ETHIOPE JOURNAL OF ENGLISH, LITERARY AND CULTURAL STUDIES: JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES

I

EDITORIAL NOTE

The *Ethiope Journal of English, Literary, and Cultural Studies* (ISSN: 0795-5413) is an interdisciplinary journal that explores topical and generative issues in English linguistics and in literary and cultural studies. We recognise that African humanities research is both problem-based and knowledge oriented, and our aim is to provide a platform for scholars to analyse and theorise Africa in a way that is generative, conversational and decolonial. Specifically, the journal focuses on both the analytical and theoretical approaches to knowledge production in the context of Africa and the Global South. We want to curate papers that are hinged on African indigenous paradigms and approaches or that seek to extend, reimagine, or contextualise current theoretical or analytical approaches in English language studies and in literary and cultural studies.

We invite papers that dwell on all aspects of English language studies, including phonetics/phonology, semantics, syntax, discourse analysis, pragmatics, stylistics, ESL, ESP etc. We also welcome papers that theorise literary and cultural texts, including film, still and moving images, music and dance, photographs, cultural objects, spaces and places, society and social formations, and other relevant corpora. While we accept purely analytical essays, we encourage authors to focus on theorising the texts or data they engage with. In particular, we welcome theoretical conversations that implicate postcolonial subjecthood, ecocritical approaches (especially postcolonial ecocriticism), feminism and gender studies, new trends in linguistics, object-oriented criticism and approaches, and other generative approaches to knowledge production. Authors are encouraged to do original theorisation rather than adopt extant theoretical frameworks. They may also extend the scope of extant theories and approaches based on the material they present and discuss.

Furthermore, papers with interdisciplinary approaches are also welcomed. We recognise that knowledge production is an elastic phenomenon, and that bright ideas might implicate various fields. Interesting multi-modal, eclectic, or collaborative research is encouraged in this journal.

JOURNAL   POLICY

The *Ethiope Journal of English, Literary and Cultural Studies* is published biennially by the Department of English and Literary Studies, Delta State University Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria. All papers submitted to this maiden edition of the journal had undergone double-blind peer review and published papers are well researched, original and data-driven.

Contributors are to submit an e-copy of their manuscript for assessment and publication to ethiopejournal@delsu.edu.ng   or ethiopejournal@gmail.com. Such manuscripts should be original and not under consideration for publication elsewhere and should not have been published in any other journal.

Submitted manuscript which should not exceed 7000 words should be typeset in MS Word Times New Roman Font 12, with double line spacing. The first page should include the title of the manuscript, name(s), and institutional affiliation/address, abstract (not more than 250 words and with not more than six keywords). Manuscripts should conform to the current APA or MLA style sheet. Author(s) of published papers will derive the benefits from   peer-review of contributions by seasoned scholars, global visibility and receipt of hard copies as well as soft copies of their papers.

The twelve papers in this maiden edition of the journal cut across disciplines in cultural, media studies and sub-disciplines in English and literary studies. The contributors include seasoned and renowned scholars of international repute and young astute scholars with burning desire to excel in academics. The first article titled: "Folklore and African Poetry in the Age of Globalization" by Prof Ojaide is on cultural studies. Prof. Ojaide is a renowned poet and professor of international repute from the University of North Carolina, USA. It is pertinent to note that the contributors are from universities across the globe. We believe that the twelve articles will be of immense interest to researchers and students.

EDITORIAL   BOARD

REIMAGINING AFRICAN IDENTITY AND SPACE: DECOLONIZING VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS

Victor Onibere

Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Delta State University, Abraka

