

# perspectives

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POLITICAL ANALYSES AND COMMENTARY

## AFRICA

### What Ya Looking At? Africa Returns the Gaze



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## Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

The Heinrich Böll Foundation is a publicly funded institution that is affiliated with but intellectually independent from the German Green party. From our headquarters in Berlin and 30 overseas offices, we promote civic participation in Germany, as well as in more than 60 countries worldwide. Our work in Africa concentrates on promoting civil society, democratic structures, gender democracy and global justice. Together with our partners, we work toward conflict prevention and search for solutions to the challenges of environmental degradation and the depletion of resources. To achieve these goals, we rely on disseminating information, creating a deeper understanding between actors in Africa and Europe, and supporting global dialogue.

# Contents

- 5** **Editorial**
- 6** **Interview**  
**Europe: The View from Africa**  
Jean-Pierre Bekolo
- 14** **The Angola-Portugal Connection: A Relationship of Mutual Dependency**  
António Tomás
- 19** **Little Black Man Cake**  
Billy Kahora
- 23** **African Perceptions of Europe and the Rise of Emerging Powers: Implications for Future Relations**  
Sanusha Naidu
- 29** **Between Rhetoric and Reality: Kenya's Relations with Europe**  
Murithi Mutiga



# Editorial

Europe–Africa relations are generally depicted from the view of Europe as the centre or actor and Africa as the periphery or acted-upon. The colonial history of European countries in Africa, their present day policies towards the continent, or the way that Africa is reported on and written about by Europeans are all familiar topics. Relatively little appears to be said about African views of Europe and Europeans, and how these have changed over time.

Over the last decade, a number of significant geo-political and socio-economic changes have made it all the more interesting to ask how Europe is perceived from the continent. The rise of emerging powers such as China, India and Brazil has called into question the privileged relationships that Europe and the West have enjoyed in Africa. And while the global financial meltdown of 2008 has left large parts of the Eurozone struggling with a sovereign debt crisis and subdued economic growth, Africa has shed its “hopeless” label to become the world’s latest growth story, widely known as “Africa rising”.

It is against this background that the Heinrich Böll Foundation asked a number of African intellectuals, writers and analysts to provide their take on Africa’s relationship with Europe. The result is a small collection of interviews, short essays and comments that throw light on the complexities and complexes of this relationship, using analysis, imagery, experience, provocation and humour.

While hundreds of Africans continue to migrate to Europe, daily risking their lives to reach a place of perceived modernity, stability and economic opportunity, these changing conditions are producing bold

new images and statements. Europe is portrayed as old and arrogant in its ignorance of Africa’s true potential. Many African leaders have become visibly more assertive in their engagement with Europe, with some “looking East” to cultivate extensive political and economic relations, particularly with China.

But even though the terms of engagement are changing, these articles suggest that Africa is nowhere near severing its ties with Europe to join up with the emerging powers of the global South. The interdependence of the two regions is such that it can be hard to make a clear separation, as the contribution from Angola particularly illustrates. After five centuries of colonialism and a post-independence civil war during which thousands fled to Portugal, the roles between the two countries seem to have reversed in some respects. Due to Angola’s current oil-boom economy, thousands of Portuguese have emigrated to their former colony in hope of a better life.

Africa is building a new, more confident self-perception and will expect more from Europe than its habitual well meaning but paternalistic attitudes. As the Cameroonian filmmaker and intellectual Jean-Pierre Bekolo provokingly puts it: “It is no longer Europe that has a plan for Africa, but Africa that has a plan for Europe.”

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Director

# Europe: The View from Africa

## Interview

Jean-Pierre Bekolo

**HBS:** Before we talk about the perception that Africans have of Europe, let's first agree on the nature of the object we are referring to: Africa.

**Bekolo:** Africa is a Western invention. In other words, the Africa we are talking about is a concept that was created based on a perspective and ideology that has existed only since colonial days. To prove this, one can simply deconstruct the idea that there are three distinctive Africas: supposedly "white" North Africa, where, in fact, just as many blacks are; sub-Saharan Africa – everything to the south of the Sahara supposedly forming one homogeneous block; and then you have South Africa, which is presented as being different, but based on what? Based not on the majority but rather on the white minority that ruled the country. Africa really is an invention.

Added to this is the fact that there were no Africans present at the [1884–5] Berlin Conference that divided up Africa. They carved up the continent according to the different styles of the colonising countries, and by advancing ideas that presented their view of the continent's characteristics, starting with differences such as: they are not Christian, they are exotic, they have strange customs, they are conquerors or submissive, there is decadence, they were important figures in history, etc.

We did not create our countries. Cameroon, for example, is a Western creation, from its territory to its laws. Even the cities – Yaoundé, Douala – are Western creations. The name Cameroon, which we have never dared to change, does not come from us. The whites gave us this name, derived from *camaroes* (shrimps), and we are very proud of bearing it today.

The Africa we are talking about is not about Africans!

**Are the two continents still separate spaces today, physically and mentally?**

By launching the European project of extending borders beyond Europe, countries such as France, Great Britain, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Germany were locked into a common narrative that would bind the destinies of colonialists and colonised forever. With a view of exploiting resources, colonisation introduced the idea of an African Europe and a European Africa.

So the answer to the question posed by Valentin-Yves Mudimbe in *L'Odeur du Pere* [*The Smell of the Father*] on whether Africa can get rid of the West is final: no. And the first signs that demonstrate the irreversibility of this approach are religion on the one hand and language on the other. Can the African, who has chosen to pray to the white man's god and to speak his language, still claim such a different



**Jean-Pierre Bekolo** is an accomplished Cameroonian director, who has distinguished himself as one of Africa's boldest and most unconventional filmmakers, producing genre-busting material such as his 2005 film *Les Saignantes*, a sci-fi political satire about two high-class vampire prostitutes using their sexuality to expose and kill corrupt politicians. In 2013, back in Cameroon after years spent teaching film at US universities (including Duke University, UNC Chapel Hill), Bekolo produced *The President* as a commentary on the state of his country, with the intention to spark debate among Cameroonians. However, the similarities between the film and the actual situation in Cameroon, where President Paul Biya has been in power for more than 30 years, were too obvious and disturbing for the country's government, which swiftly banned *The President* from being screened.



*Even I Exist In Embo: Jaundiced Tales  
Of Counterpenetration #4, 2007.  
Photographer: Oliver Neubert.*

identity? It becomes clear that, if he gets rid of this “smell”, he will surely get rid of a part of himself. The paradox is that, in his absence, the white man is hyper-present. It is a very effective form of imaginary colonialism.

Frantz Fanon, inspired by Freud, developed a clinical discourse in the 1950s on a supposed “mental illness” in the black man. There is no doubt today that Africa’s problems are associated with the encounter with the white man. But when he writes, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, that the encounter between black and white made the black man sick – a sickness likened to mental illness such as trauma, schizophrenia or something like that – I believe that this encounter has also made the white man sick. Africa has made the white man crazy.

Western narcissism has seriously damaged the world by seeking to refashion the world in its image. The separation with Africa has left the West with a lot of anger and frustration – like a child whose toy was taken away. That’s why the white man needs therapy, just like the black man, to make him drop his “white mask”.

You may ask why we still use the terms “white” and “black” or “African”. This is because they obey the mental representation that we have established for ourselves. It is the symbolic language of Fanon, history, colonialism, slavery, alienation and trauma. I believe in mental language, the language of our thoughts, and prefer to deconstruct what colonialism has created in our minds.

How would you describe African attitudes towards and perceptions of Europe in the post-colonial period?

It can be said that the ambition of the colonial project, which was to turn Africans into “little whites”, did work. It worked so well that Africans are looking to the Western world as the place of their utopia, the place of their future. But they are no longer satisfied like before to wait and see what future Europe has in store for Africa. Today, it is Africa that knows what it wants to do with the white man – in Africa and far beyond, when one thinks of immigration. Africa has plans for the West.

There are, however, two Africas clashing on this issue. On the one hand, there are people who want the white man in order to escape from misery, and on the other hand, an elite that simply wants to enjoy a privileged relationship with the white man from whom it derives all privileges. It’s the elite that in some places has even never struggled for independence but benefits from it and says to the masses, “We will get there on our own”. The masses are saying: “If in a half-century you have not even succeeded in maintaining what the colonist (who did not like us) has left us, how can we believe that it is time you need?” And then the elites paint all sorts of apocalyptic scenarios to the masses in the event that the white man was ever to return: “You will no longer be free. There will be the whip, exploitation, etc.” As if the masses don’t know that it’s these African regimes that are responsible today for exploitation and oppression. African dictatorships must not have any complexes about this compared to the colonial oppressors. All they need are Western or Chinese accomplices as a conduit to strip their countries of all resources that they go and hide in Switzerland.

