

ISITA to hold symposium in honor of John Hunwick

More than 20 scholars from Africa, Europe, and North America will convene in Evanston from April 21 to 22 for an international symposium dedicated to the memory of history and religion professor emeritus John Hunwick, cofounder of the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa. Organized by ISITA with the Program of African Studies, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Center for African Studies, and Chicago's American Islamic College, "Sacred Word: Changing Meanings in Textual Cultures of Islamic Africa" explores the meanings of textual cultures in Africa's Muslim societies and the changes in those cultures over the last two centuries. Papers will address how African Muslims give aesthetic form to the sacred word in different contexts, including handwritten manuscripts, printed works, material objects, sound, music, and performance.

"Sacred Word" is the first in a series of collaborative programs on Islam in Africa organized under the auspices of the newly established UIUC-Northwestern Consortium for African Studies. Northwestern's cosponsors are the Office for Research; the Buffett Institute for Global Studies; the Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities; the Chabraja Center for Historical Studies; and the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, and its Departments of History and Religious Studies.

Three April 21 panels in the PAS seminar room will be followed by a special evening memorial reception at the John Evans Center. The next day's two morning panels at PAS will be followed by a final panel at the American Islamic College in Chicago.

The symposium is free and open to the public, but advance registration is requested. For program and registration information, visit www.africanstudies.northwestern.edu.

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Outreach event explores African wrestling as sport and tradition

by Amy Settergren

A January event on Africa's wrestling tradition welcomed Josef Blaiz Nonga, Cameroon's national youth wrestling coach, and David Curby, director of the International Network of Wrestling Researchers, which cosponsored the event with PAS and an affiliate of international



Josef Blaiz Nonga

wrestling's governing body, United World Wrestling. Their presentations explored the importance of wrestling on the continent.

Curby's lecture gave an overview of international wrestling, emphasizing its widespread prevalence as well as its ancient roots. Indigenous folk styles can be found from Iceland to Japan, from Mongolia to South America, and in every region of Africa. Curby's institute conducts and publishes wrestling-related research, supports men's and women's Olympic-style wrestling worldwide, and documents the sport's traditional forms. In Africa these forms include Senegalese *laamb* wrestling, *kabubu* in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nuba wrestling in Sudan, and the wrestling tradition of southeastern Nigeria.

Lecturing on Cameroon's *besua* wrestling, Nonga discussed oral traditions that locate its origin in conflict resolution. He stressed its importance to his country's cultural heritage, noting that *besua* matches were held at bereavements and festivals. Nonga teaches *besua* and coaches youth teams. He also coaches international Olympic-style wrestling and hopes one day to field a Cameroonian national team.

Nonga's Chicago visit coincided with the Midlands Championships, a major wrestling competition hosted annually at Northwestern's Welsh-Ryan Arena. The partnership behind the event at PAS represents a new area of outreach, connecting African studies to new constituencies on campus and beyond.

The Nollywood phenomenon

by LaRay Denzer and Ivan Albertson

Over the last 20 years Nollywood has become a global phenomenon, spreading beyond Nigerian borders to reach across Africa and the diaspora. Its enormous output and popularity are all the more remarkable considering the lack of corporate infrastructure governing the industry; Nollywood is driven by independent contractors, not large studios. The vast majority of its movies are produced for \$50,000 or less and still sold on video CD in street markets.

While Nollywood serves as a convenient catchall term for the Nigerian film industry, it encompasses sharp ethnic distinctions. Besides Igbo productions in English—the popular image of Nollywood—hundreds of movies are made each year by various other ethnicities. Many Yoruba films, such as those by Tunde Kelani, opt for greater cultural specificity than typical Nollywood fare. Northern Nigeria’s rich Hausa filmmaking tradition is said to be even more abundant than its counterparts; known as Kannywood, it shares Nollywood production values while evincing the influence of Bollywood musicals. The various Nigerian film industries collectively produce about 2,500 movies a year, making Nigeria the second-most prolific filmmaking nation in the world behind India. In addition, the Nollywood DIY approach has inspired filmmakers across Africa and the diaspora to make their own movies in a similar vein.

