



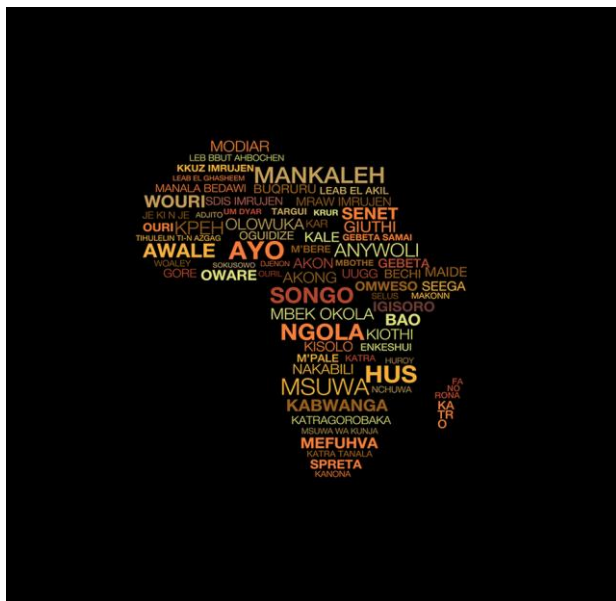
STATE OF THE  
**AFRICAN  
DIASPORA**

# NEWSLETTER

A GLOBAL STATE WITHOUT BORDERS NEWSLETTER

SPECIAL ISSUE: AWALÉ!

N° 8, MAY 2021



*Her Excellency Brigitte Decour, Ambassador of the State of the African Diaspora,  
organizer of the International Awalé Championship*

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**EDITORIAL**



*By Dr. Louis-Georges Tin  
Prime Minister of the State of the African Diaspora*

Awalé is a game that is widespread in almost all of Africa and is representative of the continent. It is a great game of strategy, which already existed in Egypt, at the time of the Pharaohs. It is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is to Africa what ‘Go’ is to Asia, and ‘Chess’ to the Arab world.

Under the leadership of Her Excellency Brigitte Decour, Ambassador of the State of the African Diaspora, for this month was organised the first edition of the International Awalé Championship. It took place in nearly 20 countries around the world, from South Africa to Denmark, Brazil, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Guinea Bissau, Morocco, Spain, France, etc.

The State of the Diaspora is proud to participate in the promotion of African heritage, and on May 25, International Africa Day, the winners received their prizes in Lumi, our national currency.

Viva Awalé !



## Presentation of Awalé



*Shamba Bolongongo, king of Kuba, in front of an awalé tray (1620)*

Awalé is a very old game. It already existed 3500 years ago, in ancient Egypt, as revealed by archaeological excavations. It is also found in the remains of the Kingdom of Aksum, in present-day Ethiopia, which existed between the 1st century BC and the 10th century AD. It is mentioned in the *Kitâb al-Aghâni*, or Book of Songs, composed in the 10th century, and gathering poems or songs from the Arab-Muslim world. In 1620, Shamba Bolongongo, the King of Kuba (a kingdom located in the present-day DRC), who presented himself as a man of peace, asked an artist to sculpt a statuette in his effigy: the figurine depicts him sitting in front of an Awalé tray. In 1684, the British orientalist Thomas Hyde published *De Ludis Orientalibus Libi Duo* in which he also mentions the game. In short, the historical evidence is old and numerous.

Awalé is a game that belongs to the board games called "Mancala". It is played on a wooden board, often stylized, with zoomorphic or anthropomorphic representations, which sometimes make them true works of art. Two rows of holes are dug into the board, with the players taking their places on either side of the board. But you can make a real Awalé board with a simple egg tray - websites explain how to do it very simply. Sometimes, the holes are even dug in the ground, so that you can play without any expense.



Awalé is also a sowing game. Indeed, the objective is to sow and collect seeds, which are often from the *Caesalpinia bonduc* tree, a kind of flamboyant pod. In some countries, shells, marbles or pebbles are used instead. In any case, it is a matter of sowing and harvesting. Seeds are placed and moved in the holes, and collected according to more or less complex rules, depending on the version and tradition. The goal of the game is to accumulate as many seeds as possible.



