

# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

## Africa/Pleasure: An Agenda for Future Work

We conceive the topic “Africa/Pleasure” as a capacious frame that will allow us to achieve a number of goals. Our first goal is to explore and analyze the many ways and forms in which pleasure is imagined, produced, disseminated, and enjoyed in Africa and/or elsewhere in the world about Africa. We are also interested in how pleasure can function as a site of agreements or contestations, and how it is (or is not) a tool for the fashioning and refashioning of subjectivities, even shaping social and political actions on the continent, which themselves may be viewed as regressive or progressive by different observers. Second, either as running commentaries or as direct emphases of exploration, the theme “Africa/ Pleasure,” we hope, will allow us to theorize what constitutes pleasure—pleasure in and of itself, and in relation to, or as attached to, other things or entities. Our overall objective is to encourage scholars in African studies to begin to build a rich scholarly archive marked by a focused, social, historical, and theoretical exploration of pleasure in Africa.

All of this is not to say that considerations of pleasure are entirely missing in existing African studies works across the disciplines. Surely, that cannot be, with so much African studies research available now on sexuality, HIV/AIDS, health, and popular cultural forms and practices such as music, dance, film, television, theatre and performance, comics and cartoons, sex work, smoking, drinking, eating, sports, and more. As examples of existing African studies research in the area of popular culture in particular, one might mention the special issue of the *Journal of African Cultural Studies* from 2010 titled “African Film and Video: Pleasure, Politics and Performance,” edited by Lindiwe Dovey, or Deborah Bryceson’s edited volume *Alcohol in Africa: Mixing Business, Pleasure, and Politics* (2002). We also call to mind more recently

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published articles such as Brenna Munro's "Pleasure in Queer African Studies: Screenshots of the Present" (2018) or Naminata Diabate's "Nudity and Pleasure" (2020).<sup>1</sup> Reflections on pleasure, whether implied or direct, brief or lengthy, are not entirely missing in much of the literature in African studies, especially if you are specifically looking for them. But that is precisely the first problem with our approach to the subject as scholars in African studies: one often has to be specifically looking for studies on pleasure—among the many other subjects of investigation within which it is buried—before one stumbles across it. It is not difficult to find evidence to support this view; let us judge our books in African studies by their covers, or more precisely by their titles, and survey the number of those with "Africa" or its cognates and "pleasure" in the title. They are so few that we will not need more than the fingers of one hand to count them. Indeed, we are not aware of any other African studies books with the word "pleasure" in their title besides the aforementioned volume by Deborah Bryceson, Rachel Spronk's *Ambiguous Pleasures: Sexuality and Middle Class Self-Perceptions in Nairobi* (2012), and Laura Fair's *Reel Pleasures: Cinema Audiences and Entrepreneurs in Twentieth-Century Urban Tanzania* (2018). We certainly do not discount those books with suggestive and promising titles such as *Leisure in Urban Africa*, edited by Paul Tiyambe Zeleza and Cassandra Rachel Veney (2003), *Love in Africa*, edited by Jennifer Cole and Lynn Thomas (2009), *Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* by Luise White (1990), or the volume *Africa Every Day: Fun, Leisure and Expressive Culture on the Continent*, edited by Oluwakemi Balogun, Lisa Gilman, Melissa Graboyes, and Habib Iddrisu (2019), to mention just a few. But even in the latter books with their suggestive titles, attention to the specific question of pleasure tends to be discontinuous and intermittent rather than focused.

There are several more articles spread across various journals and edited books with the word "pleasure" in their titles, and some of these will be referenced later in this introduction, though here again, we find that having the word "pleasure" in the title of an article is no guarantee that there will be sustained attention to the specific topic in the publication. For good measure, and so as not to exclude ourselves from a field-wide indictment, we reviewed some of our own work to see if we could find in our publications, if not in the title, a reference to the pleasure of the researcher, if not to the pleasure of the subject under consideration.<sup>2</sup> Although we are far from representative, what we find in our own earlier work speaks to a larger trend. The fact is, when pleasure is even acknowledged in much of African studies research, it is often adjacent to some other consideration and rarely the core subject in our work. For this reason, it is not too soon to conclude that what we, in the field of African studies, do not have is a sustained historical or analytical study of what constitutes or has constituted pleasure in Africa over time, nor do we have a practice of investigating how the experience of pleasure fits into the social organization of varied constituencies across the continent.

