

Destination Africa

Contemporary Africa as a Centre of Global Encounter

Edited by

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Lions Clubs in Africa: A Travelling Model and its Appropriation for the Creation of a Pan-African Network

Jean-Frédéric de Hasque

1 Introduction: The Lions Clubs and their Arrival in Africa

Lions Clubs International was founded in Chicago, United States in 1917 by Melvin Jones as an elite, charitable organisation. A few years earlier, in 1913, the Rotary had been formed in the same city. The two organisations have since expanded internationally, both reaching over one million members and establishing themselves in almost 200 countries, as they assert on their websites. The charitable objectives upon which they are founded fall into two distinct areas and can be more or less categorised as education, in the case of Rotary, and health, in that of Lions Clubs.¹ Since 1972, the Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) has been responsible for the allocation of Lions Clubs funds received from members and external donors. They are collected through a programme known as the Melvin Jones Fellowship via a donation of USD 1,000 upwards, with the title of Humanitarian Partner reserved for people donating of USD 100,000 or more.² To date, the total sum allocated stands at over USD 826 million.³

The organisation was exclusively North American until the end of the Second World War. Lions Clubs subsequently emerged in Europe, with the first French club established in 1948; England followed in 1950 and Belgium in 1952.⁴ On the African continent, the first Lions Clubs were established in

1 I make a general distinction based on the core activities of each of the two organisations, which does not preclude them from working in other areas such as education, disaster relief, community-based projects, or those selected annually by the two international presidents and their respective foundations.

2 Among the 166 Humanitarian Partners, there are four Africans—one Congolese, one Kenyan, one Ethiopian, and one Zambian—no Europeans, and only 15 Americans. Extract from the LCIF's website: <https://www.lionsclubs.org/fr/give-how-to-give/humanitarian-partners> [accessed 24 August 2020].

3 LCIF: Lions Clubs International Foundation. Source: Lions Clubs International, Our Story, PDF

4 Today, France has 1,200 clubs and approx. 25,000 members; Belgium has 281 clubs, with approx. 7,500 members.

Morocco and Algeria in 1953 and would later form District 401 with Tunisia in 1968. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the Republic of the Congo, Guinea,⁵ and the Ivory Coast each established their first clubs in 1954. Cameroon followed in 1955, Senegal and Chad in 1956, and the Central African Republic, South Africa, and Togo in 1957. Finally, Reunion Island and Mali made their entry in 1958, as well as Burkina Faso, Niger, and Benin in 1961. It is worth noting that Rotary had a presence from 1920, establishing itself in the south of the continent beginning in South Africa.⁶

The first African Lions Clubs were established by Europeans, but they quickly took on local members (except in South Africa and Namibia). However, the network remained small with only a few clubs in each country and a small number of members until the 1990s. During this period, Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), challenges to authoritarian regimes,⁷ and internal social dynamics⁸ provided fertile ground for private enterprise (Krever 2011) and also saw state actors establishing themselves outside major cities (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 1998). The decentralisation policies required by European states and the institutions that were formed out of the Bretton Woods Agreement⁹ played a role in expanding the network, particularly in West Africa. This process was led by high-ranking civil servants, business people, doctors, and lawyers, who made the most of their mobility and financial resources to establish clubs beyond the capital cities and main urban areas. After the first clubs were set up, the African continent became part of a Constitutional and Geographic Area encompassing a vast territory, including India, South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Lions Clubs refers to this as the ISAAME Area, a grouping that comprises around 300,000 members, of whom just under 30,000 were

5 Guinea had a club from 1954 until it was dissolved in 1969; the club was reopened in 1987.

6 Rotary has already appointed an African to the post of International President, the Nigerian Jonathan B. Majiyagbe, in 2003, something which Lions Clubs is yet to do.

7 In particular by the Baule speech in June 1990, which called for the democratisation of African political institutions. It is seen as decisive in the political changes that took place, notably in the case of West Africa, and feeds into what S. Huntington referred to as *the third wave* (*The Third Wave: Democratization in the late twentieth century*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

8 For further information on the case of Benin, see Richard Banégas, 'Mobilisations Sociales et Oppositions Sous Kérékou' [Social and protest movements under the Kérékou Regime] in Thomas Bierschenk and Roch Mongbo (eds) *Le Bénin, Politique Africaine* 59 (Paris 1995), pp. 25–44.

