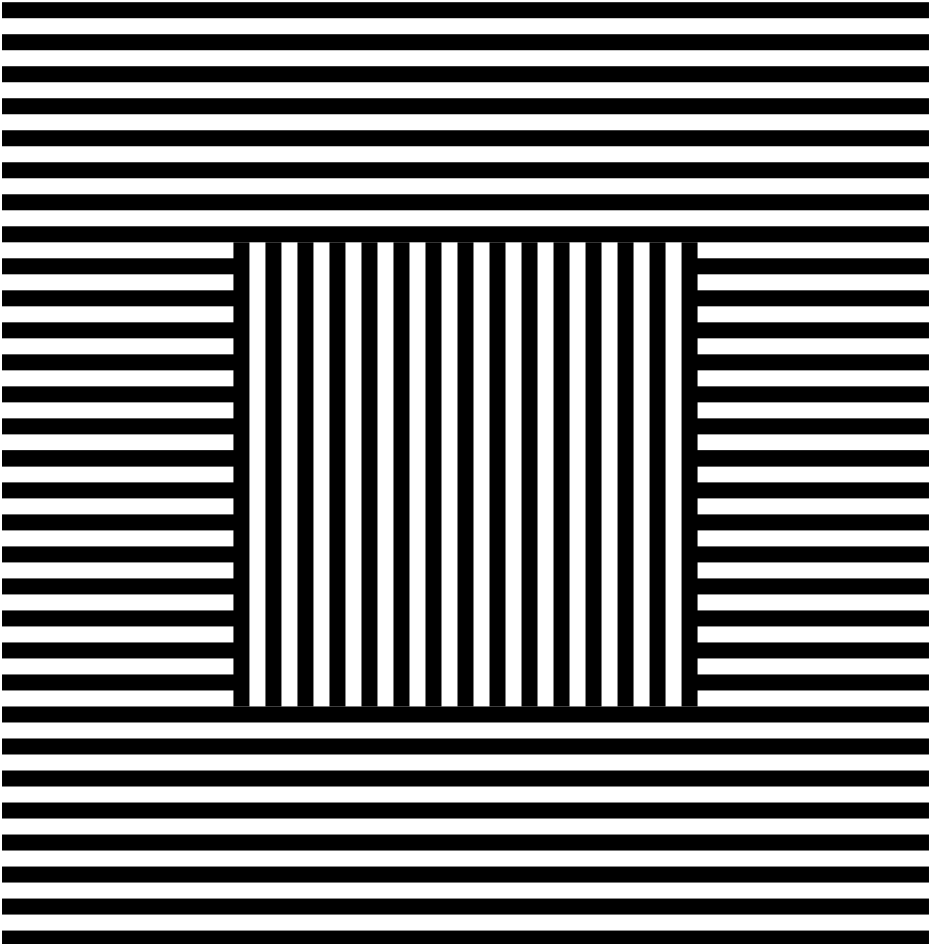


# LINES

MAKING FRIENDS;  
CROSSING BORDERS

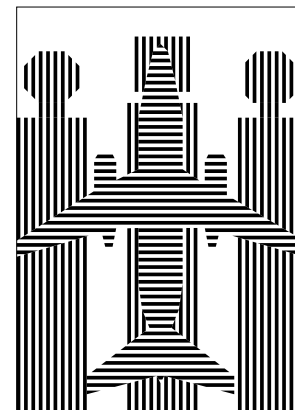


# MAKING FRIENDS; CROSSING BORDERS

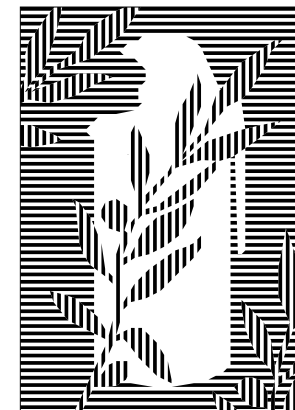
This exhibition is about ‘twinning,’ but not as you currently know it. Twinning is a term used to describe a range of different practices through which sustained links are established between two or more communities. These communities are usually, (though not exclusively) located in different countries, making twinning a *translocal* activity that connects groups of people both below and beyond the level of the nation-state. The idea of twinning has come to be most readily associated with the post-war peacebuilding project. From the 1950’s local mayors and national officials in Europe collaborated to forge ongoing cultural connections between towns that had been torn apart during the Second World War. Many of these connections still exist today and they have long acted as a conduit for the exchange of people, goods and ideas. The intra-European town twinning project has been surveyed by academics, journalists and literary figures. However, far less attention has been given to twinning beyond Europe, and the ways that the practice has – in the past fifty years – opened up to a huge range of different agendas beyond that of cultural diplomacy and peacebuilding. Where some of these newer twinning relationships have been straightforwardly instrumental and premised on the possibilities for courting business and investment opportunities from abroad, others have exhibited a more complex meld of emotional intensity, moral compulsion and political zeal.

