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**Matacong Island: A Short History
of a Small Island on the West Coast of Africa**
To be, to move, to react
Reflections on possible neo-postcolonial
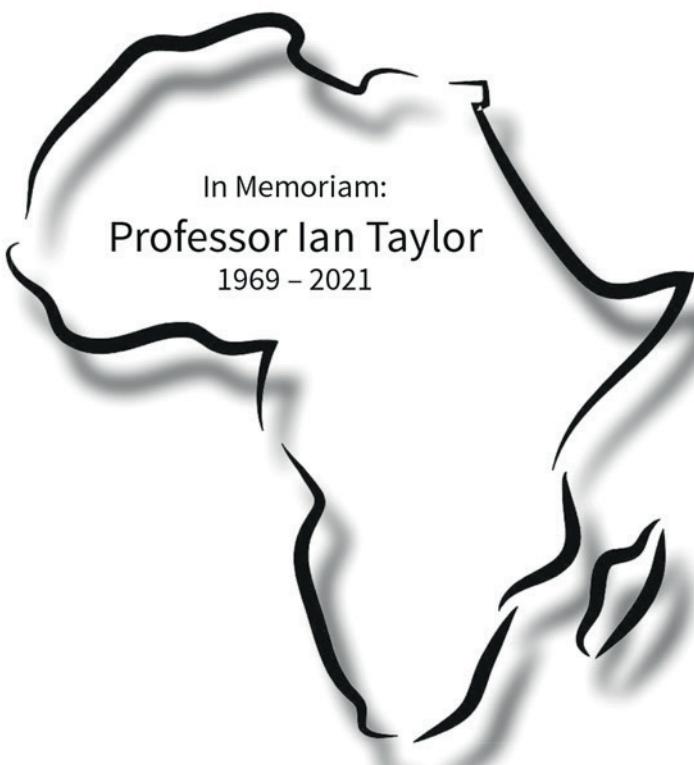readings of the African agency
**Political Legitimacy and Democracy
in Central Africa:
A Look at Cameroon, Chad,
the Central African Republic and Gabon**
Popular media and its ability to (re)form perceptions
about Africa and Blackness: Black Panther

In Memoriam:
Professor Ian Taylor
1969 – 2021

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Hungarian Journal of African Studies

The paper offers evidence of the intrinsic relationship between political legitimacy and democracy and scrutinizes the factors that provoke a crisis of political legitimacy and democracy in Central Africa. It contends that there is a need for the reconceptualization of political legitimacy and democracy in Africa as the conventional lines between democracy and totalitarianism seem to be clouding. It then concludes that despite the fact that democratic foundations in the region suffer from daunting challenges, demands for democratization continues to grow, resulting in the need to pay close attention to state legitimacy to ensure a democratic consolidation.

This reflection essay, with the help of studying Black Panther, describes how popular media form or potentially reform our perceptions about Africa and Blackness. The introduction creates a base for understanding the movie's place in public opinion and how critics have reviewed it; and raises the issues that are to be addressed. Ultimately the paper asks the question: Does Black Panther deserve to be called a milestone for Black people in cinema or is it just another form of white exploitation?

IN MEMORIAM PROFESSOR IAN TAYLOR

Genuine Academic, Witty Soul and Friend of Central and Eastern European African Studies

When we were just about to send our new English-language journal issue (Vol. 14, No. 6, 2020) to the printing house, devastating news arrived and shocked all of us... It is still incomprehensible, and very difficult to cope with. Our great scholarly supporter, a global leading authority in China–Africa relations, and a personal good friend, Professor Ian Taylor has passed away. Although we had been communicating about his illness and struggle in the past months, I simply cannot believe this finally has happened. We were planning so many things for the coming years, including yet many more returns to Pécs, a place he had always enjoyed to the fullest, a jointly edited book, the upcoming conferences on African Studies at the University of Pécs, with the African Studies Association, and of course, ECAS – each of these events offering great opportunities for reunion and more discussions over numerous academic and personal matters.

We first met in June 2009, at the 3ʳᵈ European Conference on African Studies (ECAS) in Leipzig, Germany. We sat on the panel *"Beijing Consensus" versus "Post-Washington Consensus"? China's Impact on Africa's socio-economic spaces* and enjoyed a very vivid discussion with other panellists and colleagues – then, obviously, continued it in other forms, even on the train to the airport. Ian was always keen on exchanging views also about the bipolar world, and he was very interested in Sovietized Hungary's policy towards Africa. Many years later he introduced me to a good colleague of his, Dr. Gavin Bowd who edited a thematic issue for the journal Twentieth Century Communism (Vol. 15, 2018) in which both of us published a paper – Ian wrote about "Mao Zedong's China and Africa". Leipzig boosted his interest in Central and Eastern Europe, which he had followed with special care already for some time. We, then, agreed that he would visit us one day in Pécs. And he did! Many times, returning with great enthusiasm and advocating Hungarian, Polish and Czech scholarship in African Studies.

After we initiated the Pécs Conference on African Studies in 2010 – the year when the city was European Capital of Culture and South Africa hosted the Football World Cup –, I approached Ian and could easily convince that he accepts our invitation to be one of the two keynote speakers of our 2012 conference. Together with Professor Goran Hyden they were forming a fantastic pair as they were addressing the issue of the new, or second scramble for Africa. Ian underscored that "old and new actors such as China, Brazil, India, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea etc. are aggressively competing and seeking access across the continent. It is not a re-play of the 19ᵗʰ century, but Africa's resources are being increasingly exploited by competing international actors all with the active complicity of African actors. Where this will place Africa in the Twenty-first Century is of foremost importance to the continent." He kept returning to Pécs, in particular, after he had been introduced to

the fine products of the first brewery of the country and the famous wines of the Villány wine region. One of the most important 'missions' for him, as he told me the other day, was to help us position Central and Eastern European African Studies in a wider global context and to reach out to young scholars and students to converse with them, encouraging them to engage themselves in debates. We will always remain grateful for his support and all-time enlightening presence with his scholarly wit and enchanting humour.

Ian was never lazy or sluggish to introduce his colleagues, academic contacts, or to say a couple of nice words to some important scientists, diplomats, top university managers to support others' efforts to get a boost in their research project, publication, or assignment as student. We frequently spent sufficient time at the annual African Studies Association (ASA) events to plan joint projects involving our students. The peak of this was realized in the spring of 2015 when a mixed group of MA students from the University of St. Andrews where he was a highly respected Professor of International Relations and PhD students from the University of Pécs, led by his former colleague, Dr. Hazel Cameron, carried out a field trip in Rwanda. Ian was never exhausted to explain to the students the complexities of the 1994 genocide and the geopolitics of the macro region.

He was a genuinely warm-hearted and open-minded person, who gladly invited our family to his home on our way back from Florida to Hungary. I will never forget when we arrived at their house in St. Monans on an evening hour early April 2014, and after having realized that we had over 14 suitcases for the forthcoming almost two weeks, he just sighed: "OMG, the Hungarians have invaded us." During those mesmerising days in Scotland we certainly became closer friends, which I will value forever!

The entire China–Africa research community feels the pain and mourns as Ian Taylor has passed away. All the people who knew him, I am sure, will always remember his critical approach to African politics and the international relations of African countries. His seminal works, including *China and Africa. Engagement and Compromise* (2006, Routledge), *China's New Role in Africa* (2009, Lynne Rienner), *The International Relations of Sub-Saharan Africa* (2010, Continuum), *Africa Rising?: BRICS – Diversifying Dependency* (2014, James Currey), or *African Politics. A Very Short Introduction* (2018, Oxford University Press) will stay with us and the upcoming generations of researchers, demonstrating also a humble and diligent, as well as innovative and well-versed scholarly attitude that is omnipresent in all his works.

On behalf of the Editorial Committee of the Hungarian Journal of African Studies, I would like to dedicate our present issue to our wonderful colleague and friend, Professor Ian Taylor, who will be deeply missed, but forever remain in our hearts and minds! May his soul rest in peace!

István Tarrósy
Editor of HJAS

Ian Christopher Taylor

Professor of International Relations
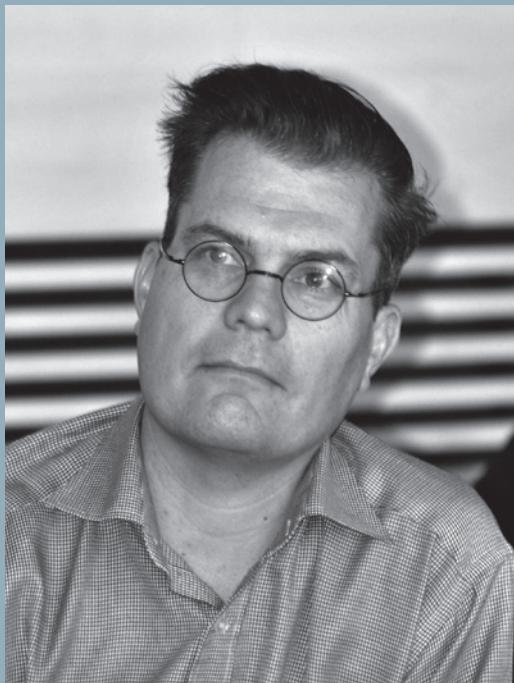
9 January 1969 – 22 February 2021

Earlier in February 2021, Ian was awarded a D.Litt. by the University of St Andrews. This was in recognition of his lifetime's academic achievements, based on a portfolio of his published works.

He was a Professor in International Relations and African Political Economy in the School of International Relations, University of St. Andrews and Chair Professor in the School of International Studies, Renmin University of China in Beijing.

He was also Professor Extraordinary in Political Science at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, a visiting professor at the University of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and an Honorary Professor in the Institute of African Studies, Zhejiang Normal University, China.

He considered himself lucky enough to have been invited to present his research in 55 different countries, ranging from Estonia to New Zealand, North Korea to Argentina.

He was serving joint editor of the Journal of Modern African Studies.

His h-index was 48 and his work has been cited by others over 9,500 times.

Before entering academia, he worked for the UNHCR in Hong Kong on the Vietnamese "Boat People" issue.

He earned a DPhil from the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa and an MPhil from the University of Hong Kong. He also hold a teaching certificate from the International Language Institute, Cairo, Egypt and a certificate in Theology from the University of the Highlands and Islands.

Prior to joining St Andrews, he taught African politics and development in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies at the University of Botswana for four years.

He also taught courses at Ben-Gurion University (Israel); University of Edinburgh; University of Addis Ababa (Ethiopia); Dalhousie University (Canada); University of Hong Kong; Mbarara University (Uganda); Renmin University (China); and Zhejiang Normal University (China).

Ian visited 44 African countries (plus Réunion) and was well-travelled in Europe, Asia, and North America.

His work has been translated into Afrikaans, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish.

Source: https://www.iantaylor.info

MATACONG ISLAND: A SHORT HISTORY OF A SMALL ISLAND ON THE WEST COAST OF AFRICA

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Abstract

This article aims to examine how Matacong Island, a small island just off the coast of the Republic of Guinea, West Africa, was claimed its possession by local chiefs, how it was leased to and was used by European and Sierra Leonean merchants, and how it was colonized by Britain and France in the 19th century. In 1825 the paramount chief of Moriah chiefdom agreed to lease the island to two Sierra Leonean merchants, and in 1826 it was ceded to Britain by a treaty with chiefs of the Sumbuyah and Moriah chiefdoms. Since the island was considered as a territory exempted from duty, British and Sierra Leonean merchants used it as an important trading station throughout the 19th century. Major exports of Matacong Island included palm kernels, palm oil, hides, ivory, pepper and groundnuts, originally brought by local traders from the neighboring rivers, and major imports were tobacco, beads, guns, gunpowder, rum, cotton manufactures, iron bars and hardware of various kinds. In 1853 alone, some 80 vessels, under British, American, and French flags, anchored at Matacong Island. By the convention of 1882, Britain recognized the island as belonging to France. Although the convention was never ratified, it was treated by both countries as accepted terms of agreement. The article considers various dynamics of usage, property, and territorial possession as relates to the island during the 19th century, and reveals how complex they were, widely making use of the documents of *The Matacong Island (West Africa) Papers* at the University of Birmingham Library in Britain. The collection purchased by the library in 1969 is composed of 265 historical documents relating to Matacong Island, such as letters, agreements, newspaper-cuttings, maps and water-color picture.

1. Introduction

Just off the coast of Forécariah Prefecture, in the Republic of Guinea, lies the small island of Matacong (*Île Matakong*). I first became interested in this island in 1993. At the time, I was studying for my master's degree at the Centre for West African Studies, which was attached to the University of Birmingham, England. One day, when I was searching the university library's archives, I discovered that they contained a collection titled *The Matacong Island (West Africa) Papers* (hereinafter referred to as "MIP"). The MIP were originally acquired by the library in December 1969 and were composed of 265 historical documents primarily from the 19th century, relating to Matacong Island in West Africa. I had never come across the name "Matacong Island" before. Although I would go on to develop an interest in the MIP, at that point I was unable to set aside enough time to examine these documents closely. Without pursuing the matter further, I ended my period of study in the fall of 1993 and temporarily returned home to Japan. However, in January of the following year, I was once more able to visit Birmingham, this time to carry out an investigation of the MIP. I made the trip to the library daily, looking over each individual historical document within the MIP and transcribing its details in my notes. Although I had started out entirely unaware of Matacong, I gradually came to understand something about this island as I proceeded with this arduous work: it had actually served an important function in the 19th century, during the colonial partitioning of West Africa by the British and the French.

In this article, I will use the MIP documents for the purpose of clarifying the history of Matacong Island in the 19th century. This was a time when the term "West Coast of Africa" was more commonly used than the term "West Africa." I will also seek to shed light upon various dynamics of usage, property, and territorial possession as relates to the island during that period.

Accounts of Matacong Island in the 19th century can occasionally be found in documents relating to the national histories of Sierra Leone or Guinea, or the history of the colonial division of West Africa by Britain and France. However, the volume of information in such sources is quite limited. It should be kept in mind, therefore, that the picture I provide in this article of 19th-century Matacong Island is only a so-called *bricolage*, a re-construction of relevant fragments that I have gathered from multiple different sources. Nevertheless, we can address many questions through securing a micro-level perspective on the discrete, concrete location that is Matacong Island. For example, how did merchants use the island? How did local chiefs assert their possession of it? And how did Britain and France colonize it? Although our focus is one specific island, such a study can actually serve to deepen our understanding of the broader topic of West African society in the 19th century. That is the goal of the present essay.

Thus, before we begin our examination of 19th-century Matacong Island, let us first undertake a general survey of the West Coast of Africa. In particular, we are concerned with the region that English speakers in the 19th century referred to as the "Northern Rivers" but that today is more or less the coastal region of Guinea.

2. A Geographical Overview of the Northern Rivers in the Early 19th Century

2.1 The Advance of European Merchants

The so-called "Northern Rivers" region of the 19th century is a river basin that extends across practically the entire coast of Guinea. It extends from Nunez River in the north to the Melakori (Mellacourie, Mellacorée, Mélikhouré) River and Little Scarcies River in the south (see Map 1). The region gained its name from the fact that it was further north along the same coastline as the Settled Colony of Sierra Leone, which was established by British settlers in 1787. By comparison, from the perspective of Senegal, France's base for expansion into West Africa, this same region was located to the south. It was for this reason that French speakers referred to it as *les Rivières du Sud*.

As the name indicates, the Northern Rivers (or *les Rivières du Sud*) is geographically characterized by a series of rivers. These rivers run more or less in parallel from the Fouta Djallon Highlands and surrounding hilly country in the northeast, down to the Atlantic Ocean coastline in the southwest. From the 15th century on, European merchants visited this stretch of coast, developing trade contacts with the local Africans. These rivers became important routes through which trade goods from Europe (such as firearms, gunpowder, tobacco, iron bars, cotton fabric, metal products, beads, etc.) could be brought to the interior of the continent, and local goods (gold, cola nuts, ivory, slaves, etc.) could be brought to the coast for export. Captain John Matthews of the British Royal Navy, who resided in Sierra Leone from 1785 to 1787, has provided the following description of the trading that took place in the Northern Rivers region at that time:

> When the adventurer arrives upon the coast with a suitable cargo—which for this place consists of European and Indian cotton and linen goods, silk handkerchiefs, taffities, coarse blue and red woollen cloths, scarlet cloth in grain, coarse and fine hats, worsted caps, guns, powder, shot, sabres, lead bars, iron bars, pewter basons [sic], copper kettles and pans, iron pots, hardware of various kinds, earthen and glass ware, hair and gilt leather trunks, beads of various kinds, silver and gold rings and ornaments, paper, coarse and fine check, and linen ruffled shirts and caps, British and foreign spirits and tobacco—he dispatches his boats properly equipped to the different rivers. On their arrival at the place of trade they immediately apply to the head man of the town, inform him of their business, and request his protection; desiring he will either be himself their landlord, or appoint a respectable person, who becomes security for the person and goods of the stranger, and also for the recovery of all money lent, provided it is done with his knowledge and approbation. This business finished, and proper presents made, (for nothing is done without) they proceed to trade either by lending their goods to the natives, who carry them up into the country, or by waiting till trade is brought to them.—The former is the most expeditious way, when they fall into good hands; but the latter is always the safest (Matthews, 1788[1966]: 142–143).

As we can see in the above description, European merchants who sailed to the Northern Rivers region in the second half of the 18th century would frequently split up the goods they brought from Europe amongst a number of canoes or boats. These various vessels would be sent along multiple rivers, with trade carried out at settlements along the banks. The rivers served as routes for the transmission and conveyance of people, things, and information, while also performing an important role as a stage for trade activities. That being said, the Northern Rivers have a complex way of intersecting with a coastline that is also broadly covered by mangrove forests and swamps. This made passage using vessels quite difficult for Europeans, such that trade in the region was not necessarily an attractive prospect. It is for this
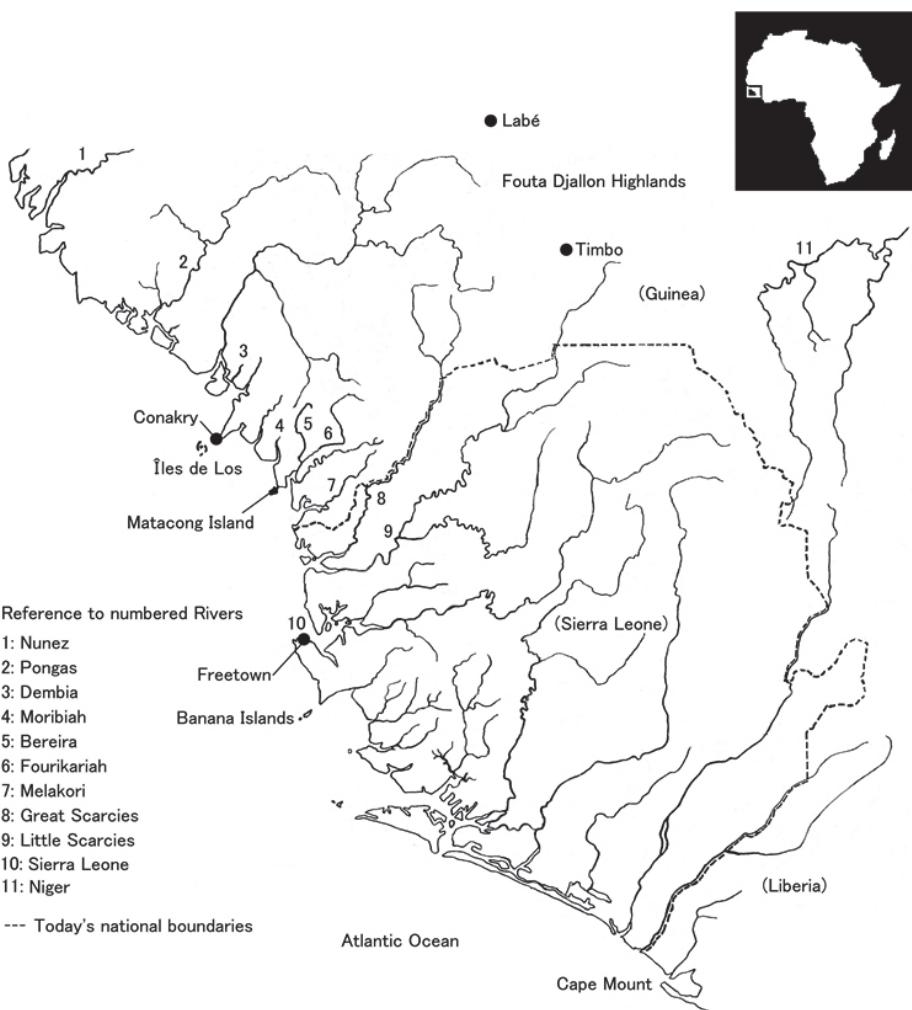
Map 1: The Northern Rivers and Sierra Leone. Source: Fyfe (1962).

reason that the conduct of trade via the Northern Rivers remained on a relatively small scale until at least the mid-18th century. It was conducted by a fairly limited number of individuals, primarily the Portuguese and their descendants.

As it happens, there is a theory that the first Europeans to voyage to the West Coast of Africa (including the Northern Rivers) and trade with the African population were French merchants who arrived in 1364 at Cape Verde (this cape is the westernmost point of the African continent and the site of Dakar, present-day capital of the Republic of Senegal) (Ogawa, 2002: 3–4). However, from a broader perspective, we can conclude that mariners and merchants of the maritime empire of Portugal were the first to expand into the West Coast of Africa and establish a serious trade presence. Portugal was well situated for vigorous overseas expansion during the so-called "Age of Discovery" that began in the 15th century. To begin with, it benefitted from its advantageous geographical position; namely, it faces the Atlantic Ocean, which links the three continents of Europe, Africa, and America. It should be further noted that Portugal centralized power under royal authority before other European nations did. The Portuguese had rounded Cape Verde by approximately the mid-1440s and by the 1470s had gone beyond the coast of Guinea and proceeded as far as present-day Gabon. Later, in 1482, they would construct a fort at Elmina, on the coast of what is now Ghana, in order to secure the profits they were making through trade in gold, ivory, and other goods.

Portuguese merchants and mariners who voyaged to the West Coast of Africa at that time included those who were fleeing persecution or punishment, such as Jewish people and fugitive criminals (Donelha, 1977: 239). Before long, some of these individuals would come to permanently reside on the African coast. These individuals who had left Portuguese society for the West Coast of Africa were known as *lançados* (literally, *the thrown-out ones*). Some of the men amongst them would take African wives and concubines, leading to the emergence of a mixed-race class. From the 15th century onwards, these children with European names and African mothers, who were frequently of Catholic faith, would play an important role in the trade that took place in the Northern Rivers (Newitt, 2010).

As we saw above in the description by Captain Matthews, when European merchants visited this region to conduct trade, the customary first step was to consult with the local chiefs. It was necessary to have the chiefs or other influential figures act as their protectors. The African protectors would grant European merchants the use of land that they could reside upon or use for trading purposes and would guarantee the safety of their lives and goods. In exchange, they received various forms of reward from the Europeans, including rent, taxes, commissions, and so forth. The descendants of the *lançados*, who were familiar with the trade goods and languages of both the Europeans and the Africans, became active intermediaries between the two.

From the end of the 16th century, Holland, England/Britain, and France began to advance into the coastal regions of West Africa. Rivalry intensified between Western nations over coastal trade. As a result of this rivalry, Portugal would lose many of its trading posts on the West Coast of Africa during the 17th century, its

regional influence entering a period of continuous decline. Yet the *lançados* were so-called outcasts of Portuguese society to begin with, and their descendants were also frequently looked down upon by the Portuguese. As the situation changed on the ground, these descendants were able to respond in a nimble manner, engaging in trade with non-Portuguese merchants. In the Northern Rivers region, at least, it is thought that they continued to trade until the rise to dominance of British merchants in the middle of the 18th century or later.

From the mid-18th century, trade activity expanded broadly across the Northern Rivers, conducted primarily by the British. In 1791, the Sierra Leone Company was established as a chartered company in control of the Colony of Sierra Leone. The company was instrumental in furthering trade activity in the region, viewing the Northern Rivers as an important region for securing food supplies for Sierra Leone, as well as a promising route for trading with Fouta Djallon. In 1795, it would build its own factory in the Pongas (Pongos, Pongo) valley and employ as its agents European merchants who were active in the basin between the Nunez River and the Mela-kori River. The Sierra Leone Company would pull out of the region in 1802, partly because of the conflict between Britain and France, as well as because of its distaste for the slave trade conducted in Northern Rivers. Stepping in to fill the gap were those white merchants who were already present, along with the Creoles of Sierra Leone, who acted as small-scale merchants and as employees for British merchants.

