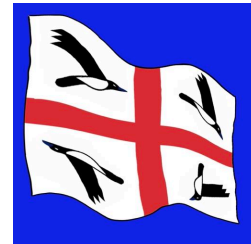


Franco Bollo travels to Togo through The Internet

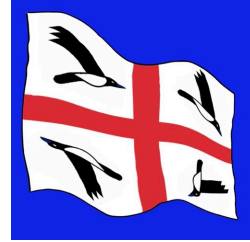
Acquires 20 jumpers from the second hand markets of Lomé,

They get sent back to the west, and will now be up-cycled. Che Togo!

P.S This is a first draft. Thank'o Bollo



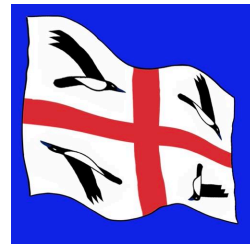
Super-simple summary



1. 1.5 years ago, I placed 5 Franco Bollo jumpers into charity donation containers with AirTag location trackers concealed inside them.
2. The jumpers reached Germany, Kenya, UAE, Ghana & Togo
3. All of these countries were well covered by street-view on Google maps, apart from Togo.
4. I wanted imagery of this jumper's location.
5. So, I contacted the closest establishment to this jumpers location, a charity called Teli caring (it was next door)
6. I explained what I had done and asked for photos of the road
7. The Charity's founder, Moïse, replied. He sent me footage and images of the road.
8. We spoke, and got on. We decided to collaborate on a project. To bring jumpers from the Second hand markets of Lomé, back to the west. Specifically to my studio, to be up cycled

This writing details my journey so far. The intricacies, the hiccups, the simple things I obsess over, my learnings about Togo, who we've decided to help with the funds and more.

Super-long summary and some somewhat structured ramblings



After having consulted and discussed my project somewhat thoroughly with ChatGPT, it recommended that I start with a short punchy introduction explaining why this project exists. It advised me to mention fast fashion, textile waste and over-consumption. Although these are themes which my project may highlight or cross over with, the truth is that this project exists because I like the look of clothes that have a lot of unknown mileage and history, mainly the jumpers. Big screwed up piles in flea markets and boot fairs are great. I don't think the jumpers I find would be as appealing if all the other rubbish wasn't surrounding them (trousers, t-shirts, dresses). The digging through and finding a solid, respectable and learned jumper is nice. They are the cheapest canvases that will always be accessible. Whether they look pleasant or unpleasant they still have an undeniable and classic function. Jumpers that we throw on at home for taking the bins out, bringing in a takeaway and any other coverage-needed activity in our nearest potentially-public vicinity are also great, but hold great value and utility and would not be easily accessible to me and nor should they. A Jumpersmith isn't a thief, and a thief cannot Smith Jumpers. People would not give away their trusty, at home, chuck-on-jumper and would likely give me decoys.

This project details my journey of connecting with a local entrepreneur in Lomé, Togo and our enthusiastic efforts to cheaply deliver a package of jumpers to England, to be up-cycled. The motifs and aesthetics I will use to design these jumpers are extracted and inspired through the story of encounter, the passage of our jumpers to England and my insight into Togo stemmed through our phone calls and voice messages.

It's a big project which I can sit in and enjoy, which I've been learning to do after my life so far of constant creative impulsivity and impatience. For me, it is my first chance to be a real nerd, and also have a reason to recount a story in writing.

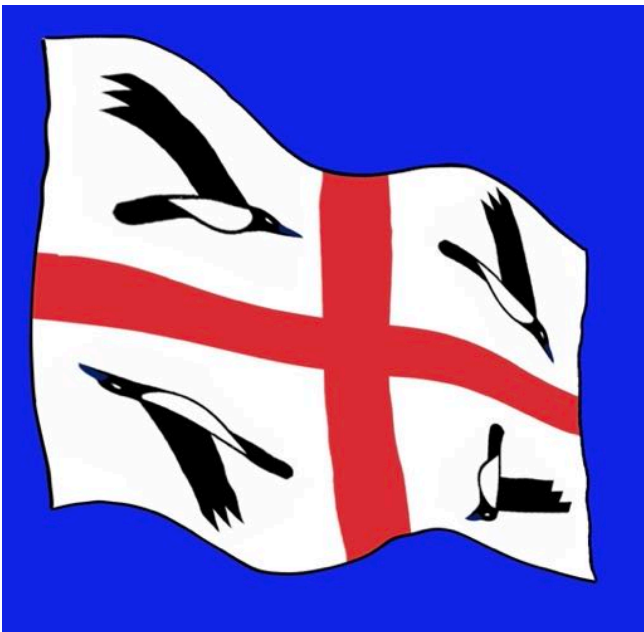
For my collaborator, it is his first tangible step into exporting from Togo to the UK, a charity project, and a cool skinny English pen-pal who speaks no French or Ewe.

With the income from this project, our mission is to make money for the three female vendors who sold us the jumpers. On top of this, my collaborator will be paid for his time, insight, logistics and support. I intend to take the smallest cut, in a shared pot with my collaborator, enough to fund the next larger shipment of jumpers from Togo to my studio.

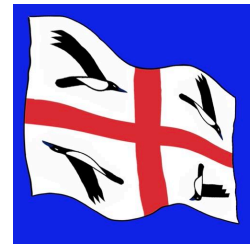
I am reversing the casual, seamless and frequented passage of clothing from the West to countries like Togo. I'll see what the journey entails for their unexpected journey back and designing them with motifs and aesthetics from their story and travels. (The type of thing that would smoothly insert into the Instagram posts of @contemporary100 would be nice)

I've brought them to England and I'm making them somewhat desirable or at least infusing them with function again.

P.S, I don't like big junk stores or massive hoarded bric a brac places, they lack the freshness and anticipation that I love. I want to find clothing at a place which from Monday to Friday is probably just a road. an old big junk shop has too much dust, unchosen items still hanging around and is too accessible to be exciting. They are a bit depressing in the way that the packaging museum in London was depressing. I think it's located in Notting Hill.



How the collaboration with Teri Caring began



I've been working with second hand clothing from UK charity shops for around 3 years now. A couple of years ago I 'donated' 5 of them, via the large (usually blue) containers on British streets. These jumpers had AirTags concealed inside their hems, which simply put, are location trackers. The final known destinations of these jumpers were: Germany, Kenya, UAE, Ghana and Togo.

I was able to view the truck stops, side roads, industrial estates, ports, stations, businesses and eventually markets which they travelled through. Google maps street-view and general internet research was good enough to fuel this investigation and curiosity.

There is no google street view in Togo, so I had to find an alternative - and on a whim, with low expectations I contacted the closest organisation to my jumpers' location, which happened to be a charity called Teli Caring. That is when I first began communicating with my collaborator (who from now on will be referred to by his name, Moïse)



Through Fiverr, I commissioned artists to illustrate the street-view screenshots of every stop of each of the 5 jumpers.

