

# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

## New Beginnings at the *African Studies Review*

It is a new year, and this editorial, my first as Editor-in-Chief of the *African Studies Review*, introduces the first issue of 2023—the first issue since the journal became fully digital. These new beginnings at the ASR promise fresh horizons and bright futures.

I am honored to assume leadership of the journal and want to begin by thanking my predecessor, Benjamin Lawrance, for his extraordinary leadership over the past five years. As film review editor, associate editor, and then deputy editor, I had the privilege of witnessing the ASR's growth under Benjamin's leadership. Each of these roles offered a unique vantage point to appreciate the tremendous growth of the journal and its approaches to reckoning with current realities in the field of African studies. I am grateful for your service, Editor Emeritus.

The recent success of the ASR would not be possible without its amazing editorial collective, and I deeply appreciate their contributions to the journal. For her meritorious service, I also want to extend my gratitude to Ayo Coly, who successfully completed her term as associate editor in December 2022.

I am pleased to appoint Kate Luongo as deputy editor. Kate has been a committed member of the editorial team since joining the journal as associate editor. I also welcome Robert Nyenhuis, who was recently appointed associate editor. Working with Kate and other members of the editorial team, I am excited to capitalize on the growth of the journal and chart new horizons for the future.

I assume the office of Editor-in-Chief keenly aware of the historical problems plaguing our field. I need not rehash the history of marginalization that others have eloquently described, and the increasing imperative for decolonization (Anyidoho et al. 2018; Allman 2019; Chachage 2019). With titles such as “Where is the ‘African’ in African Studies?” and “The Perpetual Solitudes and Crises in African Studies,” scholars have queried the field's

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racial logics and its politics of exclusion (Pailey 2016; Zeleza 1997). The ASR will intensify the work of centering African agency as a means of tackling the historical marginalization of African peoples and their knowledge systems in African studies. Under my leadership, the journal is committed to a notion of decolonization that centers Africans as knowledge producers and respects their worldmaking theories and practices as valid epistemologies. To this end, we will continue to refine approaches to increasing African representation in our journal. The ASR has made progress on this front, and we remain committed to supporting the work of African scholars, including junior scholars. I invite colleagues mentoring graduate students and newly minted PhDs to encourage them to submit work to the journal. We welcome submissions from across the geographical breadth of the continent and beyond, and across career ranks. We will also be working with the African Studies Association to convene mentoring workshops for emerging scholars in Africa and at the ASA annual meetings in the United States. We look forward to collaborating with institutional partners in Africa to disseminate the brilliant work of young African scholars and to address other shared priorities.

Centering African agency also requires amplifying the important intellectual/theoretical contributions of African thinkers that have been neglected hitherto, due to exclusions associated with field formation and the politics of canonization. Many of these scholars worked on the continent, where they developed theories and ideas drawn from African epistemes and experiences. The current editorial collective of the journal realizes the urgency of recuperating the scholarly contributions of these thinkers and making their insights widely available to a broad audience, including graduate students. To address this challenge, the journal invites proposals from any discipline or branch of African studies for articles highlighting the significance of the writings of neglected scholar(s) of African and African diasporic ancestry. We hope to make this initiative a regular feature of the journal.

The journal is also committed to increasing coverage of underrepresented fields. One recurring question is whether the journal publishes work in humanistic fields including literature, art history, and music. The answer is yes! We publish articles from every branch of African studies so far as the article is geared toward the journal's interdisciplinary audience and answers the question of relevance to the broader field of African studies. At the helm of the journal is a scholar of African literary and cultural studies. Most recently, the December 2022 issue of the journal featured a forum on pleasure in Africa which covered topics and issues in the humanities. The current issue is also curated to show the range of humanistic work covered in the journal, from the question of language, to literature and music and their intersections with aesthetics, economics, health, and politics. In fact, every article in this issue falls within the humanities disciplines. The journal, under my purview, will maintain current publishing strengths while seizing the opportunity to deepen its investment in previously underrepresented areas.

The ongoing and future work of the journal involves a considerable amount of volunteer labor. I want to thank the editors, editorial review board

members, peer reviewers, and everyone else who has served the journal in some capacity. I accepted this position with a desire to make a difference and I hope that you too will join us in taking the journal into a future of realized possibilities. We welcome ideas and suggestions for reaching our milestones and setting new ones.

As I have noted, the March 2023 issue is brimming with fascinating articles on the humanities—on language, literature, art, and music. The issue begins with the writer Aminatta Forna's ASR Distinguished Lecture delivered at the 2021 ASA Conference. Forna's "Writing in Englishes: Taking Control of the Technology of Power through Literary Aesthetics" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2022.129>] returns to the language question that preoccupied writers and critics at the Conference of African Writers of English Expression in Makerere in 1962. But the question, for Forna, is not whether African writing can be legitimately done in English. Forna instead draws attention to the impact of transnationalism and multilingualism on literary creativity in English, and shows how writers' inventive use of English expands the aesthetic possibilities of their craft.

