

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

A (Re)turn to Older Conversations in African Studies

In an interdisciplinary journal such as the *African Studies Review*, we are all enriched by the unique perspectives that writers from different disciplines bring to the table. Historians, political scientists, economists, literary scholars, and sociologists are able to draw on their own disciplinary perspectives as well as on the perspectives of other disciplines to gain insights into the continent, and we all are better off for it. What do we do, though, with disciplines that are considered ill-fitting for a study of Africa? Fifty years ago, the South African anthropologist Archie Mafeje remarked about the ways in which historically, on the continent, sociology had been viewed as a discipline best suited to making sense of the civilized European settler communities in the eastern and southern parts of the continent, while the rest of Africa could be left to anthropologists to study. He expressed the belief that these African sites, conceptualized as static and non-modernizing, lent themselves better to a discipline that had been developed to study the Other than one developed to study the metropole. Concepts such as modernity, civilization, and knowledge, as developed by sociologists, were perceived at the time as inappropriate for describing Africa, hence the decision to leave the study of the continent to those who worked with concepts such as kinship, “tribes,” and witchcraft beliefs. No wonder, then, that the early academics in many departments of sociology on the continent such as Kofi Abrefa Busia, Godwin Nukunya, and Max Assimeng, all of whom taught in the Department of Sociology at the University of Ghana in its early years, were in fact trained primarily in the United Kingdom as social anthropologists. Even today, there are many more African and Africanist anthropologists than there are sociologists.

Nonetheless, we have come a long way from that early period. No longer do we believe that between the anthropologist and the sociologist, the former is better suited to the study of the African continent than the latter. There is

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now a firm recognition that limiting the applicability of sociological principles to specific geographic locations was a handicap, not an asset. Witness, therefore, the firm presence of sociological perspectives in the *ASR* of the contemporary period. In 2020 for example, 35 of the 170 articles the *ASR* received (representing 20 percent of the total submissions) were from authors who indicated that their articles drew on sociological principles and perspectives. In 2018 and 2019, articles written with a sociological perspective represented 19 percent and 15 percent of submissions, respectively. While the acceptance rates of these articles may vary, one cannot deny that in the rich menu of readings that the *ASR* offers, sociological offerings are clearly well represented.

It is important to interrogate the kind of insights we offer from our various disciplines, though. This is especially important, given the social protests of the last couple of years in both Africa and the United States and the ensuing introspection that many institutions, including academic ones, have been forced to make. We have returned to old questions about diversity, decolonizing the curriculum, expanding the frontiers of knowledge production beyond the tried and tested Western canon, and so on. There is nothing particularly new about these ideas, but they are worth revisiting because of their implications, first for our individual disciplinary perspectives, and second for interdisciplinary journals such as *ASR*. In my own discipline of sociology, for example, two seemingly unconnected events that took place this year reinforce the importance of this discussion about diversity in the world of knowledge production.

The first event occurred virtually, during the 116th annual meeting of the American Sociological Association. The theme for this year's event was "Emancipatory Sociology: Rising to the Du Boisian Challenge." That this year's theme was an ode to W.E.B. Du Bois, the first African American man to earn a PhD from Harvard, was not surprising. The 2021 president of the American Sociological Association is Aldon Morris, a sociologist based at Northwestern University who published a groundbreaking book in 2015 detailing W.E.B. Du Bois' unheralded contributions to the field of American sociology. The contributions of the Atlanta School have been completely overshadowed by the Chicago School. This year's conference sought to redress that to some degree. It provided many opportunities for scholars to interrogate and discuss Du Bois' legacy and relevance for contemporary sociological studies. There was also a presidential panel on the theme "Sociology in the Global South," which offered speakers from the global South a platform for sharing the key questions, debates, and discussions taking place in their particular locations.

