

UNEQUAL EARTH

Afrocentrism and Contemporary African History

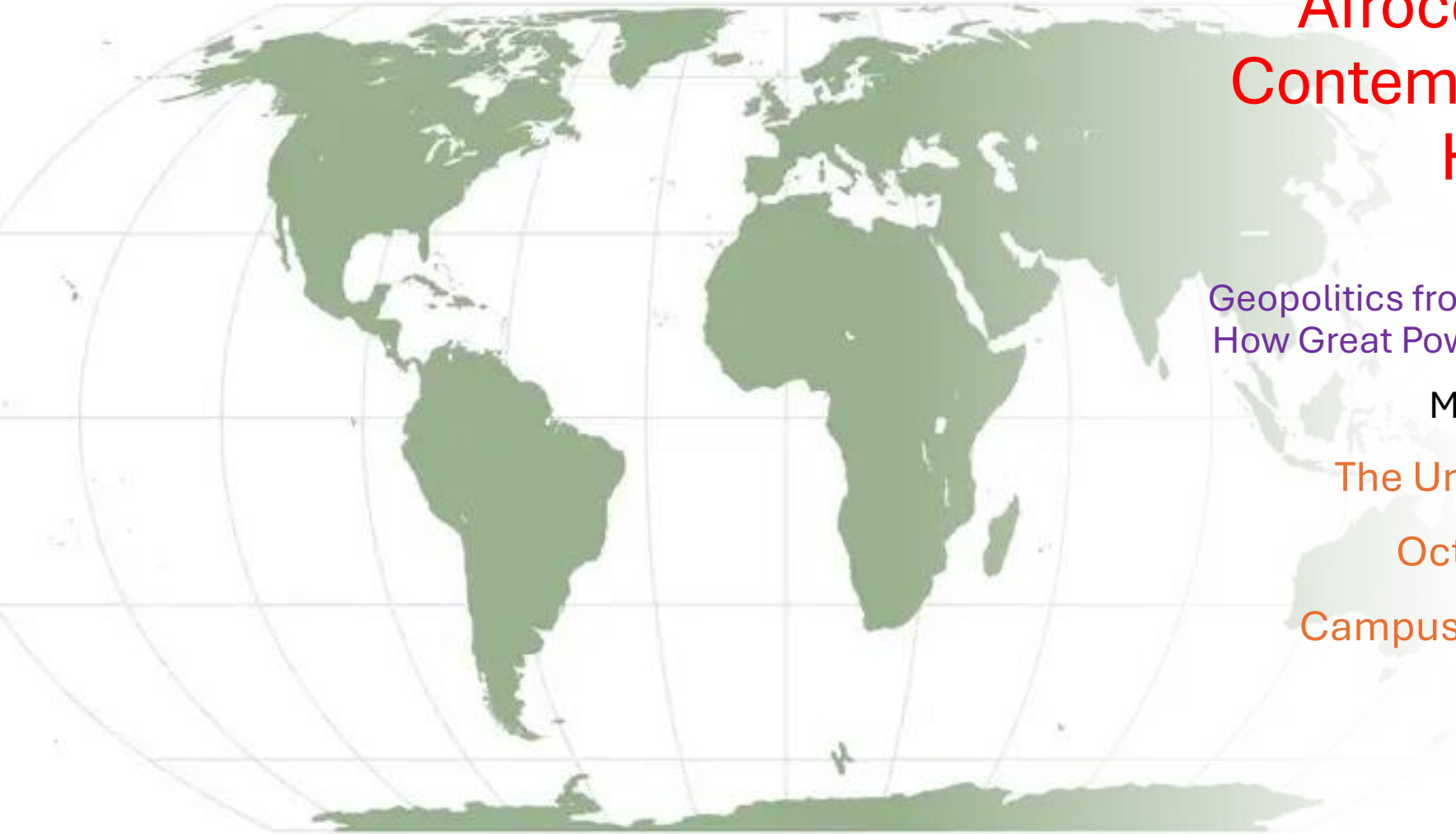
Geopolitics from African Perspective, and
How Great Powers Can Succeed in Africa

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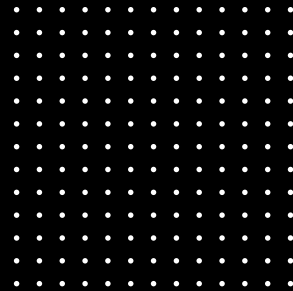
In their book *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, Roger Fisher et al. (2007) told a story about two people playing Frisbee on a beach. A man was observing them, and, after a while, he approached them and asked: “Who is winning?” He assumed that, in every game, there should be a winner and a loser.

In 2022, Mecke Nagel wrote a book titled *Ludic Ubuntu*. She invited me to write a blurb for the book. In the blurb, I opposed the *cogito ergo* (I think, therefore I exist) of René Descartes, as an act of solitary meditation, to the African concept of *ubuntu*, “I relate, therefore I exist” as a definition of existence as a collective phenomenon.

Nagel further expanded to concept of *ubuntu*. It is “ludic;” it is a game that connects humanity, as we are all caught in the vast web of life, with the possibility of failure accepted, and the obsession with success or victory excluded. As Nelson Mandela once put it, “Don’t admire me for what I have achieved. Admire me for how many times I fell down and got up.” Those who started a movement, from the thousands who died fighting against slavery to the thousands who sacrificed their lives fighting against apartheid in South Africa, for the Civil Rights in the US, and against other forms of oppression elsewhere, did not expected success in their lifetime before they began.