*Awalé seed (Caesalpinia Bonduc)*

Nowadays, Awalé is more and more practiced in the world. Historians, ethnographers, mathematicians and computer scientists are working on the subject. Books on the best strategies are published; websites allow to play it online; competitions exist at the local level - they are often very popular. Recently, a symposium on the subject was held at UNESCO. It was organized with the famous publishing house « Présence Africaine », under the direction of the intellectual Martial Ze Belinga. The



opening speech was given by the assistant director general of the institution. According to UNESCO, *Awalé* is the best game of all time.

### **Awalé : Places, Names and Symbols**



*Stylized game board*

*Awalé* is a game that belongs to the board games called "Mancala". It is played on a wooden board, often stylized, with zoomorphic or anthropomorphic representations, which sometimes make them true works of art. Two rows of holes are dug into the board, with the players taking their places on either side of the board. But you can make a real *Awalé* board with a simple egg tray - websites explain how to do it very simply. Sometimes, the holes are even dug in the ground, so that you can play without any expense.

The game is referred to by many different names: "*awalé*", "*awélé*" or "*awari*" in Ivory Coast, "*wali*" or "*wôli*" in Mali, "*aji*" in Benin, "*ayo*" in Nigeria, "*sija*" in Chad, "*igisoro*" in Rwanda, "*wure*" in Senegal, "*ouril*" or "*uril*" in Cape Verde, "*owaré*" in Ghana, "*kay*" in Haiti, "*hoyito*" in Santo Domingo, "*wari*" in the Caribbean, "*adi*", "*adita-ta*" or "*adji-boto*" in Surinam, etc. In total, there are more than 200 different names for the game, which testifies to its extraordinary spread and vitality.

The seeds evoke sowing and harvests, as *Awalé* is a game of sowing that represents fertility, wealth, prosperity and abundance. Piling up seeds in the cells (holes) during the game is a reserve to avoid starvation. For the Maasai, *Awalé* is linked to Sindillo, son of Maitoumbe, the first human being, as the game refers to the genesis of the world.

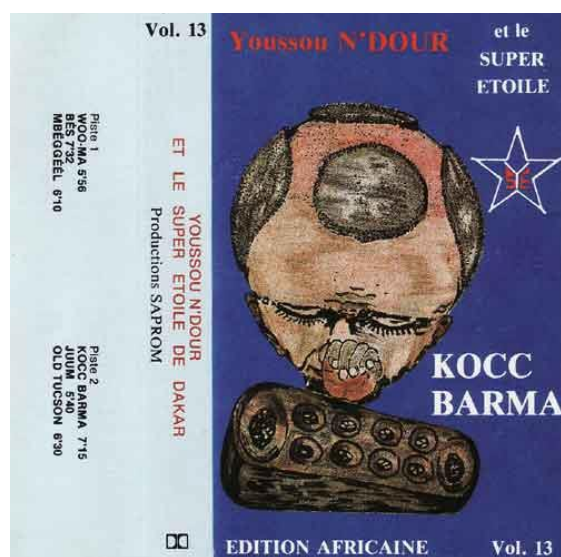
In other traditions, the game is associated with a number of rules related to gender, masculine or feminine, or to





various social groups, farmers, hunters, etc. According to some ethnographers, it is also linked to certain cosmologies, such as that of the Dogon. Among the Aladians of the Ivory Coast, it should only be played during the day, because in the evening, the tray had to be left outside, so that the gods could play. In fact, for a long time, Awalé was a sacred game, associated with the nobility, the elite or secret societies. But it has long since been democratized. It is now played in schoolyards, in families, in the village square and on the internet.

### An Ethical, strategic and mathematical game



The game of Awalé is linked to a clear ethical concerns. It is based both on the principle of competition (because everyone wants to win), but on a certain form of benevolence (because one must respect one's opponent). Thus, although one must have more seeds than the opponent, it is forbidden to starve the player against whom one is playing. Where, as in chess, some games involve killing the opponent, it is forbidden to do so in Awalé: if someone has no more seeds, one must absolutely feed him, that is to say give him marbles, sow seeds in his camp, so that he can harvest again. In addition to generosity, Awalé also promotes an ethic of responsibility, because in the game, you reap what you sow. And one must store seeds for the next move, which invites foresight and anticipation, a crucial notion in this ethic of foresight.

