RETHINKING AFRICAN STUDIES

Inaugural Public Symposium
Program
April 7–8, 2016
University of Minnesota

April 7 | InFlux Space, Regis Center for Art
April 8 | 120 Elmer L. Andersen Library

Roundtable with
Cawo Abdi, Joseph Mbele, Nadia Mohamed, William Moseley
on African Studies Beyond the Research Institution

Gallery talk by
Lorena Rizzo | University of Basel
on the international touring exhibition
Usakos – Photographs Beyond Ruins
April 5–23, 2016 | Regis West Gallery, Regis Center for Art

Organized by the African Studies Initiative •
a Title VI African Studies National Resource Center
funded by the U.S. Department of Education

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Co-sponsored by the Interdisciplinary Center
for the Study of Global Change

KEYNOTE
Eve M. Troutt Powell
University of Pennsylvania

PANELISTS
Mhoze Chikowero
University of California, Santa Barbara

Ayo Coly
Dartmouth College

Shirin Edwin
Sam Houston State University

Frieda Ekotto
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Shamil Jeppie
University of Cape Town

Jamie Monson
Michigan State University

Moses Ochonu
Vanderbilt University

Hélène Tissières
Independent Scholar
Rethinking African Studies

African Studies Initiative
Inaugural Public Symposium
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SCHEDULE | DAY ONE

Thursday, April 7
InFlux Space, Regis Center for Art (East Building)

9:30 am: Continental breakfast

10:00–10:15 am: Welcome by Ana Paula Ferreira, Associate Dean for the Arts and Humanities, CLA

10:15–10:30 am: Opening remarks, introductions by Shaden M. Tageldin, Director, ASI

10:30 am–12:00 pm | Panel 1: Engendering Critical Geographies

Moderator: Allen Isaacman, University of Minnesota

• Frieda Ekotto, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor: “New Epistemologies of African Social Realities”
• Jamie Monson, Michigan State University: “Decolonizing Translation: Gender and Interpretation in China-Africa Historical Engagement”

12:00 pm–1:30 pm: Lunch

1:30 pm–3:00 pm | Panel 2: Breaking Intra/Intercontinental Binarisms

Moderator: Victoria Colfman, University of Minnesota

• Moses Ochonu, Vanderbilt University: “Africa Within and Without: Having It Both Ways in African Studies”
• Hélène Tissières, Independent Scholar: “Transmigrational Links between North and Sub-Saharan Africa through Literature, Art, and Music”

3:00–3:30 pm: Coffee break

3:30–4:45 pm | Roundtable: African Studies Beyond the Research Institution

Moderator: Cawo Abdi, University of Minnesota

• Cawo Abdi, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities
• Joseph Mbele, St. Olaf College
• Nadia Mohamed, Minneapolis Community and Technical College
• William Moseley, Macalester College

5:00 pm: Proceed to Regis West Gallery to visit Usakos—Photographs Beyond Ruins exhibition

5:15–6:15 pm: Walk-through of Usakos exhibition by Lorena Rizzo, University of Basel, Regis West Gallery

6:15 pm: Dinner reception with heavy hors d’oeuvres, Regis West Gallery
Rethinking African Studies

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SCHEDULE | DAY TWO

Friday, April 8
120 Elmer L. Andersen Library

9:30 am: Continental breakfast

10:00–10:15 am: Welcome back, introductions by Shaden M. Tageldin, Director, ASI

10:15–11:45 am | Panel 3: Untiming Feminisms

Moderator: Njeri Githire, University of Minnesota

• Shirin Edwin, Sam Houston State University: “Apolitical Epistemologies: African Islamic Feminism and Northern Nigerian Fiction in English”

11:45 am–1:00 pm: Lunch

1:00–2:30 pm | Panel 4: Retheorizing the Archive

Moderator: Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, University of Minnesota

• Mhoze Chikowero, University of California, Santa Barbara: “Chimurenga as Self-Rehumanization: History through Song”
• Shamil Jeppie, University of Cape Town: “Notes from a Calligraphic Africa”

2:30–3:00 pm: Coffee break

3:00 pm: Keynote address by Eve M. Troutt Powell, Christopher H. Browne Distinguished Professor of History and Africana Studies and Associate Dean for Graduate Studies, University of Pennsylvania

Falling Through the Cracks of African Studies: A Discussion of the Continental Divide

This talk will discuss the negotiations that scholars have to make about which countries, cultures, or languages to explore when they study topics in African Studies. We have long struggled with the gaps left by area studies and university departments, where North African Studies is segregated out of African or Middle Eastern Studies, as just one example. What directions can we take to change this?

