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Editor's Introduction

The papers in this edition of ARAS go close to covering the four points of the compass in Africa and to the diaspora beyond, though more than a geographical sample is involved. That perspective gives emphasis, however, to a commonality of themes across space - and also controversy in the interpretation of such themes.

In the opening paper, Ezeonu plumbs the Igbo experience to challenge the common acceptance of a chronological, let alone a substantive, primacy of European ideas about governance and gender. Boye and Fayyaz, in contrast, use the semiotic theories of both European and African thinkers to interpret and explain the significance of myth in The Gambia of the present day.

De Lucia Lumeno's archivally based study of Italian and French attitudes to Algerian independence highlights the role of at least some Europeans, and one specifically, in furthering that independence even against the dominant interests of their own nations.

Bal tests conventional ideas of the horrors of the Rwandan genocide, drawing on both western and African sources, and suggests a structural interpretation that controverts much of that literature. Ottuh's polemic in support of vigilantism as a method of social harmony when all else fails to control criminality likewise challenges much received wisdom.

The final paper by Munyoka and others follows a tradition of the journal in giving close attention to the scholarly literature on the African diaspora, in this case a review of the literature on the many obstacles to the employment of African youth in Australia. As with all the papers, the conclusions drawn are both acute and essentially revisionist of dominant tropes.

ARAS renews its invitation to established and emerging scholars to submit manuscripts of their research-based work, and especially welcomes contributions from postgraduate researchers. Papers suitable for publication are referred to peer review. The editors aim to return such reviews to authors within three months of a submission being accepted for review.

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Decolonizing African Political Sociology: Gender and Judicature in Igbo Village-Republics

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Abstract

This paper aims (1) to reconstitute, using a decolonising framework, the notion of separation of powers as an original and defining characteristic of the Igbo traditional political system, even before Montesquieu's (1748/1977) thesis was published, and (2) to elucidate the gendered nature of the Igbo traditional separation of powers, as well as the sovereign judicial role of the kinswomen (i.e., the Umuada) in the society. The paper uses the Idemili communities of Anambra State, Nigeria, as its focus of analysis.

Keywords: Africa, political sociology, decolonization, Igbo, village republicanism, gender.

Introduction

It is commonly treated as settled knowledge that the 18th century French Enlightenment philosopher, Baron de Montesquieu, is the original exponent of the notion of separation of powers. This notion promotes the idea that the three organs of government in a democratic republic - the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary - should hold separate and independent powers as a bulwark against political dictatorship. Thus, extant literature on the democratic dispersion of power generally neglects non-Western forms of political arrangements where such distinct separation of powers existed as a moderating tool of governance, even before Montesquieu's (1748/1977) celebrated book, *The Spirit of the Laws*, was published. Shaped by colonial experience, the African political thought is often couched in this form of Occidental framework (see Fombad, 2016, Matthews, 2023). From the social contract theories to the need to establish a democratic check against political dictatorships, the ideas of Western Enlightenment philosophers have always been

hegemonised at the expense of similar or competing ideas from other parts of the world. Thus, Baron de Montesquieu's (1748 / 1977) thesis on separation of powers has gained prominence in the literature of political theories over the more enduring traditional diffusion of power in non-Western societies, including the precolonial Igbo village republics. The Igbo diffused power arrangement was equally designed to prevent authoritarian exercise of power by a single institution of governance. Seeking to decolonise the social production of knowledge on African political sociology, this paper discusses the gendered separation of powers in the Idemili village republics, and the judicial role of women in these communities. The Idemili people are a subgroup of the Igbo nation and are indigenous to the present Anambra State of Nigeria.

The paper adopts an Afrocentric construction of gender which emphasises the fluidity and complementarity of gender status in Idemili village republics. This fluidity of roles provides that men could become females while women could become males to fulfil certain important functions in society. In other words, only a duty to the society could compel and/or legitimise cross-gender identity. Thus, the idea of gender deployed in this paper runs counter to the Western conception of gender along biological lines; a model which has become dominant in the literature on women and gender studies. This Afrocentric construction of gender is also incongruous with the current Western-style gender identity politics, which is anchored on individual agency. Thus, a cross-gender identity in Igbo society is culturally particularised and assigned.

The paper demonstrates that women in Idemili, and in fact many Igbo communities, have enormous powers, not only in the social organisation of the domestic sphere, but also in the public administration of their communities. As Uchendu (1965) observes, the African woman who is often presented as a chattel of her husband "is not an Igbo woman." The Igbo woman "enjoys a high socioeconomic and legal status. She can leave her husband at will, abandon him if he becomes a thief, and summon him to a tribunal, where she will get a fair hearing" (p.87). This is not to suggest that Igbo women exercise the same degree of power as men in all cases. However, they are not the domestic slaves often constructed by Western scholarship.

Coloniality and the Politics of Western Knowledge Production

> *There is that great proverb - that until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter… Once I realized that, I had to be a writer. I had to be that historian. It's not one man's job. It's not one person's job. But it is something we have to do, so that the story of the hunt will also reflect the agony, the travail - the bravery, even, of the lions* (Chinua Achebe, quoted in Brooks, 1994, p.142; see also, C. Achebe, 2000, p.73).

Chinua Achebe, Africa's foremost writer and postcolonial scholar, thus encapsulates the effect and danger of the colonial epistemic marginalisation of the African voice in the social construction of knowledge about Africa and the African condition. He notes that European "vested interests" in justifying their predatory presence in the African continent (starting with their involvement in Trans-Atlantic slave trade) promoted "a literature of devaluation" which disparaged "African behavior, institutions and character." (C. Achebe, 2000, p.29). Highlighting that "there is such as a thing as absolute power over narrative", he argues that "those who secure this privilege for themselves can arrange stories about others pretty much where, and as, they like" (C. Achebe, 2000, p.24). This, certainly, is how the Occidental knowledge of Africa is produced and hegemonised.

The effect of European colonialism on the African knowledge infrastructure is enormous. A painting which once hung in the lobby of Kwame Nkrumah's office depicted three major enablers of colonialism in Africa. One was the capitalist; he carried a briefcase. The second was the missionary, he carried the Bible. The third, represented with a smaller figure, was the anthropologist or the social scientist. He carried a book (Galtung, 1967). It will probably be incontrovertible to say that anthropologists, who were at the frontier of African knowledge excavation for the European domination, inflicted as much harm on the continent as the two other bogeymen, although a smaller figure was used in the painting to represent their activities. While providing data which made the colonial occupation of Africa more efficient and acceptable to the European audience, anthropologists led the way for the other

European epistemic communities to reconstitute the way African societies are conceptualised, understood, and interrogated. These European knowledge imperialists were pivotal to the development of the African school systems and curricula.

In consolidating the European knowledge system, the colonial educational system privileged the political theories and experience of Europe over those of Africa. For instance, it presented the government of ancient Athens, which was a monarchical slave society, as representing the earliest model of democracy, even when women, slaves, and children were not regarded as citizens in this state (Agozino, 2009). As Agozino (2009, pp.566-567) observed, "as a slave society ruled by a king, Athens was far from what could be regarded as a democratic society compared to some African societies without slave economies or institutions of the monarchy."

Another European political framework which has gained hegemonic status is the idea of separation of powers as conceived by the French political philosopher, Baron de Montesquieu. In his work, anglicized as *The Spirit of the Laws* and which was first published in 1748, he proposed the division of government powers into three different and independent branches to check the excesses of one another's powers and thus prevent dictatorship (Montesquieu 1748/1977). Nevertheless, political systems built on the distribution of power across different institutions of governance had existed in many African societies even before Montesquieu's idea was published. One example was the gendered division of power between the Umunna and the Umuada in pre-colonial Igbo village republics. Similarly, contrary to a fluid conception of gender roles in the Igbo village republics, Western knowledge system has promoted the notion of gender which is based on the biological differences between men and women. Such is the extent of Western knowledge system which predominantly informed policy decisions in the continent. Unfortunately, not much of this system has changed since independence, given that many of the post-independence African leaders and scholars either trained in the West or consider its knowledge system superior to the African ways of knowing. It is not surprising that leading African scholars, such as Chinua Achebe and Claude Ake, see the European knowledge system as providing auxiliary services to imperialism (C. Achebe, 1958, Ake, 1982, Agozino, 2009). One motivation for this paper is that while a large body of works on contemporary African political sociology is still premised on the

theoretical and epistemological positions of European scholars (Fombad, 2016, Matthews, 2023), these studies often make little contribution to addressing the challenging realities of the African socio-political experience.

Doing Gender Among the Igbos of Nigeria.

While bifurcated categories based on biological differences have, until recently, been used in delineating gender roles in most Western societies, the social construction of gender in precolonial Igbo societies involved complex social arrangements designed to tackle challenges and mediate circumstances. It was not entirely determined by the biological differences between men and women. Until the British colonial occupation of Igboland and the attendant disruption of its cultural indigeneity, women in many Igbo societies could simultaneously play the roles of men or women depending on peculiar cultural exigencies. I use the phrase "many Igbo societies" to recognize the cultural heterogeneity of the network of communities, united by a common language, and which we collectively categorise today as Ndigbo (i.e., the Igbos).[1]

While Igbo societies were predominantly patriarchal, literature establishes both fluidity and complementarity in defining gender status and relationships in these societies (Amadiume, 2015, 1987, Chuku, 2016, N. Achebe, 2016). As Nwando Achebe (2016, p.36) puts it, "in Igboland, sex and gender did not coincide in precolonial society. Gender was fluid and flexible, allowing women to become men and men to become women." A well-regarded Igbo anthropologist, Ifi Amadiume, demonstrates that the Western feminist construction of gender based on a dichotomous interpretation of sexual differences was just part of the colonial epistemic imposition on Africa. She highlights that gender roles in traditional Igbo societies stretched beyond the limits of biological differences, and this enabled daughters to become sons ("and consequently male[s]"), and daughters and women to become husbands (and legitimately "males in relation to their wives"). In these contexts, being *male* is a socially assumed position legitimized by tradition. It is

[1] Following the antebellum and post-bellum genocides against Ndigbo in Nigeria, a section of these communities, especially in the present-day Rivers State, has found it convenient to redefine their ethnic identity, apparently to mitigate the continuing existential threat faced by the Igbos in the Nigerian political space. They now identify themselves as "Ikwerre" people.

different from being a *man*. Thus, gender roles were not always tied to one's biological sex. Under certain cultural exigencies, Igbo tradition permitted women to assume male roles, and accord them the privileges attached to these roles. Nevertheless, these women were not expected to be "*man-like*."

This was at least a common practice among the Idemili Igbos of the current Anambra State. Among the Idemili people, a family without a male descendant could keep one of their daughters at home to have children, replenish the family line and retain the family property. Such a family could also recall one of their daughters from her marital home to do the same. This practice is known as *nhayikwa* or *nhanye* - a form of replacement for absent males, in a society in which descent and inheritance of properties follow the male line. This was one strategy through which a man without a male child ensured that his "obi" (lineage) continued after his death and that his property remained in his family. The man or his male-daughter would choose someone (outside the immediate kindred) to copulate with the daughter (regarded formally as a "male-daughter") to produce children for him. If the male-daughter was unable to procreate, due to old age or infertility, she could marry a new wife on behalf of her dead father to continue his line. A daughter's assumption of a male status to continue his father's ancestral line could take immediate effect as soon as her father notified his patrilineal kinsmen of his intention to that effect and presented palm wine to formalise the ceremony. A daughter could still assume the male status to continue her father's ancestral line even if her father died before notifying his kinsmen. However, this would involve a more complicated negotiation with the kinsmen. Male-daughters enjoyed the privileges associated with their status (such as land inheritance) and were obligated to live up to the expectations of the same male status, such as payment of taxes which other women were exempted from (Amadiume, 2015, pp.15-17, 32). Other traditional practices in which daughters could marry wives to produce male children for their late father abounded in other Igbo societies. In some of these arrangements, the daughters assumed the traditional status of husbands/males in relation to the wives but appointed male kinsmen as the wives' sexual partners (Nwoko, 2012).

In traditional Igbo societies and among some African societies (such as the Nandi people of Kenya), women could marry their fellow women and assume the status of a male. However, this was clearly different from the present Western-style same sex relationships as the

traditional African female husbands do not have sexual relationships with their wives. In fact, the Igbo woman-to-woman marriages were not contracted in response to romantic attraction or love but were traditionally permitted as a strategy to preserve a patriarchal system which accords property inheritance exclusively to men (Nwoko, 2012, Amadiume, 2015). The same is true of this type of marriage in other African societies (see, Oboler, 1980). So, it is crucial to emphasize that the fluidity of gender roles deployed in this paper is not in consonance with the usage by contemporary Western scholars of alternative sexualities. Instead, an alternative gender was only authorized by the traditional Igbo societies as a mechanism to address religious and patriarchal exigencies, and not to legitimise alternative sexual or gender identities. Thus, the occasional recalibration of gender status in traditional Igbo societies is driven by cultural demands, rather than identity politics.

Among the Idemili people, a woman who was unable to bear a child or a male child could upon the death of her husband marry a wife to procreate and continue their husband's direct ancestral line. In Nnobi, an Idemili community, a few women could take the Ekwe title. This title was reserved for women who were stupendously wealthy and whose wealth were considered to be a blessing from the goddess Idemili. Women who took this title generally assumed a male status, and one of the privileges which they enjoyed was that they could marry wives to bear children on their behalf. These women could marry as many wives as they could afford. As they did not have any sexual relationship with these wives, they often would appoint a man of their choice to mate with their wives for the purpose of procreation. Nevertheless, female husbands exercised the customary rights of husbands over these wives (Amadiume, 2015). The customary practice of female husbands was also known among the Nandi people of western Kenya. In both societies, the female husbands bore the marriage costs of their wives, and related to these wives as males but without sexual liaison; and the woman-to-woman marriage was often motivated by the desire to produce a male heir for the family and to secure the family property which was always transferred through the male line (Oboler, 1980; Amadiume, 2015).

The mutability of gender status in Igbo societies is also highlighted by Nwando Achebe (2016), who in her study of Adani, Nsukka in Enugu State, documents the ritual transformation of men into females as a customary prerequisite to serve as priestesses to a powerful deity known as Anunje. After this ritual transformation, a male priestess

follows certain norms to make his new female status permanent and to distinguish himself from the other men in society. This included dressing like a woman and avoiding sexual liaison with his wife before going to worship the deity, which itself is culturally regarded as a female. The serving male "priestess" she interviewed put it concisely when asked how he became a woman: "I did not become a woman, I am a woman." (p.38) Amadiume (2015) therefore criticises most Western scholarship on gender status in Igbo societies and argues that the interpretation of gender roles by these scholars was rooted on a rigid Victorian gender ideology which tied male attributes and status to biological men, and female attributes and status to biological women. This form of rigid understanding of gender prohibited a more elastic role relationship in which women could assume gender statuses traditionally delineated for men, and vice versa.

Village Republicanism: The Political Philosophy and Organisation of the Idemili Communities.

Most precolonial Igbo communities were acephalous and politically republican by nature. This political philosophy and organization, best represented by the aphorism "*Igbo enwe eze*" (Igbos have no kings), has come to define the Igbo traditional political system, although it fails to account for some communities where some forms of established kingship systems existed prior to contact with European colonialists. The communities where established kingship system existed in pre-colonial times included Onitsha, Nri, Aguleri, Oguta, Arochukwu and some of the Anioma Igbos (those found across the River Niger) such as Asaba, Agbor and Osomari. In these monarchical communities, political authority was wielded by kings (Obi or Eze) in consultation with titled chiefs, known commonly as Ndichie (Chuku, 2016, Uchendu, 1965). While these kings and their council of chiefs were predominantly men, executive, judicial, and legislative authorities were often decentralised and distributed between sexes and among smaller political units, such as the age-grades and secret societies. One such prominent female political kingship tool which still survives to this day was the Omu. This position, which dates to about th15th Century, was common among the Anioma Igbos. The Omu position was always held by a woman who derived her status and title through great wealth and character and not by virtue of any form of relationship with the king or any man. She was regarded as the women's monarch, as she presided over the affairs of

the community's women, including the control of the village market where women traded. She had her own palace and female council (Chuku, 2016, Uchendu, 2006; Okonjo, 1976). Nevertheless, while the Omu was biologically a woman, she would transition socially to become a male upon coronation. Given her male status, the Omu could also use the traditional kingship title of Obi, which was used by a male king. In her new status as a male, the Omu could not marry a man, and if she desired to have children, she would only marry a woman and appoint a sexual partner for her wife for procreation (Ochei, 2019, Onoyume, 2018; see also, Okonjo, 1976; Uchendu, 2006**).** As Obi Martha Dunkwu, the current Omu Anioma and Okpanam puts it,

> At the point of coronation, [Omus] are bestowed male rights; that is why [they] can break the kolanut, [they] become a man and a woman put together… the Omu means Eze Nwanye [*Nwanyi, in some dialects*], female king in charge of women, female youths, markets, ancestral shrines, businesses (Onoyume, 2018, p.1).[2]

While the powers of the Omu were considered secondary to that of the Obi (who was biologically a man), she had a powerful political influence in her domain. So, whereas modern scholarship on the Igbo traditional political system appear to reflect mostly the political organization of the communities east of River Niger, some of the Igbo communities which are located west of this river were less acephalous with the kingship system distributed between the two genders, as the Omu institution demonstrates [3] (Okonjo, 1976, Uchendu, 2006).

Nevertheless, most precolonial Igbo communities were without established kingships or centralised political leadership structure. In these communities, power and authority were diffused (Chuku, 2016, Amadiume, 2015, Uchendu, 1965). It is the political culture and

[2] In most Igbo societies, only men were traditionally allowed to break kolanut, a ritual nut used in offering prayers. The situation is almost the same in contemporary time.

[3] The greater Igbo nation is spread across several states both east and west of River Niger. Most of the Igbo communities located west of this river are found in Delta State and are collectively known as the Anioma people.

organisation of these non-monarchical groups which are commonly associated with the Igbo nation, and which naturalises the narrative of "*Igbo enwe eze*." The Idemili Igbo group in the present Anambra State of Nigeria practiced this acephalous and republican form of political organization. This group of communities are currently located in two local government areas of the state – the Idemili North and the Idemili South local governments areas. The group is made up of sixteen communities, one of which is Ogidi, the home community of the late Chinua Achebe, Africa's most celebrated writer. Another of the communities is Ojoto, the home village of the late Chris Okigbo, the avant-garde poet who died in the Nigeria-Biafra war. Ifi Amadiume, a well-known Igbo anthropologist and gender theorist whose works are cited often in this paper, is a native of Nnobi, another Idemili community. The works of these scholars, particularly the plot of Chinua Achebe's acclaimed book, *Things Fall Apart*, tell the story of the Idemili people – their worldview, cosmology, and political organisation. This paper also benefits from my own experiential knowledge of the traditional political system of Alor, a notable Idemili community. Before their contacts with British imperialists, these communities existed as autonomous village republics, which operated effective structures of governments with independent internal, defence, commercial and foreign (inter-community) policies.[4]They had voluntary armies of young men, sometimes with identifiable war leaders (*ochiagha*), who conducted border or inter-community wars with neighbouring village republics in the same manner as the Anglo-Scottish wars of the 14th and the 16th centuries. These village republics also had an organised and efficient internal security architecture in which the Umunna (a diffused centre of patriarchal power), age grades, traditional chief priests and priestesses, and the ancestral spirits represented by sacred masquerades (such as Ayaka Anyasi and Onyekulum in Alor) performed policing functions by enforcing the laws of the land and the edicts of the gods. These communities had all the structures and attributes of independent republics, in addition to a unique system of governance in which every

[4] The exception was Ideani, which was a village in Alor until 1970.

male and female adult, to varying degrees, had a major say in how his/her community was run.

The village republics were autonomous and exercised their sovereignty in all matters. They were commonly segmented into different Ogbe or quarters (equivalent to states or provinces in modern parlance) and each quarter was made up of several kindreds or Umunna (which were made up of male descendants of a common ancestor). The Umunna constituted the structural foundation of ultimate power in the precolonial political organisation of Igbo village republics. They had the power to make laws, enforce laws, banish serious offenders, regulate commercial activities and settle disputes within their kindred units. The Umunna would send representatives to the council of elders at the other levels of power (quarters and village level). However, most political decisions in the village republics took place at the kindred (Umunna) level, and the republics were made up of several Umunna kin-groups in a system resembling a modern federal union (see, Afuekwe, 2011).

Idemili villages are traditionally governed by a unique system of village republicanism which I describe as consensus democracy. This form of democracy seeks to negotiate and secure consent from every single family unit that makes up a kindred. While political organisation at the kindred level is directed by elders and title holders, decisions are taken by the consensus of all male adults. Where dissent exists, every effort is made to secure the consent of dissenting adults or families. Sometimes ostracism is used as a last resort to secure this consent. Ostracism is used to exert enormous pressure on dissenting members of a kindred by cutting them off from participating in community life and denying them all benefits associated with being a member of the kindred. For instance, members of the kindred would refuse to visit their homes or host them in theirs. The ostracised would be treated as social pariahs in the local market, as people would neither buy anything from them nor sell to them. Members of the kindred would also not participate in marriage or funeral ceremonies involving family members of ostracised people. The latter action is particularly effective because Igbo marriages could hardly be contracted without the involvement of kinsmen. While ostracism does not usually involve the deployment of force (except where banishment is authorised), it is always designed to create a condition of social death for dissenting members of the kinsmen which would force them into compliance.

While the political culture and organisation of Idemili communities is well-documented (C. Achebe, 1958, Nwajide et al, 2011, Amadiume, 2015), this paper highlights the status of women, particularly the Umuada, in the power hierarchy of these communities. As the studies above demonstrate, while women in these communities exercise less power than men, they nonetheless wield significant power and influence, especially on judicial matters.

There are two major institutions through which women participate in the political organisation of Idemili communities. These are the institutions of Umuada (also known as the Umuokpu) and the Ite Ose (also known as the Ndi Inyom). The Umuada consists of all living female descendants of a kindred, irrespective of their age or marital status. The membership of this group is automatic for all females born into the kindred and does not require any ritual ceremony. The Umuada constitutes a powerful political group within the kindred. They are respected for their ability to resolve lingering conflicts among kinsmen and feared for their ability to stir trouble for the kinsmen and families. They are an alternate source of power to the Umunna and sometimes act as a check against the excesses of Umunna or a single kinsman. They are also known to deal ruthlessly with people who failed to take adequate care of their aging parents. As Afuekwe (2011, p.32) puts it, the Umuada "may play some peace-keeping role in troubled situations but are generally notorious for trouble-making" in their ancestral kindred. Even in contemporary times, organisers of certain ceremonies (especially funerals) in Idemili and almost every Igbo community work hard to avoid attracting the trouble of Umuada. Although the majority of the Umuada are married and live outside their ancestral homes, they exercise their greatest political power among their own paternal kinsmen. The magnitude of their power in their ancestral homes is hardly tamed by the patriarchal political system. The second political institution, the Ite Ose, is made up of all women married into a clan. This group of women is much less powerful than the Umuada and is not the focus of this paper.