This image above is Mahfuds (@vectorinid) drawing of the container that the jumper that went to Togo was initially placed in.

Every artist was selected because of their low prices, I was on a mission to get the very cheapest illustrations I could, the average price for each illustration was between £6-£7



Mahfud @vectorinid

★ 5.0 (127) Level 2 ++

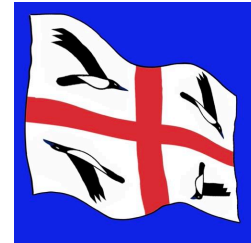
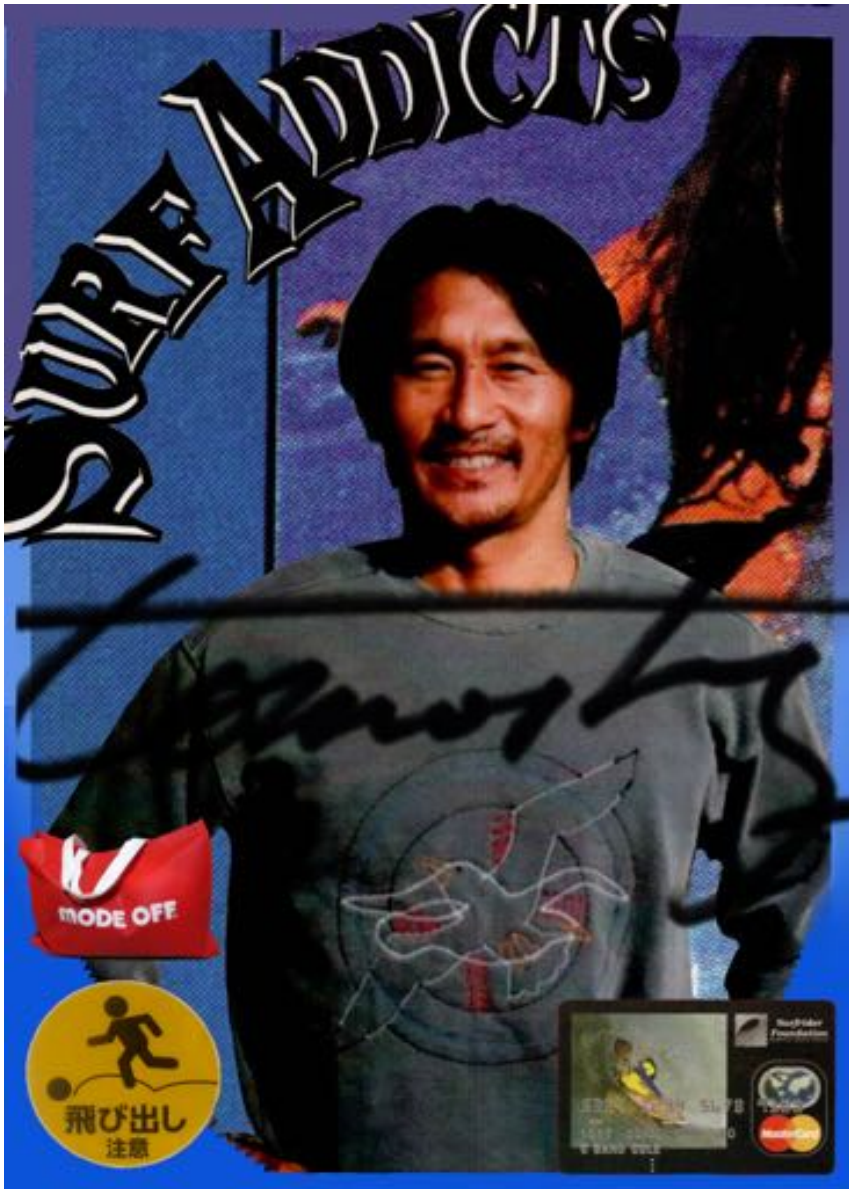
Professional illustrator specialized in vector and pixel art

📍 Indonesia 🗨 Indonesian



I believe I did this commissioning through Fiverr to increase and explore the characters and diaspora who can all be involved in the project.

So an Indonesian man, illustrated an English charity donation container which had a Japanese jumper in which would end up travelling to Togo. You know what I mean? I guess this ties in with some sort of English identity, but we won't be going into that in this book.



From Tokyo to Togo. This Jumper is the one that ended up in Togo, AKA Lotte Albion

I made this jumper on my 2 month residency in Japan in late 2023. I bought it second hand, I believe this one was from one of the second-hand shops about a 15/20 minute bike ride from where I was accommodated, in Isumi, Chiba. Isumi is south east of Tokyo and was about a 2 hour journey from Tokyo, it was a beautiful and incredibly peaceful mix of countryside and coastline. There was this long road I'd often cycle up and down. The equivalent of this road in England would've been depressing and aesthetically displeasing, filled with B&M, most likely a Costa somewhere or a Greggs, McDonald's for sure. definitely not worth long bike rides for pleasure. But in Japan with it's splendid signage and font, respected recycling culture, funny boxy cars, jungle-like foliage, clustered and overcrowded electricity lines and poles, humble food spots, no tourists, unexpected shops, their iconic vending machines never far, and all the time in the world, it was so so so perfect for a bike ride and exploration into the establishments.

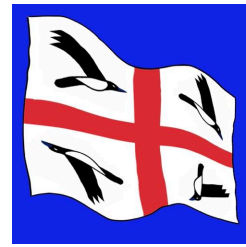
Anyway, I embroidered the Logo of the local baseball team on the jumper (Chiba Lotte) who's mascot is a seagull. Followed by embroidering the Brighton and Hove Albion Seagull logo on top. Two seagulls!

Before sending it away I cut a trading card size out of it and patched it up, I also distressed it by cutting small holes into it. I wanted to try and see if this would be accepted as viable by the sorters and whether damage could affect a destination of a jumper. By this point I had already sent a couple which were un-damaged and in great nick.

P.S, the model is a Japanese surfing champion who lived round the corner, Tomoshige.

The First Actions

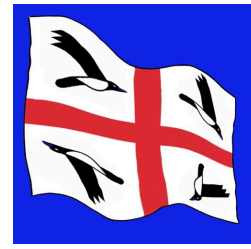
After a muddled phone call which used up all of my credit and a few emails repeating gradually more clearly to Moïse what I had done and how he could help, he matched, or even topped my enthusiasm. Moïse got on his motorbike and circled the couple of streets right near his house, therefore including the building the donated jumper was being stored in. This was the first footage which I got from Moïse - the wobbly phone footage from a country I only every knew existed because of Emmanuel Adebayor was very special to me and I have loved every single video that he has sent me.



I had no real preconceived ideas about what I wanted from this new contact and insight, aside from getting a visual insight into its new location. Moïse told me he would love to collaborate somehow. It felt quite instinctual and obvious to begin co-ordinating the delivery of a number of jumpers from the Lomé second-hand markets to my studio in the UK. We decided that we would do it for the cause of his charity, Teli Caring.