Over the course of a four year research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, the exhibition curator, Dr Holly Eva Ryan, has been examining the ways that the practice of twinning has featured in struggles to intervene, challenge and change the course of global political affairs. Her research offers a fundamentally new account of twinning which situates these relationships within a wider, evolving landscape of global political activism and claim-making.

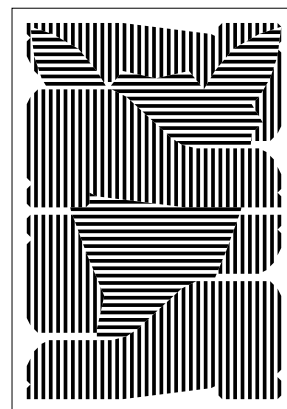
For LINES, Dr Ryan has worked in collaboration with Minute Works graphic design studio to co-produce a series of eight unique posters. These posters represent examples of twinning practice, past and present, that have worked to disrupt existing constellations of global power and challenge the status quo. The sketchbook placed in the centre of the room is an artefact of Dr Ryan’s research journey. Functioning as a fieldwork diary, the multimedia artwork found in the sketchbook captures some of the emotional and cognitive processes elicited by the research process rather than its outcomes and conclusions.



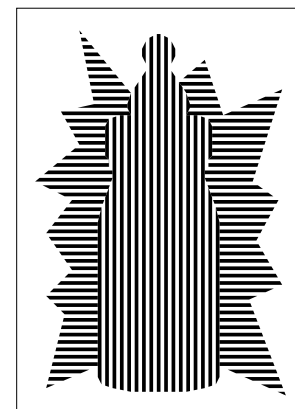
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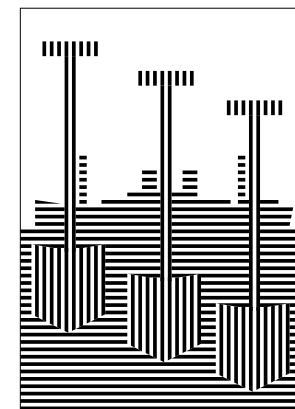
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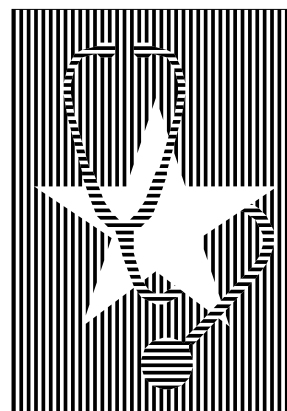
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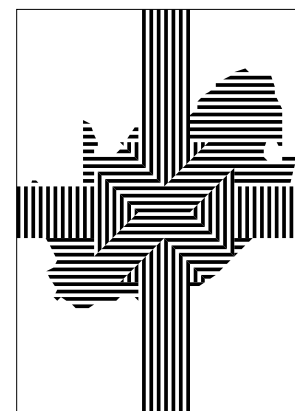
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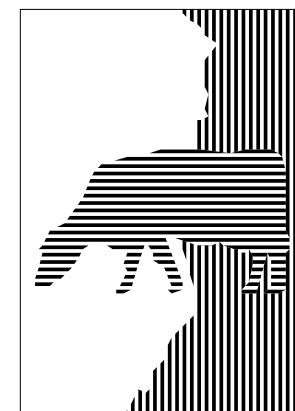
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# TWINNING AS RESTITUTION: DENVER-NAIROBI AND THE RETURN OF THE VIGANGO

In a recent report conducted on behalf of the French government, Sarr and Savoy (2018) affirm that some 90-95% of African cultural patrimony is held outside the continent. Most of this heritage, was removed during the during the so-called “scramble for Africa”, a race for territory among European colonial powers which took place in the late 18th and early 19th century but patchy laws and persisting colonial logics mean that cultural objects have continued to leave the continent, being sold or simply taken away as aesthetic curiosities. Many African countries have been calling for the return of their cultural objects since they gained independence (ibid.), but so far very little has been returned. Whilst more and more museums, galleries and cultural sector organisations have been taking steps to address the colonial legacies of their institutions, there are differing views about what this process can and should entail, with responses ranging from inclusion and engagement with communities that have historically been looted or pillaged through to more concrete agendas of repatriation/rematriation, restitution and reparation. Whilst many national museums have been accused of reducing decolonisation agendas to ‘art-washing’ by offering loans rather than return, in non-traditional museum settings, from those belonging to universities to those run by local authorities, there have been many more pioneering and experimental approaches. Against this backdrop, it is possible to situate the pioneering story of Denver, Nairobi and the funerary statues of the Mijikenda.