So, while the Idemili communities are patently patriarchal, women are part of the governance structure, and have some say on matters which would affect their wellbeing. When this governance structure was disrupted by British colonial administration, Igbo women across the country strongly resisted the new system of governance, through a series of protests, known in local parlance as "Ogu Umunwanyi" (i.e., "Women's War"). The most famous and best documented of these protests

is known officially as the Aba Women's Riots of 1929. These riots, were organized against the colonial imposition of traditional rulers, known as Warrant Chiefs, without consultation with the local population, including women. These appointments were against the traditional system of village republicanism. The riots were also triggered by a rumour that a system of direct taxation which had been imposed on men the previous year was to be extended to women. This was against the traditional Igbo practice of not imposing any form of taxation on women. The women felt so strongly against this system of governance that they organised and confronted officials of British colonialism and attacked its symbols such as courts and prisons in the process. In response to these protests, the colonial occupiers deployed the police and troops to crush the rebellion, killing more than 50 women, while many others suffered different degrees of harms (Allen, 1975, pp.11-12, see also, Korieh 2001, Falola and Heaton, 2008).

The Umuada and Gendered Separation of Powers in Idemili Communities.

Long before de Montesquieu's idea of the separation of power was published in Europe in 1748, the political structure of Idemili communities were dispersed as a bulwark against dictatorship. Different levers of powers existed, often working as a check on the arbitrary practices of the others. The patriarchal powers of the Umunna (the kinsmen) and the powers of the Umuada (the kinswomen) represented, and still represent, different bases of power in the political organisation of these communities. Both institutions of government are independent and co-equal. Nevertheless, in some conflict situations which threaten to compromise the unity of the kindred, the decisions of the Umuada supersede those of the Umunna. This is because in these patriarchal communities, members of the Umuada have no proprietorial rights and therefore are often seen as impartial arbitrators. They are also committed to keeping the peace in their ancestral kindred since this is usually their place of refuge should they have problems in their marital homes. In fact, the pinnacle of Idemili women's power is collectively embodied in the Umuada institution and they exert their greatest political influence among their kinsmen. In the kindred groups in which they are married, they barely have any political influence.

However, one major area where the powers of the Umuada are seen as both sacred and inviolable is conflict-resolution in their ancestral clan. In this circumstance, the Umuada assume both judicial powers and those of arbitration when the Umunna are unable to resolve the conflict. The Umuada can also challenge the decision of Umunna which they perceive as either arbitrary or unfair. In precolonial Idemili societies, nobody (including the Umunna) questioned the decisions of the Umuada who were traditionally seen as embodying the spirit of Ani (the ancestral land), which is the mystical goddess of truth, morality, fertility, and death. The ancestral land was venerated because it was seen as the great provider for the people (the society then was predominantly an agrarian economy). The land was also seen as the home of the ancestors, whose spirits protected the clan. So, people were afraid of engaging in behaviours (such as murder and incest) which were traditionally regarded as abominations. Such abominable behaviours were seen as defiling the sacredness of the land. The land also represents that abode of Idemili spirits such that to resolve conflicts, people were sometimes required to swear by "aja ani" (sand from the land, which were seen as sacred). It was believed that a false oath made with these sands would result in death or calamities for the perjurer.

The most dreaded tool used by the Umuada to enforce their decision is the ritual curse, which they often complete with "itu aja" - i.e., ritually tossing the sacred sand from the ancestral land on the cursed person or his family compound. It was culturally believed that when someone or a family is ritually cursed by the Umuada, the accursed pronouncement continues for generation until the Umuada is appeased. Even in contemporary era, the fear of the Umuada lingers on. This cultural belief gives the Umuada of every ancestral clan the powers of judicial intervention in most disputes within a clan. However, the Umuada do not just intervene in the affairs of the clan. They only get involved when there is an impasse among the Umunna, when the Umunna are believed to be acting arbitrarily, or when they are invited by the Umunna to deal with a particular conflict. Traditionally, the Umunna act as a tribunal of first instance. However, when a problem could not be resolved by the Umunna, the Umuada gets involved either through direct intervention or by invitation. Their first judicial toolkit in conflict situations is arbitration. This process of negotiation often takes a long time with the intention to secure an amicable solution. Often many problems are resolved at this stage. However, when they fail to resolve

the problem through arbitration, they constitute themselves into a traditional court to adjudicate between the aggrieved individuals. This adjudication process is often led by the oldest members of the Umuada, but any member of this institution can cross-examine the disputants. In pre-colonial times, once the Umuada issued a judgement in a case, it was generally difficult to challenge it at other layers of authority, as clans were basically semi-autonomous within village republics.

While the Umuada performs these helpful peace-keeping functions in their ancestral clans, they could also cause serious disruptions in the clan if they felt disrespected or undermined as a group. For instance, the Umuada sometimes disrupt the burial ceremonies of kinsmen or other traditional ceremonies if their traditional entitlements associated with such ceremonies are not fulfilled. Even in these situations, nobody, including the Umunna, can overrule them. Instead, the clan tries to appease the Umuada in almost all circumstances (see, Afuekwe, 2011). So, although popular discourse identifies the Umunna as the ultimate wielder of traditional power in Idemili village republics, the de facto most powerful institution is the Umuada. While the Umunna controls the daily affairs of the clan, their power can be challenged and checked by the Umuada.

At every opportunity, the Umuada try to assert, through their actions, that although many of them may have moved out to live in other clans because of marriage, they have non-negotiable rights and social entitlements in their ancestral home. Of course, the Idemili traditional practices support this position. Prior to the contact with Christianity, whenever a Nwada (a daughter of the clan) dies, her body would always be returned to her ancestral home to be buried among her ancestors. Also, her livestock at her place of marriage would be returned to her ancestral home. While the massive conversion to Christianity has stopped this practice, a dead Nwada in Idemili community can still not be buried without the permission of her kindred. A violation of this rule could lead to a serious inter-clan or inter-community conflict. And if the kinsmen of a deceased Nwada determine that she was mistreated in her marital home or was not well-taken care of, they would deny the permission to bury her among her husband's people. In that case, they would return the body of the woman to be buried among her people as a way of protesting her ill-treatment. In precolonial times, a murder of a Nwada was always avenged by her kinsmen (see, C. Achebe, 1958).

The discussion of the gendered separation of powers in the Idemili village republics is, therefore, consequential for challenging the hegemonising influence of Occidental scholarship in political discourse. Years of colonial occupation of Africa has privileged the Eurocentric production of knowledge about Africa, its history and the experience of its people. This European episteme constructed an enduring narrative of a dark continent in which people "had lived in universal chaos and stagnation until the coming of the Europeans." (Davidson, 1958, p. ix). Eurocentric knowledge also consolidated the imposition of Western epistemology on the continent, including an alien conceptualisation of gender along biological lines.

Unfortunately, even after independence, the emergent African comprador leaders, many of whom were educated in the West or internalized western pedagogies, have done little to reform the remnants of colonial educational systems in their countries. The African intelligentsia are also complicit in the regurgitation of the Western ways of knowing. So, the challenge for modern African scholars is to deepen the decolonisation of the knowledge they produce and the type of knowledge they privilege. One way to do this is to re-establish contacts with and engage in a productive encounter with their African experience. An increasing number of African scholars have initiated this process (C. Achebe, 1958, Agozino, 2003, 2009, Amadiume, 2015), but more needs to be done. There is an urgent need to decolonialise the social construction of knowledge about African societies; but more importantly, to reconstitute existing theories and methodologies to accommodate the African experience. Then, maybe, the hegemonising ideas of Montesquieu and other European scholars will cease to take precedence over the preceding political framework under which African societies have been organised.

Conclusion

This paper aims to decolonialise the production of knowledge of the African political sociology. Using the precolonial Idemili village republics (in present day Nigeria) as the focus of analysis, the paper discusses the special role of ancestral kinswomen, known as the Umuada, in the administration of justice. It demonstrates that in these patriarchal communities, women play important roles in the arbitration and adjudication of conflicts. This function has endured even in contemporary time. Against the Western conception of gender roles along biological

lines, the paper uses a decolonising framework to highlight the fluidity and complementarity of gender roles in the communities.

The paper is conceived against the backdrop of the common practice which privileges Western knowledge system in the political discourse of separation of powers. It shows that even before the ideas of de Montesquieu were published in 1748, the Idemili village republics have been organised on a framework of diffused power among different institutions as a bulwark against political dictatorship. The paper challenges modern African scholars to re-engage with their African experience in the production of knowledge which will be relevant to the continent.

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Italy's Defence of Algeria's Energy Sovereignty in the 1950s

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Introduction

The causes and events of the Algerian War (1954-1962) have been studied worldwide (Ageron, 1990; Alleg, 1981; Courrière, 1971; Harbi and Stora, 2004; Horne, 2006; Stora 2004; Wall 2001). After years of French resistance, the arrival of General de Gaulle in 1958 opened up the possibility of greater openness to Algerian needs. Various proposals for integration into the French system were put forward. The war had depleted the country's resources and finances, but the most difficult sacrifice was the abandonment of oil exploitation, which was seen as an almost limitless source of wealth. From an Italian perspective, there are few authoritative studies on the position of this state in relation to the Algerian war (Ambasciata d'Italia, 2011a, 2011b; Bagnato, 2012; Calchi Novati & Roggero, 2018; De Lucia Lumeno, 2020). Moreover, none of them has focused exclusively on the oil and energy aspects of the conflict and their impact on international relations.

The aim of this study is to analyse the impact of the discovery of oil and gas fields in Algeria on the relationship between Italy and France in the 1950s. Specifically, it examines how Enrico Mattei, the president of Italy's main energy company, Eni, hardened Italian investment in Algeria as a result of the conflict. The paper identifies the political, economic and idealistic factors that influenced his resistance to French pressure for cooperation and investment in the exploitation of Algerian oil. Mattei's support for the cause of Algerian independence is also reflected in the gratitude shown to him by the political leaders of the People's Democratic Republic. Some recent outward signs were the dedication of a garden in Algiers to Mattei in 2021 and the posthumous award of the medal of Friend of the Algerian Revolution. The material

used in this work comes from the historical archives of Eni and some other important Italian institutional archives.

The first steps

In the 1950s, the first studies of the Saharan oil fields produced positive results and aroused the interest of foreign investors. In May 1952, the French National Commission for Industrial Production reported that there were at least 200 applications for oil exploration in the Sahara. The Commission expressed concern about Washington's interest in the area (APa, 1952a). The applications covered large areas, some of which were far from the coast or the capital, making it difficult to control foreign exploration. The French, however, pointed out that the Americans' interest had to be justified by actual potential for profit. Otherwise, the willingness to invest large sums of money would be incomprehensible. The desert was a focal point for the Americans, the French and the Algerians. The Algerians wanted to divide it into three departments, while Paris preferred to monopolise the area by incorporating it into the French Union (APa, 1952b).

France's approach to oil was very different from its approach to other natural resources. In the case of coal and steel, it was prepared to distinguish (and separate) the European zone from the North African zone: for example, the applicability of the ECSC Executive Treaty was limited to the European territory of the contracting states so as not to favour trade from other countries. This limitation was seen as detrimental to Italian interests: 'On our side ... there is a tendency to try to extend the value of these agreements, particularly in economic terms, to the African territories of the powers concerned' (DGAP ufficio III, 1950). As far as oil was concerned, the French wanted to incorporate the Algerian departments into the metropolis in order to maintain control.

At the beginning of the 1950s, French companies had a de facto monopoly on the areas where oil exploration was permitted. In a telegram sent from Algiers to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March 1953, Consul Messeri reported some important data. On the occasion of a visit to Algeria by the French Minister of Industry and Energy, Jean Marie Louval, the diplomat recalled that French oil exploration had been suspended since 1948 but had intensified at the beginning of 1952. Until

then, the area under exploration had been in the south of Algeria, in a vast stretch of the Sahara between Morocco and the Tunisian border. By then, Algeria had attracted the interest of the world's major oil companies, and France had granted drilling licences covering 650,000 square kilometres. In northern Algeria, the Société nationale de recherche et d'exploitation de pétrole en Algérie (SN REPAL), founded in 1946, was already producing around 300 tonnes of oil a day at Sidi Afssa, near Algiers, and surveys in other areas were yielding encouraging results. The company was also drilling for newly discovered gas on the Tunisian border.

Only a few foreign observers were granted access. However, Shell (Royal Dutch), for example, was increasingly hampered by the presence and actions of French companies as concrete prospects for exploitation emerged. According to Messeri, the US companies Caltex and Standard Oil were prominent among the world companies, duly supported by their government, which had posted one of its 11 vice-consuls in Algiers specifically in charge of oil (Consolato d'Italia Algeri, 1953a). However, France was irritated by the US position, which tended to treat Maghreb affairs as a single issue. France felt that Algeria was different from Morocco and Tunisia. The Quai d'Orsay made it clear that Algeria was and must remain an integral part of the metropolitan area (Consolato d'Italia Algeri, 1954).

In November 1954, the Algerian War of Liberation began, forcing France to commit considerable economic and military resources. However, the war did not go according to plan for the French and, despite prolonged operations, they were unable to defeat the Algerian rebels. The Algerian guerrillas knew the territory better and had the support of the local population.

In early 1956, France was forced to grant independence to Tunisia and Morocco, but French concerns and desires for Algeria remained unchanged: Algeria was part of the metropolitan territory of France. In November 1956, the Italian ambassador in Paris, Pietro Quaroni, noted that the French media were skilfully disseminating news of oil discoveries to offset the negative image of the country caused by its intervention in the Suez crisis. He also noted that the prospect of achieving economic independence in such an essential matter, the supply of which was particularly precarious at the time, served to justify, at least

in part, the heavy financial and human sacrifices that the North African situation demanded. In this case, the French press had reported the discovery of a large oil field in Hassi Messaoud containing one billion tonnes of crude oil. According to the French, this supply could easily have been transported to the sea by pipeline, although it started some 700 km south of the Algerian coast. The news was significant because it appeared on the same day that measures to reduce fuel consumption came into force in France. Quaroni argued that the news was used for a specific purpose, as evidenced by the contrast between the optimistic predictions of the Algerian general government (led by the Frenchman Robert Lacoste) and the more cautious estimates of the French oil companies investing in Algeria. The latter believed that it was impossible to provide reasonably accurate figures after only one initial survey (Ambasciata d'Italia Parigi, 1956b).

In May 1957, Caracciolo, counsellor at the Italian embassy in Paris, wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He pointed out that French domestic policy was aimed at exploiting African resources that were still in their potential state. This exploitation would allow the French budget to be balanced and the nation to live within its means without mortgaging its potential wealth, as had been the case until then. To achieve this goal, it was necessary first to solve the political problem of Algeria, then to find the necessary funds for the increasingly important investments in the overseas territories, and finally to have the necessary manpower to exploit these territories (APa, 1957a). According to Caracciolo, the French were very interested in this venture and were even prepared to accept Italian financial contributions and labour. It is worth noting that both Caracciolo, as financial adviser to the Italian Embassy, and General Giuseppe Mancinelli, Chief of the Defence Staff, were invited by their French counterparts to 'return to Africa'. For the counsellor, it was vital to support France, not only to benefit bilateral relations, but also to make the entire European Common Market develop. A French recovery, with the help of Italian participation, would be beneficial to the whole of Europe.

In August 1956, the Italian ambassador in Paris, Pietro Quaroni, had raised the issue of Saharan oil in the context of the Algerian question. He noted that the issue was growing in importance and had international repercussions. It also shaped French public opinion on the policy to be

adopted in Algeria (Ambasciata d'Italia Parigi, 1956a), because, by mid-1957, the rebellion had even begun to target wells, carry out sabotage and attack communications. One of these attacks was reported in 'Il Giorno', the newspaper that Eni's chairman, Enrico Mattei, had helped to save from bankruptcy a few months after its launch. The articles on Algeria caused great concern in France and it was widely believed in Paris that they reflected the views of the Eni chairman (Bagnato, 2011).

In November 1957, Quaroni reported on the negative impressions the French had of Algerian oil. These impressions were based on an article by the director Gaetano Baldacci, who stated that Algeria 'can only gain its independence for oil-related reasons'. The Italian ambassador noted that this position could also have jeopardised relations with Morocco, which was very sensitive to the Sahara issue. On the other hand, the French were also worried about foreigners who would undoubtedly be attracted by the prospect of oil. In addition to the restriction that foreign groups could not acquire a majority share in the concessions and had to make a real technical contribution, a condition was added: investments could only be made by countries that had pursued a 'policy of strict non-interference in France's relations with its overseas possessions' (APa, 1957b), i.e. had not taken sides in favour of Algerian independence.

The role of Eni

In 1956, the Italian Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (Eni), which was at the height of its development and had a keen interest in North Africa, also began to study the possibilities of investing in Algeria. In September of that year, an internal memo reported on assessments made by the French engineer Giraud of the Compagnie Générale de Géophysique, which specialised in seismic and mining studies. The opportunities offered to Eni were in two areas that were perfectly compatible: exploration and drilling. With regard to the former, Giraud recalled that, according to the Mining Code, the foreign oil companies that had been granted exploration and exploitation concessions in Algeria in 1952 had to return 50% of the territory entrusted to them in 1957. In those few years, the companies had not been able to explore the entire area and it was possible that some areas rich in hydrocarbons had remained unexplored. Moreover, if Eni had been interested in these areas, it could

have carried out further analyses. If Eni did not have the means or the desire to request independent analysis of these areas, it could have collaborated with the transferee companies to continue exploration. Moreover, if it had continued with the drilling, in which it had previous experience, it could have obtained significant advantages, since the fees for these contracts were four times higher than those for the Italian ones.

In any case, a quick decision was needed as competition could intensify. Until then, only Royal Dutch Shell (still in partnership with the French) had permission to operate in the Algerian desert. However, American requests for permission were increasing, although they had not yet been granted. Giraud was ready to discuss the matter with Mattei himself. Eni's experts considered that - if the information uncovered was considered of interest - further investigations would still be necessary, not only because the climatic and environmental conditions in the Sahara were difficult, but also because there was a high percentage of barren or gas-only fields. (Direzione Estera, 1956).

In the months that followed, the company began to assess the true extent of Saharan oil resources and to explore the potential for cooperation with France. In February 1957, two technicians, Dante Jaboli and Luigi Scarpa, sent a detailed report to the managing director, Carlo Zanmatti, who passed it on to Eni's technical advisor, Attilio Jacoboni. Eni made initial contact with the Compagnie Européenne des Pétroles (Cep), which had applied for a concession to drill in the Adrar area and appeared to have no competitors in the area. The document states that the main objective was to assess the feasibility of a research collaboration with Cep. The experts stressed the importance of the existence of permeable zones. At present, only gas has been found in the geological layer where drilling is planned, but the possibility of finding oil cannot be ruled out. However, the actual size of the reservoir could not yet be determined, although it was expected to be substantial.

The Italians then met with Georges Schiff-Giorgini , the Franco-Italian president of Société Générale Foncière, a credit institution. Giorgini admitted that he had no technical knowledge and that he had contacted Eni (and, according to the testimony of the two geologists, the Fiat and Montecatini industries as well) on behalf of the Banque de Paris and only for political and financial purposes. The information does not

seem to be secondary: it is likely that the "Banque de Paris" mentioned above was the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas. The summary document of the 1958 annual general meeting of this bank, presenting the accounts for the 1957 financial year, contains numerous references both to the Algerian question and to oil investments (Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas, 1958). Shiff-Giorgini's intervention, whether on behalf of this bank or another, demonstrated the interest of the French financial world in Italian involvement.

Although he lacked expertise in the oil field, he introduced them to the environment of the Compagnie financière de recherches pétrolières (Cofirep), a company that had small financial holdings in Saharan companies. The director of Cofirep did not add any relevant data. However, the two geologists pointed out that, of all the bodies concerned with the Sahara, the Bureau de Recherches de Pétrole (BRP) was probably the most reliable, as it carried out geological studies with its own staff (and was therefore not influenced by the oil companies, as the Italian technicians seemed to suggest) and produced confidential reports on the studies it had carried out. If investments in the Sahara were to be considered, Jaboli and Scarpa concluded, the collaboration with BRP would have to be taken into account.

The Italian engineers concluded that it was not yet possible to estimate the energy wealth that could be extracted from the Sahara: there would probably be more than just rich deposits, many of them of limited size. At present, there was no evidence that the Sahara could become a new Middle East. However, there were some interesting findings and positive indications of commercial production possibilities, as well as encouraging geological premises for further research (Direzione Estera, 1957). As we'll see, a year later Schiff-Giorgini wrote directly to Mattei to ask for a share in the field's exploitation.

The interest in Algerian oil was not limited to industry experts. The Italian political authorities were also considering the possibility of oil exploration in Algeria. In July 1957, Renzo di Carrobio, the deputy director-general for economic affairs at the Italian foreign ministry, wrote to Enrico Mattei (Direttore Generale Aggiunto degli Affari Economici, 1957), the president of Eni, to inform him that foreign companies would be allowed to explore for oil in Algeria if they set up a subsidiary under

French law, with headquarters in the metropolitan area and a French capital participation of at least 50%.

The French embassy in Rome confirmed (as reported by Carrobio) that the French government would consider it advantageous for Italian companies to use the expertise of the Bureau de Recherches de Pétrole (BRP) in Paris to obtain all the necessary information (Ambassade de la République Française en Italie, 1957). Mattei's reply, as far as we know from the documents, was brief. He thanked him for the information but did not express any interest in pursuing the projects on which Carrobio was seeking an opinion (Mattei, 1957).

Mattei's ideal of freedom and the Algerian gratitude

A skilled manager like Mattei, who was committed to securing energy sources for his country's survival, would undoubtedly have explored all possibilities. Moreover, as a shrewd politician, he could have exploited France's weakness and isolation to obtain the best concessions, while maintaining direct relations with state officials and influencing Italy's foreign policy. In the case of Algeria, however, Mattei was able to resist both pressing economic needs and political temptations. What was the reason for Mattei's reluctance to open a new investment area in North Africa after other successful experiments? Based on the available documents and the opinions of some scholars, it seems that Mattei's decision not to negotiate with France was justified by his intention to wait for Algeria's independence (Bagnato, 2004; Vangimigli, 2006; Pirani, 2011 and 2013). However, this attitude was not motivated by a desire to exploit the vulnerability of a young nation that could be Italy's ally rather than negotiate with a pretentious state with conflicting interests, as France was perceived at the time. Nor was it motivated by Mattei's hostility to France, but rather by his desire to secure every possible support for the people fighting for independence. Mattei himself had fought in the Resistance against Nazi Fascism and understood the sacrifices necessary for victory.

