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# ZAM annual report 2025

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*Image © Ingrid Spinnox*

ZAM

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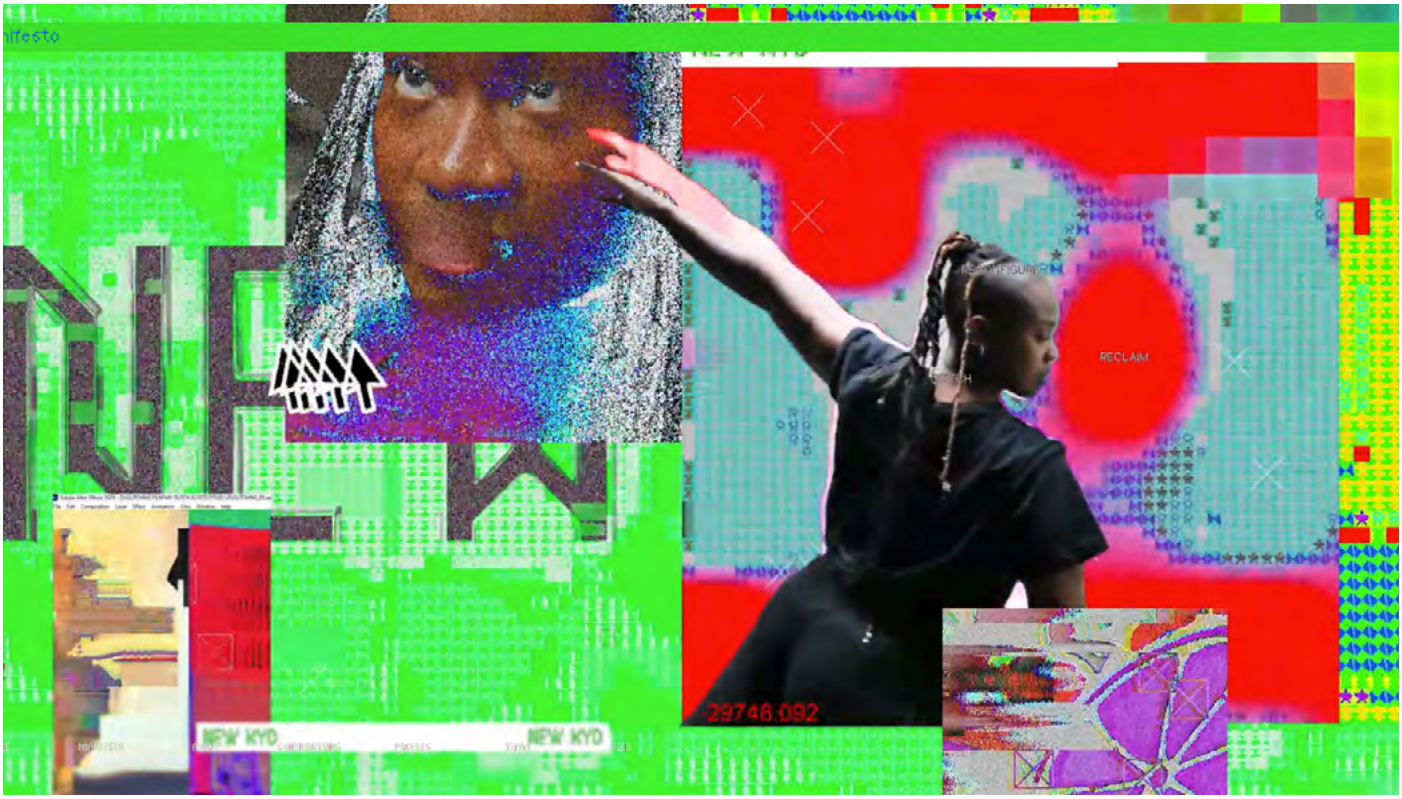
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# Introduction: A year of explosive progress and steadying of the ship

ZAM took inspiration from the optimism and energy of the Gen Z protests in Kenya and Mozambique as we launched ourselves into 2025 with the promise of a real fire-cracker of a Nelson Mandela Lecture in February. The lecture exceeded expectations and charged with the energy from the event, the ZAM newsroom got stuck into some powerful investigative journalism. Our morale was further boosted with the news of a new grant awarded by the Stimuleringsfonds Creatieve Industrie for our project Glitching the Future. Work began in earnest on this project, resulting in an extremely fruitful and inspiring partnership with BubblegumClub in Johannesburg. More funding success came our way in September with the news that our grant from NED for the Kleptocracy Project was to be continued for a further two years.

In November, ZinhleLi Tschabalala strengthened our team as Project Manager. ZinhleLI worked earlier in the year with ZAM on the Glitching the Future project, and her patience and management skills in guiding such a complex collaboration of artists, designers, makers and stakeholders have now become a vital asset in streamlining our monthly newsroom output. Nyoxani Mazive, stalwart of the team, took on the role of social media and outreach officer, allowing us to up the frequency and quality of our social media output and make advances in our outreach programmes. Under Investigations editor Evelyn Groenink, our other team members were Farren van Wijk, Heidi Sincuba, Alisa Westbroek and Sean Fitzpatrick, director of ZAM.

Unfortunately, not all activities were smooth sailing, and after the sudden resignation of a newly appointed board member early in the year and the mandatory retirement of Maria Kint after 8 years' dedicated service, the board was reduced to three. The search for new members began, but with only 8 months in the position, chairperson Joseph Seh also chose to resign, leaving treasurer Dineo Nhlapo and Secretary Milton van Wijk as the only official board members. To stabilize our governing body, former chair Annelies Verdoologe graciously agreed to return ad interim, and after an unsettling year for the board and with tasks clearly prioritized for 2026, the year came to a calm end.