Email: voonibere@delsu.edu.ng

Abstract

Through a decolonizing lens, this paper explores the multifaceted dynamics of identity and space within African art and culture. In a world marked by a history of colonial oppression, the visual representations of African identities and spaces have often been distorted and misappropriated. This study aims to shed light on the process of decolonization in the context of African art, with a particular focus on visual representations. The research employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining art history, cultural studies, and postcolonial theory to analyze how visual representations in African art have been influenced by colonial legacies and how they continue to evolve in contemporary society. It investigates how African artists, scholars, and cultural institutions are reimagining and reclaiming their identities and spaces through various artistic mediums. By engaging with a range of case studies and artworks, this study uncovers the strategies and narratives employed by African artists and cultural practitioners to challenge colonial narratives, redefine African identities, and reclaim spaces within the global cultural landscape. Additionally, the research explores the role of technology and social media in facilitating this process, allowing for broader dissemination and engagement with decolonized African visual representations. The outcomes of this research contribute to the ongoing discourse on decolonization, African cultural studies, and the transformative power of art in shaping perceptions of identity and space. Ultimately, it fosters a deeper understanding of African visual culture's complexities and its role in the broader context of global decolonization efforts.

Keywords: Africa; Art; Culture; Decolonization; Identity; Reimagining

Introduction

The intersection of identity and space in African art and culture has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry and cultural exploration. Within this discourse, the theme of decolonization stands as a profound and timely endeavour. The legacy of colonialism has left an indelible mark on the visual representations of African identities and spaces, often distorting them through the lens of colonial narratives (Smith, 2016). In contemporary times, there is a growing recognition of the imperative to decolonize these representations, acknowledging their pivotal role in shaping perceptions of self and place (Mbembe, 2017).

Africa's diverse and rich artistic traditions, spanning millennia, have been deeply affected by the dynamics of colonization, which include the appropriation and misrepresentation of African art within colonial contexts (Gikandi, 1992). As a result, reimagining identity and space in African art carries profound implications for artistic expression and broader social and cultural narratives within the continent and beyond.

This research paper embarks on a multidisciplinary exploration, drawing insights from art history, cultural studies, and postcolonial theory to unravel the intricate tapestry of visual representation in African art and culture. It aims to uncover the influence of colonial legacies on these representations and illuminate how contemporary African artists, scholars, and cultural institutions spearhead the decolonization process through diverse artistic mediums. The research is motivated by the acknowledgement that African art and culture play a pivotal role in reclaiming agency, challenging stereotypes, and crafting authentic narratives that mirror African identities' intricate complexity and diversity (Hall, 1996).

The paper adopts a multidisciplinary research approach to highlight the significance of examining the intersections of colonialism, visual representation, and decolonization in African art and culture. The research design encompasses essential components, including a comprehensive review of scholarly literature, analysis of artworks, interviews with contemporary African artists, scholars, and cultural practitioners, and archival research. Data collection methods

involve artwork analysis and interviews with individuals with expertise in African art and its intersection with decolonization. Data analysis employs thematic and comparative analyses to explore variations and convergences from diverse stakeholders' perspectives. Ethical considerations are diligently observed throughout the research process. This combination of research methods facilitates a comprehensive exploration of the intricate interplay between visual representation, identity, and space within African art and culture, all within the overarching context of decolonization.

The research exploration extends beyond traditional art forms, embracing new media and digital platforms as powerful tools for African artists and cultural practitioners to reclaim their identities and spaces within the global cultural landscape (Mudimbe, 1988). By scrutinizing the strategies employed by African artists and their interaction with technology, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on decolonization, African cultural studies, and the transformative capacity of art in shaping perceptions of identity and space. Ultimately, this research seeks to foster a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between visual representations, decolonization, and the evolving narratives of African art and culture.

Historical Perspectives on Colonialism and African Art

The study of African art in the context of colonialism has been a focal point in cultural studies and art history. The late 19th-century European scramble for Africa, a defining era of colonization, left an indelible mark on the visual representations of African identities and spaces (Mudimbe, 1988). The repercussions of colonization were extensive, affecting both traditional African art and the broader spectrum of African artistic expression.

European colonial powers, in their conquest, frequently appropriated African artefacts and artworks as symbolic spoils, resulting in the displacement and removal of these objects from their original contexts (Thompson, 2015). This practice raises critical questions concerning the authenticity of these artefacts and the narratives they once conveyed.