4:45–5:00 pm: Closing remarks, thanks, farewells by Shaden M. Tageldin, Director, ASI

6:00 pm: Dinner for invited participants and moderators at Dilla’s Ethiopian Restaurant (address: 1813 Riverside Ave N, Minneapolis, MN 55454 • phone: 612-332-2898)
Welcome

The African Studies Initiative (ASI), a University of Minnesota Title VI African Studies National Resource Center funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is pleased to convene this inaugural public symposium on Rethinking African Studies at the University’s Twin Cities campus. The Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change (ICGC) is cosponsoring this event. To our speakers and to all in attendance, we extend a warm welcome!

Our intent in this symposium is to deconstruct and to pluralize the idea of “Africa” that subtends both African Studies as such and Africanist scholarship in the humanities and social sciences, as these fields are conceived in the U.S. academy today. Equally important, we seek to deconstruct and to pluralize the notion of “study” that informs African Studies in the United States: that is, to consider how we might decolonize the intellectual geography of Africa in the U.S. university by shifting away from constructions of knowledge about Africa, transacted largely through the epistemological eye of the global North, toward more dynamic co-creations of knowledge with African scholars and African scholarship.

Our focus will be on Africa in two dimensions: time and space. We ask: When is “Africa”? Can we imagine new periodizations of the continent and its diasporas? Should we do away with these altogether? Why Africa now? Do the continent and its diasporas make particular claims on our attention at the present cultural, economic, historical, and political moment? And we ask: Where is “Africa”? Should we understand specific forms of knowledge as “African”? How does the term “Africa” resonate elsewhere? To whom is it useful? To these dimensions we might add a third, no less vital: language. Indeed, central to our efforts to reimagine reigning conceptions of Africa is a focus on the perilous yet promising task of translation.

We seek a critical engagement with the epistemological and methodological implications of disciplinary reason for the production of knowledge on and in Africa. How do we account for the complicity of many academic disciplines with the regimes of truth and modes of evidence that underwrote slavery, colonialism, and other forms of rule, power, and exploitation whose racialized and gendered legacies haunt the present? Does the continent that supposedly had no history, according to Hegel and other European philosophers, call into question our assumptions about history and its epistemologies? We also seek new modes of inter/disciplinarity. Can a critical humanities that re-envisions the world from African perspectives, for example, enable a better understanding of what it means to be human in the face of the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, the implications of rapid technological change and the challenges of globalization, the pervasiveness of neoliberal economics, and the devastating impact of modern human activity on the environment?

This event brings together faculty across disciplines—within and beyond African Studies, the ASI and ICGC communities, the University of Minnesota and other institutions—to explore these and other vital questions. Building on the 2015 ASI conversation “What Was ‘Africa’ Then, What Is ‘Africa’ Now?”, we will engage the force fields within which U.S. study of Africa has emerged and continues to unfold.
We stand at an important crossroads between the heterogeneous pasts and the many possible futures of African Studies, in the U.S. academy and beyond. While the institutionalization of African Studies at many U.S. universities from the 1950s onward was tied to the establishment of area studies centers, scholarship on Africa and on other world regions at the University of Minnesota has tended to color outside the lines of area studies, even when the University has been the beneficiary of Title VI awards for the study of those regions.

Like its Title VI-funded predecessors, the ASI pushes the boundaries of “Africa” even as it makes the continent and its diaspora a focal point of analysis across the disciplines. We recognize that the history of African Studies exceeds and challenges its institutionalization in the U.S. academy. Indeed, the field has long been both area- and anti-area studies. At Northwestern University, the anthropologist Melville Herskovits organized a faculty seminar in African Studies as early as 1927, and two decades later, in 1948, the first African Studies program in the United States. Yet, as the historian James C. McCann has suggested, the contributions of African American intellectuals such as W. E. B. DuBois to new understandings of Africa in the United States—contributions that spanned 1900 through his death in 1963—predate or parallel those of Herskovits and other Euro-American scholars who constituted the academic discipline. Moreover, as McCann notes, even as African Studies in the U.S. university—funded first by the Ford Foundation, then under Title VI by the National Defense Education Act (NDEA)—assumed the economically and politically strategic form of “area studies” in the Cold War 1950s and 1960s, the African continent continued to buck area studies paradigms, as many African peoples had yet to wrest their independence from European empires. In 1980 the U.S. Department of Education absorbed NDEA-funded area studies centers, including those in African Studies, and funded these as National Resource Centers under the Title VI program we know today. Contestation of African Studies paradigms, however, has never ended. To cite one vital example, the post-1960s emergence of Black Studies, African American Studies, and African Diaspora programs in the United States further unsettled the conceptual and geographic parameters of both “Africa” and the field of African Studies itself, whether by reopening “Africa” to diasporic as well as continental definition, thereby reaffirming the global conceptions of “Africa” at play in pan-Africanisms since the late nineteenth century; by challenging the complicity of African Studies programs with neocolonial and neoimperial regimes; or by questioning the marginalization of Black scholars in the field.