Many African figures testify to the high ethical value attached to the Awalé. If, at the beginning of the 17th century, Shamba Bolongongo, the king of Kuba, asked to be

represented with an Awalé tray in front of him, it was because he wanted to leave the image of a king of peace. In fact, he had forbidden the use of the shongo, the traditional spear used in the region. He said: "You must not kill men, women or children. Are they not the children of Chembe?" That is to say, of God ? On the contrary, he sought to develop the arts of peace, such as raffia weaving and the Awalé. It is therefore not by chance that he wishes to leave to posterity the image of a king playing Awalé. The game has an ethical and political dimension. Among the great moral figures associated with Awalé, there is also Kocc Barma Fall, the great Wolof sage, who lived in Senegal at the beginning of the 17th century. He taught under the shade of tall trees using a variation of the Awalé, and in this way he prepared his disciples' minds for reflection and wisdom: the game is a propaedeutic for life.

Obviously, Awalé is also a great game of strategy. Contrary to most card games, there is no chance in Awalé: everything is a matter of tactics. Because of the combinations it allows and the calculations it presupposes, it requires a great capacity for abstraction. This is why, in certain regions of pre-colonial Ghana, the succession of kings was organized around the game of Awalé: the best candidate for supreme power was obviously the one who won the tournament. As a system of examination and probation, the game was literally king-making. And in the same way, the rulers of the region trained their generals before the great battles, in order to strengthen their tactical abilities on the field. Even today, the winning strategies are taught in books. Thus, in 2000, Jean Retschitzki published a book by L'Harmattan on the *Strategies of Awele players*.



Finally, as a game requiring calculation, memory, and intelligence, *Awalé* is often used in educational settings. In small classes, it is used to facilitate the learning of numbering. But in more advanced classes, it is used to work on more advanced skills. In their "Plaidoyer pour l'exploitation didactique des jeux de semilles", Carrefour de l'éducation, n°26, 2008, p161), J. RETSCHITZKI and C. WICHT evoke "the potentialities of the *Awalé* to illustrate the combinatorial analysis, the reduction of a relational graph, the calculation of probabilities and the determination of the winning strategy by recurrence".

### Rules of the game

-Players stand face to face, each in front of their 6 squares. Each square contains 4 seeds.

-The objective is to collect a maximum of seeds

-The player who is going to start the game is drawn by lot and the game is played in turn.

-The player drawn chooses a square and takes all the seeds

-From left to right, he places the seeds in each of the following boxes, one by one.

-The player never places his seeds in the square where they were just collected; if this should happen, he must skip that square.

-If the square in which the player places his last seed is an opponent's square, and if it contains 2 or 3 seeds, then the player picks up the marbles in that square (single pick).

-If the square immediately preceding the one where the capture has just taken place is also located in the opponent's camp, and also contains 2 or 3 marbles, the player also takes them (multiple capture).

-As soon as a square no longer meets these two conditions (opponent's square and contains 2 or 3 marbles), the capture stops and the player passes the turn to his opponent.

\* If a player starts with more than 11 seeds, he jumps after 1 turn the square from which he started.

\* A player cannot play twice in a row; if the player whose turn it is has to skip his turn, the game stops and the seeds are counted.

The seeds remaining in the holes are to be counted with those already collected. The one who has the most seeds wins.

Given the extraordinary diffusion of the game, there are sometimes different rules, linked to various traditions or cosmogonies. Thus, among the Dogon, the *awali*, which is called *Wali*, is declined in three forms:

- the female game or game of fertility,
- the male game or game of war,
- the mixed game or game of food.