*Beeld: Glitching the Future - Bubblegum Club*

# A big bang

ZAM started 2025 with a big bang: the Nelson Mandela Lecture held on 16 February brought a literal feast of arts, creativity and change-making to a sold-out 500-seat ITA. In addition, the video of the lecture has been viewed by more than 300 people.

Framed by exhilarating performances, especially Hugh Masekela's Stimela performed by FraFra Sound and the celebrated South African jazz musician Mthunzi Mvubu, and further accompanied by photo exhibitions and discussion panels, the lecture was given a standing ovation. It was the first time such a large, and notably diverse, audience had attended this ZAM event, the fifth since 2019.

Nelson Mandela speaker John-Allan Namu, who heads Kenya's investigative journalism platform Africa Uncensored, dedicated part of his lecture to the historical horrors afflicting his country, from colonialism and torture at the hands of British security forces to the recent killings by national authorities of protesting youth in Kenyan towns and cities. However, the recent spectacular growth of a large 'Gen Z' mass movement in Kenya has led Namu, he said, to believe there is reason for optimism, not only in Kenya but across the continent and even globally.

At the time of the lecture, protests in Kenya even resonated in the Netherlands, where a petition against the Dutch royal visit to Kenya's president Ruto amassed thousands of signatures and beckoned a contingent of a few dozen NL-based Kenyans to ITA to listen to Namu. It had all been announced three weeks earlier in ZAM's first newsletter of the year, announcing ITA as a "stage of solidarity."




*Design: © Sindiso Nyoni*



*Kunstwerk: © April Bey -*

## Inspiration

ZAM's red thread of solidarity with the "waves of change" in Africa, remained inspired not only by African protests and (investigative) writing, but -as was also acutely present at the Nelson Mandela Lecture- even more so by the often-breathtaking creative work that African artists contribute to the international scene. Also in February, we highlighted the Cape Town exhibit Umngqwambo by our copy and arts editor, Heidi Sincuba, work that draws the viewer into a sensory landscape beyond politics. Sincuba's oil painted works at the exhibit interrogated African initiation rites, and thereby concepts of tradition and modernity, the individual and the collective, the sacred and the profane. Just by creating and exhibiting work such as this, old and tired stereotypes of a downtrodden, powerless Africa, are ground down.

Throughout 2025, such and other art kept ZAM grounded in an awareness that the end purpose of our work is to share, across continents, our imaginations of a different world, one with "no them and no us." While this sharing and exchanging of imaginations has certainly always been part of our concept of solidarity, in 2025 we put this into words with a sharpened message statement: ZAM stands in solidarity with those fighting exploitation and injustice in Africa and beyond. We see African thought leadership and creative initiatives as the force needed to forge a new relationship of equality and equity between the European and African continents.

Our message of solidarity was echoed in the "Solidarity" exhibit "Past Disquiet" by our partners Framer Framed, of which we saw a preview at the Nelson Mandela Lecture. In the words of Framer Framed: "this documentary and archival exhibition uncovers a largely forgotten history of politically engaged artists and initiatives and their role in anti-imperialist solidarity movements from the 1960s to the 1980s." The full exhibit, which the team visited later, brought back memories for our older team members, and invoked curiosity and senses of historical parallels in the younger ones.

In this buzz, even the Trump Administration aid scare which affected aid to African countries but also threatened to affect our funder, the National Endowment for Democracy, and thereby ZAM, did not significantly interrupt our work. How could we feel despondent, when African countries were engulfed in Waves of Change,? When even African discussion forums, were responding to the aid cuts in defiance, by challenging their governments to finally start taking care of their own citizens? A ZAM editorial saluted those in Africa who asked the "provocative question" if this was a moment that could be used to "achieve genuine independence and put an end to the kleptocratic self enrichment" in many African power centres?

Is it time, we asked, "to establish effective taxation systems, curb the neocolonial exploitation by Western, Chinese, and Russian resource extractors and compel Africa's own wealthy elites to assume responsibility for the development of their nations?" The editorial supported the rallying cry in the forums—for a change from aid to solidarity grounded in equality.

How necessary all the above still remains, was once again underlined in an investigative report featured in ZAM's January newsletter edition, titled Predator Governors, which exposed Nigerian state authorities appropriating important wildlife and nature reserves for personal use.




*By polyp.org.uk*

## "White Genocide"

On a different note, in March, ZAM highlighted how South Africa's progressive citizens joined the waves of resistance against Trump's 'white genocide' disinformation when they became digital warriors on the subject. The "Infowar" waged by President Trump and his surrounding coterie of South African apartheid beneficiaries, which alleged a "white genocide", was countered by South African opinion makers like former MP Phumzile Van Damme and influencer Tumi Sole who, united under the hashtag #CountryDuty, combated a heavily funded misinformation campaign across social media, and ZAM wholeheartedly joined in, highlighting #CountryDuty in its newsletter and on social media.

A key element in the counternarrative, also featured by ZAM, was the "Alliance of Democracies'" 2025 Ranking of Most Popular Countries, in which South Africa ranked seventh on measurements of "how countries are perceived by their neighbours, key trading partners, and other nations" on issues such as credibility and global trust. Van Damme shared this in the campaign, saying "This is what digital resilience looks like."

The March 2025 newsletter once again further presented African inspiration by featuring Algerian photography, a community art lab in Senegal, and the When We See Us exhibition in Brussels, featuring a century of art works by painters from Africa and its diaspora.

The beauty and depth of the aforementioned were once again accompanied by features about political protest and democratic changemaking, most notably through an op-ed by Jaya Khamala, who had led the petition against the Dutch royal visit to Kenya and a report on a win for Ghanaian investigative journalism in a US court, where our NAIRE partner and exco member Anas Aremeyaw successfully sued a Ghanaian politician.