Halfway around the world, a second event took place. This was the publication of a special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* on the work of the Nigerian sociologist Akinsola Akiwōwō. There is no Wikipedia page devoted to him. His is not a common name offered up in sociological discussions. And yet, his contributions to both African sociology and what Raewyn Connell calls sociology on a planetary scale are immense. Based at

the Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife for much of his academic career, Akiwoṣoṣo painstakingly devoted his time to engaging in what Jimi Adesina has dubbed the Akiwoṣoṣo project. Like other scholars such as Archie Mafeje and Bernard Magubane, Akiwoṣoṣo was firm in his belief that scholars of the global South had unique perspectives to contribute to the larger body of work in their disciplines and should do so unabashedly. He proceeded then to demonstrate the value of indigenizing sociological thought by drawing on Yoruba oral poetry to identify concepts that could serve as explanations for social phenomena. Rather than drawing on the founding fathers of sociology, he asked what it was that Yoruba oral poetry could offer sociologists as insights for interrogating the societies in which they lived. In his contribution to the special issue, Olúfemí Táíwò argues that in looking to Yoruba oral poetry, scholars in other disciplines besides sociology can actually gain insights into their fields of specialization as well. Building situated concepts in our various disciplines must also lead us to being open to rethinking some of the dominant categories and concepts we have come to accept as useful ways of understanding the continent.

These two events, both of which took place in the third quarter of 2021, offer food for thought for our individual disciplinary perspectives as well as for our interdisciplinary approaches. They serve first as a call to contemporary scholars based on the continent to (re)-affirm their commitment to doing sociology, history, economics, or political science from the ground up, so as to widen the scope of knowledge production. Second, they highlight the need for scholars of African Studies both on and off the continent to revisit the work of the academics of previous generations whose works may not necessarily be available in academic databases or on the bookshelves in our various institutions. Across the continent, in little-known pieces shared at seminars, conferences, and workshops can be found a rich tapestry of ideas. What would an excavation of these voices of the South in history, economics, political science, anthropology, archaeology, geography, literature, sociology, and other disciplines bring to our understanding of the African continent and its diasporas, and how can that reshape the kind of articles we begin to see in the *ASR*?

Even as the memory of the numerous Black Lives Matter protests held last year begins to fade, may we continually seek to do far more than has previously been done in this renewed discussion and conversation about the inclusion of diverse voices in our knowledge production efforts. In both our teaching and our research, may we be reminded of the continued importance of this old conversation about diversity. Journals such as *ASR* can encourage this effort by supporting the work of scholars who seek to revisit the work of previous scholars on the continent as well as to show its contemporary significance.

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As Editor-in-Chief, one of my great privileges is to convene the prize committees and announce their decisions. The *ASR* Prize for the Best Africa-based Doctoral Dissertation recognizes an Africa-based doctoral student who has successfully defended their dissertation/doctoral thesis on any aspect of African studies at an African institution of higher education during the previous calendar year. The winner is presented with a Cambridge University Press e-certificate, honored with a plaque at the ASA Annual Meeting, and invited to submit an article based on the dissertation to the *ASR*. The winner of the 2021 *ASR* Prize for the Best Africa-based Doctoral Dissertation is Dr. Kobenan Atta Nicaise Yao, for a thesis entitled “Littérature, Bande Dessinée et Cinema en Côte d’Ivoire: Histoire, Adaptation et Réception. Un Essai de Sociologie du Public,” completed at the Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny de Cocody-Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire. The committee designated Dr. Martin Bekker’s “Rebellion with a cause: An inquiry into the nature of South African post-apartheid protest, using computational social science methods,” completed at the University of Johannesburg, for honorable mention. Congratulations to both scholars, and thank you to the committee for its hard work!