*Akan artifact, weight to weigh gold, in the form of an Awalé (Toulouse museum)*



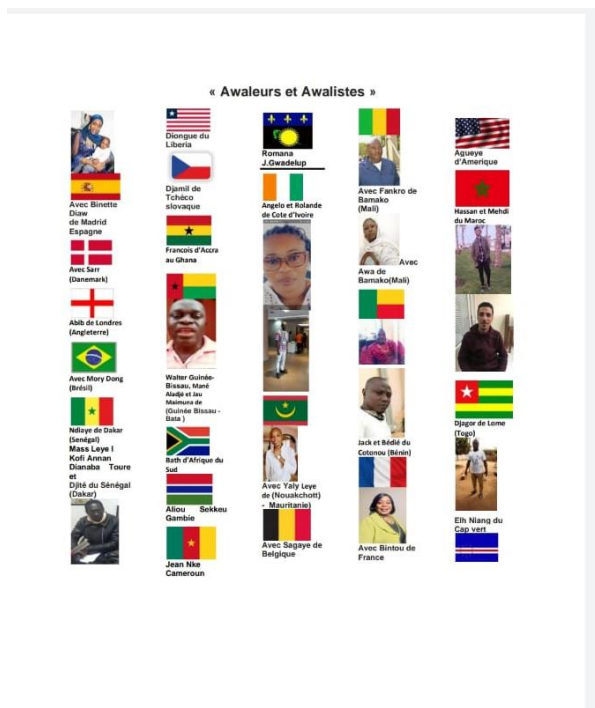
## The International Awalé Championship

Under the leadership of Brigitte Decour, the State of the African Diaspora is launching this year's International Awalé Championship.

In the preliminary phase, national competitions will identify the best players in each country. In the final phase, the competition takes place over 2 days. The pre-selected players compete against each other 2 by 2, and the organizers make sure that the top players do not compete against each other during the first day.

At the end of this day, 11 players are qualified for the second day. To these 11 winners, we must add the 5 best runners-up. This gives 16 players who are qualified to go to the 8th final. At this stage, the game continues as it is done for soccer competitions, with quarter-finals, semi-finals, and then the grand final.

Here is the list of countries participating in the championship:



## Why May 25th ?



On May 25, 1963, thirty nations met in Addis Ababa, under the aegis of Haile Selassie, and decided to create the Organization of African Union. Since then, this emblematic date has become the International Day of Africa. It is obviously a day of celebration for the State of the African Diaspora, alongside other emblematic dates that we also celebrate:

July 1: National Day of the State of the African Diaspora, created on July 1, 2018,

August 17: "Marcus Garvey Day", Marcus Garvey was born on August 17, 1887,

October 19: "Nanny Day", named after Nanny, heroine of the Maroons, who won the victory against the British troops in Jamaica.

It is therefore the date of May 25, 2021 that the State of the African Diaspora has chosen to award the prizes in Lumis to the winners of the International Awalé Championship. Although the competition is international, the event is in Côte d'Ivoire, as the country can rightly claim to be the international capital of Awalé. Most of the trays purchased in the world are made in Grand Bassam, the former capital of the country. Awalé in Côte d'Ivoire is not just a game: the name has also been chosen by a fashion brand in the country, a tourist residence, a computer company, a trading company, an exotic goods store, and even a gold mining company.





In short, in Côte d'Ivoire, Awalé is everywhere! It is therefore there that Brigitte Decour, Ambassador of the State of the African Diaspora, and organizer of the International Awalé Championship on May 25, had to celebrate Africa and Awalé in the same movement.



### Preparations for the International Awale Championship



In all the countries participating in the championship, the organizers have put in place the necessary preparations.

In Guinea-Bissau, these preparations have taken a remarkable scale. In the country, awale known as Hurr is practiced throughout the country, especially in the villages. Currently, the game is a little less practiced, but when the championship organized by the State of the African Diaspora was announced, several specialists of this game decided squarely to create the structure of a national federation of the game, with representation in all provinces. They held meetings with the elders of the different regions that make up Guinea-Bissau. And this was done with the support of the board of directors of the Friendship São Paulo Educational Centre's Association of Parents, Friends and Guardians, and through a group of young leaders, which allowed for a fruitful dialogue between the generations.

Another example : in Côte d'Ivoire, where Brigitte Decour, the State Ambassador of the African Diaspora, was present, preparations were also intense. Mrs. Decour met on the one hand with the local authorities, in order to ensure the presence, on the day, of several officials, and in particular the Minister of Sports, the Minister of Culture, the Mayor of Bassam, the Queen Mother of Bassam, the representatives of the nationals of the ECOWAS of Bassam; on the other hand, she met with several leaders of the State of the African Diaspora in Côte d'Ivoire such as Sidibe Nouhon, or Bolou Bi Olivier Lazare Goé, who also contributed to the organization. For several weeks, Ms. Decour has not ceased to circulate everywhere, and has moved actively on the ground: she went in particular to the National Museum of the costume of Grand Bassam, emblematic place for the Championship, because it is the conservatory of the African traditions, and moreover, on May 25, a giant Awale of 25 kilograms was given to the museum. In addition, the Ambassador of the Diaspora State also visited a natural area in Ivory Coast, where the trees whose seeds are used for the Awale are planted and protected.