After some insight of how the markets worked there, Via YouTube videos (usually focusing on the neighbouring Ghana) and what kind of prices we'd expect to pay, I sent him 50 pounds through western union with the aim to get around 10 - 12 plain jumpers, ideally the lowest grade ones, the less favourable and more unsellable. He agreed to film everything, because as we know through Instagram girls and performance art, if it wasn't recorded on a phone, it didn't really happen.

Jumper Acquisition and Charity direction



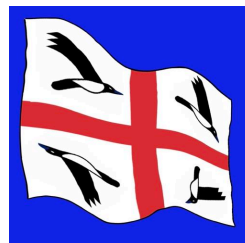
Moïse ended up purchasing 21 jumpers and added in one of his own for good measure. Alongside this, I was sent around 20 minutes of more handheld footage of every aspect I could have asked for, detailing his travel, search and purchase and also his thumb against the camera, or some incomprehensible visuals (which is great).

He also sent me the footage he recorded of him going out with all of the jumpers to get them weighed. It's one of my favourite videos I've received. It was at night at some sort of street side miscellaneous stall with loud Afro-beats playing.

He also sent me a list of his charity's aims, and I liked the idea of supporting the local female vendors. They were the ones we bought the jumpers from after all.



Carrier Bag And Newspaper Acquisition

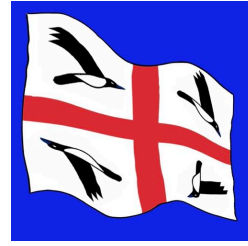


Whilst in these early stages, pondering the project and considering it somewhere in-between the categories of a business, a brand and a charity, I was thinking about what would make our project special. To be honest, I wondered if another brand could use this same concept (which would be great), but maybe make our project obsolete or easily mimicked. What could separate our project and give it a real personal touch. What this project was fortunate enough to have is most simply put, a local, and more importantly a local who's running a charity aiming to better his country and city.

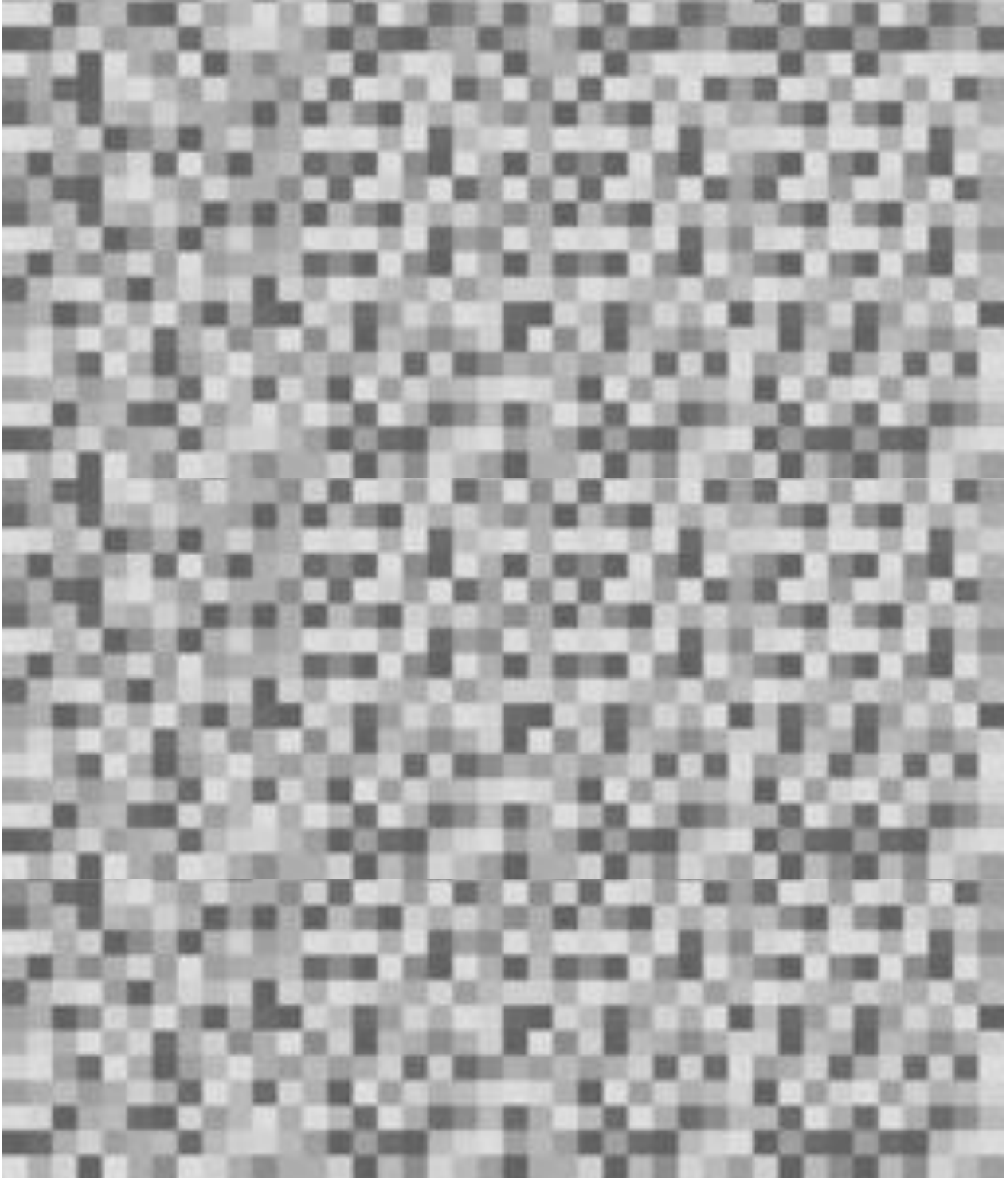
Whenever I go abroad, I always end up collecting newspapers and supermarket carrier bags that I come across. What I love about newspapers is their initial disposability and accessibility. After a week or so, they then become extremely difficult to acquire. Good luck trying to get hold of a Togolese newspaper from the 24th of June. It's easier to access a Lamborghini I think. This insanely quick shift in accessibility and rarity is what I love. Fun fact, I have about 12 newspapers from the day after the Queen died, good stuff. So Moïse purchased 22 newspapers to include in the package, the one condition I set was that they were Togolese and that they were varied in terms of organisation. Turns out the newspapers are tightly controlled and extremely skinny. The corrupt dictator Faure Gnassingbé, (who was recently taking refuge in London from the protests) would obviously not allow any newspapers to highlight his problematic rule or weaknesses. Although I cannot read French, I have been assured that this is the case.

With the carrier bags, it is a similar thing. I like the idea of just having these tacky bags as the packaging you receive the jumper in once purchased. It makes sense, jumper from the local market, alongside a local newspaper, delivered in a local market bag.