Also worth noting was academic Kristof Titeca's op-ed that exposed how a Dutch Bible-thumper was instrumental in fanning anti-LGBTQI flames in African countries, which were and are heavily funded by the US Christian nationalist and Trump-aligned rightwing. It reminded us that African affairs are really not African per se: much in the postcolony continues to be affected by foreign powers and power players, and as ZAM we believe we have a role in uncovering and addressing these mechanisms.




*Courtesy: Alisdare Hickson/ African Arguments*

## Outreach and new partnerships

In this vein, the ZAM team had encounters with journalist partners and friends in the Netherlands. At an investigative journalism encounter in De Balie in Amsterdam on 5 March, we presented our partnership with the NAIRE investigative reporters network and met with colleagues of the OCCRP, the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, as well as with the Open Society Foundation (not to be confused with the international one connected to George Soros). The OSF looks into Netherlands and EU state documents, trying to fish out important policies and activities that may have escaped the public glare. Both these new acquaintances would later be followed up with discussions about possible joint projects, set to materialise in the near future.

Also initiated at the journalism exchange was a connection between ZAM and a Follow the Money team that researched "green" carbon credit schemes on African land. The shadow side of such projects is that these, even when carried out with approval from the local authorities, often dislodge communities who live there. The FtM team requested a separate meeting with ZAM for contacts for a book on the subject; they were put in touch with our Ugandan NAIRE partner Emmanuel Mutaizibwa, whose work later featured in the book they wrote. Interviews with the FtM team, whose book on carbon credit projects was nominated for the prestigious Brusse Prize, were conducted with FtM and fellow thematic ally SOMO by Nyoxani Mazive and featured on our YouTube and Instagram channels.

In April, Burundian NAIRE member Gilbert Bukeyeneza invited ZAM investigations editor Evelyn Groenink to become part of an advisory board for a new Great Lakes collaborative journalism initiative called Ukweli.

An initial online meeting outlined the challenges the new Ukweli Coalition is facing, especially in terms of grave risks to investigative journalists in countries like Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania. Ukweli's ideals are similar to NAIRE's. Good collaboration has followed. Groenink was also invited to a conversation about "state capture" by Zenobia Ismail of the University of Birmingham's Democracy in Africa project, with an aim of joint publications. So far these have, however, not yet materialized.

ZAM's book club event for April, which discussed celebrated Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie's Dream Count, attracted a large group of diaspora women, prompting a decision to further increase our outreach into Netherlands- and Europe- based diaspora communities.

## Rumbling and Glitching

In ZAM's April newsletter, we featured important rumblings in Mozambique, where employees of the nature reserve Quirimbas Park, a UNESCO heritage site much appreciated by tourists, wrote an open letter to the country's one-party government and state park management, denouncing corruption up to the highest level. The letter was passed to ZAM for publication by ZAM's NAIRE partner member Estacio Valoi, who had gained the trust of the employees during ZAM's previous *Into the Woods* investigation, for which he contributed the Mozambican chapter.

In the same newsletter, we graciously received permission from our colleagues at The Continent to republish their special edition *Stolen History*, in which their team traced artifacts from every corner of the African continent. The work done by The Continent, who impressively report in-depth on Africa, by Africans, every month, often touches on ZAM's work. (A collaboration would materialize again later, in 2026, when ZAM's interview with 'Elegy' artist Gabrielle Goliath, whose work Elegy was incomprehensibly banned from featuring in SA's presentation at the Venice Biennale, was republished by The Continent.) We also alerted our audience to *Paris Noir*, an exhibit of African artists who had resided in this city, in the Centre Pompidou.

Even more importantly, we started crowdfunding for a new project: *Glitching the Future*, a new partnership with Bubblegum Club, aiming to break into 'white male tech' and influence dominant algorithms and narratives through innovative "Black, queer and marginalised" use of internet and social media. "We're changing this", the project announced on ZAM, "by using art, design, opinions and imagination to open up space for more inclusive, equal and creative digital futures. We're building a toolkit, creating disruptive design, performances and debates to help people everywhere take part in reshaping tech."

The announcement included a call for donations to add to seed funding received from the Creative Industries Fund NL, saying "this is a grassroots project. We rely on grants from you, our friends, and funders like the Stimuleringsfonds to make it happen, so please donate." The result would be highly successful (see below.)

The fight for better governance, including efforts to break through colonially inherited patronage systems in African countries, was highlighted again by ZAM in May, through an op-ed by Ghanaian Delali Adogla-Bessa titled *Recurring Fires*, in which he likened the systemic failures of his country's government to a market that keeps going down in flames because the root cause fire hazards are never addressed.

It was one of those articles that regularly prompt members of the NAIRE network to comment on "how similar" state systems in their otherwise very diverse countries function. This in turn challenges ZAM to look ever more in-depth into how global financial and corporate systems impact on such states. Are they helpful in terms of bringing "modern" practices as the protagonists of these systems often proclaim, or are they set to perpetuate what is essentially a pattern that serves exploitation by the West and others?




*Design: Lex Trickett - Bubblegum Club*

## Legal Rebels and a torture squad

Joining Adogla-Bessa in portraying efforts to achieve better and more socially just governance in African countries were the *Legal Rebels*, portrayed by a transnational NAIRE investigation in five countries on the continent. The Transnational Investigation, as usual coordinated and edited by Evelyn Groenink for ZAM, followed groups of democratic activists using legal means to challenge corruption and misgovernance. The fascinating reports outlined means, ways and successes of citizen action in these countries that often go unnoticed in the West, with strategies and tactics ranging from "radical rudeness" in Uganda, to "naming and shaming" in Malawi, exposing family and other nepotist linkages between political executive and judiciary in Nigeria, and alliances of NGO's and lawyers in Cameroon and Ghana.

