

“Draft paper for the Africa Knows! Conference; Panel B09”

MARIA LIBERA

Safeguarding African cultural heritage on postage stamps against further colonization efforts.

Multiple aspects of the cultural heritage and identity of African countries have been promoted visually to the world through the postage stamps produced by the various European countries that had colonized Africa during the 19th century. Many such stamps and their original artwork and printing elements are extremely valuable and important elements of cultural, historical and philatelic displays in communications and postal museums worldwide.

For more than 150 years, since the creation of the postage stamp until electronic and Internet communications in the 1990s, the main facilitators of written communications were postage stamps affixed to correspondence reaching the farthest corners of the globe. As “official symbols” and “roving Ambassadors in miniature” of their Nation, postage stamps promoted the economy, fauna, flora, geography, history, landscapes, national personalities, status in the world, tourist sites, etc. The stamps became collectors’ items for tens of millions of the world’s avid philatelists and stamp collectors, of all walks of life and professions, who sought to acquire any existing stamps on their favourite topics of interest, including those in the name of African countries.

Postage stamps, as an important source of revenue for national governments and their postal services, continue to play an important role in expanding trade of both developed and developing countries, in spite of the increased use of electronic communications. A multi-billion dollar stamp industry creates, produces, promotes and sells, physically and virtually, stamps and related philatelic products of all countries. Available internationally, postage stamps are also a valuable source of foreign currency.

Notwithstanding the cultural value of postage stamps, their expected financial value has unfortunately given rise to numerous abusive and illegal stamp industry practices by mostly non-African contracted philatelic agencies and private companies. Their high revenues and turnover are also probable contributors to money laundering transactions and other illegal activities.

Additionally, the majority of “stamps” produced today by abusive and illegal producers have little or no relationship with the culture and identity of the African countries concerned. Many are often photographs or crude and tasteless drawings, illustrating, in a pejorative way, mostly Asian and Western culture, fauna, personalities, transport means, etc. One can easily perceive them as “colonizing” the African identity.

In conclusion, optimal management of African postage stamps should be an essential part of the overall effort to “decolonize African heritage inside and outside the African continent”. Remedial actions should defend the national interest and strategies of the African Union.

“postage stamps, cultural heritage and identity, “roving Ambassadors in miniature”, abusive and illegal stamp industry practices, safeguarding”



Maria Zofia Libera is multilingual and a dual citizen of Poland and Canada. She is at present Coordinator of the Worldwide Philatelic Observatory (WPO), that is part of the activities of the PROGRESS Market Research company registered in Tunisia. In cooperation with philatelic, postal sector and other industry partners, the WPO is striving to safeguard philately and the cultural heritage and identity of Nations from continued abusive stamp industry practices, such as the large-scale proliferation of illegal stamps produced, distributed and sold in the names of many countries worldwide.

Ms. Libera is a graduate of the University of Toronto and studied further at the Political Science Institute of Paris between 1976 and 1979. She worked with the Canadian government between 1980 and 1986. Between 1986 and 2012, she was an international official at the International Bureau of the Universal Postal Union. For more than 26 years, she managed significant world projects such as, amongst others, developing postal security guidelines & regulations to combat stamp fraud and ensure revenue protection; contributing to the creation of global postal remittance network and better financial inclusion services for migrants; promoting best practices, good governance and accountability in the philatelic and stamp production activities, organized training workshops, conferences, etc. with the partners of the World Association for the Development of Philately (WADP) and other international and United Nations institutions. Since retirement, Ms.Libera has participated in several international conferences focussed on promoting best practices for the postage stamp industry.

Since the creation of the postage stamp more than 150 years ago, it was possible to visualize and appreciate the multiple aspects of the cultural heritage, history and identity of African countries, as they existed at the time of the mid nineteenth century, thanks to the numerous postage stamps and related philatelic-stamp items that were produced by the major European powers who had established Post Offices in the African nations they controlled. Many stamps included local customs and landscapes in addition to the emblems of the governing authority. Immediately following their accession to Statehood and independence, the postage stamps issued by the African countries continued to be considered “official symbols” and “roving Ambassadors in miniature” of their Nation.

Every political action had stamp issuing consequences that provided insights into the effects of the European influence in Africa. African postal history consequently became an activity of study for history researchers and philatelists and stamp collectors who followed how the developments of postage stamps reflected the African country of origin or region and its contacts and links with the rest of the world. Indeed, until the expansion of electronic and Internet communications in the 1990s, the main facilitators of communications between Africa and the rest of the world have been postage stamps affixed to correspondence and other mail items exchanged.¹

The main colonial powers in Africa were Great Britain, France and Portugal. Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain were also present in a smaller number of countries between them. A multitude of postage stamps produced for their African colonies constitute valuable historical documents that include the rarest and most valuable classical African stamps that have been sold on public auctions during the last years. Postcards depicting African scenes that include cancelled postage stamps are also historical documents with a significant market value.