Although there are manifold definitions of pleasure, as reviewed by Naminata Diabate in this collection of articles, we can still affirm that

individually, we already have some ideas about what pleasure is. Furthermore, we can also assert without fear of contradiction that the experience of pleasure is universal across cultures, notwithstanding the variety of local names used to describe the sensation among different groups and in different locations. Simply put, pleasure is what makes us feel joyful, happy, pleased, ecstatic, or delighted. We take our scholarly cues here from Aaron Smuts (2011:254), who writes that “pleasurable experiences are those that feel good.” The opposite of pleasure, then, is pain, discomfort, suffering, and distress. This simple binary experience is so common to normal human psychological development that for very good reason, we take it for granted. We all know when we feel it and when we do not. No one requires an advanced education in order to know what pleasure is and to recognize pleasure when we experience it.

There is an additional binary in pleasure studies that we need to account for before returning to the question of where pleasure sits in African studies research. For our schematic purposes in this introduction, and although philosophers may propose many more subdivisions, we consider pleasure as being primarily manifested in two forms. The two categories we have in mind are borrowed from Daniel Russell in his *Plato on Pleasure and the Good Life* (2005); these categories identified are pleasure as sensation, and pleasure as emotion. These are rough, heuristic categories and they are not to be mistaken for absolutes. The more common, and therefore universal, stereotype of what pleasure connotes, is that it is a sensation, experienced in the body through such activities as eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse, among other things. When the word “pleasure” is uttered in many contexts, these are the general connotations that come to mind. The sensational forms of pleasure do not have to emanate from a literal contact with the body, which is why pleasures derived from laughter, for instance, or from listening to agreeable music, can also be categorized as sensational pleasures since they are related to the pleasures derived from direct contact with the body as in the case of eating or drinking.

The second category of pleasure is pleasure as emotion, meaning pleasure as the affective attitude that one has or develops toward things, events, or ideas. Pleasure as emotion is more intentional and self-conscious, and is generally cultivated over time, based on knowledge and elaborate deductions, suppositions, dreams, and so on. It is in this sense, that we can say that the birth of one's child, a promotion at work, one's football team being on top of the league table, one's favorite candidate winning an election, and similar experiences, are all events which give pleasure. Pleasure as sensation is primarily somatic and corporeal, while pleasure as emotion is primarily psychological and cerebral. Sensational pleasures are general and fleeting, while emotional pleasures are focused and more enduring.

As is evident from the few titles on pleasure in Africa cited earlier, many of the scattered reflections on pleasure in African studies relate to the pleasures of sensation: drinking, dancing, smoking, laughing, listening to music, or sex and sexuality. Yet sensational pleasure is hardly the only or even

the most important arena to discuss pleasure and its problematics. In fact, this is already a subject for consideration: why do we not have more scholarship on pleasure as emotion within our field? In this question, we identify one of the many gaps to be filled in pleasure research in African studies. To recapitulate, these are the two initial features of what we observe in the studies of pleasure in the African world today: the first is the paucity of reflections on pleasure, and the second is that the bulk of what is available in African studies research pertains to pleasure as sensation.

Furthermore, and even in those instances where the topic of pleasure makes an appearance in the archive of African studies, it has more frequently been envisioned from the perspective of deficit, if not as a pathology or a distraction. This is an additional and central feature of pleasure work thus far as it has been conducted on African societies. Indeed, on a subject such as sex, and specifically female sexuality, in Africa, which would seem well suited to an exploration of pleasure, Signe Arnfred (2017:57) notes that prior to conducting her field research in Mozambique starting in the 1980s, all that she had been exposed to regarding African female sexuality was “an abundance of feminist (and other) literature on female genital mutilation (FGM)—but nothing on labia elongation. Could it be,” she inquired, “that to Western feminists, images of women in Africa in terms of risk and danger, violence and mutilation had greater purchase than images of sexual pleasure?” Although scholars such as Nkiru Nzegwu (2010), Bibi Bakare-Yusuf (2013), Sylvia Tamale (2005), Stella Nyanzi (2008), and Rachel Spronk (2012), among several others, have been working since the early 2000s in particular to expand the discourse on African female sexuality to include discussions of pleasure, Jane Bennett (2017:3) writes in her introduction to the volume in which Arnfred’s chapter appears that “while the urgencies of the HIV pandemic continue to deserve the attention of researchers, sexualities research cannot be imagined solely within the scope of viral transmission, ‘vulnerability’, and ‘risk.’” In research specifically oriented toward sexuality and public health in Africa, Kylie Marais has recently confirmed that:

the majority of contemporary research on sex and sexuality is still largely framed within sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) frameworks and generally ignores erotic aspects of sexuality. While SRHR research is certainly vital for social transformation and justice, focusing solely on this type of research has wider implications as it: (1) contributes towards narrow understandings of sexuality and disregards the subjective nature of sex; (2) reproduces and emphasises sexual discourses of disease, danger, and death. (Marais 2019:89)

