning. Can you speak to a few examples you have seen where technology has improved the delivery or content of curriculum; and also several examples where it has not?

CB & FS: Technology will play a critical role in enhancing the delivery of education across the continent, for a few reasons. Firstly, technology’s ability to deliver cutting-edge content across vast distances through online or mobile applications is a critical way in which Africa can overcome its infrastructure gaps and poor school quality. Secondly, recent developments in technology have meant that we now have the capacity to showcase educational content that is unique to the African context—successful case examples of African entrepreneurship, innovative ideas to address social needs, etc. Finally, mechanisms such as tablet computing could allow for cheap, easy-to-update alternatives to paper-based textbooks. By using technology-enhanced platforms, African education is indeed on the brink of a revolution.

JJ: For some time to come, the most important and available technology in African schools will still be the textbook. A good textbook, well framed and accessible, teaches children and teachers in underserved, rural areas of the continent. Still, the advent of other technologies like the cellphone has made a massive difference to everything from the administration and distribution of learning materials for distance education, to online learning and student exchange. In many parts of South Africa, for example, traditional telephones and post offices do not exist; but we found that every teacher had a cellphone and this enabled us to facilitate communication through distance learning.

SAUTI: What are your thoughts on the importance of creating more technical schools which may be more helpful for an unskilled population, versus more liberal-arts universities that offer skills that may not necessarily lead to a career? Is one more important than the other in an African context?

CB & FS: Technical education has typically been considered as “second-tier” compared to its more “academic” counterparts—liberal arts and professional education.

However, we would argue that the traditional paradigms of both academic and technical education do not adequately prepare students for careers and employment. Both paradigms require a significant shift and possibly more of a convergence. This perspective does not detract from the importance of dedicated technical and vocational colleges, critical for upskilling and employment in both the formal and informal sector in emerging markets.

We believe that students in the world today need a range of competencies to survive and establish their competitive edge—including leadership, entrepreneurship, critical thinking, and analytical skills, in addition to a basic foundation in technical skills and academic competence.

JJ: I think we need both. Academic universities must be developed, extended and sustained for more and more youth given the overall low participation rates of the age cohort in many African countries. But we also need post-school technical and vocational colleges for those who prefer not to choose a liberal-arts kind of university education. In all three cases (academic, technical and vocational) the numbers are low enough to not yet talk about preferences. But we know that in the postcolonial situation, technical and vocational education still carry the stigma of being for the less abled youth and this is disconcerting; that situation can be turned around through the
provision of high quality instruction and infrastructure in these non-academic disciplines, and strong connections established between career-preparation and work internships and job placements directly related to training.

SAUTI: Should African governments continue to use the same education model that in some cases has been in existence from pre-independence, such as Britain’s A-Level system? Should a new curriculum be designed that fits the African context?

CB & FS: As a continent, we are a highly creative and gifted people. In our experience with education models across the continent, we have often found that traditional educational models have stifled our talents by emphasizing rote-learning and memorization. African educational models need to encourage creativity and out-of-the-box thinking—not only to allow for multifaceted expression, but also to showcase what is cutting-edge and new in the fields of business, public policy, social enterprise, and the arts. African educational systems ought to work hard to reward creativity, because we need imagination and resourcefulness to be able to address the continent’s most pressing social problems. By adopting a spirit of critical inquiry and by rewarding creative problem-solving, Africa’s educational institutions can mold exemplary citizens and employees of the 21st century.

JJ: Many African societies and schools are deeply authoritarian and teacher-centered. You cannot change cultures of schools towards innovation and creativity when they are so deeply immersed in societies that value the opposite. It will require country-wide shifts in ideologies of governance and education for creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation to happen beyond the exceptional cases to be found everywhere.

SAUTI: What is the best way for African governments to counter the infamous brain drain of African professionals migrating to Western countries where they may earn higher salaries? What needs to change in government policy, in the educational system, and within society for the brain drain to stop?

CB & FS: The brain drain will inevitably reverse as the continent’s economic promise translates into direct opportunities of impact and relevance. However, African governments, as well as African institutions, should do their best to incentivize professionals and students to return to the continent. We believe that directed employment opportunities and a powerful network of mentors and like-minded peers would provide great channels for African professionals to return to the continent. Government or private scholarships for university study, instead of discouraging study abroad, could stipulate a return to home countries for employment after a finite period of time. We need to grow and establish networks of professionals on the continent, in order to provide role models and mentors for returning young Africans. Governments should also cut red-tape for starting new businesses and create enabling environments so that our best brains find it attractive and easy to return home as entrepreneurs.

JJ: People move in a global economy; that cannot be resisted. But many scholars leave Africa because salaries and conditions of work (libraries, laboratories, stable institutions, for example) are below par. While salaries change more slowly, strong institutional leadership can at least create more favourable conditions for teaching and research without large injections of outside funding.