In recent years, Africa has become economically and politically quite engaged with emerging powers, China in particular. Do you think that this has come at the expense to the West? And do you foresee a similar reconfiguration taking place on a cultural and social level?

The Western world refuses to acknowledge that the ties being forged today between Africans and China, Africans and India, Africans and

Brazil are primarily ideological. Despite the horrors of colonisation, Africans have followed the Western model as a model for development, sometimes even at the very costly expense of their previous ways of life which were not necessarily less good. Yet the West has always refused to give them the development they were expecting. The West exploited them without ever keeping their promise.

In return, the West has turned Africa into the place of all its fantasies, taking advantage of its obvious differences to denigrate it by promoting its uniqueness. If Africa is unique, it can thus be excluded from humanity – which is what happened to the Jewish people in Europe, and we know what happened after that. Europe and even America have never had any relationships with Africa that were void of complexes. Each time, they imposed conditions in a very paternalistic way, and even when the Africans had succeeded in satisfying them, they found a way to impose others. That is what the IMF and World Bank have done all these years. They are the instruments of this new form of colonialism.

You need to understand that the Africans know all of that, that the Chinese know it, too, and the Indians and the Brazilians. They know it because they were the victims of the same Western ideology and have managed to break away from it so much so that China, for example, has been able to reverse the relationship based on the master-slave dialectic. Only the Western world does not seem to know that we know. This is the very essence of the relationship between China and the Africans. We are very comfortable together. We talk about the things that we want to do

together, without a hidden agenda, without ideology, without supremacist ideas, without racism. And we do it. What the Chinese offer us is not Chinese culture,

but Western technology and modernity that the West has denied us. China is the solution Africans have found as a response to the West. But again: isn't it another consequence of that Western ideal that our countries are chasing after?

The EPAs [economic partnership agreements] that the European Union has proposed to Africa, just like the Védrine Report on Africa<sup>1</sup>, harbour within them the wounds of this Western sickness caused by its encounter with Africa. Unlike the Chinese, the West remains blinded by ideology and seems to lose all rationality when it comes to Africa.

France, which opens a Sorbonne or Louvre Museum in Dubai, believes that Africans do not notice this. This is because of a lack of ambition for the continent, while at the same time the Chinese are proposing a railway line that will cross the continent from north to south and from east to west. Africa sees this Western sickness that blinds it. This was expressed so well by the Bolivian president, Evo Morales, who reminded members of the European Parliament in 2008, who were on the verge of voting the law on the "Return Directive", that tens of millions of people had left [Europe] to go to the Americas to colonise and to escape the famines, financial crises, wars or totalitarian regimes and persecution of ethnic minorities. The Europeans arrived in their droves in the countries of Latin America and North America without a visa or conditions imposed by authorities. They were always welcome, and they remain welcome in countries on the American continent which have absorbed the economic misery and

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political crises of Europe! The insensitivity and blindness of the European members of parliament can be highlighted when they ended up voting for this law on 18 June 2008, in violation of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

However, only six years later, history has shown that Evo Morales was right, because thousands of Portuguese landed in Angola in search of work. The crisis that has struck Europe today is therefore imposing the white man's re-entry, as can be seen in countries such as Angola where Europeans are welcomed as part of a new plan. In Nigeria, too, the white farmers who were driven out of Zimbabwe were welcomed as part of this new re-entry. It is no longer Europe that has a plan for Africa, but Africa that has a plan for Europe.

So are you suggesting that Africa uses the white man to rescue itself?

When rereading Fanon's appeal to the Africans – *Let's go, comrades. The European game has finally ended. We must find something else. We can do everything today provided we do not mimic Europe, provided we are not obsessed with the desire to catch up with Europe* – we can say that Africa today has actually preferred to mimic Europe. Even when China came along, Africa has continued to have this default obsession to catch up with and follow Europe. It is clear that Fanon has not been heard.

Worse, the white man has parted, he has left us – but we stayed without moving from the place where he left us behind. When the white man came to us, he started to dominate us, and he saw that we did not want his domination. He decided to eliminate our leaders and to replace them with some of our people who were going to collaborate. He created a state with puppet leaders so that he could continue to pull the strings. He put in place a kind of administration that does not emancipate us, but an administration that enslaves us. Why is it that today we keep this same administration? Why do we stay where the white man has left us?

Given that the black and white are both sick from their encounter, can they also be each other's medicine?

If the bad news is that Africa is an invention, the good news is that reinvention is possible. As there can be no doubt that Africa's problems are associated with this encounter, how does Africa today hope to succeed without using the "white man" matrix, which defines all the contours of its identity today? If it would indeed be possible to detect the "sick" actions that are referred to by Fanon in behaviours towards the white man, it should be recognised that other behaviours could be considered pragmatic or even utilitarian – just as the refrigerator was able to better meet the demands by the feminists in the 1930s than any other discourse. The white man is used to solve Africa's problems.

For the elite, it's all about deceiving oneself to better deceive the others. The African elite, which is rather pleased to have replaced the whites, not to serve but – through mimicry, another form of disease – to better subjugate the people and benefit from the status of the whites. This elite will therefore take everything from the white man: his methods, systems, references. It will copy the white man in order to legitimise its position. The African elite castigates the white man to whom it owes everything: the diplomas they obtain, the decision-making positions in government that serve as a means to personal enrichment, even the cars in which they strut around, the suits they wear, their children abroad, etc.

Africa and its traditions are almost invisible in the state appara-

tus, which is designed like a cake and not like a plantation where all hands would be welcome. What Fanon did not take into account is this degree of sickness, where the absence of whites would mean poor acting, or where the African would cast him with all his faults, which he would use to excel in looting and oppressing. After some hard-fought struggles to take over the state from the whites, it has now become the tool of exploitation of the African by the African.

The white man's re-entry would therefore enable the African to cast aside his dishonesty and hypocrisy towards his own people. Because today, more than ever, these people require help from foreigners, half a century later, to solve the many problems which they are facing in the areas of health and education, areas that have been neglected today by the ruling elite.

Are you not afraid of criticism that you expect too-easy solutions from the whites?

If we consider that white people were the disease, how do you expect a cure without manipulating that virus that is at the origin of the problem? Given that the black man and white man are both sick from their encounter, how then can the sick African and Western brains heal?

There is a necessity for Africans to create modern democratic states that are able to meet the many needs of the citizens. Nobody can say otherwise. There is no longer room for hypocrisy. It is time to move ahead.

I am like all those Africans who try to understand and explain, very plainly, without ideology or pre-conditions, what is happening to us in order to find a solution once and for all.

I don't feel emotional anymore about what the Western world is saying about Africa. History teaches us that we've seen worse. We know that our historical defeats were due to our mistakes and our weaknesses first, even if we acknowledge how powerful our enemies were. Hence the passion for politics in all African countries. And, once more, Europe does not seem to notice this popular interest in politics and democratic vitality.

There is a debate happening right now on the continent. This debate is not happening in the conventional media. It's a debate that can be observed between two different forms of behaviours that are opposed to each other.

Behaviour is also a kind of language. From the behaviour of the masses, we can see that if we opened up the borders in some African countries, the whole country would run empty

– and for good reason! It will not be the Congo where people run to.

How can we explain why the African elites find it necessary to inflict so much pain on their people? Just to be able to say that we govern our own country? There is no longer room for such hypocrisy, but we need to move ahead. So what the people are saying is: "We want to get out of this place." Besides emigration, there are many signs that you can read in people's behaviour which show that Africans want something from the West. In response, the ruling elite proposes the old nationalistic discourse of "we can do it ourselves". In the meantime, many sectors such as education, health, are so much in ruins that the ruling elite itself prefers to travel for treatment of their health problems and to school their children abroad.

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What is happening is a conflict of two wills: the one of the people who want the West and the one of the elite who want to enjoy the privileges of positions without delivering. What do we do? Do we put our ego aside and open up to help our people improve their conditions by bringing white people, based on my “re-entry” concept mentioned earlier, or do we continue making our people suffer?

We Africans also need to get out of this psychological mindset and move on from that reactionary attitude towards colonialism. We should get rid of our duplicity in relation to the West. As I said in the beginning, our countries are Western inventions. I prefer to analyse what the language of our thoughts is, and deconstruct what colonialism has built in our minds and what is not always real. How do we get out of the mental language that colonialism inflicted on us by producing a reactionary attitude that is now a burden for us?

