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This article is about the interaction of esthetic systems seen through the integration of heraldic traditions and the rich, but not always pleasant, history that accompanies that process.¹ It is based on a combination of perspectives in Anthropology and in the academic discipline of Design. Let us begin with a brief history of heraldry in the British Isles as it forms the basis of present heraldry throughout the British Commonwealth, of which Kenya is a member.²

The English term 'heraldry' is derived from 'herald,' meaning the person who announces the presence or arrival of a leader or other person of great importance. The word has other meanings connected to announcement but this is the one most relevant to the present inquiry. It is also the foundational term used by various governments in designating their official bodies that deal with the granting of armorial bearings. Over many centuries, it came to mean the complex system of symbols and their arrangements that designate a person, family, institution, corporation or nation in the form that began in Europe in the 1100s CE. The main form of heraldic device in the European systems is the Coat of Arms. Others are the crest, badge, seal, flag and other insignia of any of the above-mentioned entities. Within the Anglophone world, that is, the former British colonies, there has been an all too frequent assumption that British heraldry is the defining form and model for all heraldic systems.³ Many scholars and lay people still assume the hegemony of the British system to be normal and all other systems to be something outside the realm of true 'heraldry.' Nonetheless, from the late 20th century onward

there has been a movement toward adoption, inclusion and innovation of new heraldic forms and symbols as evidenced in many online resources regarding heraldry in general and the heraldry of Great Britain and members of the British Commonwealth.

European heraldry began in the 11th century CE when warriors could not recognize their leaders in battle because they were encased in steel body armor.⁴ A graphic intervention was devised in which cloth trappings and coats were draped over the leaders' armor, their horses, servants, retainers and their heralds, the people who announced the leader's presence or arrival. These cloth trappings were emblazoned with easily recognizable symbols that represented the persons and descent lines of the leaders who wore them. They came to be known as 'Coats of Arms', and they took on a life of their own as the colours, and symbols were repeated on everything the arms bearer owned and became a rallying point for his followers. The 'blazons' were described in the Norman French language which was the official language at the time.⁵ There was no English language then; it began to develop as the *Sheng* of French among the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic speaking peoples of the British Isles⁶ and did not become the language we now speak until the 16th century.⁷

By the 14th century an elaborate code of symbols and colours had been developed and committed to writing and record. The Coat of Arms became the symbol of a whole family line of descent and, by the 15th century, became the subject of an elaborate registration procedure that led to the establishment of the first official British College of Arms in 1484.⁸ The rules and regulations were codified and passed on as new families, notably the Spencers among many others, entered the nobility and were endowed with the symbology and icons of the British heraldic system. The McCartneys, Thatchers and Middletons came much later (**Fig. 1**).

When the Europeans invaded Africa south of the Sahara, they could not help but notice that the kingdoms of the West African Coast had their own well developed heraldic systems. The literature on West and Central African heraldic representation is very extensive. Some important works are those of Paula Gerschick BenAmos, Ekpo Eyo, Frank Willett, Leiris and

Delange, Leuzinger and many others (QV). Later, the British also imposed their heraldic system on their colonies including the thirteen that they held in North America until 1776,⁹ plus Canada, the Caribbean, Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands and India.¹⁰ In other parts of the world, notably Eastern Africa, they either did not notice or simply dismissed the local heraldry as insignificant or non-existent.



Fig. 1. Sir Paul McCartney, Coat of Arms, incorporating innovative, non-traditional symbols and using the traditional mantling and escutcheon to resemble a beetle. Wikipedia, Heraldry.