Faure Gnassingbé, The leader of Togo



Some important context. Togo and Lomé are having many protests these days, this is because Fa



LOOKING FOR A COURIER SERVICE



Our first look online quoted us around £260+ for door to door delivery through companies like DHL and Fedex. This was far too expensive, but also far too boring and easy. With a mix of some inspiration from a scene in the film 'War Dogs' and my 4-5 months of working in a warehouse, we got creative and decided to find another route. I had a preconceived idea that in West Africa there was more room for handshake agreements and a lower demand for official documents, especially for inexpensive, arguably worthless second-hand clothing.

What was helpful about working in the warehouse was that it was run by three best friends, it was a small team and I worked there for around 4 months. It showed me that it isn't some super-duper official robotic flawless process which feels out of touch and hidden. We'd kick a ball about, drive a forklift after a very unofficial 8 second induction from a 21-year-old and just complete these mindless jobs that just need a human hand and brain. Sticking labels on boxes, moving boxes and counting items. Ultimately I learnt that the logistics process was just some friends making phone calls and sticking labels on boxes.

It made me believe that I could eventually get this big box of jumpers from Lomé to England through an alternate route, through phone calls, the internet and a cardboard box.

I had also been thinking about what can give our project some exclusivity or individuality. Something that my connection with Moïse could give me, that would not be easily replicated, let's say if another company wanted to use the concept of reversing the trade as a business idea. local newspapers, carrier bags from the markets were added. It was also agreed that we would request a photograph, the name and a short bio from our 3 selected vendors. the newspapers and the bags were added before being shipped.. and of course I was very importantly sent the footage of these being purchased.

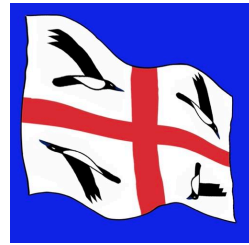


The warehouse in Crawley I worked at for a few months... private contractor, so basically I was meant to pay my own taxes... but I forgot.



"We're gun runners, let's go run some fucking guns"

AMAH AYIVI



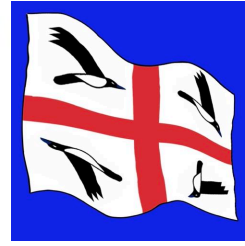
Early in the process, before doing any real digging into our alternative options, I had learnt about Amah Ayivi. A Togolese creative and re-seller, based in Paris, who takes clothes “from the floor to the showroom”. A t-shirt I saw him wearing in an Instagram story said something along the lines of “you put your trash in my backyard, I sell it back to you.”

His shop Marche Noir is located in Paris, he spends a portion of his year in Togo and the rest in Paris. Marche Noir is where he sells the worthy clothes that he finds in the second hand markets of Lomé. I found his email, prepared a portfolio and asked if he could advise me on a route for these jumpers, and anything else he could add. He replied very quickly and said he was intrigued by my process and that we should call.

In the end it was very hard to get hold of him. Despite a couple of messages and one promising call a few months down the line, with him offering to introduce Moïse to his assistant and courier service, we figure it was better for us to proceed with an alternative route and not wait around for him.

It was great to find out about him and see the best example of somebody doing this already. Unfortunately he was either too busy or distracted to be able to help our project properly. He is quite present online so go and look him up or visit his shop in Paris.

Starting to think
creatively about the
delivery of our package

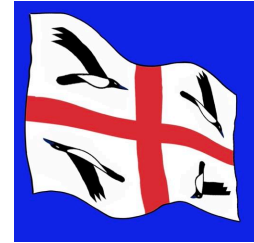


After looking into some other quotes from other well established International companies, looking for potential travellers from Lomé to England (hoping they could fill a suitcase) and even enquiring directly with The Ethiopian airlines cargo team - we ruled all of them out. At this point I had decided that I'd be looking into a passage to England via another West African Country.

The first solid piece of information I gathered (probably through ChatGPT) was that the cheapest shipping from Africa to UK was from Nigeria. I expected it to be either Nigeria or Ghana, seeing as there is a larger presence of Ghanaians and Nigerians in the UK. There are also Nigerian and Ghanaian grocers and restaurants which indicate trade. I am yet to find a Togolese restaurant or grocer anywhere in England. It seems they are quite culturally aligned with Ghana however, so this isn't me saying you cannot access products or textiles or food from Togo. In between Togo and Nigeria there is Benin, which I know even less about than I did Togo, and it'll stay that way for now.



Grafters, who make regular trips in their cars to Nigeria from Lomé

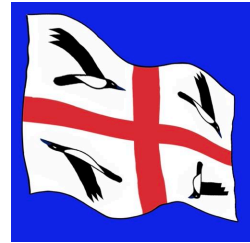


Now having decided we would go via Nigeria, Moïse began talking to local 'bus' drivers and transporters who make regular trips to Lagos. They transport goods and people when needed and I assume they co-ordinate their trips alongside other business or visits they are undertaking whilst in Lagos. Lomé and Lagos are both close to the coast and have a good main road which connects them. Moïse very quickly found a trusted driver who told him he could take our package for 65 Euros, this works out at 42,637 West African Francs. Whilst investigating different methods to send money over to Togo, this particular chunk of money I sent got hit with a criminal exchange rate and we lost about 24 Euros. I think my favourite video so far is the footage Moïse sent me of these drivers discussing the package with him and examining it.

I think it's the risk or the word of mouth aspect of the delivery which excites me a lot. It's also important to add that I had mailed an active Airtag to Moïse a few weeks before. He tore open one of the hems and inserted it inside. So with this jumper in the package, I was able to track it all the way to Lagos. The driver went up on a Friday night, was in Lagos for the weekend and dropped it on Monday once the courier service had opened. This particular location was Magnet shopping plaza, which was home to two companies we considered. In the next few ages I explain how we ended up choosing the courier company and the difficulties we had in doing so.



This is where these drivers begin their routes from



At my end I had found a very reputable company called CargoNaija, I spoke with them on the phone multiple times and visited their building in Wembley to talk. It did take me nearly 3 hours to get there and slightly less to get back on the day. I expected an office but I ended up walking a large nearly empty room. It felt casual and un-official but luckily a lovely lady there was very helpful and clarified things. It all came across as very reputable and reliable and I was chuffed that the first option I looked at seemed perfect. I was looking at somewhere in between £50-£70

Everything seemed perfect and we waiting to hand over the package to our driver in Lomé. The lady was a bit unsure about being able to pay from the UK, but another call to their office confirmed it was possible.

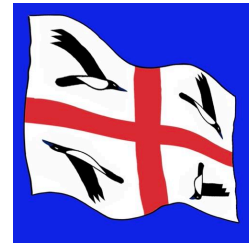
At the last minute after making a final confirmation call, I was told that the payer had to be a Nigerian citizen... this led me to contacting my only Nigerian friend who did not have a citizenship, or at least didn't have the appropriate documentation or desire to remain a citizen. His parents were also very worried that he had been asked to get involved in some Nigerian business.

