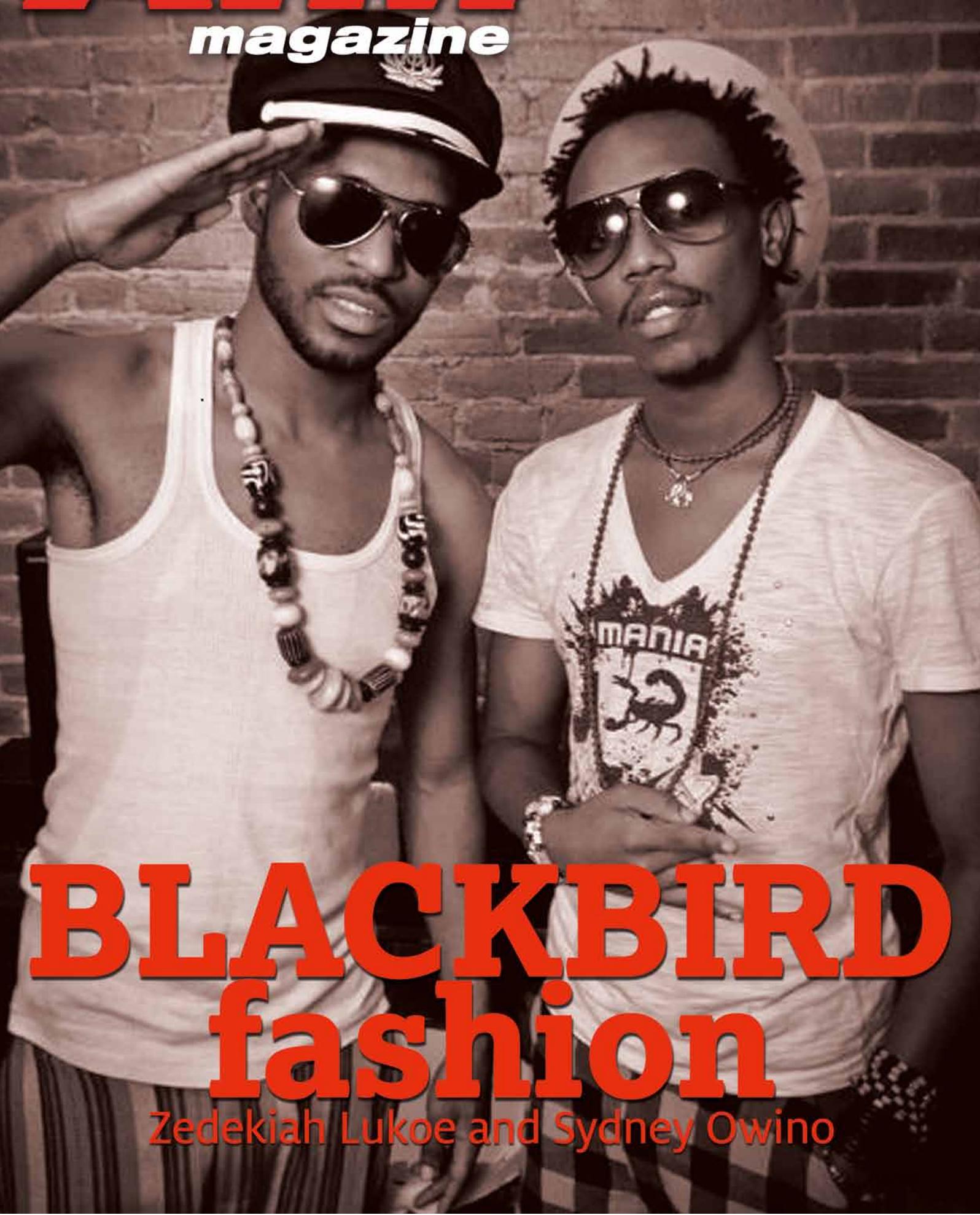


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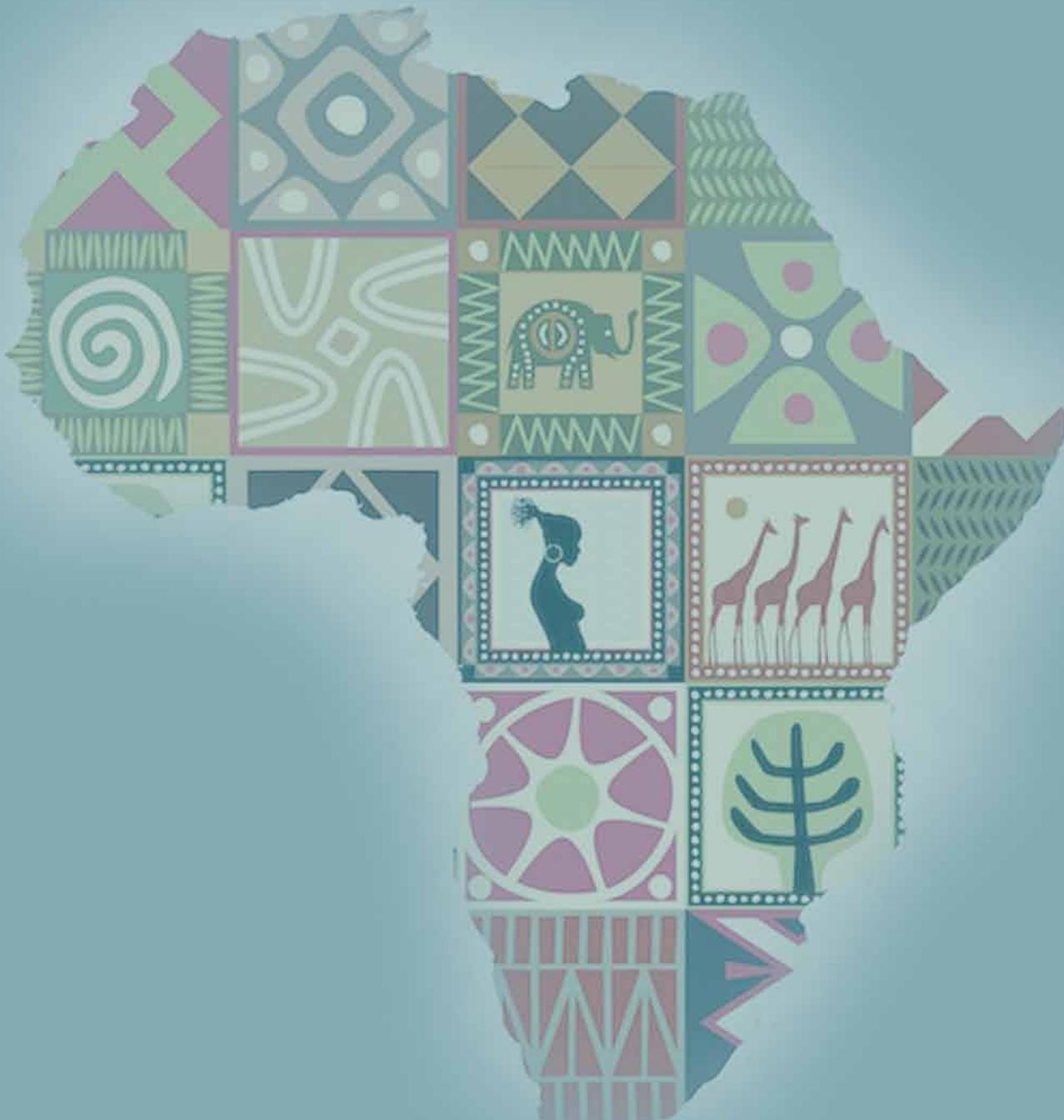
magazine

APRIL 2014



BLACKBIRD fashion

Zedekiah Lukoe and Sydney Owino



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CONTRIBUTORS



Editor : Wangechi Rugaru



Editor : Eva Githina



Co-Editor :
Wambui Wamutogoria



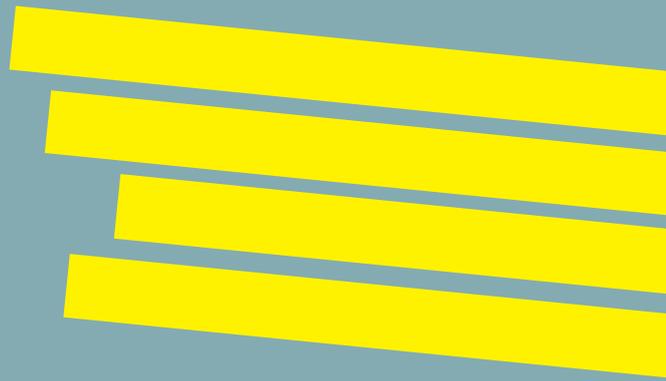
Contributor :
Gerald Montgomery



Contributor : Joan Njagu



Designer- Sam Gathenji



Editors Notes

I had plans for 2014. I re-evaluated the previous years plans, goals, failures and achievements and based on that and where I thought I fell short, I planned, dreamed and strategized for the new year ahead.

As I sit here writing this note I know for sure that nothing could have prepared me for what the year has taught me so far. There is something going on here that makes me feel very keenly vulnerable