To be sure, in highlighting the lopsided direction of some of the work on sexuality and pleasure in Africa, we are not calling for decreased attention to the real dangers surrounding activities that are potentially pleasurable in diverse forms and locations. In addition to the longstanding concerns about different forms of genital cutting, think for example of the increasing

attempts to police pleasure arising from sexual intimacy, especially by religiously affiliated groups, as evidenced more recently in institutionally sanctioned attacks against same-sex sexuality in many countries (see Pierce 2016; Atuguba 2019; and Muparamoto 2021, for example). What we decry is not the attention given to these ways of policing pleasure and the dangers that this might bring to specific demographics/populations, but the paucity of work acknowledging instances and opportunities for pleasure itself or responses to what pleasure signifies for several constituencies. In fact, even these actions intended to deny pleasure inspired by particular interpretations of religious doctrine or tradition are an opportunity to think about what the policing of pleasure or sources of pleasure indicates about other trends in society. As Asef Bayat has remarked in his thinking about what he calls the “anti-fun sensibilities” of both the French Jacobins and Russian Bolsheviks, “anti-fun sensibilities are not restricted to religious doctrines.” He further adds:

Anti-fun ethics, whether religious or secular, modern or premodern, bourgeois or communist—and espoused by individuals, movements, or states—are not merely doctrinal concerns; they are primarily historical-political matters. More immediately, they represent and embody a particular technique of power, a discursive shield that both legitimizes and insulates moral or political authority by binding it to “what is not to be questioned,” to the sacrosanct, the untouchables—God, the Revolution, the Resistance, the Proletariat, the Nation. (2007:451)

In yet other cases where sites and opportunities for pleasure are not envisioned in African studies research from the perspective of risk and deficit, an aptitude for pleasure can take on the form of a pathology or a harmful condition. Consider for example, Achille Mbembe’s well known characterization of the *commandement* in the postcolony and its “marked taste for lecherous living. Festivities and celebrations are the two key vehicles for indulging this taste, but the idiom of its organization and its symbolism focus, above all, on the mouth, the belly, and the phallus” (2001:106–7). Later, on the same page, Mbembe expatiates about the *commandement*, noting that “the oft-cited ‘a goat grazes wherever it is tied up,’ all recall the mouth and the belly at the same time they celebrate the great feasts of food and drink, setting the pattern not only of official banquets but also of the more banal yet major occasions of daily life—purchase of traditional titles, weddings, promotions and appointments, awarding of medals” (2001:107). The fact that when the *commandement* indulges in licit and illicit pleasure, postcolonial subjects then respond as “homo ludens” with “outbursts of ribaldry” (2001:107) and a “preference for ‘conviviality’” (2001:112) is not to the credit of the postcolonial subject either. As Mbembe himself observes, “Those who laugh, whether in the public arena or in the private domain, are not necessarily bringing about the collapse of power or even resisting it” (2001:110). While Mbembe’s nuanced analysis of the aesthetics of vulgarity, as he terms it, often reveals the postcolonial subject simply playing along in order to survive, the focus of this

chapter in *On the Postcolony* is very much on the exploitative pleasures of the *commandement*, often taken at the expense of regular citizens. By contrast, Patrick Chabal's book, *Africa: The Politics of Suffering and Smiling* (2009), whose subtitle draws inspiration from a popular song by the Nigerian singer Fela Anikulapo Kuti, pays more attention to the lives of ordinary people. But as at least one reviewer of Chabal's book has also noted, notwithstanding the title of Chabal's book, there is much more of the book dedicated to the suffering of the subaltern and the African poor than there is to their experience of smiling.<sup>3</sup> And understandably so, for many of us view attention to pleasure as a distraction from the serious matters that we as scholars of the African continent must grapple with, such as unemployment, war, violence unleashed by non-state actors, deleterious forms of governance, human trafficking, and other serious issues.