To
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world



- To do the impossible, one has to see the invisible. Therefore, the poet Aimé Césaire of Martinique, in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*,” (1939) (Journal of a Homecoming), writing at the height of the French colonialism, gave us this exhortation: “recommencer la fin du monde” (to recommence the end of the world).

Minnesota Bridge

- To recommence the end of the world, to re-imagine and engineer a different world may come like Hurricane Milton experienced in the south this month (October 2024), or the series of relentless mini waves that made the Minnesota bridge collapse on August 1, 2007.



To give an idea of the task of seeing the world from a different perspective, an African one in this instance, let's take the case of WWII. We are taught that it started in 1939 and ended in 1945. If you consider that many regional wars merged into one global war, from an Asian perspective, WWII started in 1931 with the invasion of the Chinese province of Manchuria by Japan.

From an African, perspective, WWII ended in the 1960s with the wave of independence in Africa. After Europeans fought for their freedom (with the help of Africans), they turned around and fought against the freedom of others, including Africans'. I mean the struggle for decolonization.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a medical syringe. The hand is in the foreground, with fingers wrapped around the syringe's plunger. The syringe is clear with a needle attached. The background is dark and out of focus.

From the post-covid era: Africa in Geopolitics

Boubacar Boris Diop, in a recent article, “Après la pandémie, the réveil de l’Afrique ? “ (After the pandemic, Africa awakening?) (Le Monde Diplomatique, No. 796-, Juillet 2020) perceived signs that a post-covid19 pandemic era may be like the post-World War II era in Africa. The experience on the battlefield revealed the truth about human nature. African combatants were demystified (if not disillusioned) about the superiority of their colonial masters. Thus, when they returned home, they asked for their money back! They joined the movements for independence that then began. According to Diop, Africans learned two important lessons during the covid-19 crisis: how poorly Western countries managed their own affairs; and how Africans must rely on themselves.

Some have shown boldness, afterwards, compared to the past. Several states including Burundi, Morocco, and Equatorial-Guinea refused to follow the World Health Organization regarding the use of hydroxychloroquine. In Zimbabwe, the US ambassador was summoned to explained what happened to George Floyd.

The President of South Africa declared that the assassination of George Floyd reopened the wounds of Black South Africans, while the Africa Union harshly criticized police brutality against Blacks in the US. China is not spared. There have been official protests against the treatment of Black Africans in China which the Ambassador of China was summoned to explain in Abuja, Nigeria.

Such bold actions have yet to be seen in former French colonies until the military coups d'état in Mali (08-18-2020; and 05-24-2021), Burkina Faso (1-25-2022), and Niger (07-26-20-23).

Commenting lately on the security assistance from the West, a general from Niger stated that, “When you are at the bottom of a wells, you accept everything they throw at you, even a snake.”

Thus, Claire Metelits, in the conclusion of her book on *Security in Africa: A Critical Approach to Western Indicators of Threat* (2016) deplored that the “securitization” of Africa is based on western perception and perspective. Because there is a hierarchical relationship between those who assist and those who receive assistance, African voices are absent in policy design and decision-making. She concluded the book with an advice: “Let Africans define their own challenges.”

In this context, the global south found its voice, post covid-19 and has become more assertive in international affairs. The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) have become BRICS+ on January 1, 2024) as decided at the end of the conference of Johannesburg (August 24, 2023), by extending membership to six new states (Argentina—which withdrew its candidacy after the election of a new President--, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, and Iran). Shortly after the BRICS' summit in Johannesburg, India hosted the G20 summit in New Delhi (September 2023). The African Union, at the summit, was admitted with the same status as the European Union. At the meeting of the UN General Assembly meeting of September 2024, the idea of having two African countries as permanent members of the UN Security Council was in the order of the day. It will add Africa's voice to decision concerning the globe, not jut Africa.

What was not in the order of the day was using the continent as a surrogate terrain for others' conflict.

- **Africa in a non-linear warfare**

The fear, when the shooting started between Russia and Ukraine, was a flow of European refugees into Africa. Instead, there are reports that the war itself has spilled over to Africa. For example, Niger and Mali cut diplomatic relations with Ukraine, while Senegal summoned the Ukrainian ambassador for explanation as a reaction to a statement by a Ukrainian intelligence service official that his country provided information to Malian separatists and jihadists who attacked, on July 25, 2024, a joint Malian-Russian patrol in the Tinzouatene District where 47 Malian soldiers and 84 Russian from the Africa Corps (formerly Wagner Group) were killed.

While dealing with contingencies and demanding mutual respect from the international community, African leaders want African solutions to African problems. The Russia-Ukraine war does not meet this requirement.



Conclusion

The incident of Tinzouatene, Mali, is both symptomatic of African relations with great powers, and symbolic of the expectations from the cooperation with the outside world. It looks like great powers are reluctant to help create powerful armies in Africa. On the contrary, they prefer to intervene themselves, however with their own agenda. In so doing, they create *interstitial spaces* where different legitimacies apply, thus weakening local authorities (*etherarchies*).

In the case of the Russia-backed Africa Corps, they patrol together with Malian soldiers, they share weaponry, they fight together, and, in some cases, they die together. As Claire Metelits put it, “Let Africans define their own challenges.”

As Russia took the presidency of the BRICS this month, it is hope that African member states will exercise their agency to prevent the BRICS from becoming anti-western coalition.

Thank You.