and although it is a new feeling, I have learned to embrace it just as I have freaked out about, rejoiced, lamented, shrugged off all that life and the fates have brought my way so far.

This month's feature on Blackbird is a great example of how nothing we go through is for naught. Every person or event we meet or go through has a purpose in our lives. Dr. G also writes about the feeling of being incomplete and how that affects our reasoning and shapes our perspectives and decisions.

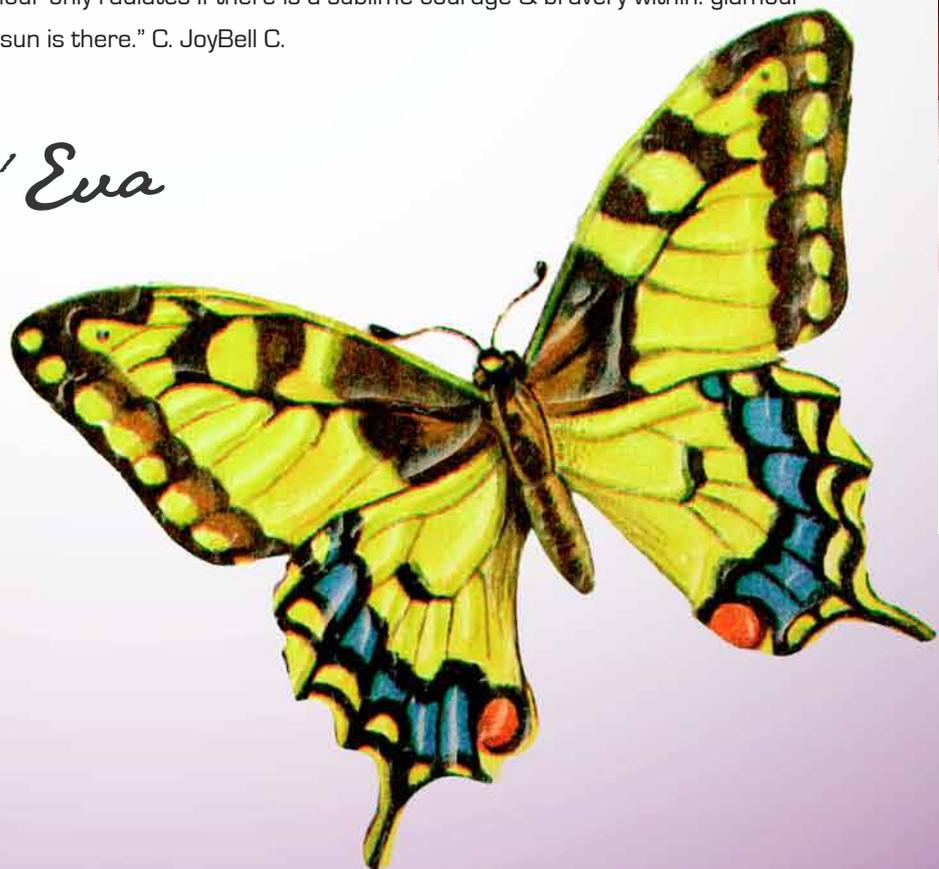
There is an element of fear that accompanies vulnerability and incompleteness and we could either deal with that as we would the decision to jump off of a cliff. We can either embrace it and thrill in the experience or grit our teeth and screech all the way. #africansinmotion, this issue will bring you some unexpected gems and we urge you to embrace it and thrill in the experience.

