MAYDAY

magazine

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Westless Youth
What's next for the Transatlantic alliance?

Decolonizing Development
Europe must be better at remembering its past

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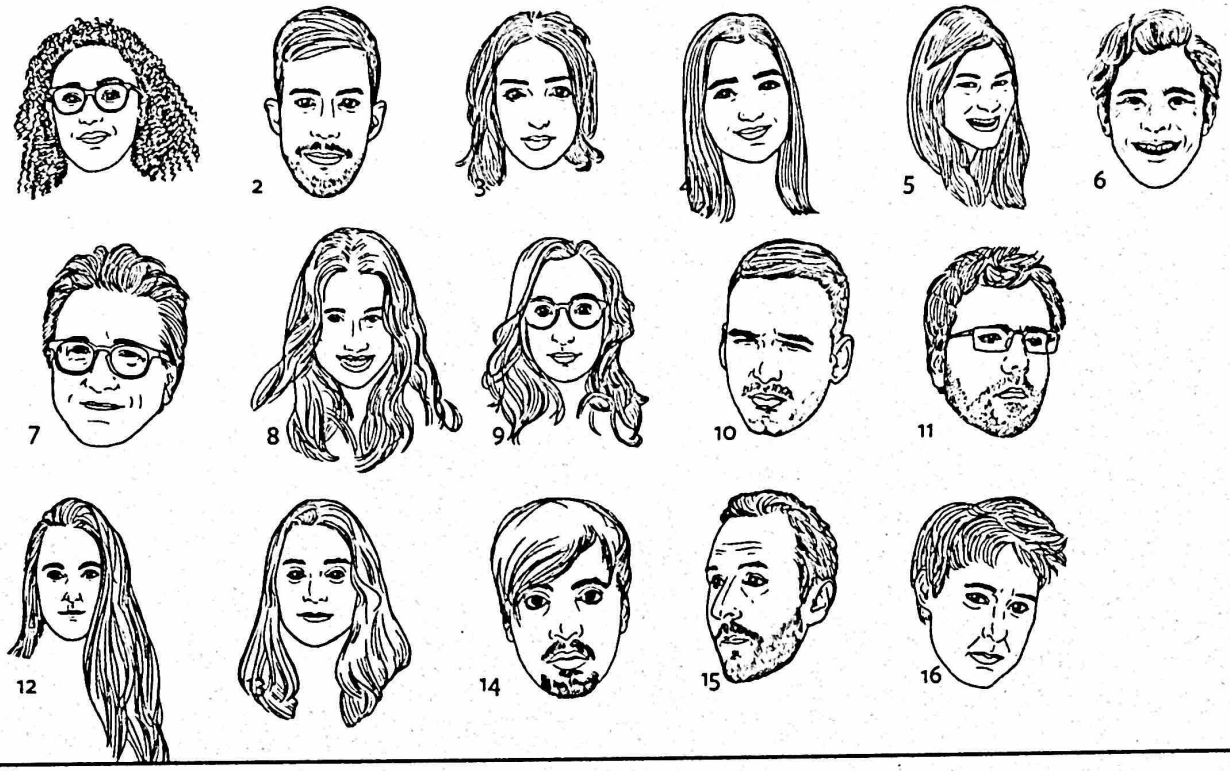
Contributors



Bios

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Pamela Peters is the assistant coordinator of Agora, the platform for debate and reflection on the crossroads of arts and society at BOZAR—Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels.

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Nathalie is a writer, researcher and multimedia journalist born and raised in London. She is currently living and studying in Aarhus, Denmark.

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6. KYRILL HARTOG
Kyrill Hartog is one of the founders of Are We Europe and the Editor-in-Chief of AWE Magazine. In the past he has worked as a researcher and writer at a think tank, and as a consultant for the public and private sector. He spends his spare time thinking and writing about what Europe may or may not be beyond Brussels.

7. KARL VAN DEN BROECK
Karl van den Broeck is a Belgian journalist. He is the coordinator of Agora, the platform for debate and reflection on the crossroads of arts and society at BOZAR—Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels. He is also the chief editor of Apache, a platform for investigative journalism based in Antwerp.