Let’s take the case of Zimbabwe and the land issue as an example. The semantic definition of the land has evolved from the time it was taken by the British during colonial times to the agro-business it represents now in the independent country called Zimbabwe. Although President Mugabe took the land back from many white farmers, the mental idea of land linked to the heritage, the culture and the ancestors which the black Zimbabweans are claiming will never been given back to them. Instead of acknowledging this fact in order to find another form of compensation, Mugabe decided to take back something that, with changes in time and in this world, was simply not the same anymore.

What makes you so sure that a second encounter or re-entry would not deliver more of the same old results?

The first encounter was a discovery; the second one is a recognition. This phenomenon is clearly explained in physiology. This is the way the brain and the immune system function. The first time the white man came, he appeared in the same way a virus does. The body has no information about the virus and cannot fight it. This was the first encounter with the white man, when the discovery of one another was marked by misunderstandings and prejudices – not to mention brutality, oppression and exploitation. But when the virus comes a second time, because of all the information and knowledge now collected in

the body, it will develop an antidote and be able to organise its own protection. That’s what I see in that second encounter between the West and Africa. In this postcolonial period, Africans will want to protect themselves from their past experience.

We can characterise the current period of Africa as the second step – in other words, the rejection of whites after the experience of colonialism. If it is around this rejection that the project of self-

determination was built, which produced independence, it is also, paradoxically, around this same rejection that postcolonial Africa is imitating Europe, against the wishes of Fanon, according to whom this should be avoided. Unfortunately today, more than half a century later, this relationship to the whites is deadlocked. Our previous experience begins to play tricks on us and we find ourselves frozen around the ideology of liberation and resistance that was a natural development from step one to step two. When, however, does step three arrive: that of re-entry?

Today many Cameroonian women are seeking marriages with older European men. Do you really believe they are being manipulated? They know exactly what that old white man will offer to them,

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What is happening is a conflict of two wills: the one of the people who want the West and the one of the elite who want to enjoy the privileges of positions without delivering. What do we do?

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and what they can offer him in return. The way people understand the Western model implemented in African countries today is problematic. It seems like we are running a machine without knowing the operating manual. People understand modernisation as something strange, Western. Don't forget: Africa is a Western invention. It is difficult to manage that invention without the inventor himself. And sometimes updates are needed.

For example, in Cameroon, the way we are implementing economic liberalism at a local level is problematic. Everyone is given the license to open any business and believes he will be rich. In the end, however, too many people are running the same businesses, and they end up only surviving and remaining poor. The way the government is implementing democracy at a local level is problematic, too. Every village has a mayor and they all want to have a nice city hall, a high school, a university, a hospital, while there are no resources for them. I don't know whether it is political cynicism that the regime uses these Western models to give people what they want – on paper – but there is no real development plan.

On another note, emigration has turned many Africans into Europeans, Americans, etc. While our brothers, sisters and children are becoming French, German and British, why can't we turn people of these nationalities into Cameroonians? Because of colonialism? But those countries wouldn't be doing it if it was not benefiting them. Don't you think our countries could benefit from being mixed with Western and Asian populations, too? There is a trend of globalisation at that level and I am afraid that Africa is losing out on something important here. ■■■

*Translated from French into English by Nathalie Heynderickx.*

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1. The 2013 report compiled by Hubert Védrine, a former French minister for foreign affairs, and others, entitled "Un partenariat pour l'avenir: 15 propositions pour une nouvelle dynamique économique entre l'Afrique et la France" ("A partnership for the future: 15 proposals for a new economic dynamic between Africa and France").

# The Angola-Portugal Connection: A Relationship of Mutual Dependency

António Tomás

In recent years, more than 100 000 Portuguese have immigrated to Angola in hope of a better life. The Angolan economy is booming while times are tough in the former colonial power, where the economy has stagnated and unemployment is high. At the same time, capital is flowing in the opposite direction, as Angolan investors snap up chunks of Portugal's ailing economy. After five centuries of colonialism, and a post-independence civil war era, during which thousands of Angolans fled to Portugal, Angola's and Portugal's destinies are tied again: no longer through colonialism, but through a very particular form of mutual dependency, which, not surprisingly, is based on their common history. This article reflects on this phenomenon and the implications of the newly found confidence of Angola's elite vis-à-vis the former colonial master.

In July 2013, the president of Portugal, Aníbal Cavaco Silva, went to Angola for an official visit that lasted five days – the longest for a Portuguese serving president, according to the Portuguese press. The goals of the visit were to unblock overdue payments that the Angolan government owed to Portuguese firms operating in Angola, to make formal and informal contacts with the Portuguese community there, and, more importantly, to formalise the commercial and diplomatic relationships between both countries in what was then called “a strategic partnership”. According to many statements made by Cavaco Silva, it was a question of strengthening the ties forged through the common history of both countries.

However, two months later, in mid-October, Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos himself announced the end of negotiations. In his State of the Nation speech, Dos Santos named “high-level misunderstandings and the current political climate” as the main reasons for the change in Angola's position. The news fell like a bomb. For some analysts in both Angola and Portugal, the reason for the change was not hard to fathom. A number of important figures in the Angolan political-business elite – including the vice-president, Manuel Vicente, and General Kopelipa, a senior adviser to the president – were involved in a number of legal cases in Portugal related to money laundering. Portugal sent high-level emissaries, including ministers, to revive the deal. Portugal's then minister of justice, Rui Machete, apologised to Angola, but it was not enough. Even though the cases did not reach the courts, the Angolan side did not consider the strategic partnership again.

In theory, a partnership would have been mutually advantageous. On the one hand, Portugal is facing a serious economic crisis, with a related rise in unemployment. Many Portuguese have been forced to search for jobs overseas and it is estimated that about 350 000 Portuguese citizens are living in Angola. On the other hand, Portuguese products, such as wines, that cannot compete in more demanding markets are finding niches in countries like Angola. Furthermore, Angola's economy is thriving. With the end of the civil war in 2002, financial resources could be redirected from the military into development projects. The oil boom of the last years has also improved Angolan economic prospects. Consequently, the economy has become increasingly more



**António Tomás** received his doctoral degree in anthropology from Columbia University, New York. He is the author of a study on the African nationalist Amílcar Cabral titled *O Fazedor de Utopias: Uma Biografia de Amílcar* (The Maker of Utopias: A Biography of Amílcar Cabral). António is the Ray Pahl Fellow at the African Centre for Cities at University of Cape Town. Currently he is working on a book called *In the Skin of the City: Luanda or the Dialectics of Spatial Transformation*.

complex, requiring the expertise of a well-trained labour force. In purely economic terms, a “strategic partnership” could be beneficial for both countries.

However, as the Portuguese president stated, the partnership was based on “a common history”, and this is the crux of the matter. Cavaco Silva may have been thinking of positive aspects, such as shared culture, language and blood. But for many Angolans, this encroachment of Portuguese interests is tantamount to colonialism in other terms.

I do not mean neo-colonialism, or the privileged relations that have characterised some European countries and their former African colonies. The ties between Portugal and Angola are of a particular nature. Portugal never had any sort of military influence in Angola after independence (as France, for instance, has in its former colonies), nor does it influence Angolan foreign policy. The most advantageous deals in the Angolan economy, in sectors such as oil and infrastructure, are in fact dominated by American, French, Chinese and even Brazilian multinationals. The economic relationship between Portugal and Angola is largely based in cultural, linguistic and blood ties. Portuguese interests act as a sort of middleman between Angola and the world, with the necessary language and cultural skills to help with financial and legal services, for instance.

The emergence of the postcolonial ties between Angola and Portuguese today has been in the making since before 1975. To understand the particular nature of Portuguese-Angolan ties, one has first of all to grapple with the particular nature of Portuguese colonialism in Africa: in Mozambique, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau and Angola. Portuguese scholars have dedicated par-

ticular attention to this, and one of the most interesting is the sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos. In “Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, post-colonialism and inter-identity” (*Luso-Brazilian Review* 39/2, 2002), he reasons that, if Western identity is the product of colonialism, then the identity of the places where the Portuguese language is spoken today reflects the specificities of Portuguese colonialism. And this was a “subaltern colonialism”. Because Portuguese colonialism was different from what he calls the “hegemonic colonialism” of the British, this also requires an alternative understanding of the end of Portuguese colonialism.

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In the early 1960s, the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal, confronted with the impending independence of African countries, believed that the solution was to advance the integration of the colonies and the “mother country”. The infamous indigenous code – a set of laws that reduced natives to a subhuman category, with no rights whatsoever but forced to pay a tax in the form of labour conscription – was abolished, and Portuguese citizenship was extended to everyone born in these territories. The so-called “luso-tropicalist” theories of the Brazilian-Portuguese anthropologist Gilberto Freyre were extended to other ter-

ritories of Portuguese colonisation in order to convince the international community that the Portuguese were building multiracial societies in Africa. Settlers did not cut their ties with Portugal and the relations between Portugal and the colonies were conceived in terms of mutual dependence. This myth sustained Portuguese colonialism for another decade, and it still permeates the ties between Portugal and some of its former colonies, in particular Angola.