The industry’s beginnings

Nigeria’s Nollywood film industry was born in the early 1990s during a severe national economic downturn. The emerging business demonstrated grassroots resilience and optimistic entrepreneurship, which in combination with artistic creativity and modern technology flowered into a vibrant new enterprise that resonated in popular culture. A steep currency devaluation and a ban on imports made foreign movies unavailable, and celluloid film was too expensive for local efforts. Undaunted, industrious producers, writers, and actors realized that cheaper formats—such as VHS and digital video, already widely used in recording family and cultural events—offered ready filmmaking alternatives. The traditional market and street trading systems provided a means of quick and effective distribution.

The origins of the industry can be traced to the 1992 video release of the Igbo-language *Living in Bondage*. Immensely successful, it established many of Nollywood’s most enduring tropes and effectively demonstrated that African microbudget filmmaking was not only possible but also economically viable. By 2007 an estimated 9,000 feature-length films had been made, with an estimated 45 films released every week. Nollywood’s importance was specifically noted in 2014 when Nigeria rebased its economy and estimated the industry’s annual revenue at \$5 billion.

Production today

Nollywood primarily consists of many small-scale producers who work with very low budgets, tight production schedules, and quick turnarounds to release. It is largely self-funded, market driven, and responsive to its audience. Films are generally shot in more isolated areas around such major cities as Lagos, Enugu, Abuja, Asaba, and Kano. Production values tend to be rudimentary at best, resulting in subpar image and sound (though progress has been made). The process is further hindered by frequent power outages and other disruptions—for example, actor strikes or money demands from “area boys” (gangs).

New titles are delivered weekly to Nigerian shops and market stalls. In 2007 the average video sold 50,000 copies at the equivalent of \$1 to \$2 each—approximately a Nigerian laborer’s daily wage. A hit movie might generate several hundred thousand sales. Even so, piracy prevents filmmakers from realizing their full profit; according to World Bank estimates, only 1 in 10 VCDs are sold legitimately.

The rise of digital cable and streaming platforms has altered the landscape of Nollywood distribution. While physical distribution is still a necessity in the many areas of Africa lacking a fast Internet connection, such websites as YouTube and iROKOTv offer easy access to thousands of full-length movies. What used to require a visit to Idumota market in Lagos is now available worldwide, allowing a great diversity of communities to connect with Nollywood. In 2015 Nollywood gained greater exposure when Netflix added a small selection of Nigerian films, notably *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2013) and the historical crime thriller *October 1* (2014).



Themes and genres

Nollywood films tell powerful stories that reflect Nigeria's cultural traditions, popular literature, traveling theater, and television drama. They speak to popular sensibilities and local aspirations, values, worldviews, and cosmologies. Unapologetically Nigerian in content, they are produced and written by Nigerians for "ordinary Africans," in contrast to Francophone African films that often cater to European audiences. Primarily made in English, Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, and Nigerian Pidgin, the films span a wide range of genres and often draw on well-known folktales and folk beliefs. While some of the movies promote specifically Christian or Islamic ideas, others deal more generally with moral dilemmas facing modern urban Africans. A fixation with attaining instant wealth and status drives the overwhelming majority of Nigerian films across genres, while stories of infidelity are far more prevalent than stories of love. Good almost always wins in the end, and evildoers get their comeuppance or undergo amazing transformations. Such characters, according to Nigerian filmmaker Zina Saro-Wiwa, run the gamut from devious charlatans and saintly wives to scheming mistresses, embattled priests, and demonic spirits.