9 This relates to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

African¹⁰ as of 2019, when this threshold was surpassed.¹¹ It is headed by an International Director, who is a member of the International Board, which comprises 34 International Directors.

The International Board administers the 47,000 clubs spread across five continents. The 34 International Directors ensure that the directives are implemented by the Governors and Presidents located in their Area. Information and orders are thereby channelled down to the local level, which means a club of around twenty individuals on average. The flow of information, the implementation of directives, and the structure of the club's organisational chart are determined by a very detailed set of rules. Their implementation and modification rest with the International Directors, who act as spokespeople for a country or a continent at the International Board of Directors. The number of International Directors is determined pro rata in relation to the number of members signed up in each Area, and this is one of the points of friction within the ISAAME. The Africans, having determined that they are not being heard at the International Board of Directors, have initiated a process for creating a pan-African network in order to strengthen African power and visibility within the organisation, with the ultimate political aim to become an independent African department no longer part of ISAAME, in which the Asians are largely dominant. In the following, I will first further explain the Lions Clubs' model and analyse why it has been well received in Africa. After that I will elaborate how, by using the members' numbers, commitment, and zealous work, the African leaders try to carve out a position in the global organisation. Finally, by some concluding observations, I will reflect on what the success of the Lions Clubs in Africa means in terms of power, agency, and autonomy, in line with the questions brought up in the Introduction to this volume.

2 The Lions Clubs' Model: Combining a Hierarchical Structure with Space for Merit

The principal regulations of the organisation—the constitution and by-laws, and the policies of the Board of Directors—set out the admissions process for

10 According to Lions Clubs sources, <https://isaameforum2018.org/messages-from-officers-isaame/> [accessed 25 February 2019] and field interviews in Johannesburg, 2019.

11 The creation of the '8th Geographical Area' (including only the African countries and Madagascar island) was officially announced at the 2019 Lions Club International Convention held in Milan. A few month later, in Lusaka, the 'All Africa Conference' was transformed into the 'African Forum' by the African Leadership Committee, who decided to establish the African headquarter in Cotonou, Benin.

members, the dues, the frequency of meetings, the protocols, and the dress code. They also specify the annual philanthropic objectives they expect to achieve. These regulations, which are available online,¹² are modified, developed, or renewed each year and are essential tools for the governance of the organisation. They are reiterated to each member at meetings, and, therefore, play a significant role in the members' everyday lives. Discussions over their application as well as the appointment of the person responsible for ensuring that they are adhered to (the club President) often result in an atmosphere that fluctuates between seriousness and joviality. This is what creates the spirit of Lions Clubs, according to its members; going for a drink with other members is even referenced in the regulations as 'a convivial gathering of friends'.¹³ The club is also a place where businessmen meet and discuss the charitable programme, which is crucial for creating bonds between the members and is the reason for their meetings. Philanthropy is the 'cement of collective action', according to Abélès (2002) with regard to groups founded by Silicon Valley investors. Lions Clubs International was also awarded Best NGO in 2007 for the quality and quantity of its programmes.¹⁴ It should be noted that the volume of charitable work is calculated by adding both the time spent planning (meetings) and that which is spent on (acquiring) donations.

Local clubs are the rallying points for philanthropic action on the ground (donations, fundraising), and they also serve as a jumping-off point from which the most motivated members can move up the hierarchy. Each club is led by an Executive Committee—made up of a President, a Secretary, and a Treasurer—who together with the Presidents of the Membership Committee and the Service Committee (responsible for philanthropy) make up the Board of Directors. They are each elected for one-year terms and meet once a month. A second monthly meeting involves all club members and is known as the Regular Club Meeting (RCM). The main focus of the meetings is on approving minutes and uploading reports to the Headquarters' secure website. The Monthly Membership Report (MMR) and the Service Activities Report (SAR) provide details on the number of members and the hours spent in meetings. This makes it possible to calculate the total dues owed to the Headquarters as well as the hours worked, which demonstrate the dynamism of the organisation on a global scale.

12 The latest versions are available on the organisation's website: <https://www.lionsclubs.org/resources/FR/pdfs/la2.pdf>, <http://members.lionsclubs.org/FR/resources/publications-forms/board-policy-manual.php>.

13 In 2015, the International President said that having fun 'is essential to maintaining the right atmosphere among voluntary workers'. Comments made in Brazzaville.