The Mijikenda are a group of nine related Bantu ethnic groups – the Chonyi, Kambe, Duruma, Kauma, Ribe, Rabai, Jibana, Giriama, and Digo – who live in Kenya’s coastal regions. During the precolonial period the Mijikenda cultivated plants and animals and participated in trade and political life alongside other nearby coastal and hinterland groups. However, under British colonial rule, relations between the various coastal populations were altered: the British favoured the Coastal Swahili over other local ethnic groups, affording them a heightened social and economic status; and, in 1895 the British signed a treaty giving a large tract of coastal land to the Sultan of Zanzibar. In effect, these processes led to some Mijikenda being dispossessed of their *kaya* (homesteads) and relegated to the status of squatters beholden to absentee landlords. By the 1960’s, *vigango* – cultural objects sacred to the Mijikenda – had found their way to international art markets. *Vigango* are life-sized carved statues that serve as memorials for Mijikenda elders. However, these are not funerary monuments in the Western sense. The Mijikenda believe that *vigango* are living objects that embody the spirits of the dead. Once erected, they are supposed to be left in-situ to decay through natural forces, even if the community’s *kaya* moves.

Although *vigango* are listed as “protected objects” by the National Museums of Kenya and recognized as the cultural patrimony of peoples in the Republic of Kenya under the 1983 Antiquities and Monuments Act of Kenya, no international laws prevent Westerners from owning *vigango* and Kenyan law does not yet prevent their sale. As of 2005, some 400 *vigango* were believed to be held in museums in the United States. Gene Hackman and Andy Warhol are among the artists and celebrities that have allegedly held them as part of private collections. Around 2006, curators Steve Nash and Chip Colwell discovered 30 *vigango* statues among the collections at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science (DMNS). New to DMNS and keen to redefine the museum’s approach to the ethics of collecting and curating, the pair decided to return the objects to their rightful owners.

The curators hit a stumbling block when they found themselves unable to make contact with the appropriate institutions in Kenya. For five years they tried unsuccessfully to connect with the Kenyan Ministry of Culture and Nairobi National Museum. They had almost given up hope when, in 2013, Nash met with members of the Denver-Nairobi Sister City Committee who had overseen nearly half a century of translocal engagement via skills-based delegations and cultural exchanges between the cities of Denver and Nairobi. These experiences had helped forge an extensive network linking individuals from the arts, business and local government. Through this unique assemblage of individuals and organisations, Nash and Colwell were finally able to consult with Kenyan authorities about the return of the objects. In 2014, the sister city organising committee again used its network to bring together the Mayor of Denver, the Kenyan Ambassador to the United States and officials from the Nairobi city government attend a signing ceremony at DMNS. The ceremony was based around a symbolic pledge to hand the statues over to the National Museum of Kenya who would then work to identify their rightful owners within the Mijikenda. Although it was not legally binding, the pledge constituted an important public affirmation that the repatriation of the statues *should* and *would* commence. The event was covered in a 2014 New York Times editorial, which further magnified the case for returning stolen patrimony and thus fed into the wider normative agenda for change in the museum and gallery circuit.

Regrettably, this was not the end of the saga for the statues, which got caught up in a dispute over import tariffs that further delayed their journey home by several years. Nonetheless, the Denver-Nairobi story remains the only successful case of return for *vigango*. It thus offers important practical lessons for those advocating for the repatriation of other sensitive cultural objects. Moreover, this unusual story points to some of the ways that twinned communities can and might contribute to the success of larger political-cultural agendas like that of decolonisation and restitution. By using its networks to amplify the story and help facilitate the transfer of the *vigango* back to Kenya, the sister city committee participated in processes that ultimately seek to re-position and restore postcolonial states as the producers, patrons, purveyors and protectors of global history and culture.

