

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

# The Intersections of Global Africa

The 2024 Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association (ASA) in Chicago could not have come at a more pivotal time for education. Africanist scholars, practitioners, and government officials descended on the city to participate in more than 350 sessions, lectures, and special events several weeks after the reelection of Donald Trump. The Annual Meeting brought together members from more than fifty countries around the world. They braved the December cold to gather for critical conversations about higher education, immigrant communities, international collaboration, and the need to reject essentialist perspectives on Africa. With the largest attendance since the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chicago meeting enjoyed an exceptional number of intimate assemblies and special convenings. The community building and sororal care enacted throughout the week recalled the philosophy and activism of Audre Lorde and reminded members of their interconnectedness across institutional, disciplinary, and geographical distances. Most importantly, the Annual Meeting provided space and time to contemplate, negotiate, and embody the historical and political imperatives of the field in an otherwise uncertain institutional moment.

The thematic essay for the ASA's 67th Annual Meeting, "Global Africa," positions Africa at the nexus of global relations, histories, and imaginaries. The piece asserts that "Africa is central to the understanding, analysis, and interpretation of the major global issues of today" and calls for "transdisciplinary, ontologically plural, and multimethod investigations" to identify and address these issues. This prescient exposition attracted many thought-provoking and innovative sessions surrounding Africa's diasporas, Global Blackness, the African immigrant experience in the United States, and identity construction in a global digital context, among many others. These sessions also built on previous meeting themes and discussions, and in the interim inspired the symposium *African Studies and Black Studies: Intersections, Genealogies and New Directions* hosted in early November at Duke University. The symposium convened scholars from North America and Africa for transdisciplinary conversations on the intersection of African studies and Black studies. Salient ASA member presentations included Jordanna Maton's work on masculinity and the *évolué*, Walter C. Rucker's work on mnemonic praxis, and Natasha Shivji's

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work on Pan-Africanism in the Indian Ocean. These exciting discussions are part of a forthcoming *African Studies Review* forum that will further underscore the important intersection of these fields and expand on the themes of the Annual Meeting.

The ASA program in Chicago saw an expansion of sessions exploring Africa's diaspora. Whereas transatlantic slavery was at the foreground of such sessions in years past, this year the evident focal point was global Blackness. The West African Research Association organized a captivating interdisciplinary session entitled "Global Blackness: Intersections of Kinship, Identity, Agency, Politics, Soundscapes, and Memoryscapes," which highlighted global Black contributions and resonances within creative industries such as Nollywood and Afrobeat. The next day, former ASA President Aliko Songolo chaired a roundtable discussion in French entitled "Global Black French Studies: Exploring Global Histories and Thought." The dynamic exchange explored the creative and fluid intersections of African, Black, and Francophone identities, serving as an addendum to the inspiring bilingual Global Black French Studies conference hosted at Boston College in October. This innovative session eschewed English, reminding participants that the Annual Meeting is a space to embrace linguistic diversity.

Several impressive multipart sessions further explored Africa's global intersections, including an extensive six-part series entitled "New Directions in Africa--China Studies." The series began with a unique "Interdisciplinary Book Salon," which placed new methodological and theoretical publications in conversation to explore shared themes of power, racial capitalism, and postcolonial identities. Over the course of three days, the series spanned creative, linguistic, economic, and political traditions and transformations, providing a fascinating and inclusive overview of contemporary issues in the field. Jonathon Earle (Center College) organized a well-attended three-part series on "African Histories of the Holocaust," featuring nine papers that addressed myriad underrepresented historical perspectives. Notable contributions included Matteo D'Avanzo's work on Ethiopian Jews under Italian fascism, Marta Millar's work on scientific racism in Namibian museums, Timothy Longman's work on the limitations of Rwanda/Holocaust comparisons, and William F.S. Miles's work on Holocaust discourses during the Nigerian Civil War. The series did an exceptional job of weaving African social and political histories with contemporary discourses on the current Israel-Hamas war—illuminating African perspectives on the ongoing conflict.

Sessions addressing digital communities and identities were not as prominent as in past years, but a few exceptional events addressed this waning trend. The Carnegie Corporation of New York's sponsored session—"African Identities Amidst Urbanism, Migration, and the Digital"—featured five African scholars who explored the ways in which identities are (re)constructed in transnational religious, diasporic, and online spaces. The session's transdisciplinary meditation on "Who Is an African?" spoke insightfully to the theme of Global Africa and reminded audiences that global solidarities can be powerful conduits for activism and resistance. ASA's newest affiliate organization, the Africa Indigenous Knowledge Research Network, sponsored a four-part series that similarly explored indigenous knowledge systems and communal entrepreneurship as modes of activism among youth, women, and others. These sessions were part of

an exciting expansion of scholarship addressing African philosophy and thought, a trend we hope will continue as we prepare to celebrate Frantz Fanon's 100th birthday in 2025.

