

E-Newsletter -March 2015

THE  
**KARIBU**  
FOUNDATION

## A New Cartography of Africa Alternative Maps lift the “unseen” of Africa

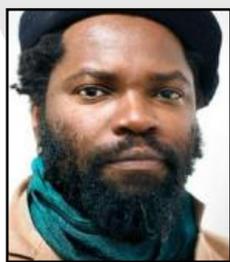
In March 2015, African publishing houses Chimurenga (South Africa) and Kwani? (Kenya) finalized a joint project that explored the links between contemporary Africa, the maps we use to show it, and how these maps don't always reflect what is actually happening on the ground for Africans. The project was based primarily on the following questions: If the maps that we use today to understand Africa were a by-product, tool, and result of imperialism, what would happen if Africans instead created maps for their own use? How would this shift the perception Africans have of themselves and how they make life on the continent? How can these maps make visible African's own realities or imaginations?

In this month's "Voices from the South," the founder and editor of Chimurenga, Ntone Edjabe, writes about the project, and the eight alternative maps that are being launched this month across Africa. He explores especially how the process of creating these "alternative cartographies" opened up the imaginations of the cartographers to highlight Africa's own evolving narratives.

The Karibu Foundation is an independent foundation that supports voices from the Global South that provide alternatives to the dominant paradigms of power, distribution, and development.

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By Ntone Edjabe  
Founder, Chimurenga

only by GDP and such indicators of “development”. And as we work in a world ruled by the uncertain- scales, set squares and compasses alone would not work; we also requires hands, feet and hearts. And memory. As Wendell Hassan Marsh has said, “History is the science of the state, while memory is the art of the stateless.”

### Mapping the unseen

In light of this, we began to ask ourselves how one represents the unseen in Africa.

For example, how does represent Somalia? Through the *Berlin 1884-85*-inherited diagram, or through the political imaginary of Greater Somalia, which includes parts of Ethiopia and Kenya?

What of the Swahili Coast which extends from Kenya through Tanzania and northern Mozambique to include parts of the Indian Ocean, and whose reluctance to be integrated into any nation-state project

Since its launch, Chimurenga has engaged, forcefully, with this question: When will the new emerge – and if it is already here, how do we decipher it?

But no edition has addressed this query as centrally as our current project on new cartographies.

Broadly, our maps project contests the narrowness of the notion of the “failed state” that publications such as *Foreign Policy* and various think-thanks mainstreamed at the peak of the structural adjustments of the late 1980s to justify Western interventionism in the so-called developing world.

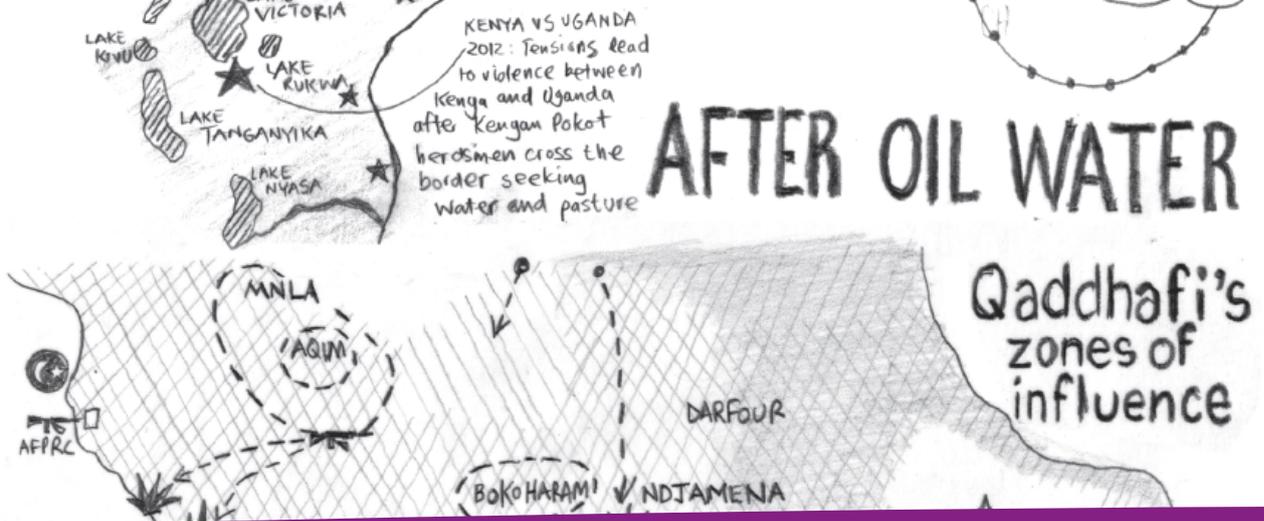
Our reality in Africa cannot be mapped

**Chimurenga**  
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Chimurenga is a pan african space for arts, culture and politics, based in Cape Town, South Africa. Its goal is to provide and sustain a pan-African, multidisplinary space for debate and innovation beyond partisan limits and national boundaries in Africa.