Devastatingly, on Monday 19 May 2025, Ugandan "rebel" Agather Atuhaire, who featured in the TI, was abducted, held incommunicado for four days, and tortured, by Uganda's equally dictatorial neighbour, Tanzania. Held and tortured together with her was Kenyan activist Boniface Mwangi. Both were part of a group that had come to Tanzania to observe the political trial against that country's opposition leader, Tundu Lissu.

ZAM called for action on the issue, within a wider call to the international community to support democratic forces and pro-good-governance protests and actions in the increasingly oppressive East African region. ZAM particularly called on the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to stop its 'capacity building' of the Tanzanian immigration service, which handed Atuhaire and Mwangi over to a torture squad.

Initially promising engagement with the Dutch parliament by ZAM, intended to achieve some attention to the fact the Netherlands, European countries and the EU, inadvertently might support oppression in East Africa through their support for immigration authorities, sadly failed. The reason was that the Dutch cabinet fell a few days after this engagement was initiated. Read ZAM's press release here:




ZAM breathed in relief when Atuhaire and Mwangi emerged alive from their torture chamber, having been dumped in empty stretches of land in Tanzanian border areas with their respective countries. Barely taking time to recover from their ordeal, the two almost immediately resumed their activism, preparing a lawsuit before the East African Court of Justice against authorities who had collaborated with the Tanzanian torturers, or had failed to take action to protect their citizens. ZAM used its legal fund to provide assistance for the case, which is still pending.

The aftermath of Agather Atuhaire's and Boniface Mwangi's abduction and torture in Tanzania, as well as mounting pressure on colleagues in East Africa generally, led to Ugandan colleagues presenting a hard-hitting op-ed to be published by ZAM, denouncing Uganda's president Museveni and several other African leaders' habit of silencing opposition by calling critics 'colonialists'.




*Design by Sky Walker. Images by Isaac Newton Kasamani*

## Investigating kleptocracy

Another partnership discussion took place on 25 June between ZAM, together with NAIRE's Anas Aremeyaw Anas, and OCCRP's Africa editor Chikezie Omeje and its European media coordinator Antonio Baguero Iglesias. The video call, where ZAM was represented by Sean Fitzpatrick and Evelyn Groenink, was intended to iron out difficulties experienced by the NAIRE network in collaborating within OCCRP's strict evidential mandates and criteria. Anas pointed out that in Africa's data-poor environment, OCCRP's standards for evidencing individual kleptocratic misdeeds are often simply impossible. Beyond that, the scrutiny of incidental criminal and corruption acts often means missing out on patterns and systemic issues as taken on by NAIRE. It was agreed that ZAM would take this discussion between Omeje and NAIRE forward at a later date.

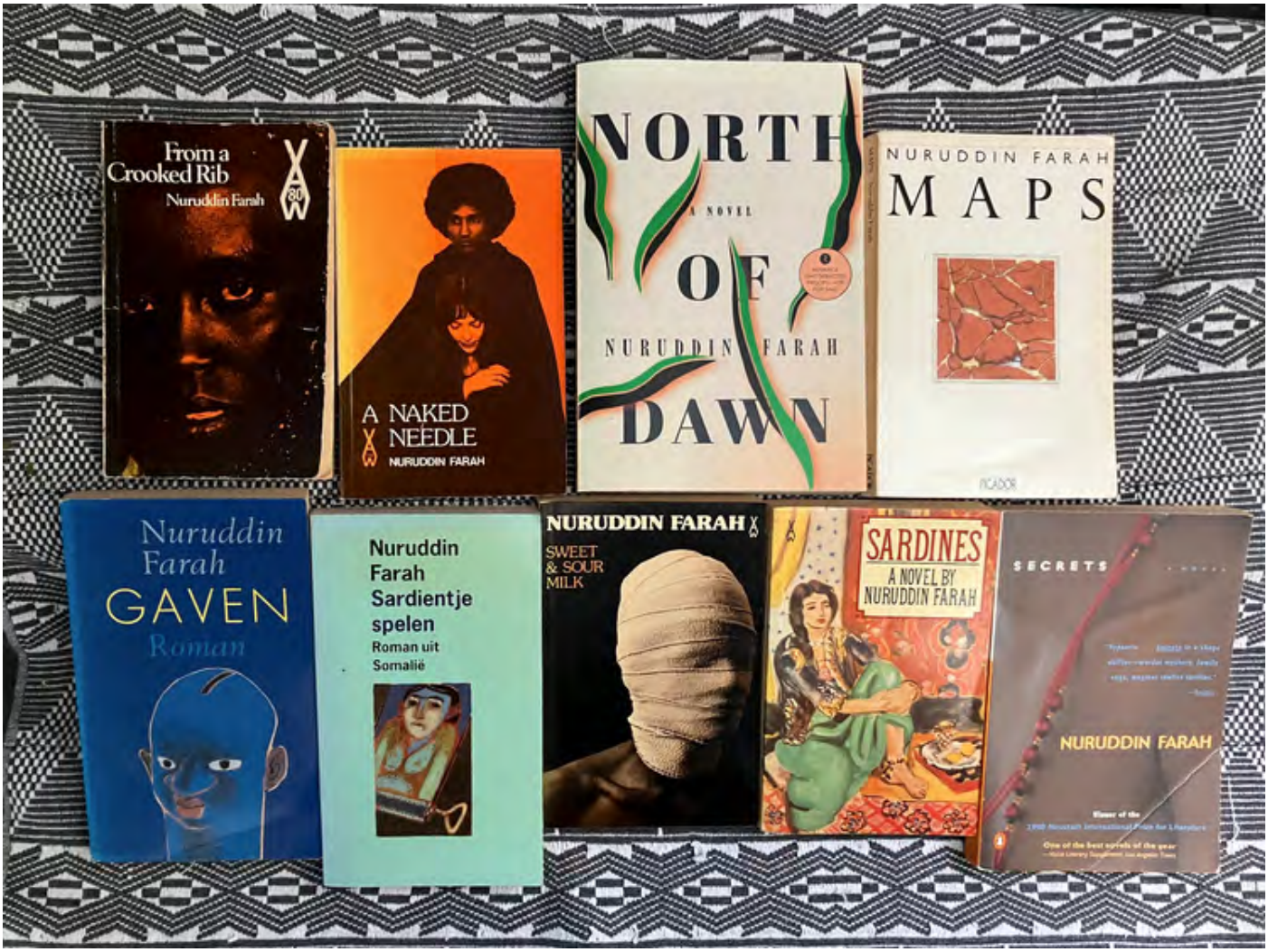
In the short term more fruitfully, and increasingly over the year, ZAM also established conections to the UK University of Sussex Governance and Integrity GI ACE programme, partly thanks to former ZAM copy editor Devi Pillay now working there. Joint references are happening, mainly in the context of the Kleptocracy Report.

