The Value of Extending Our Scholarly Geographic Scope

Broadening the geographical reach of our content and soliciting material from scholars working in countries or regions in Africa that historically have not enjoyed equal representation in *African Studies Review* are crucial for expanding the possibilities of African studies. Our collective knowledge about African sociopolitical phenomena is greatly enhanced when we develop theories, explore underappreciated perspectives, and put forth methodological diversity that take into account a diversity of locations, practices, and beliefs.

The focus of this editorial is to take account of the ways in which the dominance of certain countries in African studies has shaped our field. To understand this, we assessed which countries receive most of the scholarly attention and, in contrast, which countries were sidelined. To develop a robust sample of journal coverage we collected and scored published research articles from our own journal for the last six years, covering the period from 2018 to 2023. In sum, we analyzed 209 articles.

Table 1 reveals the top ten countries that are the focus of published articles for those six years. Unsurprisingly, the top of the list contains countries one would expect: Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana. Given the many decades of research funding from government agencies for scholars to study these countries, and economic power and attention within Western universities, these come as no surprise. Further, our sample and analysis included only articles published in English, which is also reflected in the list of most studied countries, except for Senegal, the only Francophone country in the top seven. Thematically, some of the other countries on the list—such as Uganda, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Cameroon, Somalia, and Côte d'Ivoire—frequently feature in articles examining one-party rule, authoritarianism, ethnic conflict, and the role of international institutions and actors operating in Africa.

Perhaps more significant was the list of countries for which there were no or almost no publications. Table 2 illustrates the number of articles we found for each country, with some receiving none or very little coverage in published content. These countries are all member states of the African Union, and many would significantly enrich scholars' understanding of important sociopolitical phenomena including questions of democratic consolidation, authoritarianism, climate change, and geopolitical rivalries. To name but a few ideas, scholars could examine: the use of military bases by foreign powers in Djibouti,

Table 1. Ten most studied countries in the *African Studies Review*, 2018–2023

Country	N	% of all articles
Nigeria	21	10.0
Kenya	19	9.1
South Africa	17	8.1
Ghana	16	7.7
Senegal	15	7.2
Uganda	9	4.3
Zimbabwe	8	3.8
Tanzania	7	3.3
Cameroon	7	3.3
Somalia/Somaliland	6	2.9
Côte d'Ivoire	6	2.9

Table 2. Least studied countries in the *African Studies Review*, 2018–2023

Articles	Countries
0	Algeria, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, The Comoros, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini (Swaziland), Gabon, Guinea–Bissau, Libya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Morocco, Republic of the Congo, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles
1	Botswana, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Lesotho, Togo, Tunisia
2	Benin, Guinea, Mauritania, Namibia, Rwanda, Sudan

electoral irregularities and boycotts in Malagasy presidential contests, democratic consolidation and recession in Botswana, Lesotho, and Mauritius, religious diversity in Guinea-Bissau and Togo, and Chinese influence in Cabo Verde and Guinea. Increasingly reliable data are available from many global data sets and the expanding coverage of the Afrobarometer public opinion surveys provide greater opportunities, especially for those scholars working with quantitative data, to acknowledge and better understand how research about and coming from these countries can improve understandings of various political and economic phenomena in Africa.

Realizing the importance of an African studies field that acknowledges the large diversity of histories and social, cultural, and political practices from across the African continent, in this editorial we make a particular appeal for scholars to think through how their analysis is framed by which geographic locations dominate scholarly conversations within African studies. The examination of new country cases or time periods, which may have been ignored in

earlier analyses, may yield considerable benefits. These include the ability to have greater conceptual clarity, the generation of new hypotheses, or the formulation of richer questions to consider and research (George and Bennett 2005, 39).