The impact of colonialism on African art extends to authenticity challenges, particularly in the context of traditional African art deeply rooted in local cultures and practices. The uprooting and transportation of these artefacts to European territories disrupted the organic connection between the art and its cultural context. Objects, imbued initially with specific meanings within their cultural settings, transformed when removed from their original environment, challenging the authenticity of their narratives.

Furthermore, the colonial gaze distorted the perception of African cultures and identities, impacting both traditional and broader African artistic expressions. European collectors and scholars often imposed Eurocentric interpretations on African art, framing it within their cultural contexts rather than appreciating its nuanced meanings within African societies. This distortion contributed to creating stereotypical narratives that persist to some extent today.

They also challenged traditional African artists' artistic autonomy during the colonial period. The commodification of African art as colonial trophies diminished the agency of local artists to create within their cultural frameworks. Instead, their creations became objects of European fascination, divorced from their original cultural significance. Despite these challenges, African art transformed and hybridized during the colonial period. The encounter with European artistic styles and materials influenced the evolution of traditional forms, resulting in new expressions that reflected the dynamic interplay between traditional African aesthetics and external influences.

The Role of Visual Representations in Shaping Identity and Space

Visual representations are pivotal in shaping cultural identity and space, serving as cultural signifiers that reflect and construct individual and communal identities (Hall, 1996). In Africa, visual art has been instrumental in expressing the diverse cultures, traditions, and histories that define the continent. However, during the colonial era, African visual culture often suffered from Eurocentric framing,

perpetuating stereotypes and exoticizing African art (Gikandi, 1992).

African mask traditions are a noteworthy example of visual art that has significantly shaped cultural identity. In ceremonies, rituals, and performances, these masks symbolize spiritual beliefs and communal identity (Gikandi, 1992). Another instance is found in the Adinkra symbols of the Akan people in Ghana. These symbols, traditionally printed on cloth, convey proverbs, values, and historical narratives, contributing to the visual identity of the Akan culture (Dorson, 1968). The Kente weaving tradition of the Ashanti people in Ghana is characterized by vibrant colours and intricate patterns, with each design holding cultural significance representing historical events, social status, and identity (Ross, 2019). The Igbo people of Nigeria have a rich visual art tradition, including Uli and Nsibidi. Uli, a form of body and wall painting, and Nsibidi, ideographic symbols, contribute to the visual language that reflects Igbo cultural identity (Cole, 2007). In Southern Africa, the San people, also known as the Bushmen, have a longstanding tradition of creating rock art. These visual representations depict scenes of daily life, spiritual beliefs, and environmental interactions, leaving a visual legacy of San's cultural identity (Lewis-Williams & Dowson, 1990). These examples underscore the diversity and richness of visual art cultures in Africa, each playing a crucial role in shaping cultural identities and contributing to the historical legacies of their respective communities.

Decolonization Theories and Frameworks in African Cultural Studies

Decolonisation theories and frameworks in African cultural studies offer critical perspectives on the enduring impacts of colonialism. Postcolonial theory, championed by Mbembe (2017), seeks to deconstruct colonial narratives and elevate formerly marginalised voices. African feminism, as articulated by Mama (1997), examines the intersectionality of gender, race, and class in the African context, challenging Western feminist paradigms.

Cultural hybridity, a concept explored by Bhabha (1994), acknowledges the dynamic blending of indigenous African cultures

with external influences. Indigenous knowledge systems, as advocated by Smith (2016), emphasize the importance of traditional knowledge in challenging Western epistemologies. Critical race theory, introduced by Crenshaw (1989), delves into the intersections of race, power, and law, shedding light on systemic racism and the enduring legacies of colonialism. Afrocentrism, proposed by Asante (1987), seeks to centre African perspectives, challenging Eurocentric narratives and promoting the reclamation of African identity and history.