Take, for instance, the example of the university. The colonial state only decided

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The passage of Angolan students through Portuguese institutions promotes the networks that continue the deep influence of Portugal in Angolan law-making. Consequently, when Angolan institutions need law experts, they bring them from Portugal.

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to create a university in Angola very late, in 1968. Up to that time, all higher education diplomas had to be earned in Portugal. The settler population benefitted most from the university in Angola, but most of them returned to Portugal in 1975. The newly independent country nationalised the university, but very little changed. Education policies were still rooted in the idea that knowledge is produced abroad. Either consultants had to be imported or a substantial part of the Angolan labour force needed to be trained abroad, in countries such as the Soviet Union, Cuba, Russia, China, Brazil and, more recently, in the United States and England. For both strategies, the reliance on Portugal is still paramount. Firstly, this is because of the common Portuguese

language. Secondly, there is a relation of “proximity”. For instance, it is probable that most Angolan lawyers have been trained at a Portuguese university. A number of Angolan laws have been adopted, sometimes verbatim, from the Portuguese ones: the current penal code is still the colonial one of 1886. Even more importantly, the passage of Angolan students through Portuguese institutions promotes the networks that continue the deep influence of Portugal in Angolan law-making. Consequently, when Angolan institutions need law experts, they bring them from Portugal. The recently approved Angolan constitution was vetted by a number of Portuguese constitutionalists, including José Gomes Canotilho and Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa.

Healthcare is another domain of dependency. The fragility of the Angolan healthcare system is well known. According to statistics, the country has less than one doctor for every 10 000 people. The Angolan government has worked to improve the conditions in which Angolan universities train doctors, but it has also outsourced medical care. The *Junta Médica* (Medical Board), which was created right after independence, allows the government to support Angolan patients abroad. These patients are sent to many countries, such as England and South Africa – and more recently to Namibia, where Angolans can travel without visas. But Portugal is again the first choice, for medical and other practical and bureaucratic reasons. An increasing number of Angolans no longer need visas to enter Portugal and this free flow of people is key to understanding the fabric of the ties between these two countries.

This points, perhaps, to an understand-



*Even I exist in Embo: jaundiced tales of counterpenetration #1, 2007. Photographer: Oliver Neubert.*

ing of post-colonialism that goes beyond the political and economic realms. It is a matter of culture, language and blood. Today, a significant part of the population can claim to belong in both places. Key to this is the question of citizenship. Portugal changed its citizenship law in 1974, soon after the Carnation Revolution. This was to prevent Africans born in Portuguese colonies – who, by law, were then Portuguese – from claiming citizenship. In this way, many Angolans who were transferring their retirement savings to the Portuguese treasury were stripped of their citizenship. Angola did the same: settlers were deprived of their Angolan citizenship unless they formally stated their will to continue being Angolans. Portugal privileged *jus sanguinis* (citizenship as a birthright for those with a Portuguese parent), which opened the door of citizenship for those Angolans whose ancestors were Portuguese. For the Portuguese, it was more difficult to claim Angolan citizenship. However, Angolan law would change in the late 1990s, so that it now privileges *jus soli* (citizenship as a birthright for those born in the territory). Blood ties continued to be important for the attribution of Angolan citizenship, but land was also made an important factor. The outcome was that settlers who had been born in colonial Angola could not only claim Angolan citizenship, but could also pass it on to their children.

We can now understand the intermedi-

ary role of Portugal in Angola's economic relations with the rest of the world. An increasing population of Luso-Angolans – people with blood ties in both countries – creates this constant flow of people, knowledge and money. This has been important for firms in the legal, communications and banking sectors. For instance, a number of Portuguese firms have been able to cut their logistical expenses by keeping part of their operations in Portugal, with only a residual presence in Luanda.

In conclusion, Portugal needs Angola as a destination for immigration in times of crisis. Angola is, for instance, the third largest source of remittances from Portuguese emigrants (after France and Switzerland). Conversely, Angola needs Portugal, both to supply a qualified labour force, and because of the ways that its internationalised economy and finances pass through Portugal. Angolans and Portuguese are now tied to a regime of mutual dependency. The clout that Angolans have on the Portuguese judiciary system is just one example of these entanglements.

Right now, it is difficult to predict the future of political and diplomatic ties between Angola and Portugal. However, the mutual dependency goes beyond these formal ties. To a great extent, blood and culture will continue to underpin their relationship. ■■■

# Little Black Man Cake

Billy Kahora

*No one, after all, can be liked whose human weight and complexity cannot be, or has not been, admitted. James Baldwin*

Last April in Berlin, as part of a group of travelling poets and writers, I watched a panel of individuals profess to speak about European–African relations. It was excruciatingly stilted in its attempted political correctness. There were four German panellists against the Kenyan, the well-known rapper MC Kah. When Kah was asked what he thought Africans generally thought of Europe, he seemed to fog up, lose his usual easy, natural rapper self, which has made him a Nairobi crowd favourite, and finally blurted, as if in pain: “It’s old. Europe is old.”

In the 1960s, after independence, African education curriculums retained large doses of centuries of European history, which continued to be forced on new generations. A push for Africanisation later introduced the continent’s own post-independence history and, in comparison to European history, these new narratives seemed contemporary and immediate to Africans. Official images of Europe, mediated through TV, postcards and magazines, remain generally monumental: heavy, grey and imposingly permanent castles, ancient battlefields and cobbled villages. Even recent ubiquitous statistical reports on Europe that are distributed in Africa constantly paint European populations as old, adding to an imagined narrative of Europe as ancient to Africans. MC Kah’s reaction represents a larger African idea of Europe. Age. Authority. The Old World.

However, Africans’ daily encounters of contemporary Europeans are with the tourist, the missionary or the expatriate. Adding to simplistic ideas of ancient authority, these encounters create false impressions of afflu-

ence, confidence and knowledge. Europe thus becomes an object of desire, especially amongst younger generations of Africans. It is this pining for the imagined good things of Europe that makes young Senegalese, Eritrean and Somali men get onto the tiniest of skiffs and brave the storms of the Mediterranean. In Nairobi’s coffee joints, one now observes tall dark young women with mixed race babies. And there’s nothing wrong with that, if one can imagine equal relations in the couplings of middle-aged white men and young Kenyan women. This African desire for Europe has created a veritable cottage industry. A young Kenyan woman without the right education or middle-class upbringing can find a safe and solid exit strategy by seeking out a middle-aged or older white male, either a tourist, development worker or expatriate. A sizeable population of young Kenyan men also make it their life-quest to pursue white female UN workers and interns from international government agencies that are housed in Nairobi. This pursuit in nightspots has cultivated its own sub-culture and economy. Even when it’s clear that these white young women have very little economic wealth, the sheer perception of whiteness and Europeaness, in and of itself, presents enough value for certain Kenyan youth. This desire to have some connection, however tenuous, with the larger idea of Europe or America looms for these youth.

James Baldwin observed that “No one, after all, can be liked whose human weight and complexity cannot be, or has not been, admitted.” The colonial experience is at the heart of the skewed encounter between the European and the African. The countereffect of the African’s perceptions of the European



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is that he lacks the weight and the complexity that has been conferred on the European. Therefore, to the perceptions of the affluent and the knowledgeable is added a developed sense of inferiority, especially in older generations of Africans. Add in the daily encounters with their false impressions and, inevitably, envy, dislike and even a reverse racism come into play.

Mixed emotions and mixed stereotypes thus recreate Europeans as pale and weak when observed hiding from the African sun. They are seen to have a deathly fear of malaria and other tropical diseases, even when these diseases kill Africans by the thousands each year. The envy, tinged with class connotations, further confers a slyness

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Yes, Europe is staid and stale. A cemetery. A cold one at that, snowed in and buried under the weight of its long, long history. Europeans are affluent, knowledgeable, weak, sly and grappling. And so, Africa becomes new, energetic. Africa is seen to be rising.

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and closed-heartedness to Europeans not too different from that extended to other groups, whether ethnic or religious, that are perceived as more affluent.

Yes, Europe is staid and stale. A cemetery. A cold one at that, snowed in and buried under the weight of its long, long history. Europeans are affluent, knowledgeable, weak, sly and grappling. And so, Africa becomes new, energetic. Africa is seen to be rising.