Another desperate grasp for my girlfriend's friend's friend also fell through as I was then informed by CargoNaija that the payer has to also be the one who physically visits their Lagos office and makes the payment.

This is a little boring I know, but it's part of the story. Anyway, this ruled out CargoNaija which was a shame. I cannot speak badly of them apart from the lack of clarity on this particular aspect of it. Apart from this, they were nicely branded, helpful, communicative and are known to be reliable.

On my final phone call with them I tried to pull the card of 'well I'll have to take my business to another courier service' and the man on the other side of the phone coldly and confidently said something like "yes, ok, do that then"

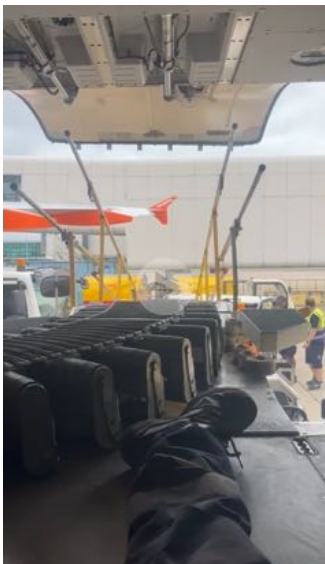
Searching for another courier service!!!!!!!!!!!!!!



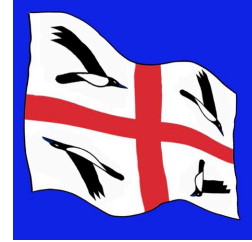
I had staked a lot of trust in CargoNaija. I ended up internet surfing and calling around and trying to find another solution. I work at Gatwick airport for DHL with easyJet planes. I have pockets of 10-20 minutes between most jobs and it gives me time to make these calls and emails throughout the day.

It was quite humorous calling some of these companies. I had to adapt for sure, sometimes it felt worrying, not helped by the massive stereotype of 'Nigerian scammers'. But I came to learn that there was a certain coldness or firmness in every call that I made, and I took it as a good sign, I had no choice though really, I had to take it as a good sign. If you were wanting to scam someone you'd probably make sure you came across as professional. Sometimes it sounded like they called me whilst standing in the middle of a busy main road. Another company I called, the Afro-beats playing in the background was so loud, rendering his voice inaudible and it made my first time trying to coordinate a delivery from Nigeria to UK even harder. If you wanted to scam me, you wouldn't want to come across as this un-professional or inattentive. So I concluded that they were legitimate.

I was being very wary about the professionalism and presence online about this company and others I looked at. I'd go onto Google maps and street view their office location to check it out. After telling Moïse that one of them didn't have a very official looking office (no sign or indication whatsoever) and that I'm not sure whether to trust them, he helpfully snapped me out of it a bit and reminded me that his Charity, the one I reached out to has no 'official' looking headquarters or a large presence, and that this doesn't necessarily mean they are untrustworthy.



County Cargo



I really needed a new company that would let me pay from the UK, so this was the first question I'd be asking on the phone calls. A promising lead I got was County Cargo, they had some positive reviews dealing with shipments from UK to Nigeria but also one review in which a lady claims her valuable package was stolen by the delivery driver and that County Cargo is a scam.

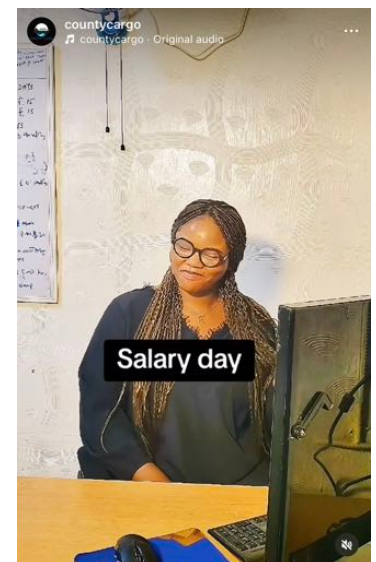
Their replies were often late, their website was clunky and not great, I had to beg them to send me an invoice once everything was agreed on. I did eventually find out that they overweighed the package by around three grams, but at least it was moving forwards and I was 100% sure that I was able to pay from the UK.

It was my best bet, so I proceeded with them. Moïse gave the nod to the driver for the County Cargo address in Lomé and he set off. The AirTag allowed me to keep an eye on its journey, he took the main coastal road through Togo and Benin until he got to Lagos. He went up on a Friday night, and delivered it on the Monday morning.

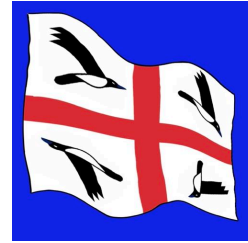
They bullshitted me for 3 weeks telling me it had left (and me seeing that the Airtag had not moved) Then, I was told they have unexpectedly stopped imports due to the company they were using not being up to standard (also bearing in mind I had to contact them every day to get this out of them). The UK office were more on job and it was through them that my refund was co-ordinated... with a delay.

Seeing their instagram reel of 'What's the favourite part of your job ??' Did rub it in a bit afterwards - Log out, Lunch Time and Salary day.

I can tell!!!!!!! Thank you either way County Cargo for being my first experience with Nigerian courier services, being polite and courteous, and for adding some humorous narrative to my story so far.



God Bless Cargo Afrik



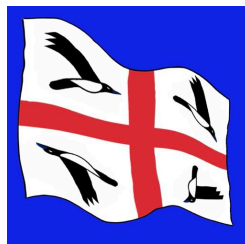
Cargo Afrik had been on my radar already, so I called them. A lovely lady assured me of their excellent service and also the option to pay from the UK (whilst she was standing in what sounded like the very middle of the busiest road in Lagos at rush hour).

Unexpectedly and fortunately their office was in the same complex as County Cargo, meaning there was no risk in the drivers raising their prices or the drive to drop it off. So they picked it up from County Cargo for an extra £5 (which I insisted on because I did not want any more delays), then sent me an invoice immediately and delivered the package, I paid £70.

A faultless process and I am extremely grateful to them. Thank you Cargo Afrik.



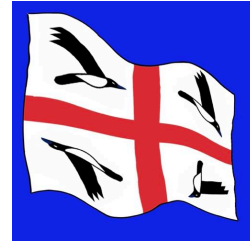
Arrival to the
United Kingdom



Cargo Afrik delivered within the time-frame they had predicted. I went to their Charlton office to pick it up and took this selfie with the box. It was a great day.



Unboxing, Inspection and the decision to bolster



I knew the clothing was very low-grade the whole time... that was the point. I had thought about our desired price range for the eventual sale of the jumpers. As soon as I got the jumpers out of the package, I knew that they could never reach the price mark (£150+) that I had been considering. As a concept, facilitated by the narrative and the aim to raise charitable funds, yes, it could reach this price point. But I want the final jumpers alone to be sturdy enough to charge at this price point.