8. ESMÉ O'KEEFFE
Esmé grew up between the U.K., France and Italy. Following an undergraduate degree in Languages and Politics at the University of Cambridge, she is studying for a Master's at Sciences Po Paris. She has written for the Times, the TImes Literary Supplement, the Economist and the Independent. @esokeeffe

9. AMANDA COAKLEY
Amanda Coakley is an independent correspondent living in London. She has reported for The Irish Times, The Financial Times, Channel 4 News and CNN International. Her work has been supported by The Pulitzer Centre and The Simon Cumbers Fund. @amandamcoakley

10. ALEKS EROR
Aleks Eror is a Serbian-born journalist currently based between Belgrade and London. His work has been published by the Guardian, Foreign Policy, the New Republic, Vice and other publications.

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Scott is an Australian-born, British-educated science and technology journalist based in New York City. He's written for a number of international titles, including the BBC, NBC, the FT and CNN. @LorumIpsum.

12. ALEXANDRA HOWLAND
Alexandra's work aims to challenge and expand the way that documentary photography covers geopolitical events. Her background as an abstract painter has led to a multidimensional practice using imagery, found objects, collage, sound and video.

13. ERIKA LARSEN
Erika is a multidisciplinary storyteller who works in photography, writing and video. She is fascinated by the way people communicate with the nature world.

14. SAM GREGG
Sam is an autodidactic portrait and documentary photographer from London, with a particular interest in marginalized and dispossessed communities.

15. IVES MAES
Ives is a multidisciplinary visual artist who lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium. His work has been exhibited in group shows in museums around the world.

16. JUDITH VANISTENDAEL
Vanistendael is a Belgian author and illustrator of comics. Her graphic novels include the Eisner Award-nominated *When David Lost His Voice* and the semi-autobiographical *Dance by the Light of the Moon*, which was nominated for the prestigious Angoulême Grand Prize. Her latest Graphic novel, *Penelope*, is a contemporary note to Homer's Odyssey.

History

Decolonizing Development

If Europe is to do good in Africa, it must be better at remembering its past.

by Natasha Livingstone

Illustration by Ivano Talamo

Walking along the burnt orange sand with his British colleague, Sitsope Ayendo was brimming with confidence. "I love helping people," he recalls thinking, "this is going to be an opportunity to do that."

Ayendo, 29, from Lomé in Togo, was a volunteer for the International Citizen Service (ICS), the British government's overseas development scheme, which sends U.K. volunteers to poorer countries to work with local volunteers on aid projects.

The project that week was building tippy taps, a cheap way of creating a hands-free sink using wooden sticks, string and a plastic tub. But as Ayendo helped drive the sticks into the ground with bemused stares from onlookers, he felt a bit frustrated.

"We don't need to learn how to make tippy taps, and it's not what people need to be taught." He thought to himself, "Are we really going to keep teaching this when people need to know how to start a business?"

Reflecting on his experiences, Ayendo told Mayday, "The real opportunity ICS missed in Togo was adapting the scheme to the needs of the people."

A Painful History

Ayendo's story is one of many in the history of development in Africa, a history inextricably linked with colonialism.

Academics have spent decades wrangling over the precise meaning of the term development, but Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton provide two simple definitions: unintentional change caused by political, social and economic forces, and the deliberate attempt, via policy, to construct desired ends.

Origins of the idea of "developing Africa" emerged in the 19th century through campaigns for the abolition of the slave trade. The British explorer and abolitionist David Livingstone's three 'C's—commerce, Christianity and civilization—depicted how Europe could transform Africa.

But development was rife in Africa before Europeans arrived. The kingdom of Buganda, now part of modern Uganda, is just one example of an intricate society with a long history of economic prosperity. For Europeans, the sophisticated political and financial system of Ancient Egypt may be a more familiar case study.