“Africa” now is less and less taken for granted by thinkers and writers in Africa itself. As the Africanists Edward A. Alpers and Allen F. Roberts have noted, African-born intellectuals such as Paulin Hountondji have questioned whether one should speak of “African philosophy.” To that example, we might add novelist Taiye Selasi’s recent provocative rejection of the term “African literature” and call for its integration into various world genres—without the qualifier “African,” which perpetuates a sense of difference and hierarchy (as the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty has underscored). On the politics of “African languages,” intellectuals have been divided: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o upholds their distinction from those of non-African provenance, while Chinua Achebe famously included languages such as English in the African fold. In the face of such wavering designations of so many academic disciplines and even languages as “African,” should we continue to speak of African Studies? Does “Africa” risk erasure, as a specific geographic and above all conceptual space, if we don’t invoke it? How does the term “African Studies” enable or disable us?

Alongside the idea of “Africa,” scholars are questioning the forms that knowledge production on Africa assumes and interrogating the institutional contexts that forge African history and memory. Writing from South Africa, for example, Brenda Cooper has argued that reigning Euro-U.S. genres of scholarship place limits on who can be heard in African Studies, and how. How are questions of form and method entangled with the subjectivities and the power positions of scholars of Africa, both on the continent and in the United States? Can new forms or methods redefine African Studies today? Are there lessons to be drawn from the ways in which, for example, tensions between South Africa’s historically Black and historically white universities echo or mirror differences between the academy in the global South and the academy in the global North?

We will consider the challenges posed to African Studies by such questions of form and context, by the critique of history and of other forms of disciplinary reason, by postcolonial approaches, and by theory from the South.
Rethinking African Studies

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Eve M. Troutt Powell

Christopher H. Browne Distinguished Professor of History and Africana Studies
Associate Dean for Graduate Studies, School of Arts and Sciences
University of Pennsylvania

Falling Through the Cracks of African Studies:
A Discussion of the Continental Divide

This talk will discuss the negotiations that scholars have to make about which countries, cultures, or languages to explore when they study topics in African Studies. We have long struggled with the gaps left by area studies and university departments, where North African Studies is segregated out of African Studies or Middle Eastern Studies, as just one example. What directions can we take to change this?

Eve M. Troutt Powell (troutt@upenn.edu) teaches the history of the modern Middle East and the history of slavery in the Nile Valley and the Ottoman Empire in the Departments of History and Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, where she is also Associate Dean for Graduate Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences. As a cultural historian, she emphasizes the exploration of literature and film in her courses. She is the author of A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain and the Mastery of the Sudan (University of California Press, 2003) and the co-editor, with John Hunwick, of The African Diaspora in the Mediterranean Lands of Islam (Princeton Series on the Middle East, Markus Wiener Press, 2002). Her most recent book is Tell This in My Memory: Stories of Enslavement in Egypt, Sudan and the Late Ottoman Empire (Stanford University Press, 2012). Troutt Powell received her BA, MA, and PhD from Harvard University. Prior to coming to Penn, she taught for ten years at the University of Georgia. She has received fellowships from the American Research Center in Egypt and the Social Science Research Council, and she has been a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton and at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. In 2003 she was named a MacArthur Foundation Fellow. Troutt Powell is now working on a book about the visual culture of slavery in the Middle East, which will explore painting and photography about African and Circassian slavery in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
PANELIST PRESENTATIONS

Mhoze Chikowero
Associate Professor of African History, University of California, Santa Barbara
American Council of Learned Societies Visiting Research Fellow, University of the Witwatersrand

Chimurenga as Self-Rehumanization: History through Song

Contemporary African humanity has never been a matter of course. Threatened by colonial dehumanization, subjugation, debasement, and criminalization, generations of Africans have had to struggle to defend, articulate and reassert their being. This is the story of the Madzimbabwe’s Chimurenga (wars of liberation) of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries that gave birth to the contemporary Zimbabwean nation-state. My talk, based on aspects of my newly published book, African Music, Power and Being in Colonial Zimbabwe (2015), considers Chimurenga as a philosophy and epistemic engagement in reverse engineering, self-defense and self-rehumanization. The musical archive allows an understanding of this undertaking as deeply rooted in African historical consciousness and popular practice.

Mhoze Chikowero (chikowero@history.ucsb.edu) is Associate Professor of African History at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) Visiting Research Fellow at the University of the Witwatersrand. He researches African music and politics as well as technologies of statemaking, including broadcasting and energy. He has worked with Zimbabwean and African artists for years. He is the author of African Music, Power and Being in Colonial Zimbabwe (Indiana University Press, 2015).