For more information, visit:  
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other than its own goes back seven centuries? What of the transnational identity of the Tuareg across the Sahel belt – and other pastoralist communities?

These questions make visible the existence of “secret countries” that are uncontrollable within the borders we know.

But there are other queries: what are the new trade routes in Africa – for the production and circulation of khat and other narcotics? Or for the export of young males bodies to the global industrial complex?

Who fights Africa’s wars? If water has replaced oil as one of the most sought after resources, are we witnessing the dawn of a new age of hydro-imperialism?

What was the real extent of Gaddafi’s financial empire across the continent? What is the impact of the “neopats” (new migrants from the China, India and Mediterranean Europe) or the “repats” (returning Africans) on the continent?

The emergence of Boko Haram in the Lac Chad region is a good example of the limit of our current analytical frames. To speak of this movement in the context of contemporary Nigerian politics is to overlook ethno-religious ties that have connected people in that region longer than the existence of Cameroon, Nigeria or Chad. Similarly, to analyze it through the logic of the “War on Terror” is to overlook long-standing local struggles among various groups in the region.

### Changing perceptions in a time of imperialism

We understand the role of cartography as a tool of imperialism. How-

ever, we ask: what if maps were made by Africans for their own use, to understand and make visible their own realities or imaginaries? How does it shift the perception we have of ourselves and how we make life on this continent?

We do not know, and this is why we started this work. And we’re not doing it alone. We are collaborating with Kwani?, the Kenyan literary magazine. Together we’ve invited writers and artists to produce this language, in words and images.

Our aim with this project is to shift the knowledge about and from Africa from “what it should be” to what we experience and imagine it to be – to make visible networks of trade, power structures, movement of people and ideas as we experience them.

We are very aware of the specificity of each country – we live in them. But we’re not producing maps of any individual country precisely because we’re contesting the country-focus approach.

We’re instead mapping political, economic and cultural realities that show how dated that approach is, that it has more to do with political correctness and some idea of “post-colonial Africa” than the reality we experience and imagine. Each of the maps represents several places and relations between and beyond countries, essentially, highlighting evolving narratives as opposed to supposedly fixed nodes.

However, these maps of “the new” are not only relevant to Africans but to the world. As philosopher Achille Mbembe suggests in an interview featured in the issue, “if you want to know where the world is going, look at Africa”.

### The alternative maps

The eight maps we’ve commissioned thus far are the following:

- “secret countries” (*Greater Somalia, Royal Bafokeng Nation etc.*);
- *Gaddafi’s financial and military network*;
- *soft power (foreign cultural agencies*;
- *the entertainment complex and its relationship with the trendy notion of “Africa Rising”*);
- *new trade routes*;
- *water conflicts (tied to land and water grabs)*;
- *neopats and repats (new and returning migrants from the West and Asia)*;
- *who fights Africa’s wars (the fiction of national armies and various players in armed conflicts)*.

Read together with the texts which accompany them (memoir, essays, reportage, fiction) they invite readers to look at our world differently and to consider what is emerging or re-emerging across the continent (geopolitically and otherwise).

This though is by no means the final word. The commissioning and research process is still ongoing and we welcome contributions, thoughts, provocations and reflections. With the support of the Karibu Foundation and in collaboration with Kwani?, we will initiate a dedicated webpage to house the research and ongoing contributions to this project.