The takeaway here is that we only get one life and due to its natural unpredictability we cannot control what comes our way. What we control is how we deal with it. We can handle it by arming ourselves with knowledge, patience, grace and delight in it for it is only then that we will gain clarity on what our purpose is and live it to the fullest.

"Elegance is a glowing inner peace. Grace is an ability to give as well as to receive and be thankful. Mystery is a hidden laugh always ready to surface! Glamour only radiates if there is a sublime courage & bravery within: glamour is like the moon; it only shines because the sun is there." C. JoyBell C.

Go forth and make the best of all of it.

D' Eva





BLACKBIRD

Zedekiah Lukoe and Sydney Owino



Blackbird is the dreamchild of Zedekiah Lukoe and Sydney Owino. As you will read in this interview, Blackbird is a journey that started before the official founding in 2008, when Zed and Syd officially launched their denim line “BLACKBIRD JEANS”. This propelled the duo to Africa Fashion Week New York in 2011 and Fashion Diaspora, and has more recently led to their re-brand as Blackbird Designs, a men’s power house that is still in the making. We skyped with Zedy to get an insight of what they are all about and here is our conversation.

AIM: Why did you call your line blackbird?

We called our line Blackbird because the bird was a sign of freedom, creativity and because we are from Kenya and from Africa we chose the black. So we came up with Blackbird.

AIM: So what came first. Your passion for fashion or your friendship with Syd and then fashion?

BB: From 2004 up to now that’s close to 10 yrs.’ so we went to school together we were in the same class. He was my best friend for 4 yrs. We played basketball on the same team. We had competition going on in school you know, fashion-wise it was all about who had the best shoe who had the nice fitted pants, but after high school, I moved to live in the coast where he’s from and I was playing rugby there and that allowed our friendship to flourish in Mombasa. We were there for a year then I moved back to Nakuru, where I started tailoring. I started as a floor man at a workshop and I was not really enthusiastic because I wanted to join

the military and to form myself and doing this knowing that I still wanted to join the military so as days went by, the passion grew but I still was not sure of myself until after some confirmations I realized that this was what God wanted me to do and as doors kept opening, as we became creative in some sense. This was mainly me and Sydney, I am creative Sydney is creative too but the main thing is not just fashion anybody can be in fashion. You know fashion is a big industry. For Sydney and I we have a story that we are telling. People won’t see it; not now, not yet. It’s still the same way we started Kenyatta Market doing our thing. People didn’t know that I would end up going to New York to show Blackbird, we did not know, we would. Right now things have totally changed, it’s just crazy so we have a story we are telling and I hope people will be listening to the story we will be telling because our passion for fashion is so high and so important is our friendship. We decided to start a workshop because is going to a small thing here and there we decided to start a workshop because one it was hard to find good clothes that would fit you, then the brand came we started doing shows, We did two shows in Kenya then we had an opportunity to come to the New York stage and we took it.

AIM: How is that change working for you?

BB: Right now we are taking things slowly, I am enjoying the journey. The main vision right now is to create a men’s powerhouse. I have an insight here. I know what needs to be done and I know what to do and when to start. I have tons of projects in place we are all ready to kick-start projects. I am not like any other designer you will see out there like I said I have a creative mind you know I have a talent and I know

how to use it and like our previous projects, I have created systems whereby another project is going to push me up to the next ten years and I know how to stay relevant. Our main vision is to have a men's power house and we will start at point zero and gradually get up to a certain level in next 10 to 15 years. I have something else I can start with you know am helping my friend build his brand, put his stuff together and on like a couple of celebrities like Michael .k. Williams, the other day at the party we had Tyson Beckford. I know so many things that I can do and build up from point zero to a certain level. I can do consultancies so the vision that I have for BlackBird is to create a mens power house and have other people on board who are going to help; we just want to produce the best garments in the world be it jeans or suits. That is all I can say for now is be ready we have so many things coming up.

AIM: What is your vision for Blackbird going forward?