In East Africa, the heraldic systems of acephalous societies were barely noticed much less recognized, studied or described by government, missionaries or social scientists. This is especially true of the traditions of pastoral peoples with the exception of warriors' shields, probably because the shield is the bedrock of European armorial bearings.¹¹ It is equally true of those communities who have seen great turmoil and upheaval in the last two centuries like the peoples of Northern Uganda and South Sudan who were constantly disrupted and unable to establish anything concrete for a long time.¹² Even where bits and pieces of heraldic systems were mentioned in the literature and records, they were not acknowledged or named as heraldic.¹³

Because of the absence of written records for the East African interior prior to the 19th century, it

may never be possible to discover heraldic iconography for earlier peoples. No one has looked at the body of abstract motifs in the East African rock art corpus with an eye to discerning possible heraldic elements.¹⁴ The author first noticed that this is possible in a door painting in Narok shown in Figure 2 (**Fig. 2**). The Maasai artist explained that the abstract was a true image of his age set's heraldic symbol, the *Enkishili*, forehead ornament at the center of the warrior's headband. Without his report, which reached the author through the tea shop owner following inquiry, we would have no way of knowing what the image/motif represents. For the artist it was an image, for the uninformed, it was a motif. The artist knew it was heraldic but did not have the terminology to call it that. The anthropologist knew from his description that it represents his whole age set but did not know, at the time, that that makes it heraldic.



Fig. 2. South African white troops displaying the armorial bearings on the flag of an Italian army that they had just defeated. Somewhere in Kenya.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenya_in_World_War_II

The few Arab travelers and geographers who passed through East Africa at the Coast before the European incursion did not observe the local cultures in sufficient depth to cover heraldry.¹⁵ Nor did the Portuguese as they came in 1498 and left by the late 1600s.¹⁶ In the extensive study of rock art in East Africa, little or no mention is made of possible heraldic interpretations or status of various abstract motifs that seem mysterious to foreigners and local people alike.¹⁷ European scholars of the colonial period tended toward religious interpretations and fantasy of what they could not realistically figure out.¹⁸

Beginning in the late 19th century, the territory we now know as the Republic of Kenya was overrun and colonized by first the British, Germans and South Asians, and, later, by many others including Polish and Italian prisoners of war.¹⁹ One thing they all had in common was their devotion to their longstanding, codified heraldic systems. Whatever the Asian communities brought with them by way of heraldry was not taken much into account by the British colonizers (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Coat of Arms of the Republic of Kenya.

This tradition, dominated by the Germans in Tanganyika and the British in most of the surrounding countries, was transferred, whole cloth, to the colonized peoples and brought forward into the post-independence period in the coats of arms, seals, badges and flags of the nation, the counties, the universities, schools, companies and societies.

The British colonial government, the post-independence government and the colonists as well as the colonized developed coats of arms for Kenya, Nairobi, and other towns, and various other bodies especially schools, in strict conformity with the British tradition. Private companies and other entities developed their own almost always along British lines as demonstrated by the Kenyan national coat of arms (Fig. 4).

The coat of Arms for Karatina Town (Fig. 5) is notable for what it tells us visually about the late colonial period and how at least one Kenyan website now interprets it.



Fig. 4. Coat of Arms of Karatina Town developed under colonial supervision probably in the 1950s.
Source: <https://mukuyu.wordpress.com/tag/nguo-ya-ngoro/>

The Karatina Coat of Arms appears to have been done in the 1950s when the colonial government was desperate to connect with the indigenous population while keeping them under control. (Author's analysis) The caption on the website where it appears says "Karatina Town Coat of Arms shows how the colonials wanted to view Africans. The motto is 'Mwana wī Kiyo Ndagaga Mūthambia' or in English 'A Diligent Child Never Lacks Someone to Wash It.' Karatina women, we say have today had their eyes licked by cats. 'Nī macūnirwo maitho nī nyau.' The cat is The Mzungu (white people) and his ways.²⁰



Fig. 5. A Matatu in Nairobi featuring football teams' Coats of Arms.
Source: http://www.imgur.org/user/matwanamatatuculture/572337132/1071041057659115162_572337132

All of this tends to mask the pre-colonial through post-independence existence of indigenous heraldic systems that were/are unique to their ethnic communities.²¹ Indigenous heraldry in East Africa was subjected to unwitting or deliberate epistemicide²² by the colonizers and sui-epistemicide²³ by Kenyans themselves who didn't bother to record or elucidate their heraldic iconography.²⁴ In many situations, they shared with the British the sad ignorance of the heraldic status of their representations.²⁵ A result is that, in the present, we are left with many uninterpretable representations in both the written historical record, and pictorial record, notably the paintings of Joy Adamson (painted in the 1940s and 50s, published in 1967) along with over a century of photographs, and the archaeological record, especially the paintings and engravings on rock faces.