As articulated by Ramose (1999), the philosophy of Ubuntu emphasizes interconnectedness, communalism, and shared humanity, providing an ethical foundation for approaches to decolonization. These theories collectively contribute to the multifaceted discourse on decolonization in African cultural studies, offering diverse perspectives and methodologies for understanding and transforming postcolonial realities. The decolonization of African art is rooted in broader decolonization movements and theories in cultural studies. Postcolonial scholars have long argued for the importance of dismantling colonial narratives and reclaiming indigenous voices (Mbembe, 2017). In the context of African art and culture, decolonization encompasses the repatriation of stolen artefacts and a profound reevaluation of the narratives and representations that have shaped African identity and space (Smith, 2016).

Colonial Perceptions of African Visual Representations
During the colonial period, the European perspective significantly shaped the understanding and presentation of African art. The Eurocentric view often led to misrepresentation and exoticization of African art, framing it as primitive and stripping it of its cultural context (Gikandi, 1992; Thompson, 2015; Mudimbe, 1988). This legacy has had lasting effects on the perception of African art, influencing how it is described, the materials and subjects chosen, and its intended purpose. Contemporary African art is deeply affected by the cultural norms of the European colonizers, as seen in descriptions of "tribal" and "neo-primitivism," underscoring the need

to understand contemporary African art within the historical context of colonization to appreciate its full significance and complexity (ScholarWorks@BGSU, 2023).

Post-Independence Changes and Challenges

The mid-20th century witnessed a wave of decolonization in Africa, establishing independent nation-states (Gikandi, 1992). While this period brought about political sovereignty, it also presented new challenges in art and cultural representation. Many African countries grappled with recovering and reasserting their cultural identities after colonialism. One significant development was the emergence of national museums and cultural institutions dedicated to preserving and showcasing African art and heritage. In Nigeria, for instance, the National Museum in Lagos has played a crucial role in recontextualizing and celebrating Nigerian art (Gikandi, 1992). The museum houses a diverse collection, including traditional artefacts, contemporary artworks, and archaeological finds, contributing to the nation's cultural pride.

Similarly, the National Museum of African Art in Senegal has been instrumental in showcasing the region's rich artistic traditions (Gikandi, 1992). It features various exhibits, from traditional masks and sculptures to contemporary paintings, offering a comprehensive view of Senegal's artistic heritage. In Ghana, the Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum and Memorial Park are symbols of national identity, commemorating the country's first President and highlighting Ghana's struggle for independence (Gikandi, 1992). The site incorporates artistic elements, including sculptures and murals, to convey historical narratives and cultural significance.

However, these institutions also faced challenges related to colonial-era acquisitions. For instance, the debate over repatriating objects removed during the colonial period has been a complex issue for countries like Ethiopia, which seeks the return of artefacts, including the Aksum Obelisk, currently housed in Italy (Gikandi, 1992). Moreover, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with its rich artistic heritage, has grappled with reclaiming artworks like the "Looting of the Ivory of Mitendi" from Belgian institutions (Gikandi,

1992). This reflects broader discussions on restitution and the need to address the legacy of colonial-era acquisitions in African art.

In navigating these challenges, national museums and cultural institutions across the continent have played a crucial role in reshaping the narrative around African art, fostering cultural pride, and addressing the complexities of postcolonial identity (Gikandi, 1992). Additionally, African artists embarked on a journey to reclaim their identities and spaces through their work. The post-independence period witnessed a surge in artistic creativity and innovation as they sought to break free from the Eurocentric paradigms imposed during colonialism. They engaged with traditional artistic practices, fused them with contemporary styles, and explored new mediums, thus contributing to reimagining African visual representations (Thompson, 2015). This historical analysis underscores the importance of understanding the colonial influences on African art and the subsequent efforts to decolonize these representations. It provides a foundational context for the contemporary reimagining of African identity and space in visual art, a topic that this study further explores.