### Histories of an Aversion

At this juncture, we would like to propose a number of reasons for the limited state of work on pleasure research in African studies. One possible explanation for our collective lack of attention to the subject is the European-style university as it came to Africa as a subject for study and subsequently became the dominant institution of knowledge production about the world and the African continent. We refer to the university here as a composite institution, not just as a hallowed site, but also as a framework for thinking, producing, valuing, and disseminating knowledge. The intellectual traditions we have all been trained in across various disciplines are indebted in one way or another to the protocols of the modern university and its Christian ethos, especially in its Protestant and more Puritan proclivities as it developed since the Enlightenment. And intricately embedded in those protocols—perhaps even constitutive of them—is, we wish to argue, a most unpleasing conjunction of the two words “Africa” and “pleasure,” or more precisely “the African” and “pleasure.” By and large, that is what the European archive going back to the seventeenth century contains. The entrenched prejudice about Africa in that archive made Africa the id to the European ego-superego combination, the site of unmediated instinctual pleasures whose function, by its structural relationship to the combination, is to perpetually affirm the sophistication of whatever Europe considers to be its pleasure, whether sensational or cerebral. The close association of Africa with no pleasure at all, or lowly pleasure, or unpleasure profoundly affected the way Africa and pleasure showed up in the archive of resistance later produced by Africans in European languages as a result.

Our indifference or maybe even aversion to research on pleasure in African studies comes as no surprise then, since the history and the ensuing African counter-discourse that we had to work with, following the intellectual traditions that we have just outlined, imposed by an understandable necessity, certain themes in the production of knowledge about Africa rather than, or more than, others. In the apparent gravity of the liberation imperative,

pleasure, something so obviously in the domain of satisfaction, gratification, happiness, and contentment, was understandably an alien idea; it was and is to be discounted, even when it entered into the record, furtively or openly, for some duration. In that counter-discourse and African archive, going back to the eighteenth century, the problem was not that Africa was always associated with unpleasure, as in the European archive, but that the relationship between Africa and pleasure in it was literally truncated or outrightly silenced, whether for reasons of shame, inferiority complex, or defensiveness. In the best of circumstances, pleasure could be intimately attached to the desired outcomes for a liberation struggle, so that liberation becomes the main arena in which one can find pleasure and nowhere else—or nowhere else that should be acknowledged as such. From Olaudah Equiano's *Slave Narrative* (1789) to Nelson Mandela's *A Long Walk to Freedom* (2013) (we are choosing these two as bookends on a vast time scale) and everything in between, the discursive range commanded by pleasure in African self-understanding since the modern period bears the constraints of speaking about a once degraded self in the language and conceptual framework of the degraders.

In this respect, we are reminded of Frederick Douglass in his slave narrative (1845), speaking about the pleasures of the slave, but often in a critical and ironic tone, because a bigger task always lay ahead, namely that of dismantling slavery. Thus, pleasure, by itself, could not be affirmed. For the enslaved person, pleasure could not be a pressing need.<sup>4</sup> The enslaved were either under the gaze of the master or that of capricious allies whose support they had to earn. And for this reason, they had to show themselves in public appropriately imbued with the self-discipline and self-denial required for waging the battle at hand.<sup>5</sup> In like manner, and as progressively minded scholars attentive to the continuing need for improvement in the quality of life for the subjects of our study, we are in a sense caught in an alternative politics of respectability, fearing lest we be found guilty in giving attention to matters pertaining to pleasure, of perpetuating enduring stereotypes about an unbridled African appetite for sensational pleasures, such as those hinted at in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with the deliberately vague references to the original Mr. Kurtz presiding “at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites” (1902:67). We too are apt to think of pleasure simply as sensory, of the body, and therefore inimical to intellectual and higher pursuits. As scholars, both on the right and on the left, we are deeply suspicious of political figures who do not hide their appetite for pleasure, and like the protagonist Toloki in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* (1995), we are likely to profess a special appreciation for ascetic figures, disdaining what we perceive to be the presumably unproductive and distracting pleasures of the flesh.

