

# African Politics and Policy

Newsletter  
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## Editorial

Most of the time, when covering African news, analysts focus on Africa's well documented problems: African political leaders do not always have the qualities to lead their respective countries, corruption is widespread, political systems in the region enjoy only an ephemeral stability, governance is problematic, many countries in the continent struggle to make meaningful progress along the developmental path, while the gap the haves and the have-nots seems to be widening.

In spite of all these problems, that seem to monopolize the attention of analysts and media, observers seem to overlook that Africa is experiencing a sort of cultural revolution, a sort of paradigmatic shift, in the way it approaches its developmental needs.

Africa's new approach to development is revolutionary in cultural terms in two different, but related ways. First it is revolutionary because it views development in a holistic way. Development does not consist exclusively of a betterment of material conditions, of technological improvement, of scientific innovation, and of greater wealth, but it is a process that also has spiritual or non-material dimension.

Second, Africa's new approach to development is revolutionary because it is culture-centered. African governments are investing in and launching several programs - to protect Africa's rich cultural heritage, to promote the culture industry, to preserve its cultural identity – not only because they value culture in itself but because they understand that culture may be a driver of growth, may create the conditions for sustainable development, and may provide considerable help in addressing Africa's policy issues and in solving its problems.

And perhaps analysts should realize that in addition to what Africa can learn from them, there is also a lot that we could all learn from Africa.

Riccardo Pelizzo

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### Africa's best parks

The World Travel Awards announced the winners in the nomination "The Best Park in Africa". They are: the Maasai Mara Game Reserve (Kenya), Central Kalahari Game Reserve (Botswana), Etosha National Park (Namibia), Kidepo Valley National Park (Uganda), Kruger National Park (South Africa), and Serengeti National Park (Tanzania).

### Sudan student protests

After a student at the University of Kordofan was murdered, student protests and demonstrations erupted all over the country. The student was shot dead by some students affiliated with the ruling party in an effort to prevent the students affiliated with United Students Opposition from presenting their election list. These protests and demonstrations come few days after the students of Khartoum went on strike against the decision to move faculties to the city's outskirts.

## Revived interest in African culture

By Kristina Bekenova

There is an impression that the world has once again found interest and inspiration in African art and culture. This year world interest is culminated in the series of the world-wide events fully dedicated to African cultural ideas, concepts and ways of visualization: The Armory Show (March 2016, New York, USA), Dak'Art: African Art Contemporary Biennale (May, Dakar, Senegal), The 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair (May, New York, USA; October, London, UK), etc.

Colonial past and unique indigenous culture for a long time labeled Africa as primitive, culturally backward, and thus neglected and relegated by world audience and art admirers. However, this year focus on Africa is certainly a new attempt to engage “white-men” society into (re)understanding and (re)appreciating of the African aesthetics, ideas, styles, its rich cultural and creative heritage.

The encounter of European culture with African art has a long history and traces back to the fifteenth century, to “the age of exploration [that] ushered in a period of sustained engagement between Europe and Africa”. Although the African traditional art (sculpture of Sub-Saharan Africa) started gradually appearing in Europe, the flow of African artworks as private souvenirs or artefacts collected by missionaries, colonial officers and administrators featured the colonial period followed after the Berlin West Africa Conference (1884-1885) and started with the royal Benin art of Edo Empire (British Punitive Expedition in what is now known as Nigeria, 1897). Notwithstanding the increasing numbers of private collection of African art, the European attitude toward the indigenous cultural artefacts was condescending and disdainful, describing it as “childish”, “primitive”, “dark” referring to the continent’s tribal savagery and barbarism: “They have no history, no literature, no continent-wide religions of their own, no traditions of the past apart from the sounds of the jungle”.

However, the opinion of art audience in the early 20th century was challenged by the incipient art movements that were transforming the European cultural atmosphere. In that context, the “not-great”, “not-the-works-of-geniuses” African art became of huge importance in the modernization of European art, as noted by J. Newton Hill, “it came in time to save modern (European)

art from what threatened to be tragic atrophy”. The African art by its “formal, stylized, geometric qualities” and “configuration of shapes and elements of form” astonished Cubism (Picasso, Braque), by “exaltation of colour” and its “contorted forms flattened shapes” gave rise to Fauvism (Matisse, Vlaminck), and by “by strong linear rhythms and plastic instability” inspired German Expressionism (Kirchner), which later deeply affect Futurism, Surrealism, Suprematism and other art styles.

Thus, African traditional art has undoubtedly contributed to the development of world cultural heritage of 20th century by bringing astonishing indigenous ideas and concepts. Perhaps, this century suffering from the ‘nothing-to-say’ moment, once again tries to be recovered by “grasping greedily at the art of these alleged savages” whose art is an expression of feelings inspired by fascinating landscapes and natural harmony of savannah grasslands, by highly sophisticated prehistoric cave decorations and rock paintings (Apollo Cave in Namibia; Matobo Hills in Zimbabwe; Laas Geel in Somaliland). Another feature of African art that could be taken into consideration is its central role played in the African traditional customs, belief and social systems, thus, their incorporation not only of “l’art pour l’art” concept, i.e. admiration of aesthetic composition, but also of its anthropological significance. The understanding of the African art through its mediating role between the real and spiritual worlds, its protecting and healing role, and its role in defining community ideals could present a new guidance in value shaping and the chance to hear a distinctive voices and stories.