More than seven decades ago, Giovanni Sartori put forth the argument that concepts were "data containers" (Sartori 1970, 1039) and warned against "conceptual stretching" (1970, 1984). When assessing whether existing concepts travel to new cases and contexts, scholars are able to gain conceptual validation, or, at times, may refine or amend existing concepts (Adcock and Collier 2001). Recently, a significant debate about the presence and extent of global democratic backsliding has occurred, owing much to questions of conceptual validity amidst the ever-increasing proliferation of countries examined and covered in expert databases (Little and Meng 2023; Knutsen et al. 2024). There lies significant value in striving for greater concept validation by applying existing concepts and theories to spatial or temporal contexts that much scholarship has overlooked; conceptual and theoretical respecification may be necessary when considering new cases. Scholars' theoretical frameworks may also be modified and even strengthened, as new hypotheses are frequently generated and developed when researchers do study new, deviant, or outlier cases (George and Bennett 2005, 40).

We welcome more submissions from those scholars already doing the important work of research and teaching in and about countries that have not historically enjoyed equal coverage in *African Studies Review.* We have already been actively working to provide a platform for perspectives, geographies, and topics that have not received equal representation in *African Studies Review.* Towards this end, in addition to the already initiated Neglected Voices series, we are continuing conversations about translations and the use of forums in the journal. This editorial serves as a motivation for us to continually broaden our geographical coverage to generate novel theories and epistemes in African studies.

The issue opens with Carolyn A. Brown's Presidential Lecture, delivered virtually in November 2021 at the 64th Annual Meeting of the ASA. Brown's speech, titled "Harlem, Addis, and Johannesburg: African Solidarity and African American Internationalism in Harlem from the 1960s to the 1990s," is both a personal history of life in Harlem over three decades, and a history of a generation of activists who contributed to Harlem's status as a center of energetic scholarship and radical thought. Through this narrative of her own experiences, Brown bears witness to the "politics, challenges, and victories" of an era of struggle, decolonization, and Black internationalism; a unique period of solidarity between African nationalists and Harlem residents (and radical activists across the world), which also spurred the rise of the field of African studies in the United States. Brown concludes with a lamentation for today's Harlem, as Black residents are increasingly priced out and significant structures and cultural institutions are being lost to developers.

The practice of African studies as a transnational project connects Brown's article to the next essay: Chijioke K. Onah's "#BringBackOurGirls: Transnational Activism and the Remediation of the 2014 Chibok Girls' Kidnapping in Nigeria."

Onah examines the #BringBackOurGirls campaign, the global social media movement that arose in reaction to the 2014 abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Chibok, Nigeria by Boko Haram terrorists. He analyzes the campaign as an intermedial event, whose mediation and mediatization by activists, journalists, and celebrities around the world helped transform the kidnapping into a global memory event that bears witness to the violence of Boko Haram. The author furthers his analysis, however, observing that intermedial dynamics alone do not supply a complete account of memory practices in the digital age. "Mnemonic events," he argues, "achieve their singularity through transmedia, transnational and transhistorical connections, and affiliations with other memorial events and cultures." Thus, the distinctiveness of the Chibok girl's kidnapping derived not just from its representations on social media but also the event's ability to cross boundaries of history, culture, and memory, and in the process acquire new meanings and connections.

Abosede Omowumi Babatunde and Fatma Osman Ibnouf also discuss Nigeria, albeit alongside Sudan. In their article, "The Dynamics of Herder-Farmer Conflicts in Plateau State, Nigeria, and Central Darfur State, Sudan" the authors take a comparative approach to interrogating the factors that underlie the seemingly inexorable conflicts between farmers and cattle herders in the regions—one in Nigeria's Middle Belt and the other in southwestern Sudan—named in their article's title. Drawing upon their field work in the two contexts, the authors show that while violent clashes are often attributed simply to resource scarcity and/or preexisting ethnic/religious tensions, these conflicts are in fact shaped by "interlocking socio-cultural, economic, and political issues," including expectations around masculinity and (significantly) the actions of state and local leaders who perpetuate existing tensions through inequitable resource distribution and unfair peacebuilding processes. "Addressing the conflict between the farmers and herders ... would require concerted efforts and the commitment of credible state and local leaders to resolve the preexisting political conflicts and manage identity divisions," the authors observe in conclusion.