The largest and most significant of the colonial African powers was Great Britain that issued many stamps for its colonies through its postal agents, the Crown Agents. Usually, the stamp reproduced the reigning British monarch (Queen Victoria through George VI) along with the name of the country for which the stamp was issued. The **Mauritius and Nigeria** stamps below are examples of original and valuable stamps sold on auctions at very high prices².



The 1847 Mauritius Post Office stamps were the first British Empire stamps produced outside of Great Britain. The Mauritius Two Penny Blue (see above) sold for 1.6 million Swiss Francs in 1992 which was the highest price at that time) ever sold for a British Commonwealth stamp for over 20 years. A pair of Mauritius Penny Blue stamps, the One Penny red and the Two Penny blue, on an envelope known as the Bordeaux Cover, [sold for \\$3.83 million](#) in 1993.

A stamp for Northern Nigeria that was issued in 1904, sold for \$63,250.00 in September 2008 at a Cherrystone auction.

Additional older stamps described and reproduced below are representative of **Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika, Liberia, Nigeria Somaliland Protectorate, and Southern Rhodesia.**



Ethiopia 1919 YV 117-130
 Blocs of 4 MNH VF eBay //
 Item No.270660312605 //
Current Sales Price:
US\$200.00 // (inverstamps.com).

[British Commonwealth - Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika](#) // 1938-54 2sh red violet and orange brown, perf 14 never hinged. / Cat. #81b (SG 146b) // **Current Sales**

Liberia 1949 YV 287-288
 imperforated PROOF pairs
 UNG _ eBay // Item No.
 280418180793 // **Current**

Price: US\$70.00 //
(www.cherrystonestamps.com).

Sales Price: US\$50.00 //
(inverstamps.com).



British Commonwealth - Nigeria // 1936 £1 orange and black, hinged / Cat. #49 (SG) // **Current Sales Price: US\$70.00 //** (www.cherrystonestamps.com).

British Commonwealth - Somaliland Protectorate / 1951 2sh on 2r rose violet, top margin block of four, never hinged / Cat. #124 (SG 133). // **Current Sales Price: US\$20.00 //** (www.cherrystonestamps.com).

British Commonwealth - Southern Rhodesia --1932 Victoria Falls, set of two, lightly hinged / Cat. #31-32 (SG 29-30). // **Current Sales Price: US\$17.50 //** (www.cherrystonestamps.com).

As the next largest colonial power in nineteenth century Africa, France was present mainly in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, Chad and the Central African Republic were broad administrative areas, whereas Diego Suarez and Mayotte were post offices in significant African cities. The colonial stamps that France issued for its African colonies were originally French stamps overprinted for use in the colony to which they were sent. They became subsequently colorful pictorial sets, illustrating native African flora, fauna and people. Inexpensive, full color illustrations of African life did not exist at that time outside of these French colonial postage stamps. They were consequently highly appreciated by a growing philatelic and stamp collector community and continue to be among the most popular of all philatelic issues. A number of these issues are reproduced below.³



French West Africa. Superb series 18 new Stamps _ and _ (7315) // eBay N. 174365528233 // Current Sales Price: US\$26.00 // (MegaMinistore on eBay) // French W.Africa. Superb series 18 new Stps -N. 174365528233 -US\$26.00.

French West Africa Zeppelin Flights / 1934 1st SAF from Gabon to Brazil, with Dakar and Berlin transit markings and datestamps, minor toning, otherwise fine-v.f., rare / Catalog #Si.257Aa // Item N. 201004 // Current Sales Price: US\$700.00 // (www.cherrystoneauctions.com/ auction) // 1934 1st SAF Gabon-Brazil, with Dakar, Berlin transit - N.201004 - US\$700.00



French West Africa _ Sc #C27a, MNH (36330) _ eBay // eBay N. 174403587847 // Current Sales

1918 FRENCH WEST AFRICA SENEGAL POSTCARD _ eBay// eBay N.192951429286 //

Price: US\$11.95 // (MegaMinistore on eBay) // French W.Africa. Sc #C27a, MNH (36330) - N.174403587847 -US\$11.95. **Current Sales Price: US\$12.99 // (MegaMinistore on eBay) // 1918 FRENCH W.AFRICA SENEGAL POSTCARD -N.192951429286 -US\$12.99.**