Europeans arriving in Africa in the 19th century viewed it as an unchanged relic of the past, with explorers like Richard Burton claiming Africans were "a degeneracy from the civilized man" with an "incapacity for improvement." Yet new kinds of long-distance trade in ivory and slaves meant the societies and economies were in fact changing considerably.

The European empires' scramble for Africa began in the 1880s. The motivations were complex, but a belief in European superiority was integral. The 1925 Report of the East Africa Commission by Britain is an illustrative example. The report, investigating measures to accelerate economic development and improve social welfare, reinforced the colonial policy of indirect rule—using pre-existing indigenous power structures to control African populations—and recommended a loan for transport development.

Its concern about "the advance in civilization of the native" was rooted in racism, but many in the West genuinely believed that Africans would benefit from an externally imposed "civilization." The Spectator, a conservative British political magazine, praised the Commission in 1925, stating in an editorial that Britain "must make retribution" for the slave trade and "help Africa."

This view was commonplace across Europe at the time. France was particularly proud of its "civilizing mission" and defended it into the mid-20th century. Speaking before the United Nations in 1955, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Antoine Pinay, declared that "France would not tolerate insult or slander against its civilizing work."

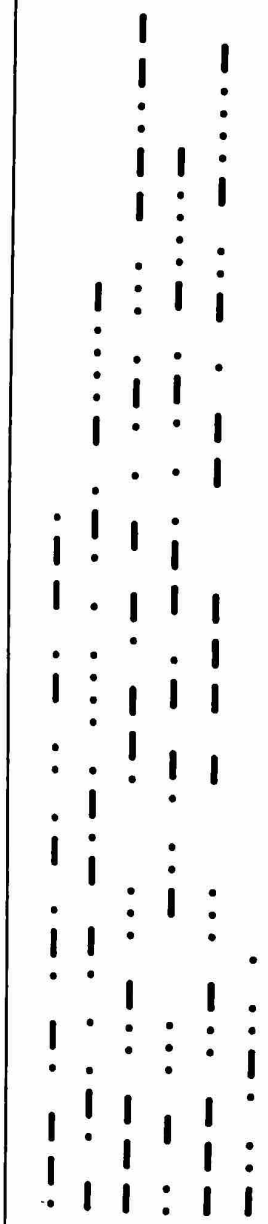
After the Second World War, France and Britain invested heavily in colonial development projects. Many of these failed catastrophically, mostly due to prejudices against "traditional" farming techniques, a lack of awareness of local conditions, and authoritarian rule.

Perhaps the most famous example in British East Africa was the Groundnut Scheme in Tanganyika, part of present-day Tanzania. The plan, presented to parliament in 1947, aimed to mechanize the production of peanuts, ushering in an agricultural revolution that would elevate economic activity and social welfare in the colonies. Yet the government's plan admitted the "immediate reason" for the scheme was the "urgent need for new supplies of fats for the U.K."

The scheme was an economic failure, with many of the hundred thousand acres of land cleared being unsuitable for arable farming. The project also came to resemble a police operation, with security forces quashing any dissent.

Other European countries suffered similar failures. The French controlled l'Office du Niger planned to irrigate 1,750,000 hectares of land to produce 300,000 tonnes of cotton in the 1920s, but by 1953 just 25,000 hectares had been irrigated, with annual production failing to exceed 4,000 tonnes.

When independence arrived, development was used by African leaders as a tool of power. The first president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, articulated his policy of "African Socialism" in the



"Policies imposed by The World Bank reduced food availability, exacerbated urban-rural inequalities and increased poverty."

Arusha Declaration in 1967, which stated: "everybody wants development; but not everybody understands... development". This statement implied that only educated Tanzanians had the knowledge to carry out development, and this logic was repeated throughout Nyerere's 24-year rule under a one-party system.

A belief in development also encouraged outsiders to establish non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Africa, although some cooperated with colonial administrations. In Kenya, overseas missionary societies and voluntary organizations from Britain had helped the colonial governments keep control. For example, the women's association Maendeleo Ya Wanawake, and the Christian Council of Kenya, participated in government-funded schemes to subvert anti-colonial resistance, interrogating Kenyans to identify "loyal Africans" from "potential terrorists" in British concentration camps during the Mau Mau uprising of 1952-1960.

