NEWS AND EVENTS

Program of African Studies

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Message from new PAS director Will Reno

I am honored to serve as the Program of African Studies' new director. I benefit from the institutional memory of a research center that has existed for more than six decades and from the wisdom and experience of its previous leaders, including Richard Joseph at Northwestern, Jane Guyer at Johns Hopkins University, David William Cohen at the University of Michigan, John Paden at George Mason University, and Akbar Virmani here in Chicago. Kate Klein continues as assistant director, bringing continuity and her considerable energy to this position, and program assistant Kelly Coffey and Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa interim director Rebecca Shereikis keep the institutional gears well oiled. All of us at PAS look to the Herskovits Library to continue to play its major role in enriching Northwestern's academic environment and in making PAS a global center for scholars who focus on Africa.

These are revolutionary times for the African continent, and my appointment presents an opportunity to marshal our collective energies to pursue new research and teaching opportunities at PAS. It is becoming more difficult to apply terms such as "postcolonial" to countries like Ethiopia and Ghana that have discovered recipes for rapid economic growth that are resistant to problems in the EU and US economies. The majority of Africans now live in cities. Chinese communities have sprung up on the continent, and airlines link African capitals to Chinese (and Brazilian) commercial centers. These global links are reflected in changing patterns of consumption and material culture. African producers transmit their own images of the continent through global cinema. The study of Africa's past challenges the perspectives of Europeans who colonized and dominated much of Africa. African writers continue to make a distinctive mark on global culture.

New PAS director Will Reno

Northwestern University's most recent strategic plan singles out PAS for its role in promoting Africa-focused research and teaching. This role appears in the African studies undergraduate major, the success of the interdisciplinary Afrisem graduate seminar and PAS programs and events, and the ongoing research agendas of Africanist faculty. Recent and proposed faculty hiring signals the continuing commitment of the University and its academic departments to this endeavor.

To serve as director of an institution like PAS is to stand on the shoulders of giants. And although a director's job is to direct, succeeding in this job demands alertness to the interests and engagements of others. Thus, in this vein, when I think of the PAS of the present and future, several core ideas come to mind.

The **undergraduate major** in African studies, established in 2009, is a relatively new PAS institutional pillar. Many African studies majors take advantage of research opportunities through

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the Office of Fellowships and the University's undergraduate research grant program. Our students have won numerous awards, including Fulbright and Princeton in Africa Fellowships and Marshall and Rhodes Scholarships. They travel to the continent to study public health, journalism, human rights, and many other subjects. New programs are on the horizon, including one on law and civil liberties.

Graduate students constitute another pillar of PAS. Northwestern draws graduate students from across the African continent and the rest of the world—some from academic institutions, others from public service, commercial life, and other walks of life. Here they pioneer studies of new subjects and innovate new research methods, such as when a student from Africa and a student from China team up to study how Chinese investment affects the way commercial actors in Africa perceive risk and competition, or when students use research on the development of languages as a means to study long-ago movements of African peoples. It is absolutely critical to PAS's identity that it continue this tradition and attract even more graduate students from around the world alongside those from this country.

Basic **research** focused on the African continent is a critical pillar. PAS stands out in its commitment to the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa and must build on ISITA's legacies. Our faculty are engaged, through funding from PAS, in studies of contemporary African political economies, oral history and performance, and meaning in the words of nonliterate and past societies. Faculty in the School of Law and Center for Global Health are conducting research into access to healthcare in Ethiopia. We now count in our ranks an economist who studies agricultural technology adaptation in Malawi. The many collaborations of these scholars with their counterparts on the continent present opportunities for new research projects. These include engagement with African universities to learn how public officials adapt to new challenges in postconflict societies, the study of warfare in new urban spaces, the adaptation of African armies to extensive peacekeeping, and new ways of studying the intersection of religion and political behavior.

PAS **outreach** to the community continues to make us a hub of activity and connectedness on campus and in Chicagoland. Some of our undergraduate research conferences have drawn audiences and participants that include the Chicago Public Schools, the Kemetic Institute of Chicago, the DuSable Museum of African American History, Chicago politicians, members of diaspora communities, Washington, DC–based officials, and others. We envision new programs that pursue outreach in a collaborative framework, marshaling the interests and expertise of people beyond campus in joint research and teaching projects.