Contemporary Reimagining of African Identity and Space

Today's African artists are vital in reshaping perceptions of African identity and the concept of space within their art. They utilize a spectrum of art forms such as painting, sculpture, photography, and digital media to question the remnants of colonial influence and to craft stories that mirror the rich tapestry of modern African life. Following the colonial era, Africa saw the rise of artistic movements like "Negritude" and "Afrocentrism" that championed a return to and a celebration of African roots (Mbembe, 2017). Contemporary artists continue this legacy, critically engaging with global market forces and diverse African realities. Although they confront the restrictive forces of identity politics, highlighted by Kabov (2023), their art persists as a powerful vehicle for societal dialogue and transformation, embodied by figures such as Shonibare and El-Salahi (Art Africa Magazine, 2023; MOMAA, 2023).

Reparation Conservation of African Art Heritage as Decolonisation Strategy

The Benin Bronzes (fig.1), a collection of intricate brass and bronze sculptures originating from the Kingdom of Benin, have emerged as a poignant and emblematic case study in the broader context of the decolonisation of African art. These remarkable artworks, distinguished by their intricate craftsmanship and historical significance, bear witness to a complex history deeply entwined with colonization and restitution efforts.

Historically, the Benin Bronzes date back to the Kingdom of Benin, which thrived from the 13th to the 19th century. These brass and bronze sculptures, often referred to as "bronzes" despite their composition, held multifaceted roles within the kingdom, serving functions ranging from religious and ceremonial to ornamental and historical (Nevadomsky, 2017). In a pivotal moment in 1897, a punitive expedition led by British forces resulted in the looting and pillaging of these cultural treasures from the kingdom (Nevadomsky, 2017). This marked the beginning of a contentious chapter in the history of African art, as the Benin Bronzes were dispersed across the globe, finding their way into the collections of museums and private individuals.

In recent years, a global movement has gained momentum, advocating for the repatriation of the Benin Bronzes to Nigeria. Central to this movement is the call for returning this artistic heritage to its rightful place of origin, which holds profound cultural and historical significance (Mudimbe, 1988). This movement has ignited discussions about restitution, the ethics of cultural heritage ownership, and the imperative to address the colonial legacy that led to the looting of African art (Nevadomsky, 2017).

Artists, activists, and scholars have played instrumental roles in shaping the discourse surrounding the Benin Bronzes. Notable artists, including El Anatsui, have utilized their creative platforms to address the issues of cultural repatriation and decolonisation (Smith, 2010). Their artistic expressions serve as powerful statements on the importance of acknowledging the colonial past and advocating for the return of these cultural treasures. Simultaneously, activists have

been pivotal in mobilizing support for the repatriation movement through petitions, protests, and awareness campaigns. These efforts have garnered international attention and have led to discussions about the moral imperative of returning stolen cultural heritage (Mudimbe, 1988).

Furthermore, scholars have contributed significantly by providing critical research and historical context, offering insights into the significance of the Benin Bronzes within the broader landscape of African art and culture (Nevadomsky, 2017). Their contributions have informed policy discussions and provided a foundation for legal and ethical arguments surrounding repatriation. The reclamation of the Benin Bronzes exemplifies the ongoing decolonization of African art and the broader movement for the repatriation of cultural heritage. These artefacts, symbolic of a painful colonial history, have become emblematic of the struggle to restore cultural identity and address historical injustices. Artists, activists, and scholars continue to be at the forefront of this movement, challenging the status quo and advocating for the rightful return of the Benin Bronzes to Nigeria, where they can once again be a source of pride and cultural heritage.
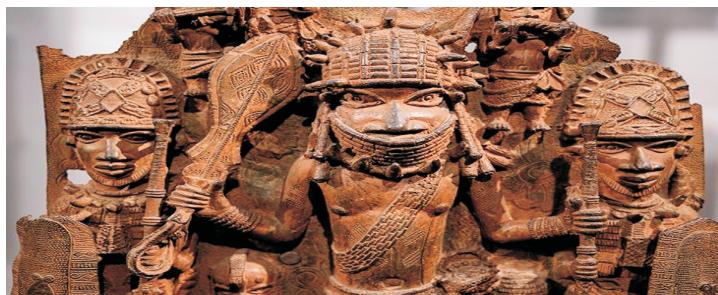

Fig. 1

Benin Bronzes on display at the British Museum. Credit: Alamy

Source: https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-problem-of-the-benin-bronzes-will-never-go-away/