The *ASR* Prize for the Best Africa-Focused Anthology or Edited Collection recognizes editors and contributors to an anthology of original scholarship, cohesive in structure and interdisciplinary in nature, that advances African studies in new theoretical and/or methodological directions. The award recognizes the editor(s) and also the contributors as a whole. In making its selection, the prize committee pays particular attention to significance, originality, and quality of writing, and the anthology’s contribution to advancing debates in African studies. The winner is presented with a Cambridge University Press e-certificate and honored with a plaque at the ASA Annual Meeting. The winner of the 2021 *ASR* Prize for the Best Africa-Focused Anthology or Edited Collection is *Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Brill, 2020), edited by Samantha Kelly. This stellar edited volume makes available recent scholarship on the history of Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea. Comprehensive in its scope, the sixteen chapters by the international scholars Alessandro Bausi, Claire Bosc-Tiessé, Antonella Brita, Amélie Chekroun, Marie-Laure Derat, Deresse Ayenachew, François-Xavier Fauvelle, Emmanuel Fritsch, Alessandro Gori, Habtemichael Kidane, Margaux Herman, Bertrand Hirsch, Samantha Kelly, Gianfrancesco Lusini, Denis Nosnitsin, and Anaïs Wion bring to light various dimensions of the history and culture of this region. The chapters explore various dimensions of the history of the Ethiopian-Eritrean region from the seventh to the sixteenth century, including Christianity, Islam, and local religions, women, trade, literature, and visual culture. In addition to providing an insightful panorama of the religious and cultural contexts in the area, the diverse authors are very successful in articulating different textual and visual sources while employing several different methodological approaches. Innovative and based on extensive research, this is a unique edited volume that showcases the rich connections between the region of Ethiopia-Eritrea, the African continent, and the rest of the globe. This magisterial edited book is an important contribution to African Studies, which will be useful for

scholars and students interested in the history of Africa, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. The committee awarded an honorable mention to *The Art of Emergency: Aesthetics and Aid in African Crises* (Oxford University Press, 2020) by Chérie Rivers Ndaliko and Samuel Mark Anderson. Congratulations to all scholar contributors, and many thanks to the committee for its careful deliberations!

The 2021 prize for the Best Article Published in the ASR is shared between two outstanding authors. We are pleased to announce that Coleman Donaldson's "The Role of Islam, Ajami Writings, and Educational Reform in Sulemaana Kantè's N'ko" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2019.59>] in Volume 63, Issue 3, and Oumar Ba's "Contested Meanings: Timbuktu and the Prosecution of Destruction of Cultural Heritage as War Crimes" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2020.16>], which appeared in Volume 63, Issue 4, are the joint recipients of this year's award. Congratulations to both authors, and thank you to the entire Editorial Collective for participating in the vote!

This December issue contains an exceptional wealth of exciting and original research in conservation and ecology, economics, health sciences, literature, history, anthropology, sociology, and political science. We are pleased to feature scholarship about Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ghana, Lesotho, Mali, Mauritania, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, and Africa writ large in the context of malaria, the subject of our latest African Studies Keywords (ASK) [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.10>] essay. We open this issue with a Commentary by Ricardo Larémont; "Climate Change and Conflict in the Western Sahel" reflects on the interrelationship between climate change, pastoralist-farmer conflict, resource competition, and state power, against the significant spike in irredentist and jihadist groups in the western Sahel region.

Our first essay is the 2020 ASR Distinguished Lecture, delivered via zoom at the virtual 2020 African Studies Association Annual Meeting [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.103>] by Emeritus Professor Bob Edgar of Howard University. Professor Edgar reflects on the connections between our national racial reckoning and our capacity as scholars to recover Black voices that were erased from history by revisiting the challenges of fieldwork in Lesotho and South Africa during his almost five decades of research. His work is also attentive to how scholars can serve the communities they study, using as examples his successful efforts to return a sacred artifact and the remains of a prophetess to their homes in the Ciskei.

A subsequent pair of essays then focuses on Senegal. "The 1970s Drought, State Crisis, and Opportunities for Transnational River Development in the Senegal Basin" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.68>] by Rebecca Wall offers a challenge to historical scholarship that sees drought as overwhelmingly destructive. A major drought in the 1970s resulted in a reshaping of power in the Senegal River basin and the creation of a finance and development scheme. Wall's careful reading and innovative methodology reveal that fear of famine ushered in a new prioritization of agriculture and new multistate collaborations.