And so with this commitment—to every undergraduate, every graduate student, every faculty member, and the wider community engaged in Africa—I look forward to serving as director of your PAS.

Email your news updates

to african-studies@northwestern.edu so that PAS can share the word with the Africanist community at Northwestern and beyond.

Conference offers retrospective on electoral democracy in Ghana

In two days of reflection and talks at PAS last October, an interdisciplinary group of Africanist scholars, students, and a general audience discussed lessons learned during 20 years of Ghanaian electoral democracy, the challenges encountered, and their implications as the West African nation prepared for elections on December 7. Conference activities included panel discussions and a screening of the documentary *An African Election*.

In his opening remarks, sociology graduate student and conference planning committee head Kofi Takyi Asante situated the December elections in the political and economic history of Ghana. The first panel, "The Historical and Institutional Context of Ghana's Democratic Transition," was chaired by political science graduate student Sally Nuamah. Faculty presenters were Richard Joseph (political science), "From Military Rule to Electoral Democracy"; visiting Mellon Foundation fellow Richard Asante, "Some Thoughts on Two Decades of Liberal Democracy in Ghana"; and Rachel Riedl (political science), "Historical Legacies of Political Party Development in Ghana and Implications for Democracy." The presentations placed the current democratic dispensation in Ghana within a historical context that traced the development of the institutions supporting electoral structures. Joseph gave a firsthand account of his participation in the transitional process in the early 1990s that led to Ghana's exit from military rule. Asante placed that transition in broad historical context, and Riedl analyzed the trajectories of party development in the history of the country.

Stability amidst Chaos: Reflections on Two Decades of Ghanaian Democracy

A conference to reflect on and discuss Ghana's political and social climate for the 2012 election

The second panel, "The Cultural Dimension of Ghanaian Democracy," was chaired by Wendy Griswold (sociology) and featured presenters Dennis Laumann (University of Memphis), "Change and Reaction in Ghana's Political History"; and Clement Adibe (DePaul University), "Leadership, Luck, and the Neighborhood Effects of Ghana's Democratic Miracle." The panel provided an internal and an external framework for understanding the full meaning of Ghana's democracy. Laumann examined the ideological stances of Ghana's two major political parties—the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party—and analyzed how these ideological positions resonated with the electorate. He then focused on the charismatic persona of Jerry Rawlings, the former military leader and democratic president, and his efforts at democratic consolidation in the country. Adibe focused on the impact of Ghanaian electoral successes on the West African subregion, stressing the need for Ghana to succeed—not only to serve as a shining example for the subregion and the continent as a whole but, more important, to act as a stabilizing force for its neighbors.

"Participation and Representation," the final panel, pointed out long-standing issues in Ghana's democratic experience that needed attention. Chaired by Asante, the panel comprised presentations by Daniel Smith (University of Florida), "Consolidation Representation in Ghana? Parliamentary Malapportionment and Rejected Ballots," and independent scholar LaRay Denzer, "Women's Participation in Ghana's Politics: An Overview." Smith focused on the problems that characterized the biometric voter registration for the 2012 elections. He also examined the decision of the electoral commissioner to create 45 new constituencies three months prior to the elections, arguing that such moves highlight the fragility of the country's democracy. Denzer contextualized her study of the role of women in Ghanaian political and social life since colonial times, particularly women's participation in the electoral process as candidates in district and parliamentary elections as well as in the presidential race. Although there has been some improvement, she noted that there still exists a large gap between male and female participation.

ASA panel debates local vs. global perspectives on African Islam

The Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa sponsored a roundtable discussion on "Reconceptualizing African Islam and the Global Community of Believers" at the recent African Studies Association annual meeting in Philadelphia. Chaired by Scott Reese (Northern Arizona University), the discussion included Abdulkader Tayob (University of Cape Town), Cheikh Babou (University of Pennsylvania), Anne Bang (Chr. Michelsen Institute), and Ousman Kobo (Ohio State University). Recently named a coordinate organization of the ASA, ISITA plans to organize at least one panel or roundtable at future ASA annual meetings.