Ayo A. Coly
Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and African Studies, Dartmouth College

The Afterlives of Colonial Statements:
The Timescape of the Female Body in African Feminist Criticism

In a recently published essay, I have argued that the colonial rhetorical deployment of the African female body to signify Africa sealed the fate of the African female body as rhetorical element of postcolonial African discourses. Building on this work, my presentation ties the elusive presence (if not absence) of the sexual female body in African feminist thought to the postcolonial discursive conscription of the female body. I argue that the female body is a timescape where African feminist criticism both contests and produces “the idea of Africa.” Furthermore, the timescape of the female body is haunted by colonial discourses of the hypersexual and grotesque African female body. Using Derrida’s work on hauntology and spectrality as an interpellation of the haunted subject into a potentially emancipatory future-anterior timescape, I assess the epistemological merits and pitfalls of an African feminist imagining, thinking and writing of Africa from the haunted timescape of the female body. In problematizing the timescape of African feminist thought, I take my cue from the conspicuous absence of the sexual female body in African feminist thought to ask whether thinking from a haunted timescape does not eventually limit the discursive, epistemological and political horizon of African feminist thought.

Shirin Edwin
Associate Professor of French, Sam Houston State University

Apolitical Epistemologies:
African Islamic Feminism and Northern Nigerian Fiction in English

In this paper, I examine the complex weave of time (history), space (the private and personal sphere of ritual practice) and language (Hausa and English) in African Muslim women’s expression of Islam in Northern Nigerian fiction in English to argue that the epistemological weight of Islamic feminism in the American and European academies is directly proportionate to Euro-American political interest in Islam in the Middle East and Arab world. Despite its outsized presence in Africa, Islam and Islamic feminist expressions of Muslim women in West Africa, in particular, remain secondary to histories and agendas that are more pertinent to the Middle Eastern and Arab societies where Islamic feminism evolved in concert with the Islamic nation-state and its laws. This is not to say that West African Muslim women do not express feminism politically or publicly. Rather, my reading of Northern Nigerian fiction in Englishforegrounds those forms of feminism that are privately inculcated toward equally private ends such as personal happiness and satisfaction in the private and personal domains of family and interpersonal relationships. I examine the space of spirituality and rituals in Islamic practice such as forms of prayer (salat, du ’a, and dhikr), virtue (akhlaq), and monotheism (shahadah) that do not aspire to political emancipation, legal reform, or women’s rights. Nor is this feminism expressed in means such as activism, demonstrations and affiliations to public or political groups. Furthermore, as Northern Nigerian writers recognize that their work will reach a wider audience, they write predominantly in English. But many of their themes and characters draw breath in an environment where Hausa is the primary language of communication and where feminist figures and agendas from Hausa history and even contemporary literature (such as the immensely popular Littattfan Soyayya or books of love in Hausa) bear an enduring and stronger impression on women’s issues today than activism for legal reform, equality, and women’s rights.


Frieda Ekotto
Chair, Afroamerican and African Studies | Professor of Comparative Literature and Francophone Studies
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

New Epistemologies of African Social Realities

What is the African modern subject? I would like to begin here through sketching out a theoretical framework for African modernity, through an examination of various writers who have already theorized on this subject. Perhaps the most important theorist I would like to highlight here is V. Y. Mudimbe and his idea of “The Colonial Library,” which connects or outlines how African modernity has been necessarily defined by the grids of historical oppression; in other words, that Africans have been defined by Western mythologies which continue to dominate their lives today. This “Colonial Library” is the archive of knowledge on Africa that is inevitably drawn from when any person speaks, writes or thinks about Africa today. It is also the central resource, Mudimbe argues, that Africans need to return to and to excavate ideologically in order to rearticulate epistemologies of Africa on their own terms.

In this paper, I would like to concentrate on two new epistemologies within the continent:

1) What language exists to describe the lives of women and sexual minorities who live in Sub-Saharan Africa? I give close attention to the stories’ different possible meanings, and place them in their socio-historical contexts in order to make an important intervention into the literary history of Sub-Saharan countries: LGBTI work must be included in our discussions of contemporary African cultural production. It is part of our modernity.
2) What is the place of culture in China Africa relationship? And, how can we change the nature of the relationship between Africa and China? I will chart new territory in exploration of connections, both historical and contemporary, between Africa and China.