Next, Devin Bryson's article, entitled "In and Out in Senegal: Unearthing Queer Roots in Mohamed Mbougar Sarr's *De purs hommes*" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.77>], examines a provocative and celebrated 2018 novel that fictionalizes contemporary homophobia and homophobic violence, which comes on the heels of Sarr winning the 2021 Prix Goncourt. Bryson is interested in the relationship between queer men and social dynamics in Senegal, and how the author's multidirectional critical discourse and oblique narrative tactics destabilize the private and public dichotomy, centering a queer existence, which in turn blurs social barriers to LGBTQ+ agency.

A second pair of essays tackles imperial political legacies in post-colonial Africa. In "Equality, Non-Interference, and Sovereignty: President Ahmadou Ahidjo and the Making of Cameroon-U.S. Relations" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.75>], Julius Amin advocates for the importance of local archives for the reconstruction of postcolonial African history. For Amin, Cameroon's first president's firm grip on power was undergirded by his capacity to leverage a U.S. policy oriented toward the development of the country while also protecting its sovereignty. This latest contribution to the current of new diplomatic history reappraises Ahidjo's actions, and shows how underutilized archives challenge the more conventional new nations on the world stage framework.

Batlang Seabo and Robert Nyenhuis direct our attention to southern Africa. In "Botswana's 2019 General Elections: A Referendum on General Ian Khama" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.69>], the authors critically reflect on Botswana's twelfth free and fair election. Despite the defection of former president Khama from the long-ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDS), the opposition Botswana Patriotic Front failed to make a dent in the well-oiled governing party machine. In the wake of the Botswana Democratic Party's twelfth successive victory, the authors speculate about the future of southern Africa's most stable electoral democracy.

A third pair of essays reconsiders the legacies of white supremacy, apartheid, and segregation in divergent contexts. In "Land Reform for a Landless Chief in South Africa: History and Land Restitution in KwaZulu-Natal" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.76>], Jill Kelly turns a critical eye to South Africa's post-apartheid land reform program. Frustration at the pace of reform, and then at the level of communal land access, productivity, and class divide, has also provided opportunity. Kelly focuses on the descendant of a colonial-era landless chief who manipulated historical narratives in KwaZulu-Natal to create the foundation for a land restitution claim.


In "Human-Lion Conflict and the Reproduction of White Supremacy in Northwest Namibia" [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.72>], John Heydinger examines the uneasy relationship between hunting, conservation, and white settler colonialism. Drawing on archival and oral materials, the author reveals how the South African-supported government used livestock and human-lion interactions to displace African pastoralists, with lasting and

deleterious effects on human and animal livelihoods, and with significance as well for present-day conservation activity.

In “Economic Change and Occultic *Sika Bone*: Market Women’s Responses to Increased Financialization in Ghana” [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.88>], Jovia Salifu offers an ethnographic reappraisal of so-called “bad money.” Within the context of Ghanaian market settings, where material accumulation is valorized, *sika bone* reflects economic uncertainty in an era of increased financialization. Market women’s views of economic change are approached through the lenses of rationality and superstition, tied to fears of uncertainty and beliefs in occultic accumulation.

Our final essay, the latest installment in the African Studies Keywords (ASK) [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.10>] series by Melissa Graboyes and Zainab Alidina, considers “Malaria” [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.133>], linking history, ethics, and global health on the continent. The authors contend that historical knowledge ought to be foregrounded in global health epistemic realms and contemporary malaria interventions. Reflecting on ethical issues germane to malaria epidemics, they turn a critical eye toward truth telling, African autonomy, and the obligations of researchers.

By way of conclusion, we are pleased to feature a review essay, “Bureaucrats at Work: African Bureaucracies and Bureaucrats from the Sociological, Historical, and Political Perspectives” [<https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.102>], along with another excellent collection of book and film reviews, all of which are available online and accessible freely.

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