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I grew up in what was called an “estate” in Nairobi, a place called Buru Buru, with middle-class pretensions of aspirational education, financial savings for self-improvement, and a new Protestant work ethic. There, I encountered Europe through the books of my father’s library, a small three-tiered shelf. When I’d run out of Enid Blyton and all other childish narratives from England, I turned to this shelf and its eclectic collection: Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, which I read again and again to distraction; a few other Shakespeare plays; the English version of *Reader’s Digest*; and a bright loquat-yellow copy of Walter Rodney’s *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. I immediately sensed this was an important book from its bold unfriendly title.

My relationship with my father had taken a strange turn when I reached my teens. He’d become extremely hostile to what he saw as my hiding inside books or films, avoiding reality. My father is a telecommunications engineer with more than a practical bent. A difficult childhood in the Native Reserves and a gruelling teenagehood as a first-born son of a single mother somehow created in him an atavistic belief in following the rules. This was in spite of working most of his life in a government parastatal known for its systemic corruption. The life lessons he imbibed from all these experiences were the soundtrack of my young life, transmitted on morning drives to school or while the family watched TV in the evenings. One of these was a constant refrain about the *Muthungu*, the European, from his early experiences of the Englishmen he’d encountered as a child in Muranga, at school, and eventually in his workplace. “*Mundu witagwo Muthungu ni mundu serious, ni mundu honest.*” A European is always serious, always honest.

The musty pages of Walter Rodney that I picked up from his small bookshelf, however, refuted his joyless sentiments. I detected a rage in Rodney’s classic anti-colonial text, in its miniscule font, in its loneliness on my father’s shelf. The book had not been picked up in years and, at that age, I was ill-equipped to struggle with its realness, its unflattering depictions of the European – just as I was ill-equipped to deal with my father’s antagonism towards my penchant for the fictional, be it movies, novels or Shakespeare. “The world is not like that. That is not reality,” he would say, referring to the latest fiction I was reading.

I could clearly see that my father had extensively read the Walter Rodney book. Full passages were marked with his small scrawl. Between his rants against my innocent take on the world and his underlined passages, I realised that a disillusionment with independent Kenya might have revised his ideas of Europeans.

The attacks on my reading ended when he found me poring over Rodney. He grunted and, from that day, stopped his flip-pant lectures on my perceived escapism. I realised something about him then – a certain inscrutability dropped away. I did some growing up when I got a glimpse of his complex worldview. I realised that his attacks on my fondness for fiction expressed anger at my belief in a world that did not exist, the world of false aspiration he had sought

through education and the modern trappings of a car, a house, modern cutlery and manners. I saw that, even after achieving what he saw as a Europeanness, the new Kenya left him empty and angry with its never-ending national mantras of hard work, progress and harambee – collective self-actualisation. And so, to him, Europeans were serious. All things modern, and by extension European, had to be pursued, irrespective of whether they provided fulfilment. To remain un-modern, un-European, was not an option, even if it was to be realised through a joyless practicality. There he was: angry in an in-between world of aspiration for a Europeanness that would never be his and the Kenyan reality of his past, the village and what writer V.S. Naipaul called the “always threatening bush”, that needed to be avoided at all costs, especially for me, his son.

Years later, I found myself at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, pursuing a masters degree in creative writing. One night, during one of those innumerable reading evenings that are part of any writing department, I met an aspiring writer named Claudia who was clearly not part of the circuit.

“There are 40,000 Polish people in Edinburgh,” Claudia said to me. “I want to start my own reading in a café in town,” she added, with a sniff at the dour castle interior. This was not due to the damp walls. “I want it to be open and free and diverse and want you to help me.”

A week later, dead cold under the high evening sky, I arrived early by taxi at Claudia’s place in Foley, which I’d never heard of. It was the farthest I had ever been from the posh Royal Mile in central Edinburgh where I stayed. The small mean flats, deep underground, with little lighting, aroused my interest, my idea of “keeping it real”. The door immediately swung open when I knocked. Claudia stood there and burst into happy laughter when she recognised me, touching the top of her chest.

“Willy, no?” she said. “I can’t remember or pronounce your second name. Come in. Come in.” I did not bother to correct her. It was quiet inside the flat. “Oh dear. Nobody is here yet. We don’t really expect anybody. But come in. Come in.” She said all this breathlessly. The flat was not heated and her words came out in small excitable warm puffs. “Why the serious face? People here in Edinburgh take themselves too seriously.”

Another girl sat in the living room at the far end of the only couch, dressed in a night-

gown and slippers. There were only two rooms. The living room I had walked into betrayed, by its smell of sleep, that it doubled as a bedroom. A small table in the corner of the room held some feta cheese dishes and a cake – deep brown and thickly rich.

Claudia disappeared into the other room. I was cold and stiff, so I tasted some of the cake idly. I regretted coming all this way now, even if my non-professional interest in Claudia did not wane. The cake was fantastic.

Somehow the Polish writer and journalist Kapuściński came up. “Yes. Great writer,” Claudia now said. I allowed that Kapuściński had some merits. But then I made it clear that the man had done a great disservice to Africa by his criminal generalisations.

“What would you do. Yourself,” the other girl said, speaking for the first time, her voice too loud in the small apartment.

“I would never generalise.”

“Willy. Willy. Willy,” Claudia started at my tone. “We are not general. Not every Pole is a Kapuściński. I could be his granddaughter, but so what?”

“The man wrote one good book. It’s called *Another Day of Life*,” I said and could not let it go and ranted away.

“Let’s talk about my writing café,” Claudia finally said. She flounced to the middle of the room and twirled. Kapuściński, Africa and writing disappeared in the small room with its mean walls. The roommate joined her, shrugging off her dressing gown.

“Willy. You know what we call this cake in Poland?” Claudia asked after maybe our fourteenth dance.

“There is a cake called Black Forest in my country that tastes like this,” I now laughed, parrying the shot, twirling her around.

The two girls laughed, delighted.

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This is, I feel, an eventual reaction to Europe and Europeans by Africans – that there is a lot that has to be let go. And there is a lot to be grappled with.

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“Then, it is okay,” Claudia said, the smile leaving her face. “We call it Little Black Man cake.” I stopped. Claudia grinned.

“It is a very famous cake. Everyone likes it. So, if you like it, you are now Polish. Little Black Man cake.”

I finally just laughed and we all laughed.

I wondered why I did not give an anecdote of my own – tell Claudia and her friend

that in my country they were called *Mzungu*, and repeat the common refrain that it comes from *Kizunguzungu*, which means “dizziness”.

But I let it go. I’ve had several encounters in Europe with Europeans where I’ve been asked not to take everything too seriously and the thought of the *Kizunguzungu* anecdote has come up. These are far from the serious professional and personal encounters of real value and exchange, where my weight and complexity have been considered. And, in many ways, the more I have of these encounters, the less I react with a knee-jerk anger. I let it go.

This is, I feel, an eventual reaction to

Europe and Europeans by Africans – that there is a lot that has to be let go. And there is a lot to be grappled with. This is something I feel that my father, in his anger against the modern world, the “European” world, did not come to terms with. And what might really matter is not so much what one thinks of the Other, but how self-knowledge can be built on one’s own terms. And that was what happened to my perception of Europe that cold wintry Edinburgh night. That it was just another place that had been building its own self-perception on its own terms for a long time, and it was time that I did that too. ■■■

# African Perceptions of Europe and the Rise of Emerging Powers: Implications for Future Relations

Sanusha Naidu

## Introduction

In 2000, the first EU–Africa Summit was hosted in Cairo. However, it took until 2007 for the dialogue between Africa and the EU to reflect the highest political level. The second EU–Africa Summit in Lisbon was a culmination of protracted negotiations that resulted in the adoption of the Joint Africa–EU Strategy (JAES). This was a significant outcome as it aimed to enhance the engagement between the two actors and to ultimately consolidate a partnership of equals. When the 4th Summit was hosted in Brussels in April 2014 to reconfigure the relationship based on the joint strategy, momentum seemed to have waned again. South Africa’s Jacob Zuma, president of arguably Africa’s most powerful state, decided not to attend the meeting, in protest of the host’s decision to not lift a travel ban imposed on the wife of Zimbabwean president and political outcast Robert Mugabe.

Engagement between Summits equally reflects an unusual combination of tension and co-operation. Since the EU is Africa’s most important market and donor, the question that begs to be asked is why is this so. The answer is found in the disparate views that each have of the other. For Africa, the ideal of an equal partnership seems to fall short when the EU is seen to be hanging on to its colonial attitude and imposing what it believes to be acceptable models of public policy and democratic governance for African governments. On the other hand, EU governments tend to assume that, despite Africa’s sovereignty, it still needs a “big brother” to intervene (with military force, if necessary) and guide its younger sibling through the issues of “growing up”.