Among all of these, it is difficult if not impossible to distinguish between heraldic and semiotic motifs. This simply means that we can't tell which components of an image or abstract are related to the identification of a specific status or important person, or are matters of style, ceremony or fashion for a particular area, community, individual or period. This lamentable situation is compounded in the photographic record by the manipulation of images, or posing, for visual effect to the extent that most commercial photographs, especially on postcards cannot be relied upon for ethnographic accuracy. In some parts of Kenya the local people move their clothing and ornaments around anticipating that the photographer will want it that way. The most notable example of this is Maasai warriors now wearing their chokers or the young girls' chokers as headbands when they pose for tourists or others.

There is also a huge body of symbolic and iconographic mysteries in Kenya surrounding the ethnically determined trappings of good dress and appropriate appearance for humans and livestock. Some of it is heraldic and some is semiotic. Some is rooted in deep history and long standing tradition while some is subject to the whims of fashion. This tragic art historical situation could have been avoided if only the colonizers and outside scholars had worked together with interested local peoples and scholars to describe and elucidate meanings

during the 20th century. Some of the meanings and symbols, as those illustrated by Joy Adamson,²⁶ were lost forever by the beginning of the 21st century. Some have been subject to small and gross misinterpretation while others have been interpreted opportunistically in the context of ethnic fantasy devoid of scholarly rigor.²⁷

This is happening at a time when Kenyans are obsessed with European football and the Coats of Arms of many football teams which they splash all over their public transport vehicles called Matatus, their jackets, notebooks and the daily newspapers (**Fig. 6.**)



Fig. 6. Age set officers of *Ilkपालi*, 1983. Note the absence of the belt on the shield. Donna Pido Images and Captions Jan 27, 2018.

Kenyans are a nation obsessed with heraldic devices but not their own indigenous ones. Kenyans love football. The majority studied prefer European to local football.²⁸ Within Europe, they gravitate toward British football teams, and the artists who decorate matatus often dot them with the coats of arms of the major British teams. Partisan commuters may refuse to board a matatu that sports the emblems or players of the wrong football club. Many are chauvinistically devoted to the vehicles that support their team. This has led to a culture of heraldic devices among matatu artists and other young people.²⁹ University students who may be lukewarm about most of their assignments snap into enthusiastic action when asked to design a coat of arms.

Teasing it all apart, for analytical purposes, we can identify 4 main streams in Kenyan heraldry. First, but least understood is the indigenous stream. Then comes the British stream, by far the most dominant. Third is the innovative

stream in which the county governments and other entities try to assert and brand themselves to attract tourists and investors. Finally, there is the digital stream that dominates an age in which anybody can easily find a picture of anything online and copy and paste it. Graphic elements that once took whole days to draw by hand can now be located, downloaded, composed and manipulated in a matter of seconds.

As the design exercise continues we can examine the historical, cultural, esthetic and technological forces that brought us to this point. To do this we must go back to the earliest historical record, most of which is in rock paintings that are not easy to interpret. We can look at one particular example of indigenous heraldry among the Pastoral Maasai of Narok and Kajiado Counties in Kenya and a large swath of Northern Tanzania. A Scottish geographer named Joseph Thompson was sent by the royal Geographical Society in 1883 to explore Maasailand. His book provides illustrations of Maasai material culture of the time including the heraldic devices painted on warriors' shields. A German Army Officer posted in the Tanganyika Territory wrote extensively about the Maasai people beginning in the late 1890s in an effort to prove that they are the descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel.³⁰