SAUTI: What is the biggest challenge students coming out of your institution face? What is your institution doing to counter that challenge?

CB&FS: Our students emerge from African Leadership Academy with curiosity for the world, passion for change, and leadership skills.

This powerful toolkit notwithstanding, our students still lack adequate financial support for their next phase in life—ranging from support of their entrepreneurial ventures or assistance to attend universities of their choice. At African Leadership Academy, we are building and developing an extensive network of partnerships that will allow our students to access a diverse range of opportunities—such as internships, mentorships, and access to capital. We have recently hired a full-time team that will focus exclusively on ensuring that we are able to provide on-going mentoring and opportunities for our graduates long after they have left our institution.

JJ: The most important challenge facing our graduates in South Africa, and at the University of the Free State, is the low expectations they encounter in the workplace and in careers in a country where mediocrity is slowly becoming institutionalized. What we do is to place great emphasis on counter-cultural leadership that raises the bar for decency, democracy and work in the face of social decay and inertia in post-apartheid society.

Nina Papachristou is a sophomore majoring in International Relations and the editor of Sauti. She was a member of the inaugural class of the African Leadership Academy from 2008-2009.
Expanding Views of Africa: Rethinking African Art at the Cantor Art Center

BY KATE COWCHER

African art has formed a part of the museum collections of Stanford University since its inception. Indeed, when the Gates of Hell were just a twinkle in Auguste Rodin’s eye, the University’s founders sought objects from Egypt as the bedrock of an education-oriented museum. Of course, Egyptian art is often forgotten in the narrative of African art history, seeming to fit more comfortably amidst its antique Mediterranean brethren from Greece and Rome. In her new reinstallation of the Africa galleries at the Cantor Art Center, Dr. Barbara Thompson, the Phyllis Wattis Curator for the Arts of Africa and the Americas, has ensured that the Egyptian and Coptic treasures of the Stanford family are firmly integrated into both the long history of artistic creation in Africa and the broader context of ancient civilizations on the continent. Here, 8th century B.C. Egyptian stelae are exhibited in the same space as a terracotta Nok head from ancient Nigeria. This important, inclusive rethinking in the display of African material culture is just one aspect of Dr. Thompson’s reinstallation, appropriately titled ‘Expanding Views of Africa.’

Thompson’s expansive reconfiguration of the African art galleries is innovative in a number of ways. There is a significant emphasis on contemporary art, which, if you enter from the main lobby of the Cantor Center, will constitute your first encounter with African art in the museum. Indeed, the galleries are situated such that you begin with contemporary Africa, moving back through the nineteenth to the fifteenth centuries and into antiquity in a logical chronology. Throughout each of the three main spaces, this chronology is peppered with the recurrence of three broad conceptual themes that Thompson traces throughout, identified subtly in each gallery on the labels of various works. Works that address personal adornments, fashions, and questions of identity and social status are labeled “Fashioning the Body/Defining the Self.” “Economies and Exchanges within Africa and Beyond” identifies a range of works that deal with trade and financial transaction, from intricate gold weights from the Akan (Ghana) to contemporary representations of bustling marketplaces. The final theme, “Moments of Transformation,” embraces works that deal with notions of transition and changes of state and includes certain religious and cultural practices, particularly those that deal with the passage from life to death as in Egyptian mummification.

With this integrated scheme of chronology and theme, Thompson has achieved what so many galleries of African art fail to do, and notably in a relatively confined space. She has embraced the broad historical trajectory of the continent and tied its many cultures together with themes that address continental interaction and exchange. She does not force associations (the themes are loosely interpretive), but she does ensure that African art is not seen as a series of discrete and timeless cultural productions, created by discrete and timeless peoples. Furthermore, she has rejected the low lighting and the ‘white cube’ aesthetic common to conventional museum exhibition spaces, and striven to liberate works from the ubiquitous plastic cases that are familiar to African art displays. Thus, here, works are not to be seen as cultural ‘specimens.’ Those objects deemed particularly environmentally fragile—such as the heavily encrusted Bamana Boli figure—do warrant such protective covering, but many of the pieces are on simple

Installation in the Arts of Africa, Thomas K. Seligman Gallery 4000 BCE - 1500 CE. Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for the Visual Arts at Stanford. (Photo by Goodwin Ogbuehi)

Detail of Installation in the Arts of Africa, Thomas K. Seligman Gallery, 1500 -1950. Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for the Visual Arts at Stanford. (Photo by Goodwin Ogbuehi)

pedestals or in niches at varied heights with no barrier between the viewer and the work. Close engagement with surface, style, and decorative features is encouraged.