The aim, as always, remains, to write our world differently. ■

# SOFT POWER DESIRE MACHINES AND THE PRODUCTION OF AFRICA RISING

ABIDJAN



Mehdi Tazi & I left Morocco after university  
TANGIER  
2010: starts his own business

2011: starts his own business  
KIGALI

1994: Frederic (D) spends three months on the run during the genocide before flying to Belgium with his family

1975: Murtala family joins the Portuguese over after Portugal's independence  
2003: Returns to Luanda  
LISBON  
LUANDA

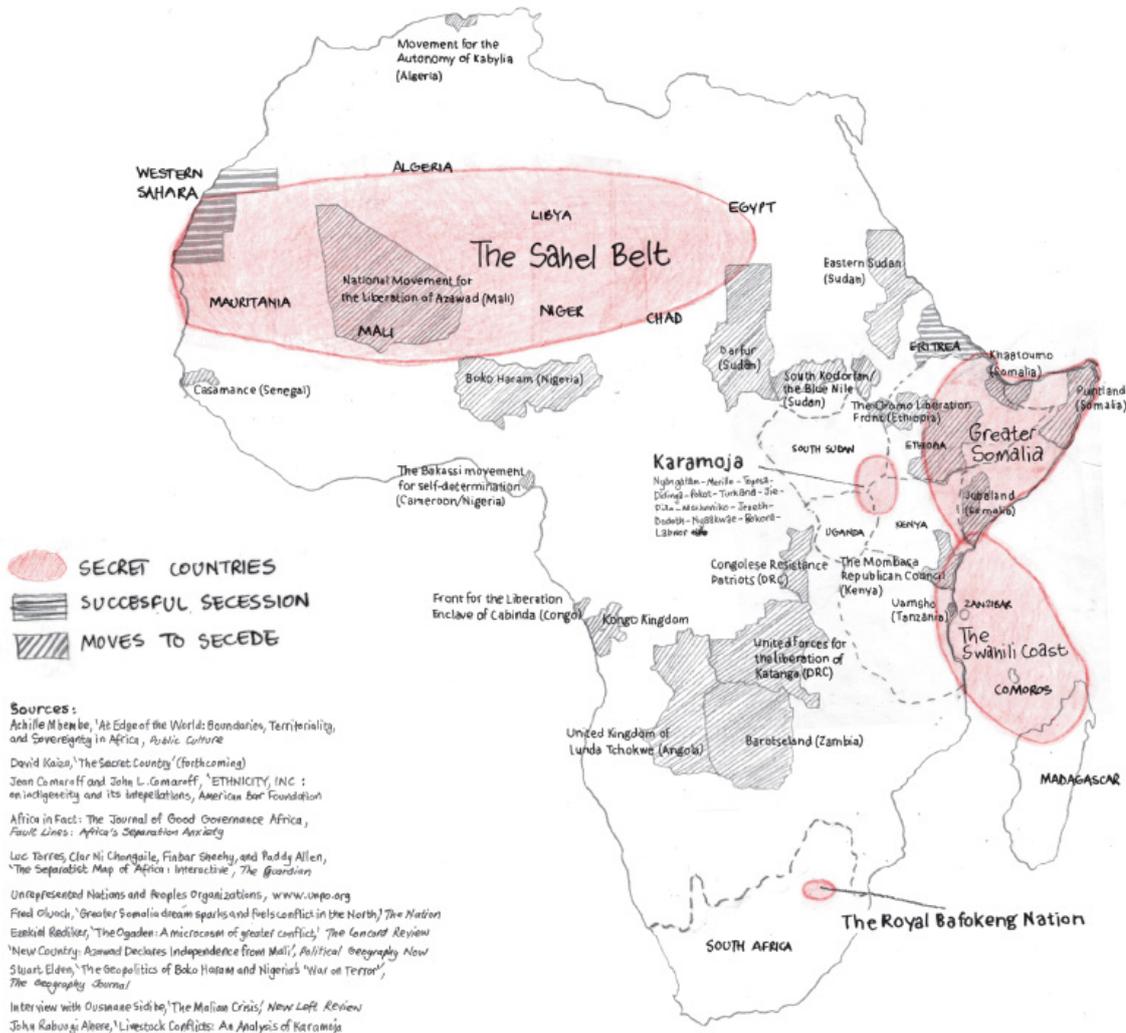
Repats and Neopats



# SECRET COUNTRIES

'Africa's visible, material and symbolic boundaries, have over the last two centuries constantly expanded and contracted. New forms of territoriality and unexpected forms of locality have appeared and their limits do not necessarily intersect with the official limits, norms or languages of states.'  
- Achille Mbembe, 'At The Edge of World: Boundaries, Territoriality, and Sovereignty in Africa'

Maps reprinted from the *Chimurenga Chronic*, March 2015  
Visit [chimurengachronic.co.za](http://chimurengachronic.co.za) for more info.



The maps and accompanying text can be purchased in full (both in print and digitally) from Chimurenga's webshop: <http://www.chimurenga.co.za/chimurenga-shop>. Ntone can be reached at: [editorial@chimurenga.co.za](mailto:editorial@chimurenga.co.za)