All warriors, used to place an image of their girlfriend's belt down the center of their shields much as medieval European knights wrapped a lock of their true love's hair around their helmets. Girls wore the belt until menarche after which they were withdrawn from the company of warriors. Placing the image of the belt on the warrior's shield was a way of showing that he was committed to warriorhood and was a 'virgin' meaning that he had had sex only with pre-pubescent girls and never with circumcised women. Since shields were outlawed in 1956, the Maasai shield has become more of a display and touristic item than an actual part of warfare, but Maasai and Samburu continue to adhere, for the most part, to their heraldic tradition, though they now omit the belt more often than not (**Fig. 7**). Each successive generation of warriors chooses a symbol and color combination that will identify it forever. The center ornament of their head band, called *enkishili* he is the defining heraldic device of each 'Hand' of their

generation. We have already mentioned an *enkishili* of the *Il Nyankusi* warrior cohort above.



Fig. 7. Tracing of a painting by an unnamed artist, on a tea shop door in Narok town, approximately 40" vertical. The abstract represents the *enkishili* of IlKalikali, the Right Hand of the *Il Nyankusi* Age Set, traced on paper and painted in by DP.

Returning to Figure 2 above, the circle with or without a centered dot and petals is ubiquitous in East African Rock art, collections of objects and personal ornament and utensils, but it is generally impossible to tell what it represents or whether its meaning is simply semiotic or heraldic in any given context. In this image, because we have seen the forehead ornaments of *Il Nyankusi*, and have been told by a member of that age set we know that the circle and dot represent a clam shell disk with a bead at the center.³¹ Looking into the Kondo rock art corpus, we can see but not necessarily identify a possible *enkishili* of unknown date and generation (**Fig. 8**).

The warrior's forehead ornament has enormous importance to Maasai men. The two images in Figure 9 below show the enormous *njli*, the aluminium triangle that characterizes the

enkishili of the *IlKepali* whose circumcision period opened in 1983 (Fig. 9). During one of the ceremonies of warriorhood in Najile, Kajiado County, the warriors finger painted images of themselves on the side of a concrete water tank near the community animal watering trough. The figure on the left shows the important features of a warrior including his huge *triangular dangle on his forehead ornament*. At right is a photo of the Senior Spokesman of *Ilkepali* with his mother in 1985 at that set's graduation to senior warriorhood. He is wearing the huge triangle that heralds his age set.



Fig. 8. Giuseppe della Giustina, *Rendering*, 1951 in Leakey, 1983. Ilkalikali circumcision opened in 1942, so this petalled circle could be an *enkishili* of that set, but we will never know for sure.

Parallel to the warriors' heraldic tradition is the series of ornaments devised by their girlfriends with the warriors' approval. This author calls them 'Symbols of Defiant Love' that identify the warriors of each Right or Left Hand cohort and are proudly worn by their female followers and their mothers, sometimes for the rest of their lives.³² This has not been studied or written about by other authors. Sadly, our knowledge begins in the 1950s when this Author would have been a girlfriend of the *Ilterekeya* warrior cohort.

In 1954 at the beginning of the age of *Ilterekeya*, the right Hand of *Iseuri*, successors to *ILNyankusi* and predecessors of *Ilkitoip*, the

first telephone poles appeared in parts of Maasailand. To the girls and their warrior lovers, the telephone and its pole, symbolized the speed of their ability to connect. They placed the telephone pole at the center of their chokers and called it *Esimu* meaning 'telephone' in Maa. By wearing the telephone pole in the 1980s to present, the author was stating her senior age in the Maasai system and letting the warriors of the 1980s know that she was still loyal to the warriors she had loved as a young girl.

By the early 1970s when the *IrRampau* set opened, there was an emergency phone number, 999, that would bring a police car speeding along the road to where ever the trouble was. *IrRampau* and their girl lovers adopted the swirling blue light on the roof of the police car as their symbol because the girls and warriors of that set were even faster than the telephone.