Many have decried Nollywood's amateurism and emphasis on morally dubious behavior. While these criticisms are valid to a point, they often preclude closer consideration of films' merits. For instance, from a certain perspective, Nollywood's rough aesthetic stands refreshingly outside received notions of quality. Likewise, it is a mistake to suggest that only upstanding behavior can trigger a moral

Nollywood Working Group

The Nollywood Working Group was formed in fall 2015 to build on interest among PAS faculty, staff, and students in exploring emergent artistic and digital trends in Africa. The group is interested in exploring Nigerian filmmaking in all its diversity—looking at where it came from, where it's going, and its influence around the world. Meetings are held at PAS every two or three weeks to discuss a film and a related reading and to analyze various aspects of the industry, such as its star system, generic tropes, and issues of representation. Preeminent Nollywood scholar Jonathan Haynes (English, Long Island University) is among those making presentations this spring. The group will announce additional speakers and has plans for a Nollywood film festival on campus in 2016–17. To join the Nollywood Working Group, contact Rebecca Shereikis at 847-491-2598 or r-shereikis@northwestern.edu.

response. The films instead demonstrate what Brian Larkin terms the "aesthetics of outrage," wherein moral transgression is exaggerated to provoke audience revulsion. The films are more productively considered as the unique expression of Nigerian popular concerns about corruption, the wealth gap, family, relationships, and treasured cultural memes.

With the glut of films preventing most from gaining recognition or making a profit, many producers are looking to rebrand Nollywood and make it competitive at international film festivals. The mission of Kunle Afolayan and like-minded filmmakers is to make fewer films with larger budgets and improved production values and to distribute them to theaters across Nigeria. Others are striving to build viable distribution networks to increase revenue and discourage piracy. While the "New Nollywood" aspires to American and European models of production and distribution, ideally it will retain the cultural specificity that has made Nollywood singular for two decades.

LaRay Denzer is editor of PAS News and Events. Ivan Albertson is on the staff of the Herskovits Library and compiled the research guide Nollywood and Beyond: Getting Started, accessible at libguides.northwestern.edu/nollywood.

Noura Mint Seymali performs at Old Town School of Folk Music

by Stephen Hill

On March 24 Mauritanian singer Noura Mint Seymali and her band performed to a full house at Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music. A self-named "Moorish griot," Seymali presented a fascinating musical and cultural hybrid. She sings and plays ardin (a Kora-like lute); her husband, Jeiche Ould Chighaly, plays modified guitars; Ousmane Toure plays bass; and manager-translator Matthew Tinari plays drums.

Chighaly's guitars call for explanation. Finding a normally fretted instrument unsuitable, he had removed several frets high up on the neck, then inserted one between each of the first to sixth frets. Thus, where a normal guitar has 6 frets, his has 12. This modification was necessary to play the quarter tones characteristic of the band's Middle Eastern-influenced music. His second guitar was entirely fretless.

The band's performance was an amalgam of local and remote sounds and practices. Both Seymali and Chighaly are griots—hereditary musicians responsible for maintaining history through praise singing—and in Mauritania they often perform at weddings and naming celebrations. Seymali's songs reflect this tradition. Performing them as arranged

pieces with bass and drums, however, reflects

new performance contexts. Musically, the band sounds more Middle Eastern than similar groups from neighboring regions.

That the sound evokes the Middle East is no surprise. Seymali's grandfather studied music in Iraq, and her mother, the famous Dimi Mint Abba, won the Umm Kulthum contest in 1977. Making the musical crosscurrents even more delicious, Chighaly uses effects that align his instrument's timbre with West African psychedelia. Yoking musical, cultural, and artistic influences from across the Middle East and North and West Africa, Seymali's band demonstrated again the vibrant mixtures that enliven African music.

Stephen Hill is a lecturer in anthropology and senior associate director of the Office of Fellowships.



Symposium focuses on African studies in community colleges

by Amy Settergren

PAS and its Title VI consortium partner, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, hosted the joint two-day symposium "Building Africana Studies in Community Colleges" with the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) March 10–11. Supported by a Department of Education Title VI grant, the event had a twofold aim: building an African studies curriculum at Chicago community colleges and exploring connections between African studies and US racial justice struggles.