Certain that the liberation of Algeria would be achieved, Mattei was determined to negotiate only with the new leaders in order to support the Algerians in their efforts. An agreement with the French to exploit Algeria's oil resources would have strengthened their presence in the

Sahara, whereas Mattei was convinced that this territory belonged to the natives. Mario Pirani, his 'ambassador' in North Africa, stated that 'he had taken a very firm stand on the issue: it was therefore not a question of "oil", but first and foremost a question of independence' (Pirani, 2011).

In 1960, in Tunis, Mattei explained his position on colonialism, which he saw as a widespread 'mentality' not only in international relations but also in domestic contexts, as the imposition of a way of seeing in order to keep others subservient. In the Italian context, for example, he recalled the difficulties he himself had encountered in developing a national oil industry in the face of entrenched interests. In this context, he mentioned the Algerian war too:

> I am here to answer your call for investment and to help you fight underdevelopment. I am not afraid of the Algerian war. I am not afraid of decolonisation. I believe in decolonisation not only for moral reasons of human dignity, but also for economic reasons of productivity. Without decolonisation, it is not possible to arouse in the Afro-Asian peoples the energies, the enthusiasm necessary for the valorisation of Africa and Asia. Now the wealth of Africa and Asia is immense. ... I, too, fought against the fixed idea that existed in my country: that Italy was condemned to poverty for lack of raw materials and energy sources. I identified these energy sources, gave them a value and extracted raw materials from them. But before I did all that, I also had to do some decolonisation, because many sectors of the Italian economy were colonised; I would even say that southern Italy itself was colonised by northern Italy! The colonial fact is not only political: it is also and above all economic. A colonial condition exists when there is a minimum of industrial infrastructure to process raw materials. A colonial condition exists when the interplay of supply and demand for a vital raw material is altered by a hegemonic power: even a private, monopoly or oligopoly power (Mattei, 1960).

In October 1961, at a meeting commemorating the resistance against Nazi-fascism, Mattei testified his stance against all forms of colonialism and prevarication:

> Other countries yearn for freedom and justice, and we know that they suffer and die for them. That is why we share a broader

> vision of human problems and relations, from the individual to the peoples. [...] But it requires the exclusion of any form of blackmail or intimidation and is not compatible with undue interference by economically stronger countries in the internal life of weaker ones. We must ensure that colonialism [...] does not persist or seek to survive under different but no less onerous forms. The forces of political immobility, allied to economic privilege, cry out against the spirit of rebellion of these peoples and join forces in an inexorable march towards independence and freedom. Economic paternalism is not very different from colonialism, less humiliating in its form for those subjected to it, but also the result of the blind selfishness of the strongest towards the weakest (Mattei, 1961a).

A few weeks later, the 'Le Monde' journalist Alain Murcier asked him: 'You have refused to invest in the Sahara until Algeria is independent. What would be your policy towards an Algerian government responsible for the future of its country?'. Mattei answered: 'One of your compatriots, who was to become Minister of Defence, called me a visionary when I told him that I believed Algeria would be independent and that your government would negotiate. I'm not a man of arms, I'm a pacifist. I want to work peacefully, and that's impossible in a country at war. Working with an independent government? Time will tell what this government will have in its hands' (Mattei, 1961b).

In February 1962, a few months before his death in a tragic plane crash on the eve of an important agreement to be signed with the government of independent Algeria, he was interviewed during a press conference at the Foreign Press Association. Many journalists, both Italian and foreign, asked him questions about his links with the then provisional Algerian government:

> If we had a secret agreement with the Algerian government, I would say no. We made contact with the French government six years ago. On that occasion, the problem of working in the Sahara was put to us. The war had just broken out, and since we love peace, not war, we replied that we did not want to send our workers and technicians to work in the Sahara with machine guns at their feet, and that we would wait until the situation was clarified. The situation has not been resolved, but I see that after

> six years it is the French government that is negotiating peace with the Algerian government. When everything is calm, we will be very happy to work in the Sahara. … I believe that the wealth of the Sahara is impressive, but for the moment we have not examined the question of ENI's collaboration in the exploitation of the Sahara. We are waiting to see if it is possible to work and how. We are only interested in working and we believe that this action can make a significant contribution to Europe, which in turn can help Algeria to develop (Mattei, 1962).

As can be discerned, for Mattei, economic independence was a necessary condition for the realisation of political freedom. In this respect, his position aligned with that of the Algerian National Liberation Front, which in 1957 had already declared that it considered France's extended agreements with other countries for the exploitation of petroleum to be solely temporary:

> We understand that the development of such an immense territory requires technical and financial means that not even France can provide, let alone a nation subject to foreign domination for more than 125 years … However the Algerians intend to determine by themselves the conditions and modalities of these indispensable foreign contributions … Only a free Algerian government will be entitled to approve such contracts and to grant concessions on the national territory. The foreign companies that have invested their capital in the Sahara and those who refer to the French government to obtain research permits are building on sand. We would like to emphasise that the contracts recently signed with France by foreign oil companies are, in fact, provisional. The Algerian people and their government are not bound by these wartime contracts and regard them as an act of hostility towards the Algerian people (Débats Parlamentaires, 1962).

Mattei's support was not just an attitude that remained unfulfilled because of his death. On the Algerian side, the chairman of Eni is considered a true supporter of the revolution. In 2021, the President of the Republic, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, decided to award the Medal of the Friends of the Algerian Revolution to Enrico Mattei by Presidential

Decree No. 21-356 of 18 September 2021. This medal is awarded by the President of the Republic to foreign personalities who have given effective material and moral support to the national liberation struggle, as a sign of recognition on the part of Algeria.

Dahou Ould Kablia – a former collaborator of the Algerian Minister and founder of the Algerian intelligence secret services, Abdelhafid Boussouf, and president of the Association of MALG (Ministry of Armament and General Relations) Redoubts – argued that the French special services killed Enrico Mattei, 'who was considered to have become the most formidable competitor of French interests in Algeria after independence'. He was one of the European friends 'a hundred of whom paid with their lives for their active support of the Algerian revolution' (Kablia 2011).

Ali Cherif Deroua, an ALN/MALG officer, described Mattei as 'extremely positive in his commitment and his material, diplomatic and political contribution to the Algerian revolution' (Deroua 2011). Laid Rebiga, Minister of Moudjahidine and Rightist Affairs of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, described Mattei as a 'fighter who dedicated his life to just causes in the world, before whom we all bow today, before his soul with respect and consideration. ... Although he has left this world, Enrico Mattei remains one of the world's great personalities whose illustrious support for our national cause will remain engraved in the memory of the Algerian people and whose human values will continue to contribute to, encourage and support the liberation movements of peoples still suffering under the yoke of colonialism' (Rebiga 2023).

The Italian government's interests and French pressure

Although some Algerian observers (Kablia 2011; Rebiga 2023) believe that Mattei succeeded in steering Italian policy in favour of the Algerian cause, archive documents show that, at least in the early stages, he had the daunting task of resisting the explicit and implicit demands of the Italian government and French pressure. In May 1958, Ambassador Ugo Sola, President of the Commission Internationale pour l'Exploration Scientifique de la Méditerranée in Paris, telephoned Attilio Jacoboni, Eni's Assistant to the President for Foreign Relations, to say that a former ambassador, Jonel Somario, - 'head of a French financial group operating in Algeria' with 'an excellent introduction to French and Algerian oil and

official circles' - wanted to meet him, although this was not the most appropriate time to be dealing with Algeria (Direzione Estera, 1958a). In any case, there is no evidence of any follow-up to this note.

In July, the president of Société Générale Foncière (Sgf), the Franco-Italian Georges Schiff-Giorgini, whom two Eni geologists had met on an exploration trip the previous year, wrote to Mattei to invite him to participate in the construction of a refinery at Hassi Messaoud. The letter began with an introduction that could have political implications, perhaps to underline the importance of the request. Schiff-Giorgini noted that if Mattei did not know him, he could have asked for references from Armando Angelini, the Christian Democrat transport minister, the banker and economist Raffaele Mattioli or the Socialist MP Pietro Nenni. The Franco-Italian financier stated that a subsidiary of an SGF company, the Compagnie de Raffinage en Afrique du Nord (Cran), had signed agreements with Sn Repal for the construction of a 100,000-tonne refinery in Hassi Messaoud. The Algerian government had granted the company a 42-hectare concession for the plant. Schiff-Giorgini stressed that the refinery would cost one billion francs, but that financing was not an issue. Rather, the financier was looking for a group that could provide technical assistance and quickly procure the necessary equipment. The deal had the potential to bring 'significant benefits' and serve as an 'excellent observatory' of Saharan activity. It was also mentioned that Sn Repal intended to entrust Cran with the degasification of all its crude oil. To lend credibility to the deal, Schiff-Giorgini mentioned that Cran's president was General Koenig, a highly decorated veteran of the Second World War and a former French defence minister. According to the archives, it was the technical adviser Jacoboni who was instructed by President Mattei's secretariat to reply to Schiff-Giorgini's request. Jacoboni's reply was brief and straightforward, stating on Mattei's behalf that he could not accept the proposal 'because of the Group's commitments in the sector' (Direzione Estera, 1958b).

However, Mattei's position could have jeopardised relations between Italy and France. A file of confidential documents on Eni from the Senate of the Italian Republic, kept in the fund of the President of the Republic, Giovanni Gronchi, contains a study on Italian participation in the exploitation of the Sahara. The study, dated 16 October 1958, highlights the French reluctance to allow Italy to participate in the Algerian oil field after Eni had wrested an agreement with Morocco from France. French representatives explained that France's exclusion from

Morocco had strained relations between the two countries. The French therefore saw Italy's exclusion from the exploitation of the Sahara's oil resources as 'just retribution'.

By flattering their 'transalpine cousins', the Italians tried to convince them of the 'inappropriateness of pursuing a strictly nationalist policy when a loyal agreement with Italy, possibly extended to Spain, could have provided the financial and technical means to solve the problem'. Moreover, an agreement with Italy would have allowed the French to use their own oil machinery instead of relying on that of the United States. However, the French did not welcome this prospect. It is clear that there were high expectations of improved relations between the two countries, which necessarily involved Eni's participation.

After the talks, which were reported to President Gronchi, the Italian representatives were satisfied that they had obtained a commitment from the French to create an Italian-French company, with 49% Italian participation, which would be able to obtain concessions for the exploration and exploitation of oil in the richest areas, which would be selected in advance. The authors of the analysis envisaged that the majority of the shares could be returned to Italian hands by means of agreements with the French banks which, together with the oil companies, would have subscribed to the 51% package. Or rather, in Eni's hands: although Paris would have preferred to negotiate with a newly formed technical-financial group, Eni was finally accepted as a partner. In any case, national companies, workers, geologists and machinery would have been used for research, with great economic and knowledge benefits. But the agreement would not have been free for Italy. ‘Not as a quid pro quo, but as part of the new relations it was ready to establish with Italy in this field’, France would have welcomed reciprocity in Morocco, where the Italians would have been able to hand over 49% of the activities. In this way, economic relations between the two countries would have been strengthened and Paris would have had a justification for ceding its share of the Sahara on more favourable terms than usual. In addition, to reinforce the positive aspects of the agreement, the analysis stressed that this cooperation could have attracted other 'Latin' interlocutors, which President Gronchi was keen to do, as demonstrated by his recent trip to South America. Satisfied with the feasibility of the project, a deadline was even set: 7 December, when the National Assembly was to meet and approve the statutes of the Italo-French company (Senato 1958). The approval of Eni was necessary for the conclusion of the agreement.

However, there is no clear indication that the proposal was accepted by the company.

The French demands were made at a time when the repression of Algerian guerrilla warfare by the French had become systematic. This was due to the division of the country into sectors and the organisation of a relentless repressive system, as well as a system of border barriers. Initially, many villages were devastated and the population made to emigrate. Then the ALN strongholds were targeted. At the same time, the guerrillas specialised in ambushes and night raids, eliminating not only French soldiers and settlers, but also Algerians considered to be collaborators. The climate of terror was widespread in Algeria, so the attitude of the technicians who looked at the oil factor almost without taking into account the terrible circumstances was somewhat alienating.

A few months later, on 21 January 1959, the French oil company (Cfp), which had just signed an agreement with Standard Oil of New Jersey to participate in Saharan oil, also contacted Eni, which 'refused to enter Algeria, preferring to wait for peace', as Redha Malek, former head of government and spokesman for the Algerian delegation at the Evian negotiations, recalled in a testimony about Mattei. Malek believed that Mattei's assessment was correct, given that investing in Algeria involved considerable risks from both a prudential and a managerial point of view. Indeed, a few days after the CFP attempt, on 24 January 1959, a tanker train carrying thousands of litres of oil from Hassi Messaoud jumped a mine and burned for three days south of Constantine (Malek, 2011).

In any case, Mattei was keen to learn more about the extent of Algeria's potential. He was therefore attracted by the supply possibilities and remained interested in the value of Algeria's resources. Although he had declined Schiff-Giorgini's offer to participate in the development of the Hassi Messaoud field, Mattei was interested to find out how far work had progressed in December 1960, when some Agip geologists were invited to visit the field by colleagues from the Compagnie française des pétroles Algérie. Created in 1953, Cfpa, in which the French state held a 35% stake, had been in control of two fields since 1956, an oil field (Hassi Messaoud) and a gas field (Hassi R'Mel). The visit was prompted by an invitation from Cfpa's exploration director to Agip's technicians at the World Geological Congress in Copenhagen in August 1960. The visit was facilitated by the presence of Engineer Passegna, who was a consultant to both Agip and Cfpa, and took place over a period of about 10 days between late November and early December 1960.

According to the Italian geologists, the Hassi-Messaoud deposit was "sui generis". It covered an area of 1,700 square kilometres and there were 24 plants (12 by Cfpa and 12 by its subsidiary SN Repal), but the structure was so vast and the plants were so far apart that the area hardly seemed active. On the other hand, the industrial centre, where the crude oil was collected, the tanks and the power station were located, was - in the eyes of the Italians – 'truly imposing' and conveyed the importance of the field. In 1956, the two companies agreed to build a 24-inch pipeline between Hassi Messaoud and Bougie (now Béjaïa) on the Algerian coast. This pipeline facilitated the transport of 500,000 cubic metres of oil in 1958. At the time, reserves were estimated at 2.5 billion tonnes, of which 400 million tonnes were recoverable. The current facilities had a capacity of about 8 million tonnes per year, which could be increased to 9 million tonnes with improved technology. Crude oil was transported to Bougie and then sent by tanker to Algiers for refining.

With regard to the Hassi R'Mel gas fields, geological and geophysical data predicted reserves of 1980 billion cubic metres of natural gas and 310 million tonnes of gasoline, with a possible recovery rate of between 37.5% and 50%. However, no firm figures were given. Apart from some technical data indicating good potential, no conclusions were drawn from these fields (Agip, 1960). It is important to note that the oil and gas fields in the region are still very active. Six new discoveries were made at Hassi Messaoud in 2023, and Hassi R'Mel is currently the largest gas field in Africa.

Conclusion

According to the material consulted and previous studies, there seems to have been considerable French interest in the 1950s in obtaining support for the exploration and exploitation of oil in the Sahara. Italy was the preferred choice, and during the Algerian War of Liberation it managed to maintain a commendable balance between loyalty to Western (Atlantic and European) commitments and national needs. After the Second World War, Italy was interested in securing energy supplies, building relations with the Arab world and completing the European integration project, in which France played a central role. The exploitation of Algerian oil could be seen as a confluence of these interests. The involvement of Eni, a hydrocarbon company founded in 1953 to supply Italy with energy resources, was a crucial factor. `

However, Eni was run by Enrico Mattei, whose position on the issue of Saharan exploitation became clear when he refused to give in to Italian and French pressure. In his view, oil and gas deals could only be concluded with an independent Algeria. He had fought against Nazi Fascism in Italy and led the Resistance and chose to postpone negotiations with the future Algerian state in order to ensure a fair and equal discussion. Mattei's tactful refusals and deliberate pauses forced France and Italy to halt negotiations involving banks, companies, governments, presidents of the republics and parliaments.

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Unveiling Cultural Significance: A Semiotic Analysis of the Moral Essence of Myths and Folk Tales

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Abstract

This article analyses Gambian myths and folk tales through a semiotic lens using Rolande Barthes' (1972) semiotic theory as a framework. It examines how certain tales in Gambian folk lore and fables could be read as mythical narratives laden with morally and culturally significant meanings. The narratives are selected thematically and subjected to a semiotic analysis that highlights their metaphorical, ideological, cultural and moral significance. We thus explore the role of Gambian myths in conveying moral and cultural values, with a view to providing insights into the society's structures and emphasising the universal tendency to create and interpret mythic narratives. The analysis shows that several figures such as the hare, the hyena, the evil stepmother, the marabout, the witch and the cultural hero serve as mythical symbols through which moral values such as honesty, truthfulness, justice and equality are metaphorically expressed as cultural principles that guide social existence.

Keywords: myths, morals, narratives, metaphorical, ideological, semiotic

Introduction

From ancient times, societies have used myths and folk tales to provide basic explanations, however simple, of nature and natural forces, and to strengthen social norms and values that benefit the common good and contribute to the creation of a well-ordered, secure, and decent community (Madden 2006). The second function pertains to the impact of myth and folk tales on the social system as means of expressing and conveying core beliefs, values and morals that shape the cultural self-image of a particular society. According to Lugli (2014), a myth is a traditional story that is held by a particular community to be of collective social importance. Lugli refers to allegoresis as an interpretative method by which myths are seen as the heart of moral truths and values that were revealed by philosophical inquiries. On the other hand, Madden (2006) describes folk tales as parables that illuminate, reinforce or illustrate previously established morals and community values. In examining the cultural realities of a social group, therefore, myths and folk tale are considered constitutive elements that engender beliefs and customs that express themselves explicitly in the form of morals, values, purposes, goals, and philosophies that motivate and shape cultural reality (Shynkaruk, Salata, and Danylova 2018).

Danesi (2004) asserts that the study of myth can lead to a useful understanding of how a particular group developed their social system, customs and ways of life as well as the values that bind them as one community. He identifies several types of myth that contribute to shaping the customs, values and cultural identity of a particular social group. Cosmogonic myths, for instance, explain in various ways that differ from culture to culture, how the world came into existence. Eschatological myths, on the other hand, explain how the world will end through a variety of culturally dependent predictions. Myths of birth and rebirth explain the renewal of life or the emergence of a perfect society or saviour. The myth of the cultural hero is a particularly common depiction of a figure who makes a discovery or achievement of cultural significance and change. Explanatory myths describe natural processes and events. As a form of grouping, these varieties of myth can be useful categorisations in determining the significance of myth in any particular social group. In fact, Juenghani (2020) argues that, closely related to other symbolic forms such as language, myth is the foundation of the philosophy of culture that defines a particular community.

The relationship between myth and language is explored more explicitly by Barthes (1972) who argues that myth is a form of speech, a mode of communication, a message, a form, and a system of signification. In his theory of mythology, Barthes argues that the study of myth in fact belongs together with linguistics to the same broad field of semiology. Considered as a form of speech, mythology is a branch of the science of signs. In line with Saussure's theory of the sign, Barthes identifies the semiological concept of signifier as a sensory element which acts as a mediator between itself and something else it is used to refer to, which is known as the signified. For Barthes, the relation between the signifier and the signified constitutes the sign as it does for Saussure. However, while Saussure's theory recognises the sign as a binary structure, Barthes considers it a triadic concept. Additionally, for Barthes, the relations between these elements constitute only the first order signification system such as that which is found in the linguistic sign. Therefore, beyond Saussure's theory, Barthes recognises the existence of a second level of signification in which the sign composed of the signifier and signified of the first order functions as a signifier.

In Barthes' theory (1972), the relations between signifier and signified that produce the sign on the first level of signification form only one part of the second level of signification. The second-order semiotic system provides another level of expression where we encounter myth and connotation. Therefore, myth is a system of signification that is unique from that of language. Barthes explains that this peculiarity stems from the fact that myth is constructed from an already existing semiological chain. In other words, myth is a second order semiological system in which the sign, i.e., the combination of the signifier and signified of the first semiotic order, becomes merely a signifier or a form that is given a new meaning. Barthes explains further that at this second-level signification, the form or the signifier is distanced from its previous meaning in replacement of the concept for which the myth is uttered. It is on this level that the interpretative process of allegoresis may seek to establish a relationship between a mythical signifier and a form of moral or cultural belief or value.

Bearing in mind the duplicity of the mythical signifier both as meaning and form, Barthes suggests three ways of deciphering myth which correspond with three different points of focus: on the form, or the meaning, or on both at the same time. He argues that focusing on the

empty form of the signifier merely lets the concept of the myth fill the form of the signifier without ambiguity and the signification becomes literal again as in the first order. On the other hand, focusing on the meaning of the signifier alone, distinguishing clearly between it and the form, reveals a distortion that unveils the myth as a fake. The third reading which concentrates on the mythical signifier as an inseparable combination of meaning and form reveals the composing mechanism of myth as an ambiguous signification open to a variety of potential meanings. Barthes maintains that in order to explicate the semiological process that transforms myth to the moral interests of a particular society, the third type of reading explains myths according to the purpose for which they were built. Additionally, he asserts that myth is not defined by the content of its message, but rather by the manner in which this message is conveyed.

According to Walter Burket, quoted in Bremmer (1987), myth is a tale of antiquity that possesses a secondary nature that makes allusions to the collective consciousness of humankind. For Lugli (2014), folk tales are the aggregate of traditional oral narratives that mirror the beliefs, customs, and values unique to a particular culture. Therefore, both myth and folk tale are traditional narratives that are sustained by their cultural significance. Like religion, they constitute a cultural force with the power to arrange social life in a moral order, performing utilitarian functions of education, socialisation and entertainment (Lugli 2014).

As Madden (2006) explains, myth frequently establishes norms that are subsequently reinforced by folk tale, thereby ascribing to myth and folk tale the same functional value. However, Madden explains some important distinctions between myth and folk lore in three different ways. Firstly, unlike folk lore, myth predates society; secondly, whereas myth often involves powerful supernatural characters that claim divinity, folk tale often involves ordinary protagonists with ordinary qualities such as intelligence, courage, and luck; and thirdly, while myth establishes a moral precept or expectation with general application, folk tale, typically understood to be a mixture of imagination, history, culture, custom, and advice, does not prescribe any specific conduct, but encourages people to consider the pros and cons of different actions. Nonetheless, the present discussion avoids any structural or procedural differentiation of myth from folk tale in preference to a functional approach that highlights their utilitarian purposes.