Besides exceptional scholarship, the Chicago meeting enjoyed more formal celebrations than usual. In addition to the many memorial sessions celebrating the lives and careers of colleagues, special events highlighted new research and fellowship funds announced earlier in the year. ASA Distinguished Africanist and longtime ASA member Ken Harrow was honored at several events, including the newly renamed Sembène-Kelani Film Prize screening, which was accompanied by the inspiring remarks of Ken's widow Elizabeth Harrow. The couple jointly endowed the Ken Harrow ASA Film Fund—including the Sembène-Kelani Film Prize—earlier in 2024 to promote African films and film scholarship. Allen and Barbara Isaacman attended the meeting to celebrate the launch of their ASA Samora and Graça Machel Presidential Fellowship Fund, which will bring African scholars to US institutions and to the ASA Annual Meeting in 2025. The fellowship launch was punctuated by a special message of gratitude from Graça Machel during the awards ceremony. Following the announced expansion of the Mahmoud Mohamed Taha Student Travel Awards in October, Steve Howard traveled to Chicago to meet the inaugural cohort of grantees. Over coffee, students discussed the grant's impact on their dissertation research as well as the significance of attending the Annual Meeting. Students and emerging scholars comprised 40 percent of Annual Meeting presenters in 2024, a sharp increase from the consistent 30 percent of years past. The future of travel funding was a frequent topic throughout the event.

The Presidential Lecture afforded attendees the chance to reflect upon the contributions that African women are making in appointed political roles, particularly as cabinet ministers. Focused on West Africa, the lecture more broadly considered the challenges to women seeking and holding executive office around the world. Only one month after the electoral defeat of Howard University alumna and current US Vice President Kamala Harris, the lecture resonated deeply with the audience. While there is a fair amount of uncertainty about what the next administration will mean for higher education and area studies, the conversation in Chicago was defined by a collective focus on community care and financial investment. Amid vital scholarly conversations about the rise of academic surveillance and xenophobic rhetoric, there were also hopeful discussions surrounding the imperative to foster mutual aid, invest in precarious students and faculty, and strategize in defense of academic freedom. African studies can leverage these networks to build meaningful trans-institutional partnerships, international and diasporic solidarities, and publicly engaged knowledge production. Together, the 10,000+ individuals that have engaged ASA in the last decade, as well as the thousands who have yet to join, can constitute and fortify an inclusive and vibrant future for global African studies.

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James Ogude pursues such an inclusive and vibrant future for African studies in his “2023 ASR Distinguished Lecture: Decoloniality and Its Fissures. Whose Decolonial Turn?” Interrogating the question from an African standpoint, Ogude critiques the exclusionary practices of decolonial discourse, which risks reifying the privileged even as it mounts a critique of dominant epistemologies. Ogude’s essay—a revised version of his well-received lecture at the 2023 Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association—insists on conjoining decolonial theorizing, embracing indigenous and marginalized epistemes and worldviews, with action. For Ogude, a robust and relevant decolonial turn not only links theory to action, but it also centers indigeneity and connects “to the wider problems of economic deprivation, extraction, environmental degradation and dependency, and struggles about land among indigenous and non-white groups.” To put this differently, the route to a vibrant future for global African studies, in Ogude’s rigorous thinking, lies in embracing “alternative ways of thinking, but underpinned by action” predicated on both epistemological and sociopolitical change that dissolves boundaries between the ivory tower and broader society.

In “Political Institutions and Perceived Political Representation before, during, and after Identity-Based Conflict: Comparing Views from Rwandan and Burundian Citizens,” Bert Ingelaere, Régina Ndayiragije, and Marijke Verpoorten turn to the question of how different ethnic groups understand the extent of their representation in the political sphere. Turning to the salient, comparative examples of Burundi and Rwanda before, during, and after conflict, the authors examine “who perceives gains and losses in political representation, and how these perceptions relate to the post-war remaking of institutions.” To address their research question, the authors turn to ordinary people in rural areas—rather than oft-studied elites—to obtain a more representative sense of political representation. Identifying differences between Rwanda and Burundi based on postwar reversal of the leadership’s ethnic identity and performance, the findings show that various subjective factors influence perceptions of political representation, “including expectations, feelings, and prior fortunes” and the state’s ability to deliver on policies.

The next article turns to contemporary Sudan, more precisely to the challenges of the Transitional Government that took office in 2019 and was later deposed by the military. The authors consider the implications of the subsequent conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), for policymaking during political transitions in developing societies. Muez Ali, Muzan Alneel, and Mayada Hassanain’s essay, “Conditionality Breeds Contempt: Donor and Multilateral Myopia in Sudan,” contends that the Transitional Government fell because of its failure to enact the radical reforms proposed during the revolution that preceded the collapse of Omar al-Bashir’s government and ushered in Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok’s Transitional Government. For Ali, Alneel, and Hassanain, the transitional government, shackled by donor countries’ stringent conditions, prioritized exclusionary economic reforms that increased the hardship on the ordinary people, thereby deviating from the demands of the civil society and grassroots movement that precipitated its ascension to power. The Sudan experience, the authors

argue, necessitates contextual policymaking and a bottom-up approach to economic and political reforms, especially in developing countries.