14 Lions Clubs document: LCIF 619 2/11.

Each report (MMR/SAR) sent to the Headquarters in Chicago has a copy attached for the local leaders, who are made up of the Zone Chairperson (overseeing five clubs), the Region Chairperson (overseeing thirty clubs) and the District Governor (overseeing a minimum of forty clubs). The latter is responsible for several hundred members who are often spread across several countries, so he or she has a Cabinet that includes a secretary and an accountant. They analyse the reports submitted by the clubs and produce statistical quarterly reports, which the Governor uses to monitor the clubs. The reports become a means of exerting pressure, since the members are conscious of the fact that they are being observed by a global hierarchical structure. From the local level (a town, a city neighbourhood) up to the national and continental scale, they are watched over by superiors who are not afraid to come down on them should they make an error. With summary documents in front of them, they will question the Presidents over their club's projected performance and the objectives they have achieved. No wonder that during these meetings the Presidents often look like nervous schoolchildren during an exam. In return, however, at the end of their mandate, the best of them are awarded a medal and a diploma, which will enable them to pursue a position further up the hierarchy. Those who perform poorly know that their career within the organisation may come to a standstill.

A President, a Secretary, or a Treasurer can move up through the ranks quickly if he or she fulfils the tasks assigned to him/her. As a team leader, the incumbent must convince his or her members to find new recruits and to become involved in high-profile charitable works. The organisation became mixed at the end of the 1980s, after which women could become Lions, and not only Lionesses as the wives of members are known.¹⁵ Since then, unisex clubs have been progressively transformed into mixed clubs made up of men and women, which has meant women have been able to take up senior posts, as men do, albeit with less regularity since women are still in the minority. In 2018, the organisation elected its first female International President. In the same year Benin became a District it also appointed its first female Governor.¹⁶

15 In July 1987, at the Lions Clubs International Convention, the delegates voted in favour of opening up the membership to women. A total of 3,500 women would become Lions over the course of the following two months. Current figures show that 25% of Lions were female in 2014, whereas in 2002 women made up just 13.7% of global membership. Within the African membership, they made up 28% in 2013–2014, which represents a decrease compared with 2002, when they made up 37% of the membership. [Source: Lions Clubs All Africa Conference.]

16 This was Vicenza Bocco, who oversees District 403 A4. A country, or part of a country, becomes a District when it reaches 1,250 registered members in its area.

A member who becomes a leader and manages his or her team effectively is guaranteed to achieve a higher rank. Promotions help to create progression for the best members, who then go on to international careers. Certain positions are highly sought after by the wealthiest members, who are drawn to the recognition and the power that go with the title of Governor or International Director. They are motivated and prepared to contribute financially over and above that which is expected, in order to obtain favourable reports and progress up the hierarchy. Young members in particular want to compete with the senior members 'who were young Governors before', as they refer to them. These young Governors were well-known economic operators and high-ranking officials during the 1990s. Achieving a high rank at a young age is considered a sign of socioeconomic success, which is part of the reason for the enthusiasm of members for these posts. Conversely, for those older confirmed members, seeking out a high-level post can represent the peak of a leader's career, having carried out the job in an unerringly professional and voluntary fashion. Being appointed to the highest posts also demonstrates a member's financial means—any prospective Governor must demonstrate that he or she can meet the costs associated with such a post. Once appointed, he or she will be aware that the organisation's budget will not be sufficient to carry out their activities and cover all the costs, particularly transport. The key posts are, therefore, financially burdensome for their holders, but they do offer social prestige.

The journey of a member is an ascent dominated by ranks, mandates, and medals, which guide him or her towards increasingly exclusive and privileged circles. Becoming a Lion is a signal that an individual has been identified, as the heads of the organisation would say, and those with the financial means or high-level professional skills will pursue their advancement towards a coterie of a few hundred members at the global level. Members do not, therefore, seek to accumulate capital—they have it already—and they do not join the club to do business in the first place. It is a setting in which they are able to demonstrate their skills and pursue their societal success.