The symposium began with the panel discussion "African Studies and the Pan-African Vision: From Garvey to Biko to Black Lives Matter," featuring UIUC faculty Ken Salo, Erik McDuffie, and Theresa Barnes. A second panel, "Transatlantic Perspectives on Islam and Africa," featured Misbahudeen

Ahmed-Rufai (CCC), Ibrahima Ndoeye (Parkland Community College), and Mauro Nobili (UIUC). Prexy Nesbitt of Columbia College Chicago's humanities, history, and social sciences department gave the keynote address, "Telling No Lies: History of African Liberation Movements, Lessons for the United States Today." CCC professors Daniel Davis, Edward Davis, Crystal Rudds, and Myti Sengstacke led the discussion "Teaching Africana Studies at Community Colleges."

Another "Building Africana Studies" workshop at Northwestern is planned for April and will include a tour of the Herskovits Library as well as presentations by Northwestern faculty on Islam in Africa and on teaching African studies through hip-hop.

Visiting scholars join PAS and ISITA communities



Fulbright visiting scholar **Nisbert Taisekwa Taringa** joins PAS for the spring and summer quarters. A senior lecturer (equivalent to US associate professor) at the University of Zimbabwe and head of its religious studies, classics, and philosophy department,

he has authored the book *Towards an African-Christian Environmental Ethic* (University of Bamberg Press, 2014) and many book chapters and articles on Zimbabwean religion—including Shona, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahai faith. During his residency he plans to develop a postgraduate course on religion, human rights, and contemporary issues to expand his department’s interreligious and international courses. He argues that religion is an ineradicable condition of the lives of individuals and communities, underpinning many of the values by which they govern themselves. Thus religions are allies in the modern struggle for human rights.



Paul Naylor joins the PAS-ISITA community in the spring as a visiting predoctoral scholar. A PhD candidate in African studies and anthropology at the University of Birmingham, he takes part in a doctoral partnership between that university and the British Library,

combining his own research with cataloging and curatorial work on the West African manuscripts in the Herskovits

Library. His dissertation project, provisionally titled “Islamic Pluralism in the Political History of the Central Sahel: A Critical Study of Arabic Sources for West African History,” examines the 1804 reform movement of Usman dan Fodio and its wider regional implications, with a focus on the political texts composed in Arabic by the movement’s leaders. Naylor proposes a fresh reading of the output of scholars associated with the Sokoto caliphate—not as sources to be mined for historical facts but as skillfully used narrative devices in local struggles for legitimacy.



Ana Karina de Morais joins PAS as a visiting scholar for the summer quarter, funded by a grant from the University of California Consortium for Black Studies in California. Pursuing a PhD in the history of consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz,

she is writing a dissertation provisionally titled “Imperial Geographies: Ethnography, Museology, and the Cape-to-Cairo Dream.” A critical history of the visual culture of European imperialism in Africa, her project focuses on the historic and contemporary roles of anthropology along the Cape-to-Cairo route through the visual, material, and archival museum culture it has cultivated. She expects to consult resources in the Herskovits Library, including postcards in the Vernon McKay Papers, the Winterton Collection of East African Photographs, and rare books.

Students in case competition tackle refugee camp challenges

by Margaret Anne Smith

At the third annual Northwestern University Intramural Global Health Case Competition on February 13, PAS, the Global Health Studies program, and the Center for Global Health charged six teams to find feasible and innovative solutions to streamline operations at refugee camps in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. The multidisciplinary teams tackled the topic from various angles to understand the myriad socioeconomic, health, and developmental issues in each camp.

Acting as judges, Shannon Galvin (Feinberg School of Medicine), David Gatchell (engineering), and Ogenga Otunnu

(history, DePaul University) provided feedback based on their expertise in global health and refugee studies. Otunnu added depth to the competition by bringing tangible realities to bear on the hypothetical issues each team explored, highlighting the everyday physiological factors facing refugees in their new situation.

In her keynote address, Galvin encouraged students to maintain the human element of their research despite the obstacles and complexities that arise in any type of research.

Community news

Andrew Brown (performance studies), below, completed his PhD last fall with the dissertation “Refuge in Performance: Restaging LGBTI Refugees in South Africa.” He is currently assistant professor of performance art at Western Washington University’s Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies.



Mark DeLancey (PAS visiting scholar) attended the February conference “Forum Sociocultural y Económico Marroquí-Español: Las Relaciones Socioculturales y Económicas un Puente Para el Desarrollo Entre la Región de Dajla Oued Eddahab y las Islas Canarias” in Dakhla, Western Sahara.