After independence, these organizations reinvented themselves using the language of development. Christian Aid, a prominent U.K. charity that operates in 37 countries, evolved out of a network of these bodies.

Charities established to rebuild Europe after WWII also needed a new raison d'être after Europe was reconstructed. As the continent recovered, these "war charities," including Oxfam, Save the Children and Plan International, were faced with a choice: wind down activities, or turn their attention overseas. They chose the latter, with Oxfam and War on Want, for instance, supporting the UN's call to relieve global poverty through "self-generating agricultural development."

By the 1980s, development in Africa had failed to create the promised rewards. In fact, the World Bank's "structural adjustment programmes" of the 1980s exacerbated economic decline. The Bank advised that African regimes needed foreign loans, but had to alter their domestic policies to be an eligible recipient. These alterations included currency devaluation, the intensification of export agriculture and trade liberalization. Such changes would supposedly lead to the "adjustment" of malfunctioning economies to become viable parts of the global system. In practice, these policies reduced food availability, exacerbated urban-rural inequalities and increased poverty. Kenya, for example, was forced to import food between 1983-84.

NGOs also contributed to conflict by undermining state structures, while political leaders manipulated aid to benefit their allies and punish their enemies. This occurred most notably in Sudan. Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), established in 1989, was the first UN-managed humanitarian program mandated to help people on both sides of a conflict while working with a sovereign government. OLS was a response to the Sudanese civil war that had reignited in 1982, but donor agencies called for, and funded, a review of the operation in 1994.

This led to the OLS review, the first systematic assessment of humanitarian policy in a chronic political emergency, produced by international development academics such as Joanna Macrae, a Brit, and Douglas Johnson, an American. The review argued that OLS was "complicit with... oppression" by working with the Sudanese government, because "the existing development process in Sudan (was) linked to the war aims of the government of Sudan."

Historians have also argued NGOs in southern Sudan contributed to the second civil war (1983 - 2005) by building stronger social infrastructure than the state, thereby undermining it. In their devastating critique, Short-Cut to Decay, Sharif Harir and Terje Tvedt listed the many NGOs operating in southern Sudan

in the 1980s, many of which were European: Euro-Accord, German Volunteer Service (GTZ), German Leprosy Relief Association, Swedish Free Mission, Swiss Interchurch Aid, Norwegian Council for the Prevention of Blindness. According to Harir and Tvedt, Norwegian Church Aid repeatedly warned other NGOs about the dangers of establishing institutions the government couldn't take over. Despite these warnings, many NGOs were unconcerned about the sustainability of their projects and "contributed unintentionally to the erosion of the authority of the very weak state."

"They cannot admit that for 60 years they've been causing harm."

"It's a historical fact that international development is rooted in colonialism," says Firoze Manji, a Kenyan academic and professor at the Institute of African Studies in Ottawa, Canada. "In my opinion, development is a continuity of European colonialism, all dressed up in a modernist lingo because it implies progress."

"I think international NGOs should close," says Manji, citing Oxfam as an example of a "war charity" that has become a global NGO. "They are saviors and they need victims, or they go out of business. For more than 60 years Oxfam has said 'we've been working away to get ourselves out of business' and now they are bigger than they ever were."

"They'll fund a few progressive little projects, but they cannot admit that for 60 years they've been causing harm. To do so is to go into crisis."

(In response to these comments, an Oxfam spokesperson said: "Nothing would make us happier than a world where no one lives in poverty... Our priority is always to maximize the impact for the communities we exist to serve. The whole Oxfam confederation is undergoing a transformation to devolve power away from the global North. We are working hard with partners and allies fighting poverty and inequality to support them to find their own solutions to the problems they face and act in solidarity with them.")

For critics like Manji, the industry's historical links to colonialism are reason enough for development organizations to close their doors. Others think differently.

