BA Fine Art: Studio, Site and Context

Ways of Thinking (ADDA4022/C)

Analyse, evaluate and reflect about an artwork introduced in the class using critical theories related to the Postcolonial Condition.

AI ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

- I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment.

- I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work.

- I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.



Figure 1: '*Throne of Weapons'*, Kester

Africa remains a continent in which many of its constituents experience widespread conflict, governmental corruption and exploitation of their civilian populaces. Marred by the power vacuums left after the dissolution of European Empires and the consequent withdrawal of their Imperial presence, many African nations found themselves embroiled in brutal struggles for independence, often remaining divided politically and susceptible to foreign influence and intervention. In this essay I will use Kester's 2001 piece 'Throne of Weapons' (fig 1) as a basis to discuss how civil war in Africa (Using Mozambique's 1977 – 1992 conflict as an example) following the decolonisation process was, and still is a product of postcolonialism

and how the funding of these wars, namely the arming of insurgent groups and funding of specific ideological parties, in effect places the Cold War as a continuation of applied colonialist ideology.

It would be appropriate to begin by discussing the artwork itself. *'Throne of Weapons'* (2001), created by Mozambican artist Cristóvão Canhavato (who uses the moniker 'Kester') is a sculpture that is rather blatant in what it depicts in a purely visual sense, yet simultaneously possesses a wealth of history and symbolical meaning behind it. Described as "The Cold War as furniture," (Macgregor, N.) at first glance we simply see a chair constructed out of rifles and other firearms, yet upon closer inspection this chair becomes a 'throne' of death, a monument to the weapons that gained perpetual infamy following the brutal civil conflicts that preceded the liberation of many African countries. Prime amongst these, the AK-47 stands out as a weapon synonymous with communist-led insurgency and arguably the national identity of Mozambique, after all their flag features the same rifle, even to the present day (fig 2).

However, this piece is composed of weapons acquired in the TAE's ('*Transformação de Armas em Enxadas*' or '*Transforming Arms Into Tools/Plowshares'*) disarmament programme following the aftermath of Mozambique's civil war where approximately 600,000 weapons had been surrendered (Schwartzott, A.). In using such material, Kester has created a piece that serves as a defiant reclamation of war materiel rather than an object that glorifies war, transforming tools of death and control into a sculpture representative of a want to persevere, even following the aftermath of Mozambique's violent past. A throne fashioned from weapons can easily be disregarded as crude and intimidating. Kester's throne possess a wealth of historical and political context that I will now use to justify the key points of this essay.



Figure 2: Flag of Mozambique

The Cold War presented an opportunity for Socialist states with a vested interest in the development of emerging African states to gain influence within the contentious political landscape of the continent. Exploiting the social and economic instability proceeding decolonisation, a new "scramble for Africa" had emerged, the socialist East and capitalist West vying for influence in newly formed states via the provision of wealth and, more aptly, military aid. As Kester's piece is constructed mostly with weapon designs of soviet origin, the G3 rifles remaining an exception (yet being representative of Portugal's former imperial presence within Mozambique), it would be more pertinent to focus on Eastern/Socialist motives within Africa as opposed to Western/Capitalist ones. In the case of Mozambique, Communist ideology prevailed in no small part due contributions in arms and munitions provided by socialist states. Amongst other socialist states, the USSR had "Interests in Mozambique's postindependence development," and that "the Soviet Union…provided military logistics, expertise, and capital to Frelimo and its army," (Bertelsen pg.29) 'FREMILO' (from the Portuguese '*Frente de Libertação Moçambique')* referring to the '*Mozambique Liberation Front',* (Dziak, M.) the current ruling left-wing political party with

origins in resistance fighting and consequent success in the struggle for independence against the Portuguese Empire, and subsequently against the right-wing resistance movement and their main political adversary and opponent during the civil war 'RENAMO' (Acronym for the Portuguese '*Resistência Nacional Moçambicana'* or '*Mozambican National Resistance'*) (Riches, C. and Palmowski, J.). The funding of groups such as 'FREMILO' and 'RENAMO' represented the propensity of players in the cold war to simultaneously take advantage of post-colonial Africa whilst mimicking the tactics of its former European overlords, specifically the armament of guerilla fighters and paramilitaries in order to oust parties that did not align with the ideals of a foreign power's political and economic agenda.