Political crisis engenders resistance, as Ali's article demonstrates; such resistance can also take the form of art, as Rebecca's Wolff shows in "Visual Propaganda and Biafran National Identity: Artists Constructing a Nation during Wartime." The function and efficacy of propaganda during the civil war that pitted the short-lived Biafran republic against the Nigerian state, between 1967 and 1970, has been well studied. Wolff's contribution centers the work of artists in the discourse on the uses of propaganda for forging a national community. In Wolff's account, currencies, stamps, posters, and cartoons were integral to national mobilization and actualization. Making a case for a "holistic visual program," the author traces the convergence of art, war, and Biafran national consciousness, drawing on the work of Obiora Udechukwu, Uche Okeke, Chinwe Ezeani and others who served in Biafra's Graphics Department, and its Audio Visual Unit.

Whereas visual art animated the formation of national culture in Wolff's study of Biafran propaganda, Charles Lwanga shifts our attention to sonic possibilities in Uganda's public sphere. In "'Watch Your Tone!': Music and Meaning in Bobi Wine's 'Tugambire ku Jennifer' and the Kampala Street Vendors," Lwanga studies the music of Robert Kyagulanya (aka Bobi Wine), Ugandan Afropop musician and politician. The article focuses on "Tugambire ku Jennifer" (Tell Jennifer on Our Behalf), a song composed to articulate the frustrations of street vendors displaced by the government. Drawing on speech act theory in the analysis of Bobi Wine's music, Lwanga underscores the agency of listeners in shaping the meaning of the song, which not only reflects but also aims to transform society. As Lwanga puts it:

the construction of music meaning in Bobi Wine's song, "Tugambire ku Jennifer" can be imagined and understood in its wholistic entirety, not only through the message as delivered by the singer but also through the very process of the song's circulation and interpretation by various listeners (such as the street vendors, sympathizers, and the KCCA officials, who were consequently moved to respond to the song's perlocutionary intent).

The economic precarity underpinning Bobi Wine's music and its reception in Uganda occasions the "spiritual hustle" that Josiah Taru and Fraser McNeill theorize in a study focused on Zimbabwe. The context for "'Faith it, till you make it': Prosperity Gospel and Spiritual Hustling among Young Pentecostal Christians in Harare," is the economic uncertainty that has driven young Africans to the promise of prosperity Pentecostalism. Taru and McNeill elaborate the performative strategies of "spiritual hustling" through which young people in Harare try to parlay prosperity gospel to material comforts. According to Taru and McNeill, based on data collected from ethnographic work and interviews, the strategies of spiritual hustling include sartorial elegance (including the wearing of counterfeit suits), performance of obedience, and the adaptation of social media technologies. To borrow Taru and McNeill's language, "the mimicry that

young Pentecostal Christians exhibit is steeped in aspiration and Pentecostal imagined futures anchored in the prosperity gospel. This impersonation of the prophet in terms of suits, hairstyle, and ways of talking illustrates agency, creativity, competency, and desire for upward mobility.”

We are proud to include in this issue Ousseina Alidou’s presidential lecture that she delivered at the 65th Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association in 2022. Alidou’s address is inspired by its COVID-19 context, as it examines the misrepresentations of Africa in the Global North media during the early days of the pandemic. Challenging the doom and morbidity that characterized the Africa-in-crisis depictions of the continent in “African Studies, Forging Common Grounds: Languages, Scripts and Translation,” Alidou recognizes and affirms the contributions of African biomedical and public health experts in Africa and the diaspora as well as the African youth artists (hip hop artists included) who worked with and alongside to raise awareness about the pandemic and to develop and disseminate strategies of survival. Honoring the diversity of languages and scripts in Africa, Alidou is particularly cognizant of the artistic projects in African languages mobilized to combat COVID-19 and their ability to reach local communities.

The December 2024 issue of ASR includes a crucial essay on “Science” as part of the journal’s keyword series. Damien Droney’s essay traces the multivalent dimensions of science in Africa while concluding that political independence and nation-building fueled and continue to shape scientific enterprises on the continent. The issue concludes with scholarly review essays, book review forums, book reviews, and film reviews, all demonstrating a commitment to democratizing and promoting African epistemologies. In the spirit of that democratization and the dissemination of cutting-edge African research, the *African Studies Review* editorial team invites article submissions and proposals for special forums (four to six papers on a theme or subject) to appear in future issues of the journal. We hope that you will consider ASR as home for your conference papers and other research projects. Please be in touch with the editorial team at [managingeditor@africanstudiesreview.org](mailto:managingeditor@africanstudiesreview.org) with questions about submissions.

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