Standing sentry before the entrance to the contemporary gallery is a brilliantly colored mask and costume of the Bush Buffalo character from the Nunuma peoples of Burkina Faso, installed in characteristically animated fashion. Though now retired from “active duty” within this gallery context, the mask and costume are an important testament to a vibrant creative culture; this masquerade ensemble was last danced in 2008. The contemporary collection, which Thompson has put considerable effort into expanding, is notably rich and varied. It includes works from a range of esteemed African artists, from the iconic Malian photographer Seydou Keita to the celebrated South African social critic William Kentridge to the Kenyan terracotta artist Magdalene Odundo. Works by such artists as Etiye Dima Poulsen (Ethiopia) and Laila Essaydi (Morocco) demonstrate that the Cantor collection is not one restricted to West Africa, nor does it ignore the talents of women artists. The contemporary galleries also showcase important artists from the Diaspora, such as Jose Bedia (Cuba) whose collage Kalunga (Nsila Nsambi – Tukula – Ndima) (2002) speaks to the enduring connections of Cuba and Africa and recalls objects used in Kongoles as well as Vodun religious practices. Amidst such work by named contemporary artists, one also finds displays of anonymous, exquisitely rendered, Tuareg jewelry from Niger and Algeria.

The prominent display of a densely impasto canvas, Red Townscape II (2008), by Ghanaian Ablade Glover, demonstrates Thompson’s desire to challenge assumptions about both contemporary Africa and its artistic productions. The work, by an artist of critical import to the art scene of his home country, has an undeniable magnetic quality, its predominant red coloring brilliantly contrasting with the blue wall against which it hangs. Whilst Glover’s work could be compared to Western artistic movements such as Post-Impressionism or Abstract Expressionism (and in the worst critiques, as somehow derivative of these movements), it is much more important to recognize his mastery of a range of influences as a means to visually communicate the experience of urban life in modern Ghana. Certainly, Glover may draw from the European artists he encountered during his periods of studying abroad, but his work also derives inspiration from Ghanaian artistic practices, such as the weaving of complex Kente cloth and the work of other Ghanaians such as Ato Delaquis. In Thompson’s reconfigured installation, Glover’s painted depiction of lively, even frenetic urban life resonates with neighboring photographic and sculptural works by Zwelethu Mthethwa and Sokari Douglas-Camp, who, in their exposition of hardship and survival in contemporary South Africa and the Niger Delta respectively, provoke important questions about the African experience of urban modernity.

‘Expanding Views of Africa’ is designed to offer maximum accessibility to this growing collection of African material culture for the Stanford community. The inclusion of QR codes enables smartphone users to augment their gallery experience by accessing online videos or sound clips that further animate the display. A small resource area provides further reading material and a notice board displays press clippings and visitor feedback. Amidst the overwhelmingly positive responses are one or two comments about the seeming lack of space; indeed it must be asked, what will happen as these views keep expanding? Given Dr. Thompson’s collecting interest, particularly within contemporary African art (of which Stanford now boasts an important capsule collection), it is hoped that the Cantor Center will facilitate room for growth. For now, ‘Expanding Views of Africa’ should be celebrated as a unique, educative display and a critical component in the growth of interest and research at Stanford into art from the African continent.

Kate Cowcher is a PhD student in art and art history. Her research interests include art in modern and contemporary Africa, African socialism, modern and contemporary art in the African diaspora (particularly in the UK), legacies of the Cold War in African visual culture, cultural exchange between Africa and Soviet/post-Soviet Russia, African filmmaking, artist collectives and the post-colonial city. Her doctoral work focuses on the aesthetics of socialist Ethiopia.
Creative Expressions

Cultural Heritage and African Art: Negotiating the Rise of Ethical and Legal Collecting Concerns
BY MARIE LORTIE

This year’s Ruth K. Franklin Symposium on the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas at the Cantor Center for Visual Arts explored the legal and ethical concerns raised by the collection of African objects in Western institutions. The main questions animating the discussion were: should objects of African cultural heritage in Western museums be returned to their source communities and if so, how? The process of repatriating African objects to source communities has inspired vigorous debates in the fields of art history, museum studies, archeology and anthropology. At the symposium, six participants with backgrounds in art history, law and cultural heritage from the United States and Africa weighed in on the issue.

Two speakers at the symposium who argued forcefully for the return of African objects to their source communities were George Okello Abungu, Founding Director of Okello Abungu Heritage Consultants in Nairobi, Kenya and Sylvester Ogbechie, associate professor in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture at University of California Santa Barbara. Of prime importance to both speakers was the positive role objects of African cultural heritage could be playing in their source communities today. Dr. Abungu stressed that cultural heritage is a resource people turn to for personal strength, an important economic motor in our knowledge-based economy, a means of encouraging social cohesion, and a source of sacred meaning. Among these, he cast the sacred to be of utmost importance and called for the return of all sacred objects to source communities. However, he did not clearly define what constitutes a sacred object: is it strictly an object used in religious or spiritual rituals or can it be applied more broadly? He focused his argument on the Benin bronzes removed from present day Nigeria by the British in the late 19th century. From his perspective, the bronzes should be returned to the descendants of the King of Benin because their original owner, who commissioned and paid for them, as well as his descendants, are clearly identifiable. While Ogbechie’s argument was compelling, it also raised the question of what should be done when the original owner or source community for objects in Western museums cannot be pinpointed. Should these objects also be repatriated? To whom? This grey area in Ogbechie’s discussion demonstrates the ambiguities that arise in repatriation cases.