Plakhova (2016) brings out the correlation between myth and folk tale clearly. The sameness of purpose between the two is accentuated by his definition of folk tale as a socio-cultural form of communication with the dual purposes of interpreting the nature of the relationship between man and the world, and of inspiring strategies of value and belief in a variety of texts. These texts serve as a repository for the mythological beliefs shared by a community. Plakhova argues that folk tale is founded on the use of myth that has been desacralised, functioning as means to organise social memory. The symbolism in folk tales is predominantly shaped by signs that refer to mythological situations. When original mythological elements are transformed according to the dominant values of folk consciousness, it results in the creation of distinct signs within folk tales, which take the form of folk tale images serving as names, events, and expressions in the context of the narratives. A significant feature of folk tales is the semiotic space they occupy as a particular sign system functioning as a form of cultural communication. Therefore, the principles of semiotic analysis can be applied to the interpretation folk tale discourse.

A significant contribution to the study of myths has been made through extensive analysis of their cultural, religious, as well as symbolic significance. According to Danesi (2004), myths have been considered by different scholars from different perspectives. According to Claude Levi-Strauss (1978) for instance, myth holds a significant role as the primordial wellspring from which binary conceptualizations such as the dichotomies of life versus death, good versus evil, maternal versus paternal, originate. In his seminal work, Freud (1913) delved into the intricate depths of human motivation and the complex interplay of individual psyches. He perceived myths as a profound manifestation of the conflicts that individuals grapple with as they navigate the complex terrain of their unconscious psyche. On the other hand, Carl Jung (1965) saw myths as consisting of primordial archetypal images that constitute evidence of the collective human endeavour to express cultural values in symbolic forms. Thus, while Freud highlights the importance of myth to individual consciousness and values, Jung emphasizes its role in molding the collective consciousness. Jung's emphasis is similar to French sociologist Durkheim's (1912) view that myths emerged from the realm of social existence and, together with their attendant rituals, nurture and revive moral systems that bind people socially. What these great thinkers seem

to highlight is the profound impact of myth on the cultural and social identity of a community.

Exploring the concept of myth as a cultural phenomenon, Shynkaruk, Salata and Danylova (2018) investigate how myth functions as a cultural language. Using an anthropological integrative method, the researchers examine its interpretive role in understanding the world and highlight the significance of the basic mythological concepts of "world" and "human" in shaping life attitudes in the early stages of human development. A relevant observation in the contemporary stage of human development is their opinion that although myth has yielded to philosophy and science, it remains influential throughout history utilised by both religion and literature. Talking about the application of myth in religion, Humaeni (2015) explores the significance and functions of religious myths. Adopting a similar anthropological approach as Shynkaruk et al., Humaeni focuses on the cultural and moral values of religious myths in the Bantenese community. He also reaches a similar conclusion that the development of science and technology and the rising genres of popular culture in all kinds of media have not diminished the significance of myth. Both Shynkaruk et al. and Humaeni emphasise that myth is still revered both commonly and by the educated owing to its profound impact in upholding moral values, fostering virtuous behaviour, and promoting proper conduct in society.

However, Onu (2018) reaches a different conclusion that challenges this understanding. In examining the roles of myth and folk tales in the inculcation of moral values into children within the context of a rapidly advancing global era, his study reveals an emerging moral decline. This decline is attributed to the erosion of the cultural significance of myth and folk lore that is witnessed by parental indifference towards children's moral development in the midst of a fast-paced and technologically driven society. Emphasising the crucial role myth and folk lore play in instilling morals in children, the study calls for concerted efforts to integrate them into the educational and cultural fabric in order to restore and strengthen the moral foundations of the younger generation.

Also related to the impact of myth and folk lore on behaviour, an interesting study by Del Moral et al. (2020) examines the impact of myth on intimate partner violence. The researchers sought to understand how myth contributes in shaping general beliefs and attitudes towards the

expression of violent behaviour during adolescence and adulthood. Their findings reveal that high levels of myth acceptance contributed to the expression of intimate partner violence particularly among males. Consequently, they recommend that efforts should be made to challenge or deactivate mythical narratives and beliefs that escalate intimate partner violence. On a different aspect, Ansar and Unti (2021) analyse the use of myth in the reports of state auditors to highlight how financial statements also utilise language at the second level of signification for ideological purposes. Their study is significant as it demonstrates several of Barthes's assertions that every text can contain myth as long as the text is conveyed by a discourse. It also underlines the semiological transformative link that turns myth into ideology.

Tanduk, Maruf, and Suluh (2021) also demonstrate the link between myth and ideology. Using data obtained from the oral literature of the Toraja people, their study investigates the use of symbolism, parallelism and metaphor as devices to convey deeper meanings in mythical constructs in the ritual text of the cultural ceremony of the buffalo meeting. The study reveals that the ritual text is a mythical construct that serves as means of transmitting Torajan ideology concerning the value of character. It also makes an important observation concerning the relationship between myth and connotation as second level systems of signification. Whereas the denotational meaning of the ritual text highlights Torajan reverence for the buffalo, it is through connotation that the concept of myth created through the use of symbolism, parallelism and metaphor is conveyed in the text. Another study that underlines the intimate relationship between myth and connotation is Ishar and Irawan (2022) which highlights the use of myth and connotation in a number of lyrics by The Beatles. The study demonstrates, as Barthes theorises, how myth is a means to analyse the connection between denotative and connotative meaning.

As Kolesnyk (2019) asserts in a study that addresses the cognitive premises of myth-oriented semiosis, myth can be considered a cognitive and cultural phenomenon pertaining to verbal depictions of noematic senses that accumulate in the national conceptual space. He adds that the interpretational process is also determined by sets of conceptualisation models applicable to the anticipated states of affairs or alternative realities. It is on the strength of such arguments that this study proposes to address the moral significance of Gambian myths and folk tales as

culturally significant phenomena that reflect the moral beliefs, customs and values of Gambian society.

The existing literature on the analysis of myths and folk tales has mostly focused on investigating its cultural, theological and symbolic import across diverse settings. However, a significant gap remains in conducting a thorough semiotic examination of the moral significance inherent in myths and folk tales, especially within the distinct context of Gambian myths. Although previous research has explored the influence of myths and folk tales on moral values and behaviour, there is a dearth of scholarly investigations particularly examining the semiotic resources and linguistic devices used in Gambian myths and folk tales to communicate moral principles. The objective of this study is to address this gap by undertaking a semiotic analysis of Gambian myths and folk tales. The aim is to offer a culturally unique viewpoint that reveals the complex mechanisms by which myths and folk stories convey and strengthen moral values.

Additionally, despite the existing body of scholarly works that emphasize the dynamic nature of the connection between myths and modernisation, there is a limited body of research that has specifically examined the dynamic relationship between conventional myths and the current socio-cultural environment in The Gambia. The present study aims to fill this void by examining the enduring moral impact of Gambian myths and folk stories in the context of contemporary Gambian society.

The literature reviewed above indicates that a substantial body of research on the significance of myth as a source of moral values already exists. Additionally, the close relationship between myth, folk tale, and connotation as second level semiological processes has also been recognised in the literature. However, while Gambian myths and folk tales have been recognised for their cultural and entertainment values, not much has been done to explore how they instill moral concepts, ethics, and life lessons into the local consciousness. Since both myth and folk tale are two intertwined phenomena that weave themselves into the tapestry of cultural existence and the fabric of social life, exploring these narratives can unearth the explicit and implicit moral values and beliefs embedded in them and cast more light on the traditional norms, ethical values, and social dynamics that shape Gambian society. Additionally, as Gambian society embraces modernity, it is necessary to reexamine these ancient narratives to evaluate their adaptability to solving the moral

dilemmas of our time. By doing so, this research can illuminate their capacity to cultivate virtuous conduct, inspire compassion, and nurture social cohesion. Exploring this research gap will reveal how the cultural legacy of myths and folk tales may continue to influence the moral foundation of Gambian society in a constantly evolving environment.

In order to fill this gap, this research more specifically seeks to identify the mythical elements in the selected folk tales that are deemed relevant in the inculcation of moral values, determine the means by which these mythical elements are conveyed, and explore the extent to which the mythical elements instill or maintain moral values within the context of Gambian society. To achieve these objectives, the research is guided by the following set of questions: what are the mythical elements conveyed in the folk tales? by what means are the mythical elements conveyed in the folk tales? and to what extent do the mythical elements contribute to establishing or maintaining moral values in the society?

Methodology

The study thus explores the significance of myths and folk tales as cultural phenomena that contribute to the moral fabric of society. The data consist of narratives selected from *Folk Tales from The Gambia* by Bojang and Bojang (2009). This text is chosen because it serves as a repository of traditional Gambian folk tales that have been transmitted for several generations. Five folk tales are selected purposively on the basis of their moral significance. The methodology involves a textual analysis and ethnographic research that seek to examine the intricate layers of cultural importance and moral lessons embedded within these narratives. Employing Barthes theory (1972) of myth, the analysis of the data is based on a close reading that pays attention to what signs are used from the first-order signification to serve as mythical signifiers on the second-level signification. This is to facilitate the exploration of the connotative, ideological as well as metaphorical meanings of the mythical elements in the narratives. These are highlighted as a means to access the socio-cultural associations that the folk tale and mythical elements generate. Finally, these associations are assessed in order to gauge the extent to which they shape or influence moral values in contemporary Gambian society.

Analysis and Discussion

Honesty has always been the corner stone of moral principles. As a result, there are numerous examples in myth and folklore where it is rewarded, and dishonesty is punished. In the folk tale of "The Hyena and the Hare", the two animals are used to illustrate the difference between uprightness and fraudulence. The tale recounts how hare tricks hyena on their way to visit their father-in-law, and strategically exchanges hyena's high-quality rice, meant as a present for their in-law, with his own low-quality rice, with the aim of securing the position of favoured son-in-law. In the narrative, hare and hyena are used as mythical symbols to illustrate the divide between honesty and dishonesty. The tale can thus be seen a localized depiction of what Levi-Strauss (1978) describes as the form of conceptual thinking that resonates with the binary oppositions that underlie all myths, good vs. evil, rich vs. poor, trickster vs. dupe, life vs. death, chaos vs. order, and so on. In this case, hare is presented as a trickster and hyena as a dupe.

From a Saussurean perspective, it is clear that the mythical elements *hare* and *hyena* are each a linguistic sign comprised by the word as a signifier and the animal to which it refers as a signified. The two elements therefore constitute the final terms of the first semiological chain. From a Barthesian perspective, however, the linguistic signs *hare* and *hyena*, which already exist as the associative totals of signifier and signified, are reduced to signifying functions in the narrative chain. Thus, they become the first term of the second signifying system on which the myth is built, and of which they are only the first part.

In his studies of *Folk Tales from The Gambia,* Magel (1977) says that the attributes of honour and shame are assigned to hare and hyena as metaphorical concepts. In addition, Beidelman (1961) states that the hyena is metaphorically associated with the concept of a duped trickster and is frequently connected to witchcraft. A common figure in Wolof folk tales, the hare has been analysed as a character from both psychological as well as sociological interpretations. As Magel (1981) explains, it is depicted from both perspectives as a cultural symbol of trickery and deception. Its antics and cleverness are explained as the result of its selfishness and individuality. Its endeavours to trick other animals for its own satisfaction pose as the polar opposite of the African ideal of communality. This is evident in this particular tale in the cunning and deceitful manner it tricks hyena despite the assurance of an elusive

cooperative relationship.

As Roberts (1989) explains, the moral function of the trickster figure in many mythical African tales is to remind people not only of the behaviours related to the trickster, but also of the effects of behaving like the dupe. The relationship with one's father-in-law is a sacred one in Gambian society. The cost of hare's trick on hyena is therefore not just an opportunity to strengthen the bond with his father-in-law, but it is also a usurpation of the sacred alliance between son and father-in-law. Roberts (1989) observes that this violation of social ties is a common practice of the animal trickster figure in African folk tales. The prevalence of this theme reflects the socio-cultural importance that is attached to the preservation of social ties within African society. Hyena is a friend who is duped by another friend. Although the lesson is clear, the practice of double standards is a critical zone of uncertainty in many societies. How can one get to know their friends, and how can one be sure that friends won't evolve into something else? The trickster tale serves as a mythical illustration and a warning to society that while one may admire the trickster for his cunning wits, one should be wary of other's actions, including those regarded as friends.

Thus, it is possible to associate the metaphorical roles of the hare and the hyena to the fundamental processes of socialisation in Gambian society. They are reminiscent of the dilemmas that confront the urge to satisfy individual needs juxtaposed against the communal obligations and demands established by social relations (Biedelman 1975). With the use of animal characters as mythical symbols, the tale is fundamentally allegorical as the animals are assumed to behave like people. In addition, the use of animals to convey moral issues creates a sense of detachment and liberty. With a certain degree of exaggeration and embellishment, people's intentions and acts may be conveyed to highlight certain social and moral tensions without the flagrance of involving human characters in atrocious deeds. Nonetheless, there are still mythical tales in Gambian folklore depicting human characters who, by their intentions and actions, raise serious moral tensions that burden the cultural consciousness. The myth of the evil stepmother is one such enduring tale.

From her numerous depictions in myths, fairy tales, folklore, and film adaptations across the world, the evil stepmother is indeed an infamous mythical figure thought of in more negative connotations than any other family figure. Looking at the history of the linguistic sign

stepmother itself, one may argue that the bias against the figure of the stepmother is ingrained into the history of the language system. The etymological path to *step* traces it back to Old English *steop*, which expressed a feeling of loss and deprivation. This feeling is heightened if one considers that even the metaphorical reference to something as *stepchild* suggests its inferiority. As Barthes (1972) explains, the linguistic sign is emptied of its history as it passes from being a complete final term of the first semiological system to being only the first term of the second semiological system of signification. Thus, the linguistic sign enters into myth as an empty signifier or form waiting to be filled by a signified.

However, the history of the meaning of the linguistic sign is absorbed as part of the concept of the myth which becomes its new signified. In that light, the loss and deprivation suffered by the stepchild left only to the mercies of a stepmother may be considered the major concept behind the tale of 'The Two Half Sisters'. Thus, the tale serves as a cultural outlet to confront the delicate subject of stepmother/stepchild relationship within Gambian culture. As Pateh's first wife Bintu passed away leaving him with their daughter Mai, Pateh is compelled by society to bring home his second wife Khadijatou and their daughter, also named Mai, to ensure that Mai Bintu, already in her puberty, is given a proper upbringing. However, as soon as Khadijatou is brought to her husband's home, she assumes the role of the evil stepmother and hatches a plan to get rid of her stepdaughter. Khadijatou disregards the fortune teller's dire prophecy of her impending doom and the fact that her stepdaughter and her real daughter are practically identical. The concept of the myth, therefore, inherits the history of wickedness and cruelty that has been ascribed to the evil stepmother for centuries.

Additionally, the portrayal of Mai Bintu and Mai Khadijatou as identical twins with identical names emphasizes a common cultural and filial identity that seeks to obliterate all differentiating notions of prejudice between child and stepchild. It is a metaphorical representation of the moral principle of equality among offspring that must guide the maternal spirit of nourish and nurture. Thus, while the name Khadijatou denotes a second wife who replaces the first one on the first plane of semiosis, on the mythical plane of signification, it symbolises the antithesis of the benevolent matriarch who is revered for her maternal instincts that keep the body and soul of the family together. As Tatar

(2019) explains, folk tales of the evil stepmother provide therapeutic means of addressing taboo emotions such as maternal bile and hatred. Khadijatou's resolve to get rid of Mai Bintu despite the fortune teller's warning accentuates the sort of resentment that emerges from the competition for resources and attention between stepmother and stepchild. However, as Barthes (1972) elucidates, there is no obduracy in mythical concepts. That is, a mythical signifier can refer to a wide expanse of changing concepts. The idea behind the evil stepmother folk tale may as well as be cautionary household counsel for stepmothers to treat stepchildren fairly and for fathers to be a little more sensitive to their (stepchildren's) protective needs in order to prevent undesirable things from happening.

Furthermore, given the increasing rate of divorce and re-marriage in Gambian society, there is no want of concern and good advice for the evil stepmother. Khadijatou's visit to Efra, the fortune teller, is a symbolic gesture that does not only reinforce the use of ritual in African life as a potent means of bringing about knowledge and resolution (d'Almeida 1994). As mentioned earlier, Carl Jung (1965) considers myth and folk tales as proof for the existence of a collective unconscious made up of archetypal figures that are expressed through symbolism and other means. One of these archetypes is the figure of the wise old man. According to Jung (1965), this is a kindly figure of wisdom, knowledge and power with a mystical aura around him. The role of the mythical wise old man in Gambian folklore, as in many other parts of Africa, is frequently portrayed by the fortune teller, popularly known in and around The Gambia as marabout. He is considered a religious man of great wisdom, knowledge, and supernatural powers. Like the Jungian archetype, the marabout is considered a source of guidance and resolution. Seeking to set her daughter apart from her stepdaughter, Khadijatou turns to the venerable Efra for guidance.

However, the ambiguity that Barthes (1972) associates with the mythical form is evident in the concept of the marabout figure. Despite his wise counsel to Khadijatou on how to nurture a stepdaughter, Efra proceeds to facilitate a distinction between the two half-sisters. This turned out to be a profoundly symbolic and anti-social gesture of discrimination that culminates in the complete disintegration of the sacred filial bonds that held Pateh's family together. A clear depiction of the dark, ominous side of the marabout figure, this tendency which often compels

him to abuse his power and influence in evil, unreligious, and cynical ways, constitutes a real menace for Gambian society. Countless relationships, marriages, family ties, and innocent lives have been destroyed by the dark mysticism of the marabout. Thus, parallel to the mythical figure of the evil stepmother, Efra fulfills the role of the archetypal wise old man, a mythical form signifying the ambivalent figure of the marabout as he dithers in the nature of his actions between good and evil.

The battle between good and evil and the ultimate defeat of the devil by the divine constitute the cornerstone of all social systems and are accordingly the subject of numerous myths and folk tales. The tale here is that of the villain, Lolly, versus the hero, Bai Njougoup. As a witch, Lolly is an old lady who casts evil spells to devour men who wish to marry her daughters. Bai Njougoub, born with the power to transform himself sought to save his brothers and the rest of their society from the witch's evil. He poses as the cultural hero who delivers society from the menace of a persistent malice. As for the witch, Singh (2021) explains that it is a cross-cultural figure that is portrayed in many demonising myths and narratives as the representation of evil and immorality. Believed to be in possession of dark powers, it is a portentous figure to the community, regarded as morally repugnant.

On the other hand, Njougoup is a Wolof noun that translates into English *bat*. As a linguistic sign, it comes with a certain history attached to its meaning. Thus, the heroic figure of Bai Njougoup is associated with the mythical creature of the bat. In that sense, it is possible to link the character of Bai Njougoup with the popular mythical hero of the Batman. This can be explained by a number of convergences in the narrative arc of the two characters' stories. Firstly, Bai Njougoup's resolve to make sure that the witch claims no other victims is a plausible adaptation of the Batman's dedication to fighting crime and evil. This way, Bai Njougoup gives his life to something bigger than himself and transcends the ordinary level of achievement, manifesting a typical quality of the heroic figure. Additionally, the cultural identification that associates Bai Njougoup with the mysterious creature of the bat suggests the source of his supernatural powers. It is reminiscent of the mythical belief that the Batman was initiated into his calling by the bats. In this case then, Bai Njougoup's duel with the witch can be read as a metaphorical representation of the ongoing battle between good and evil. Then, as Bai

Njougoup pushes the witch into a pit of fire, his victory is not to be deciphered merely as a moral lesson against evil tendencies. It must also be regarded as a symbolic expression of the ultimate victory of good over the inevitable conquest of evil.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to analyse Gambian myths and folk tales as traditional narratives through which cultural and moral principles, values, beliefs and customs of the society are transmitted. Employing Rolande Barthes' (1972) semiotic theory, the paper has attempted an exploration of the symbolic, metaphorical, and ideological concepts of various mythical forms contained in these narratives to unveil the moral and cultural significance that sustains them. The analysis has revealed that two main groups of mythical characters have been used as metaphorical vehicles to express a number of moral and cultural values. Animal figures such as the hare and the hyena, and human characters such as the evil stepmother, the marabout, the witch and the cultural hero have been used as symbolic vessels to raise a multitude of moral and cultural principles. As cross-cultural mythical figures, these are universal characters found playing different roles in diverse narrative forms across the world. However, these figures have been adapted to Gambian folk tales. On the first level of signification, these myths and tales utilise the linguistic system as narrative forms of storytelling. On the second level, however, the mythical characters assume symbolic meaning as metaphorical figures whose interactions within the narratives are used to preach the concepts of honesty, truthfulness, kindness, justice, fairness and equality. These moral principles function as a cultural compass guiding generations of Gambians through the conundrum of social existence.

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Structural Violence in Rwanda: An Alternative Explanation for Genocide?

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Abstract

This article outlines the contribution of structural violence to the gradual outbreak of genocide in Rwanda. It examines how such violence, albeit indirect, provided permissive grounds for the egregious events that took place. Doing so challenges the popular notion that this genocide was primarily caused by ethnic hatred. Such a characterisation oversimplifies this tragic incidence of violence. Referring to theories of political opportunity and scapegoating allows an interpretation that the manipulation of the masses by political actors caused the 1994 genocide. By negating the role of primordial ethnicity, this article illuminates how ethnicity was used by elites to apportion blame to "othered" groups, namely the Tutsi.

Key Words: Structural Violence, Genocide, Rwanda, Manipulation, Elites

Introduction

"Few tragedies can be more extensive than the stunting of life, few injustices deeper than the denial of an opportunity to strive or even to hope..." (Gould, 1981, p. 29). Gould's conception of injustice and tragedy offers itself, quite harmonisingly, to the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. In 100 days of violence, an estimated 800,000 to one million people died, mostly the Tutsi ethnic minority, at the hands of extremist Hutus. This genocide has no equivalence; it is the most intensive ethnic slaughter in modern history. While much commentary has suggested that pure ethnic hatred is to blame for the outbreak of genocide, this article contends otherwise. The Rwandan Genocide did not stem from differences in ethnicity that were benign for centuries before the entry of colonisers. The Genocide stemmed from what has been popularly coined

as “structural violence.” This type of violence is not physical, but it is not to be reified; it is an abstraction that explains how the structure and institutions of society limit opportunity for specific groups within it. It manifests through poverty, exclusion and favouritism.

This article illuminates how structural violence was a factor that caused the Rwandan Genocide. In doing so, the article does not disregard other elements that contributed to this malevolent outbreak of violence. It simply intends to show how structural violence is more salient than commonly thought. In the words of Peter Uvin, Rwandan Genocide scholar, "[s]implistic, monocausal explanations are useless here..." (Uvin, 1998, p. 3).