BB: I am in this industry to make men look good; I don't cure cancer or anything but I am creating a brand and a space where men can and will look good. Sometimes looking good means you have to feel some pain too. We sell our suits for \$3000; it's hard to afford a \$3000 even a \$1000 suit so what we are selling is experience and quality you know we are we are making the best suits. Look at jeans not anybody can afford a pair of jeans that start at \$300. In the American market, jeans dropped in price 5 years ago because nobody was able to buy a pair of jeans for that price when the economy was not doing well. That is why we stick to Bespoke and you know anybody that can afford it can come and get it, I know my client, I know where they work and I know how much they make let's say in a month or in a days' time so both of these are key. As a designer you have to know where your clients work whether on Wall street, or the street. There are guys who have money to spend on suits or they may buy two pairs of jeans four pairs of jeans in a month two pairs of suits or four shirts in a month.

Here it is a totally different ball game. When people get into fashion they think, Oh! You know I am going to start my start my own line, I want to go into mass production etc. One needs capital and if you can see into the Kenyan industry for example nobody has ever gotten that far, it's hard when we have the likes of Kikoromeo, Patricia Mbela, Kaveke and many other designers who have not been able to get there despite being well known and supported. It is hard to justify going into mass production because who are you going to sell to? In the Kenyan market we don't really we don't buy our products I can say I grew up in a different ball game and I have much to learn. At Alexander Nash, we produce the same suits made in Seville Row so we like give out the best all suits are made by him or by Master tailors and if you look at how those suits are made it's the same way Tom Ford, or all those other designers they have their suits made and sold to other clients. African consumers too are not ready. It is hard for me to come back to Kenya and either go into styling and have brands come up because people can buy the clothes but they will be very few.

It's hard to make a million in fashion. You only make enough to survive. When we see people that are well known designers we assume that they have a lot of money. The money that is spent is for production but it is hard to make



millions in fashion. In fashion this far, we just survive.

AIM: Who is your ultimate customer?

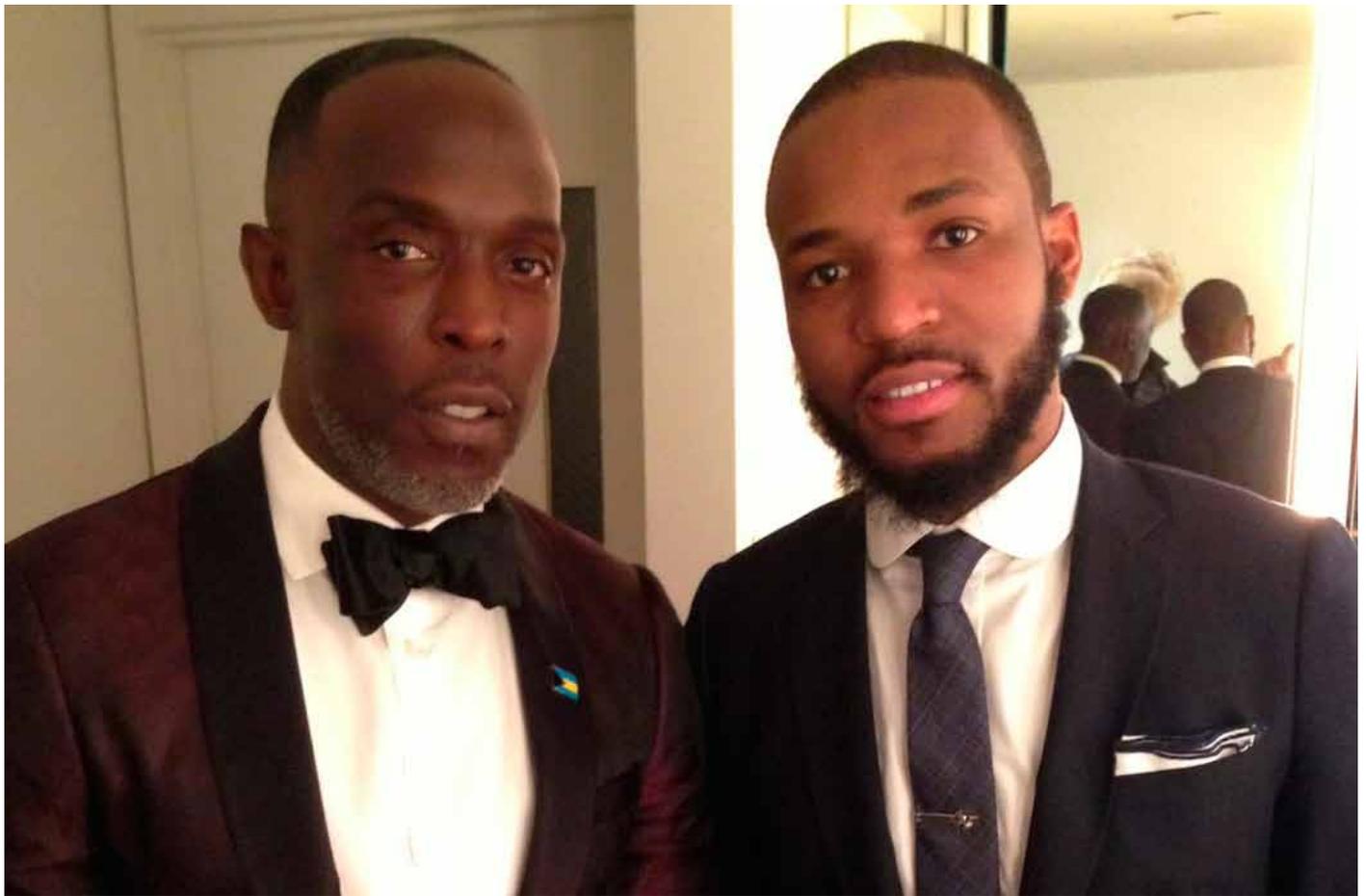
BB: Our customer's age group is from 27 going up, a high-end, consumer. If you cannot buy a 3000 suit, There are brands that cater to different needs, say if you go to J. Crew they have the \$700 one, Zara will have an excellent and differently priced suit etc....If you want something custom made we are here for you. We cater to the high-end consumer that wants something custom-made and well fitted.