Frieda Ekotto (ekotto@umich.edu) is Chair of the Department of Afroamerican and African Studies and Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan. She holds a PhD from the University of Minnesota. As an intellectual historian and philosopher with expertise in 20th and 21st-century Anglophone and Francophone literature and in the cinema of West Africa and its diaspora, she concentrates on contemporary law, race and LGBTQI issues. Ekotto’s research focuses on how law serves to repress and mask the pain of disenfranchised subjects; she traces what cannot be said in order to address and expose suffering from a variety of angles and cultural intersections, thus reassessing the position and agency of the dispossessed. She is also interested in examining the importance of the Bandung Conference (1955), the first large-scale assemblage of African and Asian leaders of the post-colonial era, as a cultural event and in the development of philosophical and political thought in the second half of the twentieth century. She is the recipient of numerous grants and awards, including a Ford Foundation seed grant for research and collaborative work with institutions of higher learning in Africa, and most recently a recipient of a John H. D’Arms Faculty Award for Distinguished Graduate Mentoring in the Humanities at the University of Michigan. In 2015, she received the Benezet Award from the Colorado Alumni Association Board and in 2014, the Nicolás Guillén Award for the Caribbean Philosophical Association. She is the author of seven books and numerous articles in professional journals. She has lectured throughout the United States, United Arab Emirates, Australia, Algeria, Cameroon, Cuba, Canada, England, France, India, Ivory Coast, Peru, Malaysia, Malta, Nigeria, Tunisia, South Africa, and Singapore, among other countries.

Shamil Jeppie
Associate Professor, Department of Historical Studies | Director, HUMA: Institute for Humanities in Africa
University of Cape Town

Notes from a Calligraphic Africa

How do you do “African studies” on the African continent when it seems like the field is still a legacy of a post-WWII western reconfiguration of the world? The continent is still studied very largely in geographically demarcated sections, in terms of “Area Studies” paradigms, and of course, the frame of the nation-state. Much of its history and other forms of knowledge are produced in the humanities outside the continent. Seeing its expansion there is, of course, positive for the ways this might force colleagues and new generations of students to look at the world differently. However, what is produced on the continent is in many instances considered really as in the genre of “primary sources” and not academic discourse to be taken seriously. This raises large questions about publishing on the continent and such associated issues. Yet there are various initiatives that address some of these challenges, that breakdown the internal geographical divisions and have seen greater scholarly curiosity and mobility across the continent itself. I shall use an example of my own interests and location: based at a South African Anglophone university and developing a Saharan-Saharan, and ultimately pan-African, network of scholars concerned with histories and ethnographies of libraries/collections of texts, textual practices, and rethinking philology relating to and practiced on the continent.

Shamil Jeppie (shamil.jeppie@uct.ac.za) is Associate Professor in the Department of Historical Studies and Director of HUMA, Institute for Humanities in Africa, at the University of Cape Town. He received his PhD from Princeton University and also was educated at the universities of the Western Cape and Cape Town. The recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship, he also has held a Chevening Scholarship at Oxford University and has been a fellow of the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research. Jeppie serves on various platforms concerned with the development of the humanities, history, and heritage in Africa and in the global South. Founder of the Tombouctou Manuscripts Project (www.tombouctoumanuscripts.org), in which he has explored the formation of a culture of collecting in Timbuktu, he has led a National Research Foundation study group on history and the humanities in South Africa today and has served as chairperson of the South-South Exchange Programme in the History of Development (Sephis). He is author of Language, Identity, Modernity: The Arabic Study Circle of Durban (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007) and other publications, as well as editor of Toward New Histories for South Africa: On the Place of the Past in Our Present (Lansdowne: Juta Gariep, 2004) and co-editor of The Struggle for District Six:

Jamie Monson  
Professor of History | Director, African Studies Center, Michigan State University

Decolonizing Translation:  
Gender and Interpretation in China-Africa Historical Engagement

In 1965 Premier Zhou En Lai gave a speech on the island of Zanzibar as part of his famous tour of Africa. When he had finished speaking in Chinese, his interpreter Ms. Shen Zhiying translated his words into fluent Kiswahili. Once she had spoken, the audience erupted in wild cheers and ululations. The crowd was not only responding to the content of the premier’s speech, but also to the thrill of hearing a Chinese guest speak to them in their own language. In this paper I focus on three women who were Chinese-Kiswahili translators during the Cold War, to argue that the voices of women interpreters played a critical role in internationalist Third World diplomacy between Africa and China. While most research on the role of intermediaries in African History has focused on European-African interpretation in the colonial period, this paper queries whether it is possible to identify a specific form of “decolonizing translation” in China-Africa engagement in the 1960s and 1970s. It therefore reframes the study of interpretation geographically from a North-South to an East-South axis. At the same time, the paper shifts the study of African intermediaries forwards in time to include the decolonization period, while historicizing the China-Africa relationship in its longue durée. Lastly, the paper analytically situates these three women interpreters within the larger global historical context of gendered mediation.