However, or so a widely-held argument goes, as Africa has established new kinship

ties with emerging powers such as China and, to a lesser extent, India and Brazil, it is increasingly sidestepping Europe. This view becomes particularly conspicuous when African leaders declare that “Europe is less and less attractive for Africa”<sup>1</sup> or announce a “look east” policy, calling into question the privileged position Europe has enjoyed on the continent.

Has Africa’s relationship with Europe really reached a point where it is threatened by the emerging powers’ footprint on the continent?

Considering that African leaders in 2014 racked up air miles flying to Western capitals to attend the EU–Africa Summit (April), the US–Africa Leadership Summit (August) and the OECD-hosted 14th Economic Forum on Africa, among others, this does seem like a plausible scenario to policy makers in the US and Europe. But is it an accurate reflection? Or is it a product of populism and media hype about the rising powers debate in Africa?

Against this backdrop, this article takes a look at how public and elite views of Europe have changed in Africa and what role Europe has come to play as a result.

## EU vs. the Emerging Powers: Alternatives for Africa

Undoubtedly, the rise of the emerging actors in Africa is not to be seen as short-term nor romanticised. The question at hand is whether the evolving analyses of this phenomenon and its impact are being thoroughly interrogated.

One such area of investigation is the impact of African perceptions concerning



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the emerging powers on elite and public opinion across the continent. What implications do such perceptions have for defining the engagement of African countries between the global North and the global South? How do such perceptions inform the hierarchy of Africa's international commitments? And to what extent can the interpretation of these perceptions serve as a framework to estimate the cauldron of Africa's interests in international relations?

While there are very few perception studies related to the engagement between Africa and the emerging powers, the popular view seems to be that, as a result of this

engagement, African elites are prone to frustration when dealing with the rigidity and paternalism of traditional partners, especially Europe.

Two sets of issues inform elite perceptions when it comes to the EU versus the emerging powers. The first is embedded in the history between Europe and Africa, from slavery to colonialism and the post-colonial era. Each of these periods saw asymmetrical levels of engagement, with Europe appearing to be dominant in shaping the terms of the relationship. This could be seen in the Lomé Conventions – the trade and aid agreements first signed in



1975 – which, according to Gruhn, were effectively negotiated to anchor EU–Africa relations as a transitional arrangement in the post-independence phase, but “were seen as a perpetuation of neo-colonial ties”<sup>2</sup>.

The inception of the Cold War served to not only reinforce the trajectory in which African states became proxies to serve the broader contours of polemic and rivalry. It also allowed African political and economic elites to manipulate relations to satisfy their self-interest by either threatening to switch allegiances or actually doing so.

The end of the Cold War eventually led to the emergence of a multipolar world

order with diverse centres of power. It is this shifting geography of power relations in the global architecture that underlines the second aspect of Africa’s elite perceptions of the EU, precipitated by the rise of the emerging powers.

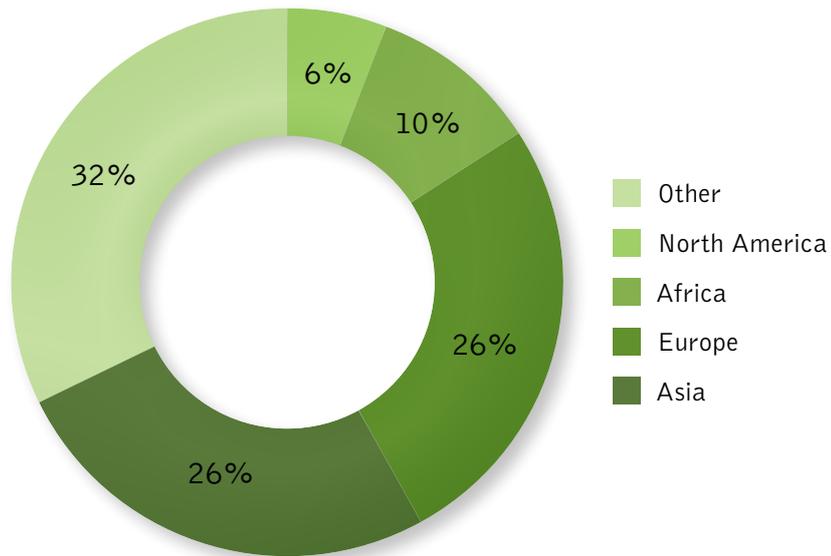
With investible capital, and ostensibly driven by an intense appetite for resources and markets, the emerging powers looked to Africa for opportunities to fuel their economic growth. Following decades of punctuated development, Africa was ripe for alternate international engagements. This led to “collective emerging power involvement in the modern era, especially when measured in economic terms”, as Chris Alden has described it, at a level the “continent has never experienced”.<sup>3</sup> Increasingly, African political elites see the rising powers as a catalyst for Africa’s political, economic and global revival.

However, this notion is not uncontested. Over the past several years, the question of whether Africa’s engagement with the emerging powers is an opportunity or threat has evolved a discourse of its own.<sup>4</sup> The resulting perceptions show two faces in juxtaposition. The first is found in African state authorities and parts of the think-tank and academic community. Here the relationship with the rising powers is seen to contribute to the continent’s global rise, modernisation and development, which is often defined as a positive-sum game. Moreover, the nature of the interaction is considered to be pragmatic and based on mutual interests and respect for equality, unlike the pilloried relations with EU partners. The rising powers are thus significant drivers of Africa’s development since they share a history of colonial baggage, a common desire for global integration and inclusion, an intersection of development agendas, and the undeniable desire to challenge the hegemony of the West and reform the international governance system.

The second face of perceptions is evident in the realm of African civil society, which is composed of social movements, grassroots organisations and other non-state actors that have taken up the struggle for social justice and human rights. This sector is pre-occupied with the threats they associate with the emerging powers. Here, the same accusations of exploitation, underdevelopment and marginalisation that were levelled against former colonial powers are now directed to the rising powers’ engagement across the continent. This perception is rein-



*Even I exist in Embo:  
jaundiced tales of  
counterpenetration #3, 2007.  
Photographer: Oliver Neubert.*



Africa's key trade partners, 2013.

Source: Intracen, Ecobank Research

forced through empirical studies drawn from community-level struggles, which provide insights into the relationship between African governments and emerging actors. Many studies propose that the emerging powers do not offer an alternative set of engagements for African governments. For these non-state

as the EU's uncompromising attitude. For the EU, the strategic calculation is whether it wants to reconfigure its partnership, and if so, in what ways.

## Mutual Engagement: The Sticky Issues

**Africa is no longer a junior partner in the engagement. It has alternatives and does not need to continue to accept what it sees as the EU's uncompromising attitude. For the EU, the strategic calculation is whether it wants to reconfigure its partnership, and if so, in what ways.**

At present, the sticky issues between Africa and Europe relate to two areas of engagement: trade, and the democratic norms and values for co-operation. The challenge for the EU in each of these spheres is as much about retaining political traction as it is about maintaining its global status.<sup>6</sup> The evolving question is whether it can be "business as usual" for the EU's Africa policy in the face of a more aggressive attitude by African leaders.

actors, the bottom line is that the emerging powers merely disguise themselves to be different when in reality they maintain the status quo. Parochial arguments define the rising powers as 21st century scramblers after the continent's extractive resources<sup>5</sup>, with the underlying assumption that the rising powers are mainly seeking to take their legitimate place as strategic players in global affairs.

The two interpretations of the emerging powers in Africa seem to resemble the conflicting narratives about the EU engagement: a positive-sum game versus a zero-sum game. It has become apparent, though, that the emerging powers have increased African state and elite agency by allowing them to leverage their position between the rising powers and those of the global North.

Africa is no longer a junior partner in the engagement. It has alternatives and does not need to continue to accept what it sees

The sensitivities underpinning the conclusion of economic partnership agreements (EPAs) are a case in point. Anticipated as a painless process, the negotiations have morphed into a protracted set of differences and disagreements about reciprocity and market access. The recent deadline of 1 October 2014 to finalise the negotiations between the East African Community (EAC) and the EU was missed, highlighting the political stalemate and anxiety around EPAs.<sup>7</sup> While the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and West Africa have signed on to the EU trade deal, the reality is that the EPAs represent a new chapter in Africa's trading relationship with the EU, which is really about replacing aid with trade. If the EU indeed wants to make a significant impact with the EPAs in Africa's

markets, it will have to go beyond its trading profile with the continent, which is currently on par with Asia (see chart below).

Of course, with Africa still dependent on EU development assistance to support regional integration and peace and stability efforts, it may be pertinent that the EU's comparative advantage remains in the area of development co-operation.