For its two main colonies in Africa, the Southern Africa-Angola and Mozambique regions, Portugal followed a stamp issuing policy that was apparently inspired from the policies followed by Great Britain and France. The stamps produced during the latter part of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century issues added some colour and were interesting depictions of African life, as can be seen hereunder ⁴



<p>Portuguese+Colonies - Angola // 1945 Emergency Air Post, 90a green on black, used in combination with regular franking on cover from Porto Amboim to Luanda / Cat. #Sanabria 12 / // Current Sales Price: US\$160.00 // (www.cherrystonestamps.com).</p>	<p>Portuguese Angola covers 1913 Frontside franked PPC_Pungo-Andongo sent Losoncz_ eBay Item No. 283718377302 // Current Sales Price: US\$40.00 // (inverstamps.com).</p>	<p>Mozambique Co. 1937 5c Huts Waterlow color sample black_red block of nine _ eBay // Item: 392430085946 // Current Sales Price: US\$225.00 // (ebay.com - george_alevizos-USA).</p>	<p>Lot 2952 - PORTUGUESE COLONIES // ST THOMAS & PRINCE ISLANDS 1934 20E orange "Ceres", SG 343, very fine mint // Current Sales Price: £50 - £60 // (www.https://www.sandafayre.com).</p>
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As is the case for the older pre-independence stamps reproduced above, the majority of stamps in the name of African countries are available, exchanged and sold worldwide among Internet sellers, philatelists, stamp auction houses and stamp collectors. In summary, tens of millions of the world's avid philatelists, stamp businesses and stamp collectors, of all walks of life and professions, are endeavouring regularly to acquire any existing stamps on their favourite topics of interest, including those in the name of African countries.

Interest in stamp collecting and organised philately is growing or is already part of the cultural landscape in several African countries as African historians, among other professions, are seeking to learn about past African history through postage stamps. This is the case in Algeria, Egypt, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa and Tunisia, among other countries. There are organised stamp collecting activities, namely philatelic associations, clubs, exhibitions, newsletters and publications. Additionally, African postal history study circles based in several European countries promote continued interest in African history through the medium of postage stamps and their usage.

Both older authentic and modern-day stamps of all the countries of the world are sold on Internet sites that are based mostly in Europe and the Americas with a smaller percentage working out of several Asian countries and a still smaller number that are based in several African countries. The main Internet search engines in the Western world that have a large number of registered sellers are ebay, Delcampe and Hipstamp. A new search on 8 November 2020 revealed 125,016 Results for Africa on ebay.com; Delcampe had 127,686 items for Africa, and Hipstamp had 44,848 items. All these sites have a mixture of authentic and illegal "stamps" that are sold next to each other.

Postage stamps were important sources of revenue for both the colonial powers and their localities and remain so to this day, not just for every African country, but for every recognized official stamp issuing authority in the world. If postage stamps were not such a lucrative business, they would not have become such an easy source of revenue gained through abusive and illegal industry practices. The turnover for certain philatelic agents and private companies far outweighs the amount of revenue African countries receive from their genuine stamps. The phenomenon of totally "illegal stamp" productions that is synonymous with "identity theft" has had a revenue estimate in the millions of dollars already back in the early 2000s. If only a dozen African countries were victims of "illegal stamps" at that time, at present, twenty years later, 52 African countries out of the 54 constituting the African continent are victims of illegal "stamps" produced and sold in their name. A list can be provided of the 52 countries concerned and their status concerning the "illegal stamps". A certain Internet site based in Russia sells not only hundreds of illegal "stamps" of the 52 African countries but of several countries of other regions, as well, such as the Asia-Pacific, the Caribbean and South America.

It remains highly unfortunate that numerous contemporary "postage stamps", in the name of many African countries, continue to have very little or no relationship whatsoever with the culture and identity of the African countries concerned. Such "postage stamps" are usually categorized as "abusive" or "illegal", and are produced

by non-African philatelic agencies, working under contract with African countries, as well as by private companies and individuals. These “postage stamps” are often crude and tasteless drawings or photographs, often displaying, in a negative and pejorative way, Asian and Western cinema and erotic artists, contested military and political figures, royal personalities, singers; Northern fauna such as Arctic dogs, penguins and polar bears (in the name of desert and landlocked African countries); international nude painters; Northern sports such as ice hockey; transport means such as ships and submarines for desert and landlocked countries; world war commemorations; etc. Additional wrongful and deceitful uses of the medium of the “postage stamp” are abuse of intellectual property, erroneous descriptions, misspelt country names, as well as the production of “postage stamps” in the name of the capital city and other main cities as well as dependencies of the African countries concerned. In light of the foregoing, how can one not conclude that such so-called “postage stamps” represent another way of “colonizing” the identities of Africa’s countries in addition to attacking its sovereignty.