Lastly, the article will explain how structural violence itself is not enough to fruit genocide; political manipulation by elites must occur. This manipulation, in the case of pre-genocide Rwanda, was motivated by a desire to retain power in the face of the Arusha-accorded democratisation. Elites used ethnicity to apportion blame against the Tutsi for the poverty and exclusion that the everyday Hutu felt. These same elites transformed this Hutu indignation into a motivation for genocide.

Theories of structural violence

Structural violence refers to how the structure and institutions of society cause indirect and avoidable harm to persons (Lee, 2016). It is violence that occurs on a social level; it is to be juxtaposed with direct personal violence. Due to the fact these harms are perpetrated by the structure and institutions of society, are human-made “and because it is correctable and preventable through human agency,” there is an increasing will to call them “violence” (Lee, 2016, p. 110). In this way, structural violence is ascribed the highest levels of moral guilt. In the words of violence scholar, Bandy Lee, “[t]he harm is structural because it is a product of the way we have organized our social world; it is violent because it causes injury and death” (Lee, 2016, p. 110).

Johan Galtung first coined the concept of structural violence in his seminal 1969 article, Violence, Peace and Peace Research (Galtung, 1969). In this article, he broadly defined structural violence as “that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that which impedes the decrease of this distance” (Galtung, 1969, p. 169). Galtung uses an actual-potential dichotomy to explain that structural violence is any factor that impedes the limiting of the distance between the two.

Hence, using his conception, poverty, injustice and malnutrition count as forms of structural violence. To allow further analytic clarity, Galtung does provide limitations. He suggests that forms of structural violence ought to be avoidable through human agency. Using analogy, Galtung proposes that using structural violence in a contemporary discourse about earthquakes is illogical, but "tomorrow, when earthquakes may become avoidable, such deaths may be seen as the result of violence" (Galtung, 1969, p. 169). Hence, a key element of Galtung's conception is the idea that harms of structural violence must be avoidable.

Structural violence manifests itself in many ways, from unequal access to resources, political power, education, health care and/or legal standing. Galtung, in a later work, proposes that structural violence can manifest through the human emotions and actions of misery, repression and exploitation (Galtung, 1980). As can be seen, structural violence shows itself varyingly. However, commentators suggest the manifestation of structural violence is always linked to social injustice and mechanisms of oppression (Farmer, 2004). Furthermore, a key characteristic of structural violence is the insidiousness it possesses. As this type of violence is societal and indirect, it is not easily identifiable and typically occurs subtly. As Winter and Leighton (2001:1) stipulate, "structural violence produces suffering and death as often as direct violence does, though the damage is slower, more subtle, more common, and more difficult to repair".

This type of violence is a persistent issue because it is embedded in "ubiquitous social structures [and is] normalized by stable institutions and regular experience" (Winter and Leighton, 2001, p. 1). The regular experience that the scholars cite would not be problematic for the issues of "ethnic" conflict at hand if they did not produce resentment, deprivation and oppression. However, they do. Christie (1997) proposes that structural violence causes economic deprivation and when this occurs "the need for well-being is not satisfied, resulting in deficits in human growth and development" (p. 315). Such deficits arouse the human tendency to feel indignation. In a well-known piece of political literature, *Why Men Rebel*, Ted Robert Gurr proposes that it is this indignation (as a result of deprivation), that is a key generator of conflict (Gurr, 1970). Winter and Leighton (2001) eloquently support this idea when they stipulate that structural violence "is… dangerous because it frequently leads to direct violence; the chronically oppressed are often, for logical

reasons, those who resort to direct violence" (p. 2). This is an apt idea in the case of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide.

Theories of ethnicity

Ethnicity

Ethnicity, even more so than the concept of structural violence, has long raised academic debate about the meaning of the idea. Hence, the idea is subject to many developed and conflicting theories that each delineate their own version of the concept.

Max Weber stipulates that ethnicity refers to "those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both" (Weber, 1968, p. 368). Weber's definition portrays ethnicity as a collectivised identity that relies, primarily, upon the belief of commonality. Another scholar, Anthony Smith, posits that ethnicities have six main elements: a collective name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, differentiating elements of a common culture, an association with a homeland and a sense of solidarity for those persons similar (Smith, 1991, p. 21). Smith's typology is protean in the sense that all six elements can be changed; this will be discussed below. Abner Cohen, takes a different view of ethnicity when he states that ethnicity is "fundamentally a political phenomenon… It is a type of informal interest grouping" (Cohen, 1969, p. 4). As can be seen, Cohen takes the view that ethnicity is a way to organise for resource extraction. These conceptions mainly feed into two main theories of ethnicity: primordialism and instrumentalism.

Here we utilise the definition of Paul Brass who stipulates that ethnicity is an affinity with a particular group due to perceived commonality (Brass, 1996). The article uses this particular definition due to its inference that ethnicity is a fluid concept and relies upon a sense of shared common descent, as opposed to an immutable fact of commonality. Both of these premises are proven to be the case in Rwanda.

Primordialism

Primordialism is one of the two main theoretical foundations of ethnicity. The theory postulates that ethnicity is a characteristic that is rigid, fixed and immutable. Further, its proponents argue that ethnic conflict results from the innate differences among ethnicities. Primordialism "constitutes the layperson's view of nations and nationalism" (Ozkirimli, 2010, p. 51). In simplistic terms, primordialism

suggests "man is seen as a leopard who cannot change his ethnic spots" (McKay, 1982, p. 398).

In their seminal article, The Poverty of Primordialism, Eller and Coughlan (1993), propose three key tenets of primordialism: apriorism – ethnicity is an identity that is a given; ineffability – ethnicity is an identity that is extremely strong and overpowering; and affectivity – ethnicity is an identity that is emotional and hence is different to other identities. The main inference that can be drawn from these tenets is the notion that ethnicity is an overarching, biologically defined and hence exclusive type of identity. It differs from identities of nationality and gender, which are highly fluid and malleable concepts.

Clifford Geertz, one of the main proponents of this school of thought, laid the theoretical framework upon which primordialism was developed. He stipulates his conception of the theory: one is

> bound to one's kinsman, one's neighbour, one's fellow believer, ipso facto; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself (Geertz, 1963, p. 42).

For Geertz, the primordial nature of ethnicity is explained without reference to the extrinsic factors of necessity and interest. Ethnicity goes beyond an aggregation for political mobilisation; it is, simply, a biological connection. Geertz's explains that the process of modernisation heightens ethnic self-awareness; "during the disorienting process of modernization… unintegrated citizens… will grab hold of an increasingly anachronistic ethnic identity" (Geertz, 1998, p. 14). It is this deep-rooted nature of ethnicity that gives it the propensity to spark violence. As Sambanis (2001) posits, primordial ethnic conflict "is rooted in old sources of enmity and memories of past atrocities that make violence hard to avoid" (p. 263).

Instrumentalism

Instrumentalism offers itself to a more recent conception of ethnicity. It stipulates that ethnicity is used as a tool by political elites. Hence, in this theory, ethnicity is a characteristic that is fluid, can be manipulated and is based upon a sense of commonality one person has with another.

Anthony Smith's typology of ethnicity, summarised above, is an instrumentalist one. As noted, the elements that Smith proposes are easily altered and manipulable. The ancestral myths that Smith references can "be revised, reinterpreted, or abandoned. Historical memory, language, culinary taste, forms of artistic expression – all are highly mutable" (Jones, 2010, p. 293). Hence, prima facie, it is not hard to see the malleable nature of ethnic characteristics. This is especially the case when there is a strong reasoning behind the elite manipulation of ethnicity. As Ted Robert Gurr proposes, ethnicity is not more salient than other identities unless "entrepreneurial political leaders" need it to be so (Gurr, 1994, p. 348).

While primordialism has three key tenets, it is arguable that instrumentalism has one: the ability of ethnicity to be manipulated by elites. It is apt to note that ethnicity can disappear from the public narrative when it is no longer expedient to political elites (Joireman, 2004). This ability lends itself towards the notion that the manipulation of ethnicity can occur and stop when desired. Horowitz proposes that it is "organizations, often tied to ethnically based political parties, [which] reflect and reinforce interethnic hostility through propaganda, ritual, and force" (Horowitz, 2001, p. 243). This sentiment explains the ascriptive power that elites have when it comes to defining ethnicity and the saliency of this ethnicity to a person or particular group (Nagel, 1986). It is the premise of instrumentalism to suggest that "ethnic" conflicts themselves "are typically not really "ethnic" at all… [they] are motivated by economic or criminal disputes but are later reinterpreted as having been ethnically motivated for political purposes" (Brass, 1997, p. 93).

The prelude to genocide

As a United Nations official quipped, "[e]very "serious" study of Rwanda ... begins by giving the ethnic composition of the population (84 per cent Hutu, 15 per cent Tutsi and 1 per cent Twa)" (Rahnema, 1962, p. 4). Many contemporary discussions of Rwanda exclude the most consequential ethnic group in Rwanda preceding the genocide: the Umuzungu ("the White person"). This is important to note, as it was this ethnic group that constituted the apex elites in pre-genocide Rwanda and made the political distinctions among ethnic groups more pronounced.

Ethnicity in Rwanda proves to be an interesting case of social fluidity. Commentators suggest that it "is hard even to describe them as distinct ethnicities, since they share the same language, territory and

religion" (Jones, 2010, p. 4). Typically, in regard to ethnicity, there is some cleaving factor such as those suggested in the previous section. However, the absence of such factors makes Rwanda an interesting case of instrumentalist thought. Uvin (1998) suggests that occupation determined the social entrance to the groups that would eventually constitute these ethnicities: "whoever acquired a sizable herd of cattle was called Tutsi and was highly considered, farmers were Hutu, and hunters and artisans were Twa" (p. 13). Hence, there is a basis in malleable human agency (due to occupation) as opposed to biological and non-protean links that formulate these ethnic groups. This runs in the face of primordialism. This is further proved to be the case considering the non-rigid nature of ethnicity in Rwanda. Mamdani (2001: 51) stipulates:

> [t]he rare Hutu who was able to accumulate cattle and rise through the socioeconomic hierarchy could *kwihutura* – shed Hutuness – and achieve the political status of a Tutsi. Conversely, the loss of property could also lead to the loss of status, summed up in the Kinyarwanda word *gucupira*.

The presence of such channels of social and "ethnic" mobility again, negate the propositions that ethnicity is an a priori identity and is fixed for life. This article proposes that ethnicity in Rwanda served the function of being a grouping which was "was gradually transformed into a racial distinction that shaped ethnic identity" (Jones, 2010, p 235).

While academic opinion seems to provide the qualification for stating ethnicity in Rwanda was malleable, what provides political consequences on the ground is the perception of the populace of Rwanda. There was the view that ethnicity was built upon primordial grounds, in pre-genocide Rwanda. Maquet (1961) claims, when asking if a Hutu boy brought up with Tutsis could develop Tutsi characteristics, that both Hutu and Tutsi "informants answer that such a training could change the boy to some extent, but not completely; the differences pertain to nature" (p. 164). Such a view of ethnicity is primordial. Popular discourse about ethnicity in pre-genocide Rwanda proposed that "Tutsi were said to be intelligent… capable of command, refined, courageous, and cruel; Hutu, hardworking, not very clever, extrovert, irascible, unmannerly, obedient" (Maquet, 1961, p. 146-7, 164). With such a perception, promulgated by elites, within the populace, it is not hard to see how "ethnic" differentiation resulted.

Manifestations of structural violence in pre-genocide Rwanda

Structural violence manifested itself numerous ways in pre-genocide Rwanda. Oxfam (1996) notes that "poverty, the politics of exclusion, the denial of basic rights and economic exclusion are all facets of a problem that has frequently erupted into bloody conflict" (p. 5). This typifies much of what caused the Rwandan genocide. Khan (1978) notes four typologies of violence: (a) classical, or direct, violence; (b) poverty—deprivation of basic material needs; (c) repression—deprivation of human rights; (d) alienation— deprivation of higher needs. All four of these elements were present in pre-genocide Rwanda, with the last three being structural in nature. The latter two constituted the main variations of structural violence in pre-genocide Rwanda.

Agrarianism, and the issues associated with it, were a form of structural violence perpetrated against the Rwandan people. A United Nations report suggested that 26% of the population was landless due to elites buying up all available land (United Nations, 1991). These elites consisted of military officers and party officials of the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (MRND), which "prompt[ed] many to speak of Rwanda's elite as a 'military-merchant' class" (Taylor, 1999, p. 47). Such economic exclusion targeted mainly the rural Hutu as many Tutsi, not all, were urbanised. Lemarchand (1970) explains that the Hutu were in an "exceedingly circumscribed position" whereby the word "Hutu" "tended to become almost interchangeable with 'peasantry'" (pp. 95, 93). These Hutu found themselves in highly dyadic relationships with the land-owning elites, typically owing to them free labour for shelter on their land. As could be expected, many Rwandans were "extremely unhappy with the accumulation of land by the privileged of the regime and the constitution of large pastoral domains" (Erny, 1994, p. 80). However, for those Rwandans lucky enough to own land, this land was woefully inadequate to provide for them and their families; "Rwandan farms are quite small, just a little over two acres on average, whereas the typical Rwandan household consists of about nine people" (Taylor, 1999, p. 35). Due to elites aggregating land and hence lessening the amount available for the population at large, 43% of the population lacked the minimum land needed for survival and lived in chronic undernutrition (United Nations, 1991, p. 29).

An obvious impact, as alluded to above, of the agrarian system in Rwanda, is the malnutrition that the everyday Rwandan felt. Kimonyo (2015) finds that between "1964 and 1966, Rwandans on average received only 73 percent of the minimum required calories" (p. 37). However, closer to the outbreak of genocide, due to Habyarimana's self-sufficiency-orientated policies, malnutrition increased. Uvin (1998) shows that "over the period 1984–1991, kcal. produced by Rwandan farmers dropped from 2,055 per person per day to 1,509" (p. 54). When such calories are divided among a family, the provision assigned is pitiful. This was much the case preceding the genocide, whereby an estimated 50% of the population was considered malnourished (Brasseur, Govens & Vis, 1994). Furthermore, the lack of economic diversification in Rwanda rendered the population more susceptible to issues associated with excessive rainfall, failure of crops and high exports. The impact of the 1988 harvest failures preceding the genocide was particularly severe, as "authorities had banned all food imports that year; 1988 being Rwanda's "Année de l'Autosuffisance"" (Pottier, 1993, pp. 6 & 15). The lack of economic opportunities and the exacerbation of these issues of malnutrition are forms of structural violence as they result from governmental desires of self-sufficiency promoted through the structure and institutions of society.

Considering that 95% of the population gained livelihood through agriculture, any economic changes in regard to the international fluctuation of coffee prices (coffee being the main export crop), would be dire (Taylor, 1999). This is exactly what occurred in the years preceding the genocide, when coffee prices decreased internationally. This decrease led to the Rwandan Franc being devalued by 40% during the late 80s and the early 90s (Christian, 1997, p. 466). Mass economic upheaval that left the elites unscathed, but the majority of the populace in dire straits, resulted. Rwanda's economy could have been more diversified and provided a greater breadth of economic opportunities to its people, but there was an ideological focus on agrarianism. Verwimp (2013) proposes Rwanda "was a Peasant-State in which Habyarimana, the Father of the Nation, assumed the task of government in order for the peasants to devote themselves completely to food cultivation" (p.8). He had an anti-intellectual and anti-urban bias which he utilised to make the breadth of economic opportunities in Rwanda reductive. Herein lies a key characteristic of structural violence: lack of opportunity.

While in the aforementioned cases, lack of opportunity fruited from governmental policy, the same can result from corruption. In an empirical study of pre-genocide Rwandan elites, Reyntjens (1994) found that more than a third "of the eighty-five most important government positions… [and] functions in the army and the security apparatus, were held by people… [from] the president's native province" (p. 33). This clear example of nepotism alienates people from attaining a high living standard for themselves. Again, this is a key element of structural violence. Corruption did not solely affect employment opportunities, however. The akazu (the informal elite body of Rwanda) were involved in "standard manipulation of access to assets that could be distributed by the state as well as a highly effective harvesting of international aid flows" (Cramer, 2003, p. 407). Hence, money accorded to social services by the international community, was misappropriated for personal use. This is another example of the organs of the state perpetrating structural violence against its populace.

Forms of governance can also constitute structural violence. It is obvious that the preferential treatment that the Belgians accorded the Tutsi was structurally violent. However, this was only the beginning of such violence. Under the Tutsi monarch Mwami Kigeri Rwabugiri, obligations of corvée (unpaid hard labour) was placed solely on Hutu, "thereby polarizing the social difference between Hutu and Tutsi" (Mamdani, 2001, p. 66). Further obligations of corvée were placed upon poor families which could not pay for land rent. Hence, "two out of every five days, a family had to provide manual labour on the lands owned by the chiefs" (Kimonyo, 2015, p. 15). As such, many ruralised persons were caught in a trap of bonded labour whereby their "debt" would not be paid off, even after generations of free labour in conjunction with compulsory government mandated corvée. To extend this, while the populace had to provide manual labour, they also had a high tax burden they needed to overcome. Taxes were applied to coffee sales/exports, cattle, heath services, schooling, water and the compulsory MRND fee (Verwimp, 2013, p. 70). There was no discrimination on who had to pay these fees – both Hutu and Tutsi alike had to. Furthermore, for those persons engaged in subsistence agriculture and who seasonally produced excess, there was an extra burden to selling this off. Person to person trade was highly regulated; travel permits and trading licences were required "even for those wishing to sell a basket of vegetables" (World Bank, 1994, viii). Hence, even when there was an opportunity to make extra income for a

family, the populace of Rwanda, was structurally precluded from doing so.

Structural violence manifested itself through poverty and economic inequality, also. According the Rwandan Government figures, in 1986, the lowest paid 49% of all salaried people earned 7.6% of total salary mass while the best-paid 1.1% earned 27.8% of total salary mass (Ministry of Planning, 1988). Such a disparity is not due to consequence, but due to governmental design and hence, is structurally violent. In the years preceding the genocide, the "incidence of poverty in Rwanda greatly increased, from 40 percent in 1985 to 53 percent in 1992" (World Bank, 1994, p. 10). Being in a situation of poverty has many results; a lack of education, a lack of job opportunities and the development of hopelessness. Rwandans wanted to attain a higher standard of living but were structurally excluded from doing so. Development agencies and policies did not seem to help either. Observers have noted how development in Rwanda infantilised impoverished persons, depriving them of their self-respect and agency (Hancock, 1989). Uvin (1998:137) sums up the position of pre-genocide Rwandans eloquently:

> [f]or most of us, it is hard to imagine how tense and frustration-ridden a society must be when every day the large majority of the population is shown the lifestyle of the "developed" and exhorted to achieve it but is at the same time structurally excluded from this "good life," with very little chance of achieving it.

Theories of manipulation: scapegoat and economic/political opportunity

It is evident that the Rwandan Genocide was caused by the manipulation of ethnicity, not ethnicity itself. Uvin (1998) stipulates that at the time of the genocide, 80% of the population had been born after independence, and hence before Tutsi rule. What follows is that majority of the population had personally never known Tutsi rule. It was a symbiosis of propaganda, elite-directed hatred and scapegoating that lead to the violence that fruited via genocide.

Scapegoat theory is one that explains how and why manipulation of an ethnic identity occurs to deflect the blame for governmental shortcomings and challenges to popular sovereignty. For scapegoating to occur, Kuper (1981) proposes that three elements are important: identifiability, vulnerability and an ability to defend oneself and exact

reprisals. As aforementioned, while ethnicity was a highly fluid concept, everyday Hutus used socio-economic positions, their knowledge of ethnic enclaves and pseudoscientific evidence to "identify" the Tutsi. The Tutsi, devoid of all political, social and economic power, were in an extremely compromising and vulnerable position in pre-genocide Rwanda. Due to the Tutsis' bases of military force being based outside Rwanda, there was a low ability to exact reprisals (although the RPF eventually did) and defend themselves. Hence, using Kuper's conception of scapegoating, the Tutsi were highly likely to be put into such a position by Hutu political elites. This is especially so, when considering the political challenges towards Hutu governmental power in the wake of the Arusha Accords.

As alluded to above, a main element of scapegoating is its elite-directed nature. Horowitz (1976) proposes that when "ruling elites decide that their continuation in power transcends all other economic and social values, at that point does the possibility, if not the necessity, for genocide increase qualitatively" (pp. 38-39). For Rwanda, political power was at stake from many sides and hence, the akazu elites had strong motivation to scapegoat. Firstly, the Arusha Peace Accords promised democratisation of the country with elections (which would include the RPF) being undertaken. The accords also outlined the RPF would have a total of five seats out of 21 in the cabinet and 11 seats out of 70 in the transitional national assembly which would essentially put it on par with the ruling MNRD party. Further to this, 40% of the troops of the Rwandan Army and 50% of the officer corps were to be constituted of RPF elements (Lemarchand, 1995, p. 9). Hence, there was a large scope of change to be enacted should the Accords be imposed and possibly later, the RPF voted into power. Preceding the genocide, coffee prices had dropped, and this caused large scale economic and social crises, considering it was the cash crop of choice (Hintjens, 1999). Famine, poverty and aggression where all exacerbated and anger at the government increased. As Jones (2010) posits, genocide against the Tutsi "would simultaneously eliminate the perceived constituency for the RPF; resolve the economic crisis through distribution of Tutsi land, wealth, and jobs; and bind the Hutu majority in genocidal complicity" (p. 237). Elites used existing channels of prejudice based upon ethnicity, via propaganda, popular discontent and scaremongering, to scapegoat a particular group. As Mueller (2000) notes, ethnicity is seldom a motivating factor of genocide, but "an ordering device or principle [upon which politicians organise their campaigns]" (p. 42).

The effectiveness of scapegoating refers to the fact that it benefits those elites who perpetrate it, along with the circumscribed masses who were looking for a group to blame for their circumstances. Uvin (1998) suggests, for many people, "hatred of 'the other' served to combat the low self-esteem caused by chronic unemployment and squelched aspirations (p. 137). For the everyday Hutu, a lack of opportunity and generational poverty had led to historical trauma and belief in the defect of oneself. Scapegoating and prejudice limit the impact of these effects. Simpson and Yinger (1953) suggest "a person who is brought up in a culture that is rich with traditions of prejudice... and who is insecure or frustrated will have a high probability for prejudice" (p. 51). The everyday Hutu, distraught at the situation they found themselves in, angry and devoid of any undertaking to put their efforts towards, had a high propensity to prejudice. However, while prejudice has its behavioural benefits, the same can be said for scapegoating. Staub (1990) proposes that scapegoating allows for "renewed comprehension of the world, hope, and feelings of purpose" (p. 137). Hence, it is not surprising why such a political strategy was well received by the population. The population was actively seeking out coping strategies that eventually manifested via scapegoating.