I needed jumpers to attach these Togo jumpers to. Acquiring appropriately sized second hand jumpers from charity shops, aside from being a nightmare and probably boring, I feel like it would confuse and add too many additional layers of narrative, history and miles which I do not want, as I'd feel compelled to address them. They needed to be consistent, intact and solid. Of course I considered the generic idea (which I thought was genius and revolutionary at the time), of using Shien jumpers, therefore having a sharp contrast between them. I thought that this could lead the project to becoming overloaded and ultimately these 'carrier jumpers' should not be overthought. I remembered from a recent conversation at the DHL Gatwick uniform store that I could buy my uniform after I had used up my designated allowance. I found out each DHL jumper was £6.90. Aside from this being an incredibly competitive price for a sweatshirt or blank, it adds a subtle narrative of this job being what I used to fund this project so far at my end. They are all the same, no previous history or miles, simple logo, sturdy quality and black, perfect for colours bouncing off them. I got 4x3XL + 4x2XL + 13xXL and it came to around £130 which was taken from my week's pay. On the day I collected the 13 XLs, I did clock out a few minutes early so I could make my way to the car park before my colleagues. I didn't want to look like a weird loner who had bought way too many work jumpers for some peculiar reason. That sounds bad, but yes I would've looked odd in some sense.



£36.27

VAT included (where applicable), [plus postage](#)

Vintage DHL Express Black Sweatshirt Medium DHL
Delivery Courier Spell Out Embroidery Logo Crewneck
DHL Airline Hub Sweater Size M

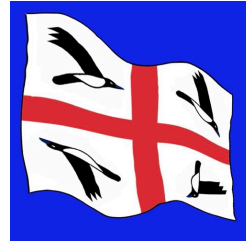
RetroGarmentCo ★★★★★

I found someone had actually sold one of these DHL jumpers on Etsy, for £36.27.

Of course this is tempting but the uniform store lady already had to speak to higher management to approve my request for the 21 jumpers so I won't be getting anymore.

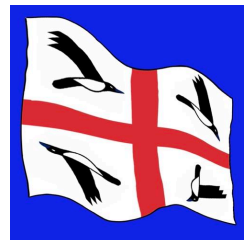
I think something is really off with the DHL logo and it has seemed to slip its way into culture as an aesthetically desirable workwear brand. Something doesn't work with the logo but I don't have the words or effort or technical lingo to explain

KEY THEMES - MOTIFS AND AESTHETICS FOR THE EVENTUAL DESIGNS AND UP-CYCLING OF THE JUMPERS



- Emmanuel Adebayor
- Abloni (2005) a documentary by Alexandre Oktan
- The Abloni (2005) Hoodie
- Street names
- Nana Benz & car sales
- Miscellaneous motifs

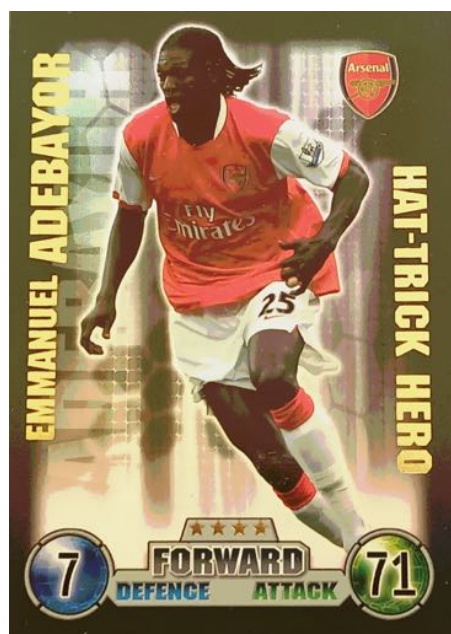
Emmanuel Adebayor



AKA, the only reason I ever knew about Togo. I think this is likely the case for other English lads growing up in the 2000s.

The first plan was simply to stick to this original knowledge I had of Togo, replicating every kit he had worn in the UK, or maybe extended to Europe. I loved how this was a strong link between Togo and the UK which could introduce our partnership. Since then I have other motifs and ideas which excite me, but at this early point, I liked how direct, honest and authentic this could've been. As more of a business, assuming I'd have the patience to do it, this could work very well.

He was most dangerous at Arsenal, but played for FC Metz and AS Monaco before this, and then followed this by playing with Man City, Real Madrid, Spurs, Crystal Palace, Istanbul Basaksehir, Kayserispor, Club Olimpia and AS Semassi.

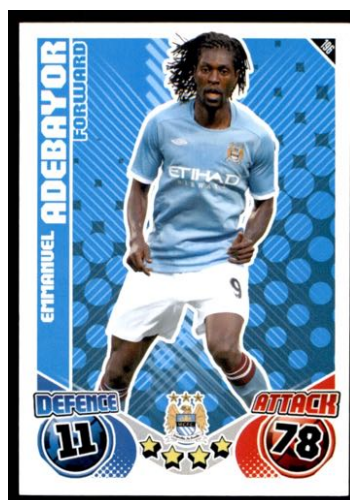


The website 'football kit archive' lists every kit he played in, so I have references to pick from and replicate.

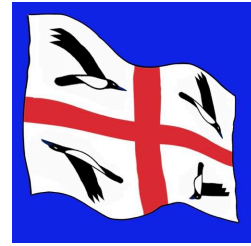
Ultimately I have decided to not centre the project on this, but it will be popping up in the final 20 jumpers for sure.

Maybe in future, whether it is up-cycling second hand like this time or commissioning a Togolese manufacturer to produce new clothes, this could be a great, more mechanical and commercial path to take.

I thought it was important to mention that it seems Adebayor is expected to be doing more to aid Togo in its fight for a new leader. I quote, from Moises WhatsApp message 'Even that fucking football player is an evil guy, but let's use his name on the project to make money, don't worry about him'