The following Ice Hockey sheetlet is considered an “abusive issue” as Ice Hockey has no relationship whatsoever with Niger. It was decided and produced by the philatelic agency under contract with the Republic of Niger.



Customer Feedback: beautiful stamps fast service

Niger - 2016 Ice Hockey on Stamps - 4 Stamp Sheet - NIG16111a (#312593924954) // No. 0001/1000 // REPUBLIQUE DU NIGER / POSTES 2016. // Price: US\$6.50 – 2 avail / 1 sold // US\$6.50-2a-1s // Last updated on: 13 Dec, 2019 17:06:04 GMT // Seller assumes all responsibility for this listing. // (From: lbphilatel-USA - eBay.co.uk -Feedback Profile .x200 - Pg. 5 of 1014 – At 04 Apr'2020).

The quantities of illegal “stamps” in the name of African countries sold on the Internet are in the tens of thousands. Such illegal “stamps” are produced and sold on numerous topics of interest to collectors in general, and not only specifically to stamp collectors. Because the title description does not include the name of the country, it is difficult to determine at the outset which country can be involved. Because it is the topic that counts for the collector. Below is an example of a massive sale of “stamp” sheetlets that are a mixture of legal and illegal “stamps”.



Worldwide Foreign Souvenir Sheets Stamp Collection Lot // 8 DIFFERENT SHEETS // eBay N.121665461327 // Price: US\$3.50 - More than 10 lots available (8 items per lot) / 2,883 sold // antique_trader84-US-Site / Items for Sale - At 18 June 2020. // Description: “This Buy It Now listing is for 8 different world souvenir sheets. You will receive a mix of sheets from many different countries. The number of stamps per sheet varies. Multiple purchases will receive as many different sheets as possible. Purchases of up to 6 lots (48 sheets) will receive all different sheets.”

Illegal “stamps” of the following countries were identified, amongst others such as: Azerbaidjan / Benin / Burundi / Republic of Congo / Cote d’Ivoire / Malawi / Rwanda / Tchad.

Customers who purchased the above sheetlets provided the following feedback, among others: “A+++++++ looks amazing”; “Beautiful stamps-Including the delivery envelope -I love them”; “A five-star deal. I will buy from this dealer again!”

For example, collectors of memorabilia of FIFA and Olympic Games will also definitely purchase stamps to enlarge their collection. In fact, a large variety of FIFA and Olympic topics are illustrated on many illegal “stamps” that are described without including the name of the country as illustrated in the following two examples, namely, “Sport FIFA Confederations Cup 2017” and “Sport Olympic Games in Sochi 2014”.





The above two sets of illegal “stamps” include the year 2017 and were produced in the name of Nigeria, as a set of eight sheetlets in the perforated format for an average sales price of US\$27.00. Each set of eight sheetlets also exists in the imperforated formats, for an additional sales price of US\$27.00 or more. Nigeria recently denounced these sets of illegal “stamps”, together with many other illegal stamps, via the public dissemination system of the Universal Postal Union, attached as an Annex. Because of the abusive use of the FIFA and Olympic logos and symbols, the organisations concerned can be expected to launch legal cases against Nigeria to defend their intellectual property rights.

A common abusive practice of selling “stamps” and deceiving the stamp collector / customer is to sell on the same Internet site a genuine recent stamp issue of the issuing country as well as an illegal set of sheetlets produced in the name of that same country. The genuine stamp issue includes the country name in its description, whereas the “illegal” stamp set does not, as illustrated by the two examples below.

	<p>Genuine stamp sheetlet of Namibia Elephants - 2015 Namibia elephant rhinoceros fauna MNH block // Item No: 1120944127 // Price: €14.00 // Start of the sale: Tuesday, 3 November 2020 at 02:16 / 3 visits // Sale ends: Tuesday, 1 December 2020 at 02:13 // lentsenstamps-DE on Delcampe At 06 Nov'20</p>
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Illegal set of “stamp” sheetlets in the name of Namibia:



Namibia 2017 - Boxing - Sport Boxing boxers of the world set of blocks // Item No: 1123357063 // Price: €51.00 // Start of the sale: Thursday, 5 November 2020 at 00:08 / 2 visits // Sale ends: Thursday, 3 December 2020 at 00:05 // lentsenstamps-DE on Delcampe At 06 Nov'20.