What about Matacong Island? Located within the Northern Rivers region, Matacong Island is situated off the tip of a peninsula covered in mangroves and sandwiched between a number of river mouths. On one side is the estuary of the Moribiah (Moribaya, Morébaya) River, and on the other side is the estuary of the rivers Bereira (Bereire, Beriera, Berie Erie, Berrie Erie) and Fouricariah (Forecariah, Forekaria, Kise Kise, Kissey). Documents within the MIP state that Matacong Island is 22 miles (approx. 35 kilometers) to the southeast of Îles de Los (which in turn are located off the coast of Guinea's present-day capital of Conakry).[1] When a special correspondent for *The Illustrated London News* visited Matacong Island in 1854, he reported that it was located 42 miles (approx. 67 kilometers) to the northwest of Freetown, the current capital of the Republic of Sierra Leone.[2] Although the origin of the name "Matacong" is not certain, according to one theory, it dates back to when visiting Portuguese hid wealth upon the island, referring to it as their "hiding-place."[3]

In 1802, British Captain Richard Bright was dispatched to the Northern Rivers to demand that rebels fighting against the Colony of Sierra Leone be handed over. In a journal entry on September 29th of that same year, he described the landscape of Matacong Island in the following manner: "Matacong [Matakong], gently sloping from the water's edge, has a pleasant and fertile aspect. It appears to be an intermixture of Grass and wood-land. It abounds in wild hogs and has a spring of excellent water." (Bright, 1979: 32).

It is not entirely clear what kind of role Matacong Island played in coastal trade before the 18th century. What we can say is that historical documents dating back to before the 18th century do not give any indications that European merchants were

engaged in significant trade on the island. Yet, once we reach the early 19th century, we can observe a gradual change in the situation. Although we do not possess detailed information, by the time the above-mentioned Captain Bright sailed by Matacong Island in 1802, a British merchant by the name of R. Simmons was already residing there (Smith, 1979: 134–135).

2.2 Ethnic Groups and Chiefdoms

The peoples believed to have lived in the Northern Rivers from the earliest of times are the ethnic groups that speak the so-called Atlantic (formerly "West Atlantic") languages, a subgroup of the Niger-Congo language family of Africa. It is thought that it was the speakers of these Atlantic languages whom the Portuguese mariners referred to as "Sapes" (Sapi, Çapes, Çapeos). The Sapes were not originally from the Atlantic Ocean coast but dwelled primarily in regions such as Labé and Timbo, in the present-day Fouta Djallon Highlands (see Map 1). However, in the 13th and 14th centuries, they began to be pushed from the interior to the Atlantic Ocean coast, as a result of pressure from the movement of groups speaking the Mande languages of the Niger-Congo language family. It is thought that until at least the 14th century, the Baga people of the Sapes resided to the north of present-day Conakry, in a region that stretched from the interior to the coast. Their presence was confirmed by Portuguese mariners who visited this region in the 16th century (Nelson et al., 1975: 62–65). Another two ethnic groups belonging to the Atlantic languages were the Nalou, who resided by the mouth of the Nunez River, and the Landouma (Landoma), who resided further upriver. It is believed that both groups remained within these areas until at least the 16th century. Amongst the Atlantic languages, the Bullom people in particular (who belonged to the language group known as the "Mel languages") were by the 14th century already residing in an area between the southern part of Guinea and the coastal region of Sierra Leone. The Temne people of the same Mel languages group are believed to have arrived in the northwestern part of present-day Sierra Leone around 1500.

Meanwhile, the Susu people (Soussou, Sosso, Soso, Suzeés), who belong to the Mande languages group, are the largest ethnic group in present-day coastal Guinea. They speak a language that is similar to that of the minority ethnic group known as the Yalunka (Dialonke, Djallonke, Jalonke, Jalunka), who reside in Central Guinea. It is believed that this similarity indicates that the Susu and the Yalunka once split off from the same subgroup of the Mande languages, whose speakers lived in Fouta Djallon. The proposed cause of this split is the movement of the Fula people (Fulani, Fulbe, Peul) down from Fouta Toro (present-day northern Senegal) in the north. Another possibility is that rather than a split, the impetus provided by the Fula exacerbated slight differences that already existed. It seems likely that the Susu moved to the Atlantic coast from the Fouta Djallon Highlands to flee the pressure and dominance of the northern Fula. Meanwhile, the Yalunka, who belonged to practically the same original group, instead remained in the highlands and became subordinate to the Fula. The Susu would proceed to absorb other ethnic groups during the course of

their migration, while also continuously clashing with the various groups belonging to speakers of the Atlantic languages who already lived in the region. As a result, by no later than the 18th century, they had come to inhabit a broad region of coastline, stretching from the northern bank of the Pongas River in the north to the vicinity of the Great Scarcies River in the south.

Map 2: Chiefdoms in the Matacong Island Region. Source: Mouser (1979: 17).

The origins of the Fula, meanwhile, who occupy the hinterlands of the Northern Rivers, are not entirely certain. However, their language belongs to the Northern group of the Atlantic languages. Starting out from Fouta Toro, the Fula began to migrate from around the 11th century. They reached present-day Northern Nigeria by the 17th century, Cameroon by the 18th century, and Sudan by the 20th century. Over a span of one thousand years, the Fula have expanded across a truly vast area of West Africa. In the case of the Fouta Djallon Highlands, it is thought that they began to arrive by the 15th and 16th centuries at the latest, after which they continued to flow into the region intermittently. The Fula who first arrived at Fouta Djallon were not yet Muslims. Yet, by the 17th century, the Fula who moved into the region, and into Timbo in particular, included many Muslim merchants and Islamic teachers. Initially, the Fula co-existed with the Susu and Yalunka, or with their parent group. That said, they also frequently came into conflict with them on matters such as land usage. This was the state of affairs when, in the 1720s, the Fula chiefs assembled at Timbo and granted the title of "Almamy" (Islamic instructor) to the Fula known as Alfa Karamoko (Musa Ibrahim, Alfa Ibrahim Sembegu). Following the bestowal of this title, Alfa Karamoko announced a jihad, subordinating surrounding ethnic groups one by one, and constructed an Islamic state. Despite periods of internal strife, the Islamic state at Fouta Djallon persisted until 1896, when it came under the effective control of France. It played an important role as a site of Islamic education and long-distance trade (Clarke, 1982: 84–85). The state expanded its sphere of influence as far as the Northern Rivers, with successive Almamy receiving tribute in exchange for granting their protection over various chiefs of the Atlantic Ocean coast or for acting as mediators in disputes (Suret-Canale, 1970: 82).

What can we say about the political situation of the Northern Rivers, and the Matacong Island region in particular, in the early 19th century? Map 2 illustrates the political divisions of the 19th-century Matacong Island region. As noted above, the Matacong Island region was originally the home of peoples of the Atlantic languages subgroup such as the Bullom. However, in due course, the Susu people of the Mande languages group moved into the region from the Fouta Djallon Highlands because of pressure from the Fula. As a result, in the early 19th century, the coastal region facing Matacong Island comprised a complex mixture of chiefdoms, with the Susu and Bullom peoples forming the core.

First, in the northern region of the coast by Matacong Island, the Sumbuyah Chiefdom was established by a subgroup of the Susus known as the "Sumbuyah." Thomas George Lawson, who held the post of interpreter for the Sierra Leone colonial government in the second half of the 19th century, gave a contemporary description of the Sumbuyah. In a document he prepared on July 14, 1875, Lawson refers to the Sumbuyah as a "mixture of people." It would seem that the Sumbuyah or Sumbuyah-Susu developed through the Susu mixing with other ethnic groups, such as the Bullom (cited in Skinner, 1980: 87). The capital of the Sumbuyah Chiefdom was located in Wankafong (Wonkapong).

To the south of the Sumbuyah Chiefdom was another chiefdom that controlled the towns of Bereira, Fourikariah, and Maligia. This was the Chiefdom of Moriah (Kissi Kissi, Moribia), whose population primarily spoke Mandingo, a subgroup of the Mande languages. The capital of the Moriah Chiefdom was located in Fourikariah. Islam had also made significant inroads within Moriah. Another important point with respect to Moriah was its geographical location: it was situated along a long-distance trade route between the interior of the continent and the coastline, which was referred to as the "Fouta Scarcies Corridor." The towns of Fourikariah and Maligia, in particular, flourished as stopping points along this trade route. Yet, conversely, because of its stake in regional trade, the Moriah Chiefdom was continuously wracked by internal trouble between different chiefs. In the 19th century, this domestic strife would frequently develop into conflicts that involved neighboring chiefdoms.

Further south again, below the Moriah Chiefdom and south of the Melakori River in particular, was a chiefdom called the Samo (Samu, Samoo). The Samo Chiefdom was created by a number of ethnic groups, including the Bullom, and was split into northern and southern regions. The northern region was known as "Moricania" and had been mainly Islamified. By contrast, the people of the southern region were predominantly non-Muslim.

The earliest group to permanently settle on Matacong Island was a Bullom group or a group closely related to the Bullom. They would later come to be referred to as the Samo Bullom.[4] In a journal entry by the previously mentioned British Captain Bright (dated October 27, 1802), we find the following comments about this group:

> Finda Moodoo [Fendan Modu], I am informed, claims a right to Matacong [Matakong] by purchase, having bought it of Mauricanou [Mori Kanu] and the Bullom people. He has not however taken possession of it as yet, and it still remains in the hands of the latter (Bright, 1979: 96).

If we put aside the question of the veracity of the Sumbuyah-Susu chief Fendan Modu's claim that he had purchased Matacong Island, this document does tell us something concrete, namely, that by 1802 at the latest, a Bullom group (or the Bullom along with other ethnic groups that spoke Atlantic languages such as the Temne) was able to claim traditional possession or settlement of the island (Skinner, 1980: 120–121). Incidentally, as I shall outline further below, by the 1820s, ownership of Matacong Island would be contested by chiefs from groups speaking Mande languages, such as the Sumbuyah and the Moriah.

2.3 The Colony of Sierra Leone

The present-day Freetown Peninsula and its vicinity were named *Serra Leoa* (*Lioness Mountains*) by Portuguese mariners who visited in the middle of the 15th century. However, until at least the early 16th century, the place name of *Serra Leoa* meant not only the peninsula; it was also widely used to refer to an extensive stretch of coast-

line, from the Îles de Los to Cape Mount within present-day Liberia (Donelha, 1977: 239). It is from the perspective of this second meaning that Portuguese mariners and merchants at that time considered Matacong Island to be little more than a "small island in *Serra Leoa*."

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to come to *Serra Leoa* and engage in trade. They were also the first to carry out Christian missionary work, albeit to a limited extent. However, the British would go on to establish the initial settlement on this coastline that went by the name of *Sierra Leone*.

While still extremely small in scale, an African community began to take shape within London at the end of the 18th century. Some members of this community had been brought to England from Africa or the colonies as slaves, to serve as domestic workers, and had gone on to become free citizens. Some were ex-slaves who had arrived via British Nova Scotia (present-day southeastern Canada), having been granted freedom in exchange for serving under the British in the American War of Independence. Yet others were ex-mariners from the West Coast of Africa, who had once served on trade ships that plied the African routes but had now settled in Britain. However, the majority of these people with African backgrounds belonged to the underclass of British society. What is more, as they were not even eligible for aid under the so-called "Poor Laws," many individuals lived lives of extreme deprivation.

In response to this situation, British philanthropists and politicians who were strongly committed to the abolition of slavery and the slave trade moved to assist those of African backgrounds who were impoverished. They established a committee to support destitute African diaspora members, gathered donations, and engaged in actions such as the distribution of food. However, before long, these individuals concluded that such actions alone were insufficient for a fundamental resolution of the problem. They began to search for suitable land in the broader Atlantic where the Black Poor in England could be resettled. It was then that their attention was drawn to a proposal by an amateur botanist named Henry Smeathman. In 1771, Smeathman had visited the Banana Islands (now part of Sierra Leone) to collect new plant species. Later, he had spent several years living in the same region. After returning to England, he suggested that the region of the Sierra Leone River would be suitable land for the resettlement of the Black Poor. The committee was initially quite wary of this proposal, yet it ultimately agreed to move ahead with a plan to induce people of African background to resettle. In April 1787, it secured the support of the British government and was able to place 411 individuals (including members of the African diaspora, European women, carpenters, and mariners) on a ship departing for Sierra Leone from the port of Plymouth in southwest England (Fyfe, 1962: 13–19).

An abolitionist named Granville Sharp played a guiding role in helping to advance the resettlement plan. It was Sharp who gave the new colony of resettled African diaspora, established near the Sierra Leone River, the name "Province of Freedom." It was his hope that this colony would be an idyllic place, unpoisoned by the money-worship of Western civilization, where African colonists would have the

chance to create their own autonomous community. When the settlers themselves arrived at Sierra Leone in May 1787, receiving permission from the Temne chief to use land near their point of arrival, they named their new settlement "Granville Town," in honor of Sharp.

The colonists had set out for their new lives with a turbulent mixture of both hope and trepidation. Yet what was waiting for them on the continent was a life that was far more cruel and wretched than they could have imagined. In fact, their travails actually preceded their reaching land, with one in five colonists perishing over the course of the month-long voyage from Plymouth. Unfortunately, the time of their arrival in Sierra Leone also overlapped with the rainy season, such that over the following four months, almost as many colonists again died from infectious diseases such as malaria or dysentery. As the colonists were initially unable to harvest grains, the food reserves that they had brought with them soon ran low, forcing them to trade what belongings they had with the local peoples in order to secure food. After Sharp and the other committee members learned of the terrible conditions the colonists faced, they dispatched a further 39 (predominantly white) colonists to Sierra Leone to lend assistance. This new group departed in June 1788. However, this effort was also entirely inadequate. Eventually, in December 1789, Granville Town was completely destroyed as a result of an attack by the local chiefs, who had come into conflict with the colonists.

In the above manner, this early attempt at colonizing the area met with failure. Yet the abolitionists were not dissuaded. In 1790, they established the St. George's Bay Company, for the purposes of re-establishing a colony. Then, as previously noted, in the following year, they received permission from the British government and founded the Sierra Leone Company. In 1791, this company would dispatch an agent to construct a new Granville Town in a different location from the first. Later, in January 1792, it succeeded in securing more colonists for this new attempt. One thousand one hundred and ninety African ex-slaves from the United States, along with their families, were shipped to Sierra Leone from their place of settlement in Nova Scotia. After their arrival in Sierra Leone, the town constructed by these primarily Nova Scotian colonists became known as Freetown. A further 500 or so ex-slaves known as "Maroons," who had fled from plantations in Jamaica, were

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also later shipped to Sierra Leone in August 1800. In 1807, a law banning the slave trade was passed in the British Parliament, and the British Navy began to seize slave ships on the West Coast of Africa. Following this development, Sierra Leone was transformed into a base for dropping off slaves who had been freed from slave ships, referred to as "recaptives" (or as the "re-captured," or "Captured Negroes"). As a result, a large number of ex-slaves began to flow into the settlement. The recaptives would form a number of villages and towns in the vicinity of Freetown, on the basis of their original ethnic origins.

And so it came to pass that the Sierra Leone Settlement expanded with several waves of new colonists, with the bulk of the population composed of four main groups: (1) the initial colonists from England (1787); (2) the Nova Scotians from North America (1792); (3) the Maroons from Jamaica (1800); and (4) the recaptives, who were from various parts of the West Coast of Africa (from 1807 onward). These four groups differed significantly with respect to cultural background and political consciousness, and there was often friction between them. However, by around the 1870s, each group had effectively transitioned from its first generation to its second, and these differences began to fade somewhat. It was then that a Creole identity and culture unique to Sierra Leone began to take shape, born of a fusion of peoples from various parts of the West Coast of Africa, Europe, America, and the islands of the West Indies.[5]

Meanwhile, it was not long before the Sierra Leone Company, which managed the settlement, ran into financial difficulties. On January 1, 1808, Sierra Leone would become a Crown Colony of the British government.

3. Various Rights Relating to Matacong Island and the Moriah Conflict: 1802–1826

In 1802, a leader known as Amura (Amara), from the Touré (Tura) family, was selected by the chiefs of the Moriah Chiefdom as the paramount chief. However, Amura would go on to order caravans from the interior of the continent to conduct their trade at Fourikariah. He even went further in forbidding them entrance to the coastal region. This special treatment given to the Fourikariah region generated a strong backlash within coastal society. In response, the coastal chiefs selected their own chief called Senesi from Maligia to be their leader, who could help them in confronting Amura.

As it happened, at the outset of the 19th century, French merchants had still not advanced into the Northern Rivers (they would not arrive in the region until the end of the 1830s). Until then, coastal trade was carried out by the Americans; by Nova Scotians and Maroons from Freetown; and, above all, by British merchants. These British merchants frequently tried their hand at the slave trade in the Northern Rivers. This meant that when it came to the confrontation within the Moriah Chiefdom between Amura of Fourikariah (in the interior) and Senesi of Maligia (on the coast), they lent their support to Amura, who tolerated the slave trade. By contrast, merchants based in Freetown tended to back Senesi, who was supportive of so-called "legal trade," in other words, trade that was separate from the slave trade. Although

the colonial government of Sierra Leone strongly opposed the slave trade, it also wished to develop a trade route from Timbo in Fouta Djallon to Freetown, passing through the Moriah Chiefdom. For this reason, it attempted to approach Amura and win him over. However, Amura viewed the merchants of Sierra Leone as supporters of the opposing Senesi side and showed little indication of responding positively to the moves of the Sierra Leone government.

Then, in 1820, Amura finally launched an attack on Maligia. Senesi fought back, gathering supporting forces from the nearby chiefdoms of Sumbuyah and Moricania. The outbreak of this conflict effectively paralyzed coastal trade in the Northern Rivers. Before long, however, the Fula state of the Fouta Djallon Hinterlands intervened, acting as a mediator between the two sides. This dispute that had entangled Moriah, Sumbuyah, and Moricania thereby came to a temporary close in 1822.

However, not long after this conflict was resolved, a new confrontation developed: rather than Senesi, it was now the supreme chief Fendan Modu of the above-mentioned Sumbuyah Chiefdom who came to the fore, challenging the Amura of the Moriah Chiefdom. Modu's faction controlled a stretch of coast running from Pongas River to the Bullom Shore opposite Freetown. Amura's faction, meanwhile, was composed of the various Moriah chiefs of the interior. Open conflict between the two factions broke out in 1823. In order to avoid the fighting, almost all of the merchants of Sierra Leone shifted their base of operations further south, from the Great and Little Scarcies Rivers to the Sierra Leone River. Yet some individuals actually took this state of conflict as a business opportunity and attempted to expand their activities into the Northern Rivers. Here, I refer to two merchants of Sierra Leone, Stephen Gabbidon and William Henry Savage, who had formed a business partnership at the time (Mouser, 1979: 18–24).

Gabbidon was one of the most successful of the Maroons in the Freetown business world at that time, acting as a leader within this group. In 1825, he had even been nominated for mayor (although he refused the post out of the desire to focus on business) (Foray, 1977: 77; Fyfe, 1962: 123, 178–179). Savage, meanwhile, had been born in London to an African father and a British mother and had come to Sierra Leone in 1808 to take on a posting as a school master. Before long, he shifted to trading as a merchant and at one time even involved himself in the slave trade. In 1821, Savage headed to London to study law. When he later returned to Sierra Leone, he opened a law firm in Freetown and began practicing as a lawyer. At the same time, he began to collaborate with Gabbidon in business ventures (Foray, 1977: 188–189; Blyden, 2000: 16).

When almost all the merchants in Sierra Leone pulled out of the Northern Rivers region because of the Moriah Conflict, Gabbidon and Savage decided to brave the dangers and take the situation as an opportunity to expand into the region. On December 30, 1825, in Fourikariah, they signed a lease agreement regarding Matacong Island with Amura. They were granted permission to use the island for their own purposes provided that every year they compensated Amura or his successors in goods equivalent in value to 100 iron bars.[6]

According to the agreement that Gabbidon and Savage reached with Amura at this time, the mixed-race people who lived in the nearby coastal region had traditionally asserted their ownership of Matacong Island. Later, the island had been purchased from them by Amura's grandfather, Bocarrie Manga, in exchange for payment in goods.[7] With respect to how the island was to be used after it was leased, the agreement simply states, "they said Stephen Gabbidon and William Henry Savage should be enabled to carry on a joint business in commerce trade and agriculture on the said Island as they may think proper."[8] It would seem that Gabbidon and Savage intended to create a structure to hold cows on Matacong Island, with the goal of selling beef to the troops garrisoned in Freetown.

Yet their plans were not to unfold as they had hoped. Upon receiving word of the signing of the lease agreement, the acting Governor of the Sierra Leone government, Kenneth Macaulay, ordered that Gabbidon and Savage be removed from Matacong Island (Fyfe, 1962: 159; Foray, 1977: 77). When Macaulay was officially installed as Governor in 1826, the participants in the Moriah Conflict petitioned the colonial government of Sierra Leone to step in and help broker a peace. In response, Macaulay set about mediating the conflict, enlisting the assistance of an influential figure by the name of Dala Modu, a member of the Sumbuyah-Susu people who was broadly active in trade activities conducted around the environs of Freetown. On April 18, 1826, Governor Macaulay met with the Sumbuyah-Susu chiefs and representatives of the Touré family of Moriah, securing the ratification of a comprehensive peace treaty. This treaty not only brought an end to the Moriah Conflict. As we can see in the quotation below, under its terms, the chiefs of the Sumbuyah-Susu and the Touré family of the Moriah recognized British sovereignty over the coastline and rivers from Conta (Contah) on the Melakori River in the south to Ferighna (Faringhia) on the Pongas River in the north, to a depth of one mile inland. At the same time, the parties recognized Britain's sovereignty over Matacong Island and agreed that, under Britain, the island would be treated as a neutral place that surrounding ethnic groups could freely use.

> His Honour the said Kenneth Macaulay, for himself and his successors, Governors of the said colony, on the part and on behalf of His Majesty's the King of Great Britain and Ireland, his heirs and successors, agrees to accept the sovereignty of one mile inland from the seaboard, and of all the seas, rivers, harbours, creeks, inlets, and waters of the Mandingo and Soumbuya countries from Conta in the south to Ferighna in the north, for the more effectual performance of the obligations of this Treaty, Island of Matacong, and also to accept the sovereignty and possession of the island of Matacong, and to preserve the same as a neutral and free resting-place for the craft and canoes of all the surrounding tribes whilst in amity and friendship with His Britannic Majesty (Hertslet, 1895[1967]: 34–35).

What we can see taking shape here, in the background of the Moriah Conflict, is the original form of Matacong Island's complex dynamics relating to usage,

property, and territorial possession. That is to say, first, by signing an agreement to lease Matacong Island with Amura of the Moriah Chiefdom, in December 1825, Gabbidon and Savage established that the island could be used as a leasehold that could be profited from, or that somebody could have usage rights over. Although they were temporarily ordered by Governor Macaulay to leave Matacong, Gabbidon and Savage continued to claim that their lease agreement with Amura was valid. After the initial leaseholders (Gabbidon and Savage) died, third parties (descendants and traders) would go on to inherit, resell, and transfer use of the island as an independent right, regardless of the desires of the lessor (the local chief). In the above manner, Matacong Island's leasehold became completely detached from the original owner. Once the island's leasehold began to be consecutively transferred between third parties (the traders), these same leasers naturally began to think that so long as they were paying their lease fees to the lessor (the local chief), they should be free to use the land for profit, or subleasing (this was because they understood themselves to have purchased or inherited the lease itself, separate from the lease fees that they were paying). They began to develop a strong sense of entitlement as those with rights over the land, or even as its effective owners. If you were to here pose the question "To whom did Matacong Island belong?" then at least from the perspective of "usage," these merchants with usage rights now somewhat removed from the original leasehold agreement increasingly viewed the island as their own possession, or as practically theirs.

Meanwhile, the 1826 treaty also served to establish new concepts of rights with respect to the island, such as sovereignty or territorial rights. However, as noted above, although the peace treaty decreed that Britain had sovereignty over Matacong Island, the concept of "sovereignty and possession of the island of Matacong" that appeared in the provisions did not necessarily possess the same meaning as we would grant such words in the present day. Although it is not entirely certain how local chiefs understood the agreement, at the very least, the Sierra Leone colonial government did not understand the acceptance of Britain's "sovereignty and possession of the island of Matacong" as conferring official possession as a territory. Certainly, in 1877, the Sierra Leone government would claim territorial rights over Matacong Island on the basis of the 1826 treaty.[9] Yet we can understand this step as simply flowing from the necessity of opposing France's imperialistic advances into the Northern Rivers from the 1860s onwards. In the 1820s, when the threat of France was not yet on the horizon, the colonial government of Sierra Leone did not understand the acquisition of sovereignty over the island as meaning the same as its colonization. Indeed, although a degree of political influence accompanied the acquisition of "sovereignty," this meant the incorporation of the island into a category of territory that could be thought of more as a "sphere of influence" or an "informal empire"; it did not necessarily confer governing responsibilities or financial burdens. Incidentally, the 1826 treaty was signed by Governor Macaulay under his own authority, without his having first secured permission from the British government. It is said that it was never even formally ratified by the British govern-

ment (Fyfe, 1962: 409; Hargreaves, 1957: 4). In truth, the British government did not consider Matacong Island as part of its own official territory for many years after the signing of the 1826 treaty.