As scholars in African studies, we are the inheritors of this attitudinal and discursive edifice, and it shows. In light of this history, the rarity of pleasure as a subject in the archive of African studies scholarship is perhaps to be expected, given the constituent elements of the African past (and indeed, the African world) in the last five centuries: slavery, colonialism, and the

continuing challenges of post-emancipation, civil rights, and post-independence. Responding to this large historical canvas, the field of African studies has, in large part, been dedicated to matters of the serious, the grave, the self-sacrificing, the resistant, and, indeed, the heart-rending; the tragic is its ruling tone. Together, these features define the dominant composite accent of the scholarly study of Africa.

## An Agenda

Having retrieved this historical trace of our intellectual present, let us borrow the emancipation thematic mentioned earlier for a related but narrower task: How do we liberate the two words “Africa” and “pleasure” so that their relationships can be more freely and boldly investigated, without the circumscriptions of an entrenched and parochial gaze, emanating from those within and outside our field for whom Africa and pleasure always denotes a problem to be solved? How do we discuss “Africa” and “pleasure” together in a manner that foregrounds Africa as subject—not subject with a capital S, the delusion that exists only in the imagination of the Eurocentric archive, but subject as the contingent effect of the conjunction, the intersection, of constraints and possibilities. We mean here constraints that are not coercively imposed from the outside, and possibilities that are more or less achievable within the existing structure of agency. How can this research task be carried out in the scholarly discourses and deeply structured epistemological frameworks we currently work with, within, and from? How do we construct an archaeology of pleasure in Africa from Africa’s pre-contact with Europe, through the imposition and dominance of European episteme on Africa, to the African discourse produced by Africans upon contact and mostly in the languages of Europe? This is an impossibly large research agenda, covering at least three major recognizable archives: pre-fifteenth-century Africa; fifteenth- to late nineteenth-century Africa and Europe, and Africa since the twentieth century.

What we envision by way of response to these questions is a study of pleasure in Africa and among Africans that extends beyond the currently prevailing framework of deficit, danger, pathology, and distraction. The slash (/) in our title, “Africa/Pleasure,” does not call primarily for the establishment of points of opposition, but for attention to connections and disconnections, meetings and departures. At its simplest, this expanded agenda calls for us to identify and analyze the variety of sites and forms of pleasure that are to be found on the continent and among communities of African descent around the world. It will not suffice, however, to simply discover that Africans experience pleasure; we will need to inquire more deeply about the significance of pleasure itself as an experience, and to situate our study of pleasure in relation to other dimensions of life. Thus, we are hoping that in an identification of forms of pleasure, there will be as much curiosity about pleasure as emotion as there has been historically with respect to pleasure as sensation. Regarding forms of pleasure, we seek a study of pleasure in all its



dimensions—historical, social, psychological, philosophical, political (macro and micro), aesthetic, secular, religious, visual, auditory, and tactile. As stated earlier, we would like to see future explorations of what constitutes pleasure—pleasure in and of itself, and in relation or as attached to other things or entities, whether those entities are practical-behavioral, as in actions; institutional, as in entrenched structures that rule our living and social relations; corporeal, as in bodies; or discursive, as in expressions, representations, ideas, and ideologies.

The interactions and distinctions between pleasure, leisure, and fun will also be of interest in our expansive agenda. An accounting of the sites of pleasure in specific contexts goes hand in hand with an acknowledgement of the ways in which diverse pleasures or, more importantly, the subjects used to procure pleasure for others can be commodified. As is well known, there are individuals who derive pleasure from inflicting pain on others, a situation that is more easily arranged where commodification has occurred. We could inquire, for whose benefit particular pleasures are commodified, and which people are themselves turned into commodities so that pleasures can be sold to those with the means to purchase. In other words, even as we acknowledge the real harms and injuries done to human subjects who may end up being treated as commodities, we also want to understand how and why these economies of pleasure are sustained. It is equally important to investigate the means by which those who procure pleasure at the expense of pain to other humans rationalize their pleasure and decouple the pleasure that they enjoy from the pain that they inflict on those who are compelled to become providers of pleasure. We should not, however, assume that such subjugated providers of pleasure can never experience pleasure for themselves. Even in the most dire circumstances, we cannot rule out the possibility that individuals and groups of individuals may be able to extract some form of pleasure for themselves or may aspire to some form of pleasure for themselves and others. There will obviously be a need to think about how best to characterize and evaluate such forms of pleasure beyond thinking of them as potential instances of resistance, especially when the pleasure comes at the expense of other members of the same community or brings long-term harm to the self supposedly benefitting from such pleasure. This will also be an opportunity to investigate the myriad ways in which pleasure might be connected to unpleasure.