Fig. 9. A. *Painting in Ochre on concrete*, between 1983 and 1985, Najile, Kenya; B. *The Senior Spokesman of Ilkepali with his Mom*, 1985.

The 999 gave way to the helicopter, *Enteke Olkapira* after the opening of *Ilkepali* circumcision in 1983. The helicopter, many of which had appeared in the skies of Narok and Kajiado Districts, is even faster than the telephone or the police car. Its original form was a tourist gimmick of the 1950s, the Bowtie. By the late 1900s the bowtie had been reinterpreted by Maasai to represent the rotor blade of a chopper. The bowtie was widely worn as a fashion statement but took on heraldic significance in Narok and Kajiado districts where it was reinterpreted as the Helicopter and re-formed and placed as a projection from the front of the girls' chokers.

Maasai girls, after enjoying the company of warriors and wearing the heraldic symbols of their age, are usually married off to men of senior generations. They continue to wear the symbols of their former lovers in defiance of having had to marry an older man. All of this is changing fast as more girls stay in school and demand their rights to choose their own husbands.

National Heraldry in Kenya

We turn now to a consideration of the present state of heraldry in Kenya from the purely indigenous, to the eclectic/innovated to the totally foreign. No one known to this author has actually aligned the indigenous symbols directly with what the Europeans call heraldry, nor has anyone been known to have undertaken serious study of them in any group since Merker was in Tanganyika in the late 1890s.

Fast forwarding 1000 years or so from the beginnings of European heraldry, we find the British Commonwealth of most of the former colonies adhering, with modifications, to the long standing heraldic traditions of Great Britain. Many are struggling to assert their independent identities through their coats of arms, seals, badges and flags while retaining their interconnectedness with all the other members of the Commonwealth.

Onto this scene comes the Republic of Kenya, independent for nearly 50 years and having its own College of Arms, but with a new constitution promulgated in 2010. The new Constitution devolves certain powers and semi-autonomous status to the 47 counties, created from the earlier 47 administrative Districts. Money is allocated by the central government to enable the counties to establish their identities. Since then Kenyans have been overhauling their British based heraldic devices while trying to brand and promote themselves at the county level. Each County now enjoys devolved powers from the central government and also has responsibility for creating its own image through its coat of arms, seal, flag and badges.

The Kenyan College of Arms was established in 1968.³³ It was updated by the College of Arms Act in 2012. Unlike some other members of the commonwealth which are under control of the British College of Arms in London (Canada,

Australia, New Zealand) Kenya, along with many other Commonwealth Countries, operates independently while adhering to the basic tradition and spirit of the British system. While Kenya now allows individuals from other countries to register their armorial bearings with the Kenya government, few armigers either foreign or local have taken advantage to this provision.

The standard format for British/ European Coats of Arms has been the guide for nearly all the countries south of the Sahara. The only absolute requirement is a shield or escutcheon. As the heraldic system in Britain developed, several other elements were added and became part of cannon. These include supporters, helmet, wreath, crest, crown (where appropriate), compartment, motto and scroll.

The subnational kingdoms of Uganda have their own coats of arms that follow the British system using their own symbols and iconography. We can note that the royal families of the Kingdoms in Uganda have their own heraldic symbols and artifacts. These were barely noticed during the Protectorate in Uganda or the colonial period in Kenya. In Kenya, there is only one Kingdom of minor importance in comparison to the other regional subnational kingdoms. That kingdom, called Wanga, appears not to have armorial bearings though, being the only one in Kenya it has received somewhat dismissive treatment from both the colonial and post-independence governments. Several Abawanga (people of Wanga), when asked, reported that they were unaware of any armorial bearings of their kingdom. The Tutsi Kingdom of Rwanda, having been abolished in 1961, lost all claim to heraldic status for any of its symbols.

The new Kenyan constitution has stimulated the generation of 'innovative' Coats of Arms as the cities and counties create their own. County governments headed by governors and led by County Assemblies have risen to the task in ways that are, in some cases, very excellent from both the graphic design perspective and the deployment of relevant symbols, while in others, the results have caused great controversy among residents of their Counties and have been severely criticized by design professionals.