Jamie Monson ([monsonj@isp.msu.edu]) is the newly appointed Director of African Studies at Michigan State University, where she is also a Professor of History. Dr. Monson received her MA in African Area Studies and her PhD in African History from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her current research focuses on Chinese development assistance to Africa. She is a specialist on the TAZARA railway, a development project built in Tanzania and Zambia with Chinese development cooperation in the 1970s. Her book, Africa’s Freedom Railway: How a Chinese Development Project Changed Lives and Livelihoods in Tanzania (Indiana University Press, 2009) has been widely acclaimed and has been recently published in Chinese (2015). Professor Monson’s new research projects concern technology transfer and civil diplomacy in China-Africa engagement. She also has a strong background in African agricultural and environmental history, an interest she developed originally as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Kenya. She speaks Swahili, German, and French and has been studying Chinese since 2009.

Moses Ochonu  
Professor of African History, Vanderbilt University

Africa Within and Without: Having It Both Ways in African Studies

Africa is often posited in a dichotomous frame. On one side, there is an Africa with certain fixities—place, people, culture, and way of seeing and acting traceable to a particular geography. On the other side, there is an Africa that moves and circulates, an Africa that is mobile and fluid, an Africa that has to be tracked, followed, understood, and analyzed in flexible, contingent idioms. This Africa, diasporic but connected to the continent, replenishes and is replenished by the homeland. My reflection argues that we cannot, even in the age of high theory, abstract Africa from the very sociological, geographical, and cultural realities that give it form and being. Africa is a fixed place, and we should not pursue programmatic and epistemological projects in which Africa and Africans disappear, are no longer recognizable objects of inquiry, and are reduced to mere empirical units and referents of analysis. At the same time, Africa moves; its peoples cross oceans and resettle voluntarily or involuntarily on other shores, taking with them ideas, knowledges, cultures, and memories that they reconstitute in their new abodes. Because there is both a fixed and a mobile Africa, it is no longer enough to simply focus our inquiries on continental Africa and its humanity. I argue that we should instead strive, in our programmatic and epistemological engagements, to have it both ways, explaining the Africa that is a fixed place as well as the Africa that moves and recreates itself in multiple
spaces and temporalities. At Vanderbilt University, we are in the early stages of an African studies initiative and have decided that it is possible to focus on both continental African realities and realities created or recreated when Africa and Africans move. In this frame, for instance, it is possible to study Nigeria in both Lagos and Houston, Texas, an American city which hosts the largest population of Nigerians in this hemisphere; or to study Somalia in both East Africa and Minneapolis, another American city which has a large Somali community. One Africa does not have to displace the other, and one is not more authentic than the other. Both are complementary and should coexist in any programming on Africa.

Moses Ochonu (moses.ochonu@vanderbilt.edu) is Professor of African History at Vanderbilt University. He holds a PhD in African History from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and a Graduate Certificate in Conflict Management from Lipscomb University, Nashville. He is the author of three books: *Africa in Fragments: Essays on Nigeria, Africa, and Global Africanity* (New York: Diasporic Africa Press, 2014); *Colonialism by Proxy: Hausa Imperial Agents and Middle Belt Consciousness in Nigeria* (Indiana University Press, 2014); and *Colonial Meltdown: Northern Nigeria in the Great Depression* (Ohio University Press, 2009). Ochonu’s articles have been published in several scholarly journals and as book chapters. His op-eds, commentaries, and essays have been published in *TIME Magazine, The Chronicle of Higher Education, GlobalPost, The Tennessean, History News Network, Maple Tree Literary Supplement, Pambazuka*, and several Nigerian and African newspapers and magazines.

Hélène Tissières
Independent Scholar (formerly Associate Professor of French, University of Texas, Austin)

Transmigrational Links between North and Sub-Saharan Africa through Literature, Art, and Music

The divisions between North and Sub-Saharan Africa are problematic, as they erase the many influences and intertwinements between the two regions, prolonging the artificial schisms put in place by the colonial powers. In this talk, I will show how writers, artists, and musicians (in particular rappers) dismantle this divide and in their works refer to multiple art forms. I will discuss the paintings of the Senegalese artist Abdoulay Ndoye, who inscribes sacred writing forms. On his canvas, he uses henna, which refers to the practice of tattooing in Morocco. The work evokes as well the trace in the desert—fragments of information that need to be deciphered before they disappear, linking the painting to ancient practices found throughout the Sahara and Sahel region. The known Algerian writer Kateb Yacine expressed on many occasions his concern about the North/sub-Saharan Africa divides: “We are African, Tamazight is an African language: cooking, craftsmanship, dance, song, life style, all of it shows us that we are Africans” (Yacine, *Le poète comme un boxeur*, 109). In his novel, *Nedjma*, the main female figure symbolizes the invaluable intertwinements that have constructed the Algerian identity. And this position can be found in the works of many writers, including those of Abdelwahab Meddeb, Werewere Liking, and Amadou Hampâté Bâ. Finally, I will discuss in this presentation the work of the Senegalese rapper Didier Awadi, who in his album *Présidents d’Afrique* has us travel throughout the entire continent to recall the many historical figures (Nasser, Kwame Nkrumah, Mandela, Lumumba), their contributions, and the Pan-African links they tried to create in order to surmount the ongoing destructive presence of the postcolonial powers. Awadi, following the Tunisian uprising that began in 2010, shows that Africa must unite to move forward. I will discuss how he then carries out on a deeper plane those influences in his music, recalling what has been at play for centuries on a spiritual, social and cultural level.