# TWINNING AS RECOGNITION: ACTS OF WITNESSING IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

The areas known as The West Bank and Gaza have been militarily occupied by Israel since the 1967 Six-Day War. Collectively, they are known as the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). The West Bank is a land-locked expanse to the west of the Jordan River. It is bounded by Israel to the North, South and East, with Jordan to the West. Gaza, meanwhile, is a small enclave bordering the Eastern Mediterranean. Gaza and the West Bank are separated from each other by Israel. The precise character and intensity of Israeli occupation differs within and across the two territories. For Palestinians in the West Bank, the occupation entails restrictions on movement and civil liberties, arbitrary violence and the ongoing demolition of homes and other infrastructure to make way for expanding Jewish settlements, a practice which is in direct violation of the Geneva Conventions (Amnesty International 2019). Where the West Bank (except for Eastern Jerusalem) remains under the partial administration of the Palestinian Authority, Gaza has, since 2007 been governed by Hamas, a militant, fundamentalist Islamic organization. Following the ascent of Hamas, Gaza was placed under an international economic and political boycott by Israel and the United States. Although Israel announced its withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, the majority of international commentators still regard the territory as falling under indirect occupation. This is because Israel maintains total control of Gaza's air and maritime space, it administers six out of seven land crossings and maintains an extensive buffer zone within the territory. Gaza remains dependent on Israel for its utilities and basic needs: water, electricity and telecommunications. Formal and informal twinnings linking British communities to the OPTs have been active since at least the turn of the millennium. Due to the immense challenges of travelling to and communicating with civilians in Gaza, the overriding majority of these relationships are currently with communities in The West Bank. Some 4.5 million Palestinians live within the OPTs, with a large proportion housed in United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) administered refugee camps. Those living within the camps face the compounded challenges of overcrowding, poor infrastructure, high levels of unemployment, food shortages, and protection issues.

Twinnings with the OPTs are couched in the language of 'friendship' and 'peace', with an emphasis on providing visibility, care and aid to communities living with the constant threat of direct and indirect violence that comes with living under occupation. The Hanwell Friends of Sebastiya (HAFSA) for example, have been visiting and sup-

porting the ancient Palestinian village of Sebastiya for well over a decade. Sebastiya is located in the Nablus Governorate of the State of Palestine, some 12 kilometres north-west of the city of Nablus. Home to some 4,000 people, the village relies on Nablus for access to services and employment, but Israeli military check-points make travelling back and forth difficult. Sebastiya is one of the oldest continuously inhabited places in the West Bank. It houses an archaeological site of great historical and religious importance which has often been a flashpoint for conflict. Therefore, alongside fundraising for a number "village enhancements" – including the purchase of olive seedlings and shrubs for planting, the upgrading of an Ottoman palace into a guesthouse, and the clean-up of the local cemetery – the community in Hanwell has also raised money for first aid training and gas masks to assist residents living in close proximity to the archaeological site. Having observed the frequency with which the civilian population residing near Ancient Sebastiya has been exposed to tear gas, these projects seek to mitigate health risks for the elderly, the immuno-compromised and children who are especially vulnerable to the effects of atmospheric chemical weapons.

Concerns about the brutality of the Israeli military was also one of the factors behind friendship links established between Oxford and Ramallah. Although a formal twinning pact was only signed in 2019, the relationship between these cities dates back to 2002, when volunteer observers from Oxford witnessed Israeli tanks rolling into Ramallah as a part of Operation Defensive Shield, a period of heightened conflict during which the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) seized most of the buildings in the headquarters compound of Yasser Arafat before moving on to impose curfews in most major West Bank cities. The Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association (OFRA) was established by these volunteers who had the aim of supporting residents of Ramallah by reducing their sense of isolation and making their voices and experiences known. Over the course of the last two decades, OFRA have focussed much of their attention on Al Am'ari refugee camp. Am'ari is located to the east of Ramallah city in al-Bireh municipality. One of the smaller camps in the West Bank, it was established in 1949 for Palestinian refugees who lost both home and means of livelihood during the 1948 conflict. In accordance with the Oslo Accords, Am'ari camp is located in Area A and is thus under the control of the Palestinian Authority. However, UNWRA observe frequent incursions and detentions of residents by Israeli security forces. They note that prior to the first intifada, many refugees living in Am'ari camp were able to move to surrounding villages and cities. However, the construction of the West Bank Barrier and rising prices for land have limited the mobility of Am'ari refugees, whose numbers have doubled since 1949 (UNWRA 2015). Since the early 2000's, OFRA have sought to improve conditions in the camp and address the lack of prospects and opportunities for its residents. Recent projects have included the upgrading of a teaching room in the camp's Women's Resource Centre; and, replacing toilets and changing rooms at the camp's youth centre. Since 2005 OFRA have organised several opportunities for children from Am'ari to visit Oxford. They also work closely with the *Palestinian History Tapestry Project* which uses techniques and patterns common to Palestinian needlework to narrate the histories and experiences of families in the OPTs.

The work of HAFSA, OFRA and the wider Britain and Palestine Twinning and Friendship Network (BPFTN) can be understood in terms of an everyday politics of witnessing. Their long-standing links to communities in the OPTs allows them to stay informed of the realities on the ground, making them especially well placed to call out abuses of power by the occupying forces. The twinings also have an important performative function: by repeatedly enacting forms of recognition for Palestinian territory, culture and identity, they pre-figure possibilities for a future Palestinian state.