## The May 25, 2021 Program

The May 25 event took place in Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire. The program began with a procession, and a gathering at the roundabout of the city center of Grand-Bassam at 10:30 am.

11h00 : Arrival of the march at the cultural center J.B MOCKEY of Grand-Bassam

11h00 -11h30 : Animation

11h30 : Welcome of the godmother and her delegation

Performance of the national anthem of Ivory Coast "l'Abidjanaise »

12:05 : Presentation by the master of ceremony

12:10 : Libation

12:15 : Interlude

12h20 : Various speeches

13h00 : Handover of the torch to the president of ANAA by the Minister of State for the edition of 2022 and Delivery of diplomas

13h30 : Cocktail

End of the ceremony

On D-Day, as planned, the participants handed over to the Museum of Costume a giant Awale, weighing 25 kg. Then, at the end of the international championship, the winner was crowned: the lucky champion is called Ekra Kouame Noël, and he is the deputy director of cultural animation at the National Museum of Costume. The Prime Minister of the African Diaspora State made a point of calling him on the phone to offer his congratulations.



The 2021 Champion made the following statement: "I am particularly happy to have won. I had to use a lot of patience, cunning and intelligence to defeat such a tough opponent. I congratulate the State of the African Diaspora for having had this initiative, which is very beautiful, and which must be perpetuated. And I hope that Ivory Coast will support this initiative more in the future," he added. Dr. Louis-Georges Tin took the opportunity to announce the good news: a payment of 10 000 USD in Lumis was given to him as a reward for his merits and his victory.



As for Mrs. Brigitte Decour, Ambassador of the State of the African Diaspora, she declared herself satisfied with the holding of the events. It was indeed a great moment to promote the African heritage. Moreover, she declared herself ready for the editions to come: "We will organize competitions in the African countries and in the Diaspora in order to set up an international confederation of the game of Awale. This organization will be the prelude to the Pan-African Olympics that we will organize in 2023, in Liberia, under the aegis of the African Diaspora State and its Prime Minister, Dr. Louis-Georges Tin," said the Ambassador.

### Awalé online



Nowadays, Awalé has conquered the digital space. It is available on Google Play, and on several other platforms. It can be played by two people, or played against the computer. Often, the computer can evolve to several levels of mastery.

One can find games online, see the games of the masters to study, best moves and strategies, see the rankings of the best players in real time, practice online and progress.

Depending on the case, the digital boards mimic African traditions, are inspired by the aesthetics of cartoons, or move towards the electronic and abstract elegance of logic games. Between tradition and modernity, it is Africa that metamorphoses before our eyes...



*Ekra Kouame Noël  
The winner of the Awale Championship*





## Awalé and the Pan-African Olympiads in 2023



The history of these physical and cultural practices will be shared during these Pan-African Olympics. In this sense, the 2021 International Awalé Championship is an outpost or a preview of the Pan-African Olympiads that we will organise in 2023.



The International Awalé Championship is a stand-alone event in 2021, but it is planned that by 2023, the competition will be part of the Pan-African Olympiads. These games will bring together participants from Africa and the Diaspora, in an event organized by the State of the African Diaspora in Liberia. Indeed, the Liberian Minister of Sports, as seen below, has invited the State of the African Diaspora to « host the Pan African Games in Liberia ».

March 2, 2021

Dr. Louis-Georges Tin  
**PRIME MINISTER**  
State of the African Diaspora  
Paris, France

Dear Dr. Tin:

I present compliments and wish to recall that on May 18, 2020, the Republic of Liberia signed a Cooperation Agreement with the State of the African Diaspora.

In furtherance thereof, for and on behalf of the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Liberia, I request the partnership of the State of the African Diaspora (SOAD) to organize and host the Panafrican Games in Liberia.

Meanwhile, we look forward to a cordial working relationship in the premise.

Sincerely,

  
D. Zeoggar Wilson  
**MINISTER**

These Games aim to promote the culture of Pan-African countries. This is why, beyond the classic sports, such as soccer or running, this competition seeks to promote traditional practices such as capoeira, African high jump, percussion (from the djembe of Mali to the steel band of Trinidad, through Brazilian batucadas) and street dance battles (which come from young urban African-Americans in the United States and elsewhere). Intellectual and strategic disciplines such as Awalé will also be included.