One objective for participants was to ask whether categories like "Islamic Africa" and "African Muslims" are still relevant, even as scholars increasingly study religious phenomena through translocal, transregional, transnational, and global lenses. African Muslims—from erudite scholars to ordinary believers—have long played an active role in the networks that create and sustain the global Islamic community. Webs of interaction among Muslims of diverse origins have become more intricate and prevalent in recent decades, at a pace accelerated by new media and communications technologies. The challenge, according to the ASA discussion panelists, is to exploit the greatest strength of area studies—that is, in-depth understanding of local contexts and languages—while acknowledging African Muslims' participation in networks that transcend geography. The panelists drew on their own teaching and research to suggest productive approaches to the tension between the local and the translocal in Islamic studies.

Tayob said that while it is still valid to study Islam as a discursive tradition, scholars must explore a broader range of discursive spaces. Religion is a vital category of inquiry, he said, but it often enfolds other important discourses—including class, gender, and economics—that should be explored along with faith. He cited halal certification and consumption patterns as a promising area for investigating the local-global interplay involved in creating new markers of identity and discourses of authority. Bang and Babou emphasized keeping a dual perspective—maneuvering between local and global—when studying Islam in Africa. Bang also cautioned against overemphasizing translocal agents of religious change at the expense of local actors and stressed the need for more historical studies of local religious practices as they developed across Africa after conversion. Kobo also favored keeping a dual perspective, noting that the key is to "localize but not isolate," and suggested that scholars could make better use of locally produced knowledge about Islam in African contexts. Finally, Reese argued that the flow of knowledge and ideas between African Muslims and their coreligionists elsewhere is multidirectional; the scope of inquiry, he said, should be informed by patterns of human interaction rather than simple geography.

The well-attended event sparked a lively discussion, with audience members suggesting that attention also be paid to interaction across religious traditions (e.g., Shiite Islam or Christianity) within Africa. A video of the whole discussion, as well as a condensed 10-minute version, is available as a link on the Islamic Africa website: www.islamicafricajournal.org.

Ousmane Kobo speaks at the ASA roundtable "Reconceptualizing African Islam and the Global Community of Believers" last November.

Islamic Africa, University press make strong ASA showing

For a third consecutive year Northwestern University Press sponsored a booth at the exhibition hall at the African Studies Association annual meeting, held in Philadelphia last fall. The booth showcased the press's journal, *Islamic Africa*—now in its third volume year and sixth issue—and offered discounted subscriptions and print-on-demand copies for sale. Also displayed were some of its backlist African studies titles, including Melville Herskovits's *Dahomean Narrative* and Jack Berry's *West African Folktales.*

Islamic Africa managing editor Gianna Mosser organized a meeting of the journal's editorial board and staffed the booth, with assistance from production coordinator Dino Robinson, who also videotaped the ISITA roundtable "Reconceptualizing African Islam and the Global Community of Believers." Acquisitions editor Peter Raccuglia met with prospective book authors.

On the importance of attending the ASA, Mosser remarked, "The exposure is invaluable, when Northwestern University is so renowned for the Africana library and our African studies programs, including ISITA. The journal gets increased exposure, and we are paving the way for the eventual publication of scholarly monographs by African postdoctoral fellows at Northwestern and other exploratory projects in the field of African Studies."

Peter Raccuglia and Gianna Mosser staff the Northwestern University Press booth.

In addition, members of the editorial board met at the ASA and discussed plans for future issues and strategies for increasing subscriptions and submissions. Journal editors attended panels and discussion of scholarly papers focused on Islam and Africa, with an eye to recruiting new submissions and identifying emerging talent.

"There was an incredible number of papers and panels at this year's meeting dealing with Islam," editor-in-chief Scott Reese said. "Many concerned topics we're familiar with, such as Sufism and religious reform, but others represented work by young scholars in novel areas of research ranging from sacred charms in Mauritania and the social significance of Indonesian-language religious texts for Cape Malays in South Africa to the digital humanities. These presentations demonstrate the vibrancy of the study of Islam within the African context. *Islamic Africa*'s presence at the ASA was a golden opportunity to publicize the journal among these young scholars."