Scapegoating as a strategy for the political elite in pre-genocide Rwanda was supposed to be a successful one. However, Kuper's last element - of an ability to exact reprisals - became more salient as the RPF invaded and took control of the country. Hence, losing control of the country was an unexpected result for the Hutu extremists. In the past when they employed the strategy, "mass anti-Tutsi campaigns were orchestrated," and popular sovereignty restored (Uvin, 1997, p. 101).

Scapegoating did not stand alone in genocidal Rwanda. It provided the conditions for the political and economic opportunity theories to fruit. Fanon (1963: 61) unknowing forwards this theory when he suggests that the peasants

> alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The starving peasant, outside the class system, is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays. For him there is no compromise, no coming to terms.

Such a theory posits that genocide is viewed as such: "potential rebels evaluate their expected gains from war, given their grievances, and compare these… gains with the expected losses, which include… the cost of forgoing productive economic and political activity" (Sambanis, 2001, p. 264). For the majority of Hutu, being in control of political power did not produce any efficacious outcomes for them. Furthermore, many, if not most, Hutu were unemployed or undertook subsistence agriculture. Hence, the cost of forgoing this employment activity was negligible for them.

The conditions of structural violence that the everyday Rwandan found themselves in only exacerbated the violence of the genocide. Straus (2006) suggests that "many Rwandans had few life chances. There were land shortages. Many young people faced a future with little prospect for employment, so Hutus lashed out" (p. 37). While many Hutu people were reluctant to join the genocide at first, many were allured by incentives and the large-scale looting of Tutsi resources (des Forges, 1999). This was only the case as the genocide was a dispossessive one; a genocide "which, by design or by consequence, have the effect of stripping large groups of people of their possessions, their homes or their way of life" (Valentino, 2000, p. 30). The nature of this genocide allowed for Hutu to be attracted into the killing as food, land and money were promised to them.

Of the perpetrators of the genocide, 77.6% were farmers with little hope after the coffee price drop (Straus, 2006). The other perpetrators were generally peasants, drifters or the unemployed, motivated by the economic gains the genocide could offer (Mueller, 2000). Friedman (2010) found that participation in the genocide was "associated with greater education among Hutu, and lower employment among Hutu" (p. 3). As is typically the case, more education equates to more expectations and hence, in the absence of opportunity, it likely to lead to violence. Such a proposition is supported by the notion that those Rwandans (either Hutu or Tutsi) who were educated and urbanised (and thus likely to have employment) were more likely to die in the genocide than any other sub-grouping (Walque & Verwimp, 2010). Prunier (1997: 231-32) sums the ethos of this section up nicely:

> For these [genocide perpetrators] the genocide was the best thing that could ever happen to them. They had the blessings of a form of authority to take revenge on socially powerful

> people as long as these [victims] were on the wrong side of the political fence. They could steal, they could kill with minimum justification, they could rape and they could get drunk for free. This was wonderful.

Conclusion

The Rwandan Genocide of 1994 is often known as an "ethnic frenzy". The layman believes it resulted purely from ancient hatreds between immutable ethnicities. This article proposes such a view is an oversimplification of this conflict and that it is, indeed, wrong.

The article negates the underlying ethos of primordialism; conflict results purely due to ethnic differences. There are many reasons to suggest why this is not true. Some 80% of the pre-genocide population had never lived under Tutsi rule and hence, only ever knew of their oppression by Tutsi, due to Hutu political extremists. There were tales of Hutu persons paying the ultimate price in solidarity for their Tutsi relatives, neighbours and friends; "[t]here are many, many cases of Hutus who died to protect Tutsis" (African Rights, 1995, p. 590). If ethnicity is primordial in the sense it is ineffable and overpowering, such actions would not have occurred.

Scapegoating and the resulting opportunism had been used as a strategy in the past when political power was challenged; "in crisis times, it did provide a tool that could be activated to discriminate against Tutsi" (Uvin, 1997, p. 101). The notion of "ethnic conflict" only erupting at times of challenge to popular elite sovereignty should speak to the curated and instrumental nature of ethnicity in Rwanda. It was the years of structural violence that was perpetrated against the Rwandan people that led to the elite-need to scapegoat and resultantly, cause a genocide. Hence, this article is unequivocal in the proposition that this genocide was a calculated political opportunity, not an ethnic frenzy.

Genocide is a crime marked by its viciousness and extent. The Rwandan Genocide proves to be the most apt case in point. Structural violence is not atypical. The vicious and pernicious nature of such violence rears its ugly head across countries globally. Thus, there needs to be a concerted effort to confront the often tough realities that produce this violence. It is a moral indignity not to do so. Development, on the terms of the people who it affects, is the only answer to the systematic and seemingly perennial *problematique* of "ethnic" conflict. However, such action will only occur if history records the correct formulation of

sparking of genocide. As Hintjens (1999: 241) notes, "[l]etting their [victims] deaths go unrecorded… distorted by propaganda, or misunderstood through simple cliché's, would in fact bring the last touch to the killers' work…".

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Barriers Encountered by African Refugee Youth as they Integrate into the Australian Labour-market: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

This review explores the barriers faced by African refugee youth as they integrate into the Australian labour-market. The number of young refugees from African countries is steadily growing in Australia, yet the obstacles they encounter in the Australia labour market remain under-researched. Utilising a systematic review, we explored the barriers that impede their integration. Data analysis included 13 articles that met the inclusion criteria. Findings indicate that African refugee youth face an array of challenges including a lack of Australian work experience, racial discrimination, a lack of strong connections and social networks, and psychological and mental health problems. African refugee youth may however play an important role in addressing labour and skills shortages in Australia especially during the post-Covid-19 recovery era. Policymakers and service providers should develop holistic interventions to actively support African refugee youth to integrate into the Australian labour-market.

Key words: Australian labour-market; Integration, Employment; African refugee youth; racial discrimination; mental health problems

Introduction

A refugee is defined as a person who has fled war, conflict, violence, or persecution and managed to cross an international border into another country to seek safety (UNHCR, 2020), and Australia is a destination for many. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023), 30.7 percent of Australia's population was born overseas, and since the early 1980s Australia has resettled thousands of refugees from countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe (Molla, 2021). Among those who have been resettled in Australia is a sizable proportion of African refugee youth (Ziaian et al., 2019). Young people from African refugee backgrounds are among the most disadvantaged cohorts of people in many countries. Most of these young people have fled war and persecution from their home countries in search of a better life in resettlement areas (Baker et al., 2021). One area in which young people from African refugee backgrounds struggle within their new environments is finding employment (Ziersch et al., 2023). Employment is significant for African refugee youth and failure to integrate successfully into the labour-market result in financial instability (Thern et al., 2017). Unemployment can also cause massive impacts on the mental wellbeing of African refugee youth including anxiety about the future, depression, despair, and stress (Abur and Mphande, 2020). People of African origins are already facing many challenges in life, for example racial discrimination and racial profiling, and failure to secure employment exacerbates the obstacles that African refugee youth encounter and disempowers them in almost all aspects of life (Udah et al., 2019).

Research and scholarly interest in the participation of African refugee youth in high school and higher education has grown (Molla, 2020; Naidoo, 2019). However, little research focuses on the challenges that impede African refugee youth from finding employment (Curry et al., 2018; Kuzhabekova and Nardon, 2021). While the successful integration into the labour-market remains significant for African refugee youth to realise their aspirations, only a few studies have explored this area. For example, Baker et al. (2021) argues that despite the increased focus on the integration of African refugee youth into higher education in Australia little is known about their integration into the labour-market. Less attention is given to how African refugee youth integrate into the Australian labour-market; available scant research has focused on the experiences of the adult population (Patulny, 2015). There is a huge

silence in the current literature about what happens to African refugee youth when they complete education and seek employment, let alone professional employment commensurate with their qualifications (Baker et al., 2021).

Literature shows that African refugee youth face higher rates of unemployment than the general youth population (Beadle, 2014, Abkhezr et al., 2015). The integration of African refugee youth into employment is associated with some unique challenges compared to the workforce integration of other university graduates (Kuzhabekova and Nardon, 2021), and it is important to understand those challenges. A comprehensive understanding may inform policy makers and service providers about the barriers and so this article addresses the question: what obstacles impede the integration of African refugee youth into the Australian labour-market? We draw from a systematic review of the existing literature, and regard Australia as a suitable typical case for research of this nature. Not only is the number of African refugee youth growing: there is also a growing body of literature indicating poorer working conditions for African refugees generally, compared with native-born workers in Australia (Beadle, 2014; Cain et al., 202; Curry et al., 2018). There are many reasons for this, including segregation into niche occupations and industries (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007), non-recognition of prior educational qualifications (McMaster, 2001), lack of social networks to assist in finding employment, and poorer English language proficiency (Curry et al., 2018), as well as the sending home of remittances which necessitates risk taking and working in survival jobs (Reid et al., 2014).

Background

As of 30 June 2023, Australia's population included 8.2 million people who were born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). The proportion of Australia's population born overseas increased to 30.7 per cent in 2023 (up from 29.5 per cent in 2022) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). In addition, Australia's African-born population is now over half a million and has more than doubled over the last 20 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). By comparison, Australia's overall population has risen by 35 per cent or 6.9 million at the same time (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). In 2020, an estimated 3.2 million young people aged 15-24 lived in Australia, making up 12 per cent of the whole population (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021).

These figures also include a sizable proportion of young people of African origin (Ziaian et al., 2019). There is non-linearity in how African refugees integrate into employment in Australia (i.e., any type of employment) due to a variety of factors, including cultural differences, English language difficulties, and past-traumatic events experienced during displacement (Baker et al., 2021). Often, an individual is considered to be integrated into the labour-market when that person is part of a formal employment relationship (Felbo-Kolding, 2018). A formal employment relationship exists when a person performs a job under a certain set of conditions in return for remuneration. In line with this definition, African refugee youth who are outside of employment are not integrated into the labour-market (Felbo-Kolding, 2018).

Australian literature shows that employment outcomes for refugees of all ages are poor, especially through the early settlement period (Kellock, 2016). The literature also indicates that humanitarian entrants are more susceptible to being unemployed even after five years of settlement (Kellock, 2016). They are often under-employed, lowly-paid, in low-skilled and precarious employment (Webb et al., 2021). In the previous decade, African and Middle Eastern refugee groups in Australia were exposed to the government's effort to relocate immigrants to rural regions with guaranteed jobs (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006). These are insecure and poorly paid jobs like farm and abattoir work (Kellock, 2016).

The process of getting into employment is determined by several factors, one of which is a lack of knowledge of the host country's labour-market and employment norms (Kuzhabekova and Nardon, 2021, Centre for Multicultural Youth Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, 2008). Understanding the local labour-market is essential for knowing better employment opportunities and locating vacancies (Dunwoodie et al., 2021). Young African refugees are often unfamiliar with the new environment, and this disadvantage is compounded by their dependence on family members, who may also lack knowledge about employment opportunities in Australia (Lauer et al., 2012). Due to these difficulties, young African refugees are forced to work in precarious jobs.

Unemployment at the start of a career exposes vulnerable young African refugees to a high level of uncertainty, which can lead to serious mental health problems as well as feelings of rejection and hopelessness (Ziersch et al., 2023). For example, the Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA) longitudinal study discovered high levels of psychological

distress among all young people aged 18 and above, with 31 percent of young men and 37 percent of young women classified as having moderate or high psychological distress at Wave one of data collection (Rioseco and Liddy, 2018). This is significantly higher than the general population proportions of moderate or high psychological distress, that is 5 percent of males and 12 percent of females aged 16 to 25 years. This statistic shows how unemployment and job-search related difficulties affect young people in general before unique vectors of disadvantage such as race are added. The literature shows that unemployment at a younger age has long term effects on a person's career prospects, both in terms of the likelihood of future unemployment (Helgesson et al., 2014) and future diminished income (Laurijssen and Glorieux, 2015). Despite challenges in securing employment, African refugee youth prioritise employment because it opens doors for successful resettlement and social inclusion (Beadle, 2014, Streitwieser et al., 2019).

The literature suggests that Australia has the problem of a segmented labour market, where racially and culturally visible migrants are allocated the bottom jobs regardless of their human capital (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006). A segmented labour-market is one whereby social and institutional forces reduce opportunities for certain social groups like refugees and women and relegate them to the second division (jobs that pay low wages) of the labour-market (Flatau & Lewis, 1993). In Australia, labour-market segmentation negatively impacts immigrants from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, who at the same time come from economically and culturally distant countries (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006). Others have pointed to the labour-market disadvantage of CALD as a result of the competitive labour-market being blind to ethnicity and the inescapable loss of human capital in the process of migration, frequently associated with the lack of English proficiency (McAllister, 1995). However, others consider it as primarily owing to ethnic and racial discrimination leading to the segmented labour-market, which is favourable to the capitalist economy at a societal level as well as for individual employers, because it offers a constant supply of cheap labour ready to take on the bottom jobs (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; Howe et al., 2020).

Inexperienced African refugee youth, particularly those with low educational backgrounds, are often disproportionately represented in situations characterised by poor labour-market integration (Kang, 2021; Bellani, 2020). Young African refugee graduates face challenges in the

labor-market, including stiff competition, family responsibilities, and discrimination (Reyneri and Fullin, 2011). Struffolino and Borgna (2021) suggest that young African refugees often transition into part-time jobs during their first job, which often lack benefits like health insurance and sick leave (Bellani, 2020). Several studies have argued that moving into employment has now become a complicated process for young people (Furlong, 2006, Baker et al., 2021). The complexity is seen in the employment experiences of African refugee youth which are no longer individualised because of the impact of institutional policies and structural factors like race (Brzinsky-Fay, 2015).

Research design and Methodology

Research question: This systematic review was conducted to assess existing research on the barriers faced by African refugee youth when integrating into the Australian labour-market. Our research question was "What obstacles impede the integration of African refugee youth into the Australian labour-market?"

Identification of relevant studies: The identification of relevant peer-reviewed articles was conducted in two steps. *Search 1* was conducted in two databases, Scopus and Web of Science, and S*earch 2* on Google Scholar. Search terms were used in each data base to locate relevant articles were: "African refugee youth" OR "Refugee-background African youth" OR "Refugee youth from African backgrounds" OR "Refugee youth" AND "Labour-market" or "Job" or "Work" or "Career" or "Occupation" or "Employment" or "hire" AND "Barriers" OR "challenges" OR "obstacles" OR "Experiences" AND "Australia". The search was first conducted on 10 September 2023 and repeated on 10 June 2024 after ten months. The reason for repeating the search in the databases was to look for papers that had recently been published so that their findings could be included in this systematic review.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria: The research articles that met the inclusion criteria were original peer-reviewed papers found in the databases as above. The focus of the selected papers was on the barriers that impede the integration of African refugee youth into the Australian labour-market. We included only peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2007 and 2024, written in the English language and studies located in Australia. The search was limited to the most recent 17 years because studies on the labour-market integration of African refugee youth in Australia are scanty and still emerging. Both papers that used the

qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methodologies were included in this paper to gain a comprehensive understanding of the evidence published so far on this topic. Studies on African refugee youth participation in high school were not included as the focus of the paper was mainly on the obstacles African refugee youth encounter post-higher education.

Selection process: Search 1 returned 174 articles and after screening the titles and removing the duplicates, a total of 44 articles remained. Abstracts were then reviewed based on the exclusion and inclusion criteria and 22 articles were removed, leaving 22 articles for a full-text review. Following that, 12 articles were excluded as they did not fully address the research question. Thus ten (10) articles from search 1 were selected for thematic analysis. Search 2 returned a total of 857 articles. Fifty-three (53) articles remained after title and abstract screening and the removal of duplicates. The remaining 53 articles were further reviewed by applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, leaving a total of 3 articles to be included in this systematic review. The PRISMA diagram (Figure 1) highlights the process.

Results: A total of 13 eligible articles that met the selection criteria for this review were included for analysis from both searches. Methodologically, most articles (n= 7) used a qualitative approach. One article used a quantitative approach (n=1) and four (n=4) used mixed methods (n=4). One article was a literature review (n=1). The authors included literature reviews due to the scarcity of literature on the barriers that impede the integration of African refugee youth into the Australian labour-market.

Analysis: Thematic analysis was used as a framework to analyse the 13 articles included for synthesis. We followed Braun and Clarke's six steps of conducting thematic analysis, that is: familiarisation with data, generation of initial codes, search for themes, review of themes, the definition of themes, and writing (2006).

Limitations of the study: We acknowledge that there are methodological limitations to systematic reviews. There is a probability that the review has not identified all the relevant articles due to the terminology and search criteria utilised. Since the review included only peer-reviewed, academic articles, relevant policy documents and commissioned report may have been excluded.

Figure 1: PRISMA diagram

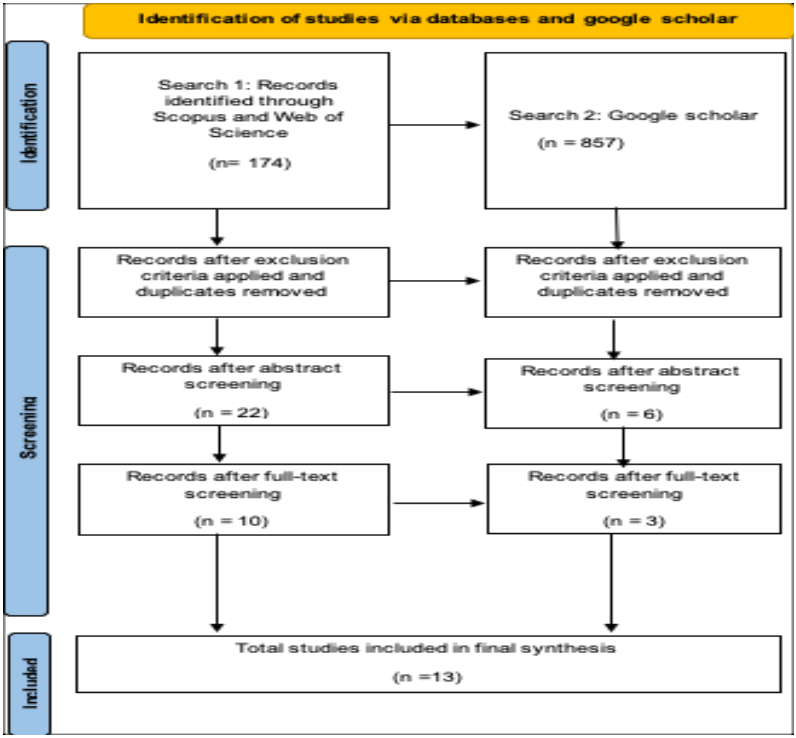

Figure 2: Study characteristics of the included articles

Study	Description	Design	Population	Setting	Key findings
Udah et al. (2019)	The study focused on the economic integration of black African immigrants in South-east Queensland, Australia. The article discusses the employment experiences and perspectives of black African immigrants in Australia's labour-market, as well as the barriers preventing successful labour-market integration.	Qualitative	Black African immigrants (n=30)	Australia	Black African immigrants in South-east Queensland face several challenges to a successful labour-market integration, such as prejudice, the rejection of foreign qualifications, and a lack of knowledge and networks. Employment is significant in the settling and integration processes of black African immigrants as it impacts their socio-economic well-being and sense of identity and belongingness.

Colic-Peisker, and Tilbury (2007)	The research article examines the employment and integration experiences of refugees from Sudan, Bosnia, Afghanistan in Australia.	Qualitative	Refugees from Sudan, Bosnia, and Afghanistan (66)	Australia	Due to their physical characteristics and cultural heritage, refugees in Australia from countries like Sudan, Afghanistan, and Bosnia confront substantial difficulties in obtaining jobs and integrating into the workforce. The successful integration of refugees into the labour-market is made easier by factors such as language proficiency, cultural familiarity, and social networks. The significant obstacles to refugees' integration into the Australian labour-market include racism and discrimination.
Baker et al. (2021)	The paper explores various challenges that culturally and linguistically diverse migrants and refugees experience when transitioning from education to employment in settlement settings by examining the available literature on the subject.	Literature review	Literature Review (n=110)	Australia	Culturally and linguistically diverse migrants and refugees face many hurdles in transitioning from education to employment in settlement environments. Language barriers, discrimination and racism, a lack of recognition of overseas degrees, and a lack of social networks are among the challenges that they face. Effective policies and programmes that address these challenges may enhance the employment outcomes of culturally and linguistically diverse migrants and refugees.

Ziersch et al. (2023)	The article explored the impact of job seeking and employment experiences on the health of refugee women in Australia, highlighting the difficulties refugee women endure in finding employment, the adverse impacts of unemployment on mental health, and the negative effect of poor working conditions on both mental and physical health.	Qualitative	Refugee Women (n=42)	Australia	Refugee women encounter great difficulties in finding employment in Australia. Employment could increase happiness by providing a feeling of identity and contribution, as well as through expanding social networks. Unemployment has devastating consequences on the mental health of female refugees. Also, employed refugees were working under risky conditions, which impacted their physical and mental health. In addition, women were shy and hesitant to complain about bad working conditions, claiming a lack of understanding of processes, fear of losing their jobs, and concerns about the implications for their legal status.
Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007)	The paper examined Australia's refugee resettlement programme and employment assistance for migrants and refugees from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, with a focus on the impact of visible difference on employment outcomes for recently	Mixed methods	Refugees from middle east, ex-Yugoslavia, and Africa (n=150)	Australia	There are high unemployment rates among skilled refugees. In the job market, refugees are at a structural disadvantage due to things like qualifications that are partially or completely ignored and a lack of readily available references. Unfulfilling employment outcomes are a result of racial, religious, and ethnic background discrimination. Soft skills such as awareness of Australian culture are used as grounds for discrimination by employers. Daily public racism has less of an

	arrived refugees in Western Australia.				impact on life satisfaction than perceived discrimination in the workplace.
Curry et al. (2018)	Understanding the factors that contribute to the successful resettlement of refugees in rural New South Wales, Australia, and what could be done to ensure successful resettlement	Qualitative	Refugee adults (n=9)	Australia	Access to employment and education, social support, and feeling secure in their new community were all cited as attributes that led to successful resettlement by refugee respondents. Racism and English language problems were mentioned as the primary obstacles towards successful resettlement. Policymakers need to consider the distinctive experiences and needs of refugees in regional locations when formulating resettlement policies and programmes. Community-based support services and programmes are momentous in supporting successful refugee resettlement in regional locations.
Hebbani and Khawaja (2019)	The goal of the article was to understand the employment-related ambitions of former refugees from Myanmar, Ethiopia, and Democratic Republic of Congo resettled in Australia,	Mixed methods	Refugee adults (n=222)	Australia	Refugees were unable to find their desired jobs because of lacking the knowledge of how to search for employment, their limited English language, and the poor health of their relatives and loved ones. A lack of formal educational qualifications has led several refugees to become entrepreneurs and their own bosses.

	using a mixed method approach.				
Olliff et al. (2022)	The article explored how social capital and social networks can positively or negatively impact African migrants' employment possibilities in Australia by analysing how social capital and social networks can assist or impede African migrants' job prospects in Australia.	Mixed methods	Black African migrants	Australia	African migrants in Australia suffer serious employment obstacles owing to factors like a lack of acknowledgement of qualifications, racial discrimination, and a lack of social networks. Social capital is crucial in black African migrants' employment-seeking experiences in Australia. African migrants who have strong social capital and social connections are most likely to get jobs and have better employment outcomes than those who do not have strong social capital. Nonetheless, social capital and social networks can be a double-edged sword, strengthening inequities and restricting opportunities for individuals outside the web of social networks.