AIM: Looking at your closet what are your favourite pieces to wear and why?

BB: Suits are what I like to wear, probably on Friday and the weekend, some jeans. It has been a tremendous journey. I thank God for he has put me in a better place. A place where I meet and interact with people who are on a different level some of who you would probably see on TV. I wear suits everyday, a couple from my line Blackbird, a couple pair of our jeans, Alexanders Nash, those are my people. That is what is in my closet. They fit well, make me look good and people do not judge me (harshly) then....

AIM: Do these also reflect where you are mentally?

BB: When people see a black man in a bespoke suit, they go okay, interesting...as opposed to a guy in sagging jeans. Perception is power for a fact. People change the way they



approach you and they treat you better. I keep learning growing and learning and mentally I get better everyday.

AIM: Good for you. Is your age a challenge?

BB: It is hard for a 24 year old to be in the Bespoke industry. Everywhere I go people remark on that and they encourage me to keep doing it.

I love my age, it challenges people but not me. I love the fact that I am young and I am in the game that is so not my age. When I came to the US I was 20/21 and even then people were wowed by my age. By the time I get to...[God Help Me] 80 years old, I will have some crazy style. My style gets me into places, where I know if I was dressed down, I would not get in. My age, my style and my heritage give me an edge and an opening that I would not necessarily get. That chance to be here is thanks to God. It is a great opportunity. I just love my age.

AIM: Given that you understand the importance of being well dressed, do you have any style tips for our readers?

BB: Well, one thing to know about style is you have to practice, especially men. As far as men want to be great in bed, have a great sense of style, we as creatures do not want to ask. You rarely hear a man ask, how can I be great in bed, how can I get to talk to this woman, how do I tie this? Style is something that takes time to get, you have to practice over and over and over again. It takes discipline. Know your size, get fitted clothes, they look better. Be meticulous in what you do. If you are disciplined in other areas and then you focus on style you will get it man!

AIM: Cool. Kenya and many other African countries turned 50 last year and many more have and will turn 50 in the years to come. What do you want to see Africa achieve in the years to come?

BB: Well, we need good governance. That is our biggest problem. Africa is a big continent and we need to be governed well. Once we have that, all else will fall in place. Health care will fall into place, insecurity and corruption will reduce once we have good, solid leaders. We need leaders like Kwame Nkrumah that hoped that Africans would stick to the plan that we had at independence, if we stuck to Pan-African ideals, we would be way far ahead and able to compete with the west. I wish we can have great leaders who really, in their hearts, want the continent to grow and not only their families.

AIM: Thanks. So what do you do for fun?

BB: Fun, wow, my life has been busy since I moved here. I hang out at fashion mixers, those became my life. Going to events, I watch my favorite movies over and over and on Sunday's that is what I do. Skateboarding, at Alexander Nash that is what we do so I had to learn. Other than that not much really going on because it is cold now. Waiting for the summer so that I can play some football maybe...

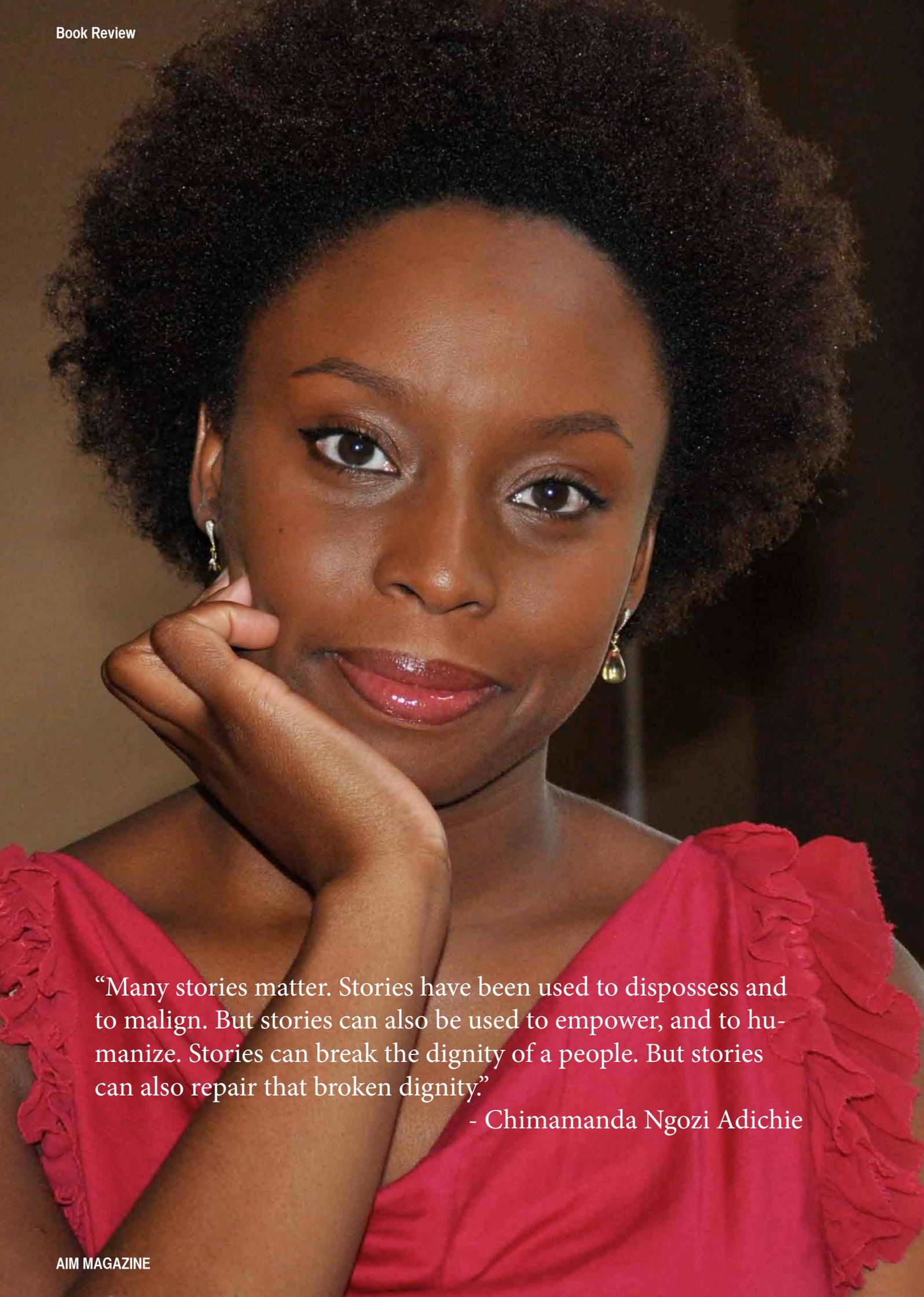
AIM: Thank you for those insights. We are rooting for you. There you have it #africansinmotion, we hope Blackbird's journey serves as an inspiration to you. Adama Amanda Ndiaye once said, "Fashion is life and just like life you must always express your feelings freely"... and in well, fitted, stylish clothes that are true to you :-), well that last part was all me.