Abloni (2005) by Alexandre Oktan



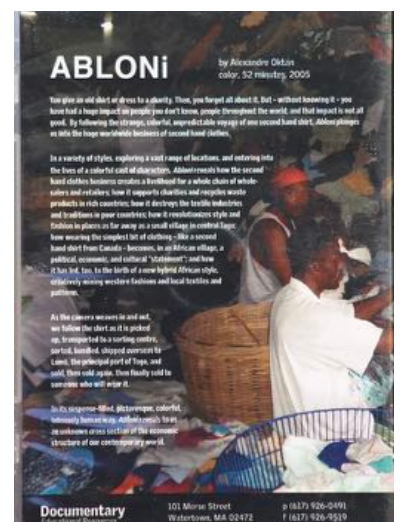
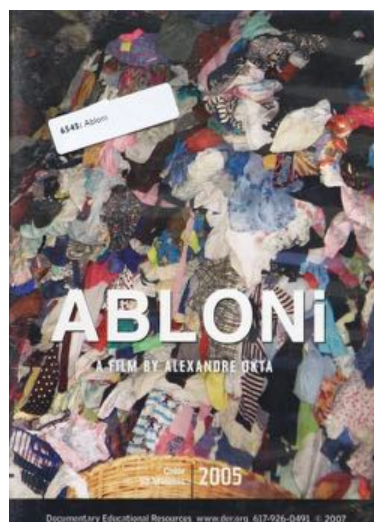
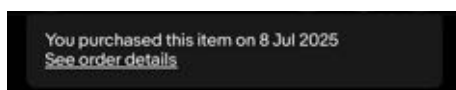
I was researching around the terms used in West Africa for second hand clothing and mainly around the terms 'dead white mans clothing'. I liked the idea of repackaging these second hand jumpers bluntly as Dead White mans clothes and selling it back to the West basically. It kind of plays on the feeling of previously mentioned Amah Ayivi but also is influenced by my adoration for Paolo Wood's Pepe project, in which he documented the washed up, crappy t-shirts which made their way to Haiti from the US after a natural disaster. I liked the idea of mirroring Paolo woods and creating thee dead White mans clothes jumpers and getting unsuspecting people to model for them, perhaps creating humorous images for West African viewers. This isn't eliminated from potentially being involved and it's still lingering around.

Anyway that didn't progress much further and the research into the terminology lead me to the word Abloni. When I typed the word Abloni into Google, the AI suggestion said that I must be referring to this 2005 documentary, 'Abloni' by Alexandre Oktan. It is a French spoken documentary which follows a piece of clothing from being donated in Canada all the way to its eventual arrival and ultimate sale in Lomé. Watching it free online was impossible, watching it by paying was extremely expensive or hard. It's usually possible to find what you want to watch somewhere and somehow on the internet but it really wasn't happening. The one documentary which centres around Lomé seemed to be too expensive or out of reach

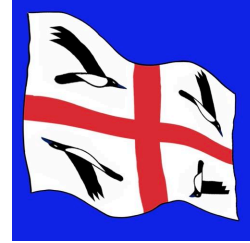
I found the single physical copy of it that was being sold online. It was listed on Ebay for \$2.94 by Fulton County Mall. I did have to pay about \$20 delivery but for me it was so worth it, and still a lot cheaper this way. Moïse sarcastically congratulated my business acumen when I told him how much I paid for it. It did make me laugh when he did this but I do get a bit obsessive and it felt like a real win. It's mine forever now.

Before even watching it, before it had been delivered, I was flooded with thoughts of how I could use this documentary toward the jumpers I receive. I thought about piggybacking on it, some vague ideas to bootleg it and the kind of stills that there might be for me to sample.

Ultimately it was a great insight which fed me information that I have since sprung things off. Ofcourse I also got it copied and digitised so I will never not have access to it and I was able to send it to Moïse too.



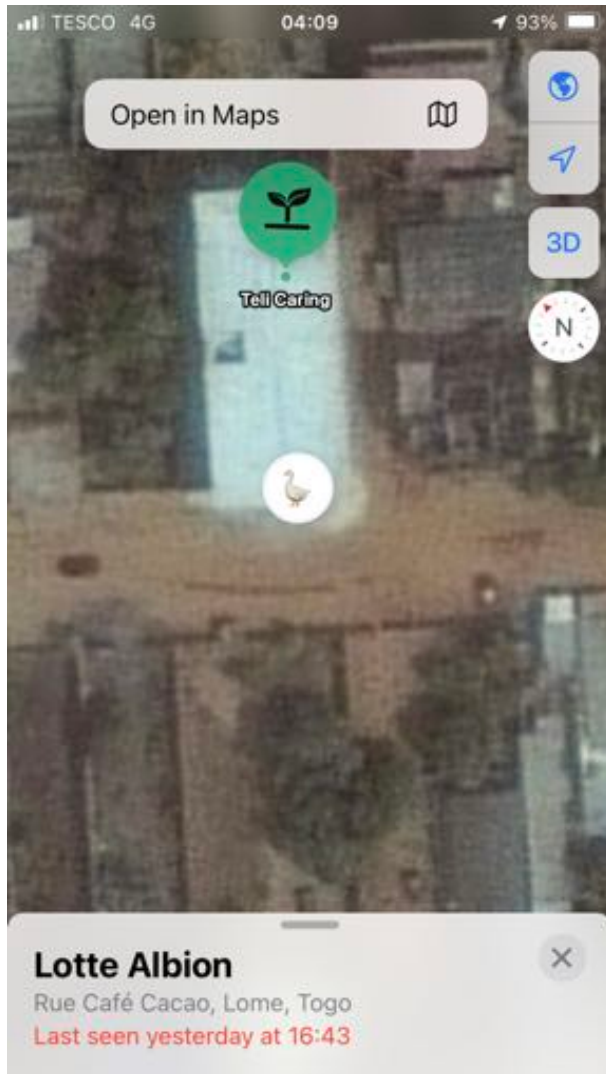
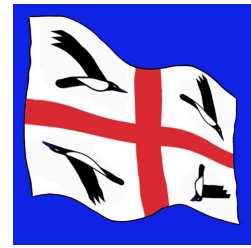
The Abloni (2005) Hoodie



Thanks to a bootlegger in Brighton, a man whose front door and house looks like he's up to bootleggy or legal grey area business, I got 30 copies of the Abloni DVD copied for £40. He copied them onto DVDs of all different qualities. This hoodie will have the 30 DVDs attached to it with zip-ties and will be delivered to all the stops the original jumper (Lotte Albion) made on its way to Togo. It will then be sent back in the same exact way that the package was, driven through Benin to Lagos, reaching Cargo Afrik, and then over to Charlton. These DVDs will be unprotected and will replicate the cycle of the clothing in this project. The journey of the hoodie, whilst it is loosely placed in a delivery bag, will inevitably lead to damage and therefore glitches in the DVDs once played. With the help of a DVD drive which ChatGPT assured me had the best reading capabilities of errors, I will find out what this journey has done to a DVD about the journey of clothing to Togo. Not too sure where this will lead me, whether its purely investigative and will inform another idea, or it will just accompany the sale of the final jumpers in an exhibition or hopefully have the glitched stills painted onto the jumpers. What I do know though, is that it needs to be done. First stop Newhaven.



Street names like Rue Café Cacao



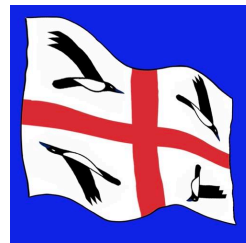
Rue Café Cacao is the name of the street that the Lotte Albion jumper travelled to originally. Aside from being an awesome name for a road, it is a simple and crucial detail which we could rely on for narrative and design. A simple US College font could do the job, or Moïse could take photos of the legitimate road signs present and I replicate the design. I wouldn't rely on this for the whole project, as I feel the project is too rich to limit it to this. Maybe they will end up in every design maybe not.