Still on the subject of kleptocracy, the Sell Outs Project a NAIRE transnational investigation in Zambia, Zimbabwe, The Gambia, Mozambique and DRC, was published in July. The hard-hitting report on African kleptocrats selling out natural resources for their own benefit was copublished by independent media in Mozambique, Zambia and Central Africa (via the Museba Project platform). A new NAIRE member, Mariam Sankanu, came on board from the Gambia. The report, once again coordinated and edited by Evelyn Groenink, also featured a comment by Ilona Hartlief of the Dutch Multinational Research Centre SOMO on relations between multinational extractive companies and African kleptocrat leaders. The DRC chapter included images of oil paintings dealing with the subject of extraction by a Congolese artist, operating underground for safety reasons.



In an editorial accompanying the launch of the investigative results, ZAM reflected on the then recent "scandalous reception" of four West African leaders by Donald Trump. It slammed Trump's deeply offensive remark to the (anglophone) Liberian President that his "English" was "beautiful", but also the fact that the same President, Joseph Nyuma Boakai, silently endured the humiliation without offering even the politest correction.

"To compound the farce, Gabon's President, Brice Oligui Nguema, returned home and disembarked from his plane wearing a MAGA cap". The reflection made extra clear, as our NAIRE partners have also repeatedly stressed, that African and international kleptocracy are two sides of the same coin.




In this period ZAM paid homage to new great literature emanating from Africa, in a Book Club review of Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* by Vamba Sherif, a preview of Oyunga Pala's book *Strength and Sorrow* and an interview with the artist Globalisto, whose concept *the beauty of flux* presents a very different way to look at migration. We also published a clip featuring a young Zohran Mamdani - now New York Mayor - in another life as a rap singer in Uganda.

Lastly for this month, an op-ed by our network partner Rosebell Kagumire smashed the ill-advised admiration, then still expressed by hopeful progressives in both the global north and south, of new Burkina Faso junta leader, Captain Ibrahim Traore and his "glamourized militarism."




*glitchingthefuture.org*

# Futuring

In July we celebrated the launch of the Glitching the Future project, a bold collaboration between ZAM Magazine and Bubblegum Club in South Africa. *Glitching the Future* launched as a creative movement that challenges the dominance of Big Tech through art, design, research, and cultural production. The project doesn't try to "fix" the future; it reimagines it, one glitch at a time. The partnership created many different manifestions and outputs, including a microsite where the work of more than 30 artists, researchers and designers resides, a Manifesto video, a digital tool kit and a mini zine and poster on sale in our shop.

www.glitchingthefuture.org
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRlD_MZLLOQ.
https://www.zammagazine.com/store/2056-gliching-the-future-postcards

The project is set to be a sustainable success, thanks to the work of the project lead Heidi Thembeka Sincuba, (ZAM's copy editor). Both the microsite and the Manifesto garnered scores of views, comments and praise. Plans for symposia with various institutes in the Netherlands and South Africawere also made, culminating in the first Glitching the Future summit at the Fak'ugesi Digital Festival in Johannesburg.

In the words of Phila Hillie, one of the project's contributing designers, *Glitchin g the Future* shows "the power of cultural production: not only to critique systems, but to imagine alternatives that are built by everyone for everyone. What we build now becomes what we inherit tomorrow. This isn't just about what tech can do, but who it chooses to serve. It's time we all became its authors."

The project has been made possible by a grant for *internationalisation of the design sector* from the Creative Industries Fund NL (Het Stimuleringsfonds), Het Cultuurfonds, De Vriendenloterij and all the wonderful people who supported the project through our crowdfunding campaign.

creative industries fund NL

## Grassroots

As the Palestine struggle caused ever more global outrage, with South Africa's case made before the ICJ gaining increasing international support, ZAM published an op-ed showing important parallels between that issue and Western narratives about Africa in August. The author, our network partner Sisonke Msimang attacked the new Western trend of combating "hunger" in Palestine with charity, while overlooking the systemic oppression of Palestinians

Back in Africa, ZAM partners delved into African grassroots lived experience by highlighting how Nigeria's poor communities are increasingly exposed to malnutrition due to high food prices, while leaders in the security sector spend billions on equipment, often sold to the state by business friends. In *Bullets instead of Food*, NAIRE partner member Theophilus Abbah pointed out that misery of the poor in conflict areas increases the risk of insurgency more than any security equipment can combat. In the same newsletter, Anas Aremeyaw Anas documented how in Ghana criminal networks victimise the poor by stealing donkeys from small farmers, severely harming their ability to plough fields and transport produce. His investigation showed that, like the security businesses in Nigeria, the syndicates also thrive through political alliances. In Ghana, however, Anas reported, state officials of integrity had started to decrease the scourge.