AFRICAN PRINT SHOES



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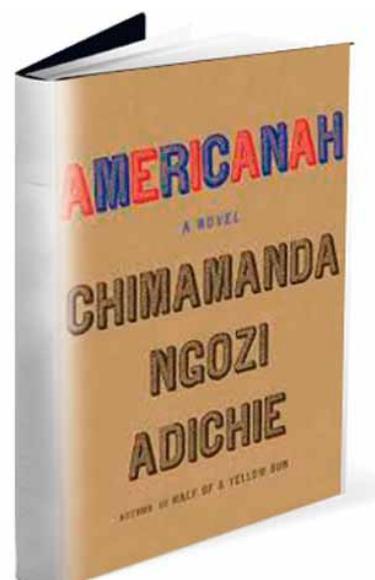
“Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.”

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Reviewed by Joan Njagu CO, USA!

Book Review

Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie



“This book got me, it really got me!” I just finished reading *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie – I may have just had a cathartic experience! It is funny, raw and reads like an autobiography. It is a must-read!

Americanah is an extremely bold book and Adichie dares to go where no one else has. I have read many books but none as compelling. There is a truth and a really honest depiction of the lives of all these young women and men with their dreams to leave Nigeria for better lives in the United States and Britain, not knowing what they will find; and consequently leaves you with a very strong sense of awareness for things that have long been untold about your own life and the pursuit you have made.

When the author describes the character Ifemelu in a hair Salon, you feel as if you are in there with her (with no air condition while trying to avoid talking about your whole life to people you don't know but you stay because, well, they're doing your hair and you are all from Africa, and there's a kinship). You may not have gone to that particular salon, but you know it “exists” somewhere!

The subject of race in America couldn't have been better narrated in my opinion, and by the extremely introspective Ifemelu. It leaves you with a feeling of wanting to know her and read her blog. There is a certain sense of loss and confusion in the beginning when she “realizes” she is black when she gets to America, but the feeling of freedom that ensues when she returns to Nigeria years later when she suggests that she feels as if she again “stops” being black upon her return.

One thing that strikes me is how the author is able to effortlessly, through characters, convey many intricate messages including the fact that it might be easier for Ifemelu to address as heavy a subject as race in America, because she is not an “American-black” and can therefore

make these observations and somehow avoid being seen as having a kind of victim mentality. It makes you wonder if that is fair for African Americans; and so when the author then posts italicized scripts from the blog to remind you that you are “Black” as far as America is concerned, it is a very sobering moment. You may not agree with everything she feels, for instance, you may not always have to agree that you understand the significance of Watermelons and fried chicken with black people in America, but when she reminds you that it is part of being black in America, you cannot help see it through her eyes.

There is a love between Ifemelu and Obinze that is breathtaking. It is told in such great zest and is also racy at times. It is very beautifully written and you really want to see these two people end up together in spite of all the challenges they face in their journey. A true love story! I find that the other relationships that the author creates are not accidental. Like her great relationship with her young cousin who attempts suicide while in America, her Kenyan friend, Wambui, as well as Obinze's relationships in Britain. Each one appears purposeful and as if there's a teaching in each character.

Americanah was very introspective to me. I would venture to say that it should be read in high schools across Kenya/Africa by young people who have dreams for better lives elsewhere. The only caveat being that I am not sure that the racy details would fit “proper” curriculum. However, the rest of the message needs to be told. Personally, it made me aware of things I had long forgotten about my experiences in America. And even now, I am made aware of the perceptions I give people even when I think I am living my best truths. And finally, how much of an “Americanah” I would be stepping foot in Kenya today; and how I can best represent Kenya in my every-day life while incorporating my American experiences.



After 3+ years of cooking and baking...lots of waiting,
Miriam Chemoss is ready to
serve and share her labor of love.

