

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Bright Spots in African Studies

In my March 2023 editorial (<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2023.14>), I acknowledged some of the lingering problems in the field of African Studies, notably the challenges facing the study of Africa in the western hemisphere. Indeed, the mention of African Studies quickly recalls these challenges in many circles. But as gloomy as the discussions can be, amazing work is happening all around that indicates significant progress. Recognizing these developments does not imply perfection. The work of field recalibration remains incomplete, and the epistemological goal must always be to take Africans seriously as knowledge producers, as research subjects deserving ethical treatment, and as complex human beings inhabiting complex societies. Yet it is important to account for the bright spots, appreciating the progress being made in addition to the work that remains undone. In this editorial, my second as Editor-in-Chief of ASR, I highlight some of these bright spots.

I will begin with the Lagos Studies Association (LSA), the brainchild of three Nigerian historians in the United States—Saheed Aderinto (Florida International University), Abosede George (Barnard College), and Ademide Adelusi-Adeluyi (University of California, Riverside)—which has witnessed tremendous growth since its first meeting in 2016. On the approach of its 2023 conference, the association reports that at least 700 scholars and practitioners from across the world (based in 163 international and 95 Nigerian institutions) will participate in the 130 panels of LSA 2023. The LSA offers a terrific model of undertaking African studies, harnessing intellectual energy from across the world without deprivileging Nigerian-based scholars, including several emerging scholars who have credited the association with aiding their professional development. A collaboration between the LSA's leadership and the University of Lagos (which hosts the conference every June), the LSA conference attracts senior scholars and rising scholars in different fields, from across Europe, North America, Asia, and beyond; yet its leadership has prioritized making space for younger scholars to present their

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work and to receive mentoring from senior colleagues who are eager to support the next generation of academics. The LSA must be commended for one of its signature initiatives—Women’s Mentoring Network—which brings junior female scholars to the University of Lagos for a pre-conference mentoring program with senior academics from Nigeria and elsewhere across the world. Beneficiaries of the program have published their work in top journals and seen increased professionalization since participating. The association also has its footprints outside Nigeria, with regular panels at conferences such as the annual meeting of the African Studies Association held in the United States. At a time when the cost of conference attendance continues to spiral, the LSA has managed to keep costs low, especially for junior scholars attending from Nigeria, and the Nigerian delicacies that are served throughout the conference—free of charge—offers an inspiring example for other conferences.

The LSA’s collaborations with local institutions and organizations outside Nigeria, such as the British Academy, and its galvanizing of robust exchange and mentoring opportunities (across academic generations and between Africa-based scholars and their colleagues elsewhere) make the association a terrific example of a positive development in African Studies. We need more such initiatives across the continent and outside of it to generate and exchange ideas about Africa’s possibilities and challenges; we also need such a convivial environment for inter-generational dialogue for the sustenance of the field.

Outside the continent, the vision of a Global Black studies at Duke University in North Carolina, USA, is worth mentioning as another bright spot. The university has hired several scholars working across the Black diaspora in the past few years, including Africanists. In theory and in practice, what is exemplary about Duke’s commitment to Black Studies is a sustained interest in Africa, and in manifold experiences of blackness outside the United States. Time will tell whether the current initiative will endure, but the Duke example represents a sustainable approach to Black Studies in the West today. Africa’s knowledge systems, peoples, histories, and cultures must be core components of reimagining Black Studies in the present and for the future. This demarginalization of Africa does not call for eliding the experiences of Black peoples in the United States or other parts of the Americas, as some fear. The either/or fallacy that often underpins this conversation is misguided: Blackness is complex and heterogeneous, and institutional advancements in Black Studies must reflect the globality of the African experience. Examples such as the program at Duke University will contribute to correcting current blind spots and to stemming the miseducation of students who have been exposed to little about the continent that the majority of black people call home.