3 Reasons for the Lions Clubs' Success in Africa

One could say that Lions Clubs International has created a contemporary 'liturgy' on a poor continent aimed at the more affluent economic actors. It gives the latter a strict framework to follow and administrative duties to carry out in the service of an exclusive group, not dissimilar to the way a zealous civil servant carries out his or her duties on behalf of a state. In contrast to numerous African states, Lions Clubs has an effective inspection regime in place, based

on a system of sanctions and rewards, which can accelerate (or slow down) a much sought-after rise through the hierarchy. Although the merit-based system is voluntary, it attracts those who dream of being a leader of a large number of members. For those from a provincial club, or those who feel that their true worth is not recognised in their professional careers, being put in control of hundreds of members can provide a source of social prestige. It also opens doors to huge professional and social opportunities, as several members have revealed to me. They travel like diplomats and are greeted at each border post, as detailed in the very clear protocol on this issue. In each town where the organisation holds high-level meetings, they meet with local political leaders and work closely with national governments to carry out philanthropic work in the fields of health (vaccination, awareness programmes, road safety) and culture (heritage preservation, promoting visual arts). This means that the work carried out by the organisation and the assignments awarded to the most capable members allow them to form relationships with the decision makers at the nation-state level. Some of them get to deal with the latter on level terms¹⁷ and get to know them personally. The organisation does not speak openly about its close links with the financial sector; however, it does promote its members' links to political power, in order to show how effective the organisation is and, indeed, to demonstrate the necessity of its existence.¹⁸

The trust and the freedom of action granted to those in voluntary posts ('President', 'Governor', 'Treasurer') form the basis for the Lions Clubs' success, and the rules and the administrative inspection procedures guarantee the interest from (prospective) members. The analysis of Michaël Roll, who worked among healthcare workers at a state facility in Nigeria, supports this analysis. He explains that if employees are chosen for their achievements and enjoy good working conditions, they put in more effort than is asked of them.

Merit-based recruitment is one of the better-known explanatory factors for exceptional organisational performance. [...] qualifications and merit were not the only criteria, however. Commitment to the mission of the agency as well as proven integrity were equally important, particularly for those in leading positions. ROLL 2014: 380

17 Some sequences of the film *The Lions* (a 90-minute documentary based on my field observations) show this, <https://vimeo.com/168629615>.

18 During the 1970s and 1980s, the Marxist state in Benin, which initially outlawed the club between 1979 and 1981, later authorised its presence, insisting that it should carry out social programmes among the local population and promote the work that was carried out. Source: Lions Clubs archives in Cotonou—audience with the President of the Republic, 16 October 1981, Kérékou's speech.

These civil servants and the members of the Lions Clubs are less susceptible to corruption and are aware of the importance of their work, and so they carry it out in a professional manner. Those who are admitted to Lions Clubs know that they have been selected based on their managerial abilities by a group of their peers who work in the same type of profession. After having been 'chosen in anonymity'¹⁹ to become a member, they are consecutively appointed as 'Officials' before becoming 'President' or 'Governor'.

Volunteer work is accepted because of the regular monitoring of activities which guarantees the progression of those who are the best. The desire to please and to get recognition are such that candidates will sink all of their resources into achieving the level of excellence.²⁰ They offer free use of their business infrastructure—meeting rooms, transport (buses, lorries)—or provide corporate gifts and gadgets (pens, water bottles). The most ambitious among them will go so far as to write off the debts of their club. Having a labour force made up of members who dream of becoming Governor or International President makes it possible to create a reliable and effective network.

The organisation's exclusivity is reinforced by a very particular dress code. It is not intended to differentiate from what Lions wear elsewhere; rather, it should serve to augment it. In contrast to European clubs that err towards understatement (Daloze 2002, 2010), members in West Africa demanded that white trousers, shoes, and belts be worn throughout the continent (except in North Africa and South Africa). This gives members a striking appearance, whereas in Europe and North America Lions tend to go for a sky-blue shirt, a dark blue blazer, and a tie displaying the logo of the organisation.

The African clubs moved towards this form of display after a Beninese surgeon insisted on the colour white in the 1980s, and it has since been adopted almost everywhere. His son explained the reason to me: 'Wearing white requires care and attention. Keeping your trousers immaculate while working is a manifestation of the idea that Lions are flawless.' While the use of uniforms and medals in Africa developed against the backdrop of colonialism, when wearing them was a symbol of power and coercion (Glasman 2014), the use of these 'attributes' is highly appreciated. It involves logos, badges, and medals displayed on the waistcoat, indicating the importance and the rank of the wearer. These accessories are awarded at official ceremonies by senior members and signal the conclusion of an assignment or the completion of a task. They are granted by a member of the senior leadership, such

19 Extract from an article written by a Beninese Lion who said he was selected 'dans la foule anonyme'.

20 Based on my interviews.

as the International President, which reinforces the associated prestige. These badges and symbols of membership, which are utilised by clubs around the world, have been successfully repurposed by the African Lions and combined with the membership badges of other local organisations. I have been witness to multiple wardrobe changes over the course of one day by prominent Lions Clubs members.