## TWINNING AS SOLIDARITY: BUILDING CONNECTIONS WITH REVOLUTIONARY NICARAGUA

For much of the twentieth century, Nicaragua was ruled by a corrupt family dynasty - the Somozas - who were, in turn, backed by the United States. Years of repression, corruption and dispossession at the hands of the Somozas led the country to a tipping point in 1979 when a popular uprising ousted Anastasio Somoza Debayle and brought the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (Sandinista National Liberation Front or FSLN) to power. Invoking the legacy of the martyred peasant hero Augusto César Sandino, the FSLN formed a Council (or *Junta*) of National Reconstruction and initiated process of sweeping reforms, investing heavily in healthcare, infrastructure, literacy and culture. This transformative policy agenda was widely welcomed by large parts of the international community. Nonetheless, through the prism of United States Cold War foreign policy, the FSLN were perceived as a 'communist threat'. In the early 1980's the US imposed an economic blockade on Nicaragua and, behind the scenes, President Ronald Reagan authorized the Central Intelligence Agency to begin financing and training irregular forces of *contrarrevolucionarios* (counter-revolutionaries or *contras*) with the aim of destabilising and ultimately overthrowing the *Sandinistas*.

*Contra* tactics included disrupting trade and economic supply lines across the country, attacks on public services, as well as acts of violence and intimidation directed towards civilian populations. The escalating situation was followed closely by international audiences. NGOs, UN agencies and left-leaning governments offered rhetorical and material support to the *Junta*. Private citizens also came together as part of transnational solidarity campaigns that conceived of novel acts of witnessing, claim-making and awareness-raising to support the *Sandinista* cause. Among these, the practice of 'twinning' saw popular uptake. By the end of the 1980's it was possible to count dozens of Nicaraguan sister cities in the United States and many more links in Europe. By the end of the 1980's there were some 17 formal or informal twinings between Nicaraguan and British localities.

Solidarity twinings with Nicaragua were forged on the basis of emotional connections wrought in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, when scores of international volunteers (*internacionalistas*) made their way to the war-ravaged country to help in factories, schools, farms and healthcare facilities. Accommodated in home-stays and inspired by narratives about the progressive ideals and achievements of the new *Sandinista* government, the *internacionalistas* were so moved by their experiences in Nicaragua that,

when they returned home, many of them sought out new avenues for ongoing solidarity work. Twinning was regarded as perfect for this task as it bound communities into pacts of mutual assistance and allowed for the ongoing exchange of people, goods and ideas.

Practically speaking, UK-Nicaragua solidarity twinings provided nodal points for the collection and transfer of resources in aid of the revolution. UK partners mobilised resources and machinery to donate to schools, hospitals and public utilities. Examples included glues, tacks and textiles for shoe-making which were purchased by the Leicester-Masaya Link Group and two large refuse trucks from Lambeth which were filled with household items and shipped to the community of Bluefields on the Atlantic Coast. Before long, many of the twinning links also started to facilitate *two-way* travel between Nicaragua and the UK, placing an onus on identifying professionals – teachers, nurses, engineers and planners – for upskilling and capacity-building opportunities. With these skills-based delegations growing apace, longer-term infrastructural projects such as the upgrading of hospitals, maternal health units (Swindon-Ocotol), schools (Islington-Managua), and community centres (Oxford-Leon) were realised.

The twinings served to challenge existing stereotypes, discourses and concentrations of power. Firstly, by facilitating manifold individual encounters between Nicaraguans and Brits they worked to loosen and dismantle preconceived notions of self and *other*. For the British partners, dinner table conversations, pillow talk and impassioned political dialogues at local bars, churches, repurposed theatres and *alcaldias* (town halls) breathed life into the political axioms of *Sandinismo*, making the revolutionary figure of the metallurgy worker, *campesino* or weaver both relatable and sympathetic. Similarly, for the Nicaraguans, interactions with outsiders who were broadly supportive to their struggle helped to challenge preconceptions of the Global North as a monolithic foe.

Secondly, the twinings helped lend credibility to the *Sandinistas*, while circumventing the power and reach of the state. With the support of the Nicaraguan embassy, British solidarity activists acted as interlocutors between receptive *alcaldias* (town halls) in Nicaragua and their own local councils in the UK, petitioning both sides to establish formal twinning ‘pacts’ that would enshrine and institutionalise the relationships at the level of subnational government. Successful overseas cooperation via municipal links contributed to the FSLN’s international image campaign through a process of ‘counter-framing’ in which existing discourses that painted the FSLN as hard-line agents of Soviet-style Communism were successfully challenged and supplanted by day-to-day interactions that normalised relations between British and Nicaraguan officials. Therefore, although the official foreign policy of the British government under Margaret Thatcher was closely aligned with that of Reagan, by institutionalising twinings with Nicaragua, the solidarity activists succeeded in amplifying an alternative foreign policy narrative at the level of subnational government. Some British councils went as far as to publicly declare their solidarity with the . As such, solidarity twinning sits among a number of examples of alternative diplomacy or – paradiplomacy – that transcend traditional state-centric political models and problematise claims about the state’s ‘unified’ nature.