Hélène Tissières (htissieres9797@gmail.com) is the author of *Créations et défis au Sénégal: Sembène, Diop, Diadj et Awadi* (2013) and *Écritures en transhumance entre Maghreb et Afrique subsaharienne* (2007), which was published in English translation by the University of Virginia Press (2013) under the title *Transmigrational Writings between the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa: Literature, Orality, Visual Arts*. She writes on African literature, film, art, and music. Tissières has been closely following the Dakar Biennale of Contemporary African Art. Presently she is the curator of an exhibition at the Manoir Museum in Martigny, Switzerland (June–September 18, 2016), which is an homage to the Dakar Biennale and will showcase the work of 30 established African artists.
ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS
African Studies Beyond the Research Institution

Cawo Abdi
Associate Professor, Department of Sociology and Institute for Global Studies, University of Minnesota
cla.umn.edu/about/directory/profile/cabdi

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GALLERY TALK
Usakos — Photographs Beyond Ruins

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Postdoctoral Researcher and Lecturer, Department of History, University of Bielefeld
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Organized by the African Studies Initiative (ASI) at the University of Minnesota, a Title VI African Studies National Resource Center funded by the U.S. Department of Education

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Cosponsored by the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change

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This exhibition centers on three private photographic collections owned by four female residents of the small town in central Namibia called Usakos: a hub of first the German colonial and later the South African railway system. Most images were taken by local or itinerant African photographers.

Usakos
Photographs Beyond Ruins
The Old Location Albums, 1920s to 1960s

April 5–23, 2016
Regis West Gallery
Regis Center for Art
University of Minnesota

Remarks by Lorena Rizzo
April 7, 5:15–6:15 pm
Regis West Gallery

Remarks by Giorgio Miescher and Lorena Rizzo
April 21, 2:00–3:00 pm
Influx Space
Regis Center for Art

Curators: Paul Grendon, Giorgio Miescher, Lorena Rizzo, Tina Smith

Project Partners and Funders: Carl Schlettwein Stiftung Basel • Centre for African Studies, University of Basel • District Six Museum Cape Town • Freiwillige Akademische Gesellschaft Basel • Max Geldner Stiftung Basel • Pro Helvetia Johannesburg • Stiftung Mercator Schweiz • Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

University of Minnesota: Organized by the African Studies Initiative, a Title VI National Resource Center funded by the U.S. Department of Education; cosponsored by the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change and the Department of Art.http://africa.umn.edu
Usakos — Photographs Beyond Ruins: The Old Location Albums, 1920s to 1960s

What

Usakos — Photographs Beyond Ruins: The Old Location Albums, 1920s to 1960s is an exhibition that centers on three private photographic collections owned by four female residents of the small town in central Namibia called Usakos. The exhibition on display in the Regis West Gallery at the University of Minnesota is a mobile version of an exhibition on permanent display in Usakos.

When

April 5–23, 2016
Exhibition
Gallery Hours are 7:00 am – 7:00 pm | Monday – Saturday

Where

Regis West Gallery | Regis Center for Art (West) | University of Minnesota
405 21st Avenue South • Minneapolis, MN 55455

Related Events

Thursday, April 7, 2016
Opening remarks by Dr. Lorena Rizzo, University of Basel | 5:15 – 6:15 pm • Reception | 6:15 pm
Regis West Gallery, Regis Center for Art (West)
Join us that evening for a walk-through talk on the exhibition and an opening reception

Thursday, April 21, 2016
Capstone remarks by Dr. Giorgio Miescher and Dr. Lorena Rizzo, University of Basel | 2:00 – 3:00 pm
InFlux Space, Regis Center for Art (East)
Join us that afternoon for capstone remarks and Q&A on the exhibition

Accessibility, Cost, and Parking

Parking is available nearby on the street, at the 19th and 21st Avenue South ramps, and at the 5th Street South lot; hourly or event rates apply. These parking locations and the Regis Center for Art are wheelchair-accessible. Exhibition and related events are free and open to the public.