One important reason for paying attention to pleasure in our work has to do with the relationship of pleasure to social order and orderliness. Less cryptically, we should seek to determine what relationship there is, if any, between the volume, variety, and relative consistency of pleasure that a social order makes possible for its people to have and the degree of the people's affective investment in that social order. The less and more inconsistent or unachievable pleasure is to a population, the less invested the population will be toward social order and orderliness, and the reverse is also the case. We mean here that what social scientists, inspired by Antonio Gramsci, like to call "social hegemony"—which means the ability of a ruling group to command

appreciative regard from the population it rules—is in reality measured by how much pleasure in the system the people have, based on how much the system constrains, enables, or disables them. In fact, we might go so far as to say that the currency of exchange in hegemony, the currency used by rulers and the ruled to trade affect, concession, stability, and institutional solidity, is really no more and no less than pleasure.

We earlier alluded to the ways in which the policing of what are presumed to be opportunities for pleasure might represent, as Bayat puts it, a “technique of power” used to legitimize political and moral authority. In exploring this dimension further, we could as scholars in African studies identify whose pleasures are being policed, what kinds of pleasures are being policed, and the covert purposes for which the policing of pleasures and sites of pleasure is being carried out. We should definitely consider what pleasures those who are dedicated to policing the pleasure indulge in for themselves, even as they approve and disapprove of particular pleasures for others. We will also want to account for the varied ideological values attributed to specific pleasures by different centers of power in a society. Because efforts to police the pursuit of pleasure do not always emanate from those who already enjoy the highest levels of political and moral authority, we stand to learn much by studying how those who are under the authority of more powerful institutions and figures seek to ascribe some modicum of power to themselves by regulating how and when others who are subordinate to them can access pleasure. Naturally, the obverse should also be of interest: that is, an analysis of the settings in which, and the rationales for which, powerful institutions choose to accommodate themselves to the pleasures permitted for those who are beholden to such institutions. Distinguishing between the contexts in which accessing pleasure should or should not be seen as a form of defiance and resistance is an equally important subject for consideration.

If, as Daniel Russell intimates, our pleasures are closely connected to our values and attitudes (2005:4), what, then, might the pleasures accepted in specific places and communities suggest about the values and attitudes that are accepted within those groups, both at the present time and historically? Which forms of pleasures are perceived to be anti-social, and by which groups? If some purveyors of monotheistic religions have in the past and present time shown themselves to be fearful or hostile toward any kind of indulgence in sensational pleasures, how much do we know about the thinking on both sensational and emotional pleasures in indigenous African forms of spirituality, historically and in the present time? In relation to this, we are equally interested in a deep analysis of the terms for pleasure and its cognates in African languages and what these might indicate about historical ideologies of pleasure. If, under specific circumstances, some individuals were permitted to indulge in pleasures that were otherwise forbidden to most people, how was this permission rationalized? Were those actions explicitly acknowledged as providing pleasure, or were they rationalized in such a way as to suggest a distancing from the actual experience of pleasure? We will want to think about pleasure not only at the level of the group, but also

at the level of the individual. How do particular individuals interpret their preferred sources of and experiences of pleasure? Under what circumstances and for what reasons might pleasure and anxiety intersect in the experience of particular individuals? How do we account for the situations in which some individuals deliberately seek out experiences that are viewed as non-pleasurable? Why, beyond the possibility that some individuals are deluded or otherwise psychologically disturbed, do they find pleasure in certain kinds of objects, actions, or events?

### **Our Contributions to Africa/Pleasure**

The collection of articles that follows represents a token contribution toward a fleshing out of the agenda that we have sketched above. It makes no claim to covering all the requisite ground and serves mainly as an example of the directions that future research on Africa/Pleasure might take.