Ostentation provides credibility to the power held by members, and it also drives the membership by giving Lions the opportunity to take centre stage. Meetings are held in public places, which means they are visible and partially audible to non-members during coffee breaks or when new members are admitted. The Lions are required to attend in uniform (failure to do so is punished with fines) and to follow a strict agenda: a bell signals the start of the meeting, a Chief of Protocol announces each speaker, and an anthem is sung.²¹ Taken together, these rules transform the members, who are widely known to be economic players, into the holders of a form of political power. Jean-Pierre Warnier describes the ‘new kings of Cameroon’ (2007), those university professors and national-level businesspeople who undergo a similar transformation in order to convince their populations. They must demonstrate their management skills by bringing in development projects to their areas. These abilities are also measured based on the number of titles held and on physical appearance. Lions Clubs leaders do the same when recruiting new members based on the organisation’s dynamism, thanks to its ambitious charitable projects, but also through the exposure of their activities, which is reinforced by their dress codes and formal procedures. Members are held in high regard by the public, and one member described to me an encounter in the street with a young salesperson who wanted to know how they could acquire one of the waistcoats bearing the club’s logo. This young salesperson believed that the outfit alone was a guarantee of future success.

The activities the Lions carry out in uniform set them at the heart of everyday life in the city, where they are seen as actors with power beyond the club’s purview, and at that point they become political actors. As is the case with the ‘new kings’, the Lions combine resources (both financial and political) with corporeal preoccupations. They merge the political and economic within their bodies to ‘imbibe the resources of modernity’, according to Warnier. The king, he explains, possesses ‘three bodies: his physical body, the palace, and the city’ (Warnier 2007: 31–32). This same coalescence of powers occurs in private organisations: the Governor heads a network and is a respected master

21 There are several scenes in the film *The Lions* that document this happening; see above.

of ceremonies and has a framework in which to exercise his power over his supporters, who work for him voluntarily because he provides them with extensive projects that also offer them a great deal of recognition. This makes an African Lions Clubs' leader a political actor through his or her philanthropic work and the ability to mobilise members who all possess financial and physical resources. Being a member, and subsequently becoming a President or Governor, confers a symbolic and mystical directive power (de Hasque 2017). The observance of rules, the lure of positions of power, and the awarding of medals do not apply only to Africa, since European and American members also compete over the most influential positions. These aspects, however, are not an universal reference, as non-members often tend to view this type of organisation as outdated or second-rate (Gousset 2004). By contrast, on the African continent, the large economic disparity between the members and a significant portion of the population emphasises the relevance of belonging to an elitist club.²²

4 An African Political Project Fuelled by a North American Model

Field observations of several clubs (Benin/Congo 2011–2015, South Africa/Namibia 2019–2020) show that, for some members, their membership has meant the taking on of a larger political project. They do not wish simply to attend meetings at luxury hotels to compare their respective economic successes; rather, they are working towards the Africanisation of the organisation. In order to achieve this, they recruit members and modify the rules. The most invested have been members for several years and devote enormous amounts of time to the club. They also willingly offer their expertise to bring in new candidates and publicise the club's work, or organise business seminars to bring together up to one hundred or so members. Over fifteen years of membership growth and 1,000 African clubs are evidence of their success. Beyond this, their political engagement demonstrates that Africa, whose countries are ranked lowest in the global economic order, possesses numerous businesspeople and intellectuals who want to organise themselves collectively. That is the reason

22 Benin, one of the countries observed, had a GINI index of 47.08 in 2015, the economic inequalities there being much more significant than in most European countries (e.g. France 32.07; Netherlands 28.02; Belgium 27.7, Norway 27.5). Source: <https://donnees.banquemondiale.org/indicateur/SI.POV.GINI?locations=BJ>. The GINI coefficient is between 0 (perfect equality) and 100 (absolute inequality). Source: World Bank 2016.

they create an independent African branch within the Lions Clubs—the Africa Area—with an administration exercising full executive powers. Its heads will appoint their own Governors and International Directors, something which is not currently possible within their group known as the ISAAME.