LaRay Denzer (PAS) presented the paper “Zainab Hawa Bangura and Political Reform in Sierra Leone, 1996–2005” at “The Politics of Women’s Empowerment in Post-War Sierra Leone,” a February conference at Florida Atlantic University’s Center for

Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

Karen Tranberg Hansen (emerita, anthropology) gave the lecture “‘The Way We Stay’: Domesticity and Desire in Zambia” at an April colloquium at Leibniz University of Hannover.

Richard Joseph (political science) gave the address “State, Governance, and Democratic Development: The Nigerian Challenge” at the University of Ibadan’s Ibadan School of Government and Public Policy in February. The full text ran online in the *Nigerian Tribune* (tribuneonline.ng). He also posted two essays, “The Growth-Governance Puzzle in Africa” and “Dilemmas of Democracy and State Power in Africa,” on the blog AfricaPlus.wordpress.com.

Moses Khisa (graduate student, political science) appeared in February on Voice of America’s flagship television-radio talk show, *Straight Talk Africa*, to discuss the 2016 Uganda elections. In April at Oxford University’s African Studies Centre he is to present a paper at a workshop on the Uganda elections. He also continues to write a regular op-ed for Kampala’s *Daily Monitor*.

Ed and **Kate Klein** (former PAS associate director) are the parents



of a son, Maxwell Lennon Klein, born on January 16 in Hanoi.

Samuel O. Oloruntoba (PAS visiting scholar in 2010) returns to Evanston in April to give a talk on his book *Regionalism and Integration in Africa: EU-ACP Economic Partnership Agreements and Euro-Nigeria Relations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). He is a senior lecturer at the University of South Africa’s Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute.

Matthew Pietrus (PAS program assistant) chaired a panel and presented the paper “Mapping Narratives of Persecution: GIS and Its Utility for Refugee Asylum Seekers” at the American Association of Geographers annual meeting in San Francisco.

Will Reno (PAS director and political science) gave two presentations in February: “The Changing Character of Armed Group Organization in Failing States” at Ohio State University’s Mershon Center for International Security Studies, and “Youth in Armed Conflict” at the World Peace Foundation conference “Transforming Violent Masculinities” at Tufts University’s Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. He also participated in the February 22–26 meeting “The Role of Ethics in International Affairs,” organized by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences at Italy’s Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center.

David L. Schoenbrun (history) authored the chapter “Pythons Worked: Constellating Communities of

Practice with Conceptual Metaphor in Northern Victoria Nyanza, ca. 800–1200 CE” in *Knowledge in Motion: Constellations of Learning across Time and Space*, edited by Andrew Roddick and Ann Brower Stahl (University of Arizona Press, 2016).

Noelle Sullivan (anthropology) posted her article “Posing as a Doctor Is Illegal . . . Unless You Go to the ‘Developing World’” on globalsl.org. An edited version was originally published on February 25 as an op-ed in the *Orlando Sentinel*.



Krista Thompson (chair, Weinberg College Board of Advisors), above, is the 2016 recipient of the College Art Association’s Charles Rufus Morey Book Award, one of the most significant prizes in art history, for *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light*

in *African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice* (Duke University Press, 2015).

Alumnus **Alexander Thurston** (religious studies) is the author of two published articles, “The Salafi Ideal of Electronic Media as an Intellectual Meritocracy in Kano, Nigeria” in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (jaar.oxfordjournals.org/content/83/4/1058.full.pdf+html) and “‘The Disease Is Unbelief’: Boko Haram’s Religious and Political Worldview,” Analysis Paper number 22 in the Brookings Institution Project on US-Muslim World Relations, January 2016 (www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2016/01/boko-haram-ideology-thurston/brookings-analysis-paper_alex-thurston_final_web.pdf).

Marlous Van Waijenburg (graduate student, history) has been awarded a three-year Michigan Society of Fellows postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, beginning in September 2017. She will be hosted by the economics department.