Artists as Agents of Decolonization

Contemporary African artists have taken on the role of decolonizers, using their art to challenge existing narratives and assert their perspectives. El Anatsui (b. 1944) is noteworthy among these agents of decolonization, whose monumental work *"Gravity and Grace"* transforms discarded materials, particularly aluminium liquor bottle caps, into shimmering artworks that challenge conventional notions of African art. Similarly, Wangechi Mutu (b. 1972) deconstructs and reconstructs the female body in her multimedia installations, such as *"The End of Eating Everything,"* challenging Eurocentric representations of African women and critiquing the objectification of Black bodies.

Zanele Muholi (b. 1972) documents the experiences of South Africa's LGBTQ+ community in the *"Faces and Phases"* photography series, challenging stereotypes and celebrating diverse identities. Meanwhile, Chéri Samba (b. 1956) employs vibrant paintings like *"J'aime la Couleur"* ("I Love the Color") to address social and political issues in Africa with bold colours and satire. Sokari Douglas Camp's (b. 1958) sculptures, including *"Battle Bus,"* explore themes of conflict, migration, and the impact of oil on African communities. These artists collectively contribute to decolonizing visual representations in African art, offering diverse perspectives, reclaiming narratives, and fostering a sense of agency and empowerment within African communities (Thompson, 2015).

El Anatsui's "Gravity and Grace"

El Anatsui, born in Anyako, Ghana, in 1944, is a renowned Ghanaian-Nigerian artist known for his transformative artistic journey that transcends continents, cultures, and artistic mediums (Smith, 2010). His early life and education were marked by a fascination with metalwork and a commitment to exploring the artistic potential of everyday materials (Smith, 2010). One of his most prominent pieces, "Gravity and Grace," (fig.2) challenges conventional notions of African art (Mbembe, 2017). Composed of thousands of aluminium liquor bottle caps flattened and woven together, this shimmering, monumental artwork is a testament to Anatsui's commitment to

sustainability and cultural reclamation (Mbembe, 2017). Its use of repurposed materials challenges colonial narratives that once exoticized African art as "primitive" and highlights the resourcefulness and resilience of African communities (Mbembe, 2017).

Anatsui's innovative use of discarded materials, particularly aluminium liquor bottle caps and other reclaimed objects, distinguishes his artistic practice (Smith, 2010). Through a meticulous process of flattening, weaving, and assembling, he transforms these seemingly ordinary materials into monumental, shimmering artworks that challenge conventional notions of African art and identity (Smith, 2010). His creations' intricate patterns and textures evoke the rich history of African textiles and traditional craftsmanship while also pushing the boundaries of contemporary art (Smith, 2010).

El Anatsui's work has garnered international acclaim and has been exhibited in prestigious museums and galleries worldwide (Smith, 2010). It invites viewers to contemplate themes of history, transformation, and cultural exchange while celebrating the resilience and resourcefulness of African communities (Smith, 2010). His artistic journey continues to inspire and provoke discussions about the power of art in reshaping perceptions of identity and culture on a global scale.

Fig. 2

El Anatsui, *Earth's Skin* , 2007, Aluminum and copper wire, 449.6 x 1000.8 cm, Courtesy of Guggenheim Abu Dhabi.

Wangechi Mutu's "The End of Eating Everything"

Wangechi Mutu, a Kenyan-American artist born in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1972, is celebrated for her multifaceted and thought-provoking artworks (Mutu, 2019). Her artistic journey has been marked by a profound exploration of themes related to gender, identity, the African diaspora, and cultural hybridity, challenging conventional artistic norms (Mutu, 2019). Her artistic repertoire spans various mediums, including painting, collage, sculpture, and multimedia installations.

One of her notable works, "The End of Eating Everything," (fig.3) is a multimedia installation that delves into themes of gender, identity, and cultural hybridity (Smith, 2016). In this piece, Mutu deconstructs and reconstructs the female body in a way that challenges Eurocentric representations of African women and critiques the objectification of Black bodies (Smith, 2016). Through her innovative and visually striking creations, she weaves elements of African and Western influences, resulting in emotionally resonant pieces that resonate with audiences globally.