This is further corroborated if we take China's involvement in Mozambique's struggle for independence into account as well. COREMO (formed in 1965 under the name '*Mozambique Revolutionary Committee'*) acted as an amalgamation of splinter groups that had separated themselves from FREMILO due to "Personal and ideological disagreements," (Passemiers, L. pg.41) and were able to garner support from Mao Zedong's PRC (People's Republic of China) as "In the 1960s, the People's Republic of China backed COREMO and Third-Worldism, providing COREMO with military training and material." (Passemiers, L. pg. 54) Not only this, it can also be said that the PRC were regarded by COREMO as their prime supporters, their secretary of information Julius Dzonzi having stated in 1967 that "…Above all the great Chinese people under the leadership of President Mao Tse-tung, are with us in the common struggle against imperialism," the PRC literally being regarded "above" COREMO's other noted supporters (Vietnam, Angola, Zimbabwe etc) (pg.53). Here we see yet another example of a major participant in the cold war (Mao's PRC) funding and arming an insurgent group (COREMO) in the aim of using an African nation's struggle (in this case Mozambique) for self-determination in order to gain a political foothold in an emerging independent state. There were no noble intentions behind the military assistance provided by both the USSR and the PRC, no true care for the independence of Mozambique's people nor their wellbeing, only a want for control of yet another piece on the proverbial chessboard that was the Cold War. I see Kester's throne as a representation of this military aid as in a literal sense it is plainly constructed out of guns yet figuratively, the weapons used to construct it represent a sordid past of guerilla warfare and revolutionary action within Mozambique and all emanate from communist-aligned countries. I'd argue this reflects some of the past colonial actions of the Portuguese empire (arming specific groups/natives to garner military and political support) and thus served as a continuation of colonialism in Mozambique,

cementing the Cold War as an advanced stage of colonialism. Perhaps not as apparent and cruel as the methods employed by European powers during the height of colonial activity in Africa yet definitely present and counter-intuitive to the livelihood and welfare of Mozambique's citizenry.

As the dominant geopolitical phenomenon that oversaw the process of decolonisation and myriad of independence movements across the globe during the mid to late twentieth century, the Cold War in its implementation, I argue, replaced colonialism within Africa (specifically Mozambique) as the primary source of influence in its development. In his book, '*The global Cold War : third world interventions and the making of our times*' Westad writes: "The forming of anti-colonial revolutionary movements and of new Third World states is inextricably linked in time to the Cold War conflict and Cold War ideologies," (pg.74) Which supports the argument that the Cold War can be interpreted as a progressed stage of colonialism in the sense that these aspects (the Cold War alongside Independence movements and the formation of new states within Africa) are linked both chronologically and in political ethos.

A suggestion that "The high point of decolonization was between the late 1940s and the 1960s," (C. Sharad, V. Katherine, pg.11) would also place many of Africa's independence movements as events adjacent to that of the timeline of the Cold War (1945 -1991). Amongst these would have been Mozambique's violent separation from the Portuguese Empire having secured independence on June 25th, 1975, after "…a decade of armed struggle," (Isaacman, F.A.). The resulting civil war (1977 – 1992) that Kester's piece represents also aligns chronologically here and served to extend this "decade" of conflict into the early 90s. I see this continuation of violence exacerbated by communist intervention within Mozambique as upholding the state of unrest within the country, the same unrest established by Portugal's former Imperialistic presence, therefore perpetuating an aspect of colonialism. We also know that Mozambique had intrinsic links to the Soviet Union at this time, it's left-wing government FRELIMO declaring itself a "Marxist-Leninist state," (Macgregor, N.) after securing independence from Portugal in 1975. Here we see that not only was Mozambique caught up in the midst of the Cold War, it also directly fashioned itself in the social and economic image of its main political influence, the Soviet Union, via the adoption of a markedly communist political title.

To conclude, ‘Throne of Weapons’ is emblematic of not only civil war, but of how outside influence in the form of military aid only served to exacerbate the 1977 conflict in Mozambique that it was created in response to. It reflects upon the true intentions of major participants in the Cold War and as stated before, these intentions only served to continue colonialist ideals and implementations, thus rendering powers such as the USSR and PRC as pseudo-imperialist presences. Contrastingly, Kester was able to take the hostile, tainted material supplied by such presences, and reappropriate it into a symbol of hope, defiance and unadulterated African pride, becoming both a monument to those lost in the civil war and evidence that Mozambique’s people had an innate willingness to overcome the turmoil caused in the aftermath of colonialism and communist-funded civil war.

Word count: 1577

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Figure 2 - Available at: https://flagmakers.co.uk/flag-history/mozambique/ (Accessed: 07 December 2025).

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