While no participants at the symposium specifically set out to defend the right of museums to the African objects in their collections, several speakers pointed to the value of maintaining such objects in Western museums. From my perspective, the most compelling argument in this context was made by Kate Fitz Gibbon, an attorney in Santa Fe, New Mexico who explored this issue with respect to our increasingly multicultural societies. She argued that while repatriation will be necessary for some objects, museums should maintain African collections in order to engage more effectively with their culturally diverse publics and to foster dialogue and understanding between people of different cultures. More broadly, she suggested that museums have a responsibility to present a vision of art and culture that goes beyond local, regional and national cultures. An audience member asked whether the same applied to museums in Africa: Do they display or aspire to display Western art and artifacts alongside their collections from the continent? The answer, it seems to me, would be yes, they also want their audiences to have access to art and artifacts from the world over. Obviously, the way in which African museums acquire Western objects today bears no comparison to the forced removal of African objects during the colonial era. Nonetheless, this question points to the fact that all museums worldwide feel a responsibility to present a global image of art and culture.

A central topic at the symposium was how repatriation cases should be negotiated. Perhaps surprisingly, there was consensus among the lawyers and legal scholars who participated in the discussion that the law does not provide the most appropriate framework for handling repatriation cases. Derek Fincham, assistant professor at the South Texas College of Law in Houston argued that this was the case because laws can perpetuate discrimination against historically marginalized communities and don’t provide enough flexibility to address the specific circumstances of each case. As a result, he suggested that repatriation requests be treated on a case-by-case basis and negotiated between institutions and source communities rather than in court. Moreover, what became clear over the course of this symposium was the extent to which repatriation cases do not have to be combative processes; rather, they can be collaborative and educational. Fincham evoked the case of the University of Aberdeen as an example. It treats repatriation cases as opportunities for exchange between source communities and their institution that can improve their understanding and appreciation of objects in their collection. Additionally, Okello Abungu suggested that opportunities for co-ownership and co-publishing between Western institutions and source communities should be explored.

While the Cantor symposium provided no clear guidelines for when and how repatriation should occur, the interdisciplinary conversation it fostered was extremely valuable. As a result, it managed to mediate and nuance more extremist views about the rights of Western institutions to the African objects in their collections. The stimulating exchange at the Cantor symposium suggests that conversations across institutional, geographical and disciplinary divides provide a promising template for further debates addressing the legal and ethical questions surrounding collections of African objects in Western institutions.

Marie Lortie is a Ph.D. student in Art History at the University of Toronto, Canada currently based in San Francisco. Her research examines contemporary art from Africa and and the diaspora and contemporary French cultural policy in the contexts of France, Europe and the Francophonie. She can be reached at marie.lortie@utoronto.ca

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Performing Osogbo: A Review of Peter Probst’s “Osogbo and the Art of Heritage”

BY MICHELLE APOTSOS

Osogbo and the Art of Heritage: Monuments, Deities, and Money is a work by Professor Peter Probst that reflects an interest that has been over two decades in the making. Focusing on the complex postcolonial and aesthetic narratives that lay at the base of the art phenomenon of the city of Osogbo, Probst engages with the past, present, and potential future of this site in terms of how it has and will continue to negotiate its dual reality as both a sacred pilgrimage site and secular tourist attraction into an increasingly globalized future.

The town of Osogbo, located in the southwestern region of Nigeria, is the historic location of the Osun Sacred Grove and the proposed abode of Osun, the Yoruba goddess of fertility; as such, the area contains great religious significance for the followers of Osun and is estimated to be around four hundred years old. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Austrian artist Suzanne Wenger and a number of local Osogbo artists and craftsmen began, with the blessing of the Osogbo palace, to aesthetically renovate the Osun Grove. Christened the ‘New Sacred Art movement,’ Wenger’s group aimed to revitalize the Grove’s spiritual space through the construction and installation of a number of new sculptural pieces and thus provide “aesthetic expression to the grave social and political changes through which the Nigerian/Yoruba society was going” (Probst, 2011: 2). This aesthetic movement revitalized not only the Grove but also the Osogbo artistic community surrounding it, so that in 1965 part of the space was declared a national monument; by 1992, the entirety of the shrine was considered ‘protected’ (UNESCO, 2005). The Osun Grove now exists as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, whose annual festival draws both Yoruba and Diaspora communities from around the world to participate in the twelve-day event.