In effect, the strong Indian presence at the heart of the ISAAME (over 200,000 members) has regularly led to the nomination of Indian leaders to the highest positions, given that it is delegates from each club who vote in internal elections. Consequently, the most prestigious position has been held by an African only six times,²³ and since 2000 the African leadership—which notably includes the few honorary African International Directors (known as Past International Directors)—has been attempting to redress this situation. The International Board of Directors has provided a special dispensation by permitting the creation of the Africa Area upon reaching 30,000 members (instead of the previously required 40,000). It is a win-win agreement, since Western countries have been losing members in large numbers, and they stand to benefit from Africa's energy to maintain their global dominance as the largest charitable service organisation in the world. This agreement is meaningful, making it a more realistic prospect that Africans will be considered for the highest positions, that they will manage their own budget, and that a remunerated African Board of Directors can be appointed. And a year ago, at the Lions Club's International Convention held in Milan in July 2019, the African continent was officially proclaimed 'the 8th geographical Area'.

Paradoxically, in view of the need to acquire new members (in order to reach the 30,000 figure), the African leadership has decided to recruit from a broader range of people while at the same time applying stricter selection criteria than is the case in the United States and Europe, meaning an adaptation of the Lions Clubs' model. Media coverage of the clubs attracts many candidates, particularly merchants and importers who have benefitted from the globalised economy to build up capital. These have a significant income and are looking for social recognition. Other less well-off candidates, such as school teachers, nurses, and small business owners (catering, transport), now form the target audience for the African leaders, who say they want to 'open the club to everyone, like in America'. Consequently, however, they are going to modify the Lions Clubs' rules to gauge candidates' financial solvency and availability for volunteering, because, while not only accepting individuals who are members of the elite, the leadership nevertheless wants to ensure

23 Julian Musikanth (South Africa) (1987–1989), Ashpoll Kapoor (Kenya) (1993–1995), S.P. Amin (Kenya) (2001–2003), Manoj Shah (Kenya) (2005–2007), H.O.B. Lawal (Nigeria) (2009–2011), and Alexis Gomes (Republic of the Congo) (2013–2015).

that they will contribute financially and project an impeccable image of the organisation. An important tool for this is a process of *circularisation*, a word created by West Africans, meaning being on a list that is circulated among club members. Those who are *identified* and declared *candidates* (terms used by the members) are taught about Lions Clubs' objectives, and their backgrounds and are thoroughly investigated. The Officers (senior leadership) provide a list of candidates to each club and invite the members to submit any potential objections to the candidates. This final part of the selection process is intended to discourage the less well-off, but also those who are attempting to find employment as a result of their membership. Business networking is looked upon disapprovingly by African members, as it is by their European colleagues. The latter do not condone a utilitarian approach to the club (Cousin and Chauvin 2010), but according to one of the African Governors, on the African continent this attitude indicates, besides a lack of grace, that the member may not be as wealthy as he or she claims. He explains: 'You know, you have to put your hand in your pocket when you're a leader. It's one of the unwritten rules.' Becoming a Lion in order to progress professionally is likely to be ineffective and, therefore, unprofitable, due to the number of commitments (bi-monthly meetings, event organisation, collection and distribution of donations) that a member is expected to carry out and the expenses that he or she must incur to become President (travel, attending international meetings). The club is also a space for professional meetings, but only for seasoned members, who have been around for many years and proved their worth through the posts they have held. One leader explained this by highlighting the importance of knowing one another well before bonding. One must integrate with the group before doing business, because, he says, 'Among a community of men, obviously, any business deal can be agreed.'

The North American rules, then, have been modified to guarantee the quality of candidates, as well as the credibility of the organisation, which must, in the eyes of the public, be powerful, or in other words, wealthy. Those who wear the Lions uniform must be well-off and have an influential network of friends. These are the candidates the leaders hope to attract. In return for their membership, they can hope to achieve a higher social standing and take on a role that as mere economic actors may have been beyond their reach.

The African continent, called since 2019 the 8th Constitutional Area, thanks to the newly recruited members will in its turn serve as a showcase to attract more African members to the organisation, while its rules and dress code advance its success and imbue it with an extra-continental aura. It could be argued, however, that the independence that will come with the establishment of the African Constitutional Area is symbolic and that the Africans will

remain bound to the Headquarters based in Chicago, as also the heads of the African leadership have explained to me. What matters to them is to obtain a place at the table and a voice at the heart of an international network. Independence is, therefore, a case of making their voice heard and obtaining equal status with every other region—European, American, Asian, and Arab. For the African leadership, it is a full access to the network that is the aim, rather than breaking ties with it.

