

## TIMBUKTU PAPERS

Lukas Kubina

On the shores of Lake Turkana, my grandfather and I sit by the barbecue and bathe in the twilight of a violet sunset. While piling firewood, he starts reminiscing over dark times. He pulls me into a past in which African countries were considered periphery, patients of the world economy at best, disconnected from the 'first-world' and perceived as causes for migration problems. "They were viewed as a pain to be protected against. With walls, fences, and Frontex. It's a true story!", he insists. "Today, language doesn't have these concepts anymore. You would have to visit one of the reserves, where there are still people who haven't left the market-centric psychology or its syntax and vocabulary."

*In fact, I did. Once, I visited the eco-metropolis Munich, my grandfather's birthplace, physically. When I heard about the reserves in the Alps, I couldn't resist and took a train to Salzburg. At the gate, signs were suggesting how to interact with the inhabitants: "Don't expect public goods! Don't question their beliefs! Act friendly! Don't take LSD — it is prohibited by the local authorities!"*

Today is the 10th anniversary of the Timbuktu Files. Grandpa loves telling me about their importance. He's done so countless times before, but their mystery never gets old. And I just love hanging out with him. His happiness feels so different compared to my generation's, somehow more relieved rather than relaxed.

I know more or less what's coming: The Timbuktu Files are a large collection of manuscripts about art, medicine, philosophy, and science that were preserved in private households since the 13th century. Throughout time, they were saved by brave bureaucrats, hidden from the torches of bigotry, and juxtaposed against a colonial mind-set. On the one hand, I think Grandpa simply enjoys story-telling. On the other, I assume he wants me to understand that I should never take anything for granted — although everything now is, kind of.

"The Timbuktu Files were collated and made open-source when Europe disintegrated and retreated into a fragmented standstill. Just after the jackpot in 2023. You have to keep in mind that the European Union once had been the flagship of hyperlocal supra-nationalism. A bit premature, a bit opaque and sabotaged by particular interest. But hey, at least they tried. Then, borders reappeared and were closed, public life caved in, and the political sphere was under anesthetic. The whole continent retreated to the privacy of four-walled homes. At that time, while Europeans were beating on pots and pans, the African Union not only picked up the principle of supra-nationalism. They were also rediscovering ancient paths to lead the way."

*While listening to my grandfather's soft voice, I recall that a series of rare events led to the complete breakdown of societies and economies across the globe almost 20 years ago. They exposed the vulnerabilities of the old regime but before its extremest absurdities were overcome, the world was paralyzed for a while. Basically, people retreated to privacy and looked into the abyss. As far as I remember, this era is commonly known as "The Renaissance of Biedermeier".*

"More than half a decade after the first implementation of the viable system model in Allende's Chile, the combination of Stafford Beer's ideas and blockchain technology was born here, on the shores of this lake. The machine learning community, which was originally leading the systematic understanding of the Timbuktu Files, sat down in the value village Nariokotome and designed the prototypes." Grandpa points vaguely towards the North. A few Nile crocodiles paddle across the horizon.

***"These prototypes have evolved to be the best-practice, self-repairing, steadily-evolving blueprints for autonomous systems. Afrofuturism has always shown solidarity and transnational thinking. At times, when Europe and the so-called 'first-world' lost unity, the African Union got stuff right. Now, their models are distributed and implemented on a planetary scale."***

I am still a bit puzzled by his ironic terminology. What does 'first-world' exactly mean? Even though I've heard it many times before, I still cannot wrap my head fully around it. He takes notice of my confusion with sympathy and gently rubs my Max Weber tattoo. It feels like he's utterly pleased.

"The digitized Timbuktu writings led to a rediscovery of the Pan-African cultural and scientific heritage. And it's been only a few years since they were understood by the rest of the world. Acceptance and tolerance had not been a strong suit before." His face morphs into one extra-large smile. "The tipping point was when the machine learning community across Africa shared the decoded knowledge in the papers with the world freely."

He then turns on the daily telecast of the President of the African Union. Omoju Miller is addressing the anniversary, too:

"The knowledge from our datasets has helped us to completely reverse the impact of climate change. Also, we no longer have the migrant crisis. People are thriving in their own homes. This technology has revolutionized life on Earth to the point that no one is thinking of making humans multi-planetary as a form of supporting life outside of Earth."

The telecast fades into twin holograms as Juliana Rotich, Minister of Economic & Social Affairs of the African Union tunes in.

"Think about the laser beam of human effort, that laser beam being composed of technology enabled governance, technology enabled participation, technology enabled collaboration and using technology to actually solve problems and pointing all of that onto actual real-life problems."

The lake gleams Patagonian. The moon is blue. Tonight, Jupiter and Uranus meet each other three times. The telecast flicks back to Omoju Miller, who now sits in the shade of a massive Baobab tree, in a forest of all sorts of trees, Buffalothorns, Bushwillows, Jackalberry, Knob Thorns, Marulas, Mopanes, Tambotis, Jacarandas, Welwitschas and German Oaks. In the background, Ouroboros meanders between the tree trunks, and, with a full mouth, her soft mumbling ripples in cosmic circles. The President of the A.U. says: changed. All the species are back, because their habitat has been

restored. Extracting the DNA sequences from plants assisted in the development of all kinds of cures to previously chronic and terminal diseases. The current life expectancy — with full mobility — of humans is now 111 years — female and male alike. The transformative power of ancient wisdoms across the African continent changed the way how we live on this planet. Imagine, in the late 2010s one of the biggest challenges we had was global payments. I remember not being able to use my mobile app to pay for goods in Dakar as I used to do in Lagos. Nuts, right? Once we cracked the thing, we built a system that allowed us to do payments anywhere across Africa. As it turned out, that system and The Timbuktu Files unified all of us. It ended up creating an experience of a Pan-African reality such that even our former governments had to get on board. And finally, we created an African Union that was truly continental. The things that the Europeans were trying to do with the EU, we achieved them in Africa. Through software. We realized that humans can work cooperatively. On a software platform that became the viable system. Sharing it globally, it became how the world actually convenes. The first milestone for the planetary system was the collaboration with the New State in 2031 ... ”

Grandpa switches off the telecast and we share a pleasant moment with our own thoughts. A lion roar cuts through the air. The coEXIS-Tence app hasn't sent a message yet but I check anyhow. Easy, we are not in the predator's territory for the next hours. Suddenly, I feel the urge to tell him about my trip to the reserves. Something which I haven't done before.

“It was bizarre. The inhabitants owned very big vehicles. And it seemed like that odd fact made them proud and happy. They drove them from their private homes to lifts that were just a walking distance away. On top and at the bottom of the mountains, they were gathering in small tents and listened to noise that they could only cope with because they intoxicated themselves with alcohol. On the slopes in between, it was social Darwinism. At nighttime, you could not see the stars because of all sorts of fireworks and the valley was filled with the sound of machines that were producing artificial snow for their sport activities. It was very stressful.”

My grandfather listens carefully. After a little while, he looks ... me in the eyes and lays his hands on my shoulders. “It was close. We almost didn't make it. But we did. No more drama, Max. Let's go for a swim.”