This narrative, according to Probst, highlights the modes through which the Osun Grove has maintained two distinct “careers:” first, as a site of aesthetic and spiritual interest, and second, as the focus of both national and international heritage agendas. Over the course of an introduction, seven chapters, and a coda, Probst examines how these realities have overlapped, negotiated, and grappled with one another within Osogbo’s postcolonial context, beginning with the dark age of the early 1970s when all academically critical accounts of the space disappeared to the mid 2000s when the UNESCO heritage-making machine sailed into view. Importantly, Probst also parses the amorphous identity of the concept of heritage, positioning it as a malleable, contextually dependent phenomenon that frees itself from the Western philosophical tradition in Osogbo through its utilization as “a reservoir of identity” in both Osogbo’s colonial and postcolonial contexts (Probst, 2011: 7).

At this point, Probst addresses the methods through which art and architectural objects begin to signify on a local, national and, in the Osun Grove’s case, a global level, and also the inherent problems that lie within this situation. Particularly, Probst focuses in on the fundamental reality of heritage itself as a type of utopian trademark that problematizes concepts of authenticity, memory, and identity.

Probst’s approach to the subject of heritage and its contentious nature not only within the space of Osogbo but within the larger West African context as well, pulls from a pool of both art historical and anthropological methodologies, commiserate with Probst’s training in each field. In turn, it is almost possible to divide the volume down the middle in terms of the approaches utilized in each. Chapters one through four detail the historical and aesthetic narrative of the Osun Grove and its relationship with Osogbo, creating a classical art historical narrative that reaches its climax at the inception of the Osogbo New Sacred Art movement. This section concludes with the subsequent establishment of an Osogbo identity, solidly constructed within the postcolonial context via the ‘re-habilitation’ of the Osogbo project in the mid 2000s. Chapter five is a transitional space that outlines the various components of the annual Osun festival and specifically focuses on the annual debates that occur within the Osogbo community over the ritual effectiveness of Wenger’s structures. These perpetual discussions not only revolve around issues of authenticity and legitimacy regarding the art forms themselves, but also indirectly reference the larger reality of the festival itself as a purposeful, functioning spectacle. The Osun festival is a mode of accessing and communing with the divine; yet, it also maintains a strong secondary identity as an indirect method of exercising agency through discussion, negotiation, contestation, and debate centered around these ‘ritual objects.’ By exercising the ability to question the validity of these objects, these members are exercising control over them and, in turn, the ritual situation itself. The final chapters employ material productions and different forms of visuality as evidence towards the agendas at work in the creation of communal identity, using a decidedly anthropological tone to make the connection between cultural production and social reality. It is only at the end of this volume that Probst addresses a question that many readers may have been asking at the beginning of this account: namely, why the
The Spectacular Art

BY TANAKA MAWINDI

Note: The following is an abridged and edited version of a larger art history piece.

The popularity of art from the African continent is a relatively recent phenomenon, its validation as an art form being a gradual process hindered by the incompatibility of "African aesthetics" with Western conceptions of what art should entail. Furthermore, contrary to the ideals of pre-1940 Western art practice, African art was not observably mimetic with reality, nor was it usually just "art for art’s sake.” Rather, African art tended to be the integration of specific aesthetic sensibilities and functionality.[1] This practical nature of many African art forms led to an emphasis on observing objects’ function, and as a result, many creative productions from Africa came to be regarded as exclusively ethnographic in nature. In other words, African objects were attributed with having the sole function of aiding in the study and explanation of human culture.

For the most part, and fortunately so, such biased distinctions of African art have been largely abandoned, and one readily observes a strong African art following. Nonetheless, there are still advances to be made in this process, or rather struggle, of African art validation. And nowhere do we observe this more than in the valuation of nomadic versus sedentary arts of Africa, wherein art of nomadic people is classified as little of consequence or solely ethnographic. These distinctions are most likely vestiges of the thought processes that brought about the valuation and validation of African art in general, whereby extensive research into Western and Central African art made art from these cultural spheres assume the status of poster child for any and all “African” art. And so we turn to the case of the Fulani.

The Fulani are a semi-nomadic pastoralist people who live in the Sahel. They are a diverse people whose populations extend from the Gambia to Lake Chad, an area composed of countries such as Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad. Their history is thought to go back many thousands of years, but their predominantly cited history starts with their conversion to Islam in the 5th century A.D., making them one of the first Muslim peoples in Africa.[2] Having this distinct, early history with Islam, alongside a culture of constant travel, the Fulani did not develop a tradition of institutionalized and durable sculptural forms such as the masks and ancestral figures of the sedentary and spiritualistic West and Central African populations. Their arts are spectacular nonetheless, reflecting both their aesthetic and intellectual genius, while simultaneously functioning as a text through which one can “read” their culture.