"LOVEBIRD"

will be in digital stores worldwide from January 7th, 2013.

G-Spot

DEALING WITH FEELING INCOMPLETE

"If I only had this, or that, or so-in-so, my life would be complete." Have you or someone you know ever thought these words? Okay, we'll go with "having a friend" who has. At times a person can feel that the addition of someone or something in his or her life can be the proverbial icing on the cake or cherry on top of an already deceit life. In other cases the something is salvation from a dreadful existence, or doing something spectacular to save the world from itself. But then there are those times wherein we desire to make sense of it all; to know what we lack in order to have a fulfilling life.

Too often a person is ridiculed by his or her peers for asking this question; as if the act of asking infers weakness or, even worse, a lack of faith. "You feel this way because you have not yet realized your full potential," one might say. But isn't this the essence of the question; are you not inquiring about the infallible assessment of your full potential and not just the speculation you or those around you have ascertained? Or someone might say, "Oh, that's just the Devil being business." But is feeling incomplete always an issue of faith?

Pondering one's purpose in life is part b of the unabridged "why are we here," question; a question which suggests the answer is beyond human knowing, and that, short of a booming voice from the heavens, the mystery remains unsolved in the face of ramped speculation. I believe to do so, that is to ponder one's existence, is the trademark of intellectualism. In other words, not only is it ok to pose the question and then seek the answer, but you will be better for having done so.

More often than not, no matter the course taken or source of direction, after reaching the goal, a successful person finds him or herself "here" again; asking for clarity. I would go as far to say very few persons throughout time have come close to their potential, nearly completing their purpose; only to die in this service or venture. I am of course referring to individuals, like Martin Luther King Jr. and El Hajj Malik El Shabazz who died prior to reaching their ultimate goal. And I have little doubt that if permitted to achieve their ultimate goal they would have eventually ended up back "here," once again, asking for clarity.

Dreams are to be chased until caught, i.e. realized. But then what? Perhaps we dream another dream, and then chase it. This may be the curse of man; that we be content only in death and only if we died in the service of our Higher Power. Not necessarily religious, mind you... not necessarily. But in whatsoever service with which we have come to believe our Higher Power has burdened us.

I don't automatically assume feeling incomplete is negative, or of the devil. It could just as rationally be argued that it is positive and or God; as if preparing you for your next journey, because you've completed this one; or a correction to the current path, because you've taken the wrong fork in the road. Who knows? The point is there is no shame in asking the question.

I also don't automatically assume it is a matter of spiritual things. It could just be something you are feeling today; a feeling which will dissipate in due time. In any event, emotions are neither positive nor negative, in and of themselves. They are traits of our humanity. And only our actions, the way we allow our emotions to manifest, can be positive or negative. Do not disregard these feelings. Meditate, pray, seek counsel from a trusted source... just don't ignore your feelings. And remember; it's ok to ask questions, as long as you continue to seek answers.

Iron sharpens iron, so let's be better because of it!

Gerald Montgomery

Chew on this

Meal Ideas



I am an avid and regular reader of your Chew On This Column. Please give me ideas of what to include in my menu apart from: ugali, goat meat, rice, green grams and spinach. That constitutes my regular diet. I eat liver, cabbage, chapati, githeri, spaghetti, beans, potatoes once in while. If I am to become a vegan what options do I have?

Nyakio,

Thank you for supporting AIM Magazine. We are pleased you find our articles helpful and that you sought our opinion.

Consider adding:

Vegetables:

Peas

Green beans (include all varieties)

Onions (green and purple)

Tomatoes

Amaranth greens (terere) and other indigenous greens.

Starch:

Yams

Sweet potatoes

Arrow roots

Fruits:

Avocados

Paw paws

Oranges

Mangoes

Bananas

Teas:

Green tea

Fruit teas

Rosemary, Hibiscus, wheat grass (these are considered herbal)

Herbal teas are also a great way of adding variety to your diet.

Here you can also include spices such as masala, cinnamon, nutmeg both for their flavour and taste benefits.

Spices: These have health benefits that go beyond making food taste great. I would say you need to experiment with a wide array of these to maximize the benefits. Some of the most beneficial ones are Turmeric, Cinnamon, Sesame seeds, Cayenne pepper, black pepper etc.

Please consider including spices such as mustard seeds, turmeric and vegetables such as onions and garlic in your chapattis and mandazis so that you maximize the benefits.

I hope I answered your questions. Please let me know if you need additional information.

Wannabe nutritionist,
Eva

Political animal

AFRICOM: UNITED STATES AFRICA COMMAND



AFRICOM: United States Africa Command

The AFRICOM website Africom.mil describes AFRICOM as the United States African command; one of the U.S. defense department's geographic combatant commands and is responsible to the secretary of defense for military relations with African nations, the African Union and African regional security organizations.

For this reason Every African on the continent and in the diaspora must look into the connection of AFRICOM to their government as well as their presence and activity on the continent. For most African countries it has been over 50 years since independence. In my last article "Africa's midlife crisis" I addressed the responsibility that being 50 brings, gone are the days when we can afford to be naïve and bury our heads in the sand. It is necessary that we ask some very crucial questions about all our affairs especially our military interests.

About AFRICOM

AFRICOM is headed by Commander General David M. Rodriguez of the US Army. And its Mission "builds defense capabilities, responds to crises, and deters and defeats transitional threats in order to advance U.S national interests and promote regional security, stability and prosperity." According to the AFRICOM website The Headquarters of AFRICOM is in Stuttgart Germany where 1500 out of the

2000 employees are based. The other employees are based in MacDill air force base Florida and Males worth England.

