

## **Art and Technology offering Africa different cultures to choose from**

The perspectives reflected in this proposal emerge from shared musings with young people aged 17-25. The title borrows from thoughts of a young Ghanaian Science student, Paapa, in the Diaspora who does music “on the side”, but in an increasingly big way—he comes home for concerts annually that have developed their own dedicated following. In one song, *Kukua*, Paapa sings an ode of regret and longing to his homeland Ghana, captured through the metaphorical character of Kukua. Kukua, the name for Wednesday-born females in Ghanaian Akan traditions, matches Kwaku, Paapa’s own Wednesday day-name. The song plays out as a dialogue between the two, Kwaku telling Kukua he “just got a scholarship” and will be “moving to the dollar ship”; that the “cedi and pesewa” (Ghanaian currency) “cannot afford my dreams.” Kukua sings, “Please don’t l-e-eave me-e,” ending in a low tremor, “If you leave / Please write songs for me / And come back to me...”. And Paapa uses technology and the internet to create and share his craft in a big way (<http://framework5.wordpress.com>).

I am a former architect and a sociologist, not an historian—and yet I despair that our failure to examine our past condemns us to a barren future devoid of identity. I am certainly not a youth, and yet I am self-interested enough to appreciate that Africa’s future is theirs, and if I am to survive in that future I better respect that fact. I am not an artist, and yet I acknowledge the strong bonds that tie Africa’s youth, her future, popular culture and technology together. And into that mix I must throw the environment, religion and sexualities. The relationships will, hopefully, become clearer in my musings. I am both heterosexual and religious—and yet the homophobic murmurings, sometimes growling, in the church and mosque bear little resemblance to the tolerance of traditional understandings of minority identities. And as I traverse the urban spaces of my city, Accra, gleaming ever more with luxury apartments striding adjacent to overflowing gutters, and that claimed the lives of century-old trees, I weep—wondering what Africa’s multiple futures hold, and if there would be any recognition for my ancestors? Where does *future* lie here? And yet, the young people I reflected with assure me that they construct, and de-construct both past and future, politically and aesthetically, and that arts and technology will shape the continent's future mindscape.

Thus, while I am interested in all the questions of the Working Group, I am particularly intrigued by the question of which temporal, social, political, logical and aesthetical dichotomies are involved in concepts of ‘future’? and the extent to which historical, biographical, communicative or environmental processes are related to concepts of ‘future’?

For example, as young people conceptualise *future*, and think pop culture, technology and social network platforms linking up with identity and contributions to Africa’s future, they recognise the potential risks of leaving others behind. Without necessarily meaning to, they question and destabilize notions of future. One way to speak to the question could be to look at the evolution of popular

culture--music, education, fashion, language and expression, technology etc—comparing youth today with their parents and grandparents when they were youth (a generation history, including perceptions). Particularly interesting would be the perspectives of “Afropolitan” youth who live in temporal multi-spaces, at home both in Africa, the Diaspora and virtual worlds. They crave support for multiple identities, including sexual, and care, indeed worry, for a sustainable environment that will allow them to live out a comfortable future. Can they have their cake and eat it—a seeming future mindscape at odds with that of their parents and grandparents. At the same time a lot of young people talk about "not fitting in" when they return" or "not having the same opportunities" as they would abroad. They talk about tensions between people “back home” and them, about their notions of future (and by default, past) and those of their parents.

Sexualities, Religion, the Environment, Health, Employment, Political Participation, Pan-Africanism, ... in all of these both Art and Technology loom large for the future and potentially offer Africa, through its young people, different futures to choose from? Which they will choose will be very much influenced by how they read “past” and what they call “future”? These would be the reflections and curiosities I would be excited about engaging with.