Nomadic existence discourages the creation of large objects and permanent structures, a quality that is in turn echoed in Fulani art, which tends to be of an ephemeral, domestic, and portable nature. The influence of nomadism on the art and culture of the Fulani is further reinforced by the Sahel’s two-cycle rainy season. This means that at least two times a year, the Fulani travel long distances looking for pastures for their livestock. This culture of nomadism and dependence on cattle explains why objects that

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Michelle Apsotos is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the department of Art and Art History, working on Afro-Islamic architecture in northern Ghana. Her interest in Africa began while she was a Peace Corps volunteer in Mali and has subsequently led her to pursue an M.F.A., an M.A. in African art, and now a doctorate in African art and architecture.

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and Culture of the Nomadic Fulani

Given the nomadic and pastoral projections of Fulani life onto their art, the art of the Fulani can be separated into two categories: 1) bodily arts such as hairstyle and jewelry, and 2) household designed objects such as calabashes. Art here refers to their static art, and does not include Fulani “mobile” art forms such as song, music, and dance. Although their art belonging to the category of bodily art is often described as being solely reflective of the Fulani’s obsession with physical beauty and their own personal appearance, it too fulfills a practical and social function in the daily activities of the Fulani. Likewise, the art belonging to the category of household objects is often attributed as simply highlighting the service of the object, but it too expresses the aesthetic creativity of the Fulani. Thus, in the context of the nomadic Fulani who live a mobile lifestyle in an atmosphere of complex cross-cultural interactions, art and practicality are woven into a self-reinforcing and integrated narrative that celebrates the history and culture of the people.

The Fulani hairstyle is the quintessential example of the literal weaving of Fulani art and culture, revealing not only the value of aesthetics in Fulani culture, but also a consideration of the function of the head in their daily lives. A popular and distinctly Fulani hairstyle consists of a thick mass of hair being left to hang over the forehead, while long, stylized, pendulous braids hang down the sides and/or back of the head. This guarantees that such designs would be covered by the heavy head loads that the nomadic Fulani carry. Hair designs serve multiple aesthetic and functional purposes for Fulani women: 1) they are a projection of women’s aesthetic sensibility and ideals of beauty, 2) they provide a surface on which to balance prized calabashes and other gourd objects, and 3) they help to attract potential customers to buy the calabashes that effectively balance on top of these beautiful hair designs.

Although Fulani jewelry serves more of an aesthetic purpose, it also reflects a culture whose history is dominated by complex, inter-ethnic trade networks. When speaking of “Fulani jewelry”, this label does not necessarily denote that the Fulani manufactured the jewelry in question, but more so refers to Fulani ownership or appropriation of these objects. In the figure shown, a Fulani woman adorns herself with large gold earrings and twisted circular gold ornaments most likely purchased from and manufactured by different ethnic tribes throughout the Sahel. Irrespective of origin, it is clear that jewelry plays a crucial role in the cultivation and accentuation of physical beauty amongst the Fulani, as evidenced by their predilection for bright colors that sharply contrast with their hair and skin tone. But perhaps their enthusiasm for jewelry also serves a social function—conveying the importance of trade and wealth. Bedecked in gold, cowry shells, and silver ornaments, the Fulani are strikingly reminiscent of the Tuareg in North Africa who wear silver jewelry to reflect the importance of silver as an ancient currency. Such a deduction about the social function of Fulani jewelry is not at all difficult to fathom, considering that Tuareg, Berber, and Dogon aesthetics influenced many of the geometric designs on Fulani calabashes, designs that are usually attributed to Fulani symbolism. Altogether, the importance of jewelry in the Fulani’s lives reveals their beauty-oriented and aesthetic tastes, while also reflecting the appropriations of the aesthetic purpose for which the elaborate hair designs were constructed is not defeated by designs on the top of the head, since...
and values acquired through a nomadic lifestyle.

Apart from bodily art, the Fulani are also deeply involved in the production of household objects such as calabashes, which are said to be “the true focus of the aesthetic of the Fulani.”[6] The small, portable calabash is important in that it reflects a nomadic lifestyle, but its true magnificence lies in its encapsulation of the Fulani identity, their claim to existence—their pastoral culture. Though there are other techniques, the dominant calabash design technique is that which uses pyro-engraving to etch figural and abstract motifs onto the calabash surface, which is then given color with pigment. This focus on calabash art is unique in that of all the forms of Fulani art discussed, calabash art by itself embodies every aesthetic and functional aspect that Fulani art celebrates: from social relations and ethnic identity, to accentuation of beauty and domestic and economic subsistence. Calabash art not only accentuates the beauty of the Fulani women who carry them, but with calabashes used as “containers for food, [the artistic designs] embellish the service; used as tools in the dairy women’s trade, [the designs] attract customers.”[7] Calabashes are so highly prized that they make worthy dowry or marriage presents and parting gifts to women. Taken together, calabashes reflect the deep intellectual and aesthetic sensibility of the Fulani and serve an important social and practical function in the pastoral and nomadic lifestyle.