Let us then return to the above question, "To whom does Matacong Island belong?" This time let us consider it from the angle of "territorial possession." As noted above, while the island effectively came under Britain's sphere of influence as a result of the 1826 treaty, it was not a part of its "formal empire." In this sense, we may say that at this point in time, the territorial possession of Matacong Island was not necessarily a clear-cut matter.

The peace treaty also included within its terms the agreement that Matacong Island would serve as a neutral location that all surrounding ethnic groups were free to use as a place to moor their boats. Before long, this provision ceased to be treated as an active measure. To the contrary, it gradually morphed into a passive *laissez-faire* policy, with the Sierra Leone government permitting trade to be pursued freely on the island, with no levying of tariffs.

A further subtle change with respect to ownership of Matacong Island occurred from 1825 to 1826. As previously noted, Matacong Island originally belonged to various ethnic groups who spoke Atlantic languages. In due course, the island was either purchased or seized by Sumbuyah or Mande chiefs of Moriah. Nevertheless, prior to 1825, problems surrounding ownership over Matacong Island effectively boiled down to the question of who the rightful owner was: did it belong to the Sumbuyah chief? Or the Moriah chief? Or to the chief of an Atlantic languages group, such as the Bullom? As it happened, Amura's signing of the Matacong Island lease agreement with the Sierra Leone merchants effectively created a new kind of "rights holder," in other words, the "holder of the original lease agreement." This served to render the question of ownership even more complex. In the beginning, the original lease agreement was kept in safekeeping by Amura and his successors, who claimed to be the rightful owners of Matacong Island. However, this document would later come to be passed to other chiefs. It was not long before possessors of the contract would themselves claim that they were the owners of Matacong Island. From here, the state of affairs became even more entangled, with one such individual eventually transferring sovereignty of the island to France.

4. Trading Activities by Nathaniel Isaacs: 1844–1854

Although Gabbidon and Savage had temporarily been ordered to leave Matacong Island, it appears that they later returned and engaged in trading there. Yet it was not long before the partnership between the two was dissolved, and Savage himself would pass away in 1837. Matacong Island subsequently continued to be used by Gabbidon. Gabbidon owed 8,000 pounds to a financier in London and later traveled there in order to try and scrape together the funds to pay it back. He appears to have visited the Colonial Office with the intent of having the British government buy his property and rights on Matacong Island, yet he was turned down (Fyfe, 1962: 211). When Gabbidon later died in 1839, his son William Gabbidon inherited his

usage rights over Matacong Island and developed his own business there. Moreover, while the specific details are not certain, in March 1842, William signed a similar lease agreement to the one his father had concluded with Amura. For some reason, however, he signed the agreement with four Bullom chiefs.[10] Later, in March 1844, William would use Matacong Island as collateral in order to borrow 280 pounds, 1 shilling, and 9 pence from John Dawson and George Alexander Kidd. However, William eventually fell into arrears when he failed to make a repayment on his debt of 25 pounds, 9 shillings, and 3 pence, which had been due by July 1844. As a result, Dawson, who was now the only creditor following the death of his partner Kidd, quickly sold the mortgaged island usage rights to a third party in August of that same year. The individual who purchased these rights from Dawson at that time was a Jewish British merchant by the name of Nathaniel Isaacs. Isaacs was then based in Sierra Leone and was extensively involved in trading within regions such as the Northern Rivers.[11]

Isaacs was born in 1808, in the city of Canterbury, in southeastern England. He would later go to live with his uncle in Saint Helena, before moving to Port Natal (Durban) in South Africa in 1825, at the age of 17. At Natal, Isaacs engaged in enterprises such as trade with the Zulu Kingdom and even developed a personal connection with the great Zulu king Shaka. In 1826, the wife of a chief under the rule of Shaka was raped by two Khoisan employees of an acquaintance of Isaacs. Isaacs was held responsible for this incident by Shaka, who ordered him to complete a period of military service. He would subsequently participate in battle against the Kumalo army led by Mzilikazi. Though only 18 years old, Isaacs was positioned at the forefront of 5,000 Zulu soldiers, and it is reported that he fought well. However, he would be injured during the battle when an arrow struck his back. In 1830, Isaacs departed South Africa. He later returned to Britain, and from 1834 on, he began to try his hand at trading in West Africa. In the early 1840s, he established his base of operations in Freetown. Then, as noted previously, he acquired the usage rights for Matacong Island in 1844. Isaacs subsequently sold off his assets in Freetown and moved to the island, which he began to develop into a foothold from which he could conduct extensive trade activities in the region (Fyfe, 1962: 240; Deveneaux, 1987: 572–575; Roberts, 1974).

As previously mentioned, a correspondent from *The Illustrated London News* visited Matacong Island in 1854. According to the correspondent, approximately 300 individuals lived on the island at that time. However, these were all members of the local population, such as the Susu and the Baga. Isaacs was the only European resident. The island had a number of buildings upon it. Apart from structures such as a pier and warehouse owned by Isaacs, there was also his dwelling-house, located on top of the highest hill, with a chapel right next to it. The chapel held Sunday service each week, conducted by a Catechist appointed by the Wesleyan mission at Sierra Leone. A Sunday school was also run for the local children. The island itself was thickly covered in silk cotton trees. These trees reportedly served as a marker for arrivals by ship, who used it to determine that they had indeed reached Matacong Island.[12]

It seems that Isaacs's commercial ventures on Matacong Island were extremely successful. When conducting trade at Freetown, merchants and ship owners were forced to pay a variety of fees, including vessel anchorage fees, import and export duties (particularly on high-priced goods suitable for import such as tobacco or spirits), license fees for canoes and boats, and so on. However, as previously noted, Matacong Island had been designated by the Sierra Leone government as a neutral and free place of anchorage. Because neither anchorage fees nor tariffs were collected, many merchant vessels would make a stop at the island. Over the course of 1853, as many as 80 vessels would visit Matacong, primarily British, French, and American merchant vessels.[13] American merchant vessels, in particular, would stop by the island before visiting Freetown, conducting as much buying and selling as possible.

Because Matacong Island was located near multiple estuaries, it was also an extremely convenient location for local merchants bringing trade goods on small boats from further upriver. The island was particularly convenient during the rainy season or times of strong wind. Under very windy or rainy conditions, it was not possible for local merchants to bring their trade goods all the way to Freetown in their small boats. However, Matacong was close to the shoreline, allowing for easy transportation of goods.[14] Isaacs also did not neglect to win the trust of the local chiefs, by employing their kinsfolk as ship's carpenters and clerks, by granting them generous loans, and so forth. The trade goods that local merchants brought to Matacong Island – such as gold, ivory, palm oil, and groundnuts – would be purchased by Isaacs by way of exchange for products such as tobacco, spirits, cotton fabric, and metal products. He would then store these goods temporarily in his warehouse, before selling them to Western merchant vessels when they visited, or directly exporting them himself. At that time, groundnuts were a particularly important export good for Matacong Island. They were widely grown for export in the Northern Rivers region from the mid-19th century onward. Groundnuts were in particularly high demand in France and were used as a plant-based source of oils and fats that was needed for creating various soaps, lubricating oils, and so forth. By exporting large volumes of groundnuts to France, Isaacs was able to bring in a significant profit.

It would seem that Isaacs's business dealings on Matacong were truly moving forward in a very smooth and promising

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manner. Yet his activities on the island would actually reach a sudden end in August 1854. At that time, the Governor of Sierra Leone, Arthur Edward Kennedy, learned that Isaacs was holding slaves on Matacong Island. As noted previously, Britain had already banned the slave trade in 1807. Then, in 1833, it had put in place a six-year transition period leading to the complete abolition of slavery. For this reason, when Governor Kennedy learned that Isaacs was in possession of slaves, he quickly ordered his arrest. However, Isaacs succeeded in escaping from the island before being arrested, and later returned to Britain. It is said that after he fled, slaves were found on the island, after all, as reported (Fyfe, 1962: 275).

After Isaacs fled, his business partner, Thomas Reader, handled trade on Matacong Island. Yet Isaacs and Reader's partnership would be dissolved around 1860. From 1869, a Manchester company by the name of Randall & Fisher would lease the use of the island from Isaacs for a yearly sum of 300 pounds. Like Isaacs himself, this company used the island primarily as a base of operations for accumulating and exporting groundnuts. When Isaacs eventually passed away in Britain, in June 1872, the usage rights over Matacong were inherited in accordance with his will by three people: his daughter, her husband, Peter Manning, and an individual named Walter Lewis. However, Lewis would die on the West Coast of Africa in June 1874. As a result, usage rights over the island fell to the Mannings alone. At least on paper as per the contract, Randall & Fisher Co. would continue using the island until December 31, 1881, paying their fees to the pair.[15]

5. The Resolution of the West African Committee and the Advance of France: 1865–1867

In the 1860s, when the colonial partition of Africa was not yet seriously underway, Britain's formal territory on the West Coast of Africa amounted to only four small colonies: Sierra Leone, the Gambia, the Gold Coast, and Lagos. Although some in Britain called for these colonies to be supported, or to be scaled down, almost none argued for their expansion. Merchants engaged in West African trade welcomed the potential of receiving government protection as a result of British colonial expansion. Yet, conversely, they were concerned about the prospect of being forced to pay new fees such as tariffs or anchorage charges or be subjected to various government regulations. The British government was also not particularly enthusiastic about expanding its West African colonies. The Foreign Office and Admiralty were relatively positively inclined toward West African expansion, viewing it as an opportunity to further clamp down on the slave trade. However, the Treasury and Colonial Office were much more cautious, out of concern with the attendant new financial burdens and political responsibilities (Hargreaves, 1963: 26–64).

In June 1865, a special committee of the British Parliament adopted a resolution relating to the future course of Britain's West African colonial policy. The report of the 1865 West African Committee would become "the most quoted document in the history of West African Settlements" (McIntyre, 1967: 100). In fact, it has also come to be viewed as an extremely important document within the history of the British

Empire as a whole, frequently referenced by later researchers who have viewed it as symbolic of the "Little England" era of the 1860s.

The immediate genesis for the adoption of the 1865 resolution was the Ashanti War, which unfolded on the Gold Coast over the course of 1863–1864. This was a conflict between the Ashanti Kingdom, which ruled the interior of the Gold Coast region, and Britain, which considered the coastland to be within its sphere of influence. Casualties included 13 British officers. These losses spurred the British Parliament to thoroughly re-examine its West African colonial policy to date and establish a special committee for the purposes of deliberating upon a future course.

Thus established, the Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast) comprised 17 members, including Colonial Secretary Edward Cardwell. A Member of Parliament named Charles Bowyer Adderley served as chairman. The committee commenced its deliberations in March 1865. Following three months of intensive hearings and discussion, it adopted a resolution that primarily comprised the seven articles below:

1. That it is not possible to withdraw the British Government, wholly or immediately, from any settlements or engagements on the West African Coast.
2. That the settlement on the Gambia may be reduced, by M'Carthy's Island, which is 150 miles up the river, being no longer occupied; and that the settlement should be confined as much as possible to the mouth of the river.
3. That all further extension of territory or assumption of Government, or new treaties offering any protection to native tribes, would be inexpedient; and that the object of our policy should be to encourage in natives the exercise of those qualities which may render it possible for us more and more to transfer to them the administration of all the Governments, with a view to our ultimate withdrawal from all, except, probably, Sierra Leone.
4. That this policy of non-extension admits of no exception, as regards new settlements, but cannot amount to an absolute prohibition of measures which, in peculiar cases, may be necessary for the more efficient and economical administration of the settlements we already possess.
5. That the reasons for the separation of West African Governments in 1842 having ceased to exist, it is desirable that a Central Government over all the four settlements should be re-established at Sierra Leone, with steam communication with each Lieutenant Government.
6. That the evidence leads to the hope that such a central control may be established with considerable retrenchment of expenditure, and at the same time with a general increase of efficiency.
7. That in the newly acquired territory of Lagos the native practice of domestic slavery still, to a certain degree, exists, although it is at variance with British law; and that it appears to your Committee that this state of things, surrounded as it is by many local difficulties, demands the serious attention of the Government, with a view to its termination as soon as possible.[16]

As we can see above, the report of the 1865 Committee recommended that Britain adopt a policy of "non-extension" with respect to the West Coast of Africa and that it work toward "ultimate withdrawal" from all of its West African colonies with the exception of Sierra Leone. On the other hand, as can be seen in Article 1, the resolution does take a cautious view with respect to immediate withdrawal. Article 4 also leaves room for some partial territorial expansion of existing British colonies. The 1865 Resolution thus contained a certain intermixing of views, with representation given both to those who called for a withdrawal from the West African colonies, as well as to those who argued for maintaining Britain's presence. In this sense, it can be regarded as a product of compromise. I note that by the early 1870s at the latest, it became clear that the non-extension policy promoted within the resolution was not suitable, given the realities of West African colonial policy. It would be entirely abandoned by the middle of that decade. Britain would subsequently proceed down the path of imperialistic territorial expansion within West Africa (McIntyre, 1967: 99–103). Be that as it may, if we restrict our purview to our subject of examination, namely, to Matacong Island and its vicinity, then we may say that the 1865 Resolution had an impact upon Britain's policy that was by no means insignificant.

Then, during May 1865, just as the West African Committee in Westminster was discussing whether or not Britain should withdraw from West Africa, a conflict erupted in the Melakori River basin of the Northern Rivers region. The conflict was sparked by the death of the Moriah Chiefdom's paramount chief, with a resultant struggle over the succession between two individuals, known as Maligy and Bokkari (Hargreaves, 1957: 3–8).

Incidentally, the area within the broader Northern Rivers region that had seen the most trade activity in the past was the Nunez River basin. Yet, by the 1860s, the volume of trade taking place in the southern Melakori River basin grew to be much larger. In part, this was thanks to the flourishing of groundnut cultivation, as well as the basin's location on the trade route linking Fouta Djallon. Alongside this development, French merchant vessels began to travel to the Melakori River or the vicinity of Matacong Island with some frequency (there was high demand for groundnuts in France). A French merchant by the name of Gaspard Devès, who operated out of Gorée (an island off the coast of Dakar known for the role it played in the slave trade), also began to made inroads into this region.[17]

With the outbreak of a new conflict within the Moriah Chiefdom, the Europeans (including the French) and the Creole merchants who had begun to advance into the Melakori River basin initially hoped that Britain would intervene as a mediator, given that the region was effectively within its sphere of influence. In fact, in July 1865, the Sierra Leone government sounded out the British on a possible way that they could bring an end to the conflict. Their idea was for the British to annex the coastline of the Moriah Chiefdom and dispatch a revenue officer and resident official, on the basis of the 1826 treaty. However, the West African Committee had only just issued its recommendation of a policy of "non-extension." The proposal was, therefore, given the cold shoulder by the Colonial Office. In seeing Britain's wariness of involvement

in the conflict, Senegal's Governor, Jean-Marie-Émile Pinet-Laprade, saw an opportunity. In July 1865, he responded by dispatching a French warship to the Melakori River basin, pressuring one of the conflict's participants, Bokkari, and having him promise to make reparations for the damage that his forces had inflicted upon the French merchant Devès. In November of that same year, Governor Pinet-Laprade would send a representative to the other participant in the conflict, Maligy. He succeeded in having Maligy sign a document acknowledging that the Moriah Chiefdom was under the protection of France, in exchange for recognition that Maligy was the one rightful supreme chief (Arcin, 1911: 337–338). After Maligy was killed in 1866, the governor himself took the step of heading to Freetown in December. At that time, the Governor of Sierra Leone, Samuel Wensley Blackall, was bound by the Resolution of the West African Committee. Governor Pinet-Laprade convinced Blackall of the need to accept France's basic position, which was to bring an end to the Moriah Chiefdom conflict by subsuming the Melakori River basin within France's sphere of influence. He then continued to the Northern Rivers, to deal with Bokkari, who distrusted France. Governor Pinet-Laprade half blackmailed Bokkari to accept the terms of France's protection, stating that unless the Moriah Chiefdom entered under France's protection, he could not rule out war (Arcin, 1911: 338). In 1867, the governor would proceed to establish a military post at Binty (Benty), on the southern bank of the Melakori River (Hargreaves, 1957: 8–14).

Thus, while Britain enjoyed a dominant commercial and political position within the Northern Rivers region up until the mid-19th century, this same region would subsequently be rapidly incorporated within France's economic and military spheres of influence. As noted previously, French merchants began to move into the coastal region in search of sources of groundnuts. At the same time, the French government was aware that Britain had effectively decided to restrain itself with the 1865 Resolution of the West African Committee. France took this state of affairs as an opening to secure a number of treaties with the various chiefs of the Northern Rivers. Lastly, France also took steps to increase its military strength in the region. Along with the outpost at Binty, in 1866, it built an outpost at Boké, on the southern bank of the Nunez River, and at Boffa, at the mouth of the Pongas River.

Yet the above is not to say that France was necessarily aiming for colonization of the Northern Rivers as of the 1860s. The part of the West Coast of Africa that France desired to colonize more than anything at that point in time was actually the British Gambia.

6. Territorial Exchange Negotiations between Britain and France: 1866–1876

Calls within the British government for an early withdrawal from the Gambia Colony grew stronger during the 1860s. This colony was extremely modest in size, forming a long, narrow strip along the edge of the Gambia River. Since the 17th century, it had served as a place of commerce for British chartered companies and merchants. The Gambia had formally become a colony of Britain in 1821, when it was incorporated within Sierra Leone. It would separate from Sierra Leone in 1843, becoming an inde-

pendent colony, but its finances were almost chronically in the red (Newbury, 1971b: 621). This state of affairs meant that Britain found itself funneling supplementary funds into the Gambia Colony on practically a yearly basis. Nevertheless, until the first half of the 19th century, trade in the colony was dominated more by merchants from France than by those from Britain. For example, roughly three-quarters of all exported groundnuts were destined for France, and groundnuts accounted for as much as 90% of the colony's exports. In other words, Britain was shouldering the financial cost of governing the Gambia Colony, while watching as the profits went not to its own merchants but to the merchants of France. In short, Britain was effectively protecting the stable supply of groundnuts to France. This state of affairs led to the Gambia being repeatedly mentioned in the 1865 West African Committee Resolution, which also recommended that it be immediately reduced in size.

It should not come as a surprise, given the above situation, that Britain viewed the Gambia as worthless. But France considered the same land to be valuable territory, to the extent that it was even willing to pay a significant price in order to acquire it. Yet this was not simply because France possessed commercial concessions and interests in the Gambia. It was drawn to this position as a result of political considerations. At that time, France was considering a push into the interior of West Africa from Senegal. Clashes repeatedly took place throughout the region, as local forces sought to resist France's advance. France believed that it was necessary to place the Gambia Colony under its control (or, more strictly speaking, the Gambia River and its basin), in order to cut off the route supplying weapons to anti-French forces and to make it easier to access the interior (Hargreaves, 1963: 126).

The idea of a territorial exchange between Britain and France regarding the Gambia seems to have been unofficially raised by people connected to both governments by around 1861 at the latest (Hargreaves, 1963: 136). In 1866, France would officially issue a request for territorial exchange following the adoption of the West African Committee's Resolution. In March of that year, the French government conveyed to Britain that it was willing to trade three of its settlements on the Ivory Coast (Grand Bassam, Dabou, and Assinie) in exchange for the Gambia Colony. Then, in August 1867, it further notified Britain that it was prepared to also hand over Gabon (Gaboon) on top of its three settlements on the Ivory Coast.

Given that the British government was already considering a withdrawal from the Gambia, it initially welcomed France's proposal. This was particularly true with respect to the Colonial Office. Yet, before long, Britain would shift to taking a cautious

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stance toward territorial exchange, seeming hesitant to offer France an official reply. Following the above developments, Governor Kennedy of Sierra Leone offered his own proposal to the Colonial Office. Kennedy (who had been wary of France advancing into the Northern Rivers for quite some time) proposed that the territory north of the Dembia River in the region, including the Gambia, be assigned to France's sphere of influence. In exchange, the territory to the south of the Dembia River, including the Ivory Coast, would be assigned to Britain's sphere of influence. In February 1870, the British government formally offered a proposal to France that was in line with Kennedy's plan.

France welcomed this counteroffer by Britain. Yet certain other factors mitigated against a deal moving forward. For one, there was strong opposition to a transfer of the Gambia to France by British merchants and missionaries associated with the colony, along with Britain's national Board of Trade. In addition, July 1870 saw the outbreak of the Franco–Prussian War, plunging France into conflict. In the end, negotiations on a territorial exchange between Britain and France were temporarily halted that same year.

In April 1874, the French formally petitioned the British to re-open territorial exchange negotiations. Britain responded with its own exchange proposal in July 1875: France would take as its sphere of influence the land stretching from the Pongas River in the south, up to its current territory in the north. Britain, meanwhile, would take the Pongas River as the northern end of its own sphere of influence, with Gabon marking its southern end. This proposal was extremely favorable to Britain, effectively granting it all of the West Coast of Africa south of the Pongas River in the Northern Rivers region, including the Niger River entrance. In exchange, all France really stood to gain was the small colony of the Gambia. France was perplexed by Britain's audacious proposal, yet it did not seek to call off the negotiations. However, in March 1876, Britain ultimately took France's hesitancy toward its proposal as an excuse to unilaterally announce that it was pulling out of the talks.

What would have happened if the territorial exchange negotiations between Britain and France had reached some form of agreement? It would have surely had a significant impact upon the subsequent colonial partitioning of West Africa, as well as upon the manner in which West African states took shape after independence. Above all, Matacong Island would have surely not become French territory, instead being incorporated into Britain's "formal empire."

7. The Matacong Island Incident: 1879

Following the failure of the territorial exchange negotiations between the governments of Britain and France, the hostility between the Sierra Leone side and the Senegal side became immediately more apparent. First, in June 1876, Britain's Colonial Office granted Governor Samuel Rowe of Sierra Leone permission to establish administrative authority on Matacong Island on the basis of the 1826 treaty. Having received this approval, in March 1877, the Sierra Leone government announced that the island was now British territory. Preparations also began for the collection of

tariffs from the island. In May 1877, the Sierra Leone government also concluded a number of treaties with parties such as the chiefs of the Samo Chiefdom, securing sovereignty over the coastline stretching from the Melakori River to the Great Scarcies River, including Binty, where France had its outpost. Governor Rowe further took the step of secretly visiting the Melakori River, the Great Scarcies River, and the Fourikariah River between 1877 and 1878, meeting with the chiefs of each region in order to discuss a further expansion of Britain's influence. Then, at the end of February 1879, Governor Rowe formally announced that from May of that year, the Sierra Leone government would begin to collect tariffs from the Scarcies Rivers region under Britain's control (Hargreaves, 1963: 214–222).

Why was the government of Sierra Leone in such a hurry to begin collecting tariffs in the Northern Rivers in the second half of the 1870s, following the collapse of territorial exchange negotiations between the governments of Britain and France? One major reason was the so-called "Great Depression" of that era, which began in 1873. The Great Depression caused a precipitous drop in the value of palm oil, a primary commodity for the region. This had serious repercussions for the amount of trade being conducted in Sierra Leone. It should also be noted that when the tariff rate on daily necessities used in the continental interior was raised in 1872, there was a significant trend toward importing goods subject to such tariffs via the tariff-free Northern Rivers region. This caused a serious drop in Sierra Leone's income from customs. As the Sierra Leone government relied upon income from tariffs as a major source of its revenue, the above situation served as serious motivation for expanding the scope of its tax gathering to include the Northern Rivers. This, it hoped, would help to reinforce its financial base (Hargreaves, 1963: 214–215).

Sierra Leone's efforts at recovering from its setback in the Northern Rivers through expanding its tariff-collection activities alarmed Senegal, prodding it to react. At that time, almost all trade in the Northern Rivers had become the domain of French merchants, with the exception of a small number of Sierra Leone merchants, as well as the Randall & Fisher company (which was active on Matacong Island and elsewhere). This meant that the efforts at expanded tariff collection by the Sierra Leone government effectively amounted to a tax on French merchants. Furthermore, from Senegal's perspective, permitting Sierra Leone's tariff collection would have practically meant a recognition of Britain's sovereignty over the Northern Rivers. It is therefore not surprising that Senegal's governor, Louis-Alexandre-Esprit-Gaston Brière de l'Isle, subsequently took a number of steps in response. In June 1877, he signed a treaty with Bokkari of the Moriah Chiefdom, re-confirming France's rule. That same year, he dispatched a unit of soldiers to a small town on the opposite side of Binty, to help prevent the Binty outpost in the Melakori River basin from being encircled by Sierra Leone. As a demonstration of France's sovereignty over the region, he also ordered the commencement of tariff collection. Then, in March 1879, Governor Brière de l'Isle took a further countermeasure in response to the Sierra Leone government's advanced notice on tariff collection of the previous month. He

dispatched soldiers to Matacong Island and occupied it, raising the French flag. This is the so-called "Matacong Island Incident."