The African creative vibe on the ZAM platform counterbalanced once again its exposures of wrongs and injustice, showing in the same month of August how African artists of all kinds continue to grow stronger and more influential globally in the *Afrovibes Festival 2025*, to which ZAM offered a discount ticket. And an interview by Heidi Sincuba with 2025 FNB Art Prize winner Thato Toeba underscored how art can often undermine power and its narratives too: "I explore in my art the manipulation of narratives, the construction of reality, the myth-making. (...) Making art is another way of making the world ourselves. Collage, for me, allows me to "propagandize" in a way that exposes this posture of truth," Toeba told Sincuba.

## Migrant Battalion

ZAM's September newsletter recalled the Bandung Spirit that, at the time of the Asian-African Independence Conference in1955, engulfed nations in the Global South as they announced a new, non-aligned, way forward. The editorial expressed sadness that this spirit now appears scarce among African governments. The comments were inspired by ZAM and NAIRE's new, seven-country, transnational investigation into recruitment of African citizens for Russia's war machine, which found that various African regimes had been actively facilitating such human traffic to Russia. The op-ed in the same newsletter by AIAC editor William Shoki, republished with permission, also showed how a local civil war in Sudan is largely driven by foreign interest groups.

The *Migrant Battalion* transnational investigation commented on in the editorial became the most co-published and praised investigation of the year, with impacts ranging from front- and full page attention to the work in independent media in six African countries, an interview with ZAM's Bart Luirink on the Netherlands' main radio station, a link on the African Voices Facebook page with its 49 K followers and a later reference on the global investigative site Alleyesonwagner.org. Migrant Battalion team member from Zambia, Charles Mafa, was even to be interviewed on Japanese TV after speaking about the project at the Global Investigative Journalism Conference in Malaysia in November.

In line with the earlier discussion, OCCRP's Africa editor and ZAM attempted to do a joint story highlighting this investigation. Sadly, since the investigation only proved Russian recruitment assistance by African politicians, which is not illegal or evidentially corrupt, the story could in the end not be embraced by the OCCRP.




*Design: Sky Walker*

## Family Values

September was the month in which Burkina Faso's Russia-aligned junta showed more of its dictatorial face, passing, after Uganda, an anti-LGBTQI law in line with Russian -and US- "family values" propaganda, see. ZAM followed this trend in a wider African context, where a surprising alliance between US-pushed hierarchical, patriarchal "African family values" conferences and similar Russian efforts started to materialize throughout 2025 (this convergence was firstly identified in Kristof Titeca's article mentioned above).

The same trend would later culminate in an anti-LGBTQI law in Ghana and energetic participation by parliamentary delegations from twenty countries in a pan-African "Family Values" conference in Ghana in 2026. At that conference, Burkina Faso would put forward its candidacy for hosting a similar conference in Ouagadougou in 2027.

Needless to say, the "family values" movement has also been met with much protest and ridicule, mainly from "Gen Z" youth. The African Investigative Journalism Conference in November in Johannesburg dedicated a session to its anti-democratic push. At the session, South African researcher Pontsho Pilane presented her work on the US evangelic movement in that country, with its links to the campaigns in other African countries. ZAM published an interview with Pontsho Pilane.

While rightwing evangelists, as Pilane described in the interview, prey on oppressed communities' trauma for their own purposes, ZAM continued to portray artists like Neo Matloga, whose drawings display "quiet resilience" in moments of daily life between Johannesburg and Mamaila, the village where he grew up. The artist describes his paintings as "psychological landscapes" of "everyday courage" in this review

Another portrait of resilience, highlighted by ZAM in September 2025, was Intagrist el Ansari's film *Undertows*, a unique first-person account of Tuareg history and culture against a backdrop of colonisation, sedentarisation, droughts, rebellions, and cyclical exile. In 2015, an article by filmmaker Intagrist el Ansari for ZAM had analysed increasing anti-French sentiments in the Mali and francophone West African region, the same region that would, years later, break off relations with France and invite Russia as a new partner instead.

# Transformation and grief

Planned as a major artistic event by ZAM in mid-October was the "Between Here and Now" Open Art Exchange, an exhibit featuring important works by African artists including ZAM arts editor Heidi Sincuba and web editor Farren van Wyk. It sadly failed to draw many visitors, perhaps because of its remote location in Schiedam. On the brighter side, the simultaneous Glitching the Future symposium and the "DJ Glitching" demo live from the Fak'ugesi Digital Innovation Festival in Johannesburg, South Africa, attracted way more attention. The livestream symposium, moderated by Heidi Sincuba, featured discussion, practice, and performance breaking through dominant narratives and called for collective transformation in motion.

Also well-attended was the launch of ZAM's Kleptocracy Archive prototype the Web We Weave in Amsterdam's De Balie. The prototype is still to be populated with stories and analysis on the theme of the kleptocratic systems still affecting the dynamics between Africa and Europe. While this activity remains on the agenda for 2026 and 2027, good contacts were made and remade at the event, including with OCCRP representatives who showed great interest in ZAM's angles to the theme of kleptocracy.