In summary, the Fulani place great importance in the manifestation of aesthetics, as seen from their various forms of bodily art and domestic art. This aesthetic sensibility is often deeply tied to the practical function of the object itself and in most cases evokes the cultural, historical, and social significance of the pastoral and nomadic lifestyle. Through the examination of a portion of Fulani art (confined to static art), we are able to experience a microcosm of the Fulani universe and truly appreciate both the intellectual and aesthetic sensibilities of these peoples, as well as the personal relationship they have with their art and art objects. Having completed this journey, we must then challenge those who characterize art of nomadic peoples to be of little consequence or of no artistic value, to earnestly reconsider their position. I personally dare them to behold the spectacular art and culture of the nomadic Fulani.

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Endnotes:
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
In April 2012, Islamist rebels proclaimed the republic of Azawad in northern Mali, provoking suspension by West Africa’s regional bloc, Ecowas, and condemnation by the international community. Now cut off from the outside world, the treasures of the ancient Islamic cities of the north may be inaccessible to Western eyes for years to come. In 2008, I traveled to Timbuktu and the nearby city of Djenné, both important stops on the gold, salt, and slave trading routes in the 15th and 16th centuries. These pictures offer a glimpse of the historical legacy of the Mali and Songhai empires, including mosques and relics that are still worshiped today. In early May, a group linked to al-Qaeda was said to have destroyed the Timbuktu tomb of local Muslim saint Sidi Mahmoud Ben Amar, demonstrating the critical need to preserve these icons of Mali’s fragile past.

[Right] A view of the Sankore mosque, one of Timbuktu’s three mosques, which also include Djingareyber and Sidi Yahia. Sankore Mosque hosted Timbuktu’s international university during the city’s heyday in the 16th century, which offered instruction in logic, astronomy, and history in addition to the Koran. [1] The sticks on the sides of the tower help residences rebuild the mud mosque after the rainy season each year.

[Left] The city of Timbuktu takes its name from the ancient owner of this well, a woman named Bouctou who, as the legend guides tell all the tourists goes, guarded the belongings of passing traders. “Timbuktu” means literally “the place of Bouctou,” according to my guide. Today, this well straddles the property line of a private house and Timbuktu’s National Museum.

[Right] A photoessay about Mali would be incomplete without a picture of a camel. Without these animals, capable of going without water for days, the salt traders of the 16th century would have failed to reach Timbuktu after traveling for months under the hot desert sun from the mines.
The Great Mosque of Djenné is the largest mud building in the world, both according to Wikipedia and any Malian you ask. Designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, this mosque is actually a 1907 reconstruction of the original 13th century structure built by King Koi Konboro after his conversion to Islam. [2]

It takes the whole town to rebuild the parts of the mosque which dissolve during the rainy season. During the annual festival known as Crepissage, thousands gather to reapply the mud brick using the stick scaffolds ubiquitous to all of Mali’s mosques. Meanwhile, the mosque is used for daily services and meetings of important elders in Djenné.

Endnotes:
The Importance of Film in African Studies
BY CHAD MCCLYMONDS

The past few years have seen a dramatic shift in the African film industry - not in quality or quantity, but in international acclaim. To argue that we are witnessing a cinematic breakthrough, as some have, would assume that after five decades, African filmmaking is now emerging from its adolescent stage and producing quality, creative work for the first time. That argument is wrong. Facing hurdles rarely seen elsewhere – financial, political, infrastructural – African filmmakers have produced some of the most revolutionary work in modern cinema. The largest hindrance has always been distribution. Access to African films – especially outside of the continent – has been limited, if possible at all. However, the arrival of the digital age, with its high-speed Internet and low-cost high definition equipment, has changed the cinematic landscape. We now have access to African cinema like never before, giving way to a new wave of appreciation. International distributors are providing more African content, books are being written about Nollywood, and for the first time the 2011 MTV Movie Awards included a “Best African Movie” category.