Naminata Diabate's "On Visuals and Selling the Promise of Sexual Plaisir and Pleasure in Abidjan" presents a sketch of what she calls an economy of sexual pleasure in Abidjan, highlighting the role of visual markers in that economy. A critical element in the title of Diabate's article is the word "promise," the offer of something not yet possessed and not yet in hand. The objects for sale that she describes are not in themselves a source of pleasure; instead, the visual cues serve as a deposit on what are expected to be future pleasures. As subjects for additional research, it would be worth comparing different economies of pleasure in Africa's urban landscape and the deployment of diverse visual cues linked to a variety of promised pleasures. One might also wish to know which other pleasures are being promised, and what the frequent or infrequent conjoining of sexual pleasures with other pleasures on offer might suggest about the areas of life in which residents are hailed as would-be consumers who can be persuaded about their perceived lack of satisfaction in one area of life or another. Since some of the objects on sale that Diabate describes are imported and have foreign names, while others have names in local languages, we might also wish to explore why and how indigenous concepts and terms are absorbed into contemporary economies of pleasure in Africa.

Akinwumi Ogundiran takes up this very point, offering in his contribution to this group of articles a suggestive roadmap for studying the place of pleasure in indigenous thought. His analysis of the Yorùbá ontology of pleasure begins with an interpretation of selected Yorùbá myths that recount the outcome of pleasure for prominent figures in the Yorùbá pantheon, and in so doing also account for the distribution of political and religious authority in Yorùbá society. The conclusion that Ogundiran draws from his analysis of a well-known myth is that the Yorùbá did not conceive of pleasure in absolute terms, nor did they contrast pleasure with pain. Other scholars will probably want to probe these claims further through a more expansive study of Yorùbá mythology. On the basis of this myth, with an understanding that "the pursuit of pleasure cannot be divorced from the desire for self-

realization,” Ogundiran then proceeds to examine material artefacts revealing which objects of pleasure were used in the Yorùbá pursuit of self-realization. Relying on archeological evidence excavated from important sites in Yorùbá territory, including Ilé-Ifè and Èdè-Ilé among others, Ogundiran identifies combs, beads, commemorative sculptures displayed in public during festive periods, and the consumption of horsemeat among the upper classes dating back to the eleventh century in some instances as objects or practices indicative of an investment in everyday pleasure. Our proposal for an expanded agenda for pleasure in African studies would surely benefit from similar work and further research on the degree to which there is a connection between the material artefacts associated with pleasure that can be recovered from historical sites and the forms of political organization as well as principles embedded in the mythology or other older oral narratives of other African communities and ethnic groups.

Karin Barber’s article also focuses on the Yorùbá, though the supplemental functions of the forms of textual pleasure that she examines are not necessarily peculiar to any one ethnic group. Indeed, her conclusion is potentially applicable anywhere in the world. Specifically, she states in her conclusion that textual creation is one of the means by which sociality can be constituted in a group, and that textual pleasure (especially of the performative variety) teaches us how communities anywhere understand their own process of creation. With respect to identifying priorities for pleasure studies in our work, what this suggests is that by studying particular pleasures which can only be accessed when individuals interact with other individuals in public spaces, we might begin to understand how certain kinds of social interactions among specific groups of people are made possible and sustained. Pleasure, then, is not an end in itself, and undoubtedly has supplementary social functions worthy of our attention. To illustrate her argument in the case of the Yorùbá, Barber considers three textual genres: *oríkì* (or praise poetry), the now defunct traveling theater, and Yorùbá language newspapers from the 1930s, each associated with a different kind of textual pleasure. The three forms of textual pleasure that she identifies involve exegesis, reaching out, and tuning in to the textual performances of others in one’s immediate community. In a sense, Barber’s argument regarding textual pleasures complements what Ogundiran has to say about the role of pleasure items and pleasurable actions in the realization of the self.

The articles by Asante Mtenje and Moradewun Adejunmobi also address the pleasure-sociality nexus, but from different perspectives. Both deal with a gendered sociality and the pleasures emanating from that gendered sociality. While Mtenje considers pleasurable activity arising from leisure outside normal routines, Adejunmobi focuses on pleasurable activity alongside work and daily routines. Both Mtenje and Adejunmobi reflect on what leisure is and its connections to particular forms of frequently gendered pleasure. Mtenje highlights the role of fun and play in her article that recounts how some female-centered gatherings described as play (or *macheza* in Chichewa) associated with urban women in Malawi provide an opportunity for pleasure

and leisure for the female participants while also reinforcing patriarchal expectations for the women. The pleasure that these female participants experience through activities envisioned as play appears to derive in no small measure from being in spaces where they can be autonomous from men. Some women use these spaces of autonomy to defy local codes of respectability while others, it would seem, find pleasure in the same spaces while also reaffirming patriarchal expectations. This, then, is a study of a context, in which the pursuit of gendered pleasures can both bolster social institutions and gender norms, as well as offer a reprieve from the weight of those norms. The pleasures in this case are not institutional in the manner that we described earlier in our introduction, but they are connected to social relations in variable ways.