Governor Rowe was visiting the Gambia Colony when he received word of the occupation by the French troops of Matacong Island. In fury, he quickly headed to Gorée, where he dispatched a telegram of protest to Governor Brière de l'Isle, demanding that the French troops immediately leave Matacong. As it happened, Governor Rowe would later be informed that the Bereira chief had handed over the sovereignty of Matacong Island to France several years earlier.

The circumstances surrounding the transferal of Matacong Island's sovereignty to France are quite complex. According to one account, events unfolded as follows. In the 1850s, Matacong's original copy of the lease agreement was still held by the paramount chief of the Moriah Chiefdom. However, after the death of a particular paramount chief, a dispute over the inheritance of the agreement took place between two individuals by the names of Foday Harfee and Foday Wise. Harfee's mother was a freewoman, which helped him in securing the support of many free people within the Moriah Chiefdom. By contrast, Wise's mother was a domestic slave, and so he received the support of the slaves. Domestic slaves had asserted that they were prepared to die alongside Wise if he was not selected as paramount chief, despite being older than Harfee. For this reason, some free people who feared a slave revolt began to lean toward supporting Wise. In the town of Bereira, in particular, where the household slave population was larger than in other towns, a potential uprising was a serious problem. Upon observing this situation, Wise moved to gain the support of the people of Bereira by handing the Matacong Island lease agreement to the chief there, promising that, in the future, the Bereira chief would be able to collect rent from the island. In this manner, the original copy of the Matacong Island lease agreement shifted from being held by the Moriah Chiefdom's paramount chief to the chief of Bereira. It was thus that Bereira's chief, Sorie Feekeh, was in a position to hand over the sovereignty of the island to France in 1878, the year before its occupation (Skinner, 1980: 120–121).

According to another account, a chief who was a member of the Moriah Chiefdom once visited a Maligia chief about a conflict between relatives. On that occasion, he lent the Maligia chief the lease agreement for Matacong Island on a purely temporary basis, which was then handed to Bereira via Fourikariah. Bereira's chief, Feekeh, then used his possession of the lease agreement as justification for claiming that he himself was the owner of Matacong, before handing sovereignty over the island to France (Skinner, 1980: 122–125).

What is common to these two accounts is that the original copy of the lease agreement for Matacong Island, which was originally held by the Moriah paramount chief, found its way into the hands of the Bereira chief for some reason. The chief in question, Feekeh, then gave sovereignty over the island to France, despite not actually having the authority to do so. The French in Senegal subsequently used the consent of the Bereira chief as grounds for their 1879 occupation of Matacong.

The Matacong Island Incident had the effect of immediately ratcheting up the level of tension between Sierra Leone and Senegal. Immediately after the incident, on April 9, 1879, Governor Rowe dispatched a letter to Colonial Secretary Michael Edward Hicks Beach. In the letter, he wrote as follows:

7. The occupation by the French of the Matacong is a much graver matter, and has caused me an amount of anxiety and trouble that I cannot describe.

8. It happened that the morning of my arrival at Freetown there had arrived messengers from Wonkafong, the chief town of the Sumbuyah district situated on the Sanky Brimah, Signatory of Treaty of 1826, by which Matacong was ceded to the British Government, and the first question asked by this Chief was, "Has the English Government given Matacong to the French? I wish to know because in coming from Wonkafong we stopped at Matacong as we always do, and as I found the French flag flying there, I immediately left and came on to Freetown. I wish to know if the English Government has given the island to the French, because when Matacong was given to the British, my grandfather was sent by the King and Chiefs of the Sumbuyah country with the Alimamy Dallu Mahomados to represent them and to give up the British their right in Matacong, while Amurat (as the head of the Tura family) equally gave up all his rights." I very respectfully ask what answer I am to give these people?[18]

As we can see in this letter, the 1879 Matacong Island Incident shook the Sierra Leone government. From its perspective, it was France's first serious challenge to Britain's power in West Africa. The Sierra Leone government became extremely alarmed over Senegal's uncompromising tendency toward territorial expansion (Uzoigwe, 1978: 74). That being said, the governments of Britain and France were comparatively calm with respect to the incident. The French Foreign Minister, William Henry Waddington, who valued a cooperative relationship between Britain and France in Europe, attempted to placate the British government by explaining that the occupation of Matacong Island had been conducted without permission from France itself. The French Foreign Minister also obtained a promise from Britain that it would support the status quo in the region until negotiations between both countries had been concluded. He then ordered Governor Brière de l'Isle in Senegal to withdraw his troops from Matacong Island. Similarly, the British Foreign Secretary, Robert Arthur Gascoyne-Cecil, also wished to prioritize good relations with France. He retained a calm attitude in response to the incident and showed understanding toward his French counterpart Waddington's explanation (Hargreaves, 1963: 226).

The governments of Britain and France would subsequently conduct intermittent

The Matacong Island Incident had the effect of immediately ratcheting up the level of tension between Sierra Leone and Senegal.

exchanges of opinion with respect to the territorial partition of the West Coast of Africa, including the Northern Rivers. During the course of this process, they negotiated ideas such as the Salisbury proposal. According to this proposal, Britain would renounce its territory north of the Scarcies Rivers, including Matacong Island. In exchange, France was to give Britain its territory south of the same rivers, along with Cotonou. However, this proposal to exchange territory between the two nations would eventually be set aside once the Liberal Party took office in Britain in 1880 and in the face of opposition from French merchants (Hargreaves, 1963: 234–237).

8. Boundary Demarcation: 1881–1889

A resolution to the Matacong Island Incident was eventually reached through diplomatic negotiations between the governments of Britain and France. According to the agreement that was struck, France would remove its troops from the island in exchange for preservation of the status quo in the Northern Rivers. However, the colonial governments in Sierra Leone and Senegal continued to come into conflict over the signing of new treaties with local chiefs or moves to collect tariffs. The governments of Britain and France, therefore, established a committee to deliberate upon territorial problems in the Northern Rivers, with the aim of avoiding unnecessary friction and clashes between the two nations. In June 1882, Britain and France would sign a convention based upon items of agreement reached by the committee.

The arrangement of lines of demarcation between Britain and France's territories within the Northern Rivers, as well as the jurisdiction of Matacong Island, was spelled out in this 1882 Convention in the following manner:

Article I: The line of demarcation between the territories occupied or claimed by Great Britain and France respectively to the north of Sierra Leone, on the West Coast of Africa, shall be drawn between the basins of the Rivers Scarcies and Mellicourie…

Article II: The Island of Yelboyah, and all islands claimed or possessed by Great Britain on the West Coast of Africa lying to the south of the said line of demarcation as far as the southern limit of the British Colony of Sierra Leone, shall be recognised by France as belonging to Great Britain, and the Island of Matacong, and all islands claimed or possessed by France on the West Coast of Africa to the north of the said line of demarcation as far as the Rio Nunez, shall be recognised by Great Britain as belonging to France...[19]

Thus, the line of demarcation between the British and French territories in the Northern Rivers was established so that it ran through the basins between the Melakori River and the Scarcies Rivers. This was the location of the Samo Chiefdom, which was thereby split into northern and southern sections. Along with this agreement, Matacong Island was also officially granted to France.

As it happened, France's National Assembly would later refuse to ratify the 1882 Convention. One of the reasons given by those within the assembly who were opposed to the convention was that the treaty did not clearly specify the northern limits of France's sphere of influence in the West Coast of Africa. In their view, this meant that its ratification could potentially lead to the sanctioning of Britain's further northward advance up the coastline (Newbury, 1971a: 234). However, although France did not formally ratify the convention, in reality, the 1882 Convention would, for all intents and purposes, still be respected by both nations as accepted terms of agreement. Later, in August 1889, they would reach a new agreement on the lines of demarcation between various regions of the West Coast of Africa, including the Gambia and Sierra Leone. With respect to the northern part of Sierra Leone, there was no specific mention of Matacong Island. However, this new agreement effectively meant the reaffirmation of the original terms of agreement reached in the 1882 Anglo–French Convention.

9. The French Occupation of Matacong Island: 1891

From 1869 on, Isaacs subleased Matacong Island to the Randall & Fisher company. With his death in 1872, the same company signed a new sublease agreement with his heirs, the Mannings. However, from around 1879 to 1880, the Randall & Fisher company effectively withdrew from conducting business on Matacong Island. In December 1881, it formally dissolved its contract with the Mannings. The reason for the company's withdrawal from Matacong is not certain. However, as noted earlier, in the second half of the 1870s, the Sierra Leone government began to levy tariffs on the island. Later, in 1879, the Senegalese colonial government caused the above-mentioned incident when it temporarily occupied the island. It is not difficult to imagine that such changes in business conditions would have contributed to the company's decision to pull out.

Once it was clear that the Randall & Fisher company was leaving Matacong Island, the Mannings consulted with a merchant in Liverpool by the name of Richard Philpott about how to dispose of the island. Philpott proposed that he establish a new company, named the Matacong and Northwest African Company. This company could purchase the usage rights of Matacong Island and engage in commercial activities therein. Following this proposal, the Mannings first sold the rights to the island to Philpott in November 1881, for 4,100 pounds. Next, Philpott formally sold the island to the new company in April 1883 for 10,000 pounds. However, at this time, the company already owed 4,000 pounds to the three partners of James Bowden & Company in Liverpool. As a result, that same month, the Matacong and Northwest African Company agreed to transfer the island usage rights to Bowden Co. until the debt was repaid. Eventually, in March 1887, Matacong would become entirely the possession of Bowden Co.[20]

In December 1884, Bowden Co. was shocked to learn from the French government that because of the 1882 treaty, Matacong Island was now French territory. That same month, the company employed a solicitor to send a letter to the British

Foreign Office, seeking confirmation of this fact. In response, the Colonial Office sent a reply to Bowden Co.'s solicitor in January 1885. It stated that although the 1882 Anglo–French Convention had yet to be ratified, both nations were treating it as accepted terms of agreement. Moreover, according to that treaty, Matacong Island had indeed been specified as part of French territory. Later, Bowden Co. would issue a complaint to the British government that Matacong's sovereignty was transferred to France without prior discussion with the possessor of the island's usage rights. It also asked that the British pressure the French government to allow the island to continue to be used as a tax-free zone. Ultimately, however, the company was unable to secure a favorable response from the British government.[21]

In 1891, Bowden Co. began to lease out Matacong Island on a ten-year contract to a company from Glasgow, Taylor, Laughland & Company, which was engaged in trade activities in the Oil Rivers of present-day southern Nigeria. Taylor, Laughland & Company then signed a three-year agent contract with an individual by the name of M. H. Smith, sending him to the island in June of that year to conduct trade on its behalf.

Upon his arrival at Matacong in July 1891, Smith expressed admiration at the size of the island and the fertility of the croplands and pastures. He also wrote the following with respect to the prospects for the trade activities he intended to engage in:

> Trading Prospects—I really cannot understand how it is that the place has been so long left without a factory in full swing. Have arrived here at a most opportune time for the future interests of the venture. Have had most of the principal people from the neighbouring district at Matacong to see me, the news of white man's arrival having gone far and wide. Every day brings deputations, and all promise to bring trade. Every day since I arrived, numbers of large three-mastered canoes have come laden with produce to sell. They all make Matacong a place of call for the night whatever place they are bound for, and would only be too glad, they say, to sell their produce here. Rubber appears plentiful. Hides, skins, nuts, kernels, and oil have been offered me. The island is centrally situated, and must become an important centre of trade.[22]

As we can see from the above observations, Smith had an initially optimistic outlook on the potential for trade at Matacong Island. As it happened, the situation would change quite suddenly in September 1891, two months after his arrival. First, on the 11th of that month, a group of armed locals arrived at the island from Fourikariah. They captured island residents and behaved violently, looting their belongings. When Smith protested their actions, they simply responded, before leaving, that they had the permission of France. Then, on the 16th of the same month, five French soldiers visited Matacong. Upon confirming that Smith was white, they informed him that their commanding officer wished to have a meeting with him. On the 19th of that month, Smith left the island to visit the Sierra Leone Colony. Immediately afterwards, a French military unit arrived on the island, lowered the

British flag that had been raised there, and tore it apart. They then arrested a young African man by the name of Charles MacFoy, who had been staying on the island as Smith's guest. Having come across the French unit's ship directly after departing from Matacong, Smith quickly turned back. Upon discovering that the British flag had been removed, he raised another one. Smith was then arrested on the spot by the French unit in the same manner as MacFoy and transferred to Conakry. Although he was released after a few days, MacFoy would be detained for fifteen days.[23]

Smith sent word of France's occupation of Matacong Island via telegram, initially reaching Taylor, Laughland & Company in Britain. The company then quickly informed Bowden Co., which in turn sent a letter to the British government petitioning it for assistance. In this letter, Bowden Co. requested that Britain pressure the French to apologize for the soldiers occupying the island and to pay reparations for harm inflicted upon Smith and MacFoy. However, as the Colonial Office already viewed Matacong Island as French territory, it was entirely uninterested in the rights of British individuals therein, which it regarded as falling under the purview of the Foreign Office.[24] Meanwhile, although the Foreign Office did at least negotiate with the French side, it was determined that the incident occurred because Smith ignored the fact that Matacong was French territory and that there was insufficient evidence to establish that the soldiers had caused Smith and MacFoy any harm. In the end, the claims made by Bowden Co. were almost entirely rejected.[25]

The above incident would be briefly reported in *The Times* newspaper, on October 24, 1891. The article made a few errors, including the claim that Smith was the "landowner" of Matacong, rather than simply the agent of Taylor, Laughland & Company. It also stated that the island was handed over to France in 1879. It is nevertheless worth examining the original text. It reads as follows:

> THE REPORTED OUTRAGE ON A BRITISH SUBJECT—It is stated officially that Matacong, an island on the West Coast of Africa, is not in any way under the protection of England. The reported insult to Mr. Smith, a British landowner on the island, who hoisted the British flag there, is not seriously regarded, as Mr. Smith had no authority to hoist the flag. The island was ceded to France in 1879, and in 1882, although the treaty was not then ratified, it came under French control. In 1889 an agreement was signed with France handing over the island to that country. Major Crooks, Acting Governor of Sierra Leone, has not yet reported the occurrence to the Foreign Office.[26]

10. Conclusion

Following the French unit's occupation of Matacong in 1891, Bowden Co. continued to pressure the British Foreign Office to have France recognize the company's right of ownership over the island. However, Bowden Co. did not have much success in its appeals for arbitration or for the recognition of the scope of its rights. We do know that as of August 1898, at the latest, Bowden Co. had rejected the personal arbitration granted by France, leaving the dispute between both parties unresolved.[27]

It is unclear what kind of conclusion was eventually reached with respect to the dispute between Bowden Co. and the French government over Matacong Island. However, what needs to be pointed out here is that by the end of the 19th century, the island was already losing its competitiveness and importance as a trading post. Up until the 1880s at the latest, primary commodities from the Northern Rivers, such as groundnuts, were being directly exported by small merchant ships on an irregular basis to Western countries such as France. However, this state of affairs would gradually change as the number of regular steamship lines to West Africa increased, along with the size of the vessels. By the 1890s, many of the primary commodities of the Northern Rivers were being temporarily stockpiled in places such as Freetown, which possessed relatively extensive port facilities. They would then be loaded onto large-scale cargo vessels for export (Howard, 1968: 41).

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As noted earlier, when Smith had arrived on Matacong in 1891, he had initially been quite optimistic about future opportunities for trade on the island. However, by that stage, the "age of factories" in the Northern Rivers was already beginning to come to a close, along with the end of the 19th century. ☀

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Facts Regarding Lease of the Island of Matacong, West Coast of Africa, December 1891, The Matacong Island (West Africa) Papers (MIP) 230.
2. "Matacong, West Coast of Africa," *The Illustrated London News*, December 2, 1854, p. 551.
3. "Matacong, West Coast of Africa," *The Illustrated London News*, December 2, 1854, p. 551.
4. Copy of Part of Despatch from Administrator-in-Chief, Sierra Leone, to Colonial Office, November 19, 1891, MIP 108.
5. The Creoles are called the "Krio" today. An English-based creole language, Krio, is lingua franca and a *de facto* national language spoken throughout Sierra Leone. For more detail on the Krio, see, for example, Fyfe (1987), Spitzer (1975), and Wyse (1989).
6. Agreement between Allimamie Amura and S. Gabbidon & W. H. Savage for the Island of Matacong, December 30, 1825, MIP 197c. Iron bars made by smiths in the form of long rods were widely used as currency in the region of today's Sierra Leone and Liberia.
7. Agreement between Allimamie Amura and S. Gabbidon & W. H. Savage for the Island of Matacong, MIP 197c.
8. Agreement between Allimamie Amura and S. Gabbidon & W. H. Savage for the Island of Matacong, MIP 197c.
9. Facts Regarding Lease of the Island of Matacong, West Coast of Africa, MIP 230.
10. Typed Copy of Document Transferring Matacong from the Chiefs of the Bullam Country to William Gabbidon, 1842, MIP 199a.
11. Release and Bargain Sale of the Island of Matacong, August 24, 1844, MIP 200b.
12. "Matacong, West Coast of Africa," *The Illustrated London News*, December 2, 1854, pp. 551–552.
13. "Matacong, West Coast of Africa," *The Illustrated London News*, December 2, 1854, p. 552.
14. Autograph Description of Matacong, n.d., MIP 178.
15. Declaration of Mr. Peter Manning, April 16, 1883, MIP 208.
16. *Report from the Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast); Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix*, iii, British Parliamentary Papers, 1865 (412) V, (412-I).
17. For more detail on the production and trade of groundnuts in the 19th-century West Africa, see Brooks (1975).
18. "Governor Rowe to Sir M. Hicks Beach," April 5, 1879, Doc. 45, in Partridge and Gillard (Eds) (1996: 69).
19. "Anglo-French Convention," June 28, 1882, in Newbury (1971b: 175).
20. Copy of Statement by P. Manning about Matacong, n.d., MIP 177; Mr. & Mrs. Manning to Mr. Richard Philpott: Conveyance of the Island of Matacong, May 23, 1882, MIP 203b; Mr. Richard Philpott to the Matacong and North West African Company Ltd.: Conveyance of the Island of Matacong, April 3, 1883, MIP 207a; The Matacong and North West African Company Limited with Messrs. Jas. Bowden & Company: Mortgage of the Island of Matacong to Secure Balance of Account and Interest, April 14, 1883, MIP 209a.
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TO BE, TO MOVE, TO REACT

REFLECTIONS ON POSSIBLE NEO-POSTCOLONIAL READINGS OF THE AFRICAN AGENCY

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Abstract

Focusing on African agency, this paper debates around a constructed triad of concepts found at the roots of African ways of expressing the struggle for identification, recognition and also the rise of a continent in worldly discourses, in a holistic and rather philosophical approach. The constructed triad is represented by narratives of dynamic verbs such as to be, to move and to react, in a post-structuralist intent to express the concept of following Africa, an alternative token for the changes in the perception of African agency. The aim of this concept is to symbolize, in a neo-postcolonial reading, the consciousness of self-consciousness, as a possible complex process of African becoming and the African continent's rise in the global narratives.

Introduction

This reflection is meant to briefly explore the foundations and types of African agency. The methodology used is the joining of conceptual representations that African agency assumed throughout the years from the fifties to the present day, with a holistic philosophical approach to some critiques of each period. While joining these elements, the key concepts followed are a) *to be*, or *being*; b) *to move*, or *movement;* and c) *to react*; all systematically entrenched with the African agency. Besides giving an alternative of their relations in the context of African agency, this study proposes an alternative token for the changes in the perception of it, namely *following Africa,* which would mean the consciousness of self-consciousness. One step towards the creation of it, is, in the view of this paper, the moral agency and the moral r(evolutions), terms instrumentally used within pragmatic definitions in order to simplify and highlight the conclusion on possible trends of discourse on *following Africa.*

1. Key issues on the neo-postcolonial choice

Although much attention was given to agency and leadership in the shaping of the African continent's development perspectives, in the African or Africanist writings, the subject is still open to debates as to whether changes in the polarization of the world have participated or not in a reshaping of these perspectives. Moreover, if writers, philosophers, political analysts, economists, or historians would agree to unify their works on the perspectives of transformations in the African society, with a unanimous purpose to deconstruct such stereotypes like poverty, insanity, primitivism, security risks, that accompany the image of Africa in certain domains of First World's social life, migration included (Tarrósy, 2014: 17), they would be in front of a frosty winter, forcing them to put on new jackets and re-read the African agency in the new context. The aim here is to analyze whether these jackets exist and are not like the "Emperor's new suit".

Re-reading the African agency from so many perspectives would be, with no doubt, a very long and exhausting process. Thanks to development studies some of the mentioned fields have found a good ally to have their interests defended. Since development studies look where each and every other field of study separately taken refused to look (Kapoor, 2008: 3). Valuing the idea of the relativization of paradigms (Slater, 1992: 294) and the demand if thinking in terms of paradigms is appropriate (Pieterse,1998: 344), the focus of development studies on the African issue and African agency was realized in the contested key of a "genuinely" postcolonial viewpoint, as a political (dis)engagement to relations of power in the colony and neocolonialism, functioning in certain geographical and political contexts (Moore-Gilbert, 1997: 10).

A necessary turn in this regard would be the neo-postcolonial vision, seeing that, from an African philosophical perspective, the "post" of the "post" colonial should be written in brackets, as the achievements of the African overall independence starting from the sixties had not fulfilled the African dream (Eze, 1997: 14). Or,

considering that "post" from "postcolonial" would be different from any "post" in other formulations, would not refer to domination from colonizer on colonized anymore, but would have moved in both directions (Ahluwhalia, 2001: 92).

Such neo-postcolonial proposition would keep the gaze onto a new type of colonizer, to probe not only the Western knowledge's production as in the case of Gayatri Spivak's post-colonialism (Kapoor, 2008: 55), but also the deconstruction of the West and its produced knowledge, in line with western philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, criticized by Gayatri Spivak (Kapoor, 2008: 54). On the other hand, Africa itself is a victim of the broader objectification of its own postcolonial discourse, as African states became victims of their postcolonial regimes (Bell, 1997: 206). Therefore a neo-postcolonial view would like to assess the perspective which sustains the development discourse able to reconsider, criticize or build the new African society (cultural relativism on the purpose and only for this reason being accepted), or the post-postcolonial and postmodern one.

> **Although much attention was given to agency and leadership in the shaping of the African continent's development perspectives, in the African or Africanist writings, the subject is still open to debates as to whether changes in the polarization of the world have participated or not in a reshaping of these perspectives.**

In terms of development policies and political studies, the post-postcolonial turn would be reflected in the idea shared within the African and Africanist discourse that a more strategic approach of the African governments in international relations and development would ease a reply to the question on what would be actually good for the Africans, given by the Africans themselves (Tarrósy, 2011: 27).

2. Agency in a time of Africa's rise

The notion of "agency" was largely defined among scholars of politics, philosophy, even historians. It presumes the resistance, as it encompasses a capacity to act within and against social structures (Jensen, 2011: 66) in the frame of the structure-agency debate (Bleiker, 2004: 9), or willingness and opportunity (Friedman–Star, 1997: 129), analyzed on a discourse-agency axis (Bleiker, 2004: 11). On the other hand, the agency is the capacity one individual has to desire and act for the removal of any type of freedom limitations that might jeopardize his capacity to exercise choice and opportunities, to exert his reasoned agency, as in a paradoxical return from agency to agency envisaged by Sen's capability approach for individual development, at the center of the "development as freedom" paradigm (Sen, 2000).

According to Jensen, the agency, as resistance, bears two forms: capitalization and refusal (Jensen, 2011: 6), which does not only place the individual at the center of all premises, reframing the bottom-up politics intended as civil society (Kostovi-cova–Bojicic-Dzelilovic, 2011: 96), but also opens the path for a discourse on values. This happens since capitalization and refusal would mean the non-acceptance to be devalued or the escape from the uniformization through value difference forced reductions (Jensen, 2011: 6).

Further on, in the context of agency in Africa, it would be relevant to assert the connection between values and ideas, as well as ideologies. Although in the first worlds, Third World is seen as preferring "bread", it is relevant to observe, taking into account Amitav Acharya's support of Donald Puchala's argument, that in the Third World ideas and ideologies would be far more important than power or wealth, due actually to the scarcity of power detention and unequal wealth distribution in the world (Acharya, 2018: 20). Along with this view, the question of agency in a historical moment when the African states register important improvements in regards to the place and role on the stage of international relations (relevant increases in the economic growth – e.g. DRC, Ivory Coast, Mozambique in 2015-2016[1], the membership in symbolic alliances e.g. South Africa in the BRICS, etc.) bring about the concern on the new forms of the agency or on the tendencies and links between agency and leadership.

Such concerns are articulated in a rather holistic definition of an African agency as the long, but successful and uninterrupted way from being the hopeless continent towards being a rising one, in which African voices do believe (Tarrósy, 2020: 73).