We also mustn’t forget the perverse power of Hollywood, which has convinced the world it has been making African films when it has not. If anything, Hollywood has taken Africans out of African stories. “Blood Diamond” positions Leonardo DiCaprio as the savior of Sierra Leone’s civil conflicts, and Kim Basinger, in “I Dreamed of Africa”, becomes the center of East Africa’s colonial history. In “The Last King of Scotland,” Idi Amin’s rampage was revealed to the world by the white doctor James McAvoy, not by the Tanzanian military or the countless Ugandan dissidents. Scholar and film critic Manthia Diawara has argued that African roles in Hollywood films are used to illuminate characteristics within the white characters. In other words, African roles don’t exist for their own sake, but to complement the real protagonist in the film, the white person. Kim Basinger’s loyal servants highlight her humanity, and Sierra Leonean victims challenge DiCaprio’s inner conflicts. The role of Idi Amin, as well, brings out the naivety and humanitarianism of James McAvoy.

Why have these misrepresentations proliferated for so long? For one, it helps affirm the West’s belief that they are helping a lost continent. And everyone likes being reminded how important they are. In that sense, films about Africa are representative of the development industry and development studies. White people sacrifice their comfort to save Africans; African individuals have little voice or input in decision-making; and Africa is a continent of constant war, famine, and corruption. There is also a remnant of colonial mentality. Why do we rarely see Western-made films showing love, romance, and heartbreak between Africans – like the majority of films elsewhere in the world? Colonial powers understood that a way to secure power and prevent internal dissent was to propagate an image of unaffected, emotionless Africans. Has it really changed? Indeed, there remains the question of causation. Do these Western films create the negative image of Africa, or does an existing negative image demand such films to be made? Regardless of which came first, the films undoubtedly perpetuate any existing negativity. Africa is seen not as a continent

Mahmood Mamdani, and anthropologist James Ferguson. Whether African filmmaking compliments, contradicts, or collaborates with other scholarly discourse, its voice must be equally recognized. It’s been speaking to us for five decades, we just haven’t listened.

One of the most significant contributions of African filmmakers is their “unique African perspective,” which helps counter the “stereotypical representations of Africa” made by Western filmmakers.[1] Indeed, these condescending Western films about Africa, not from Africa, have always been more popular. Here at Stanford, the screening of a patronizing documentary about Zimbabwe, made by an Australian filmmaker, will bring a huge crowd, while an award-winning Congolese film, “Viva Riva”, will attract only a handful. Many will flock to watch a documentary about Robert Kennedy in South Africa, and few will come to the South African film, “White Wedding.”

We also mustn’t forget the perverse power of Hollywood, which has convinced the world it has been making African films when it has not. If anything, Hollywood has taken Africans out of African stories. MTV Movie Awards included a “Best African Movie” category. This newfound taste for African cinema, though, has failed to contribute to African studies. Academic disciplines – from anthropology to political science to public health and history – have seen visual media as the icing-on-the-top of real intellectual discourse. However, I argue that African filmmakers illuminate truths that a Stanford public policy debate will never be able to. They reveal intimate knowledge and inaccessible stories that challenge stereotypes, confront misconceptions, and destroy fallacies. Their answers aren’t quantified or measured in GDP; their resources aren’t cited. But they give voice to aspects often overlooked, from human emotion and ambiguity to challenges in tradition and relationships.

The history of African filmmaking also illustrates psychological and ideological trends of post-independent Africa. For instance, the 1960s saw films promoting African identity and optimism, the 1970s questioned the intentions and neo-colonial habits of political elite, the 1980s witnessed a disillusion with political and economic conditions and a romanticizing of the pre-colonial past, the 1990s focused on issues of conflict, and the 2000s onward have explored identity within a globalized world.

Within African studies, the work of filmmakers Ousmane Sembene, Sarah Maldoror, and Mweze Ngangura are as equally important as that of the historian Basil Davidson, political scientist James McAvoy.
of independent voices, decisions, and accomplishments, but as a continent completely dependent on the West.

Fortunately, however, African filmmakers have stepped in and taken the lead in innovative film production and distribution. As noted earlier, the technological shift has opened up global access to thousands of films made in Africa by African filmmakers. Nigerian filmmakers have created – with nearly no government assistance – a multi-million dollar export industry that employs more Nigerians than any other industry besides agriculture.[3] The Western world is slowly beginning to notice, through film festivals, MTV awards and distribution.

Why then does African film remain neglected in academic discourse? Why is it hidden in the shadows of Western films that misrepresent and miseducate? The supply side has done their part. It is the demand side – African studies – that must realize the contribution, importance and potential for African film.◆

Chad McClymonds is a master’s student at Stanford’s Center for African Studies. He studies small state foreign policy, international organizations and the role of Africa’s global perception. He also examines the ethics of humanitarianism and the use of media as a tool for development. Chad earned his BA in International Relations from San Francisco State University. He studied at the University of Ghana, Legon, and worked with the Centre for Democratic Development in Ghana to conduct research on election-related violence in Ghana’s 2008 election. He also worked in West Africa’s film industry, broadcast television, and theatre. He argues you can’t discuss Senghor without Sembène, and Obasanjo without Adichie.

Endnotes:
[2] Ibid.

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