Throughout her illustrious career, Wangechi Mutu's art has received international acclaim and has been showcased in renowned museums and galleries worldwide, underscoring her work's global relevance and impact (Mutu, 2019). Her thought-provoking art invites viewers to engage in dialogues about the intricate complexities of African identity and the ever-evolving narratives surrounding the African diaspora (Smith, 2016). Wangechi Mutu's innovative and challenging artistic practice continues to inspire discussions about cultural identity, feminism, and the transformative potential of art in reshaping societal perceptions (Mutu, 2019).

Fig. 3

Wangechi Mutu, *The End of Eating Everything* (video still), 2013

Animated video (colour, sound), 8:10 minute loop, Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels, and Victoria Miro Gallery, London . Commissioned by the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, NC.

Zanele Muholi's "Faces and Phases"

Zanele Muholi is a South African visual activist and photographer born on July 19, 1972, in Umlazi, Durban. Muholi's work is renowned for its potent exploration of identity, mainly focusing on issues related to race, gender, and sexuality in post-apartheid South Africa. They identify as non-binary and prefer the pronouns they/them. One of Muholi's notable photography series is "Faces and Phases," (Fig. 4) an ongoing project initiated in 2006. The series comprises a collection of black and white portraits capturing the faces and experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community in South Africa. "Faces and Phases" serves as a visual archive documenting individuals' lived realities and resilience within this community.

The portraits in this series go beyond mere documentation; they encapsulate the subjects' strength, beauty, and diversity, challenging societal norms and advocating for the visibility of marginalized voices. Muholi's work with "Faces and Phases" has been instrumental in fostering a broader conversation about the intersections of identity, activism, and the power of visual representation.

Fig. 4

Zanele Muholi's, *Faces and Phases*, 2012, Photography Series, dOCUMENTA (13) Kasel Germany. (Photo: Anders Sune Berg)

Chéri Samba "J'aime la Couleur"

Chéri Samba, born in Kinto M'Vuila in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1956, is a highly influential contemporary African artist known for his vibrant and visually striking paintings that blend traditional Congolese art with modern elements. Growing up in a family of blacksmiths, Samba initially pursued a career in sign painting and later transitioned to fine art. One of Chéri Samba's notable works is "J'aime la Couleur" (I Love the Color) (Fig. 5), an artwork that encapsulates his distinctive style and thematic focus. Created in 1988, "J'aime la Couleur" is a captivating canvas that showcases Samba's mastery of colour, composition, and narrative. The painting features a central figure, often a self-portrait of the artist, surrounded by vivid hues, symbols, and textual elements.

In "J'aime la Couleur," Samba employs a rich palette and intricate details to convey a celebration of colour as a symbol of life, vitality, and the cultural richness of Africa. The artwork is a testament to Samba's commitment to challenging stereotypes and offering a positive and empowering representation of African identity.

Fig. 5

Chéri Samba, *J'aime la Couleur*, 1988, Oil on Canvas,
121 x 151cm, Atist's private collection, Belgium.

Sokari Douglas Camp "Battle Bus"

Sokari Douglas Camp is a renowned Nigerian-born contemporary sculptor born in 1958 in Buguma, Nigeria. She is widely recognized for her impactful sculptures that address political, social, and environmental issues, often drawing inspiration from her Niger Delta heritage. One of Sokari Douglas Camp's notable artworks is the "Battle Bus." (Fig. 6) Created in 2003, this sculpture is a powerful commentary on Nigeria's political turmoil and violence. The "Battle Bus" is a large-scale, dynamic piece that captures the chaotic and tense atmosphere associated with political unrest. The artwork features a bus loaded with figures, symbolizing the struggles and conflicts faced by the Nigerian people.

