

# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

## How African is the *African Studies Review*?

During a recent visit to Senegal, I spent time with Dr. Cheikh Thiam and Dr. Divine Fuh discussing what makes African studies particularly African. We reflected on some of the structural tensions in African studies research, the inequities embedded in the field, and disjunctures between research programs imagined outside the continent and realities on the ground for African scholars and visiting researchers. This meeting was one of several in Senegal, Mauritania, Ghana, and South Africa during which I considered the disconnect between those who research, write, and publish about Africa, and the lived experience of African researchers affiliated with universities, research institutes, and other scholarly networks and fora. A recurring theme in our discussions centered on how and why so many articles written about a particular place, nation, community, or group are rarely accessible or circulated among those who inhabit the very site of study. In many respects, these many and related concerns return us to a central question: how African is the *African Studies Review*?

After mulling over this conundrum, my colleagues offered a suggestion. What if we were to actively promote new research about a particular country *in* that country? What if, for example, we took the newest work about Nigeria published in the ASR to emerging Nigerian scholars in Nigeria, to share it and discuss it? Building on this proposition, the ASR Seminar was hatched. The ASR Seminar is a new initiative piloted twice in late 2019 to engage young, emerging, and early-career scholars based at institutions of higher learning in Africa with pertinent new scholarship appearing in the ASR. Two interdisciplinary seminars were co-hosted by Dr. Thiam and locally-based scholars in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia [Dr. Daniel Assefa] and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania [Dr. John Wakota, one of the team of ASR Book Review Editors], along with me (in my role as current ASR Editor-in-Chief). Fifteen participants were granted complimentary access to six recent ASR articles germane to scholars of Ethiopia/Tanzania, to be read in

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advance of the event. The seminars were conducted in the form of a graduate/postgraduate question and discussion running approximately two hours, followed by light refreshments and an informal discussion of the ASR, its mission and structure, and publishing in peer-reviewed journals more generally. Participants created CambridgeCore accounts and were provided with a complimentary one-year ASA membership, granting access to all the Cambridge University Press African studies journals.

After planning and hosting these initial seminars, I am optimistic about the future of African studies. Our hope is that ASA members will step forward in the future and offer to host seminars across the continent. The sustainable growth and future health of the *African Studies Review* rests heavily on the new generation of African studies scholars on the African continent. Over the past two years, we have taken concrete steps to make the journal more accessible to and inclusive of Africa-based scholars. We have expanded our editorial team and Editorial Review Board [<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/african-studies-review/information/editorial-board>] to include numerous African scholars. We've transitioned to being a bilingual journal, accepting and reviewing submissions in English and French. We have added Portuguese abstracts to gain traction with our lusophone peers. We have developed the Pipeline for Emerging African Studies Scholars (PEASS) to workshop, develop, and mentor new scholarship by scholars on the continent [<https://africanstudies.org/peass-workshops/>]. We have rolled out a new scheme to incentivize first-time peer reviewing by African scholars. The journal's editors are attending more conferences, meeting more emerging scholars, soliciting fascinating new manuscripts, and elucidating the process of article submission. And we have reformed our internal peer-review policies, enhancing equity and mitigating some of the deficiencies arising from inadequate resource access and distribution in African institutions of higher learning.

Just as the health of the membership is vital to the life of a professional association, a dynamic journal is only as healthy as its readership. Like the submission volume, the readership must be growing. As Editor-in-Chief, one of the most important responsibilities I have is demystifying journal publishing for people less familiar with, or entirely unacquainted with, the process. Our newly-updated FAQ page [<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/african-studies-review/information/faqs>] provides expert guidance on how to respond effectively to the Revise and Resubmit decision letter and an example by a published scholar in this very issue, Dr. Rachel Silver. As a result of our newest implemented editorial change, the dates of original submission, revision, and acceptance appear below the abstract. This invaluable data helps readers understand the timeline of production. Ultimately, these changes are being shepherded with our growing African readership in center view. Another way to think of this is through analogy. One of the best ways to learn how a granting agency makes grant award decisions is first to work from the inside, as a reviewer. My own extramural

grants were mostly made possible *after* I had reviewed applications in previous cycles. One of the best ways to maximize the likelihood that your submission will move through the peer-review pipeline is if you yourself have reviewed for us previously.