One question to encompass the research objective included herein would be whether forms of agency characteristic to the colonial period and represented by the anti-colonial movements should be again represented in the African continent today. Or, which forms of agency are in act. The philosophical approach to this would be the critical analysis of the meanings of Being, in its dynamic facets, or the African meanings of the verb *to be*, which are analyzed using a qualitative approach.

Looking into works of African writers and Africanists on the concept, an important characteristic and tendency of African agency should be represented by the rhetoric of the agency itself, meaning the narrative of actions taken by the agents and described through both their movement and reactions. In this view, the agency should not be related to leadership, as it would be defining no special individuals, but any individual and all individuals at the same time. This would be the freedom as discursive control theorized by Pettit, namely freedom as the capacity of a person to have a discursive status in relation to others (Pettit, 2001: 103). In this line, African agency is different and changed in relation to the moment the project of decolonization had initiated and continued, along with the concrete definition of freedom and consciousness of any African state's citizen. The agency was reshaped based on achieved freedom statuses.

One of the limits of such consciousness is the question of African elites or leaders who would encourage neo-colonialism according to Franz Fanon and even Kwame

Nkrumah (Langan, 2018: 160). For these elites, freedom of the self would be itself diminished due to the impossibility to avoid "weakness and allusiveness" that would hinder the ownership of Africans on their discourse or the chance of discursive relations with others (Pettit, 2001: 103).

Focusing on 'Africa's rise' and the realization of some decolonization purposes in relation to the position in the world narratives and on an international relations stage, the new agency would be represented by the alignment to a global discourse that defines Africans as speakers on various important issues such as poverty reduction (which is not only an African problem), sanity (which is mostly not an African issue and in this the Coronavirus pandemic had shown us how developed countries are facing difficulties), safety, and environmental protection.

In fact, a similar African agency had started first with Pan-Africanism, expressed moreover in arts and creativity (Ifekwe, 2018: 256) and the Négritude movement inspired by the decolonization projects envisaged by Aimé Cesaire. The Négritude, according to Cesaire, would have not been limited to the creation of independent nation-states (Cooper, 2005: 411) able to become single actors on an international relations stage, but would have gone beyond its aim and touched the very transformative possibilities of the colonizer's society. Embracing Négritude as a movement, Fanon also would have gone beyond its interpretation as a simple struggle against colonialism, or a class struggle, as Sartre would have assimilated it (Moore-Gilbert, 1997: 177).

From the appearance of agency present in Fanon's imprecations for all to recognize that the white man would not be more a man than the Negro and every consciousness should be wide open to the simple being (Fanon, 1967: 181) to the process of "Africanization" in the view of Achille Mbembé, the African agency represents the set of discursive frames of reparation, restitution, and justice, departing from the name of "Africa" (Mbembé, 2017: 54). Although Mbembé refers to this while recalling our world is still a world of races (Mbembé, 2017: 55), African agency in the new era of polarization tends to focus its narratives on the fact of extended leadership and its soft power, along with the inclusive and sustainable regional development discourses. On the other hand, the rhetoric of the agency is conciliable with the dimension of "facing forward" as it was expressed in the words of president Nkrumah when asked about his intentions to face the West or the East in his politics (Benyera et al., 2020: 10).

In line with this facing forward and post-positivist turning in the forcefully proclaimed "African reason" (Mbembé, 2017), African agency would represent the shiny part of a becoming that allowed frustrations debated on a psychological structural path by Fanon when talking about the sexual image of the black man (Fanon, 1967: 53), or about the socially created consciousness of ethnicity (Fanon,1967: 122), or even the "grotesque" and "generally obscene emulation of European" (Fanon, 2004: 239), as well as that about the frustration of being isolated by African realities as a trait of colonialism present in the discourse of Amilcar Cabral (1973: 62), to be tempered and turned into grounds for identity building and defending, such as the "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) (2013) gone on the streets and virtually.

Now the contention of the BLM movement in an African agency context would be *per se* polemical, due to the context of it. It is a reaction to unjustified violence and crime that falls under racist actions. But, as "not all Blacks are Africans and not all African are Blacks" (Mbembé, 2017: 12), to speak of Africa is to "invoke" Blackness (Mbembé, 2017: 38), as much as the correlative of Blackness invoking Africa would be true, due to both being signs of alterity, hard to assimilate in a western world (Mbembé, 2017: 38).

Therefore, the agency would be the struggle for life and identification, scramble for its own domains of discourse (unlocked from the East or West or even East–West struggle paradigms) and desire for centrality. Moreover, it would be the desire and struggle to become part of a real dialogue with the more industrialized regions of the world, that started with the formation of alliances taking inspiration from the Non-Aligned Movement (Tarrósy, 2011: 18).

While the struggle for life is reflected in the BLM slogan, as fulfilling the frame of identification as a Black and as an African in the end, the scramble for own domains of discourse and the centrality are pillars of discovery agency and the agency of consciousness over the discovered (Nyere, 2020:131), displacing the attention from Africa as an object, to Africa as a subject of its development, being and forward-facing.

On the other hand, the struggle for own domains of discourse was supported by African voices sustaining the freedom of literature, arts and cinema, and briefly the knowledge, in the African languages, without causing any isolation. As Ngugi Wa Thiong'O asserted: "The peasantry saw no contradiction between speaking their own mother-tongues and belonging to a larger national and continental geography" (Thiong'O, 1994: 23). Although Thiong'O wrote about the decolonization of the mind at the beginning of the eighties already, giving credits to language and cultural universal interdependencies and re-asserting the foundations of humankind by considering its language a unique one, the "language of struggle" (Thiong'O, 1994: 108), this topic continues to be a bias, today.

The fear of not having assisted to the complete decolonization of the mind, namely to the total liberation of knowledge production forms is translated into the preoccupation that social change in Africa would be still dominated by the interests of metropolitan forces (Lumumba-Kasongo, 1999: 8), into the suspicion to view modernity as an agency of domination (Adejumo, 2002: 175), or into the ways and forms to reconsider the transformations that are inherent to the so-called African Renaissance. With reference to it, this would be the struggle to coin and sustain an African identity, but mostly an African consciousness, in the rhetoric of the former President Thabo Mbeki (Bongmba, 2006: 294).

For Achille Mbembé, in fact, the notion of "agency" is amassed with notions of "hegemony", "moral economy" and "resistance", endlessly summoned, which have contributed to the rediscovery of a subaltern subject (Mbembé, 2001: 5) or a translated sub-culture of *Africanité* in the modernity of France and beyond (Eze, 2001: 116). All premises to rediscover them were created and maintained in advance

by Négritude representatives. For example, one of the fathers of Négritude, Leopold Senghor would have contributed to radical politics and critical social theory to prove the incessant "overlapping, interlocking and intersecting" nature of both racism and colonialism (Rabaka, 2016: 3), because of the supported essentialist particularism in treating the African as different. By such, he was treated in a register of inferiority and servitude, constructing the *Africanité* as the Other, finding itself outside the Otherness projected by Europe and being negative to the own positivity of the last one (Serequeberhan, 1994: 52). But, at the same time, Négritude was seen as a practice to translate this *Africanité* into a cultural presence.

Indebted to change this old view and reconstruct the *Africanité*, the African agency was revealed through the movements recorded as "Ethiopianism, Garveyism, Negritude, Pan-Africanism, African Socialism, African Humanism, Black Consciousness Movements and African Renaissance." (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015: 488). This reconstruction of *Africanité* or re-Africanization as "return to the source", in the conception of Amilcar Cabral (Serequeberhan, 1994: 102) is strangely linked to the post-structural deconstruction of Jacques Derrida, although in very different periods of time and in a context where, curiously, the primacy would be this time in a non-Western register of thinking. Colonization would mean, for Cabral, the suspension of history for the colonized, meanwhile decolonization a taking over from where it was left (Serequeberhan, 1994: 103).

In criticizing this view that would annihilate history even in reference to the existence and importance to reassert "African-ness"[2], the African agency sustained by contemporary thinkers on the path opened by Mbembé, refers to a pragmatic struggle on defining Africa as a sign or chimera but also, in the view of this paper, a more romantic agency on *following Africa*. It is suggested by Africa's "moving in several directions at once", being said on it that "at the same time, [it] has been, is not yet, is no longer, is becoming" (Mbembé, 2001: 241). Further on, while holding a postmodernist direction of discourse, especially on the inclusive development, the paradigm on the agency would function contextually, using adapted ways of being and doing (Rapley, 2007: 209; de Sousa Santos, 2018: 296). Therefore, any conceptualization on African agency would be most fitted in an African ontology, since any ontological difference determine an epistemological one (de Sousa Santos, 2018: 20). However, such a one-way perspective would not allow a connection between studies, by harnessing the

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work on differences that in scholarly practice would have helped imperial paradigms to be undercut and in reference to narratives of Africa from the inside, to sustain the sameness-as-worldliness (Mbembé–Nuttall, 2004: 351).

Hence, the aim of these reflections is to look into the pillars of the agency from a philosophical standpoint and create an alternative image on the causes and modalities of African agency, through a holistic critical analysis. These pillars would be, therefore, the *being*, the *moving* (like mobility or acting) and the *reacting*, representing the subject, the dynamic objects of the agency and finally the relations between subject and objects, which are often no less than relations of power. In other words, African agency is defined departing from the cumulative post and after-post colonial lenses, based on the proposed pillars, although the intention of this paper is not to impose any definition.

3. "Following Africa" and the three pillars of African agency.

The narratives of subjects, objects, and the relations governing them are focal points to postmodern social and humanist studies. A re-reading of them in the context of a more contemporary aim and cliché such as that of "following" is not casual, invoking the social media relations structure. In the more liquid society of today, this verb is necessary and relevant. The narratives of debated realities should be created and sustained around this concept if considering the verb "following" as more than "discovering" or "unpacking" but less than "being manipulated" by any influencer.

In the words of Bonaventura de Sousa Santos, emancipatory acts, meaning the expression of agency in the Global South, might not follow the Eurocentric scripts (de Sousa Santos, 2018: 298). For this reason, there is much to suppose that own receipts of the Global South are followed from within it, with consciousness with regard to the gained self-consciousness, 65+ years after the Bandung Conference. Hence, while unpacking resistance, emancipation, self-consciousness and reconciliation mechanisms that played an important role in the becoming of Africa and the definition of consciousness on an African Self, conceptualizing the 21st century's *Africa following* would mean the consciousness of Africans to pursue the awareness of their value[3] and declare it to the world.

Since the concept of "following" is sustained in contemporaneity, due to social media expansion, the fact of pursuing or having a so-called conscious way to declare the self-consciousness in an African context is linked to this fluid opportunity of getting out from a sort of marginalization. The foundations of this process are still to be analyzed in the context of power relations, given by the positionalities of media products in a neo-liberal rationale. In this context "following Africa" could represent a new form of agency developed to transform the relations of power or the perceptions on them in an African narrative, taking inspiration from one of the main questions of contemporary philosophers, if there are margins to "talk about moving beyond colonialism?" (Mbembé, 2001: 237).

Returning to the notion pillars of *being*, *moving*, and *reacting*, representing the subject, the object, and their relations, the axis of a new agency discourse based on

the "following" concept should have its first and most important reference: *the being* or the subject in the absence of which, no discourse could take place. Considering that the *ubuntu* essence of "I am because you are", describing the co-existence and co-being in a South African community (de Sousa Santos, 2018: 10), is nearly completely embraced in overall African narratives as a hint and pattern, the definition of *being*, as "being African" and "being Black", was developed during centuries of academic or non-academic discourse by still bringing up the memory and development of the colonial relations with Europe and concomitantly, the metamorphoses of race. As Mbembé states: "The notion of race made it possible to represent non-European human groups as trapped in a lesser form of being." (Mbembé, 2017: 17).

On the other hand, the becoming of being is linked to the idea of self-consciousness and the achievement of humanity through the formulation of basic "I think therefore I am" of Descartes and "I am conscious to myself" of Kant, which contributed to the racialization of man and culture (Eze, 2001: 9). Meanwhile the construction of the I was in act, this racialization assured the organization of the world in fixed groups, with limitations and the scarce possibility of movement between groups, as in the logic of an enclosure (Mbembé, 2017: 35). This entrenchment between being and moving, or *to be* and *to move*, shows the circularity sustained already in Towa's approach on reason and freedom that truly existed only in the Self (Towa, 1971: 17). It is in this view that freedom, including that one to move, might philosophically point the movement towards one-self, the freedom to be free to know one's self, so follow the completion of its consciousness.

Likewise in Towa's circularity, the connection between *to be* and *to move* in the key lecture of this direction would place *to move* in the area of conceptualization of a *critical return* to the African-ness, namely to the precolonial history or to the essence of being and the culture of the colonized, such as the notion of decolonization have been defined by Franz Fanon (Rabaka, 2009: 126). This kind of return would have tried to force the abyssal line of color between Africans and Europeans in the considerations of the pan-Africanist W.E.B. Du Bois (Rabaka, 2009: 114), but also the one between humans and sub-humans (Benyera, 2020: 12), or the being and the non-being zone imagined by Fanon in the form of freedom achievement (De Sousa Santos, 2018: 20).

As Jean-Paul Sartre had argued, one of the important secular African agencies – The Négritude movement – would have been a reaction of "alienated Africans to European racist and capitalist cultures" (Eze, 2001: 157). The Black Consciousness movement having taken the scene after the sixties, focused, instead, on the "reactionary spirituality of pacifism", that would have shattered the authenticity of reactions to pursue the humanity achievement (Mdingi, 2020: 182). Consequently, the instrumental concept of t*o react*, as the third pillar of the *following Africa* construction, would be an opposite to the movement towards the liberation from the status of colonized and the creation of being. But, on the contrary, in the actual African narratives, *to react* is seen as a necessary action taken by the ones controlled (Nyere, 2020: 152), so it co-exists with *to be* and *to move* as described above, in a normal estate of questioning the Self, from different positions.

On the African subjectivity, endorsed by the verb and the action of *to be,* there is endless literature, starting from philosophy to political studies, including international relations, where the discourse of the African agency appears more effective but more questionable (Tarrósy, 2011; Tarrósy, 2006). In this regard, the completion of the picture with *to move,* should be necessarily done. This idea is supported by the landscape of non-passivity of the African agents (more generally, the states) in international relations (Chipaike & Knowledge, 2018: 11).

In the conceptual scheme proposed herein, *to move* becomes a correspondent of the object as it reflects a consequence of *to be*, or the subject. Phenomenologically speaking no object exists without the subject creating it continuously and in a dualistic perspective, the movement, as an object, represents a series of positions [that the subject adopts in order to construct the reality] (Bergson, 1969: 9). These positions are positions of power as in a colonial context, where subject and object positions are incompatible (Williams, in Falola Jennings, 2002: 279).

Besides, *to react*, as an expression of relations between the subject and the object, or *to be* and *to move*, reflects the power of the concept *to move* over *to be*. If *to move* understanding is to direct the being towards one's Self, *to react* to this movement signifies a displacement, hence a reinforcement of movement or resistance to it. The reinforcement of movement is given by a pragmatic view sustained, among others, by Achille Mbembé and Sarah Nuttall when talking about the African continent's interstices, the emplacements, and displacement (Mbembé & Nuttall, 2004: 351). In this view, Africa as an object is a space in motion. The displacement contributes to the maintenance and direction of it and the view should be considered at a macro level. On the contrary, if displacement is seen as resistance to the movement towards the self, at a micro level, this would support Achille Mbembé's opinion that the colony is the displacement between the self and the subject (Mbembé, 2017: 105).

In a postcolonial analysis of the *be-move-react* triad concerning African agency, primacy it is given to a new 21st century's proposition of the identity. Secondly, the consciousness of this identity is being unpacked into mobility towards the Self abstracted from the various facets of mobility. Thirdly, it laps around the orientation of this consciousness, as the relation between the identity created and the image of it created for the others. In this triad, the mobility is the completion of African contexts and discourses motions, but summarizing, the creation of rights to have rights (Benyera, 2020: 12). The last element of the triad, namely *reaction*, or the relationship between identity and its image refers to the way the subject might react to the environment, therefore, guide the motion and place it in relation to the being (slipping towards it or not).

4. The *be-move-react* triad and the moral African r(evolution)

Recorded as an important reference to this analysis, the development and the justice are endings of the African moral agency, for which a moral revolution should be necessary (Benyera, 2020: 14). At this point, Franz Fanon's discourse of the fifties, from his book "Black skin, white masks", according to which blackness is immorality in

the imagination of the whites (Sardar, intr. Fanon, 2008: xiii) seems to be continued, if we consider the image of African states in the world, as less democratic and corrupt. In this case, the moral agency was linked to leadership in the contemporary debate over democracy and even corruption.

Actually, moral evolution was a special concern for an important number of scholars in African affairs in the fifties (Mudimbe, 1988: 52), not unexpectedly from Europe. This would have led to several polemics on the position of power the Eurocentric thinking could have occupied in relation to the evolution or transformation of African society.

One of the anthropologists recalled by Mudimbe was Marcel Griaule (1988: 52). Although Griaule had contributed to the capitalization of African philosophy in his book "Dieu d'eau", while exposing some worldviews of Dogon people (living on the territory being part of today's Mali) and having added knowledge and image to an overall African philosophical picture initiated with the work of Placide Tempels on Bantu people (central and southern parts of the African continent), some African critiques suggested that he or his research colleagues could have fabricated some dialogues of his interlocutory, Ogotemmeli (Wiredu, 2004: 100) in order to create a reality for Africa rather than unpack it. The preoccupations of Griaule for the moral evolution would thus be of support to Eurocentric thinking and all thesis of primitiveness in Africa on one side, but also an acknowledgment on the moral state at that time. Both Griaule and Tempels believed in the potentiality of African culture, even if enclosed in a sort of pure metaphors that the world views of Bantu and Dogon people separately offered to the European researchers. Both anthropologists considered that colonization was an accident, with historical benefit (Mudimbe, 1988: 80).

Instead, after the fifties, precisely after the birth of Négritude, Black Personality Movement and the new "thinking subject", as the African philosopher was defined by Paulin Hountondji (Mudimbe, 1988: 51), other philosophers, like Obenga and Mveng, were talking about the moral benefit of Africa as the cradle of humankind (Mudimbe, 1988:110). Meanwhile, Kwasi Wiredu refers to morality as the harmonization of interests into the community and a "fragile endowment of the human psyche" (Wiredu, 2004: 18), highlighting the frequent incorrect confusion with ethics.

Morality, defined in the context of a discourse on the moral revolution, represents "a code of conduct that, given specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational persons" (Benyera, 2020: 14). Considering Ali Mazrui's conclusion that what Africa knows about itself, or any part of Africa [regions and states] know about each other was influenced by the West (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015: 486), also, the state of morality and its evolution should be necessarily included in a logic of Euro-American-centric view. With this, the constructed triad *be-move-react*, reflects an actual discourse on the necessity of the moral revolution, from the age of African asserting the being to the move towards the Self and a moral reaction to the exterior. This moral revolution is depicted by Achille Mbembé as an urge to make Africa unique, being a moral and political problem (Mbembé, 2002: 255). In this view asserting the

being is concretized in the movements of identity such as all movements related to race and color.

It was Fanon who pictured the image of the "Black" ("Negro") in the eyes of the westerner, going beyond that one of the "African", built by earlier anthropologists like Temples and Griaule. For Fanon, the image of the Negro in this frame was beyond any morality and prohibition (Fanon, 1967: 136). Referring to Bantu, as an expression of an "African" discovered by the West, he pointed on its created image as being without a Being, with existence in non-being and imponderability (Fanon, 1967: 143). At the same time, Fanon claimed for the Negros to be "dropped", in order for them to regroup their authentic forces, which could have meant the claim to a segregation of studies (researches on Africa) that would have diminished the agency with the weakening of whichever element of the triad.

Further on, while decolonization was in progress, African intellectuals produced the metanarrative of movement towards the Self, which previously, under colonization, was not even recognized by the self, besides by the Other (Mbembé, 2002: 241). Such movement, in this view, has no end, being part of the moral (r)evolution, defined as such due to double definition of morality as status and process, namely the status of moral evolution preoccupying the Eurocentric thinkers in the past and the moral revolution preoccupying the African scholars in the present. Such definitions reflect the continuum of a movement reflected constantly in the African culture.

The third element of the triad or the third pillar of the "following Africa" assembly is signified by *to react*. It also embodies the "r" from r(evolution), bearing very distinct approaches, of status or process, in other terms, of opposite reaction to the move towards the self or the propping up of it. This is reflected in the dominant African discourses on the self, placing race at the foundation of morality and their more actual inversions, trying to annihilate the traditional dichotomies (Mbembé, 2002: 257). But, also, the reaction in the descriptive repository of the *be-move-react* triad is the adaptation to the environment, a trying to move away from the old directions of going towards the Self on a predefined road, so that „anyone can imagine and choose what makes him or her an African" (Mbembé, 2002: 258). Or, from an international relations perspective, the *be-move-react* triad expresses the gradual arriving of African states to a position of choice between different apparently antagonistic proposals of the North and the South (Tarrósy, 2011: 18).

This type of image fracturing, the reaction to old paths and paradigms, could only take place in a context where, as hypothesized in this paper, there would be a constant following of Africa, from beneath and beyond, with a particular attention to not defend a pan-Africanistic view, but rather a conceptual and *de facto* federalization, especially in regards to the creation of stronger and interest driven country unions between those who share much of the culture, traditions, and language that unpack Africa (Tarrósy, 2006: 391), while assure the continuation of its rise and recognition.

Conclusions

Having in mind Mbembé's contribution to today's philosophy, but also his critique and attention to currents that have tried, with more or less success, to explore and empower the symbols of an African collective *imaginary* (Mbembé, 2002:239), the aim of this paper was to use and adapt three general symbols of *being-moving-reacting*, in order to describe the reality on the African agency, viewing the changes and the new directions of evolution. Translating "being", "moving" and "reacting" into the subject, the object, and their relations, the intent was to highlight, on one hand, the transfer from subjecthood to objecthood as a premise and end of colonization, the necessary return, or the move towards the Self. This would be the movement of the object in a process of following itself and last but not least, the relations between them as both participants to a reactionary adaptation to global and holistic changes of contexts and discourses.

The metaphor of *following* is the contextualization and maybe forceful drafting into contemporaneity. It is reflected in the continuous return to Africa's identification issue, which is observed in various forms and periods but takes different forms from the previous ones, with the temptation to design and close a circle. This concept is also signified in the idea of moral r(evolution) which launch the invitation to attentively look into the idea of status and process. The interpretation used herein allows evolution to be considered a status, case in which revolution is necessarily a process, but r(evolution) is the combining of them with the intent to root the stereotypical premise of African backwardness out from a chronological axis.

In this way, the African continent would be pictured on a continuum of normal evolution, having the dynamic status vacillating based on impulses of discursive returns and the sum of all discourses represent the process, *id est* the actual revolution, or the *following Africa* framed in a differently but not totally estranged conceptualization of the African agency. ☀

Notes

1. according to data taken from IMF World Economic Outlook, October 2015, Africa's economic growth. Taking Off or slowing down, EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service Author: Ionel Zamfir Members' Research Service January 2016 — PE 573.891, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/573891/EPRS_IDA%282016%29573891_EN.pdf

2. own translation to *Africanité,* from French

3. the term „value" is used in its sense of worth, merit;

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POLITICAL LEGITIMACY AND DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL AFRICA: A LOOK AT CAMEROON, CHAD, THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC AND GABON

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Abstract

This paper offers evidence of the intrinsic relationship between political legitimacy and democracy and scrutinizes the factors that provoke a crisis of political legitimacy and democracy in Central Africa. It contends that there is a need for the reconceptualization of political legitimacy and democracy in Africa as the conventional lines between democracy and totalitarianism seem to be clouding. It then concludes that despite the fact that democratic foundations in the region suffer from daunting challenges, demands for democratization continues to grow, resulting in the need to pay close attention to state legitimacy to ensure a democratic consolidation.

Introduction

This paper examines the state of political legitimacy in Central Africa and its effects on democratic consolidation in the region. We should bear in mind that political legitimacy remains one of the most important foundations for democratic stability and a prominent characteristic of politics in the region since independence. Nonetheless, authoritarian rule is closely linked to it too. The question of political legitimacy in the region still presents a great challenge especially as the region's nations are still building their paths towards democracy.

Subsequent to the events of the 1980's in the world, which were marked by so many countries shifting tides towards democratization which was 'blowing across the globe,' as written Broadbent, (1992: 102)., most countries in the region began holding elections, legalizing multi-party systems, and introducing presidential term-limits for the leaders. Following these events, prospects for democracy in Central Africa grew at a proportion never witnessed since the countries gained independence. This paper seeks to offer evidence of the intrinsic relationship between political legitimacy and democracy, exploring how the presence or lack of political legitimacy has positively or negatively influenced democracy in the region. This paper also suggests evidence that the democratic impulse in the region may have been weakened by the problems surrounding political legitimacy and that the political forces intrinsic to weakening democracy are rather internal than external. Typically, democracy in the region has been defined in terms of elections and transitions of power, but we also have to include other accompanying variables like constitutionalism, the respect of human rights, freedom of association and assembly, topics which remain very much questionable in the region.