It is evident from the array of county coats of arms that appears on the internet³⁴ that some of

the county governments have assigned amateur designers and untrained or poorly trained artists in creating their coats of arms. Many have resorted to clip art and Google image searches to find the components for their designs. There is a mish mash of representational styles thrown together in compositionally poor arrays with equally poor coloration. It is clear that the counties have not taken an avid interest in their designs or in the examples set by other bodies in Kenya and throughout the commonwealth.³⁵ Yet Kenya boasts undergraduate art and design departments in at least 5 public universities and several private ones plus a large number of private art schools at the tertiary level.³⁶

As the 47 counties post their armorial bearings online and people comment on them, mostly in the negative, we can see many 'debates' in progress as recounted to this author by many Kenyans. Notable among these are constituents' dissatisfaction with composition, rendering, coloring, symbology, iconography and various other factors that have surfaced in the county level governing bodies' designs of their coats of arms. To the great relief of professional artists and designers the county, residents tend to identify the same shortcomings that the professionals see. All these factors aside, from an Anthropological/Art Historical point of view, the most striking feature of the new Coats of Arms is the lack of knowledge, interest or concern with the many centuries of history and culture that came before. Attention seems to focus on promoting tourism and investment and using clip art and digital manipulation with complete disregard for culture or professional standards of graphic design.³⁷

Looking at all the counties' Coats of Arms on Google, from a design standpoint, the quality is 'uneven'. Some, such as Tana Rivre county (**Fig. 10**) are excellent by both the British standard and the principles of professional graphic design.

From an Art, Graphic Design, Illustration, Art Historical and Anthropological point of view, we can now examine the outcomes of colonialism, forgetfulness, lack of commitment to culture, post-independence shift of focus, epistemicide by political and religious institutions and neglect of pictoracy in school curricula. Globally, the internet, the personal computer and all the

programs it provides have brought a shift of focus, generational shift and the preoccupation with digital technology. We can also refer to the reactions of various citizens to the designs their elected official have publicized. Avoidance of the rules, lackadaisical inquiry into the fundamentals of heraldry, deliberate obstinacy and 'self-assertion' are manifest in the array of 47 Coats of Arms.



Fig. 10. Tana River County.

In some counties there are two or more versions of the County Coat of Arms, a suggestion that there is an internal debate going on. So far the best example of this are the four Coats of Arms shown in Figures 11 and 12 from Narok County, one of the two dominantly Maasai counties (**Figs. 11 y 12**). The first draft to be published on the internet was deeply offensive to the Maasai because of errors in cultural details and a perceived political agenda that would acknowledge dominance of Maasailand by other ethnic communities. This led to the subsequent drafting of three others, two of which illustrate problems in rendering.

In the other dominantly Maasai county, Kajiado, officialdom has ignored public outrage at poor rendering and blatant cultural errors, particularly the woman's clothing and ornaments which portray her as either an oversized schoolgirl or an insane adult woman (**Fig. 13**).

So, from report relying mostly on hearsay from articulate informants, we know that,

countrywide, there are too many cows, bananas, tea sprigs, and mangoes, and that rendering of humans and animals is not good. Many residents of various counties are complaining about the iconography and objecting to blatant County Government self-promotion.



Fig. 11. The first publicized Coat Arms of Narok County. Google/Wikipedia.



Fig. 12. A. B. C. It is not yet clear which, if any of these will be the final version. Google.



Fig. 13. Kajiado county Coat of Arms.

Humans are also rendered badly as in the Coats of Arms of Kakamega and West Pokot. The West Pokot compartment is a photographic image of some gravel. In general, photographs are considered inappropriate in coats of Arms, at least by designers and heraldic authorities. This is because it is unprecedented in the very conservative European heraldic traditions and is considered 'sloppy' design by professional designers and lay people alike in Kenya. Animals are also rendered badly except those from clip art sources. At least one set of animal supporters are not recognizable as any known species.