More About AFRICOM

US Army Africa (USARAF) location Vicenza Italy: USARAF conducts sustained security engagement with African Land forces to promote security, stability and peace.

US Naval Forces Africa: NAVAF headquarters is in Naples, Italy and its main mission is to improve maritime security capabilities capability and capacity of African partners. Personnel are shared with US Naval forces Europe.

U.S. Air force Africa: AFAFRICA air component that conducts sustained security engagement and operations to promote air safety, security and development in Africa.

U.S. Marine Corps Forces Africa: MARFORAF located in Stuttgart Germany it conducts operations exercises, exercises, training and security cooperation activities throughout the African continent.

Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa:

Headquarters Lemmonier Djibouti. In the horn of Africa HJTF-HOA builds partner capacity, promote regional security to counter violent extremist.

U.S. Special Operations Command Africa:

SOCAFRICA builds operational capacity, strengthen regional security and capacity initiatives, implement effective communication strategies in support of strategic objectives and eradicate violent extremist's organizations.

According To africom.mil AFRICOM official website the timeline of U.S military activity in Africa begun in 1801 in Tripoli and ends in 2005 in the horn of Africa on May 20th 2005. We however know that coups in Africa since the 1950s funded by US weapons suppliers, and assisted genocide are the real effects of AFRICOM and other such groups operating within the continent. Here are some examples

AFRICOM And The Conflict In Mali

Questions have been raised about the role AFRICOM played in the conflict in Mali. The Tuareg conflict is a conflict where the Tuareg on the North of Mali have been trying to get autonomy from the central government. January 2013 The Tuareg intensified their war efforts, and decided to take over the entire country from the central government. It is said that they took advantage of the war in Libya to arm themselves with the flood of weapons that were available due to conflict in Libya.

AFRICOM'S interest In Africa

Military advantage of Sudan

Sudan has the largest land mass on the African continent, size of Western Europe.

Sudan borders the Red sea giving it access to the Middle East.

Sudan borders 7 African countries Central Africa Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Ethiopia, Libya, Uganda and Egypt.

According to CIA fact book Sudan's Oil production has gone from 209,100 barrels per day in 2001 to 514,300 barrels per day in Somalia.

It's really difficult to know the in workings of most African Armies, but lately several articles have emerged detailing the strengths and challenges of African armies. According to an article by afkinsider.com here's a breakdown of Africa's most powerful armies by November 2013

7. Libya: The strength of Libya's military comes mainly from its large cache of equipment, despite a relatively small number of active troops. Further hampering Libya's abilities is the continuing violence and unrest stemming from the revolution begun in 2011 which has yet to see a stable government emerge from it. Regardless, the country still has available 2,500 armored fighting vehicles, 500 tanks, 600 towed artillery pieces, 6,500 logistical vehicles, and much more.

6. Kenya: Kenya has established itself as a vital participant in international peacekeeping missions, and is able to do so due to high merchant marine strength and an enormous labor force – resulting in high available manpower. Though it doesn't possess as much of its own equipment, its role as a member of international teams allows the Kenyan military to

share resources with other countries, strengthening its own capabilities at the same time

5. Algeria: As Algeria has a large maritime border, it has developed all of its military capabilities to an impressively modern degree, including its land, sea, and air forces. Algeria's active frontline personnel numbers more than 127,000 troops and it has nearly 2,000 armoured fighting vehicles at its disposal. Algeria also has the added benefit of its own oil reserves, allowing it to use its own fuel to power tanks, aircraft carriers, naval vessels, and more

4. Nigeria: Due to its size, it's no surprise that several hundred thousand troops comprise the Nigerian Armed Forces, through its army, navy, and air force. Like Algeria, an abundant domestic oil supply eases the financial burden to be involved in military conflict, and it has more than 1,400 armoured vehicles, 360 tanks, and 6,000 logistical vehicles at its disposal, as well as nearly 300 aircraft and 25 high-powered naval vessels

3. South Africa: As it hasn't been embroiled in an international military conflict for some time, South Africa uses its highly advanced military for more peacekeeping and international cooperation purposes. Its aircraft and naval vessels are notoriously well-equipped with the latest technology, and though the country has less than 100,000 active frontline personnel, it has the capabilities and manpower for much more. Add to that a vast array of land system technology, and the South African military is indeed a force to be reckoned

2. Ethiopia: As a landlocked country, Ethiopia has focused its resources on developing its army and air force to an impressive degree (the GFP doesn't penalize landlocked countries for not having a naval force). Several hundred thousand personnel make up its current force, and they have significant numbers of land and air systems at their disposal. Furthermore, an enormous population that is fit for service allows Ethiopia to maintain the capacity to turn out an even larger fighting force, and gives the country one of the greatest militaries on the continent

1. Egypt: Egypt is put over the top with regard to military strength due to the sheer size of its armed forces. Nearly 500,000 personnel serve on its active frontline force, far surpassing all of its African neighbours, as well as its nearly 10,000 armoured fighting vehicles, 60,000 logistical vehicles, 900 aircraft, and large oil reserve from which to draw. Again, the military has been somewhat undermined in the wake of the Egyptian Revolution, but some argue that its increased role in government has made it stronger than ever. Whether or not this is a cause for celebration or concern will remain hotly debated for some time to come

As African Citizens and Africans in the diaspora it is our responsibility to understand how our governments represent us in global agreements. What is your country's role in the African Union? What is the capacity of your Army? Does AFRICOM have a presence in your country? Are other foreign military entities operating within your borders, and if so, what agreements allow them to do so. Africa nations that have been independent for over 50 years have the responsibility to protect their borders, skies and seas.

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