The second area of sensitivity concerns democratic norms and practice. The question at hand is whether democratic governance values are being applied uniformly with all partners – or is Africa being singled out?<sup>8</sup> This is reflected in the ongoing tension around the Zimbabwean crisis. While certain EU member states continue to stall, based on the Zimbabwe issue, African leaders have also demonstrated their resolve by showing solidarity with the Zimbabwean leader and withstanding such pressure. A case in point is President Zuma's decision to not attend the 2014 Summit, noting that Africans will no longer be “looked on as subjects” by Europe and that Europe shouldn't tell the continent “who must come and who must not come”<sup>9</sup> to meetings. This behaviour not only caught EU diplomats by surprise, it was also interpreted as Zuma heeding Mugabe's call to boycott the Summit. Not all African leaders responded to that call, including the African Union's top brass who travelled to Brussels. Of course, Zuma's non-attendance has raised further questions about South Africa's foreign policy posturing.

The Zimbabwe issue, however, raises a fundamental issue of fragmented consensus between the EU and Africa on the question of political conditionality and sanctions, especially when it comes to trade.<sup>10</sup> Two other contentious areas are the International Criminal Court (ICC) and European support for African lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transsexual (LGBT) movements, which is seen as an attack on African independence, sovereignty and cultural values.

Equally frustrating for Europe is the perception that African elites have protracted the processes of taking ownership of and financial responsibility for continental institutions.

## Moving Beyond “Us” and “Them”?

Africa's relationship with the EU appears to be characterised by “us” and “them” dichotomies. For Europe, the rising powers'

deepening footprint in Africa raises questions not only about bilateral and strategic engagements with a resurgent and assertive continent, but also about the EU's foreign policy role and identity as a bloc in contemporary global affairs.

Still, the perceptions of conflict are not always borne out. In the areas of peace and security, development assistance and regional integration, Africa seems to enjoy better co-operation with the EU. Consider, for example, the USD 43-million boost that Europe injected into the European Development Fund towards integration in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) region<sup>11</sup>, the EU's contributions to the African Peace Facility, and the EUR 840 million to set up the pan-African programme under the Joint Africa–EU Strategy.

Although the outcome of the 2014 Summit has been characterised as “moderate optimism on both sides”<sup>12</sup>, it remains to be seen whether the EU can realise the JAES objective of building a new strategic political partnership for the future that overcomes the traditional donor–recipient relationship and is based on common values and goals.

In August 2014, the EU inaugurated a new executive leadership, tasked with resolving Europe's financial woes and restoring confidence in the Union's role in regional and global affairs. It will be significant to see where Africa features in this hierarchy of interests. Conversely, since the 2014 Summit was hosted before the changing of the guard and institutional inertia may cause further complications, Africa's response to the new leadership will be vital.

A starting point would be for the EU not to compare its engagement with Africa with that of the rising powers. The EU has to recognise that its relationship with Africa comes out of a different historical experience and to not repeat past mistakes. This should entail a dialogue that is underlined by mutual respect for sovereignty. It is also clear that Africa cannot afford to marginalise one set of partners in favour of others. Africa needs Europe as much as Europe needs Africa.

From this standpoint, the new political leadership of the EU would do well to consider that, despite their good intentions, conditionalities and sanctions might not always be the appropriate tools to effect better practices of governance and democratic norms. Africa has clearly demonstrated its desire for “African solutions for African

problems”, and perhaps this needs to be nurtured.

Secondly, both sides need to be clear on their priorities for strategic interest and intent. It is important for both sides to iron out the EPAs, develop better co-ordinated and more human-rights-oriented migra-

tion policies, and to ensure that both sides deliver on their outputs, especially in respect of the transparency of financial transaction flows.

The inception of a new EU leadership may be seen as the opportunity for both sides to rebalance the partnership. ■■■

1. As remarked by Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade during a visit to the EU in 2009. Quoted in L Fioramonti and P Kimungui, “Public and elite views on Europe vs. China in Africa”, *International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 2011 (46:1).
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# Between Rhetoric and Reality: Kenya's Relations with Europe

Murithi Mutiga

Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta is, on paper, the type of leader one would expect to be a natural ally of the West.

He is the son of the country's founding leader, Jomo Kenyatta, who was one of Britain's staunchest partners in the Horn of Africa. The younger Kenyatta was educated in the US, is partial to Swiss watches and played rugby at a high school associated with the country's landed elite. Moreover, his family has maintained a business empire with deep ties in Europe and many of its managers have been sourced from that continent. Like many members of the Kenyan elite, he sends his children to universities in Europe.

His chief rival, Raila Odinga, on the other hand, seems cut out to be a staunch ally of China and, more generally, the major powers ranged against the West on the global stage.

Odinga was born into a family steeped in left-wing politics. His father, Kenya's first vice-president, Jaramogi Odinga, was a socialist whose strongest international partners were drawn from China, Russia and East Germany. He used his connections to send his son to college in East Germany.

The younger Odinga, with his bearded countenance and strong anti-regime stance, was demonised by Kenya's repressive second president, Daniel Moi, as a dangerous dissident at a time when the label "Marxist" connoted an outlaw. His first son is named Fidel, after the veteran Cuban leader, and he has long championed the politics of redistribution.

The political careers of Kenyatta and Odinga have panned out quite differently. President Kenyatta today heads an administration that has been characterised by a

marked (rhetorical) hostility to European powers and their allies, while Odinga is seen as a staunch ally of America and the major European powers.

How did this come to be? The answer to that question will also help to decipher the puzzling relations between Nairobi and key administrations in the West that especially marked the early months of the Kenyatta administration. Do these differences signal a fundamental shift, or is it a transient phenomenon driven by the prevailing political climate and the international judicial process facing him?

The answer, from all available evidence and despite the harsh rhetoric, is that there will be no fundamental breach with the West similar to Mugabe's Zimbabwe or Mengistu's Ethiopia, except in certain extreme conditions.

Instead, the freeze witnessed in the first few months of the Kenyatta administration is more likely a calculated gambit by the ruling elite to navigate the indictments for crimes against humanity laid against President Kenyatta and Deputy President William Ruto at the International Criminal Court (ICC), which represent the greatest challenge the pair have faced in their careers. It is significant that his main defence counsel at the ICC is British.

## Opportunist

Kenyan politicians are a famously opportunistic lot. Unlike other African countries, such as Uganda, South Africa and Ghana, where consecutive presidential elections are contested by the same two major political parties, in Kenya, the parties and symbols on the



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ballot paper change every five years.

There are no programmatic political parties in the country. Politics revolves strictly around individual politicians who are seen to represent ethnic groups and regional blocs.

Uhuru Kenyatta's ascension to the presidency is a classic illustration of this phenomenon.

There was almost no chance that Uhuru would have been elected president in 2013 if he had not been indicted by the ICC – a per-



*Even I exist in Embo: jaundiced tales of counterpenetration #2, 2007. Photographer: Oliver Neubert.*

verse irony that must be understood when analysing Kenya's foreign policy stance.

Kenyatta, like his predecessor, Mwai Kibaki, is a Kikuyu. In a country where ethnicity is a primary dynamic in politics, the received wisdom held that Kibaki's succes-

or would have to come from outside the Kikuyu community.

Yet Kenyatta was vaulted into the presidential race when he successfully cast his indictment not as a challenge to him personally but as an assault on his Kikuyu com-

munity. This won him solid support within the country's largest ethnic community which, together with its Embu and Meru cousins from the Mount Kenya region, contains about a third of the electorate.

The fact that he ended up in an alliance with William Ruto illustrates how opportunism – or what kinder souls may label “pragmatism” – is the thread that runs through Kenyan politics, rather than any ideological or programmatic ideas that would limit the fluidity of alliances between parties.

Ruto is a member of the Kalenjin community. The Kalenjin and Kikuyu were in opposite camps during the 2007 elections and the biggest protagonists in the fighting that followed the election. Yet only a few years after the violence, as if to demonstrate how fluid alliances, friendships and enmities are in Kenya, the leaders of the two communities were gravitating into an alliance.

Faced with a common challenge of the ICC indictments, Ruto and Kenyatta formed a joint ticket and successfully framed their candidature as a referendum on Kenya's sovereignty against an “imperialist plot” by the Western powers that fund the ICC to “impose” a president on Kenyans (read Odinga). Their savvy publicity machine helped them to clinch State House in the March 4, 2013 elections.

## Conspiracy Theory

Why was it so easy for the pair to rally their supporters into believing that there was a conspiracy driven from key European capitals and Washington to keep them from the presidency and promote the opposition?