## TWINNING AS DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AND HUMANITARIAN AID

The decolonisation processes of the twentieth century brought many new nation states into existence. However, these emerging nations, like those that had gained independence in the centuries before, remained dogged by the legacies of colonial extractivism, racialisation and social stratification as well as the underdevelopment of infrastructures and key industries required to participate on a meaningful and equal footing in the global economy. Spurred on by concerns that mainstream ‘development’ thinking was inadequate in the face of these issues, the 1980’s saw the establishment of North-South community links as places to explore alternative trajectories for technical cooperation. The idea of ‘linking’ borrowed directly from the existing model of intra-European town twinning but tended to bypass local authorities in favour of a more direct partnership between local communities. Some of the earliest community links were established between Warwick-Bo, Hull-Freetown, Marlborough-Gunjur. These initiatives were underwritten by a desire to give voice and ownership back to communities in the Global South. Over the decades they have collaborated on a variety of projects designed to resolve economic and social issues translocally (that is, *beyond and below* the state). These projects have included arts-based public health campaigns, fair trade initiatives, and collaboration on renewable energy solutions.

Established in the early 2000’s by a medical doctor, the relationship between Lalibela, Ethiopia and Glasdonbury, UK has been centred on improving maternal health outcomes and widening access to secondary education and clean water. The twinning is maintained on a day-to-day basis by British and Ethiopian volunteers for The Lalibela Trust, a UK registered charity that has managed to galvanise a range of donors – including Festival Medical Services, The Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust and Rotary International – to fund the construction of a maternity centre, as well as multiple health posts, classrooms, wells and latrines that serve up to 300,000 people in the vicinity of Lalibela. After several decades expanding their small-scale development assistance work in Lalibela, the twinning association found itself propelled into a new and urgent role. In 2021 Lalibela and the wider Amhara region of Ethiopia was invaded by the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). As the only international non-state actor with a presence on the ground, The Trust’s focus shifted to reporting on conditions in Lalibela and providing humanitarian aid, particularly to mothers and babies under siege. Following the exit of the TPLF, the twinning has turned its focus to helping to rebuild damaged infrastructure and replace vital equipment that was looted from Lalibela’s outskirts.

# TWINNING AS A CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION: READING, SPEIGHTSTOWN

Some twin links have been established by diasporic communities as a means of reconnecting across geographical, cultural and generational distances. The relationship between Speightstown, Barbados and Reading, UK can be understood in this light. The seeds of the Speightstown-Reading connection were sown at the end of the Second World War when Britain emerged with a much-weakened economy and massive gaps in essential services. The government of the time resolved to stimulate growth with large investments in national infrastructure and public health. In this context, thousands of British Subjects from the Caribbean responded to calls for agricultural and construction workers, train and bus drivers, nurses and carers to help staff the new National Health Service (NHS). People arriving from Caribbean countries between 1948 and 1971 to take up these roles have acquired the label of 'Generation Windrush'. This is a reference to the MV Empire Windrush, which was the first ship to dock in 1948, bringing workers from Jamaica, Trinidad, Bermuda and other former British territories.

Although they had arrived at the behest of the British government, these citizens from the wider British Empire were not always met with a warm reception. On arrival they encountered varied forms of discrimination, ranging from difficulties accessing housing to more direct forms of verbal and physical abuse. In time, many established their own voluntary networks to help one another navigate the complexities and challenges of 'arrival'. Over time these informal networks continued to expand in theme and scope, connecting new generations to their culture and history. Among the Windrush migrants were many Barbadians who had arrived by sea or by air to take up new roles far from home. A large proportion of Barbadian migrants settled in Reading, where they helped to rebuild the town's vital infrastructure and local economy. Many took up jobs working in factories belonging to major British brands like Huntley & Palmers and Burberry.

In 1968, just two years after Barbados gained its independence, a small group of Reading-based Barbadians decided to group together for regular meetings where they could share and build upon their cultural experiences and discuss current affairs at home. This was the beginning of the Barbados and Friends Association (BAFA) which, over many decades, cultivated economic and cultural ties to communities back in Barbados. BAFA organises annual events in Reading to coincide with *Crop Over*

(Barbados' annual Carnival) and the Barbadian Independence Day. In 2003, BAFA's long-standing tie with the port town of Speightstown was consolidated with a formal twinning agreement. This act provided symbolic recognition of the crucial role that Barbadians had played in the development and regeneration of Reading during the twentieth century. It also situated the relationship as one of several examples that connect the practice of twinning with wider political projects to see, hear and celebrate Britain's migrant communities.