It would be gratifying to see more programs enlivened in the spirit of Global Blackness, as well as more intellectual collaboratories like the LSA. Even though mobility remains an issue for Africa-based scholars due to funding problems and visa bottlenecks, collaboration between scholars in

Africa and their colleagues across the world—significantly, between African scholars and their European colleagues—continues to increase. Other notable examples include CODESRIA's "Diaspora Project" and the Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program, both of which have helped facilitate curriculum-development initiatives in African universities, as well as research collaborations between grantees based outside the continent and hosts in African countries. The outcomes of these grantmaking opportunities include new and revitalized undergraduate and graduate programs in African institutions, capacity building in the form of training and mentoring for graduate students and junior scholars, and increased scholarly productivity thanks to collaborative research between the visiting scholars and their hosts. These initiatives are transforming institutions in Africa while also benefiting African academics working outside the continent. To be sure, brain drain remains a problem for the continent, but the benefits from these exchanges for the internationalization of both African universities and institutions outside the continent cannot be overlooked.

The above list is not exhaustive by any means, but these programs and activities deserve recognition for promoting epistemological innovation, facilitating institutional transformation, and recalibrating research collaborations in Africa toward partnerships that are more just, more ethical, and nonhierarchical. While challenges remain in African Studies, these bright spots offer a reminder that change is possible and feasible. We must all do our part to broaden the map of bright spots in African Studies.

The articles in this June issue come from diverse fields and authors in various career stages, and they typify the research excellence that underpins ASR's mission. In the first article, "Eyes on the Prize: Toward a Reimagining of the Role of Awards in African Studies," Kristin D. Phillips and Kristen E. Cheney examine the impact of the African Studies Association's graduate student paper prize since its debut in 2002. Drawing data from scholarship on prizes and from a focus group comprised of previous winners of the prize, the authors argue that the award boosted winners' confidence in their own scholarly abilities and has had a positive influence on their career trajectories, while also contributing to legitimating marginal subfields. Despite these successes, however, Phillips and Cheney make recommendations for rethinking the prize to address inequalities and other structural challenges in African Studies. The questions they raise are relevant to the broader ecosystem of African studies awards: "What would it look like for awards to honor collaboration, and not individuation? How can we continue to renovate awards to result not just in consecration, but in communication, amplification, and redistribution? And how can we build awards that augment and incentivize dialogue and connection, rather than disconnection and segmentation, between the worlds of African Studies?"

The questions that Phillips and Cheney ask of awards in African Studies apply in some ways to the unequal access to COVID-19 vaccines as interrogated in Ampson Hagan's article, "Coloniality of Waithood: Africa's Wait for COVID-19 Vaccines amid COVAX and TRIPS." Hagan examines the long

wait for vaccines in Africa, an effect of exorbitant prices that favored richer nations and the refusal to grant intellectual property waivers that would allow African countries to produce the vaccines cheaply. Framing the uneven access to vaccines in Africa as a form of wretchedness, Hagan demonstrates how vaccine policies and politics accentuate still-ongoing colonial practices on the continent. The article constitutes a significant contribution to the growing scholarship on the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa.

The next article in the issue, “Dialoguing with Retired Nurses: Involving Interview Participants in the Interpretation Process in South Africa,” adds to discourses on research methods and engagement with research participants in Africa. In this essay, Leslie Anne Hadfield makes a case for including interview participants in the process of interpreting research data. Drawing on her own experience working with retired nurses in South Africa, she shows how discussing the data with participants fostered transparency, addressed the problem of inclusivity, and shed new light that enhanced the accuracy of the research. She also suggests steps to ensure that the exercise is both meaningful and collaborative, including clarifying the roles of author and interview participants at the beginning of the research process.

Teresa Nogueira Pinto’s essay, “From Pioneer Historiography to Patriotic History: Constructing Usable Pasts in Zimbabwe (1890–2018),” examines the shift from colonial historiography (deployed to justify imperial subjugation) to patriotic uses of the past to legitimize the institutionalization and consolidation of power in post-independence Zimbabwe. Pinto emphasizes the contestatory and polarizing mobilization of the past for projects of legitimation and patriotic interpellation by various factions, with the creation of monuments and denunciation of the imperial West representing some of the instruments for generating patriotic history.