The new CEO of Oxfam, Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, was also known for "bashing large NGOs" for their inefficiency before entering his current role, according to a podcast produced by Oxfam in June. In the interview, available on Oxfam's website, Sriskandarajah describes his attempts to reform the industry from within.

"For the last 18 months I've been thinking with colleagues about where can we help not hinder, where can we facilitate and strengthen the people and partners we work with without grabbing control of power and resources. It's been much harder than I expected."

Sriskandarajah may have a hard time. Current development employees told Mayday a sector-wide belief in European superiority, which was crucial to colonial thinking, has not disappeared.

"There still is a sort of 'us and them' attitude and belief that we know better," says a long-time employee from an international NGO based in the U.K., who couldn't speak on the record without risking their job. "But it's complicated. A lot of our partners in developing countries haven't had the same access to education and they don't have the same knowledge level."

Despite this, for the NGO employee, the positives outweigh the criticisms. "It terrifies me to think everyone is too consumed with problems in Europe, which are significant, to even think about the rest of the world."

"In that sense, I think development needs to stay and I think development organizations need to be part of the mix."

A senior insider at Britain's Department for International Development (DfID), who asked to remain anonymous, agrees that outsiders are still needed to help Africa develop.

"Our role is to push the hand of the population in securing easy wins like education and health. This is important because, just as Henry VIII didn't give a fig about protecting the common yeoman, we have the same thing going on in developing countries," he said, referring to the concentration of power held by unaccountable elites governing some countries in Africa.

Comparing present-day African states with Tudor Britain could be viewed as an echo of the colonial view that Africa lagged behind the West in the march to "civilization." But for the DfID insider, imperialism is a problem of the past.

"I think you can say where we had colonial relationships we've had more diplomatic and aid relationships, but that's not saying the aid project is a translation of the colonial project."

"Is the patronization and racism of colonialism being carried into the aid project? I would have to say no. I think the profound opposite of that. I think the aid project is populated by internationals that see global development as the solution to colonialism's legacy. But I'm sure you would have a load of academics and commentators that would say it's a continuity."

The BLM protests have encouraged honest discussions about European imperialism. It has highlighted the need to address racial inequality within wealthy countries, rather than viewing it as a distant issue that befalls poorer nations. But while statues of colonists

and explorers have been torn down across the globe, Europe continues to act as a development actor in Africa, albeit in the shadow of China.

In fact, just weeks after the BLM protests, commentators in Britain from across the political spectrum were leaping to the defense of the aid industry after Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the merger of DfID with the Foreign Office. The merger aims to achieve a unified foreign policy, but anxious onlookers worry it could lead to a loss of expertise, or cause aid to be more politicized. In other parts of Europe, development departments and NGOs are still thriving.

For Justin Willis, a professor of African history at Durham University, the merger represents an unexpected shift. Academics have long criticized development as an industry that originated in colonialism, used by regimes and international NGOs to construct authority. In contrast, politicians have always touted its value.

"Now it seems that it is becoming increasingly acceptable for major political figures to advocate a reduction in development spending. In this new context, perhaps the radical approach will switch back to saying more positive things about development." After all, he says, there are "more lethal ways of pursuing the projection of power."

Despite its colonial past, development still offers hope to many people in Africa's poorer countries. While Ayendo questions the efficacy of his work in Togo, Michel Epey, a Togolese volunteer, has no concerns. "Of course development is a good thing," he told Mayday. "The programme really benefited me. I learnt about cultural differences and gained leadership skills, which strengthened my CV."

For Sara Pantuliano, Chief Executive of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the closure of international NGOs is not the answer. The Italian, who leads the independent think tank and charity based in London, believes development organizations instead need to "completely rethink the role that they have."

"We need to move beyond the label of development and collectively use global expertise to analyse global challenges and empower those who are best placed to address these issues directly," she said.

"Very often, local organisations or local governments can respond much better to a context that they understand more than anyone else.

"We equally need to interrogate problems of discrimination and poverty in our own countries, as we're starting to do, rather than constantly flagging low income countries that need to catch up." MD

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—Justin Willis

Professor of African History at Durham University