# TWINNING AS INTERNATIONAL ZAPATISMO: YA BASTA!

In the very early hours of January 1st 1994, the day of the inauguration of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the USA, Canada and Mexico, an army of around 3,000 indigenous men and women, members of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista National Liberation Army or EZLN) took control of the main municipalities in Chiapas, the southernmost state of Mexico. Armed with rifles, the odd kalashnikov or uzi and – for those who had drawn the short straw – fake wooden guns, these masked *guerrillas* swarmed the streets of the old conquistador capital of San Cristóbal de las Casas. The uprising took Mexico and the world by surprise, shattering the Mexican government's façade of modernity and provoking an immediate response, with between 30,000 and 60,000 federal troops being dispatched to crush the insurgency. In the rather narrow terms of conventional armed conflict, the Zapatista revolution was restricted to a limited zone in Chiapas and the siege itself was short-lived. Yet, more than any other rural insurgency in Latin America in recent decades, the Zapatista uprising captured the imagination of journalists, activists and intellectuals around the world, transforming a relatively small-scale rebellion into a highly influential social movement with organised support all across the globe.

In 2004, exactly ten years after the New Years Day uprising that brought the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* or EZLN to international prominence, the Zapatista autonomous municipality of *16 de Febrero* was twinned with the Scottish branch of the Zapatista Solidarity Movement. Located in the Municipality of Ocosingo in the Mexico's Southernmost state of Chiapas, 16 de Febrero forms one of over 30 municipalities that have declared themselves as "communities in resistance", eschewing expropriation by large landholders and rebelling against the extractive colonial state structures that have marginalised the region's indigenous communities for hundreds of years. Linking around 40 indigenous Tzotzil, Tzeltal and Chol villages in the Highlands of Chiapas to friends and supporters across the Atlantic, this twinning emphasised the dual themes of *salud y solidaridad* (health and solidarity). The Scottish Zapatista groups raised funds for the construction of 16 de Febrero's very first health centre and collaborated on a fair-trade arrangement in which amber jewellery and woven textiles produced in the community could be sold in Scotland with all profits repatriated to Chiapas. Both of these projects were devised to assist the community of *16 de Febrero* and the wider autonomy movement in Chiapas in its plight to regain independence over all aspects of social and political life.

# TWINNING AGAINST APARTHEID: INTERNATIONAL LINKING AS ANTI-RACIST PRACTICE

For nearly three centuries black South Africans were dispossessed and exploited by Dutch and British colonial powers. In 1948, The National Party, elected by an all-white electorate, extended and formalised separation and discrimination into a rigid legal system known as 'apartheid' (apartness). Apartheid was a violent system of racial segregation and white supremacy that dispossessed black South Africans of lands and confined them to barren overcrowded 'homelands'. Segregation laws touched every aspect of social and economic life: marriage between non-whites and whites was prohibited, there were 'white-only' jobs and schools and healthcare facilities. Black South Africans were forced to carry 'passes' and their political rights were curtailed. Across South Africa and neighbouring states, many people rose up in resistance to apartheid. The African National Congress (ANC) was at the forefront of this movement. After being banned from South Africa in 1960, it operated underground and largely outside of South African territory. The ANC was supported internationally by a wide range of actors brought together as part of the transnational Anti-Apartheid Movement.

During the early 1990's Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) branches in England and Scotland established a series of long-term community links (or twinnings) with African National Congress (ANC) regions as part of a repertoire of actions undertaken in solidarity with black South Africans. While the AAM's boycott and disinvestment campaigns, active since the 1960s, had been designed to weaken and delegitimise the South African apartheid state internationally, the context and logic behind the AAM-ANC twinnings were slightly different. By 1990, the ANC had been legalised once more and some preliminary peace talks had begun. The AAM reasoned that for any proposed peace process to ultimately succeed in South Africa, there would need to be two kinds of political pressure – internal and external – applied to the Pretoria regime. Twinning was understood to sustain both. On the one hand, these links would enable AAM branches to respond quickly to requests for financial and material support from the ANC regions. This would help to keep the ANC well-resourced and allow them to mobilise quickly in the event of any uptick in violence. On the other hand, by allowing for more direct and sustained communication between British activists and the ANC regions, international awareness, information and understanding would increase. The logic of this was not dissimilar to the 'boomerang effect', a now-popular concept which has been used to describe the ways that transnational activism helps to restrict the brutality of oppressive regimes by channeling external scrutiny and pressure towards them (Keck and Sikkink 1994).