In “‘A Reason Not to Belong’: Political Decentralization, Intercommunal Relations, and Changing Identities in Northeastern Uganda,” Samuel Meyerson examines the shifting politics of identity in northern Uganda, focusing on Abim district in the country’s Karamoja Region. Meyerson shows the changes in sociopolitical identity formulations and affiliations among the Ethur following Uganda’s decentralization, and how new and old affiliations are deployed for economic and political advantages. Based on oral history, Meyerson’s analysis links Uganda’s decentralization policy to international discourse on minority rights and efforts geared to improving inter-community relations.

The next article, on Uganda’s neighbor Kenya, is by Fridah Kanana Erastus and Ann H. G. Kinyua. In this article, titled “Going Back to the Roots: Indigenous Language, Media Performance, and Change in Kenya,” the authors examine the use of local languages in Kenyan media, specifically in television and radio. While acknowledging the disadvantages of using indigenous languages, including unhealthy ethnic rivalries and hateful incitement, Erastus and Kinyua contend that prioritizing these languages can catalyze indigenous knowledge production and encourage national

development. The authors stress the democratic potential of indigenous language media, given its extensive reach and the participatory culture it fosters.

Transnationalism—between individual African countries and between the continent and its diaspora—undergirds the remaining three articles in this issue. Nathalie Raunet's "Transnational Strategies of Legitimation in the 1990s: The Togolese Regime and its Exiled Opposition in Ghana" examines the Eyadema regime's response to dissent from the opposition, who were based outside the country in Ghana. Raunet investigates the regime's transnational legitimation narratives, designed to burnish its image abroad and discredit Eyadema's opponent, Gilchrist Olympio. Relying on media sources for this study of regime stabilization strategies, the author contributes to scholarship on Togo and authoritarian regimes in Africa, with implications for other contexts.

Whereas Raunet's article interfaces Togo and Ghana, Bright Gyamfi's article appraises the bridgebuilding career of the late Ghanaian scholar Anani Dzidzienyo, whose work organically connected Africa to the diaspora. Gyamfi's "The Africa-Diaspora Orbit: Anani Dzidzienyo's Contributions to African/Black Studies and Black Liberation" integrates archival material, published research, and interviews to underscore Dzidzienyo's significant contribution to centering Africa in the Black Studies paradigm. The author argues that Dzidzienyo (whose field-building work led to the establishment of Black Studies and Afro-Latin American programs in the United States and Latin America, and whose students have gone on to remarkable academic careers), "built a transnational network of scholar-activists and institutions" over a fifty-year career. Indeed, Dzidzienyo espoused the Global Black Studies vision highlighted earlier in this editorial.

Continuing in the transnational vein of the last two articles, James Alexander Ivey's "'Welcome, Ali, Please go Home': Muhammad Ali as Diplomat and African Debates on the 1980 Moscow Olympic Boycott" discusses the iconic heavyweight boxer's trip to Africa as emissary of United States President Jimmy Carter. Ivey analyzes media responses to the visit, aimed at rallying support for America's boycott of the Moscow Olympic Games, and reveals how the media critiqued America's foreign policy toward Africa. Ali's tour of Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, and Kenya, Ivey finds, showed that Africans were less interested in Cold War politics than in challenges to African independence, including the apartheid regime in South Africa. The articles and letters in African newspapers demonstrate "a continental discussion on how African countries should respond to the changing Cold War environment and their ability to assert their own agency."

ASR's Keyword series expands with this issue, which also includes an essay on "Queer" by Edwin E. Otu and Adriaan van Klinken. Attending to the affordances and challenges of using a western construct as analytic, the essay spotlights queerness in Africa and Africa's queerness in the global circuits of knowledge production and being. Otu and van Klinken "propose that queer, from an African point of view, refers to the complex and creative interplay of

body, spirit, and mind, with multiple notions of desire, embodiment, intimacy, and pleasure emerging from the interstices of indigeneity and globality, tradition and modernity, effectively undermining any stable conception of sexual and gender identity, and interrogating narrow identitarian politics of LGBT+ emancipation.”

This issue concludes with Robert Heinze’s review essay examining recent books on “Radio in Africa,” and with book and film reviews covering various regions, topics, and genres. The ASR is always looking for book and film reviewers. Please reach out to managingeditor@africanstudiesreview.org if you are interested in this important service to the profession.

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