ZAM's October newsletter was dedicated to protests against fraudulent elections in Cameroon, Ivory Coast and Tanzania, eloquently captured in the slogan "We did not vote this old fool", referring to the ages of autocrats -especially in Cameroon- who cheat constitutions and people to remain in power. ZAM's editorial expressed happiness that even mainstream Netherlands' daily the Volkskrant now called for EU support for democratic institutions such as trade unions and independent media in African countries. The newsletter, and an article published on the ZAM website, also featured an investigation into the migration northwards of African fishing communities -after international trawlers depleted their erstwhile fishing grounds- and the treatment of these fishers by companies in the north. In the same vein, ZAM republished an investigation by colleagues in Benin into illegal ivory traffic, that somehow seems to escape appropriate action by political and justice authorities in that country as well as elsewhere.

Again on the topic of plunder, NAIRE member Estacio Valoi exposed in *Killings behind the Gate* how mining companies in cahoots with local and national authorities continue to victimize villagers in Mozambique. In a display of concern, (by now almost customary) from the side of the ruby mining company Gemfields, ZAM received a letter from director Sean Gilbertson asking for evidence by way of witness accounts. ZAM had to refuse this request because of the vulnerability of witnesses in the area, which is violently dominated by Gemfields security and local police, military and secret services. Instead, ZAM asked for a protectively structured joint investigation by Gemfields and ZAM, enabled by a neutral third party. Gemfields did not respond to this request.

In October, ZAM also published a column by Oyunga Pala, first featured in The Elephant (which Pala edits), on the Kenyan tour where the author presented his debut book *Strength and Sorrow*. Revisiting Nairobi after a long absence, mourning his sister and others who had died, Pala voiced the challenges faced by himself and other Africans in the diaspora in relation to their homelands. Would he be like "other diasporasians" he had seen, "who suddenly lost all sense of nuance after just a few miserable winters abroad, (and) began to look down on their own? Stepping away seemed to have had the opposite effect on me and it took this book to really show me what it means to belong."

An interview in the same month, by Heidi Sincuba with South African visual artist Thania Petersen reflected on a different kind of separation, quoting reflections by Petersen on the "state of mind of exile" she grew up in during apartheid, "because nobody was where they were meant to be. Everybody was put where they were." The interview further invoked thoughts by the two South African artists, Sincuba and Petersen, on the "enduring inequalities that shape Black life in South Africa." Sincuba wrote how Petersen's work, through photography, film, performance, textiles and installation, "transforms personal and collective grief into acts of visual resistance, showing how history shapes the everyday".




*Photo: Estacio Valoi*

Petersen's images are both poetic and political, tracing stolen land, broken promises, and unhealed wounds while insisting on beauty, dignity, and belonging. In holding these contradictions, Petersen's art becomes "mirror and medicine, reminding us that seeing and naming are forms of healing." At the time, Petersen was hosted by the Thami Mnyele Foundation in Amsterdam, which has a partnership with ZAM. The interview garnered 4450 web views, and an unusually high number of 140+ likes on Instagram.

October also saw the launch of a special three part series of articles looking at how art brings transformation through projects in Mali and the DRC. The series, created in collaboration with the DOEN foundation, brought insights from journalists based in these countries to audiences in Europe, with Internazionale in Italy also co-publishing. The articles *Art in times of Turmoil*, *Art as Refuge* and *Resistance and Art as Healing* published in English and French, were edited by Oyunga Pala and illustrate ZAM's ability to deliver journalistic services while creating an alternative income stream. The project solidified ZAM's partnership with DOEN, which we intend to build on in the coming years.




*Photo: Nybé Ponzio*

# On Africa's paths

In November, ZAM conducted an interview with the authors of the new Cycling Cities Africa book, that explored ways in which communities who are unable (or unwilling) to afford cars, are taking back streets of their cities and rural areas on bicycles. Titled *Bicycle Power,* the article showed how development and empowerment don't always need political stances, but can grow from something as simple as a bicycle and a growing number of bicycle paths and routes, for which significant campaigning is taking place in various African countries.

The same month saw the launch of "If you pay you may pollute", a book (in Dutch) by Follow the Money team members Mira Sys and Ties Gijzel, to which NAIRE member Emmanuel Mutaizibwa contributed to the Ugandan chapter, which exposed how rural areas, instead of being allowed to service community development, are now appropriated by "carbon credit" schemes that dislodge these very communities. It raises the question to what extent Western "green" projects can add to oppression and exploitation in the global south. Feeble efforts to source 'fair' minerals from countries such as the DRC were exposed as less than useful also by another project featured by ZAM in November, in the investigative publication *The blood mixes with everything* by another team of West-based, ZAM-contributing, journalists.

An op-ed by Nigerian NAIRE member Beloved John, also in November, slammed Donald Trump's attempt, aided by rap artist Nicki Minaj, to frame the violent conflict in Nigeria as only caused by Islamic Fundamentalism, calling armed militancy and terrorism in Nigeria's north a *Christian Genocide*. ZAM's editorial aligned with Beloved John's stance. Once again, on the occasion of Palestine Solidarity Day on 29 November, ZAM called for solidarity with the Palestinian struggle.

At Christmas time in December, ZAM reviewed Amsterdam-based, South African poet, Julia Beth Harris's performance *Where Clouds and Spirits Meet,* which poetically invoked the historic arrival in the Cape of people bearing "glass and iron and wonders of technology" the despair at the ruin that followed them, and their demise, becoming "wind, part of storms and clouds", in "water frothy with unrest". The reflection jarred with the simultaneous shrill speech by Dutch extreme rightwing politician Geert Wilders, who called for aid cuts to benefit "Dutch people", "and then they'll just be a tad more hungry in Africa." ZAM contributor, editor of The Elephant and author, Oyunga Pala, eviscerated Wilders' "politics of hunger" in an op-ed published on the ZAM website.