The following sections shall provide a brief overview of the literature on the relationship between political legitimacy and democracy and trace the history of political power in the selected countries, then explore what political legitimacy truly is. Another section will be devoted to discussing the development of political power, the prevalence of authoritarian rule or illiberal democracies, and also the reasons for the prevalence of unresponsive multi-party states as the dominant idiom of today's politics in the Central Africa by presenting the state of democracy within the existing political apparatuses. This shall be done by looking at the long-run and short-run rapport between political legitimacy and democracy.

Theorizing Political Legitimacy and Democracy

This section identifies the debates on political legitimacy and democracy by highlighting the determinants of both terms and will go further to establish the nature of the relationship between the two concepts. Larry Diamond summarizes diverse views of the determinants of democracy. These include, inter alia, the economic performance, with indicators such as improvement in living standards which he emphasizes has become a truism. Also, political performances such as freedom and order, human rights, and political legitimacy (Diamond, 1997: 19, 20), which stem from positive policies instituted by the leaders. With democratic consolidation being

the main idea, Diamond set out four standards upon which a democracy can be characterized in his lecture 'What is Democracy?', which this study greatly relies on as the guiding standards for legitimacy:

1. A political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections.
2. The active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life.
3. Protection of the human rights of all citizens.
4. A rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens. (Diamond, 2004)

We can comfortably place the analysis of democratic stability in the Central African region within the larger literature on political legitimacy, which in general ordinary thinking connotes to approval. Levitov identifies at least two points of departure from which legitimacy may be set to prevail, underscoring a sociological path and a normative path (Levitov, 2016) with the latter emphasizing the morality of right to rule. Showing the relationship between legitimacy and democracy in what he described as "loyalty to the democratic regime", Juan Linz emphasized that legitimacy must not be limited to the abstract form of democracy, but should be visible through commitment expressed in shared and normative behaviours in respect of the laws of the land (Linz and Stepan, 1975: 29-37). Lipset in his analysis on the determinants of democracy highlights political legitimacy alongside social requisites such as emergent industrialization, urbanization, education, wealth, and urbanization. (Lipset, 1959) Talking about political legitimacy, Merriam in *Systematic Politics* maintained that factors such as internal and external security, general state well-being, freedom, and justice paved the way for states to enjoy political legitimacy. (Merriam, 1945: 31) There can be several narratives from which analysis of political legitimacy can depart. My general observation is that there is some degree of legitimacy in democracy through the ballot, or what we normally know as elections. This is because all these countries hold regular elections in the name of democracy, but the problem we encounter in analyzing these elections is how free and fair they are. Again, election results are not sufficient enough variables to be used to characterize political legitimacy. The manner in which these electoral results are achieved is important too: whether or not the elections free and fair, and if the wielders of political authority are legitimate or not. Buchanan outlined three[1] (3) ground conditions for determining the legitimacy of political power. (Buchanan, 2002: 703) It is not a new thing to hear of post-electoral contestations in sub-Sahara Africa, some of which even clash out to violent conflicts. The existence of such examples alone prompts us to question whether or not the governments are legitimate.

Buchanan's works are very important for the provision of a theory analyzing political legitimacy. He argues in favour of political legitimacy rather than political authority, emphasizing on the need for real democratic institutions as the basis for determining political legitimacy (Buchanan, 2002: 718) thus the theory of democratically authorized political power (Buchanan, 2002: 693). Legal theorist Christopher

Wellman, on the other hand, sees a state as legitimate if it enjoys the moral freedom to utilize and threaten force against the ruled (Wellman, 1996: 211, 212). This direction of analysis of legitimacy focuses more on the coercive nature of the state, which alludes to the state's monopoly on the legitimate utilization of physical force to coerce and enforce actions within its territory. Buchanan's ideas are thus more useful to the analysis of this article because even in a democracy, each state has the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force (monopoly on violence). Abusing this monopoly, illegitimately using force, and sneaky attitudes on issues of state against the general health of the country in democracies raise questions in the issue of political legitimacy in these states. This highlights the pivotal role of legitimacy in the analysis of democratic studies.

Leadership has played and continues to play a great role in democracy and the discrepancies between the thoughts and actions and the diversity of the desires of these leaders are important factors in the nature of democracy. Schatzberg quotes Decalo that 'there has been an unfortunate tendency to confuse longevity with legitimacy or the absence of coups with both stability and legitimacy' (Schatzberg, 1989: 445),[2] highlighting how misleading many studies of political sciences have been so far in understanding political legitimacy in African regimes. Inherent to the analysis of Schatzberg is the importance he conveys to political culture, which has been the characterizing factor of leadership in sub-Sahara Africa.

Inglehart advances much on the debate of political culture as he analyses how societies have different patterns of political cultural approaches which are enduring and not unchallengeable (Inglehart, 1988) Inglehart's ideas provoke thoughts on the type of political culture which characterizes the political sphere in Central Africa, and gives meaning to the events which are almost peculiar to the area, there by guiding the understanding of the cultural mechanisms of political legitimacy. This paper however upholds political legitimacy to be the attitude which the system of government deems best for the country, be it morally right, justifiable, proper, and deserving of the people's fidelity. This paper furthers the thought that a legitimate government is one which operates not for the interests of a particular group or the interests of the leaders, but for the majority of the country's population or the whole country, thus giving it a moral title to govern and command obedience from the people, be able to tax the people effectively, be capable of drafting, legislating and enforcing laws, thus being able to practice a mixture of coercion and consent for the general will of the people as democracy stipulates. Democracies however vary and are unique to every area, this

> **Leadership has played and continues to play a great role in democracy and the discrepancies between the thoughts and actions and the diversity of the desires of these leaders are important factors in the nature of democracy.**

paper thus sees democracy and political legitimacy as based on the consent of the governed, not saying coercion should not exist, but it seeks to put the voluntary consent of the citizens as the pre-condition for an effective democracy. Political legitimacy explores the relationship between the leaders in power/those who control the state on the one hand and the citizens who are being governed. Also, because of the importance of this relationship to democracy, the moral grounds of legitimate governance must be well established.

Tracing the History of Political Power in Central Africa

Pre-colonial African politics was characterized by a system of governance argued by many as being authoritarian, with hierarchy composing the basis of traditional rule. Others see it as being democratic, made up of societies that engaged in general consultations prior to decision making (Kunz, 1991). Focusing on these skeletal and limited structures to discuss the present state of affairs will be misleading because these forms of practices were not practiced throughout the continent as there were variations in modes of governance in the various societies. Neither where they universally regarded as modelled systems of governance as we define today. We cannot however deny that the tradition of constitutionality (the art of governing according to legally binding written texts), which we have today was absent, because these pre-colonial modes of government had modes of operation (though not written in texts as we do today) which they followed, with laws and legislations peculiar to every environment, to represent mutuality and accountability, thus proving the legitimacy of the governments that existed then, as Gluckman explained (Gluckman, 1965).

The present institutions of governance in Africa are the remnants of a foreign system, instituted during colonialism by the colonial powers to suit their interests, wherein the existing traditional political authorities were ousted and more colonial friendly ones replaced them. Or they were friendly from the beginning and thus the colonial powers incorporated them on the basis of collaboration, thus conserving their 'traditional status' and powers and integrating themselves into the colonial governments. This system of leadership set the ground for the western loyalist governments we have in Central Africa today which operate based on a client-patron relationship. The characteristic of the political elite is one with leaders of little regard for the local political culture who also have very fragile links with societies at large.

As this paper seeks to establish, legitimacy has been variedly defined, but the propositions of this paper's view on legitimacy shall include government responsiveness as a basis for determining a legitimate government, with the assumption being that a responsive government will gain the support of the people, and the loopholes for political opposition and crises shall be limited. The question of responsiveness however remains relative. Relativity here connotes to either economic responsiveness or political responsiveness. Conventional wisdom has it that economic performance by some governments in new democracies serves as a means of a government legitimizing itself. Examples of the miraculous economic achievements witnessed in some African countries such as Rwanda and East Asian economic giants oper-

ating under authoritarian systems of governance permitted these governments to legitimize themselves in power, though as recent waves of events prove, the tides have changed towards securing basic political rights (Wike and Schumacher, 2020). A prolific writer in this field is Adam Przeworski who stresses on the importance of economic delivery to consolidation of democracy by identifying the gap between the real economic experiences and the subjective expectations to conclude that popular support for democracy will increase if the citizens have witnessed and believe democracy to improve upon their individual economic condition (Przeworski, 1991). Experience from the history of Europe has proven that their move towards democracy came with improvements in their national economies. Another group of scholars, William Mishler, Christian Haerpfer and Richard Rose, however, warn against this reductionist theory. They argue to, "not treat all political attitudes as if they were merely reliant on economic situations." They also concluded that it is not just economic factors that define the levels of popular support for democracy, but political factors do so even more. (Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer, 1998: 157, 174) Ascertaining the validity of this analysis is relative to region, country, and time. Popular support for governments has varied across time and circumstances everywhere on Earth. Analyzing the legitimacy and support for governments in countries like Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, and Gabon will place political factors in the forefront because the governments in these countries continue to thrive despite the numerous economic challenges and lapses they are facing. The popular support they enjoy (at least from electoral outcomes over the last two or three presidential elections) has proven that the governments remain unshaken, though the elections have always been contested to be fraudulent. (Election, 2018) Contrary to the situation in countries such as Rwanda, economic policy performance and responsiveness has served for many governments as the basis for legitimacy.

This paper contends that the legitimacy of governments in Central Africa is linked to and closely affiliated with the ruling party and its surrounding history. Often, the people do not even have a chance to determine if the government is legitimate or not, and it wouldn't matter if the government is democratic or authoritarian. The economic challenges faced by people often tend to obscure their judgment of legitimacy and by this, draws them further away from political participation, which in turn limits the chances of ascertaining the legitimacy of a government. Some economic policy successes and breakout of civil disobediences and terrorist attacks have been seized as opportunities by governments to further their agenda of holding on to power over an increasingly apolitical population too. Voter registration and electoral results in several of these countries have proven this to be true, with increasingly decreasing figures. Data from the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) and International IDEA shall be used to illustrate the views of this paper.
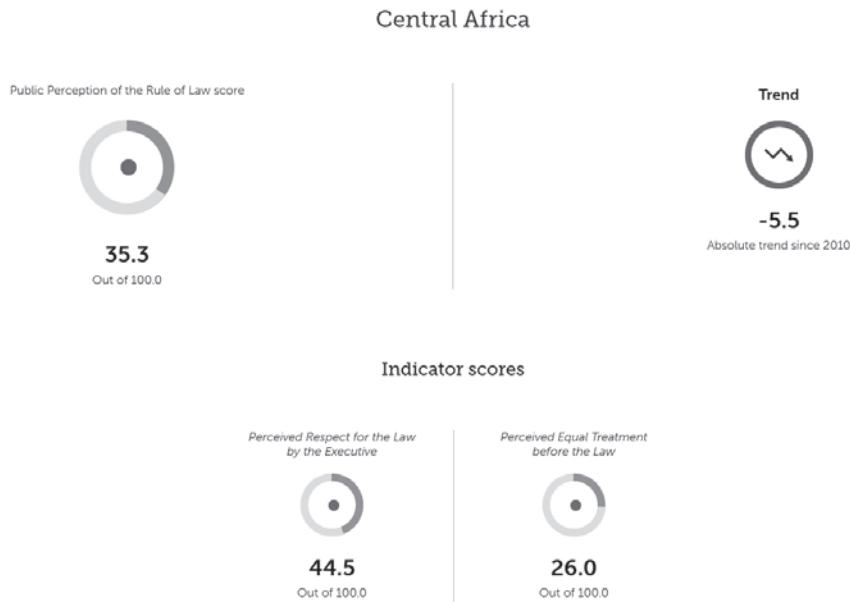
The International IDEA report on the history of electoral processes shows a steady decline in voter turnout at least for the past two presidential elections in Cameroon to have declined from 68.28% in the 2011 presidential election to 53.85% in the 2018 presidential election.[3] This same outcome happens to be exhibited with the case

of Central African Republic which in its subsequent presidential elections recorded a steady decrease from 72.65% in the 2005 presidential elections to 59.01% as of the 2016 presidential elections.[4] 'The justice-based theory of political legitimacy' proposed by Buchanan could be a starting point for further investigation of this situation (Buchanan, 2002: 23).

A few years after attaining independence, countries in this region immediately adopted multi-party politics as a basis of legitimizing their positions. This was done through the institutionalization of nationalist movements who fought for independence to become political parties to shoulder the responsibility of leading the states as the colonial masters packed their bags.[5] A promising age had begun, the age of enlightenment, true promises of the future everyone dreamt of; living in a land of freedom of expression, of speech, and of association. This age ushered in constitutional reforms in so many countries. As a case in point, Cameroon's constitution in 1961 (adopted during the creation of the federal state structure) outlined a multi-party system, with many political parties already operating as of then. Although this situation was short-lived, as the country under the reign of Ahmadou Ahidjo was geared towards another direction adopting a monolithic single mass-party system, a system which aimed to centralize power and eliminate all forms of opposition. This system was characterized by: the nonexistence of competitive political parties and, multiple candidate elections, the absence of freely formed associations, and also the limitation of fundamental political and civil liberties, and strong monopolization of political decision-making.[6] Such measures were adopted then by the regime as a form of ensuring state conservation, to ensure that a country largely divided as Cameroon remains united, which as of then had the formation of political parties based on regional and tribal lineages. Other sources, such as the United States Department of Commerce, saw it as a means for the state to tie together its resources and improve its economic development[7] because multi-party politics would have been a waste of resources. Evidence of the popularity of the existing political parties in Cameroon were proof enough that this assertion was justifiable to a certain extent as the Union Camerounaise (UC), the party of President Ahidjo was popular mostly only in the region where he came from, while the party of John Ngu Foncha, who was vice president of the Federal Republic, Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) was mostly popular only in the Anglophone region where the leader originated from. Ahidjo's position was advanced under the agenda of the "Grand National Party" known by its French appellation "Parti Unifié" (Ngoh, 1996: 235) The mono-party system adopted in Cameroon fell into the trap of desire for political authority as it gradually led to the centralization of state power, which enabled Ahidjo to consolidate his position as president. This system was however abandoned with the coming to power of Paul Biya in what was described as the *'New Deal'* (Aseh, 2006: 110) government in 1982. The idea behind the early one-party system was the same as in many other countries: unifying resources and the people towards common growth, which in essence legitimized the government. The introduction of a multi-party system was a response to a call for liberty because the one-party state had led to the

centralization of power, thus multi-party politics piloted a new era witnessing the passing of liberty laws as was the case in Cameroon (Jua, 2003: 85). This era saw the emergence of political parties who competed in political elections and provided a sense of legitimacy to the governments. The euphoria surrounding multi-parties and legitimizing the leadership of these countries has however been short-lived as political prosecution and suppression of these liberty laws have become the norm and freedoms of expression were seized from the people and opposition leaders were detained as the cases of Cameroon (after the presidential elections)[8] and Gabon in 2016[9] show. IIAG statistics show a downward trend of -5.5 on the rule of law in the Central African region, with the region having a public perception score of only 35.5% as illustrated on the image below. Consequently, the respect for liberty laws is a determinant of political legitimacy alongside government responsiveness.

Another determinant of both political legitimacy and democracy which remains largely ignored is clientelism, a phenomenon that cannot be considered nonaligned, and whose very manifestation is accompanied by high corruption, favouritism and patronage, all these, the ills of governance and the fuel burning down democracy. The role of clientelism[10] in African politics remains a paradox which is difficult to explain especially as the relationships are more or less voluntary. Kitschelt best put it as "relations not only involving some form or reciprocity and voluntarism but also exploitation and domination" (Kitschelt, 2000: 849) and one would wonder why

Central Africa

Public Perception of the Rule of Law score

35.3
Out of 100.0

Trend

-5.5
Absolute trend since 2010

Indicator scores

Perceived Respect for the Law
by the Executive

44.5
Out of 100.0

Perceived Equal Treatment
before the Law

26.0
Out of 100.0

2020 Ibrahim Index of African Governance, iiag.online
Source: https://iiag.online/app.html?v=t0CC_mnn

these relationships persist, but evidence from the Central African region proves that the clients are more accommodating because they could be better off if they severed the relationship. Several reasons could be proposed as to why these relationships still exist as many have argued, particularly the desires of these former colonial masters to maintain their status as world powers and also their spheres of influence in their former colonies. A good example to examine is the activities of France in sub-Sahara Africa, which have been very debatable[11] as their activities were described as being in "support of leaders who are loyal to them" (French, 1996).

African leaders often resort to a form of 'rent seeking' engagement (Krueger, 1974) and Tullock, 1967), which involves the disbursing of the already scarce resources to capture support (often military and economic, which generally serves just the interests of the leaders in power) from external partners and the equilibrium results are often that the support benefits some interest group at the detriment of others. This activity widely practiced by African leaders through which they create monopolies and assign political and economic rights and privileges to influential groups of people and even individuals in exchange for 'rent' with the aim of gaining the support of these groups and individuals not to challenge these leaders' authorities. These relationships have been the source of several forms of inefficiencies in the democratic consolidation process of Africa and its economic development. The approval of these powerful groups and individuals can be considered as a very important survival tactic for these rulers. Mbaku analyses these fears as competitive and transactions cost constraints.[12] The nature of political legitimacy in Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, and Gabon is very complex due to such relations because the support for these leaders is both internal and external, and monopoly on power positions keep shifting from old to new rivalries with the coming of different leaders.

Institutionalized state corruption steered by the leaders of these countries has been the most visible hand of the rent seeking which has ensued severe levels of hardship in these countries, draining the national resources into private pockets. Institutionalized corruption is a variable that affects political legitimacy and democracy in this region. Many crises of legitimacy in the continent have been linked to corruption, a continuous process of successive regimes operating with the same agenda under different groupings. The inability of governments to meet people's expectations, matched by growing corruption under normal circumstances gives a big blow to the legitimacy of the government and also democracy especially as widespread dissatisfaction leads to loss of confidence in the institutions of the state which are bent on shredding the remaining state resources for private ends. Government instituted anti-corruption mechanisms have been very ineffective in putting an end to this activity. IIAG data on the Central African region shows that there is a downward trend of -9.8 since 2010 and the public perception on government efforts fighting corruption remains at only 43.6% as shown on the figure below.

Central Africa

Public Perception of Anti-Corruption score

43.6
Out of 100.0

Trend

-9.8
Absolute trend since 2010

Indicator scores

Perceived Freedom from Paying
Bribes for Administrative
Services

72.4
Out of 100.0

Satisfaction with Fighting
Corruption

24.9
Out of 100.0

2020 Ibrahim Index of African Governance, iiag.online
Source: https://iiag.online/app.html?v=1gU40dmI

Another very intriguing issue about governance in this region that triggers questions on legitimacy is the usurping of the judiciary arm of government, or rather the political dependence of the judiciary on the executive arm, a relationship which has been clearly formalized. Majority of the governments in the region are presidential republics by constitution, and all have weird twists in their political evolution and several irregularities surrounding their constitutions. The very nature of the constitutions and the judiciary in most sub-Saharan Africa is closely subject to the special rights of the head of state, which in most cases is also the head of armed forces. The judicial authority in Central Africa, contrary to classical constitutional setups, in the context of the events clearly visible in the region have proven to be not in the aim of limiting the power of the executive arm by fulfilling the separation and balance of powers, but rather, as Kamdem explains, serves as an instrument of administrative hegemony over the state machinery (Kamdem, 2019: 52). Emphasizing on the troubling position of the respective arms of the government in Cameroon, Ndifor writes that "the judiciary system in Cameroon has been extremely intertwined in the political affairs of government such that it has lost its independence and currently is being run as an extension of the executive arm" (Ndifor, 2014: 29). The legislative arm of the government has been accused of several exploitations in this region, which allows provisions that places the judiciary in the position to pass judgments and laws to the pleasure of the government in power who appoints them and whose

judgments are final despite constitutional prescriptions that their judgments must be in the favor of the people,[13] as is the case in Cameroon. A depicting feature of this is post-electoral round-up processes. These have been subject to several court procedures but results were twisted to ensure that the government in power secures the vote, because it is the only means they have tended to as a form of legitimacy (Thurston, 2013: 3). They use the vote as proof of being in a better place to manage the affairs of their respective countries. IIAG data proves this assertion yet again correct by showing that executive compliance with the rule of law in the region is on a -1.0 trend, using indicators such as executive compliance with the constitution, executive compliance with judicial decisions and lawful transfers of power. Moreover, impartiality of the judicial system is on a trend of -1.6 and have a score of only 17.4 % as shown on the figure below.

Issues of political legitimacy have been cracking down on democratic consolidation in this region because in many of the countries, the justice system is incapable of checking the power of the other arms of the government, especially the head of the executive arm or the head of state, since the very constitution which prescribes their positions places the head of state above all other functions with statutory powers that cannot be challenged. For example, in Cameroon, the constitution stipulates that the president is the chief executive officer, the head of the armed forces and the head of the Judicial Council[14]. The pivot of political crisis in the Central African region which have led to crisis of legitimacy without further ambiguities must be linked to constitutional weaknesses, which has steered the over empowerment of the executive arm of government. Recent constitutions in the region can be characterized as divisive and interest-oriented, eventually securing very less for the majority of the citizens, with very little progress made from the constitutions drawn during

Central Africa

Executive Compliance with the Rule of Law

37.6

Out of 100.0

Trend

-1.0

Absolute trend since 2010

Impartiality of the Judicial System

17.4

Out of 100.0

Trend

-1.6

Absolute trend since 2010

2020 Ibrahim Index of African Governance, iiag.online
Source: https://iiag.online/app.html?v=AMGWtJak

the pre- and post-independence periods. The outcome of such weak constitutions has been the existence of institutional arrangements that have failed to effectively steer the state to provide mechanisms needed for adequate provision to serve the needs of the people. Pressures for state productivity regarding the ambiguities surrounding the performance of state institutions resonating from the limited nature of their constitutions have often pushed these countries into a series of constitutional amendments, setting further confusion as to which of the constitutions is finally in force in governing these states. In the case of Cameroon, its constitution has been amended more than three times since the first constitution drafted at independence for the country, with the most recent and most controversial being the 2008 constitution, which granted the president immunity from all forms of prosecution for acts as president and also removed presidential term limits, thereby permitting the president to run for an unlimited number of re-elections as he sees fit.[15] Similar cases have been recorded in Gabon (2003), where the leaders manipulate either the parliament or senate to circumvent presidential term limits to allow them to stay in power (Tull, 2017: 87). Vandeginste documents a similar situation in countries such as Senegal and Burundi, where the presidents abused the ambiguities and constitutional weaknesses to legalize more terms through the porous constitutional courts which they control, in 2012 and 2015 respectively (Vandeginste, 2015, 2016).

A good constitution sets the foundations for a sustainable democracy and paves the way for true leadership. Economic development, performance, and provision serving the needs of the citizens can be considered as very important factors for democratic consolidation and legitimacy, but this alone should not suffice in legitimizing a government under democratic constitutions. Economic performance has severally been interpreted as democratic legitimacy, but this study emphasizes that constitutional loyalty, giving the right to independent actions of the other arms of the government should constitute the primary variable in evaluating democratic consolidation.

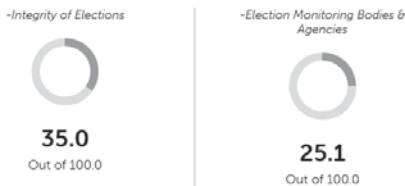**The Need for the Reconceptualization of Political Legitimacy and Democracy in Africa**

In a majority of the cases however, the strategy has changed to warrant that an election (which for many is the face of democracy) must be held, through which the classical autocratic leadership ensures that their position in office is cemented, thereby sustaining at all costs seemingly democratic parties, votes, legislature, and judiciary (Versteeg et al, 2020: 13, citing Meng, 2018). However, such elections are only formal and their fairness and independent status is regularly very questionable at the end due to the common protests from angry opposition parties. Empirical data from IIAG scores democratic elections in the region on 30.1%, following variables such as integrity of elections and election monitoring bodies and agencies.

Following Diamond's four points highlighted above, it will be fair enough to classify such regimes as illegitimate based on the unconventional means by which these leaders utilize to secure their positions in power, which has gradually blurred the conventional lines between democracy and totalitarianism. The nature of authori-

Central Africa

Democratic Elections score

30.1

Out of 100.0

Trend

+2.8

Absolute trend since 2010

Sub-Indicator scores

-Integrity of Elections

35.0

Out of 100.0

-Election Monitoring Bodies & Agencies

25.1

Out of 100.0

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Source: https://iiag.online/app.html?v=PKDF6-P2

tarianism today, what has been severally described as 'new authoritarianism' is very legitimizing once the position is secured, or at least making the position lasting through the manoeuvring of the state organs to secure decades of presidential power in countries where democracy (or at least moves for democracy) once thrived. The reality about democracy in this region is that the true nature of the governments is unknown and democracy continuous to be on a decline (Bermeo, 2016: 8). Following the past experiences in Niger, 2010, Mali, 2012, Sudan, 2019, just to name a few, a true definition of an illegitimate government would have been one which seizes power by authoritarian means such as through a military coup. Legitimacy crises however, have dissolved from military coups to engulf democratically elected leaders. These governments continually manoeuvre their ways in unethical means to stay in power against the wishes of the people they govern.