Using recycled materials to create the "Battle Bus" is a distinctive characteristic of Sokari Douglas Camp's work. Using discarded metal and other materials, she infuses her sculptures with a sense of resilience and resourcefulness, echoing the spirit of the communities she represents. The "Battle Bus" is not merely a visual spectacle; it is a profound representation of the artist's engagement with political and social issues, serving as a commentary on the impact of political instability on the lives of ordinary Nigerians. Through her art, Sokari Douglas Camp prompts viewers to reflect on the broader implications of political conflict and the resilience of communities in the face of adversity.

Fig. 6

Sokari Douglas Camp, *Battle Bus*, 2003, Steel sculpture, L 14,022.88 x B 2,743.2 x H 3,352.8

, retrieved from: https://www.artatsite.com/Europa/details/Camp-Sokari-Douglas-Bus-Guardian-London-ArtAtSite.html.

Conclusion

This study delves into the multifaceted journey of reimagining identity and space in African art and culture through the lens of decolonization. The historical influences of colonialism have significantly impacted African visual representations, perpetuating stereotypes and distorting authentic narratives. However, post-independence initiatives, such as establishing national museums, have provided avenues for recontextualizing African art and asserting cultural pride. Contemporary African artists have emerged as key figures in the decolonization movement, challenging Eurocentric representations and employing diverse artistic mediums. Their work fosters a sense of empowerment and resilience within African communities and resonates globally. The advent of technology, particularly digital media, has further amplified decolonization efforts, facilitating meaningful dialogues about identity and representation.

The journey toward fully decolonized visual representations is ongoing. Challenges such as the repatriation of looted artefacts and the commercialization of African art persist, necessitating continued advocacy and ethical considerations. This paper emphasizes the enduring effects of colonialism on African art and culture while celebrating the agency and creativity of African artists. The implications of this study underscore the importance of recognizing historical context and appreciating the innovative approaches contemporary African artists take in reshaping representations of identity and space. The journey towards decolonized visual representations is a testament to African communities' and artists' resilience and creativity, reflecting a steadfast commitment to reclaiming and celebrating authentic narratives within the global context explored in this paper.

References

Asante, M. K. (1987). *The Afrocentric Idea.* Temple University Press.
Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.
Britannica. (2023). Negritude | Definition, Movement, Characteristics, &

Facts.

Cole, H. M. (2007). *Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos.* Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.* University of Chicago Legal Forum, pp. 139–167.

Dorson, R. M. (1968). *The Symbolic Quest: Basic Concepts of Anthroposophy.* University of Chicago Press.

Gikandi, S. (1992). *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature*. Cornell University Press.

Hall, S. (1996). Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'? In S. Hall & P. Du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity.* Sage Publications.

Kabov, V. (2023). Identity Politics and Contemporary African Art: Some Lessons from the Masters. ART AFRICA Magazine.

Lewis-Williams, D., & Dowson, T. A. (1990). *Images of Power: Understanding Bushman Rock Art.* Southern Book Publishers.

Mama, A. (1997). What Does It Mean to Be a "Feminist" in Africa? *Feminist Review*, pp. 57, 16–36.

Mbembe, A. (2017). *Critique of Black Reason.* Duke University Press.

MOMAA. (2023). Art and Activism: How African Artists Are Driving Change.

Mudimbe, V. Y. (1988). *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge.* Indiana University Press.

Mutu, W. (2019). *Wangechi Mutu: A Shady Promise*. Skira.

Nevadomsky, J. (2017). *The Art of Benin*: *African Artistry and Western Aesthetic Imaginaries*. University of Rochester Press.

Ramose, M. B. (1999). *African Philosophy through Ubuntu.* Harare: Mond Books.

Ross, D. (2019). *Kente Cloth.* In Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication.

ScholarWorks@BGSU. (2023). Impact of Colonialism on Contemporary African Art.

Smith, J. K. (2010). *El Anatsui: When I Last Wrote to You About Africa...* Museum for African Art.

Smith, L. T. (2016). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples.* Zed Books.

Thompson, R. F. (2015). *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act in the Collection of Katharine Coryton White.* University of California Press.