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C O N C E P T

BURNING? is a publication borne of SAVVY CONTEMPORARY'S 2022/2023 project UNRAVELING THE (UNDER-) DEVELOPMENT COMPLEX OR TOWARDS A POST- (UNDER-) DEVELOPMENT INTERDEPENDENCE, which, 50 years on, is a revisiting of Walter Rodney's seminal work *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. This publication, more than documenting the chapters, invocations and activations which took place in Bandjoun, Nairobi, Berlin and Johannesburg as well as the upcoming iteration in Abidjan, serves as a launchpad for a more regular discourse.

BURNING? following this first issue, will be a sustained effort; a periodical echoing board of resistances to the political-economic dimensions of neo-colonialism and a live-time accounting of the continued subjugation of the so-called under-developed by the soft hands of transnational corporations and multilateral institutions.

In the words of political economist Adolph Reed, the phrase "political economy" is "a phrase whose main function of implying a kind of heft and demands to be taken seriously, but has very little to do with what Marx or Krugman (or for that matter, Rodney) would ever call political economy."¹ This exhibition has attempted to move beyond that – localizing and concretizing a discourse which too often fades into the abstract and theoretical while remaining largely detached from the actual mechanics of economic imperialism; trade agreements, structural adjustments, loans; the economic levers which control the flows of global finance, and how/why they are pulled. This publication will aim to preserve that concreteness; tying in continuous real-world case studies of how people live within the tentacles of economic imperialism. What happens when you try to cut them off? What is the effect and to whom in terms of capital inflows and outflows? Patterns of investments? Debt crises? Livelihoods, resources and dependencies?

Any analysis of the political economy of the so-called underdeveloped world is also incomplete without a robust study of the undercurrent of western led NGOs and nonprofits as well as the role they play. We must lean onto Freire's analysis of this burgeoning industry as a body of anti-revolutionary organizations. A decentralized mass government for the global poor and preservative of the status quo. There is a silent admission of complicity in the very existence of the western-led so-called NGO industrial complex. They function, as Freire states, "as an anaesthetic, distracting the oppressed from the true causes of their problems and from the concrete solution to these problems."² Our analysis will problematise the existence of this "third sector" and its functions as a placating arm of the neoliberal apparatus. It shall also include an exploration of these concrete solutions and the agents of change on the African continent and beyond. It was Rodney who insisted that "[E]very African has the responsibility to understand the [imperialist] system and work for its overthrow."³

1 Adolph Reed and Jeffrey J. Williams, "Class Matters: An Interview with Adolph Reed, Jr.," *The Minnesota Review*, no. 65/66 (2006), <https://minnesotareview.wordpress.com/2012/08/21/from-the-archives-class-matters-an-interview-with-adolph-reed-jr/>.

2 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1968.

3 Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 1973.

I M P O R T A N C E O F D E M Y T H O - L O G I S T I N G

With Berlin and Wedding specifically as a point of departure, when we write of the realities of life under neo-colonial subjugation, we want to ensure that our writings meet our audiences not as an abstraction or simply as anecdotes of a world far away for which they can only contribute their attention or perhaps pity. Instead, B U R N I N G ? must present to its readers as a problem the reality of the intertwined nature of our struggles. It must present the stories of people not as powerless observers of their own condition, but as active resisters against the uncompromising machinery of capitalist production in its many forms. B U R N I N G ? must be a nesting ground for what Ranajit Guha has termed the “small voices of history” which is a natural ascension towards a popular history and away from an intellectual history. It is an invitation to write the active histories of the people at the vanguard against land occupation, cost-of-living crises, labour rights struggles, environmental degradation, forced removal of people and so on.