Sustainable political legitimacy in Central Africa is a call for concern because the region is plagued with a multitude of problems and many of which have been aggravated by the very people charged with the tasks of governing these countries. There is growing need to put in line a true sense of political legitimacy, and moral authority which will represent the diverse communities making up these states and this is a problem whose answer is far-fetched and will take sadly decades of robust nation-building to achieve especially in an era of democratic decline, wherein donor agencies are still in close collaboration with the very state agencies. The region

is increasingly faced with leaders who did not rise to power through tankers and bullets, but through popular votes, through the ballot boxes in seemingly democratically elected parties. These leaders have, however, upheld not only the holding of regular and constituted elections, but also assumed supposedly democratic organs and institutions to look as if their governance is legitimate. It is not surprising that these countries still operate under constitutions (Elkins et al., 2014: 141, 146) these however are mere decorations serving the strategic needs of the leaders in power. History of political events in the Central African region reveals multiple cases of silencing and delegitimization the opposition, majority of whom are later sanctioned and imprisoned.

Conclusion

This paper concludes on a few important points: the institutions of government; the constitution, which is meant to be liberal and in the interest of all the citizens; the legislatures; the judiciaries, have proven to be permeable and easily bent to the will of the leaders of these states, justifying their acts and helping them eschew a bad name in the face of the world as dictators, while allowing them the advantage to secure individual and group interests at the expense of the people. This however, dreams for democratization in the Central African region are not yet relinquished. The history of democracy in the region is barely a few decades old, though growth seems to be slow and uneven. The future remains promising because at least talks of democracy remain the plea for the majority of the people, giving hope for a better tomorrow.

Judging from the four propositions formulated by Diamond, the foundations of democracy in the region suffer the daunting challenges of constitutional weaknesses, which has plagued these countries since independence, and from which problems of political legitimacy drew their roots. From the empirical data presented above, it is clear that based on the criteria set by Diamond, the countries of the Central African region have fallen short of meeting the expectations of democracy, resulting in questionable governments. The successes of democratic consolidation in the Central African region must pay close attention to the sources of state legitimacy such as the respect for the constitution and provision of basic necessities, to reinstate trust in state institutions, which has been eroded by the concentration of power, leaving state authority questionable. ✷

Notes

1. See "The central idea is this: a wielder of political power(the monopolistic making, application, and enforcement of laws in a territory) is legitimate (i.e., is morally justified in wielding political power) if and only if it (*a*) does a credible job of protecting at least the most basic human rights of all those over whom it wields power, (*b*) provides this protection through processes, policies, and actions that themselves respect the most basic human rights, and (*c*) is not a usurper (i.e., does not come to wield political power by wrongly deposing a legitimate wielder of political power)." In Buchanan, Allen. "Political legitimacy and democracy." *Ethics* 112, no. 4 (2002): 689-719.

2. See Schatzberg, Michael G. "Power, legitimacy and'democratisation'in Africa." *Africa* (1993): 445-461. Page 445, quoting Decalo, Samuel. "Modalities of civil-military stability in Africa." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 27, no. 4 (1989): 547-578.

3. International IDEA, https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/80/40 Cameroon

4. Ibid, https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/75/40 Central African Republic [09/22/2020]

5. See Healey, John Michael, and Mark Robinson. *Democracy, governance and economic policy: sub-Saharan Africa in comparative perspective*. Overseas Development Institute, 1994. Citing Post, 1968, and Collier 1982

6. See Ngolle Ngolle, Elvis. "Democratization and multipartism in Cameroon: challenges and prospects." *Beiträge/Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, Forschungsstelle für Internationale Beziehungen* 3 (1996).

7. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Country Reports*, US Department of Commerce, Washington D.C.

8. Human Rights Watch, 2019 Https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/30/cameroon-opposition-leaders-arrested

9. The World Street Journal, 2019 https://www.wsj.com/articles/gabon-presidential-guard-attack-opposition-headquarters-1472721343

10. The Oxford Dictionary of English defines it as a social order which depends on relations of patronage. This concept, variedly used tends to be suffering from a lack of consensus as to what it truly means. It could be used to describe the relationship between the native African ruler and the colonial masters during the time of colonization, or to allude to the current relationship between the African governments and the external partners including former colonial masters, or even to the most visible form, the relationship between the political leaders and the voters whom they represent

11. For some of the details of French involvement in post-colonial Africa, see University of Westminster. Maghreb Research Group. *Bulletin of Francophone Africa*. No. 9-10. Maghreb Research Group, University of Westminster, 1996, Touati, Sylvain. *French foreign policy in Africa: between Pré Carré and multilateralism*. Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2007.

12. See Mbaku, John Mukum. "The Economic Origins of Political Dictatorship in Africa." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 4 (1992): 446-477. Pages 469-471Analyzing the events in Uganda, Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea, Mbaku carefully exposes the motives and the survival tactics of Amin, Bokassa and Nguema (Macias) respectively. These three held their countries with the iron fist and are known today as the true faces of Dictatorship in Africa, leaders of competitive interest groups who seized advantage of the state apparatus to control the state economy and make personal wealth.

13. See the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon 1972, art. 37(1) which states that "Justice shall be administered in the territory of the Republic [of Cameroon] in the name of the people of Cameroon"

14. See the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon 2008 art. 8(2)) http://africaagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Const.ofCameroon2008.pdf

15. See Ibid, art. 6(2) http://africaagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Const.ofCameroon2008.pdf

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POPULAR MEDIA AND ITS ABILITY TO (RE)FORM PERCEPTIONS ABOUT AFRICA AND BLACKNESS: BLACK PANTHER

*A REFLECTION ON GODFRIED A. ASANTE & GLORIA NZIBA PIND:
(RE)IMAGINING AFRICAN FUTURES: WAKANDA
AND THE POLITICS OF TRANSNATIONAL BLACKNESS*

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Abstract

This reflection essay, with the help of studying Black Panther, describes how popular media form or potentially reform our perceptions about Africa and Blackness. The introduction creates a base for understanding the movie's place in public opinion and how critics have reviewed it; and raises the issues that are to be addressed. Reflecting upon Asante & Pind's paper, the analysis starts with Africa's (Wakanda) portrayal and how it reinforces certain stigmas and stereotypical thinking, but at the same time how the afrofuturistic setting offers to change our presumptions and helps to create a possibly better future for Black people by imagining an Africa, unaffected by Western colonialism. The characters are also flashed out, putting more emphasis on the main heroes: T'Challa and Killmonger. I examine their personalities, actions and where they come from, elaborating on the problematic aspects of the message these convey by feeding us the same reoccurring Hollywood storylines behind black character masks. Ultimately, I ask the question: Does Black Panther deserve to be called a milestone for Black people in cinema or is it just another form of white exploitation?

The Marvel Cinematic Universe released its long-awaited blockbuster film, *Black Panther*, in 2018 to global enthusiasm. It was a big success all over the world not only amongst general audiences, but critics and scholars alike praised the movie, calling it a "celebratory cinematic response to decades of racial injustice in Hollywood" while also pointing out popular culture's limited means to transform structural oppressions. (Griffin-Rossing, 2020) The hype surrounding *Black Panther* hardly faded and the anticipated 2022 sequel will only reinforce it. Describing the importance of the film, Adam Serwer wrote:

> *"Black Panther is a love letter to people of African descent all over the world. Its actors, its costume design, its music, and countless other facets of the film are drawn from all over the continent and its diaspora, in a science-fiction celebration of the imaginary country of Wakanda, a high-tech utopia that is a fictive manifestation of African potential unfettered by slavery and colonialism."(Serwer, 2020)*

Despite the overall positive welcome, some scholars remind us that cinema, no matter how influential it may be, is limited in respect to bringing about big structural changes. Christopher Lebron goes against Serwer's idea of a perfect afrofuturistic film and contends that:

> *"Black Panther is not the movie we deserve [...] Why should I accept the idea of a black American disposability from a man in a suit, whose name is synonymous with a radical uplift but whose actions question the very notion that black lives matter?"(Lebron, 2018)*

The unmistakable theme of the movie, that revolves around race, slavery and colonialism, has fueled disagreements about its purpose and effectiveness in trying to challenge stigmas and leave those behind by creating a futuristic idea of what Africa and Africans can be. Representations in the media have material consequences; it has "the power to shape, influence and suggest who people are and subsequently how they can acceptably be treated." (Griffin, 2012: 148.) Precisely because of this, it is principal to look at *Black Panther*, as a cultural phenomenon based on its far-reaching influence, and analyze what it means, what kind of message it conveys and what impact it has on how people see Africans and Africa and engage with concepts like Blackness.

The (Western) Portrayal of Africa
The way we perceive Africa starts with its name. There is little agreement on the sources and original meaning of the word "Africa", but we know the usage of the term started in Roman times and initially referred to North Africa, before it was extended to the whole continent. However, throughout the years it became increasingly confined to "sub-Saharan Africa", which nowadays is seen as the primary location of the "real" Africa. North Africa and its countries, like Algeria, Libya or

Egypt, are somehow left out from the "real" Africa concept and characterized exclusively as Arab, which erases the history and culture of these lands that existed before the Islam takeover. The picture of Africa is so closely tied to and fixated on the south of the Sahara regions that it "ultimately offers us a racialized view of Africa, Africa as biology, as the 'black' continent." (Zeleza, 2006: 15) It is common both within and outside the continent and this is why *Black Panther* concerns itself with "Black Africa".

Amongst the issues the film tries to tackle is slavery and colonialism, more specifically white colonialism. *Black Panther* envisions a world (Wakanda) with Black life left untouched, undisturbed and independent. (Hudson, 2018) The screenwriters seem to suggest that everything bad happening with Africans, more notably slavery, has to do with the West exclusively. As if they forgot that slavery in Africa predates colonialism and as early as the 8th century a full third of the continent was enslaved by African Islamic states. Even now an estimated 660,000 people are deprived of their freedom. It is not to say that the West is without fault but what good does it do to belittle one of the few forces ever to encourage the abolition of slavery in the African continent? (Knowles, 2018)

Criticism of this kind is closely tied to black America and it has little to offer to the people of Africa. Although the film makes an effort to portray African cultures, it fails to show the diversity of it. For instance, it simplifies and moulds languages into one, which does not help to improve our understanding of the continent and the variety of its cultures. However, we should keep in mind that this is merely a two and a half hour movie, and there is only so much you can put into it. It is a difficult task to show the historical background leading to the contemporary situation, while creating futuristic visions and opportunities for generations to come. Not even mentioning the challenges of displaying how the representation of Blackness means different for Africans in the diaspora and people in continental Africa.

Sofia Samatar states that afrofuturism is rarely traced back to the African continent and it focuses mainly on global Blackness and its orientation towards outer space. (Samatar, 2018) Africans cannot fully engage with the movie and it is not meant for them, which is why there was no hurry to premiere it on the continent (few could have afforded the $10 ticket to the theatre anyway). (Gathara, 2018) If your purpose is to embrace Black people and Africans all over the world, can you allow yourself such distancing from Africa while paradoxi-

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cally putting so much emphasis on it? Is it really about the celebration of the origin country and its culture or just another form of white exploitation? It is no secret that *Black Panther* is part of the highly successful Marvel franchise and from that derives its limitations on outlining intricate political situations. It is a Disney production and the company's undoubtable history of making use of depicting people of colour (Pocahontas, Mulan, Aladdin, The Princess and the Frog) makes one wonder about the real intentions of creating such a movie. Could it be just a form of capitalist exploitation in the name of social justice? (Asante–Pind, 2020) Khan says *Black Panther* serves as an example of this phenomena, when African heritage becomes only a decorative element, granting a nice sheen to western movies, without giving thorough attention to the culture and traditions. (Khan, 2019)

Also worth to note that there are very few parts of the film that have been actually shot in the African continent, although the director visited Kenya, South Africa and the Kingdom of Lesotho as well, which he based much of Wakanda's concept on. But it leaves the question: why did not they try to benefit the people and shot much of the film in the country they claim to help? Why were CGI enhanced backgrounds used instead of real landscapes? It is evident that creating a superhero movie in the 21st century requires modern filmmaking technologies (CGI, 4K+3D cameras, VR cameras, HMCs, facial movement recognition programmes etc.), but when formulating opinions and transforming stereotypical thinking is the goal, it is crucial to draw from reality. The movie paints a spectacular picture of Wakanda but the fact that it does not have much physical (more inspirational) tie to Africa takes away from its merits.

∧ *Black Panther cast. Chris Hardwick, Kevin Feige, Ryan Coogler, Chadwick Boseman, Lupita Nyong'o, Michael B. Jordan, Danai Gurira, Letitia Wright, Forest Whitaker, Daniel Kaluuya, Andy Serkis and Winston Duke speaking at the 2017 San Diego Comic Con International, for "Black Panther", at the San Diego Convention Center in San Diego, California. Source: Gage Skidmore, wikimedia.*

A Confusing Afrofuturist Vision

> *"Afrofuturist creations empower African and African diasporic subjects to cen-
> tre Africana ontologies and epistemologies in ways that fundamentally refigure
> futurism by weaving together the spiritual and technological, embodied and
> mechanical, natural and created." (Hanchey, 2020: 260)*

Black Panther and its setting are afrofuturistic because "it disrupts our under-
standing of Blackness by rethinking the past, present, and futures of the African
diaspora." (White, 2018: 422) "Afrofuturism unchains the mind" (Womack, 2013:
44) and "powerful descriptions of the future have an increasing ability to draw us
towards them, to command us to make them flesh." (Eshun, 2003: 290-91) But, this
futuristic theme does not capture the complexity of African histories and identities,
and yields too much to Western neocolonial fantasies of Africa.

Let us now take a look at a scene from the movie. In the beginning, T'Challa and
his guard Okoye stop kidnappers, finding Nakia (T'Challa's love interest) under-
cover, trying to save the women as well. The rescued respond with saying thank
yous while bowing to the heroes. The heroes fly away leaving the victims behind
in the jungle. For one, the jungle setting is not insignificant, since the forest implies
associations both to primitivistic portrayals of Africa and Africans. (Hanchey, 2020:
264) Noteworthy that "Muslim" Africa (North Africa) and Muslims are removed
from the romanticized Wakanda except the above-mentioned scene that associates
them with violence and also positions Muslim women in need of help. "As such,
Black Panther participates in Hollywood's devotion to Islamophobic storytell-
ing." (Griffin–Rossing, 2020) Also important to add that by putting Wakanda in a
privileged position, even though it helps create an idealistic picture of what Africa
could be outside of coloniality, sets them apart and leaves the stereotypes of Afri-
can nations in place. The African characters (like the women in said scene) other
than Wakandans are one-dimensional and used as foils for the Wakandan heroes,
repeating the logics of whitewashing and white saviorism behind Black character
masks. (Hanchey, 2020: 263) Wakanda itself is challenging stereotypes, since it is a
nation with technological power, wealth and military might (elevating them above
other African nations) reaching at least the level of the US if not more. But besides
Wakanda, the representation of the continent pretty much stays the same and serves
only as a glorified setting for the plot.

Another problematic aspect of this futuristic Africa, is the issue of giving aid.
Sylvia Wynter says that "international aid often functions as a neocolonial extension
of colonial power structures." (Hanchey, 2020: 260) Giving aid is one of the main
themes of the movie, starting from the above-mentioned scene, in which Nakia and
T'Challa, shortly after they save the kidnapped women, argue about Wakanda's role
of helping black people around the world. As we established before, aid functions as
a new way of colonialism and those countries who were ravaged by it, now suffer
from loans that leave them worse off economically than before and keep them in a

never-ending cycle of debt to the West. For instance, "when aid flows to Africa were at their peak, poverty in Africa rose from 11% to a staggering 66 %". (Moyo, 2009: 49) Aids that flow in are ineffective, they even make things worse and that suggests the need for even more aid. What lies behind the West's generosity? Hanchey explains this as such: "Western ideology equates Africa with ontological emptiness in order to extend white masculine humanity through the West's desire to be exceptional, to be saviours." (Hanchey, 2020: 262) In other words the West uses aid-giving as a device for keeping its colonial influence and to appear righteous while doing it. It results in a paternalistic relationship between the provider and the recipient and may lead to the feeling of supremacy on the part of the aid-giver. (Moyo, 2009) This is why it feels a little controversial when Wakanda adorns its role as a saviour, because it reenacts the Western narrative. Jenna N. Hanchey confirms this by saying that "although Black Panther challenges some neocolonial assumptions of agency and development through centring an African country as the developed aid-giver, it ultimately reinforces colonial modernity, thereby hindering the film's Afrofuturist potential." (Hanchey, 2020: 261-62) It sends a weird futuristic message, when the kingdom in focus pretends to be a third world country while underneath its disguise lies an incredible technologically advanced nation. According to Slaats, it can be understood like this: "See, underneath every seemingly primitive African hide a (possible) modern Westerner!" (Slaats, 2018)

The isolation of Wakanda is also troublesome. It depicts a Eurocentric view, when a society isolates itself while others are suffering. What we see with aid-giving, we see with isolation. This mentality goes against African philosophy, where they say: a person becomes human only amid others. (Asante–Pind, 2020)

Considering all of the above, one of the most important aspects of Africa's representation is that it "is always imagined, represented and performed in relation to master references, – Europe, Whiteness, Christianity, Literacy, Development, Technology – mirrors that reflect Africa in peculiar ways, reducing the continent to particular images, to a state of lack." (Zeleza, 2006: 16) The portrayals are mostly incapable to break away from comparisons and look at Africa through a postcolonial lens. Nevertheless, the portrayal of Wakanda has its silver lining as well. Its level of development is different than that of the West; it depends on tradition, spirituality, and nature in addition to technology. Wakandan culture integrates magic and metal, using the heart-shaped herb given to them by the panther goddess Bast to anoint their leaders – who garb themselves in clothes made from vibranium. The refusal to separate technology and spirituality is in line with Afrofuturist sensibilities that destabilize white, Western technofuturist norms. (Nelson, 2002)

The Depiction of the Characters
The cast of *Black Panther* is predominantly black, following executive producer Nate Moore and director Ryan Coogler. As we already underscored, representation does matter, and this movie makes us think about the depiction of Africans more deeply. On the surface there are obvious problems with some portrayals, such as M'Baku

and his tribe, who dress like monkeys and literally make oo-oo-oo sounds, deepening some of the major stereotypical images about Africans. (Slaats, 2018) Even though he is portrayed like this in the comic books, this was a missed chance on the developers part for not making a useful creative decision and choosing to bring a degrading element to the screen instead. Zeleza also points out that the tribal markings on several characters' bodies reinforce a homogenized "African authenticity" reminiscent of photographs in antiquated National Geographic. (Zeleza, 2018) These representations which try to show some kind of "African authenticity" do not express the contemporary understanding of Africa and African bodies.

Most of the main actors were already involved with successful Hollywood movies, just like how the director already made a name for himself with films such as *Creed*.

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Their appearance was not directly beneficial for Africa, since they were already in a position to play a role in a blockbuster or direct one. Although seeing them on the screen gives a chance for black people to relate and feel connected to the characters. Chadwick Boseman, who plays T'Challa comments about African heritage and says that it is "a great opportunity to develop a sense of what that identity is, especially when you're disconnected from it." (Smith, n.d.)

When asked about the characters, Coogler tells his experience as a black man figuring out his identity: "That's something I've always struggled with as a person". For that reason, he tries to focus on the person, he shows "not just identity, but names." (Smith, n.d.) He explores the sense of self in his movies a lot and *Black Panther* is no exception. It deals with Blackness and raises questions about transnationality as well, which is very apparent amongst the diasporic Africans:

"When you are in Europe, people say to us,
you are not European,
you are African.

And when we are in Africa, African people say to us,
you are not African,
you are European."

The above quote is from an interview with a young woman who was born in Africa and moved to France later on. A clear parallel can be made with her and Killmonger's character, who was also born in Wakanda but moved to Oakland with his father. In both cases, the colour of their skin is viewed as the primary defining characteristic of their identity and leads to discrimination based on race.

Preconceptions Outlined in T'Challa and Killmonger

T'Challa, the protagonist, falls short at first but through struggle and by confronting his darkest fears saves not only himself but the world. This story follows a classical narrative, the typical myth of the hero. It is a universal storyline, but it is also predominantly Western (Slaats, 2018), and like the main characters, who are put against each other, present us with very simplified choices, and do not represent the nuanced intricacies of black lives in the US or Africa.

For starters, Killmonger's character reinforces a not-so-flattering stereotype of African American men, dangerous and obsessed with violence. Considering that this is a superhero film, heteropatriarchal violence is given. But the problem starts when the movie does not say that violence is not an acceptable form of black liberation, in fact, this is how Wakanda is liberated. (Serwer, 2020) The difference between instances of violence in the movie is that Killmonger is willing to kill his people in order to reach his goal, and that is where T'Challa draws the line, but he as well fights physically to protect what is important to him. Do we accept the use of violence as long as it is for our people's (in this case Black people's) sake? Does not that reinforce the differences between races all over again? This problem resurfaces throughout many aspects of the movie. For instance, when Shuri, T'Challa's sister and a brilliant inventor, seeing the CIA agent she is asked to heal, utters: "Oh great, another broken white boy for me to fix"; the message becomes clear that the West and white people are to be repaired. (Knowles, 2018) The moviemakers want to fight racism, I have no doubts about that, but what they do with emphasizing racial differences is no use to anyone, given the bitter undertone of such comments as Shuri makes.

A binary opposition is portrayed in the pitting of T'Challa against the African American Erik Killmonger as narrative stand-ins for Black people more broadly. Killmonger advocates a global revolutionary politics of overthrowing the oppressor, a position repudiated by his characterization as a haphazardly violent Black man whose willingness to kill his lover renders him decidedly immoral in comparison to the unwaveringly ethical T'Challa. Indicative of its limitations, *Black Panther* cannot portray Killmonger as a "Good" subject because ultimately the Good Black Man must be "grateful, compliant, silent, etc.". (Griffin, 2018: 364) Jenna N. Hachey compares the two heroes from a moral point of view and says that T'Challa represents the "Good Black Man" and Killmonger the "Bad Black Man". T'Challa is the saviour who helps the African diaspora and Killmonger stands as the violent angry protagonist, influenced by his upbringing as a poor orphan. By this logic, the movie connects morality with development, economic security and technological advance-

Chadwick Boseman speaking at the 2016 San Diego Comic Con International, for "Black Panther", at the San Diego Convention Center in San Diego, California. Source: Gage Skidmore, wikimedia.

ment; and poverty with immoral behaviour. (Hanchey, 2020) Hanchey shines a light on this fact and contends that it again strengthens stereotypical thinking.

In addition, T'Challa is willing to put his principles aside when Agent Ross needs medical help, filling the role of the aid-giver once again. It can be viewed as a representation of a coalition between the US and Africa, enhancing the neoliberal respectability of T'Challa, but carries a contradiction, since the CIA's history with Africa includes the suppression of democratic movements. It seems that what matters for T'Challa is to be respected by these institutions, seen as an equal, rather than challenge them and their imperialistic ways. (Asante–Pind, 2020: 225) The ending of the film reflects this very well, when King T'Challa addresses the United Nations. He proclaims that the time has come for Wakanda to share its technology and be a part of the "white" world, not change it. Politics is replaced by mere recognition of racialized difference as an inclusion. (Asante–Pind, 2020: 225)

Killmonger's character is depicted as the result of the American military-industrial complex, in the movie Agent Everett even says "he is one of us". His methods are aligned with that, since he is following the US imperialist patterns of expansion to bring "democracy" to his people. It shows the contradictory logic of the US' attempt to "save" underdeveloped countries but undermine their economic independence at the same time. White says that giving credit to Killmonger is to accept that he understands persecution. (White, 2018: 426) He does to a certain degree, but only from a diasporic point of view, unlike T'Challa who grew up in Wakanda, in Africa.

But he also sees one side of the coin, his royal upbringing kept him sheltered from the realities of how systemic racism has touched every black life across the globe. (Smith, n.d.) The movie brings the difference of Black-consciousness forward, and tries to show how it is anchored differently in specific places.