The rich exhibitions programs of global-scale Armory Show with its emphasis on “geographic fluidity and global connections ... from Lagos to London”, Dak’Art with its idea “to develop African own discourse on aesthetics and conceptualization of theoretical tools”, 1:54 platform “that strives to represent multiplicity and showcase the diversity of contemporary African art”, and many others local cultural Festivals (like annual Africa-In-April Memphis Festival in USA, or annual Africa Festival of Arts and Culture in Halifax, Canada) will again discover “something new out of Africa”, or citing Kevin D. Dumouchelle (Brooklyn Museum, New York), is beginning to catch up that “Africa is the future”.



### Will culture save Sudan?

Cultural policy has been acquiring strategic importance for the economic and social development of Africa. Many African countries have taken serious steps to revise their already existing cultural policies, to protect the existing cultural heritage, and to establish more platforms for developing creative industries. The case of Sudan is emblematic. The country is often associated with violence and instability. Yet, in spite of all the problems that Sudan may be confronted with, the government has taken important steps to fulfill the cultural potential of the country, to preserve cultural heritage, and to underline Sudan’s contribution to Islamic civilization. In this regard the government launched a project called *Sennar Capital Islamic Culture, 2017*. A second project, which is also being implemented by the State Ministry of Culture, is *Al-Genaina, Capital of Sudanese Culture*. These projects, designed to provide infrastructure and cultural values to the Sudanese society, could mobilize society around more important values than violence and instability. Culture is a source of hope for Sudan.



## Anti-corruption measures: a reflection

African leaders have lamented in recent months that international measures of corruption fail to do a particularly good job in assessing the incidence of corruption in their respective countries.

Some UN officials, who may not terribly familiar with how corruption could and should be measured, noted that one of the problems of corruption measures and indexes for Africa is that they generally neglect the fact that African economies have become increasingly more integrated in the world economy and this rapid transformation may have created the conditions for greater (?) corruption.

The problem of corruption measures is due to a different set of reasons. International measures of corruption do not always work terribly well when applied in Sub-Saharan Africa because in addition to providing any meaningful information about the type, the scope or the magnitude of corruption, they say precious little about how corruption levels vary across sectors and regions within countries. Therefore they provide little to no indications as to whether and to what extent anti-corruption efforts are effectively implemented.

Finally, international corruption measures often have major problems in terms of validity and reliability. They correlate poorly with one another and they are dramatically unstable from a year to the next.

Lack of validity, possible problems of reliability, inability to capture within-country variations across sectors and

regions, and the inability to provide an indication of the scope/magnitude and type of corruption that countries are confronted with are the reasons why international measures of corruption do not work well when they are used to estimate corruption levels in Africa.

These are the issues that the international community should address to design better corruption indexes, rather than worrying about the integration of African economies in the global economy.

Riccardo Pelizzo

## Bad leaders, big problems

In an interesting article Muthoni Wanyeki argued that bad political behavior should be tackled forcefully, because otherwise it may generate even bigger problems as South Sudan and Burundi have recently discovered. Wanyeki is right and what she said is a clear lesson for the region. But there is another lesson to be learned from the examples she discusses, namely that bad leadership and big problems go hand in hand. And one should sometimes wonder, after so many policy blunders, mistakes, the use of violent means and the not so occasional human right abuses, whether this leadership is actually fit to lead in the first place. Africa deserves better.

## Angola celebrates its monuments

On April 18, during the International Day of Monuments and Sites, André Muandumba, the head of the Cultural History Department, emphasized the role of the Regional Dundo Museum (Lunda Norte province), established in 1945, in preserving and promoting cultural heritage of Angola through different tourism, research and conference activities. It is worth noting, that the main pride of the Museum is its rich ethnographic collection of wooden traditional masks and wooden sculptures of the local Lunda-Chokwe peoples. Also, on April 18 within the framework of celebrating the International Day of Monuments and Sites, Culture Minister, Carolina Cerqueira, promised to rehabilitate the Cambambe Fortress in Dondo City (Cuanza Norte province), which represent a significant site of the country's colonial legacy and the object of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese military art.



## Collaborators

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## African Art Exhibition

The National Art Gallery of Namibia presents "New Beginnings 2016", an exhibition of artworks by Graduates of the College of the Arts. The exhibition will be opened by on May 10, 2016.

## Job Openings

The National Art Gallery of Namibia is seeking applications for a position of Communications & Marketing Officer. Please submit: CV, certified copies of qualifications and identity documents, the application form, and 3 traceable referees.

<http://nagn.org.na/index.php/component/k2/item/54-vacancy-communications-marketing-officer-pro>

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