Another example of a total disregard for the sovereignty of an African nation, in this case, Sierra Leone, is the reproduction in its name of an illegal “stamp” sheetlet that had been denounced by Georgia back in 1998, via the public dissemination system of the Universal Postal Union (the specialized agency of the United Nations for postal services). The disregard is further exacerbated by the fact that illegal “stamp” sheetlet is accompanied by a “CERTIFICATE OF AUTHENTICITY” that includes the false information: “...Plate Block of 6 is an Official Legal Tender postage stamp issue of the Abkhazia ...”.

The said sheetlet was reproduced in 2018 (twenty years later as a commemoration of the original sheetlet produced in 1998!) within a stamp frame in the name of Sierra Leone. A European philatelic agency has an exclusive stamp production contract with Sierra Leone and it remains to be determined, if this stamp agency is responsible for such a “stamp” issue. The sheetlet in different formats is being sold at high prices around the world. The sheetlets reproduced as examples below were offered for sale in the United Kingdom, India, and the United States of America.

See the attached Annex for the text of the denouncement by Georgia.



<p>1998 - Comics - Caricature Stamps of Bill Clinton & Monica Lewinsky Abkhazia Block 6 // Item No: 1119403469 // Price: £7.00 // ShopOfStamps-UK on Delcampe At 08 Nov'20.</p>	<p>Unclassified - DELUXE IMPERF Sierra Leone 2018 20 Years Since Monicagate Clinton Lewinsky Scandal MS+S_S SRL18522 // Item No: 605441458 // Price: US\$50.00 – 10 available gsphila-India on Delcampe At 08 Nov'20.</p>	<p>2018 - SIERRA LEONE 20 YEARS SINCE MONICAGATE SHEET FIRST-DAY-COVER / eBay // eBay Item N. 382531839508 // Price: US\$22.95 – 5 available // (Descr: SIERRA LEONE 20 YEARS SINCE MONICAGATE---THE 20th ANNIVERSARY OF THE PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON AND MONICA LEWINSKY AFFAIR SHEET FIRST-DAY-COVER) // (From: marlen-stamps-USA – At 08 Nov'2020).</p>
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As stated earlier, postage stamps are optimal promoters of the country's image. It is consequently vital that, in order to safeguard this image for the present and the future, a multitude of cultural and governmental authorities, educational institutions as well as African civil society and other concerned groups, need to be made aware of the numerous stamp industry abuses currently on the market that are disrespectful of the sovereignty, not only of their country, but of almost the entire African continent. The postal services and the ministries they report to need to be part of a collective national effort concerning the management of the countries' stamp related activities. Serious damage to the countries' credibility is already prevalent, and any further inaction can inevitably lead to more longer term negative consequences. In this regard, urgent actions need to be undertaken by all parties concerned to redress this situation.

In summary, postage stamps will undoubtedly continue to be considered "symbols of their Nation" and enhance their added value, by immortalizing and safeguarding their cultural heritage and the national identity of their countries for the benefit of the present and the future generations. In this regard, it is consequently urgent for the African countries to put a stop to the "colonization" of their identities via abusive and illegal "postage stamps" and to exercise total control of the entire stamp value chain for the creation, production, distribution, promotion and sale of their stamps. Best practices, case studies, guidelines and toolkits can be obtained from other countries around the world that excel in stamp production. Postage stamps are not only a valuable source of revenue, both from national and international sources. The production of postage stamps plays an important role in the national creative economy – creating jobs and showcasing local and national talent – artists, designers, graphists. In this regard, vital elements of the strategy to be adopted need to include cooperation and joint actions with the relevant regional organisations such as the African Union and United Nations Economic Commissions, and international institutions such as the Universal Postal Union, UNESCO (for education and museums) and the World Tourism Organisation.

In conclusion, optimal management and oversight of African postage stamps should be an essential part of the overall effort to "decolonize African heritage inside and outside the African continent". Remedial actions should take into account the African Union's 2006 "Charter for African Cultural Renaissance" as well as its [Aspiration 5 of Agenda 2063](#) that are focused on safeguarding Africa's cultural heritage and identity for present and future generations. The creation of "the great African Museum" is one of the flagship projects of the African Union Agenda 2063 that should already be supported via postage stamps that can be instrumental in helping to preserve and promote African cultural heritage by also highlighting its continuing influence on world cultures in art, music, language, science, amongst other important areas of national interest.

References:

- 1,3,4: <https://www.apfelbauminc.com/blog/post/history-african-stamps-collections>
- 2: <https://www.workandmoney.com/s/most-expensive-valuable-rarest-stamps-55d0fbdd3e02454f>

Annexes:

Nigeria's denouncement of illegal "stamps", via the public dissemination system of the Universal Postal Union.

Denouncement by Georgia of illegal stamps.