The fourth article in the issue, titled "Performing Nigerianness: Equivocal Identities and Digital Legibility of White Women Comedians," is by Rowland Chukwuemeka Amaefula. The article analyzes a selection of TikTok videos by two white women, Hungarian Sabina Yuhas (@Overszabi) and Russian Juliana Belova aka Oyinbo Marlian (@juliewanderz)—both of whom attained popularity amongst Nigerians on the social media platform for producing comedic skits in which they "performed Nigerianness," lip-synching recordings of Nigerian comedians or otherwise adopting and/or parodying elements of Nigerian lingo and daily life. Amaefula discusses the women's popularity, contemplating the possible issues of racial and cultural exploitation implicated in such borrowings, which are impossible to separate from histories of colonialism and discrimination. He observes that, ultimately, the women's skits produce "equivocal identities" that are neither fully Nigerian nor European. In doing so, he argues, the performances "mitigate the mutual stereotyping of Africa and Europe and entrench trans-border belongingness."

With Addamms Songe Mututa's "Nationhood in South Sudan Cinema: The Iconicity of Motherhood in Akuol de Mabior's *No Simple Way Home* (2023)," the issue moves from Nigeria to South Sudan. Mututa provides an extensive semiotic critique of the 2023 documentary film directed by Akuol de Mabior, daughter of the late revolution fighter and founding father of South Sudan, Dr John Garang de Mabior. Examining the history of South Sudan vis-à-vis the film's portrayal of its protagonist, Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior (the director's mother and fourth vice president of South Sudan), Mututa sees the country's crisis of nationhood as symptomizing a search for a national icon; he further suggests that Rebecca's representation as a mother figure in the film positions her as her nation's unifying symbol.

Next is Hermann W. von Hesse's article "More Than an Intermediary: James Bannerman and Colonial Space-Making on the Nineteenth-Century Gold Coast," which examines the life and actions of the Gold Coast-born nineteenth-century Anglo-African merchant, James Bannerman, and aims to complicate the view of African intermediaries' role in European imperial projects. A London loyalist, Bannerman worked to extend British presence on the Gold Coast as a means of furthering his own plans for a modern society. Britain's formal colonization of the Gold Coast, which instituted a regime of racial hierarchies and exploitation, meant that Bannerman's vision for an "empire of progress" would never be realized. Still, the article argues, given his financial, material, and intellectual contributions to the endeavor, Bannerman must be considered a co-founder of the British administration. As the author puts it, "[Bannerman's] co-founding of the British administration requires scholars to rethink conventional understandings of colonial space-making in Africa as simply hegemonic designs of European origin run by local intermediaries."

The next article, titled "Collaborative Autoethnography and Reclaiming an African Episteme: Investigating 'Customary' Ownership of Natural Resources," is an *ASR* autoethnography forum piece by the Acholi Collective, a collaboration of ten members of landholding families in Uganda. As Uganda faces an accelerating loss of tree cover, the authors present their experiences in the form of a "collaborative autoethnography," aiming to grapple with the meanings of "customary" land ownership and its implications for sustainable use of natural resources (including trees), while resisting the colonial ideas that have in the past shaped discourse and policy regarding Acholi land and property. They draw our attention to collaborative autoethnography's "untapped potential to advance a decolonizing agenda."

Nnanna Onuoha Arukwe contributes this issue's scholarly review essay, which discusses four texts that grapple with Africa's postcolonial progress, touching on issues ranging from the restitution of the continent's looted art to the history of cinema in Nigeria, and thus "represent important efforts in the reconstruction of the evolution of the African postcolonial condition." As usual, the issue also features an assortment of book and film reviews.

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