Conclusion: Inspiring Futures

Let me steer towards the conclusion with an anecdote that Ytasha Womack tells in a conference in Amsterdam about her visit to a primary school in Chicago. She was presenting about Afrofuturism and what it means, starting with some questions about how pupils would imagine the future would be like. The kids gave surprising answers, considering they were 10-year-olds. All of them, in different ways, said that they would like a future without violence, a future without guns. Womack was shocked that the kids' imagination could not break the boundaries of their surroundings, social situation and the picture the media painted of them. However, by the end of the discussion the students realized with the use of their imagination they can create a world they would want to live in and like that, influence reality. They gained a sense of agency within their lives through this exercise. (Womack, 2017) "When we talk about the world of the imagination and speculative fiction, basically the realms of creative arts, it's not just a form of expression, it does ultimately create levels of agency. People will have a feeling that they can shape the world around them." (Womack, 2017) *Black Panther* is the first movie in a long time, in which black people have a lot of agency. Jamie Broadnax, the founder of Black Girl Nerds, states that these characters "are rulers of a kingdom, inventors and creators of advanced technology. We're not dealing with black pain, and black suffering, and black poverty" – the usual themes of acclaimed films about the black experience. (Wallace, 2018)

For me one of the greatest contributions of the "post" era is the notion that identities are created, they are a form of social construct. Indicative of that, they can be changed through discussion. "Africa and African identities both as states of being and becoming. They are dynamic historical processes, messy spatio-temporal configurations of agency, structure and contextuality that are subject to change [...]" (Zeleza, 2006: 19) Afrofuturism is one potentially useful tool for change. It is self-healing for people of African descent, helping to transcend circumstances and disrupting people's usual way of looking at reality. They will start to think about: What are my default assumptions about the world? What ideas are acceptable and which are not? Visualizing other kinds of worlds pushes us beyond our conventions and helps shape a better future. Most of the time activists are working on an issue and it takes decades to bring about change, but writing a story or making a movie can be an instant inspiration and a therapy as well.

Can *Black Panther* help to reshape the future? Despite all of its shortcomings my answer is still yes. The film achieved the single most important thing to make a difference: it starts conversations. It raises awareness and puts Blackness and its hardships into public consciousness, while inspiring Black people to create a world of their own.

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THE RIFT: A NEW AFRICA BREAKS FREE

WRITTEN BY ALEX PERRY.

WEIDENFELD & NICOLSON, LONDON, 2015. P. 431.
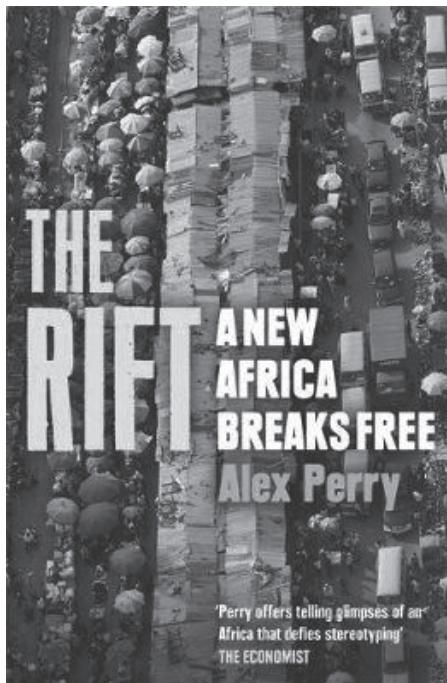
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Recently, we have seen an increasing number of books clustered around the issue of overturning Western perceptions of Africa, and in general the role of the West on the continent. By now, it is a well-known fact that Africa has long been misunderstood and abused by outsiders. *The Rift* written by Alex Perry tries to give an insider perspective and joins the list of books that give an introduction into what is going on behind the political, economic, and social curtains of the African countries.

Alex Perry is a correspondent and a frequent contributor to the Time and Newsweek. Also, he has authored the following books: Lifeblood, Failing off the Edge, Clooney's War, Cocaine Highway and Once Upon a Jihad. He has travelled Africa for a decade or so and met with locals: university professors, presidents, warlords, entrepreneurs, cocaine smugglers and ordinary people as well so he is very far from being an armchair expert only.

After reading the first sentences of the book, it turns out that the text is beautifully written and likely to spark intense academic debates as well. Alex Perry does not shy away from claiming at the very beginning that we have to follow the transforming African countries in order to revolutionise our ideas. In addition, we have to remind ourselves to get rid of the century-old misconceptions.

The Rift is separated into three different parts and the chapters contain country-related stories. These fourteen pieces are like mosaics: when we put them together we can indeed get a nuanced picture of contemporary Africa. The extraordinary stories show how a billion of Africans are struggling with charities and NGOs, jihadists, despots, and their freedom. Basically, Alex Perry starts his continental journey in Somalia during the catastrophic 2011 famine, then, jumps to the world's newest and most volatile nation, South Sudan and shows us 14 more Sub-Saharan African countries. From the very beginning, he is trying to place the current crises into historical context and seasons them with on-the-ground stories. Among the mosaics we can find pieces of famine, AIDS, humanitarian aid, terrorism, corruption, and the Chinese influence, as well. The chapters are perfect supplements for those who can rarely visit these African countries and/or do research without taking into consideration the historical, political and local perspectives. In this light, the reader may feel that the book is a bit far from the heavy-weight scientific argumentation but later we immediately realise that the context given by the author is much needed for having a better understanding of how the African countries are undergoing changes.

First of all, the reviewer has to highlight that as much as Alex Perry is good at giving a snapshot of the rapidly changing Africa, he proves to be weak in finding out and presenting why Westerners still maintain the deep-rooted perceptions on the continent and how the unprecedented changes fit into the long history of the regions, countries. In this way, I argue that a broader historical perspective is missing and it would have been better to use the longue durée approach instead of being impressed by the ground-breaking changes. We know very well that we have always been influenced by the latest political, social and economic movements, still we have to place the most recent changes in long historical perspectives. Also, I need to underline that the book contains a Further reading section which is full of vivid and meticulously selected pieces on

Africa. Even any 'heavy-weight economist' dealing with econometric analyses can find many supplementary materials if they want to avoid the critical questions related to the real African context. Among the listed books we can find those authors who can bridge the historical context and the current changes happening on the surface.

Alex Perry has been a well-known contributing editor and his way of thinking and his writings are definitely not influenced by strict scientific argumentation, theoretical frameworks and long academic discussions. Instead, his main building blocks are observed facts, on-the-ground stories, real faces and voices. After reading the book it becomes clear that the author does not intend to join the long list of scholars doing research on Africa, instead he tries to colour the general picture on Africa. Bearing this in mind, he may receive criticism from the academic echelons and some may find his conclusions pointless, baseless and less clear. However, labelling the book below-standards would confuse those academics who attach a greater importance to first-hand experience and real-life situations. Not trying to decide about who may be right, I can claim that the book represents its own class: a bridge between the theoretical and everyday Africa.

In sum, we can point at the message of the book, that Africa cannot be reduced to unending conflicts, tyrannical despots, war crimes and extreme poverty only. The continent has been a growing and innovative part of our planet capable of formulating developing strategies and technologies to deal with challenges. Even the Westerners can borrow this inspiration in many ways. The book may offer a better context for Africa's current condition than a number of books written on the continent so far. ✳

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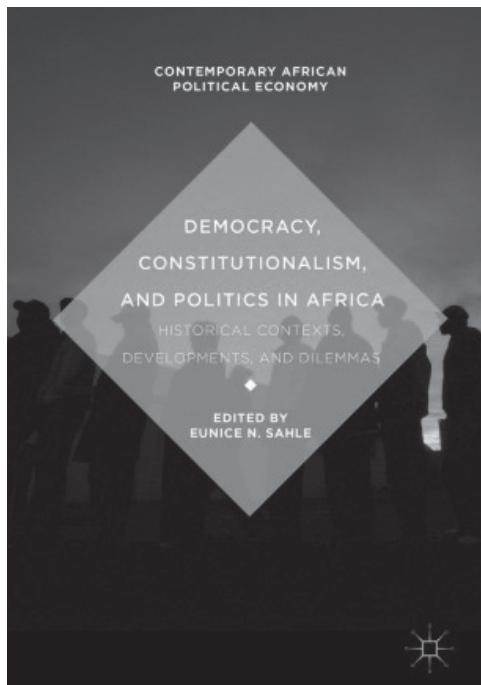
DEMOCRACY, CONSTITUTIONALISM, AND POLITICS IN AFRICA.

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS, DEVELOPMENTS, AND DILEMMAS.

EDITED BY EUNICE N. SAHLE.

REVIEW BY: FORMELLA COLLINS NKAPNWO

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Eunice Sahle's *Democracy, Constitutionalism, and Politics in Africa* accompanies a very turbulent moment in African political development, when the legitimacy and stability of its states' democratic settings since independence are being questioned. She brilliantly organizes this book into nine chapters that combine a case study and cross sectional analysis of studies by different scholars on the democratic, constitutional and political evolution of Africa since independence presenting ample evidences that is useful for any advanced or beginner reader.

Its publication is very timely, 2017, years after when many African states have celebrated 50 years of independence, and while a few have tried severely to consolidate democratic practices into their governments – a system many would today still argue as being a Western Idea –, others are still dwindling down the abyss of authoritarianism and un-constitutionalism.

Sahle's intelligent picky attitude assembles a number of well written papers to disseminate how the social contract, which African freedom fighters had negotiated after independence has been wrecked by legitimacy crises, lawlessness, economic downturns and periling developmental status' almost at a regression rate in some countries, which were in the beginning very promising. Tracing the causes of these devastating circumstances surrounding African democracy and constitutionalism today would not be without mentioning the self-desires of the continent's leaders to remain in power and the compensation of loyalists, which the authors throughout the book all acknowledge as to being the reasons for the legitimacy crises and electoral violence that have engulfed the continent. Based on these, Patrick Loch Otenio Lumumba labels the African Politician as 'Africa's curse', and I guess he is very right in his speech about African leaders. More so, pointing to the colonial heritage of the continent as one of the main foundations to the present state of affairs across the African macro regions is far enriching as it shows a continuous system of exploitation that the continents' ruling elites many of whom were very much absent from the decolonization process have adopted from colonization, leaving behind a lawless society of majority peasants. These arguments are crucial to understanding the context in which democracy has evolved in Africa since it was introduced, or whether it truly even exists at all.

The introductory chapter concludes by highlighting an often neglected side of reasoning regarding the rationale behind acts of terrorism that have consumed the world today. Blaming terrorism on the salient lapses our political and economic development faces could not be over exaggerating. Poor management of state resources by the leaders have led to a disruption in the social contract and the people have resorted to resistance in what Walter Benjamin would call 'divine violence' to free themselves of the years of silent grief.

With independence came an influx of one-party states, but as time passed, democracy remained a vital reference point for all to emulate as Kwasi argued, led to a tremendous takeover by multi-party politics which ushered into some degree of free and fair elections, freedom of association and civil liberties, independent judicial organs; as the wind of the Third Wave of democratization struck across

Africa. Agreeing very much with the above observations, all which I would argue continue to be hampered despite the plethora of multi-parties characterizing the states, Africa's problems remain far from ending or even being approached to be solved. The problems that Africa as a whole face are much greater than these reforms and cannot be ignored. The basic issues which even constitutionalism revival has failed to tackle, which continually brings these nation states to their knees, remain the lack of accountability, transparency and corruption. All of these are rooted deep in the nation state's birth themselves as the authors earlier identified, resonating from its colonial past, which stems from the way power was being handed over to these so-called leaders at independence.

> **Importantly, the authors acknowledge and highlight economic development as a major challenge to the African state's consolidation of democratic values.**

Importantly, the authors acknowledge and highlight economic development as a major challenge to the African state's consolidation of democratic values. This assertion being true is, however, to a certain extent limited because apparently, the most formidable challenge facing the African state today first begins with the lack of a strong civil society: which is conscious of the needs of a state and as such is geared towards sustainable growth, both economically and politically. Economic development without strong civil societies comes with income inequalities, environmental degradations, and many other negative aspects especially in an era of privatization, where profit making represents the main deal and goal. All these in the long or short term become major challenges facing the economic and social sectors which eventually transcend to become political crises and thus state failure.

It is yet again remarkable that the authors notice how much progress has been made with regard to presidential term limits in many African countries, and how other countries still do not have such amendments fully in place, thus highlighting the lapses facing constitutionalism in Africa due the disrespect given to the laws of the lands. Adding to this would be a great omission that scholars of constitutional reforms should take note, which in every country works well for other public sector and executive positions, i.e. age limits. The institution of a presidential age limit will be a great step towards following up post regime accountability, and drafters of African constitutions should take these very serious, as many of the continent's presidents have manipulated their constitutions at their old ages so as to remain in power and avoid indictment after they leave office. Several examples like the case of Zimbabwe's Mugabe and Cameroon's currently governing Paul Biya, and many others.

Warner Jason in Chapter 6 gives a wonderful analysis of the various casual relations influencing the abrupt inclusion of the Constitutive Act (Article 4(h)) on the African Union's charter and above all, defy the notion that the language on the responsibility to protect was forced to African leaders, by showing ample proof of its

origin and adoption in the continent and its institution into the UN. He intelligently and patiently utilizes several variables to analyze these changes in perception among African leaders as to the issue of state sovereignty and international involvement in other state's internal affairs, an issue which before the Constitutional Acts enactment remained a no go zone because its absence gave the despotic leaders the impetus to unscrupulously take advantage of the fact that non-intervention in the internal affairs of a member state was the norm to dictate and commit serious offenses against their peoples. Having reached this point, I appreciate the author's observation of scholarly works on the indolence and lifelessness of this chapter, because as of recent developments in the continent, no particular case is yet to be successfully registered as solved by the AU's rapid intervention in its member countries. Despite its several peacekeeping missions operating in several parts of the continent, the AU is yet to record challenging any sitting president on his/her barbaric acts towards its population. The true rationale behind the adoption of this act is further revealed and brought to the lamp-light by the author's strong probing skills as to the hideous motives of African leaders to portray a good image in the international stage as a means of securing foreign aid donors. This vital elaboration goes on to confirm the reason why this act has so far remained indolent and largely unproductive, due to lack of proper commitment by the leaders.

Despite recent constitutional reforms allowing subtle presidential term limits, guaranteeing some rights and privileges even though to an extent limited as compiled here by Sahle's edition, the main issue that has put all these major changes and put Africa's democracy, constitutionalism and politics on a dimming light remains the government monopoly over the use of force against its citizens. Though African constitutions largely stipulates more freedom in almost every aspect practicability remains obstructed by the use of force, which the growing civil society has not succeeded in having this control over the state. Corruption remains deeply enshrined in the state's executive as inherited from the colonial regime, that the judiciaries of most of these countries are just puppets of the ruling elites and as such, the constitutional laws remain only in text so as to secure external privileges, while the people on the ground feel no difference, thus always constrained.

One thing we should always remember about democracy is that there is no perfect democracy, and after reading through this book, it is worth adding that we live in an era of greater enlightenment and opportunities, and every community must strive to take matters into their hands and act accordingly, Africans as a people have been known to be very accommodating of dictators. The lapses of democratic consolidation and constitutionalism in Africa must be traced from its roots by addressing these issues from the local level and prudently designing each set of political institution to fit into each country's past. African constitutions are 'Western' copied without proper understanding of the environment and culture.

Eunice Sahle's book challenges conventional reasoning and sets the pace for pertinent hypothesis for further inquiry into Africa's democracy, the rule of law, constitutionalism and political evolution since independence. ☀

THE AFRICAN STATE IN A CHANGING GLOBAL CONTEXT.

BREAKDOWNS AND TRANSFORMATIONS.

EDITED BY ISTVÁN TARRÓSY, LORÁND SZABÓ AND GORAN HYDEN.

LIT VERLAG, BERLIN-MÜNSTER, 2011. PP. 216.

REVIEW BY: GÁBOR BÚR

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Habent sua fata libelli – books have their destiny. Some are senescent at the time of their publication, others are like newspapers, carrying information valid for one day and we all know that there is nothing older than a newspaper from yesterday. And some books are like wines, time will not pass on them. Ten years ago a young and dedicated team of the newly established Africa Research Centre of the Department of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Pécs dared to dream big and invited a number of already great names and an even larger number of great hopes in the field of African Studies to contribute to a book with an eloquent title: "The African State in a Changing Global Context. Breakdowns and Transformations", bringing Africanist research in Central Europe to a wider audience. In an era of accelerating change and global transformations more attention is paid to the changes in Africa and in the light of current processes, it is worth re-reading and re-evaluating previously published studies as well.

With today's eyes reading the book, we can make the diagnose, it is more relevant than ever. This opinion is valid despite the fact that the introductory lines (Introduction: The African State in a Changing Global Context) tell us otherwise. Goran Hyden, a former president of the African Studies Association (ASA) and emeritus professor in political science at the University of Florida paints a rather pink picture of the African states in their first 25 years after independence: "[…] the African state was largely driven from within by the ambition to establish political order in a world where national sovereignty over issues of development was not in question. National development plans provided a sense of economic and political direction. Government control of development was taken for granted." (p. 7.) If that would not be enough from the near idyllic presentation, the following sentence will convince everybody: "The two super powers – USSR and USA – got involved but – again – in response to initiatives or demands by African leaders." (p. 7.) But because of that we should not put down the book, this idealized image may just want to counterpoint the much gloomier reality of the next quarter century which was producing "an increased number of states that have broken down in the process of interacting with the new global forces." (p. 9.) We can argue about what was before, but we have to agree with the world-renowned author that the African state is no longer insulated from external influences.

Three sections of the book are investigating the nature of those external influences, to be specific: "The New Forces at Play", "Breakdowns and Transitions" and "New Trends within Africa". The first two chapters deal with the growing interaction with other countries in the South and the third with the exposure to new information and communication technology. The purpose of the whole book is to trace some of the more important features of the role of the state

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in Africa since independence with a view to highlighting the difference between the past and the present and drawing conclusions with reference to what might be expected in the future.

The first and most comprehensive chapter is written by one of the editors, István Tarrósy: "New South–South Dynamics and the Effects on Africa". He provides an overview of the relations with countries of the Global South outside of Africa. This relation has become even more significant for African development in the years since the publication of the book. Brazil, China and India are the focus of the study, indicating how each of them approaches Africa differently with its own national interest in mind. Tarrósy clearly demonstrates that although the South-South interactions have intensified since the turn of the century they build on a long tradition going back to the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the Non-Aligned Movement. But in "our deeply interconnected and -dependent world" it is not enough to speak the language of the Bandung conference. "The case of Tanzania is an appropriate illustration of how many factors enter into China's relations with African countries," writes Tarrósy. (p. 21.) He also turns our attention to the understanding of the new dynamism centred around the leading actors of the newly industrialized countries in the African continent and to the growing importance of the triangular co-operation model, which includes some Northern partners, like Japan. (p. 20.) Most importantly and still fully validly the author underlines: "the new dynamics created by the new emerging actors will be promoting real change only if the development they launch or strengthen reach out to the local levels of societies at large across the African continent." (p. 27.)

Almost all the contributors to this book emphasize the significance of the good governance agenda which is more valid today than ever. Also, the integration of the African economies into the global economy received a lot of attention. Our present knowledge only confirms the opinion expressed in the book that in this process Africa is exposed to new constraints but also to new opportunities. More and more countries are also realizing the value of trade and greater interaction among themselves.

The book discusses the challenges to Africa that follow from a closer cooperation with new actors that are in search of their rich mineral and natural resources and those which follow from the rapid rise and growth of digital communications in recent years. The section dealing with breakdowns and transitions focuses on the problems of sustaining regimes or trying to build new ones as old ones collapse. The chapters offer analyses over the situation in Somalia, in Southern Sudan and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Further, such questions as the past, the present and future of national states, nation building, federalism, the restoration of traditional authorities as part of local governance, refugee crises, and methods to gather knowledge about Africa form the core investigations of the rest of the book. If you read all the chapters you will have a better understanding of contemporary Africa from mutations of developmental state, violent conflicts through internal battles to gain control of an existing state to the strengthening of the international positions of the continent. ✻

Guidelines for submission of papers

(1) General requirements

All papers must be submitted in English.

The author should submit the final version of the manuscript, no major modifications (e.g., additional paragraphs, chapters) will be accepted after that submission. Of course, the blind peer review process may bring about other corrections and more work.

Prior to submission, all papers must
- have been submitted to a spell check
- have been examined by an English specialist (preferably a native speaker) who also speaks the language of the author. Papers that fail to meet a level of comprehension by the editorial board due to *poor English* will be returned for rewriting or, in severe cases, rejected.
- have a bibliography in the format specified below. The utilization of the proper referencing style is also crucial. Contributions not conforming to style will be returned by the Editors.

No cover page is needed.

Papers should be up to 40,000 characters (with spaces) in length.

Papers should be given 1.5 spacing, Times New Roman 12.

Paragraphs should be properly indented.

Do not split the text into separate columns.

Authors should state whether they are using British or American (or other!) English, and they consequently need to stick to the chosen variant. Please, pay attention especially to dates, verbs ending in – ise/-ize and –l/-ll, nouns ending in –isation/ization, etc.

After peer review, accepted authors will receive electronic versions of their edited papers to provide them with the opportunity to make final comments. Here deadlines may be tight, so the author must react quickly, or else editorial and language changes will be taken as accepted.

(2) Specific requirements

Sources (references) should be properly cited in the text and a bibliography at the end of the paper. Endnotes can also be added, however, they should be marked clearly in the text at a point of punctuation, and listed consecutively at the end of the paper. They should *not* be listed at the bottom of each relevant page. The use of notes, in general, should be kept to a minimum.

Citation

References should be cited in the text as follows: (Fischer et al., 1996) or (Kissinger, 1990) or (Kegley and Wittkopf, 1995: 23). See some examples:

1. If one examines the Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Sustainable Development, 1987) or the Rio Declaration of 1992, to name just two major examples, the sustainable development approach represents a global response to problems or challenges that are themselves of a global nature (ecological, economic or social).
2. Thus, the Brundtland Report states that "sustainable development should be seen as a global objective" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987: 40). → this latter one indicates page no. 40 from where the citation was taken
3. This is the notion of "territorial sacrifices" considered by Nijkamp in different contributions (Nijkamp et al., 1991: 160; 1992: 41).

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Each reference cited in the text must appear on the reference list.

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If the surname is the first element (like in the case of Chinese or Hungarian names), or in the case of, for instance, Ethiopian names (no distinction between family name or surname and first/middle names), do not place a comma after the surname (first name concerning Ethiopian names) in such citations.

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Examples:

1. Jackson, C. (2001). A model of spatial patterns across retail property markets in Great Britain. *Urban Studies* **38**, 1445-1471.
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- the pages of the article/study referred should be given after a comma, then, closed with a full stop.
- If there is no author, the article title comes first.
- If there is no date, use the abbreviation n.d.

2. Pack, J. R. (2002). *Growth and Convergence in Metropolitan America*. Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC.
→ here:
- the title of the book should be in italics
- publishing house/publisher first, city/settlement of publishing second

3. Stiftel, B. and Watson, V. (Eds). *Dialogues in Urban & Regional Planning*. Routledge, London.
→ if the volume has an editor (or more)

4. Glover, D. (1994). Global Institutions, International Agreements, and Environmental Issues. In: Stubbs, R. and Underhill, G. R. D. (Eds). *Political Economy and the Changing Global Order*. Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, 277-288.
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Verjee, A. and Knopf, P. (2019). A year of change in Ethiopia. *United States Institute of Peace Online.* https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/04/year-change-ethiopia [10.09.2018]

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Szarka Evelin

EGYSÉG A SOKFÉLESÉGBEN

A TÁVOLI INDONÉZIA KÖZELRŐL

Szarka Evelin

EGYSÉG A SOKFÉLESÉGBEN
A TÁVOLI INDONÉZIA KÖZELRŐL

Indonézia. Mitől olyan különleges az itt élők által beszélt nyelv? Hogyan viselkedjünk vendégségben? Milyen furcsaságokkal vagy mulatságos helyzetekkel találkozhatunk, ha elvegyülünk a helyiek között? Mit jelent a gumiidő? Hogyan él ez a rendkívül színes indonéz közösség több ezernyi szigeten, és miként villantja fel identitásának egy-egy különleges elemét közmondásaiban, szimbólumaiban és mesevilágában?

A tudományos megalapozottsággal és ismeretterjesztő igénnyel megírt kötetben mindenki megtalálja az érdeklődésének megfelelő fejezetet – legyen szó izgalmas történelmi, politikai vagy gazdasági tényekről, a mezőgazdaság és a környezet jelenlegi állapotáról, vallási kérdésekről, a kisebbségek együttélését érintő aktuális témákról, a balinéz hagyományos építészeti elvekről vagy innovatív egészségügyi kezdeményezésekről.

A jórészt indonéz nyelvű forrásokra, helyszíni tapasztalatokra és interjúkra épülő, gazdagon illusztrált kiadvány közelebb hozza ezt a távoli országot, segítségével bepillantást nyerhetünk egy változatos és számos meglepetést tartogató ázsiai nép mindennapjaiba: hogy elolvasása után Indonéziára ne csupán a komodói sárkány, az óriási – gyakran iszonyú bűzt árasztó, de színpompás – egzotikus növények, az ínycsiklandó fogások, az aromás fűszerek, a jávai előember, valamint a széles mosolyok és a lenyűgöző táncmozdulatok hazájaként gondoljunk.