The tenor of this publication will therefore be looked after with great care because we consider it a priority to avoid reproducing a linguistic hegemony which, in our view, excludes most of the people who may otherwise find our content interesting or useful. What does it mean to speak in a language which is, as James Baldwin termed, “clean as a bone”?⁴ Far from a disinclination to creative prose and imaginative expression, or a perception of these as mutually exclusive from a more precise and truth driven language, it is instead, an invitation for our writers to concretize our struggles and place them in a context which makes sense to people to who might otherwise perceive the topic as beyond their reach. As a publication which will focus primarily on political-economic issues, it is important to adopt a demythologising approach as suggested by Rwandan scholar Olivia U. Rutazibwa.⁵ To do so, we must avoid the many tropes of political and academic writing and its obfuscating tendencies. Ready-made phrases, euphemism, and jargon are tools of the political elite and used in defense of the indefensible. Their absurdity is nakedly apparent in language of the UNHCR, IMO, IOM and others when up to 700 migrants are left to drown in the Mediterranean Sea, and they proclaim in a joint statement that “the time-honored tradition of rescue at sea enshrined in international law is in jeopardy”⁶

Ultimately, our aim is to preserve the concreteness of Walter Rodney’s message and for that, our writers will be clear and precise in their language, and the clarity of their ideas and information will be apparent in their writing. Our writings will be presented in a way which prioritizes the urgency of the issues. It will avoid verbal false limbs, use direct conjunctions and prepositions and yet in no way compromise on culture and elegance. As George Orwell stated in his famous essay on Politics and the English Language, “A scrupulous writer asks themselves: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect? And they will probably ask themselves two more: Could I put it more shortly? Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly?”

4 James Baldwin and Jordan Elgrably, “James Baldwin, The Art of Fiction No. 78,” *The Paris Review*, no. 91 (1984).

5 Olivia U. Rutazibwa, “IR Should Abandon the Notion of Aid, and Address Racism and Reparations,” July 10, 2020, <https://oliviarutazibwa.wordpress.com/2020/07/10/ir-should-abandon-the-notion-of-aid-and-address-racism-and-reparations/>.

6 Olivia U. Rutazibwa, “IR Should Abandon the Notion of Aid, and Address Racism and Reparations,” July 10, 2020, <https://oliviarutazibwa.wordpress.com/2020/07/10/ir-should-abandon-the-notion-of-aid-and-address-racism-and-reparations/>.

B U R N I N G ?

Our name is inspired by a line by Robin D.G. Kelley on Aimé Césaire's "*Discourse on Colonialism*" : "It is not a solution or a strategy or a manual or a little red book with pithy quotes. It is a dancing flame in a bonfire".

It is also a provocation; not borne of a cynical and detached observation of the grim state of our world, but rather a nod to a series of happenings which precede us and are sure to survive us. We did not start this bonfire, and it will not end when this cinder eventually turns to ash. It will dance as others have before it, taking inspiration and gaining life from the energies of those around it.

Our publication is conceptualized with the questions which our name provokes and in some cases answers: How urgent is this? What should remain? Where is this coming from? Who is responsible? Is there a way out? We invite you to share with us.

S T Y L E G U I D E

We ask that submissions to B U R N I N G ? follow a few simple formatting guidelines. The goal here is not to impose a certain style or to restrict others but rather to encourage clarity and creativity as much as possible.

Our vision is to curate works that are provocative & challenging and yet lively, entertaining, joyful – that are as pleasing to read as they are to write. We hope that people will want to read B U R N I N G ? in bed, or at the beach.

Concretely, submissions should be between 500 and 5k words. Original research should be clearly documented, and citations should follow the format outlined here. Titles and headings should be clearly indicated if and when they are used. Likewise, texts should be submitted to burning@savvy-contemporary.com in `.docx` format along with a sample title and abstract along with a name and brief autobio.

Whenever possible, use UK spelling and grammar conventions (i.e. "labour" and not "labor"; commas go outside quotation marks) but don't stress about that too much.

One final note: we do not desire to forbid or impose any particular style, or even non-standard usage. However we would prefer to leave behind forms of expression going under many names, including "International Art English". Maybe you've also noticed that academic, theoretical, and "critical" writing is often dull, repetitive, and needlessly complex. It is our view that certain stylistic conventions stifle a writer's creative voice and undermine any chance that readers actually enjoy what's been written. This style does damage to readers and writers alike. We don't like that and see no good reason why it should be this way. This is not a demand for simplicity or "correct" usage but an invitation to write intuitively and comfortably, as you might speak with your grandmother or a new friend.

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