President Obama and sub-Saharan Africa: what's missing

By Richard Joseph (political science)

On June 14, 2012, President Obama affixed his signature to the "US Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa." It identified four focus areas: democratic institutions; growth, trade, and investment; peace and security; and opportunity and development. The response from the policy community was a shrug. Mwangi Kimenyi, senior fellow and director of the Africa Growth Initiative at the Brookings Institution, claimed that the policy document was neither "new" nor "strategic" and did not establish a "foundation for creative engagement with an emerging Africa."

The Obama administration must confront two challenges. First, it must convey more effectively the important contributions the United States has already made toward these priorities. Second, President Obama has to put his personal stamp on specific initiatives he considers central to his legacy.

The president's talk in Ghana in July 2009 electrified the audience by declaring that America was ready to help the continent build a broader base for prosperity. The gateway to that transformation was eliminating bad governance. While this message was repeated in the June 2012 policy document, it is lost in the long list of program initiatives.

The president's critics suggest that the United States should focus on the great opportunities in an economically resurgent Africa. Look at the dizzy expansion, they say, of China in Africa and how its engagement in mineral extraction, trade, construction, and infrastructure has been supported by frequent visits from China's top leaders.

Often overlooked in these critiques is that the American predominant role in advancing global peace and security includes Africa. This is an argument President Obama himself needs to make. Africa is not only a continent of "frontier economies," it remains one of "frontier states." The United States plays a unique role in conflict resolution, peace building, and increasing good governance within African states.

Kimenyi suggests that the president should "shelve" his June 12 strategy and "start afresh." I won't go that far. But President Obama needs to step up to the plate. He should plan a visit to Africa in 2013 that includes stops in several countries, convene a roundtable on Africa to garner policy ideas from academic experts and analysts, and lay out his "Agenda for Africa" in a major address to the American public. Moreover,

he should lead a comprehensive international effort to end the relentless wars and economic predation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The consequences have been genocidal for the Congolese people.

Despite the economic upswing, and China's growing presence in African infrastructure, manufacturing accounts for a paltry share of Africa's output. President Obama should highlight the contributions American corporations can make to industrialization and job creation in the continent. He should put forward incentives for American institutions to pursue deeper engagement with their African counterparts, especially in higher education and healthcare. The Obama name is on a dozen program initiatives in Africa, but who knows it? That must change, and soon.

Richard Joseph is the John Evans Professor of International History and Politics at Northwestern University and a senior fellow with the Program on Global Economy and Development at the Brookings Institution.

WORKING GROUP UPDATE

Making networks work for policy

Funding from the Program of African Studies is supporting a study that investigates the role of social networks in the adoption of agricultural technologies by farmers in Malawi. Despite a long-standing awareness that new farming techniques are underutilized, and that information about them can flow through social networks, there has been little research on how best to harness social networks for technology adoption.

In this study, quantitative researchers headed by Lori Beaman (economics) partner with qualitative researchers from the University of Malawi and the Malawi Institute of Management to evaluate how the use of socially connected seed farmers affects the knowledge and practice of productive but underutilized agricultural technologies—specifically, pit planting and crop residue management. Traditionally, Malawi's Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS) selects "lead" farmers from community leaders to introduce new technologies. These lead farmers are trained in the use of the technology and encouraged to share what they learn with the community. However, depending on how people learn from their peers, those who have the most social connections in the village may be more effective than MoAFS's lead farmers in sharing information. Researchers are further investigating how this communication within networks can be leveraged.

The quantitative research team, in coordination with MoAFS, is conducting tests (specifically, randomized controlled trials) that apply rigorous economic and sociological theories of how people learn and communicate within social networks. The study's aim is to help MoAFS answer three research questions: Can partnering with well-connected farmers in extension efforts increase technology adoption? Is clustering of extension partners desirable, or should those partners be spatially and socioeconomically diverse? What fraction of the gains from utilizing networks can be achieved with easily scalable alternatives to the social network?

Funding from PAS is facilitating qualitative fieldwork by local researchers, which will complement the quantitative research findings. As of January local researchers had held focus groups in four study villages using participatory rural communication appraisal tools and techniques. Data collection included questions about who in the village had the power to influence technology uptake and how. Additionally, the qualitative team will use techniques to visualize the networks and the participants, their roles and responsibilities, and how they influence technology uptake. This visualization will be compared with the quantitative data. In February and March qualitative researchers will conduct a learning workshop to discuss the complementarities between their analysis and the quantitative findings.

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