In her article, Adejunmobi problematizes the relationship between pleasure and leisure, making a clear distinction between the two, though they are often seen to go hand in hand. In particular, she explores the contexts in which certain individuals, and here again mostly women or other subordinated subjects, are able to experience pleasure in the absence of dedicated time for leisure. In her contribution, which is concerned with the types of Nigerian popular films known for their repetitive properties, she argues that expressive works can be configured in such a way as to provide pleasure, even when the act of viewing and hearing itself does not occur within the context of a break with everyday life. Viewers who are at work or otherwise engaged can find pleasure in films and other forms of entertainment known for their repetitive properties, or an attribute that she identifies as their familiarity. Adejunmobi's article opens the door to further studies of the characteristics and types of entertainment that enable this kind of pleasure, as well as the forms of pleasure experienced in relation to work, to routine, to obligation, or everyday life. Just as importantly, it is an opportunity to further ponder the intersections between leisure and pleasure, given that there have been many more publications on leisure within the field of African studies than there have been on pleasure as such.

Although each of these articles examines pleasure in conjunction with a specific setting or history, they also adopt methodologies or propose principles that could be applied to other settings and histories. Our hope is that these initial offerings on the subject of pleasure will generate additional questions for exploration and reinvigorate an agenda for future work on Africa/Pleasure.

## Postscript

Four out of the five papers in this forum were presented at a conference titled "Pleasure and the Pleasurable in Africa and the African Diaspora," organized by Tejumola Olaniyan at the University of Wisconsin Madison in 2017. The conference came on the heels of programing on the same theme in the Department of African Cultural Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, during the 2016–2017 school year and a panel titled "Africa,

Pleasure” at the annual conference of the African Literature Association in Johannesburg in 2014 put together by Tejumola. Tejumola passed away unexpectedly in November 2019 before the research project on Africa/Pleasure that he had launched could take full shape in the form of publications. This collection of articles is dedicated to his memory.

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## Notes

1. Munro's article stems from a presentation at the 2017 Africa/Pleasure conference at the University of Wisconsin Madison, where many contributors to this cluster of articles first presented their work.
2. In none of our own publications can we find the word pleasure in the title. Tejumola Olaniyan has more frequently alluded to the pleasure of the researcher, and the pleasures of different kinds of entertainment and consumption, whether they be aligned with ideologically regressive or progressive impulses. In his book, *Arrest the Music!*, for example, he, along with other young

males of his generation, talks about acquiring during his youth “the pleasurable language of male chauvinism” (2004:44) from listening to particular songs by Fela Anikulapo Kuti, while also noting that “pleasure is never innocent or innocuous” (2004:148). The question of pleasure appears even more fleetingly in Moradewun Adejunmobi’s scholarship. Her most extensive engagement with this issue is in the article “Reading BJ’s Nollywood,” where she pushes back against criticism of Nigerian popular film for its excessive commercialization and ideological failures. As she states, “even the most corrosive instance of commercialization of culture generates works triggering diverse value judgments and providing viewers and consumers with considerable pleasure” (2018:32).

3. See, for example, Kaarsholm (2009).
4. Writing about Douglass in *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*, Simon Gikandi writes: “Frederick Douglass detested any suggestion that the experience of slavery would generate any kind of pleasure for the enslaved, or that people in bondage could become sensuous beings akin to the white subjects[...] discussed earlier.... Douglass went on to provide a systematic indictment of modes of pleasure that were, in his view, created and enforced by masters to ‘secure the ends of injustice and oppression.’... Douglass believed that the only morally acceptable representation of slavery was one that took cognizance of its tragic dimension and identified and affirmed seriousness and unhappiness as the essential condition of the black in the modern world” (2011:171–72).
5. Gikandi further explains: “There were, of course, pragmatic and tactical reasons why melancholy was the preferred rhetorical mode in slave narratives and other accounts against enslavement. Within the context or aftermath of abolitionism, in which the books by Prince and Douglass were written and circulated, any contemplation of black pleasure in enslavement would fall right into the trap of the slave-owning class and its propaganda machine, which liked to display images of happy slaves as evidence of the good life they were having in the plantation” (2011:172).