Nikki Yeboah (performance studies) completed her PhD last fall with the dissertation “Performing ‘Afrika’: *Sankofa* and the Construction of Post-Colonial African Identity in Ghana.”

Transformation of library space begins

by Esmeralda Kale

Physical changes in the Herskovits Library are under way. In the initial phase, the reference area’s longtime vertical file cabinets have been relocated to the room’s perimeter. While the vertical file remains an essential source of government publications, pamphlets, and brochures from numerous organizations, moving it from its original location provides the Africana reference area with more collaborative space.

Plans are afoot to reorganize the entire collection in the coming weeks and months. Africana materials currently in rooms B190, B249, and B251 will be brought to the fifth floor. The library’s footprint will be extended from 5 East across to 5 South to consolidate the collection, providing users with easier access. Many may wonder what will happen to the gold section or whether parts of the collection will be housed on book carts; plans call for the entire collection to be housed on shelves in call-number order. It will then be possible to browse the shelves without going between multiple floors within the Main Library.

For information about the reorganization, please call 847-467-3084 or email africana@northwestern.edu.

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

Events calendar

Unless otherwise noted, all events take place at PAS, 620 Library Place, Evanston.

APRIL

- 6 noon–1:15 p.m.
“Hostile Takeover? Corporate Interventions in Nollywood,”
Jonathan Haynes (English, Long Island University).
- 8 noon–1:15 p.m.
“Sub-Saharan Africa’s Selective Attention to Contraceptive Use in Analyses of Recent Infant and Child Mortality Declines,”
Caroline Bledsoe (anthropology). Buffett Institute, 1902 Sheridan Road.
- 13 noon–1:15 p.m.
“Regionalism and Integration in Africa,” **Samuel O. Oloruntoba** (political science, University of South Africa).
- 15 **Afrisem conference:** “Knowing Africa: The Power of Narrative on a Global Continent.”
- 20 noon–1:15 p.m.
“Political Authority, the International Criminal Court, and the Future of International Criminal Justice in Africa,” **Tendayi Achiume** (law, UCLA).
- 21 **ISITA symposium:** “Sacred Word: Changing Meanings in Textual Cultures of Islamic Africa.” Through April 22.
- 22 noon–1:15 p.m.
“Agricultural Investments in Mali,”
Lori Beaman (economics). Buffett Institute, 1902 Sheridan Road.

- 27 noon–1:15 p.m.
“Urban Development in West Africa: The Conflicting Visions of Residents and Planners,” **Dolores Koenig** (anthropology, American University; Buffett Institute visiting scholar).
- 29 noon–1:15 p.m.
“Architectural Aesthetics of Power in Northern Cameroon,” **Mark DeLancey** (PAS visiting scholar). Buffett Institute, 1902 Sheridan Road.

MAY

- 4 noon–1:15 p.m.
“Cooking Data: The Embodied Practices and Expertise of Fieldworkers in a Malawian Survey Research World,” **Crystal Biruk** (anthropology, Oberlin College).
- 11 noon–1:15 p.m.
“Reinventing Marriage in 19th–20th-Century Egypt,” **Kenneth Cuno** (history, UIUC).
- 13 noon–1:15 p.m.
“Aesthetics and Political Action in Egypt,” **Jennifer Winegar** (anthropology). Buffett Institute, 1902 Sheridan Road.
- 18 noon–1:15 p.m.
“Ebola 2014: Pandemic Preparedness and the Failure of Global Health Infrastructure in Sierra Leone’s Kailahun District,”
Krista Johnson (political science, Howard University).
- 20 noon–1:15 p.m.
“The Governmental vs. Nongovernmental Nature of International Relations,” **Alex Grigorescu** (IO/IL visiting scholar). Buffett Institute, 1902 Sheridan Road.

- 25 noon–1:15 p.m.
“Precolonial Legacies and the Contemporary Politics of Public Goods Delivery in Decentralized West Africa,” **Martha Wilfahrt** (postdoctoral fellow, political science).

JUNE

- 3 3–5 p.m.
Annual PAS end-of-year picnic

Northwestern

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