5 Concluding Observations: A Model for Emancipation or Alienation?

The Lions Clubs' success in Africa reveals the mindset of economic operators in search of a domain in which they can demonstrate their organisational, managerial, and rhetorical abilities. The structure of the Lions Clubs provides them with a measure of recognition from the West, which they combine with that gained from their local political, economic, and cultural circles. The combination of these provisions and arrangements is attracting a growing number of candidates. This will help to create the African network aimed at finding the opportunity for autonomy, which is currently restricted by more powerful nations (India and Pakistan). The lack of African representation²⁴ at the top of the hierarchy has prompted the push for independence, and although this appears in a postcolonial context, the aim is not to move away from the rules developed in the West. In fact, it comes as a result of economic actors who want to 'decide for themselves and not just defer to India', as some have put it to me. Since its days as a group of prominent individuals in the 1950s, Lions Clubs has become a vehicle for political expression for individuals who are looking for an open forum that enables them to escape from a marginal position. The push for independence, therefore, is associated with what could be identified as a liberated regional administration and has a symbolic international dimension.

The rules and by-laws originating from an imported Western model (Gewald 2012) form the basis of independence and have been used to create new social capital. On closer inspection, it appears that the model was not just imported but was also reinterpreted and adapted to the African context. The adaptation of the rules was intended to recruit more members (while also permitting the exclusion of the poor) in order to gain independence.

24 The notion of African can be understood as follows: a member living on the continent who could be European or Lebanese, for example (these are the cases I have encountered), but belong to an African club.

However, the ability of the reinterpretation of this blueprint (Bierschenk 2014) to bring about independence is questionable. It rather seems to be doing the opposite: those who are attempting, at all costs, to extricate themselves from Indo-Pakistani control are going to install a competitive, restrictive, and meritocratic administration that appears to be drawing them closer to the United States. The aim is actually to gain an extra seat at the International Management Board, which seems to demonstrate that the pan-African network is simply a satellite of the Headquarters based in Chicago. The leadership has made use of an imported model to create a pan-African network from which probably only the most powerful members at the head of the new Africa Area will benefit. One of them will become an International President, but for this, thousands of African recruits are being used who will breathe life into an American organisation that is considered by many in the West to be old-fashioned. This concession, which benefits only the powerful at the expense of their members, is a process of extraversion (Bayart 1999), one which can be termed *charitable extraversion* (de Hasque 2018). The dependence engendered by the leadership itself can be seen, for example, on the ground during philanthropic work, organised in partnership with American or European members. The latter often consider African members to be their subordinates, to whom they delegate supervisory tasks while taking the credit for the work carried out. In this case, philanthropic construction work is undertaken on the African continent but remains the property of European or American partners. The African leadership accepts this, despite some reservations (de Hasque 2018), because this approach means that they minimise the costs of the charitable programmes that are essential for their progression through the ranks—and so, in effect, all they need to do is submit MMR activity reports. The few African leadership members create dependence by giving their resources—recruits, buildings, and/or land—in favour of a foreign organisation that can ensure their individual international profile, but the consequence is that they facilitate an American association pursuing its territorial conquest by expanding its network towards new horizons.

In the fragile socioeconomic context of the continent, the pan-African Lions Clubs' network is an ambiguous setting in which the most powerful members divide themselves between two worlds. They are economic actors in their daily jobs as businesspeople, but they also take on political roles such as that of the President. The existence of power structures and the use of bureaucratic systems make the Lions Clubs' organisation a quasi-state instrument, and this is unquestionably what makes it attractive to the leadership. Joseph Tonda has identified an ambiguous figure, whom he describes as the *modern sovereign*,

that is as alluring as that of the President or Governor of Lions Clubs. It incorporates both a religious and a technical fetishism, which engender both power and subjugation (Tonda 2005). Thus, the present analysis does not suggest a movement towards emancipation on the continent as a result of the pan-African network; rather, it suggests that the lure of power has prevailed over the desire for real freedom. However, it is also worth noting also that the voluntary administrators and motivated members of the organisation have contributed to a positive dynamic and activism across the continent. It is not yet possible to predict the level of autonomy and of *black empowerment* (Tangri and Southall 2008) that this will produce within the clubs and at the local level.

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