Losoncz (2017)	The research examined the relationship between emerging discriminatory narratives, resettlement policies and practises, and resettlement outcomes for refugee migrants in Australia.	Quantitative	Refugee adults (n=1798)	Australia	Regardless of being legally entitled to relocate, several humanitarian migrants in Australia face significant socio-economic hardships. Refugees are economically sidelined, stopping them from fully engaging in or fitting to the larger society. On the other hand, the Australian government does not accept the systematic exclusion of migrant minorities, instead stating that specific migrant groups are unaware of Australia's cultural norms and are prone to engaging in inactive behaviours.
Beadle (2014)	The study focuses on factors that facilitate refugee young people transition to employment, with a particular emphasis on determining what works in terms of policy and practise.	Mixed methods	Refugee youth	Australia	There is a significant scarcity of data that distinguishes the challenges that young people from refugee and other culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds face in transitioning to the workforce. It is essential to equip employers with adequate training so that they can provide culturally sensitive services and understand the context of young refugees' experiences in Australia.

Mwanri et al. 2022	The study focuses on the postmigration stressors and mental health issues faced by African migrants in South Australia.	Qualitative	African migrants	Australia	Access to meaningful employment may shape African migrants' lives. Employment helps African migrants to secure basic needs such as housing. However, barriers such as a lack of work experience, language barriers and poor physical health impede African migrants' job opportunities. Limited employment opportunities lead to poor fulfilment of family needs.
Riordan & Claudio, 2022	The article looked at the factors that were associated with increased well-being among African refugee youth.	Qualitative	African refugee youth	Australia	Employment and integration in the labour-market increased the well-being of African refugee youth in Australia. African refugee youth mentioned that their African identity limited their employment opportunities and career prospects. Discrimination was indicated as a factor that acted as a barrier to African refugee youth looking for employment.

Nunn et al. 2014	The study focuses on the factors mediating employment trajectories among young people who migrated to Australia as refugees during adolescence	Qualitative	Refugee young people	Australia	The employment trajectories of African refugee young people and adolescents are mediated by a constellation of intersectional factors, which included low literacy levels, insufficient access to information and support, and lack of experience.

Thematic findings and discussions

This systematic review identifies some of the key obstacles African refugee youth face when seeking entry to the Australian labour-market as (i) lack of Australian work experience, (ii) recognition of overseas qualifications, (iii) low English language proficiency, (iv) social networks and connections, (v) psychological and mental health problems, and (vi) racial discrimination.

Theme 1: Lack of Australian Work Experience

African refugee youth find it more difficult to secure employment than anyone else in many countries. One of the dominant factors that deter African refugees from securing employment in the literature is the lack of work experience (Ziersch et al., 2023). In Australia, African refugees can work, they have equal working rights as Australian residents, and they are entitled to receive minimum pay as directed by the Fair Work Ombudsman (Farbenblum and Berg, 2017). Regardless of their right to work protected by the law, African refugee youth struggle to secure employment due to the lack of Australian work experience which is a critical requirement most employers look for when they are recruiting employees (Ziersch et al., 2023). Even African refugee youth with previous work experience, their skills might not be transferable to the Australian labour-market due to differences in the size of the economy and way of doing business (Baker et al., 2021). The literature shows that what is considered work experience in Australia is often Australian work experience (Mwanri et al., 2022). Previous work experience in the country of origin, no matter how relevant it might be, does not really matter. Even African refugee youth with post-graduate education qualifications lack work experience, therefore making it difficult for them to be hired (Beadle, 2014).

Also, the lack of understanding of the Australian workplace culture, systems, and effective communication skills makes it hard for African refugees to secure professional and meaningful employment (Baker et al., 2021). Meaning employment entails a situation whereby the skills, competence, and experiences of refugees are acknowledged while they are engaged in paid work (Curry et al., 2018). Resettled African refugees frequently struggled to understand Australian systems and

workplace culture, which caused them to take longer to be hired by employers. In Australia, refugee employment rates highlight the challenges that this group of people face when looking for employment (Losoncz, 2017). Securing employment in Australia has grown tough; the country has had high unemployment rates in the preceding decade, and the hurdles have fallen disproportionately on Africans, who are constantly racialised as faraway strangers in the Australian labour-market. Due to barriers in securing employment, African refugee youth without relevant work experience end up accepting unfair job contracts in sectors with poor working conditions. Poor working conditions involve working longer hours and accepting low wages (Ziersch et al., 2021). Ziersch et al. (2021) indicate that women mostly suffer more as they are overrepresented in low-paying sectors such as cleaning.

A study by Colic-Peisker (2007) has shown that refugees from non-English speaking countries face more barriers as compared to refugees from English-speaking countries when finding employment in Australia, adding to the fact that refugees from Africa are more susceptible than other cohorts of migrants (Nunn et al., 2014). For example, the lack of relevant Australian work experience has led African refugees settling in regional Australia to work in hard jobs such as construction because they lack the work experience and English language skills needed to occupy colour jobs (Curry et al., 2018). Lack of Australian work experience prevents African refugee jobseekers from competing with other applicants in the Australian labour-market, and connections beyond family and friends provide the capacity to be more successful at obtaining employment (Losoncz, 2017). However, research has pointed to different forms of capital in alleviating these barriers such as social networks, proficient English language skills (Hugo 2011), previous recognisable employment experience and familiarity with the Australian workplace culture (Baker and Irwin, 2021).

Theme 2: Recognition of Overseas Qualifications

Even though African refugees might be holding educational qualifications from their home countries they often face challenges in making them recognised in Australia, as many employers do not recognise overseas qualifications (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007). For

overseas education qualifications to be recognised, African refugees like other migrants must undergo a qualifications and skills assessment process in Australia. The qualification recognition process is expensive (Settlement Council of Australia, 2019) especially for refugees struggling to settle in the new environment; this adds another layer to the existing challenges of settlement (Correa-Velez et al., 2015). For instance, the entire process could cost more than $3000 Australian dollars. The cost breakdown for interviews, practical tests and assessment of documental evidence can be seen online on the 'Trades Recognition Australia' website, one of the institutions offering assessment programs in Australia. Some occupations such as social work and nursing are even more complicated because they require employees to have accredited licenses.

A study by Cameron et al. (2019) show that the Australian skills and qualification recognition system is complicated which makes it challenging for African refugee youth. The Australian federal government has made significant progress in providing financial support to humanitarian migrants and even making the process completely free of charge (Settlement Council of Australia, 2019). However, for certain occupations, such as general practitioners, African refugees, like other migrants, must still pay for assessments to practise in Australia. In some cases, African refugees must attend additional education or training for their qualifications to be recognised, and they receive no financial assistance to cover these costs (Correa-Velez et al., 2015).

The literature indicates that the process to recognise overseas qualifications acts as an obstacle to employment for African refugee youth who are prepared to work but lack relevant knowledge and English language skills to navigate the Australian labour- market (Correa-Velez et al., 2015). In specialised occupations of the economy like nursing, previous post-secondary qualifications and work experience outside Australia have no effect on employment as that experience is not recognised in Australia. Prospective employees who might have relevant qualifications must be registered and get their qualifications assessed before they can apply for employment in Australia. Current hiring practices in Australia undermine the human capital of African refugees and humanitarian migrants (Losoncz 2017).

In the context of the Australian labour-market, research has long identified a strong relationship between skills assessment and employment (Refugee council of Australia, 2010, Iredale et al., 1996). However, a recent longitudinal study of refugees conducted by Correa-Velez et al. (2015) indicate that the recognition of overseas qualifications does not guarantee getting employment in Australia. Contrary to the findings of previous research, this study found that refugees whose qualifications are assessed will only search for jobs in their respective areas of profession limiting their chances of getting employment opportunities in other occupations (Correa-Velez et al., 2015). According to this study the recognition of skills and qualifications alone is not enough for African refugees to negotiate employment barriers. For example, qualifications of African refugees might be assessed but if they lack Australian work experience or relevant licenses then they will still not be able to secure employment until all the requirements are met.

Hugo et al. (2011) argue that the human capital of African refugees is not adequately embraced to contribute to the Australian economy which results in 'occupational skidding'. Occupational skidding is whereby humanitarian entrants are not working in jobs appropriate with their skills, education, training, and experience (Hugo et al., 2011). Reid (2012) argues that underutilising refugees' skills is associated with poor mental health, as measured by persistent emotions of depression, anxiety, and sadness. Educating and training Australian employers about the skills African refugees bring and their contribution to the Australian economy, as well as establishing measures to ease the process of skills recognition, will all help African refugees obtain employment that corresponds to their skills and qualifications (Correa-Velez et al., 2015). According to the Refugee council of Australia (2010), finding skilled African refugees working in low skilled or survival jobs such as cleaning and meat processing in factories is one of the challenges associated with occupation skidding in Australia. The literature suggests that the failure of African refugee youth to have their educational qualifications recognised, as well as the absence of other types of embodied cultural capital (like the right accents, cultural knowledge, and work experience) are fundamental to

downward occupational mobility (Creese and Wiebe, 2012).

Theme 3: Low English Language Proficiency

Low English language proficiency can act as a vital barrier to employment for African refugee youth even after completing higher education studies (Baker et al., 2021). For African refugee graduates who want to work in certain professions like nursing and social work, registration with relevant boards is mandatory. A professional English language score must be met before practising. Precisely, individuals whose first language is not English and who have not been staying in Australia, must have a 7.0 score in all areas of the International English Language Testing System (IELTs) to work as a nurse. With appropriate academic qualifications for professional jobs, African refugees may lack the necessary English language skills needed to work (Baker et al., 2021). Curry et al. (2018) conducted a study on the resettlement experiences of African refugees in regional New South Wales Australia and found that several participants were employed in labour-intensive employment because of lacking English language skills (Curry et al., 2018).

Low English proficiency has a negative impact on paid work with African refugees who have been in Australia for many years able to get jobs due to improved English language skills (Losoncz 2017). In the context of Australia, adequate policy structures to support refugees to learn English are absent. Previous research showed that the process of learning a language takes 7 to 11 years yet only 510 hours are provided to refugees on arrival in Australia (Thomas and Collier, 2002). While linguistic deficiencies are somewhat eliminated due to formal education, subtle differences in grammar and style persist (Kuzhabekova and Nardon, 2021). Accent is another important determinant in impacting the chances of African refugee youth finding employment in Australia. As Bourdieu (1986) argues, accent and other local cultural competencies are a form of embodied cultural capital that is significant to the labour-market integration of refugees. Embodied cultural capital functions on a symbolic level that is recognised as legitimate competence or incompetence, and hence remains largely unacknowledged as a form of power (Bourdieu, 1986). Compared to other immigrants, African refugee youth encounter extraordinary challenges during their migratory journeys which results in interrupted education, which deters them from coping

with others when settled in host countries (Losoncz 2017). In addition to the challenges associated with migration, lower English language competency has been shown to be negatively connected with employment outcomes (Beadle, 2014).

Theme 4: Social Networks and Connections

Refugees from Africa make up a small proportion of the Australian population when compared to immigrants from other continents such as the Middle East. The countries of origin and languages spoken by this population are diverse (Olliff et al., 2022). Despite its small size, the African community is comprised of individuals with diverse skills and experiences. However, when it comes to integrating into the Australian labour-market, this population faces various difficulties including discrimination (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007), racism (Hebbani and Khawaja, 2019), and lack of work experience (Udah et al., 2019). While there is a scarcity of research on the relationship between social networks and African refugee youth labour-market integration, research is emerging in this area (Lancee, 2012). Social capital, social networks, and connections have been found to be pertinent factors that facilitate integration into the Australian labour-market (Lancee, 2012). According to the Australian Productivity Commission, social capital is a resource that enables cooperation within or between groups of people, with the fundamental characteristics of social networks being trust and social norms (Australian Productivity Commission, 2002). Olliff et al. (2022) examined the significance of social networks for labour-market outcomes in Australia and found that social networks are imperative to employment for African refugees. While the significance of social networks in employment is obvious, it remains less clear how these social networks work throughout various professions for African refugee youth (Olliff et al., 2022).

Patulny (2015) argues that social networks can function in complicated ways, with different negative or positive impacts on job seekers. There are two common types of social capital: bonding social capital and bridging social capital, and each works in a different way (Portes, 1998). Bonding social capital denotes relationships among close friends and family members. These are relations within relatively homogeneous groups that are frequently restricted in scope and imply a depth of multi-stranded relationships. This is the most common type of

social capital African refugee youth possess, they rely on family and friends for career advise which results in limited employment opportunities in most cases. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, alludes to relationships between colleagues and acquaintances, that is, the ties that connect an individual to a diverse range of people, resources, and institutions (Granovetter, 1974), and this form of capital usually results in useful connections with people outside family or friends.

The literature indicates that bonding social capital is crucial for 'getting by', in other words, for a sense of 'ontological security' or a sense of agency, while, bridging social capital is essential for 'getting ahead', specifically achieving upward social mobility and material success (Putnam, 2002). The ability of African refugee youth to integrate into the Australian labour-market is impacted by family networks and community support (Peisker and Tilbury, 2003). These networks offer positive emotional support but limited employment. Though connections within the community and informal networks help African refugee youth to settle, these networks do not necessarily increase their chances of employment. A study by de Vroome and van Tubergen (2010) shows that the economic integration of African refugees is significantly linked to their social interaction with the larger Australian community not only relations with networks from their ethnic communities.

Theme 5: Psychological and Mental Health Problems

African refugee youth are more likely to experience psychological and mental health issues than other African youth. African refugee youth face traumatic situations in their home countries, during their settlement, integration, and migration journeys (Tomasi et al., 2022). Mental health problems have been shown to be triggered by a variety of factors that affect the well-being of people from African refugee backgrounds (Ziersch et al., 2023). For example, trauma, torture, destitution, long periods of time in limbo or in refugee camps, social isolation, English language barriers, and the multiple stresses of resettlement in a new country can all lead to the development of lasting mental and physical health problems, restraining the capability of African refugees to integrate into the Australian labour-market (Refugee Council of Australia, 2010). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other health problems have been also discovered to substantially decrease the likelihood of employment and occupational status among humanitarian

migrants (de Vroome and van Tubergen, 2010). Reid (2012) argues that underutilising African refugees' skills is also linked to poor mental health, measured by ongoing feelings of sadness, depression, and loneliness. While psychological and mental health issues are not a universal phenomenon among African refugees, studies have revealed that many people from African humanitarian backgrounds face one or both challenges (Nelson et al., 2016; Ziersch et al., 2023). Chang (2022) asserts that some refugees can overcome the challenges of migratory journeys and quickly adapt to new environments, but this is not generalisable to every refugee. However, the fact remains that mental health and psychological problems impact the employment prospects and careers of young African refugees in Australia and elsewhere.

Theme 6: Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination in the Australian labour-market has been identified as one of the significant obstacle African refugee youths face when looking for employment opportunities in Australia (Baker et al., 2021). Racism is understood as an 'exclusionary practice and ideology that essentialises and valorises phenotypical and cultural differences to defend and advance the privileges of its users' (Fox, 2013). Racial discrimination in securing employment can manifest in various ways, such as favouritism towards other job candidates, particularly those who are not from diverse ethnic backgrounds. African refugee youth may experience multiple types of discrimination based on their English language skills, accent, or ethnicity during the job hunt and even after they have been hired (Booth et al., 2012; Riordan & Claudio, 2022). Due to racial discrimination, most African refugee youth find it hard to integrate into the Australian labour-market and often work in low-skilled jobs that do not match their qualifications (Reid et al., 2014). The literature shows that Australian employers may also exhibit negative stereotypes towards African refugee youth, victimising them and regarding them as less competent despite their educational qualifications (Nunn et al., 2014). Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2006) found that most African refugee youth do not report cases of racism and discrimination for fear of losing their jobs. There is a greater chance that African refugee youth experience harassment in the workplace and they do not report it due to economic insecurity, impacting their long-term professional development (Stokes and Cuervo, 2008).

Australian employers often use the excuse that African refugees lack the cultural knowledge required for a position or may not fit in with other staff, and this may lead to the denial of employment inclusion. Australian employers interviewed for the Tilbury and Colic-Peisker's study often called this a 'soft skill' related to 'Australian-ness' (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007). Losoncz (2017) asserts that the simplistic application of government policies and recruitment processes may not account for the marginalisation of culturally and linguistically diverse individuals, particularly African refugees who face complicated challenges in navigating the Australian labour-market. A targeted approach, especially for the poor populations, may help improve economic participation for African refugee youth, and addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that considers the unique needs of ethnically diverse individuals and promotes equal opportunity in the Australian labour market.

The literature suggests that African refugee youth have no chance of entering the labour-market on equal footing with Australian-born youngsters (Losoncz, 2017). By ignoring to take responsibility for the marginalisation of African refugee groups, these processes obstruct African refugees' meaningful economic inclusion and exacerbate their social and economic disadvantage in Australia. As a result, labour-market discrimination against African refugees cannot be understood in isolation from government policy, specifically the deficiencies in recruitment processes. The Australian government's emphasis on multiculturalism and equal opportunity in recruitment processes may not account for the relative disadvantage and discrimination of African refugee groups, who often face intricate challenges in the Australian labour-market due to factors such as English language barriers, lack of cultural knowledge, and racism (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007). In addition to being an obstacle to accessing services such as employment and healthcare, discrimination and racism also impact on the psychological well-being of African refugees, with unaccompanied young African refugees being particularly vulnerable to the effects of discrimination due to a lack of family support and counselling (Borsch et al., 2019).

Conclusion

African refugee youth face complex obstacles in accessing employment opportunities in Australia. This review shows that lack of Australian work experience, racial discrimination, low English language proficiency, limited social networks, and psychological and mental health problems all contribute to the difficulties that African refugees encounter when trying to integrate into the Australian labour market. These challenges intersect and form a constellation of impediments that complicate the economic integration and overall well-being of African refugee youth. To alleviate these barriers and encourage the labor-market participation of African refugee youth, the focus must shift away from blaming African refugee job seekers towards what businesses could do differently to accommodate the skill sets of African refugee youth. Ramping cultural awareness training programs could be a useful starting point in helping Australian employers to understand and appreciate the diverse skills brought by African refugees, reducing biases related to cultural differences and accents.

Also, Australian employers should be constantly encouraged to adopt authentic inclusive recruitment practices and promote diversity and equal opportunities to all. Likewise, recognising the impact of psychological and mental health problems on employment outcomes through interventions that address past traumas can support African refugees in their journey towards economic integration and meaningful employment in Australia. By putting these suggestions into practice, Australia can build a more diverse labour market that values the potential talents and contributions of young African refugees. In addition to helping individual African refugees, providing the necessary policy and support systems may promote harmony, mutual benefits, social cohesion, economic growth, and (multi) cultural diversity.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared that they have no conflict of interest.

Data availability

This paper is a systematic review based on scholarly literature available on scientific databases such as Scopus and Web of science.

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Commentaries and Viewpoints

Bakassi and Vigilantism in Nigeria: Trajectory and Lessons for a Community Policing System

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Abstract

This paper is an historical reflection on how a local vigilante group (Bakassi-Boys) in South-Eastern Nigeria was formed. It examines how community policing systems and the use of magical powers were beneficial in the prevention and investigation of crimes. It shows also, how the use of spiritual powers in the detection and investigation of criminals was faulted on the ground that such methodology is unknown to Nigeria's laws. It argues that the outcry or view of seeing Bakassi-Boys as a security threat, its politicisation, and its abrupt stoppage are misplaced. The paper concludes that if the operations of the group were effective in the investigation of heinous crimes such as robbery and ritual killings and have reduced or rid a community of criminals, by implication, such vigilante apparatus could be employed as a template in the formation of community policing, especially considering the increasing level of insecurity in contemporary Nigeria.

Keywords: Bakassi Boys; Vigilantism; Security System; Community Policing; Criminality

Introduction

Nigeria has been and is still faced with a very high level of insecurity ranging from armed robbery, kidnapping, and ethnic cleansing perpetrated by criminals at various levels of the society. Notorious among them are armed robbery, ritual killings, Islamic Jihadism, banditry and

terrorism (perpetrated mostly by Boko Haram and Islamic State-West Africa Province [ISWAP]). This has heightened the discourse on the need for community policing in Nigeria. This in turn has resulted in the establishment of a local security organisation called Amotekun in South-Western Nigeria and Ebubeagu in South-Eastern Nigeria by the governors of the states in those regions, especially between 2015 and 2021. In spite of these efforts, such security units are yet to have the kind of security bite Bakassi-Boys brought into community policing system so much that criminals dread them. Therefore, this paper brings to the fore a reflection of the activities of the Bakassi-Boys in the late 90s and early 20s in Nigeria and the implication for contemporary Nigeria's local (community) security system.

The conceptual and contextual study of the word Bakassi, especially as it concerns community policing, has received little attention in scholarship. Although a few scholars have discussed Bakassi in previous literature they focused mostly on the Peninsula (geographical) and international conflict resolution perspectives (see for instance, Harnischfeger 2003; Anyu 2007; Konings 2011; Okoi 2016; Obodo & Akwen 2017; Akonye 2019; Opue & Usang 2020; Ogunnoiki 2020; Ottuh 2022). Besides, literature on Bakassi as a security outfit in South-Eastern Nigeria is scant (see Baker 2002; Smith 2004; Smith 2006; Ajeli 2020; Felbab-Brown 2021). Thus, this paper contributes to the ongoing research on security issues in Africa, particularly vigilantism in Nigeria, by suggesting the Bakassi Boys' variant for radical community policing. Although previous research, especially those from western perspective, see vigilantism as "ritual violence" which aligns with "religious rituals, interaction ritual", and "feelings of group unity" for revenge (Asif and Weenink 2022, 168-169), the Bakassi variant is not exactly the same as the western variant. Hence, an historical peep into the group is vital. This paper aims to give a historical reflection of how the local vigilante group called Bakassi Boys in South-Eastern Nigeria was formed and how it effectively fought crimes by using indigenous religious powers. The methodology of using abstract powers (religious powers) in detecting criminals and preventing crimes (crime prevention, investigation or otherwise) was faulted by some, especially those from a human right angles because such methods are not known to the law of Nigeria. As such, the paper argues that the view of seeing Bakassi Boys as a security threat, its politicisation and its abrupt stoppage are misplaced. This paper

thus focuses on the brief history of Bakassi Boys as a local security body and assesses the possible benefits of using the group as a template for future community policing system in Nigeria.