About the Exhibition

Usakos, a railway town: Usakos developed as one of the main hubs of first the German colonial and later the South African railway system, and its urban morphology was marked, from its early beginnings, by the policies of segregation and apartheid urban planning. The exhibition highlights a particularly traumatic moment in the town’s history, when in the early 1960s the apartheid administration began to remove African residents out of what was then called the old location into newly built townships that were geographically removed from those parts of the town henceforth reserved for “whites.”
The collectors and the collections: The photographic collections kept by the four women lay out the physical and social landscapes of the old location. They range from studio photography, images of particular location sites and buildings, photographs of mission congregations and school classes, music bands and football teams, and many portraits of men and women posing in front of the camera. Most images were taken by local or itinerant African photographers, and they evidence a vibrant aesthetic and visual culture in a cosmopolitan environment that made a stand against the containments and constrictions imposed by the politics of race.

The four women and their photographic archives are part of a trans-generational network and practice of collecting and curating. Since their lives and those of their fellow residents have been deeply marked by the experience of forced removal, and concurrently by economic decay and socio-cultural disruption, their collections have become part of diverse discourses and practices of commemoration and memorialization.

The women’s care for the photographs, the ways in which they have, for several decades, placed them in albums, displayed them in living rooms, shared them in conversations with family, friends and acquaintances, and stored them in handbags and boxes, is an expression of how these women’s small but continuous daily aesthetic acts powerfully countered the ruination of their living environments. This is why the collections transcend the concern to recover the past alone and likewise describe an ongoing reflection of the present and invite an opening towards the future. The Usakos photographic collections then constitute forms and practices of collective mobilization of memory and experience, of vision and imagination—articulated, perhaps, in a more silent, submerged tone.

Photographs by Paul Grendon: The resonances of the old location photographic collections in the past, present and future are taken up in the exhibition through the work of photographer Paul Grendon. Grendon’s camera follows the traces and layers of Usakos’s experience of colonialism and apartheid that remain visible in the physical and social landscape of the town: it exposes ruins of the old location houses and maps out a decaying railway infrastructure, but also explores the many ways in which residents of Usakos have related and continue to relate to their environment and turn spaces of ruination into places of belonging.

The Exhibition Catalogue & Content: The exhibition catalogue (Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2016) includes an essay on photography and an essay on Usakos’s urban history, three image sections including black & white sections introducing the women collectors and their collections of historical photographs, and one section with colour photographs by Paul Grendon.

The exhibition consists of framed black & white photographs selected from the women’s collections, and framed color photographs by Paul Grendon. Additionally there are information panels and two large maps. A last panel informs visitors of the exhibition curators, donors and supporters in Namibia, South Africa and Switzerland.

Notable is the substantial involvement of students in the exhibitions in Usakos and in Basel. Based on collaboration between the University of Basel and the University of Namibia, the students of both universities participated in the mounting of the exhibition in Usakos (and also worked on common oral history projects) and again students of both universities mounted the exhibition in Basel together and also integrated their research into the exhibition.

USAKOS permanent exhibition: The opening of the first exhibition was Usakos, in the Usakos municipality building on 27 June 2015. The opening event was planned by the Usakos Municipality in collaboration with the Museums Association of Namibia. The exhibition will permanently remain in Usakos and will be integrated in the future local museum.
EUROPE & AMERICA mobile exhibition: The first launch of the second exhibition, produced for Europe and America, was in Paris at Sorbonne University on 7 July 2015. The exhibition was scheduled to be shown during the European Conference of African Studies (Paris 8-10 July). Following Paris, it was shown at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien in Basel (28 August 2015), and the Gallery Auto-Kultur-Werkstatt in Bielefeld (7 November 2015). Further confirmed venues are the Regis West Gallery, Minneapolis (5 April 2016) and Brunei Gallery at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London (July-September 2017).

SOUTHERN AFRICAN mobile exhibition: A third version was launched at the District Six Museum in Cape Town on 16 February 2016, after which the exhibition is scheduled to go to the University of the Western Cape also in Cape Town, followed by the University of Fort Hare in East London, and the Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg. Eventually the exhibition will be handed over in 2017 to the Museums Association of Namibia for further use in the country.

Curators

Paul Grendon, Giorgio Miescher, Lorena Rizzo and Tina Smith

Project Partners and Funders

Carl Schlettwein Stiftung Basel
Centre for African Studies, University of Basel
District Six Museum Cape Town
Freiwillige Akademische Gesellschaft Basel
Max Geldner Stiftung Basel
Pro Helvetia Johannesburg
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University of Minnesota

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Press Images

High-resolution representative images available at:
https://cla.umn.edu/art/galleries/regis-west-gallery/media-resources

01 Cecilie Geises
Unknown
Cecilie Geises, All Red netball team, sports fields, Usakos old location, c. 1950
8.5x13.5cm
Cecilie Geises collection

02 Jan Christian
Unknown
Photographer Jan Christian, Usakos old location, 1950s
8.5x13.5cm
Gisela Pieters & Olga Garoês collection

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