Part of the answer draws on the fact that, in the absence of serious political parties, Kenyan politics is heavily personalised and communities often conflate their group's fortunes with those of the acknowledged leader of their ethnic community.

Kenyatta and Ruto painted the plot to stop them as an effort to keep their ethnic groups from benefiting from the largesse that is perceived to accompany state power. It is an unspoken fact that the identity of the president has a big role in determining how national resources are distributed.

A second factor, particularly in the case of Kenyatta, is that memories of colonialism are still raw in the Mount Kenya region, where the displacement by British settlers in the first half of the 20th century was greatest. It is exceedingly easy to convince people of

the existence of nefarious *mzungu* (white man) plots. Memories of British brutality and of the concentration camps into which hundreds of thousands were herded have endured through generations.

A third factor is that, since Jomo Kenyatta and Jaramogi Odinga engaged in a bitter struggle after independence, a Kenyatta-Odinga tussle for power is quite emotive.

Finally, the fact the Mount Kenya region had produced two presidents – Jomo Kenyatta and Mwai Kibaki – made it easy to spin the yarn that the presidency can protect “community interests”. Similarly, the Kalenjin remember the Moi presidency and were enthusiastic about the prospect of Ruto securing a place as deputy president.

## Escalating Rhetoric

It was expected that, once Kenyatta took office, he would cool the sharp language he had used against Washington and major European powers during the campaigns.

In fact, he escalated it. In a fiery speech to an extra-ordinary summit of African leaders convened in Addis Ababa in October 2013 to discuss the cases in The Hague, Kenyatta described the ICC as a “toy of declining imperial powers” and spoke of the “spectacles of western decline” and crashing “the imperial exploiter ... into the pits of penury”.

The harshness of this address startled many observers. Daniel Bekele, executive director of Human Rights Watch's Africa division, described the resolution that African heads of state should not be tried in international courts as “appallingly self-serving”.

But Kenyatta supporters gave him their enthusiastic backing.

“Despite the imminent threat posed to him and Kenya by the ICC, Kenyatta was not a cry-baby in the speech to his African peers,” wrote Prof Peter Kagwanja of the Africa Policy Institute. “Rather, in its distinct tone of a fiery African nationalist, the speech is reminiscent of those of his own father, Jomo Kenyatta, at Hyde Park London in the 1930s and 1940s against colonialism. The speech was a unique masterwork in the revolutionary oratory last heard on the floor of the Organisation of African Unity (now African Union) from Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Guinea's Ahmed Sékou Touré. It had the recognisable fieriness of Cuba's Fidel Castro.”

In a further sign of the fraying ties between Nairobi and its traditional allies in Europe, Kenyatta conspicuously chose Bei-

jing for his first official visit outside the continent. His PR team made it quite clear that Kenyatta, like his predecessor, would pursue a “Look East” economic policy.

## Not As It Seems

While all this may suggest a major breach in relations and that the gap of mistrust may prove too large for ties to be repaired, in truth there is little to suggest that a fundamental shift has occurred.

One only has to observe that the company that helped to craft Kenyatta's nationalist anti-West campaign during the 2013 elections was a British firm, BTP advisers, which is linked to the Liberal Democrats, a junior coalition partner in the British government.

That's a neat illustration of the way that Kenyan politicians in the ruling coalition see their shifting foreign policy tone – as aimed to achieve tactical goals rather than marking a more serious strategic and ideological strategy to cut ties.

There is little evidence, for example, that investors from the West are being turned away. In fact, the Kenyatta administration has made big play of coordinating economic policy with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In June, Kenya issued Africa's biggest debut Eurobond – a US\$2 billion offering that was oversubscribed three times over at lower interest rates than continental rivals such as Zambia and Ghana – showing that investors in Europe and America don't necessarily fear a total breach of relations.

Their view is informed by the historical record in Africa (as in much of the world), where foreign policy questions are often settled not on principle, but simply due to strategic and opportunistic prerogatives.

Cold War episodes from neighbouring Somalia and Ethiopia come to mind. The two countries effortlessly swapped their patrons, the Soviet Union and the US respectively, as soon as the politics of the day made this a convenient choice.<sup>1</sup>

Kenyan leaders are no different. The political careers of Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga, which have seen the pair move to different orbits, are illustrative.

## Kenyan Opinion

What, though, does the public make of all this? Are they heavily invested in the ques-

tion of Kenya's foreign policy? Have they grown more or less hostile to the West as a result of recent developments?

The answer to this is slightly complicated. Foreign policy is not a major issue of concern to most Kenyans, just as it does not head the list of pressing issues in many parts of the world. In surveys, Kenyans regularly cite the cost of living, insecurity, education, healthcare and other more prosaic needs as top priorities.

Yet it would not be accurate to say that the political posturing on the ICC question has not had an effect on regular citizens.

As part of a recent project at the London School of Economics, I worked with the polling firm Ipsos Synovate to try to determine whether there is regional variation in Kenya in views on foreign policy among people of voting age and whether the foreign policy preferences of leaders are embraced by their supporters.<sup>2</sup>

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The results painted a mixed picture. It was quite clear that foreign policy issues are polarising among people from the ethnic communities of the two main candidates in the last election, Uhuru Kenyatta (Kikuyu, with a “Look East” policy) and Raila Odinga (Luo, ally of the West).

In the survey of 2,059 adults, respondents who identified themselves as Kikuyu or Luo offered clearly divergent views that aligned with those of their communities' leaders, in response to the question: “Which of these countries do you have a more favourable opinion of – China or America?”

Kikuyu respondents expressed a preference for China over the US by a margin of 69 percent to 25 percent. Among the Luo, 89 percent viewed the US positively, while 10 percent preferred China. Notably, however, only the Luo and Kikuyu demonstrated such a huge gap, with the rest of the ethnic groups showing a much more even split.

This could be seen as a sign that most Kenyans (the Kikuyu and Luo make up 34 percent of the population) are not as animated by the question of foreign policy as supporters of the two main leaders on the political scene are.

But there is also a sense in which jubi-

lant anti-West rhetoric resonates with the discourse of “liberation” and the deteriorating stature of Britain as a political and economic power. Being able to speak strongly to Europe is viewed as affirmation of the potential power of Africa. Recent natural resource discoveries and the entry of China as an alternative lender have also contributed to the growing lionisation of anyone seen to be able to “stand up to Europe”.

While it is true that there is a slight hint of hostility to “foreign influence” and their alleged Trojan Horses, ordinary Kenyans are also able to sense that much of the fight with the West is political posturing.

## Conclusion

It is understandable that recent developments on the Kenyan political scene have raised the question of a possibly major fracture between Kenya and its traditional part-

ners in Europe and the West.

History suggests, however, that foreign policy choices of leaders in the Horn of Africa are driven by pragmatic, situational considerations rather than deep ideological ones, and there is little evidence to suggest Kenyatta's approach will be different.

Despite Kenyatta's bellicose tone and aggressive stance, it is difficult to foresee a major break in relations with the West, absent dramatic “shocks” such as a decision to openly defy the ICC (quite unlikely, considering the consequences) or another major development.

More likely, as witnessed in the softening of Kenyatta's tone after he visited Washington for the US–Africa Leaders Summit and received a number of European leaders at State House in Nairobi in the second half of 2014, is that calculations of self-interest will remain the dominant driver of policy, with little long-term implications on the shape of relations between the West and Kenya. ■■■

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## Athi-Patra Ruga

Exploring the border-zones between fashion, performance and contemporary art, Athi-Patra Ruga makes work that exposes and subverts the body in relation to structure, ideology and politics. Bursting with eclectic multicultural references, carnal sensuality and a dislocated undercurrent of humor, his performances, videos, costumes and photographic images create a world where cultural identity is no longer determined by geographical origins, ancestry or biological disposition, but is increasingly becoming a hybrid construct. A Utopian counter-proposal to the sad dogma of the division between mind and body, sensuality and intelligence, pop culture, craft and fine art, his works expresses the eroticism of knowledge and reconciles the dream with experience.

Athi-Patra Ruga was recently included in the Phaidon book *Younger Than Jesus*, a directory of over 500 of the world's best artists under the age of 33. His works form part of private public and museum collections in South Africa and abroad, namely: Museion - Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Bolzano Italy; CAAC - Pigozzi Collection; The Wedge Collection, Iziko South African National Gallery.

The artist lives and works in both Johannesburg and Cape Town.



About the artwork

Title: Even I Exist In Embo:  
Jaundiced Tales Of Counter-  
penetration #5, 2007

Material: Lightjet Print

Size: 74 x 107 cm

Photographer: Oliver Neubert

All images used in this publication are courtesy of Athi-Patra Ruga and WHATIFTHEWORLD Gallery in Cape Town.