The idea of agency accruable from language use connects Forna's contribution to the second essay in the issue. Justin Lee Haruyama's article, "Shortcut English: Pidgin Language, Racialization, and Symbolic Economies at a Chinese-Operated Mine in Zambia" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2022.112>], brings a unique take to the Africa-China relationship. Haruyama details the neocolonial exploitation of mineworkers in Zambia, which has resulted from privatization that transferred control of mines to the Chinese. While conceding the economic disparity between the Chinese and their Zambian employees, Haruyama demonstrates how "shortcut English"—pidgin English spoken by the Chinese—is read by their Zambian employees as a marker of Chinese inferiority and an aberration from normative whiteness, and as rendering the Chinese unqualified to operate the mines.

In "Literary Analysis of a Memory Book by a Schoolteacher with HIV in Rural Uganda: Writing about Living with and Dying of HIV" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2022.147>], Machiko Oike discusses the genre of memory books written by HIV patients in Uganda. In the country, the first location for such memory book projects in Africa, memory books bequeath family histories and offer guidance to children, following the demise of a parent. Analyzing an especially insightful memory project written by Aguga Christine, Oike argues that the memory book allows Christine to represent and process the traumatic experience of living with AIDS, while considering how such a project typifies grassroots writing as well as the potential for memory books to constitute a genre of African life writing.

Jean Daniel Bombela Bombela's "Communication politique et symbolique vestimentaire au Cameroun: cas de l'élection présidentielle de 2018" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2022.136>] examines an overlooked aspect of electoral campaign communication: clothing. Informing the research is data obtained from participant observation of political rallies and analyses of

campaign posters. Focusing on the 2018 presidential election in Cameroon, the article illuminates the seductive and symbolic power of campaign clothing and its use for mobilization by politicians running for office.

In “Restitution vs. Retention: Reassessing Discourses on the African Cultural Heritage” [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2022.153>], Jérémie Eyssette reappraises the discourse around repatriating African cultural artefacts from Western institutions. He scrutinizes the biases and shortcomings of each side of the restitution vs. retention debate with arguments from the Musée du Quai Branly (France), the AfricaMuseum (Belgium), the British Museum (UK), and the Humboldt Forum (Germany) serving as case studies. Eyssette affirms the need for a rebalancing of the relationship between African institutions and their western counterparts, with the goal of creating equitable partnerships and improving the accessibility and preservation of cultural objects on the continent and beyond it.

The next two articles are concerned with music. Femi Eromosele’s “Affective Capital: Lagos and Nigerian Music Videos” [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2022.93>] investigates the dominance of Lagos in the visual iconography of music videos in Nigeria. Attending to the mutually reinforcing relationship between star image and city image, Eromosele concludes that the proliferation of music videos depicting Lagos increases the city’s “affective capital” while supporting the promotional goals of the singers.

In “COVID-19 and the Ugandan Presidential Election: Contesting Lockdown Authority in Popular Songs” [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2022.143>], David G. Pier and Michael Mutagubya examine COVID-19-themed songs in Uganda. They show how opposition presidential candidate Bobi Wine and other musicians employed their sonic art to contest the authoritarianism of lockdown policies, disrupt government narratives, and mount critiques of President Museveni’s government. The authors classify the songs into three categories: “songs of information,” conveying safety messages in a health emergency; “songs of debate” invested in countering official narratives; and “songs of derision,” which openly defy government authority.

This issue also features a contribution to our Keyword Series. Martha Lagace’s “African Studies Keyword: The Bush” [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2022.152>] analyzes the complex significations of “bush” in Acholi cosmologies. The essay explores the concept by focusing on the lifework of the Ugandan musician Geoffrey Oryema who died in exile in France, and the controversy over his stated desire to be cremated. Oryema’s decision to have his cremated remains returned to Uganda runs contrary to Acholi cultural precepts on proper burial rites. Lagace examines the painful histories associated with the bush and then uses Oryema’s music, archival material, and media representations to demonstrate the shifting signification of bush as both “home” and “wild.” Viewed through an Acholi prism, the concept of bush offers profound implications for reorienting discussions of identity, belonging, and foreignness in African studies.

Two scholarly review essays appear in the issue: Mehdi Labzaé’s “A Past That Doesn’t Rest: Domination, Violence, and the ‘Question of Nationalities’

in Ethiopia" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2022.119>], and Priscilla Shilaro's "Land and Living on Little in Kenya" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2022.155>]. This exciting issue concludes with book and film reviews that once again affirm the vibrancy of African studies as an intellectual formation.

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