Armigers are placing photographs of animals and humans in their Coats of Arms that are out of proportion to one another and often are of varieties unknown in Kenya. Grayscale value and grayscale conflict with colour seem not to be significant. Likewise, rendering styles are often in conflict as in the Mandera County coat of arms (Fig. 14).



Fig. 14. Mandera County.

Some armigers have completely dismissed the appearance of European style coats of Arms without resorting to any Kenyan tradition. Some coats of Arms appear to be "cop outs" because they are shaped like seals. The Turkana County government placed its original Coat of Arms draft inside a circular border stretching it out digitally to make it fit. In order to use it in correct proportions the circle would have had to be compressed to an oval.

Few if any of the counties are recruiting professionally trained designers for their coats of arms, much to the distress of graduates of Kenyan design schools and universities. As an example, Nyamira County is one of several that

have placed what looks like a coat of arms into a circular border (**Fig. 15**). Trained designers are questioning the county's decision to use photographs of bananas as supporters though, overall, the design is 'good' from a professional graphic design standpoint.



Fig. 15. Nyamira County.

However it must be noted that the seal shaped Coats of Arms are within the bounds of Commonwealth tradition because all that is absolutely required is a shield (escutcheon). Even though these coats of arms look bad to designers and appear to be lazy solutions to a design brief, they can be accepted. Where the county governments have ignored their constituents' critical reception of their designs, the issues will be sorted out internally. Already many Members of County Assembly (MCA's) have been dis-elected due to public dissatisfaction with their performance in office.

Conclusion

Heraldic devices, symbols and armorial bearings act as a 'glue' in the cohesion of the British Commonwealth. Upon attaining independence in 1963, Kenyans upheld the formerly imposed British heraldic tradition while ignoring their own. Individuals, corporations, institutions and political entities can design, seek approval and have their coats of arms registered with the government. The choice of symbols, colors, mottos and compositions has revealed local concerns and aesthetics. Local self-assertion has enabled analysis of cultural, branding and political issues within an alien but indigenized framework. Half a century of independence has

seen the evolution, modification and innovation in heraldry through inclusion and exclusion of various symbolic elements. Scholars can now examine and elucidate the interaction of esthetic and iconographic systems in heraldry as they exist in the present and into the future.

We have looked at a contemporary interaction of esthetic systems through the lens of history, heraldic iconography and design practice. We are seeing a meeting of two ancient traditions – the British/European codified system and the many unstudied, non-codified heraldries, largely forgotten or unrecognized of Kenya's many ethnic communities. They converge in the administration of government bodies, corporations, schools and other corporate entities but also in popular culture and the political arena of football. Through the heraldic traditions of the Maasai and their counties, we can see the ignorance and disregard for tradition that seems to characterize most if not all of the counties.

In a moderately scholarly effort to analyze the factors in the selection, the choices and the esthetic and iconographic priorities of the people charged with developing new heraldic devices, we have stepped into a space that is loaded with no-go topics. The County governments have not, according to their constituents, met the armigerial challenge. According to their consumers/constituents, they have not adequately met the challenge of bringing together the commonwealth tradition with the indigenous tradition and also the vibrant culture of the Kenyan population in the 21st century. They definitely have not lived up to the basic standards of the graphic design profession. Yet we must bear in mind that esthetic judgment is extremely subjective, and it is inappropriate to denigrate other peoples' esthetics. As long as the counties fulfill the basic requirement of the escutcheon, they are technically on safe ground. The blogosphere and a great many constituents who chat daily over a cup of tea do not know this.

Having barely scratched the surface of this enormous and very rich case study, it has become clear that Kenya and other East African countries can be excellent locales for the more intensive, scholarly study of how indigenous, imported/imposed, eclectic, isolationist, professional and amateur esthetic systems

interact. Even the isolation of one from another and efforts to categorize collective, representative esthetic choice and expression is bound to founder unless we can come to grips with the fluidity and inclusiveness of esthetic inputs and choices made every day as African art continues to evolve and social scientists and art historians seek to map it.