Bakassi as a Security Outfit in Nigeria: A History

The word Bakassi has many meanings in Nigeria, stretching from geographical location, romantic expression (encomium on beautiful ladies with big butt and hips) to a local security outfit. In previous research such meanings have been extensively discussed (see Ottuh 2022: 2-5). As a local community security outfit, the term Bakassi is clearer when used as "Bakassi Boys" but it will be used here interchangeably (Bakassi or Bakassi Boys). It was a novel and famous special local vigilante security formation in South-Eastern Nigeria which was well known for its use of African indigenous religious powers (charms) in its operations of preventing, detecting, and fighting crimes. Using a historical approach here, we focus on the brief history of Bakassi Boys as a local security body by exploring its origin/evolution, and modus operandi in South-Eastern Nigeria.

Evolution

The origin of Bakassi Boys (Bakassi) as a local vigilante group in South-East Nigeria can be traced to Aba, Abia State. Aba is a commercial city which harbours many traders of Igbo and non-Igbo origins. While Umuahia is the state capital, Aba is the commercial hub of the state (Abia state) due to its colossal commercial activities. The prosperity and relatively peaceful situation of the city attracted merchants and settlers alike from neighbouring states like Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Imo. Besides, by the mid-1990s merchants from Cameroon and as far as Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had established patronage of Aba made goods like shoes and garments in large quantities in Ariaria Market (see Meagher 2009, 41). The city was nick-named as "the Japan of Africa" due to the productiveness of artisans and other professionals in the manufacturing of homemade goods like shoes, cloths, plastics, cosmetics, etc. These products became popularly known as "Aba made", especially "owing to the fact that (Nigerians)… prefer foreign materials to our local manufactures" (Ajeli 2020, 32). The city of Aba is made up of various autonomous communities, comprising of Ndiego, Ogwo and Abayi Umuocha among others (Itiri & Jacob 2014,

277). The city, especially Aba South flourished in commercial activities and enjoyed relative peace until the late 1990s when an armed robbery gang called "Mafians" (also abbreviated as Mafs) began to torment the city (traders and residents) and its environs with robbery attacks and killings of innocent people. Apart from sporadic shootings, robbery and the gruesome murder of innocent citizens, there were also cases of rapes of women, torture, extortion, and lynching (Ajeli 2020, 33; see also, Itiri & Jacob 2014, 280). Record has it that between 1997 and 1999, over two hundred innocent people had been killed by Mafs and other armed robbery gangs in the city of Aba and environs (see Ajeli 2020, 33). The situation of insecurity at that time brought about low and slow income, especially among the garment and shoe manufacturers. The Mafs carried out their nefarious activities unhindered because the government security apparatus failed woefully to protect the lives and properties of the people. This failure of the Nigerian police was largely due to corruption, lack of capacity, and underfunding by the government (see Agbiboa 2013). Due to the failure of the government security formation (police) in Aba, the situation of insecurity deteriorated to the level of the Mafs writing to residents and traders informing them of when they would come to rob them without any fear of being caught (Itiri and Jacob 2014). Moreover, the failure of government security apparatus not only fuelled Mafs's activities but also heightened the operation of other groups of armed robbers in the area, causing residents to insinuate that police collaborated with the criminals. This occurrence made life difficult, brutish, and short.

The insecurity in Aba, especially in the Ariaria Market in which traders were incessantly harassed, robbed of their monies and wares, and maimed and killed, led to the formation of Bakassi Boys. It was formed by a group of traders, especially those in the shoe making industry of the 'Bakassi' area of Ariaria market where the name was coined. The leadership of the group was also from among them. They organised this local vigilante group with the sole purpose of putting an end to robbery activities and the excessive harassment and extortion by the hoodlums in the town (Ajeli 2020, 33). By November 1998 the battle to stop these hoodlums had gathered momentum leading to a fierce confrontation with the Mafians at the Aba Mosque area. In the process, there were exchanges of gunfire which led to the defeat of the Mafs; they were forced to leave ''Emejiaka's house'' which they used as their hideout (Ajeli 2020, 34). Having decimated them from their hideouts, "the traders continued their

onslaught against the Mafs and their accomplices in such a way that some die-hard ones among them like GOC and Jango were killed and burnt while others were forced into exile" (Ajeli 2020, 34; see also, Jones 2008). Their resilience in the extermination of the Mafs made the other traders and residents nick-name the group Bakassi Boys, a name synonymous with gallantry. The successful onslaught of the Bakassi Boys against the Mafs and other criminal elements in Aba was partly possible as a result of the support of the populace who always provided them with useful information about the hideouts of criminals in the area. Apart from volunteering information, the people, especially the traders supported them financially also.

Bakassi Boys in the Wake of the Return to Democracy in Nigeria

In May 1999, Nigeria returned to democracy after several years of military rule. While the military was blamed for destroying the country's economy and political system, the return of democracy which everyone thought would be better, especially for the economic prosperity of citizens, left a sour taste in the mouths of the people. Instead of bettering the lot of the people, it became the government of the rich and for the benefit of some. This also brought about the challenge of insecurity leading to the approval of various shades of vigilantism across the country (see Smith 2004, 429). Bakassi vigilantism in the wake of the return to democracy in May 1999 was warmly received and adopted by the then state governor of Abia State, Urji Uzor Kalu (CON) who served from 29 May 1999 to 29 May 2007. Based on the antecedents of the group in successfully defeating the dreaded armed robbery cartel, especially Mafs in the Ariaria Market in Aba and environs, Kalu sensed that the group would be useful in policing Abia State locally. Kalu so much believed in the Bakassi Boys that he resisted the Federal Government from banning it.

The Bakassi Boys became in high demand in the South-Eastern States, especially considering the fact that the criminals who escaped death in the hands of the Bakassi Boys in Abia State fled to neighbouring States like Imo and Anambra. By implication, as the crime rate in Aba was drastically reduced, other cities in South-Eastern Nigeria like Awka (the Capital city of Anambra), and the commercial cities of Onisha and Nnewi became criminal infested. The armed robbers in Anambra were so daring that they would shoot sporadically into the air at the front of

Government House in Awka on their way back from their operations. Besides, they wrote letters to their victims ahead of their raiding (see Itiri & Jacob 2014). They robbed, killed and maimed many residents and business operators. Coupled with armed robbers were ritual killers amongst whom was a prophet called Eddy Okeke. Among the notorious armed robbers in Anambra were Derico Nwamama, Chiejina, Eddie Nagwu, to mention a few. They terrorised Awka and, especially Onisha and Nnewi unhindered. Between 1998 and 2004, insecurity in Anambra state had become very alarming, especially the Upper Iweka and the fly-over areas in Onitsha. The city was bedevilled with assaults, rape, ritual killings, armed robbery, murder, brutality, and other terrible activities by hoodlums (Ajeli 2020, 1).

The above situation made Nnewi traders and residents in collaboration with Local Government Authorities take their fate into their own hands by extending invitation to the Bakassi Boys in Aba. With the arrival of the Bakassi Boys in late 1999 the narrative changed within a fortnight. Nnewi became free again and commercial activities boomed again. Seeing the security progress, the then governor of Anambra State, Dr. Chinwoke Mbadinuju, in 2000 adopted the Boys as the official crime fighting apparatus of the state through legislation from the State House of Assembly and the support of the people. As such, they were equipped by the state government. The Bakassi Boys also rid Onisha of hoodlums and ritual killers, making commercial activities boom again. In spite of the so-called unorthodox and brutal methods of the Bakassi Boys, the Anambra people accepted and condoned them. The Bakassi Boys were disbanded by the Obasanjo administration in 2002 after several allegations of extrajudicial killings by them.

Modus operandi and Success of Bakassi Boys

The failure of the police and other government security elements necessitated the quest for an alternative solution to the security problem in Aba, Nigeria. By 1997 and 1999, at least two hundred traders and residents had been killed by Mafs and other armed robbery gangs in the city of Aba. Since a strong problem requires a proportionate solution, the Bakassi Boys rose to the occasion by taking the fight to the dens of the assailants and their secret hideouts. The Boys armed themselves with locally made guns, machetes, and arrays of black magic artefacts and Juju worn around their bodies (Harnischfeger 2003). They put on such magic

artefacts to supply them with spiritual powers and to fortify themselves spiritually. The fortification included charms of abstract bullet-proofs derived from African indigenous religious means, such that when they are shot at by the assailants they will say "odeichi" which means "no leakage, no entry", or "it cannot penetrate". By implication, bullets (physical and spiritual) and machetes including spells cannot penetrate them. It was speculated that the mystical powers of the Bakassi Boys were derived principally from Ogoni and Ngwa deities in collaboration with other similar deities in Igboland.

Drawn from their spiritual powers, the Boys used a lie detector charm to detect criminals who have committed heinous crimes, especially murder previously. The charms are made to domicile in two items, a special machete and a native necklace (like a talisman). These charms helped them to ascertain whether a suspect is guilty or not. The lie detector apparatus was used in two ways; either the machete is placed across the upper chest of the suspect or the necklace is placed around the neck of the suspect. When the machete is placed and it shows red, it means the suspect is guilty of armed robbery and murder, and when the necklace is placed on the neck of the suspect, the suspect will confess the atrocities he/she has committed against humanity (see Ajibade 2006; Felbab-Brown 2021, 20). It is believed that the charm-imbued necklace makes it difficult for a criminal to lie. As such, the criminal was executed. The Boys' onslaught against Mafs and other criminal elements was so fierce that they captured some of the armed robbers and executed them in public spaces like a major intersection of roads or market centres, attracting large numbers of observers. Sometimes they dismembered the bodies of the apprehended criminals with machetes, starting with what the local people referred to as 'long sleeve' or 'short sleeve', and set the bodies ablaze to burn to ashes (Smith 2004, 431; Ajeli 2020, 33). Thus, the modus operandi of the Bakassi Boys made the criminals to dread them. As such, criminals who were able to escape fled to nearby states like Rivers, Imo, Anambra, etc. This brought relative peace to Aba city. In a nutshell, the coming of the Bakassi Boys checked this menace within a short time.

The operation of the Bakasssi Boys in Aba could, therefore, be regarded as effective and successful. Their success in ridding Aba of criminals made them famous then, such that people of neighbouring states, especially Anambra, extended invitation to them to come and do same. By late 1999 they had responded to the invite. Eventually, the Boys

replicated their operations in Anambra State between 1999 to 2002 in which about 1,500 criminals were killed, especially in Onitsha and Nnewi axes (see Uchendu 2000). Just like they did in Aba, within the period they operated, they were able to restore peace in Nnewi and Onisha. Irrespective of their method which some considered as devilish, brutal, and illegal, the obvious remains that the Bakassi Boys brought peace and tranquillity to Abia and Anambra states during the period they genuinely operated.

The Stoppage of the Bakassi Security Outfit in South-Eastern Nigeria

In September 2002, the activities of the Bakassi-Boys were abruptly stopped by government due to their jungle justice system of executing suspected criminals without any trial in a court of competent jurisdiction. The Boys were also accused of killing political opponents of the sitting state governors in their jurisdiction of operation or their benefactors (see Meagher 2007, 89-91). Besides, they were accused of armed robbery and serious human right abuse (Smith 2006, 166-190; Human Rights Watch 2002; Felbab-Brown 2021, 20-26). This brought about some public outcries against the operation of the group (see Human Rights Watch 2002). In a nutshell, these outcries point to two factors. The first factor is the suspicion of the politicisation of the Bakassi Boys. The second factor was the view by some that Bakassi poses a security threat to innocent citizens due to their operation of jungle justice. Some doubt if the Bakassi Boy's investigations were truly accurate. Some accuse the outfit of being a security threat to the community because some high and mighty personalities and their relations were affected. This becomes more complicated considering the fact that spiritual means of investigating crimes is not known to the laws of Nigeria. This was a very strong point that led to the disbandment of the outfit by government. In spite of the stoppage of Bakassi vigilante group, the name remains a household name in south-eastern Nigeria till present times.

Although the Nigerian law does not recognise the investigation of crime using spiritual means, the success of the group in chasing away criminals from the community should also be considered enough ground to contemplate a more lawful modification rather than throwing the baby and the bathwater away. I therefore argue here that the outcry or view of seeing the original Bakassi-Boys as security threat and politicised, leading to its abrupt stoppage, is misplaced in the sense that such opinions

undermines the effectiveness of such an organisation in fighting recurrent variants of security problems in contemporary Nigeria.

Politicising the outfit by a governor is also misplaced in the sense that such acts amounts to abuse of political powers. It is also wrong on the side of the group to allow their benefactors or a sitting governor to use them against an opponent or perceived enemies among the citizens. However, if it is true that politicians including the state governor were able to use them against innocent citizens, that must raise a serious doubt about the authenticity and integrity of a group that claimed to be spiritual, pious and incorruptible, and dedicated to fighting criminals, especially those who had taken innocent blood through ritual killings and armed robbery. It simply means they were hypocritical. But the success of their operation in taking out notorious criminals in Aba and Anambra states should also raise questions about how people claiming such spiritual powers could stoop low to allow a governor or politicians to manipulate them to take the life of innocent citizens, an act totally against their original principles. It is very possible that those aspersions against them were political propaganda by opponents of the governor or the very perpetrators or sponsors of heinous acts. It is also possible that an adulterated group may have impersonated the group, as portrayed in the Nigerian Movie "Isakaba." Aspersions without in depth investigation and the abrupt stoppage of the outfit are misplaced in the sense that the citizens and the leadership were supposed to be on the same page as far as the genuine security of the community was concerned. All those who compromised the group, leading to its disbandment, could not have cared for the security and welfare of community.

Judging from the spiritual standpoint on which the security principle of Bakassi stands - "do not steal, do not kill and do not compromise" -suggests some of the allegations of using it against opponents could just be a fallacy or conspiracy. This kind of security outfit is the type Nigeria truly needs for community policing. However, the fear of the Federal Government (FG) of Nigeria about approving state or community policing formation is due to the suspicion that politicians might hijack it and use it against opposition or perceived enemies, especially considering the aspersions against Bakassi Boys as a case in point. Nevertheless, the need for community policing formation using the Bakassi model will be beneficial in Nigeria, especially considering the fact that the FG security (policing) structure has been over stretched,

compromised, and has utterly failed. It should therefore be backed by laws enacted by the State Houses of Assembly and the National Assembly. In order to achieve this, an Independent Security Formation Central Monitoring System can also be put in place by the FG to monitor the activities of the community police system instead of banning it completely. These are the kind of security group criminals in Nigeria dread. Their mere presence in a community discourages criminals and chases criminals away.

The stoppage is also misplaced because all commentators, especially scholars and the human right group itself, have been very paradoxical in their submissions. While they accuse the Bakassi Boys of human right abuses, they acknowledge the real success of the group in fighting criminality in the locality of Aba and environs, a function the Nigerian police could not perform. As far back as 2000 when Nigeria returned to democracy, research has shown that insecurity was very high (Baker 2002, 223), and the situation has worsened since. Moreover, the human right commentators should also go a long way to speak more and condemn more the perpetrators of heinous crimes in the society than those who are trying to clean the system. While human right organisations such as Amnesty International and National Human Rights Commission are encouraged to watch how government treats its people in terms of human rights, they should in addition look into the atrocities of criminals who have been abusing the rights of Nigerians and taking lives at will. This will encourage citizens who are willing to confront such people squarely to do so.

Implication for Community Policing in Contemporary Nigeria

Is there any social lesson that can be learnt from the development (narrative) of Bakassi as a local security outfit in South-Eastern Nigeria? An objective examination of Bakassi Boys' variant of vigilantism shows that Nigeria needs such formidable community policing system. This suggestion is not motivated by emotion or sentiment but by the very reasons that brought Bakassi Boys into existence. The reason was simply the failure of government in providing adequate security of lives and properties, and lack of or delay of justice. Those who have soldiers and mobile police as their security guards can look at our law and call the activities of the Bakassi boys "jungle justice" because they have never been hurt or their close relations killed by the criminal elements. The

impunity with which armed criminals operated in Aba and other places the Boys were invited to for security purpose left much to be desired. The hoodlums incapacitated the police and brought terror on the people unchallenged. When the Bakassi vigilante was formed, they were able take out the criminals with ease, a duty the police could not do for the people. Therefore, the reformation of the Bakassi vigilante variant in local communities across Nigeria will be helpful in the support of the police in fighting crime. While we agree with international conventions on fighting crimes and justice system (rules of engagement), the operators have refused to adequately punish governments under whose watch gruesome killings of innocent citizens were perpetrated, and the criminals never brought to justice. Just like other nations that have added punitive measures to what they regard as heinous crimes (Leechaianan & Longmire 2013, 117), Nigeria should do same for kidnapping, terrorism, banditry, armed robbery, Jihadism, and drug trafficking. When such laws are enacted in Nigeria and properly executed without corruption, incessant killings will reduce drastically. When trials are quick and thorough through special courts of competent jurisdiction, it will speed up the wheel of justice. This will reduce crime in Nigeria to a barest minimum. But when murderous criminals continue to get away or carry out crimes unchallenged, the chances of ruling out jungle justice will be very slim. In a nutshell, the government failure in the security of lives and properties and lack of justice are the major cause of jungle justice in Nigeria.

Another lesson that can be learnt from the narrative of Bakassi as a local vigilante is that the citizens trust the local vigilante more than the men of the Nigerian Police Force. This is so because the police keep failing in their duties of securing lives and properties of the people. The trust for the police has declined to an abysmal level, such that many people suspect that when criminals are handed over to the police, they often simply collect bribes from the criminals and release them (Ajeli 2020, 43). The people suspected that the police have become the friend of the criminals. The case of the notorious kidnap kingpin Wadume (Hamisu Bala) in Taraba state is one instance in recent time, though the Nigerian Army and the Judiciary is responsible in this case (see Adeniyi 2024). This incident though not in Aba in the Bakassi era, gives credence to such suspicion of security personnel (army and police) befriending criminals. Besides, when the police are called during an attack, they will

simply say; “no bullet, no fuel for vehicle or no vehicle.” The lack of trust for the police also inhibited citizens from volunteering information to them about criminals’ hideouts. This was not found in the Bakassi system. As such the people and other traders volunteered information and even contributed money to sponsor the Bakassi Boys because they were delivering. The trust issue is still there. The police need to redeem its image before the people; otherwise, the narrative will exist for centuries to come. Besides the police , governments have not been willing to or sincere in the fight against crime. The failure of the police is partly caused by the lack of equipment or what we may call inadequate funding. Overall, the Federal Government is to blame mostly for the failures.

Another lesson to be learnt from the Bakassi Boys for contemporary community policing in Nigeria is the spirit of commitment and dedication in the fight against insecurity. If there is one thing the government of Nigeria lacks, then and now, it is the political will to fight insecurity to a standstill. The success story of the Bakassi Boys apart from the use of spiritual powers was commitment and dedication to their job.

Unlike some police officers, they never brought politics of ethnicity, religion and cronyism into the equation. They never compromised the system or neglected their duty for bribes as some policemen do. As far as they were concerned, a criminal is a criminal irrespective of ethnic (Igbo, Hausa or Yoruba) or religious (Christian or Muslim or traditionalist) affinity. We as a nation should understand that a challenge in any part of the country should be seen as a threat to the entire nation. Community policing formation in contemporary Nigeria should draw inspiration from the Bakassi Boys’s variant. Such groups including the Nigerian Police Force should be committed and dedicated to their duty of fighting crimes in the society. They should not be seen as a people that are corrupt (aiding) criminals.

A further lesson that can be derived from the activities of the Bakassi Boys is their method of taking the fight to the criminals, thereby preventing them from carrying out their nefarious acts. They never waited for criminals to operate and then start arresting people at random. Even if armed robbery took place, the Boys went after the assailants, making them pay for their actions. The original Bakassi Boys never arrested people at random like the police do in Nigeria. They made sure they went directly to the criminals in their hideouts and brought them to instant justice (otherwise called jungle justice). While we may not support jungle

justice for any reason, the indefatigable effort of the vigilante is worth noting for community policing. They were so efficient, so much that they were able to send the signal to the criminals that they cannot get away with their evils. The criminals must be caught quickly and brought to justice. As such, those who have taken the lives of others in the process of armed robbery or ritual killings could not escape the justice of Bakassi, hence the criminals dread them. In the current situation of insecurity in Nigeria, the assailants are no longer afraid of being caught. They are no longer afraid of being brought to justice because they have always got away with it. They are no longer afraid of the Nigerian Army let alone the police. A good reflection on the activities of the original Bakassi Boys shows that an effective community policing will be profitable for the long run security of Nigeria. A local (community) policing system backed by law to use whatever means to detect crime and bring perpetrators to speedy justice should be encouraged. The Nigerian localities need a security variant that will be dreaded by the assailants, not the other way around.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the formation of the local vigilante group called Bakassi Boys in South-Eastern Nigeria was effective and worth replicating for community policing, especially considering the increasing insecurity across the country in recent times. It has also shown that, although their methodology of using spiritual means in the detection of criminals is unknown to the law of Nigeria, their success story of taking the fight to the criminals and defeating them may not be out place in considering a better legal framework that will commensurate with such context of crime fighting in the local milieus of Nigeria. Imagine having a vigilante group like the Bakassi Boys that can confront Boko Haram, ISWAP, bandits, kidnappers, armed robbers, herdsmen militias, and so on. It would be possible to get the support of the majority of Nigerians and even the National Assembly. Nigeria and especially human right groups by now should come to the reality that an extraordinary problem also needs a corresponding solution. As such, it may not be out of place to suggest a special legal framework for such vigilante groups like Bakassi-Boys to deal with these hardened criminals who do not respect human rights in the first place. The legal system of Nigeria should ensure that people who take the lives of innocent citizens at will must not escape

justice within the ambit of the law. When this happens, it will deter others with similar intent.

Suffice it to say that if the operations of the group were effective in the investigation of heinous crimes such as robbery and ritual killings in which they were able to rid the community of Aba and environs of dreaded criminals, it will not be out of place to recommend a replication of such vigilante apparatus that could fight terrorism, banditry, armed robbery, etc in Nigeria's local communities. While we think of this on the one hand, government must also be sincere in looking at the remote reasons (abject poverty, unemployment, hunger, marginalisation, injustice) that turn youths into criminals. Fighting criminality should be total and purpose driven. The economic and political situations that breed criminality in Nigeria must also be clearly addressed by government. While we wait for government to address this, security of lives and properties of citizens must be of paramount importance. In a nutshell, the Bakassi Boys have shown to us that a formidable community policing is possible in contemporary Nigeria.

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Appendix 1
Figures 1& 2: Photo of Bakassi Boys in Action

Source: Uchenna (2020) .