The *African Studies Review* wants to publish the best new critical scholarship, and much of that is written on the African continent by Africa-based scholars. All Africanists want our work to be disseminated, read, digested, and engaged with by scholars globally. Many of us hope that our research has real and direct impact. As much as I dislike essentializations, the ASR has a long way to go before most Africa-based scholars recognize it as an especially African journal. As editors, we not only need to make the journal more accessible, more inclusive, and more relevant, but we need develop mutually respectful and beneficial relationships that produce outcomes pertinent to the diversity of scholarship in African universities. Indeed, most area studies journals can and should do a lot more to engage scholars of the Global South and facilitate continental collaboration. In 2019, there are still journals focused on colonialism and colonial history without a single African editor on the editorial board! The reforms we have ushered in are part of the process of the decolonization of journal editing and scholarly production. The new seminars are another step toward grappling with the deep-seated imbalances bequeathed by centuries of exploitation and marginalization. But we can do more and we can be better yet. As always, we welcome your feedback, thoughtful engagement, and grounded critique. With your continued support and engagement, we will ensure the continuity and growth of the flagship journal of the African Studies Association (USA).

The December 2019 issue of the ASR is a rich repository of new scholarship from African, European, and North American scholars, featuring research from Benin, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. This new collection celebrates anthropology, economics, gender studies, literature, sociology, political science, and journalism.

The volume opens with Kingsley L. Madueke's "The Emergence and Development of Ethnic Strongholds and Frontiers of Collective Violence in Jos, Nigeria" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2018.115>]. In this provocative essay, Madueke explores the struggles between Christians and Muslims in Jos and the central place of notions of indigeneity. Using rich spatial and ethnographic data, he offers a new account of how violence originates and spreads from one neighborhood to the next.

Continuing the focus on Nigeria, Daniel M. Mengara moves south to Igbo territory and offers an important reappraisal of Chinua Achebe's first and most celebrated novel. In "Colonial Intrusion and Stages of Colonialism in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*," [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2018.85>], Mengara offers a new analytical and conceptual framework of colonialism through Achebe's eyes. He discerns five colonial phases or forms, namely exploration, expropriation, appropriation, exploitation,

and justification. He proposes Achebe's novel as a tool with which to decipher the psycho-historical processes inherent in the colonial project.

Our third article turns to the Democratic Republic of Congo and the unprecedented waves of sexual violence in the region since the new millennium. In "Resources and Rape: Congo's (toxic) Discursive Complex," [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2018.126>], Ann Laudati and Charlotte Mertens explore the intersection of sexual assault with the pillaging of natural resources, and how the two are welded together by the media, activists, and nonprofit agencies. Media articles and human rights reports are the fountainhead of the so-called rape-resources narrative, a toxic trope that sits uncomfortably with academic approaches, at least partly because of the omission of historical context, gendered conflict dynamics, and armed group/civilian activity and mobilization.

Continuing the theme of news and journalism, Leila Demarest and Arnim Langer explore the incommensurabilities of Nigeria's media landscape in "Reporting on electoral violence in Nigerian news media: 'Saying it as it is'?" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2018.150>]. They zero in on the tension between the existence of a vibrant and critical media and the incompleteness of press freedoms. With a focus on the prelude to the 2015 federal election, their analysis identifies the impact on editorial writing of reporting biases and political pressures.

Rachel Silver's "'Nothing but Time': Middle Figures, Student Pregnancy Policy, and the Malawian State" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2019.2>] also concerns state/non-state relations, particularly the role of nongovernmental operations and donors in shaping Malawian education policy. Whereas until quite recently schoolgirls who became pregnant were immediately expelled, a formal, government-led review in 2016 enabled mid-level civil servants, NGO representatives, and consultants to reshape policy and process and reclaim moral authority over Malawian schools.

The penultimate article, by Vusilizwe Thebe and Pamela Maombera, examines Zimbabwean women migrants as they move back and forth across the border. In "'Negotiating the Border': Zimbabwean Migrant Mothers and Shifting Immigration Policy and Law in South Africa" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2018.120>], Thebe and Maombera seek to understand women's migration intentions in relation to changing policy and law in South Africa. Changes in border policy provoke new strategies, revealing migrant agency and intentionality.

Our final article, by Alison Lang, Philippe LeMay-Boucher, and Charlemagne Codjo Tomavo, explores domestic expenditures on magico-religious powers in Southern Benin. In "Expenditures on Malevolent Magico-Religious Powers: Empirical Evidence from Benin," [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2018.136>], the authors apply classic economic questions and longitudinal methods to a novel research site. Beninese invest heavily in the occult, more often than not for sinister rather than curative or palliative purposes. A number of classic correlations were discernible, such as jealousy and social conflict.

I am pleased to have contributed also to this particular issue a review of seven recent works that share a common thread, namely the projection and performance of Ghanaian nationhood [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2019.16>]. The remainder of our issue is abounding with perceptive reviews of new books and films, all online only and free to access and share. One of the articles in this issue originated with the previous editorial team, and I thank Elliot Fratkin and Sean Redding for their diligence in bringing it to fruition.