Notas:

¹ This article is based on a paper that was presented to The 17th Triennial Symposium on African Art at the University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana, August 13, 2017.

² Data for this paper have been drawn from field research, participant observation, a wide range of literature and personal communications over nearly 50 years. All images of Kenyan Coats of Arms included here have been downloaded from various sites on the internet. While the author serves as Chair of the Kenyan College of Arms, the judgments and opinions expressed here are her own and are not necessarily held by the Government of Kenya.

³ DP Po. Citation abbreviations: PC – personal communication, PO – Participant Observation, Po – Personal observation.

⁴ Diagram Group, *Understanding Heraldry*, London, Diagram Visual Information Ltd., 1997.

⁵ *Idem.* and see Wikipedia. History of English.

⁶ DP Po.

⁷ Wikipedia. History of English.

⁸ Wikipedia. College of Arms.

⁹ Vide Google. US heraldry.

¹⁰ Vide Google. Commonwealth Coats of Arms.

¹¹ M. Merker, *Die Masai*, Berlin, Dietrich Riemer, 1904.

¹² John Peter Odoch Pido, “Pang’odo Heraldry”, 17th Triennial Symposium on African Art, Legon, Accra, August 13, 2017.

¹³ Donna Klumpp, *Maasai Art and Society*, Unpublished PhD thesis, New York, Columbia University, 1987.

¹⁴ DP po.

¹⁵ Ibn Battuta, *Travels I Asia and Africa 1325- 1354*, New York, Dover Books, 2004.

¹⁶ Justus Strandes, *The Portuguese Period in East Africa*, Nairobi, The East African Literature Bureau, 1960.

¹⁷ Mary Leakey, *Africa’s Vanishing Art*, London, Hamish Hamiton Limited, 1983 and see TARA Trust for African Rock Art. <http://africanrockart.org/> (accessed 26/6/2018)

¹⁸ Leakey, *op. cit.* and see others in Tanganyika Notes and Records, QV.

¹⁹ DP po.

²⁰ Gikūyū Centre for Cultural Studies. <https://mukuyu.wordpress.com/tag/muthuru/> (accessed 26/6/2018).

²¹ DP Po.

²² Epistemicide means the destruction or extinction of a body of knowledge. While it may have originated fairly recently it appears in many English dictionaries and is widely used in print and electronic media. The term may have been coined by Boaventura da Sousa Santos, a professor at the University of Coimbra, Portugal.

²³ A term coined by this author meaning the destruction on one’s own body of knowledge.

²⁴ DP Po.

²⁵ DP Po.

²⁶ Adamson, Joy, *The Peoples of Kenya*, New York, Harcourt Brace and World, 1967.

²⁷ DP po.

²⁸ Mwendu, Lucy, *The vibrant matatus I Nairobi city*, Research Methodology class paper January, 2017, TUK.

²⁹ *Idem.*

³⁰ Merker, *op. cit.*

³¹ This is discussed at some length in my 2011 draft paper. See Donna Pido, “Listening to the Stones: Perspectives on East African Rock Art”. A draft paper prepared for presentation at the first African Stones Talk conference, Tabaka, Kisii, 2011.

³² Klumpp, *op. cit.*

³³ Government of Kenya, Laws of Kenya, Chapter 98.

³⁴ Wikipedia. Kenyan Counties Coat of Arms.

³⁵ DP. Po.

³⁶ DP po.

³⁷ DP po.

¿Cómo citar correctamente el presente artículo?

Pido, Donna; “The Wages of Epistemicide: Fusion, transformation and assertion in kenyan Heraldic Representation”. En: *caiana. Revista de Historia del Arte y Cultura Visual del Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte (CAIA)*. No 12 | Primer semestre 2018, pp. 200-210.

Recibido: 12 de enero 2018

Aceptado: 14 de mayo 2018