Below is a Japanese brand called Shoo-La-Rue, that gained viral social media attention after it was noted that they had created generic location t-shirts of 'random' Scottish places. I like how it is now like an unofficial Japanese and Scottish collab, not overdone and not thought about too deeply, just chuck a basic logo on a t-shirt of a Scottish place. In this case it would be an English brand chucking on the names of some streets in Togo. Rue Cafe Cacao is really the inception of the project, the reason it works so well and it gave us a real reason to collab, like fate perhaps? The richness of the project is sparked by this location for sure, its special.

Somehow it should be included.



Nana Benz & Moïse's car sales



I'm pretty sure I learnt about Nana Benz from the Abloni documentary. I need to finish this first draft by tomorrow so i'll keep it short and crappy. They were the at the very forefront of the west African textile trade, trading beautiful traditional textiles and making very good money from it. As you might have gathered, this money lead them to owning and driving Mercedes-Benz cars.

Apart from the historical significance and admiration I have for them, it serves as a parallel to the local women who we bought the jumpers from to customise. The women me and Moïse are dealing with instead deal Abloni from the West. The role of the vendor has changed in modern day Togo and West Africa and the homegrown textile and clothing industry is weak. I guess I'd like to honour the women who do a somewhat equivalent or substituted role in the present day. Right now it seems it is more about getting by than thriving and driving Mercedes Benz like these tycoons of the past.

On the topic of cars, and this initial parallel of the modern day vendors and Nana Benz, I'm also interested in one of Moïse's hustles, selling second-hand cars.

Selling cars in the volatile state that the country is in, is very hard, and slow at the moment. Why would you want to purchase a car when you may be fleeing any second, you need to see how the protests play out and ensure the safety of your country before committing.

These ad-hoc, simply snapped, Whatsapp advertised cars of various makes are the cars that my modern day equivalent of Nana Benz is involved in, my clothing dealer in Togo.

Moïse is my friend who is a local, and for me, he is the clothing trader and is at the forefront of Togolese jumper collection if you know what I mean. But he is not driving a Benz, he is hustling and selling these second hand cars.



AI Overview

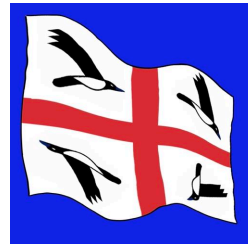
"Nana Benz" refers to a powerful group of female textile traders in Togo, named for their wealth and their ability to afford luxury Mercedes-Benz cars. They played a critical role in the Dutch wax print fabric trade in West Africa, controlling distribution, selecting patterns, and even naming the fabrics, which significantly impacted the Togolese economy and the broader African fabric market. A contemporary group also

Miscellaneous motifs options



Togolese newspaper logos, carrier bag imagery, stills from our WhatsApp videos, the photos of Togolese food that Moïse sends me, Aamron, previous AirTag locations, West African franc design, un-glitched stills from Abloni (2005), embroider the original email I sent Moïse and the first reply he sent me, replicate Moïse's jumper he gave me (south pole sports), the logos of the courier services I contacted, anti-gnassingbe imagery, protest screenshots painted, Teli Caring logo, West African translations of 'dead white man's clothes' and modelled on unsuspecting non-West-African models, replicate the cut-out of the original 'Lotte Albion' jumper which arrived in Togo, the goat which chills in his garden waiting until his demise for a Christmas meal, the mountain road in the north of Togo Moïse has had a fear of since childhood, the original charity donation container at the bottom of elm grove, Wilcox (the sorting centre it went to before leaving to Togo), magnification of details I spot in the footage after carefully watching through.

The Vendors names



Moïse returned to the female vendors he originally bought the jumpers from. After giving three selected vendors our goodwill payment, in total around £40 each, Moïse requested some information from them. Our priority was their names and portraits. The first lady thought I was a scammer, the second lady was a bit hesitant and the 3rd lady's son was at her stall that day. He seemed enthusiastic, interested and a little confused.

It turns out Moïse had told them, or at least one lady that I had been doing work in this area for a few years and I had already visited Ghana. He said that I was setting up an organisation and I'd like them to be involved. I think he should've just stuck to the complete truth, but hey, he is the local and the man doing the ground work so I'm just here writing down what happened. I think we both know in future though that we will not use this 'extending the truth' method again.

I was just very grateful he approached them and asked for information. They were going to receive the goodwill payment either way, and if they did not want to give information they would go down as 'female vendor 1' or something. No photo is a shame but I also understand why they were not willing. Anyway these three names have been condensed into, Yasmine, Odi and Mummy.

This may end up being the brand's name or collection's name, maybe I'll create fictional shops and logos. I don't know yet, have to let it mull in my mind but for now I need to get this finished and print it, ready for slow fashion week.

Ouedraogo Rafika Yasmine

Togolese

Odibeze Amarachucku

Igbo Nigerian

Ezeafakaego precious alias
Mummy

Nigerian Igbo

20:20

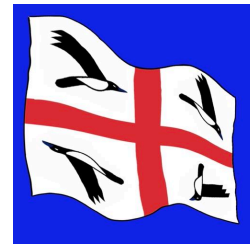
So, let's say

Yas or Yasmine
Togolese

Odi or Odibeze
Nigerian
+ even I know that the spelling
should be Chukwu right?

'Mummy'
Nigerian
Actually her nickname, but in the
market, referring to her by her birth
name would get you nowhere

Video Call



Moïse suggested that he would call me when going to talk to the vendors. I kind of knew how it would go, with me not speaking any French or Ewe. It was definitely worth it though despite this. Nothing revolutionary came from this, just some smiles, little waves, acknowledgment of one another and misunderstood verbal communication

Moïse questioned whether we use these screenshots as the images of them, originally planning to put them on the labels of the jumpers. He told me they were timid to share their photos and information originally but before his departure and subsequently, the goodwill payment, late enthusiasm and appreciation was shown. We'll be considering whether we use these screenshots within the project or not. By speaking to Moïse, we can ensure we remain tasteful and respectful whilst also doing the utmost to raise funds for Teli Caring and the vendors.

Yasmine

Odizebe

Mummy's son



The end..... until December, when hopefully a much nicer version of this book is available to buy in the Brighton Art Book Fair. And obviously I still need to actually customise these jumpers! I never want this project to end, but at some point it will. Start saving up and tell your millionaire friends who love funding documentaries that I want to become the Anthony Bourdain of jumpers and second-hand markets so keep an eye on me and stay tuned. I'd love to hear everyone's thoughts. This is just the first package, there will be more to come as this partnership strengthens and becomes more seamless. Sales of the jumpers will all go to Togo, directly to the vendors, in Moïse's pocket for the hard work and enthusiasm and a joint pot between Moïse and Franco Bollo that he will use to co-ordinate and fund the next.



This goat in Moïse's back garden will meet its demise in December for a feast. It's one of my favourite screenshots. By the time this book is in the Brighton Art Book Fair, this goat will have a week or so left before he makes a cracking little Togolese dish. I wanted a cool picture for the back of this book and also it links to the December time frame. God bless this goat.