It was in this context of uncertainty around the political transition that 14 new twinning links between ANC regions and UK AAM branches emerged. These included: The Chilterns–Northern Transvaal, Northwest/Merseyside–Northern Natal, London–Pretoria, Witwatersand, Vall (PWV), Greater Manchester–Southern Natal and Scotland–Transkei. Some of these links remained active for some time after the national elections in 1994, lending political support to the new Government of National Unity headed by Nelson Mandela; and, contributing to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of the African National Congress’ (ANC) by continuing to transfer resources to some of the most weakened and impoverished parts of the country.

## DISMANTLING BORDERS, AFFIRMING UNITY: GORIZIA AND NOVA GORICA

On 18th December 2021, the twin cities of Gorizia (Italy) and Nova Gorica (Slovenia) were designated the award of European Capital of Culture, 2025. For regular observers of this annual award, there was something unusual about this nomination. The cities did not apply as independent candidates, instead they entered the process on the same ticket. That is to say, Gorizia and Nova Gorica were co-nominated based on their pledge to affirm and celebrate their unity as one vast urban centre, despite being located in two different nation states.

Situated at the interstices between Germanic, Slav and Italian cultural influences, the towns of Gorizia in Italy and Nova Gorica in Slovenia share a border, as well as a long and interesting history. Since the 15th century, a growing commercial and residential zone stretched across what is now the border between Italy and Slovenia. However, over the centuries this area has variously been unified or divided by processes of imperial expansion, shifting territorial demarcations, and the rise of new states. Gorizia, which comes from the Slavic term gorica (meaning ‘little hill’) began as a small fortress and settlement on the route between the ancient Roman cities of Aquileia and Emona (modern day Ljubljana). By 1500, Gorizia had expanded into a small county and after a brief spell of occupation by the Republic of Venice, the area fell under Habsburg rule. From the sixteenth century onwards, the area expanded again as settlers from northern cities arrived in search of land and commercial opportunities. Over time, Gorizia developed into a multi-ethnic town, in which Friulian, Venetian, German, and Slovene were all spoken.

During World War I, Gorizia became a hotbed of contestation. Forming a frontline between Italy and Austria-Hungary, the town suffered a great deal of damage. Competing political factions emerged: Slovene nationalist parties that demanded a semi-independent Yugoslav state under the House of Habsburg, Friulian conservatives and Christian Socialists who sought an autonomous region in Eastern Friuli, and an underground irredentist movement that sought unification with Italy. Between 1916-18 the town hovered back and forth between Italian and Austro-Hungarian control but by 1920, the whole region had become a part of Italy. Under Benito Mussolini’s fascist regime, Gorizia’s Slovene organisations were dissolved and the public use of the Slovene language was prohibited. Many fled persecution, with the most popular destinations for exiles being The Southern Cone and the neighbouring Kingdom of

Yugoslavia, which had inherited much of the territory belonging to the Austro-Hungarian empire. At the end of the Second World War, the city was claimed by the newly designated Federal Peoples' Republic of Yugoslavia and in 1947, the drawing up of a new hard border between Italy and Yugoslavia divided Gorizia. The larger commercial and historic district remained on the Western side of the border in Italy, while a number of smaller villages were left on the eastern side in Yugoslavia. The Yugoslavian authorities used these villages as the basis for constructing a new town, Nova Gorica. The border between Gorizia and Nova Gorica constituted an artificial barrier between peoples that had been connected for centuries, *"[c]utting through families where grandparents could not see their grandchildren grow up, cutting through stables where cows ate in Italy and slept in Yugoslavia, cutting through the living and the dead where the city was on one side and the cemetery on the other"* (Go!2025, 2019:5). With the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991, Nova Gorica formed a part of the newly independent nation state of Slovenia. The hard border dividing Gorizia and Nova Gorica remained in place until 2007 when Slovenia was admitted to the European Union.

In spite of the hard border that separated them for the best part of the twentieth century, the two cities have always found ways to communicate and cooperate. As early as the 1960s, Gorizia and Nova Gorica were conducting significant cultural projects together and have thus been described as one of the early laboratories for thinking about how to overcome the division of Europe between East and West: *"Through decades of joint work in associations, cultural, educational and economic institutions and through small everyday gestures, though scarred by the horrors of war, people of Gorizia and Nova Gorica drilled a hole in the iron curtain. They managed to build a friendship, which is real, sincere and vibrant"* (Go!2025, 2019:6).

Mobilising against the strident nationalisms that have divided them in the past, the cities of Gorizia, and Nova Gorica have together adopted a system of common governance, making strident progress towards the total and voluntary elimination of borders.

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