## Kleptocracy Report [https://kleptocracyreport.substack.com/.](https://kleptocracyreport.substack.com/.)

The Kleptocracy Report saw modest growth, from sixty at its start in 2024 to 120 by the end of 2025. Interestingly, but perhaps unsurprisingly, most subscribers use email addresses connected to institutions that investigate exploitation, corruption and kleptocracy.

Issues featured in the Kleptocracy Report were and are often taken from ZAM's investigative publications. In 2025 these included articles on Nelson Mandela speaker John-Allan Namu, the Dutch Royal Visit to Kenya, Ghanaian investigative journalist Anas Aremeyaw Anas's win in a US court, Nigeria's Predator Governors, Africa's waves of political protest, the abduction and torture of Agather Atuhaire and Boniface Mwangi in Tanzania, and the Transnational Investigations mentioned above.
But the Kleptocracy Report also published stories from the NAIRE network that had not appeared on the ZAM website, such as:

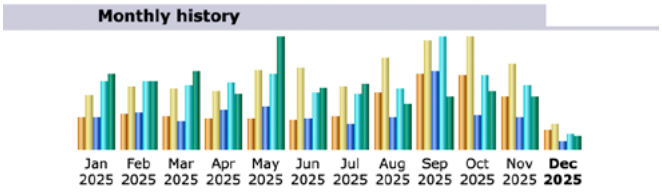
- How media and community pressure in Ghana led to the successful completion of Ofankor-Nsawam road repairs after media and activists had denounced the halting of the project and disappearance of funds;
- Uganda NAIRE partner Agora's exposure of the disappearance of parliamentary budgets for social projects;
- Zambian NAIRE partner Makanday's unearthing of politicians' complicity in exploitative mining projects that use child labour;
- Mozambican NAIRE partner Estacio Valoi's delving into the ruling party's tentacles into gas exploitation
- Great Lakes NAIRE partner Ukweli Media Coalition's report on human traffic of 17,000 women into domestic worker "slavery" in the Gulf by "unscrupulous agencies" with the "connivance of the Burundian government and some of its apparatchiks";
- Africa Uncensored's Joy Kirigia's award-winning work on land fraud by officials and politicians;
- Africa Uncensored's exposure of an impending frivolous purchase by the Kenyan government, yet again for medical machines (while the previous multimillion US$ order is still packed in boxes)
- Diaspora Kenyan contributor Jaya Khamala's report on a new money-making scheme by the Kenyan government, now preparing to tax diaspora remittances to families in the country.
- Cameroon NAIRE member Elizabeth BanyiTabi's report on Cameroonian advocate and presidential candidate Akere Muna's victory in the UK case against Glencore, which had bribed Cameroonian state oil company officials. "And now, will the recovered money be put to good use by the state?", she asked.
- The Ghanaian recovery of 2000 bags of maize from a cartel that steals from rural farmers, after exposure by NAIRE colleagues;
- Anti-corruption research by the University of Sussex's Governance and Integrity Anti-Corruption GI ACE programme, where ZAM's former copy editor Devi Pillay now works.

# Growth in social media and website reach

These above themes that ZAM tackled in 2025 struck a powerful note with our readers. Our strategy of using our social media channels to draw traffic to our website resulted in a huge increase of unique visitors to our online magazine platform. Whereas in 2023 our average monthly visits to the platform averaged 10,255, by the end of 2025 this figure had rocketed to 31037. Total number of unique visitors to our website for the year topped 372,000.

ZAM's social media outreach has grown too, with a total of 14,885 followers and subscribers across our 8 social media and newsletter channels. Posts and articles on these channels direct viewers to specific articles we publish on our website.

These and other successes during the year gave the ZAM team a strong sense of purpose and a resolve to carry the energy of 2025 forward into the coming year.




| Month | Unique visitors | Number of visits | Pages | Hits | Bandwidth |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jan 2025 | 23,696 | 40,391 | 142,578 | 302,870 | 71.49 GB |
| Feb 2025 | 26,441 | 46,533 | 162,890 | 305,421 | 65.11 GB |
| Mar 2025 | 24,241 | 44,702 | 125,151 | 288,456 | 73.47 GB |
| Apr 2025 | 22,450 | 43,272 | 176,173 | 298,980 | 52.72 GB |
| May 2025 | 22,970 | 59,020 | 195,359 | 340,566 | 106.60 GB |
| Jun 2025 | 21,739 | 60,946 | 138,383 | 252,597 | 58.23 GB |
| Jul 2025 | 24,914 | 47,066 | 114,943 | 249,683 | 62.63 GB |
| Aug 2025 | 41,670 | 67,712 | 144,393 | 270,207 | 43.35 GB |
| Sep 2025 | 55,692 | 81,273 | 352,207 | 503,624 | 50.57 GB |
| Oct 2025 | 55,257 | 83,173 | 152,816 | 333,456 | 54.60 GB |
| Nov 2025 | 39,020 | 63,670 | 140,568 | 286,189 | 50.62 GB |
| **Dec 2025** | 14,364 | 19,073 | 36,852 | 71,096 | 12.64 GB |
| Total | 372,454 | 656,831 | 1,882,323 | 3,503,145 | 702.03 GB |

# The ZAM team and board

| | |
|---|---|
| Director | Sean Fitzpatrick |
| Investigations Editor | Evelien Groenink |
| Project Manager | ZinhleLi Tschabalala |
| Copy editor | Heidi Sincuba |
| Outreach and social media | Nyoxani Mazive |
| Web editor | Farren van Wyk |
| Bookkeeper | Alisa Westbroek |

*ZAM's board of Governors:*

| | |
|---|---|
| Chair (ad interim) | Annelies Verdoologe |
| Treasurer | Dineo Nhlapo |
| Secretary | Milton van Wyk |

# Our funders and donors

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