

ASA NEWS

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PEARL ROBINSON

The 2019 Distinguished Africanist
shares the lessons she learned
throughout her incredible career.

AN AFRICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear ASA Members,

I hope that you and your families are safe and healthy during the current COVID-19 outbreak. This crisis reminds us of just how interconnected we are globally. It also pushes the limits of what can be done “virtually” in ways that stand to have lasting impact. It was announced today that there are now more than 1,000 cases of COVID19 infection on the African continent and the WHO says Africa should “prepare for the worst.” The implications that this global pandemic will have for Africa, for African Studies, and for Higher Education as a whole are still not clear, but they will be major and lasting.

While Rutgers University campus is closed for the remainder of the academic year, the ASA Secretariat team has been working in a distributed structure for many years and we have systems in place to ensure continuity of our operations despite this closure. Our team remains available via phone, email, or fax for any questions or support with membership renewals, CFP submissions, and meeting registration.

This crisis has also put incredible pressure on academic associations such as the ASA to rethink the way they operate and to find relevance in this new reality. Many associations whose meetings were planned for the first half of 2020 have cancelled their Annual Meetings due to travel restrictions. While the ASA is lucky to have time on our side and is hopeful that the situation will normalize by the time of our November Annual Meeting, the question of finding relevance outside of our meeting and our journals is a challenge to all academic associations right now.

We would love to hear your input on this matter. Please reach out to us and let us know how we can best support you during this unique time. As our members face the need to transition to virtual teaching, restrictions on travel, quarantine, and social isolation, the role of the ASA as a global network has potential to bring strength and connection to our members. We held our first webinar on Virtual Teaching on Monday, March 23 hosted by Janice Levi of UCLA, and we expect to organize other forums such as this for ASA members to support each other during this time.

The ASA is also paying close attention to the impact that the disruption of the academic year 2020-2021 risks to have for our members on many fronts. This includes faculty review and reappointment, dissertations, and scholarship in general as the ability to conduct research is severely limited by travel restrictions and quarantines. We have recently signed on to a joint statement issued by the American Sociological Association and signed by more than 30 other learned societies commending those institutions that have been quick to react to this changing dynamic and revised their process for faculty review and reappointment during this period.

Finally, I want to draw your attention to the fact that we have extended our CFP deadline to April 1. The original March 15 deadline fell during the time that many campuses were being shut-down and we wanted to allow our members time to prepare their submissions amid all the changes. This year's theme, “The Hour of Decision: Power, Persistence, Purpose, and Possibility in African Studies,” seems especially relevant in light of the challenges facing our field as a result of the current state of world affairs.

Warmest wishes to all the ASA Community,

Suzanne Moyer Baazet
Executive Director, African Studies Association

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WHISPERING TRUTH TO POWER

Sometimes not only
the loudest voices
are heard ...

A film by
**Shameela
Seedat**



Whispering Truth to Power tells the dramatic story of South Africa's first female Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela who fought against corruption amongst the country's most powerful politicians at great personal cost.

BRINGING FILM TO THE FOREFRONT

An interview with the inaugural Film Prize winner, director Shameela Seedat

Introduction by Ken Harrow

The African Studies Association has been screening films for many years, and for the first time in 2019 the ASA board, under the leadership of Ann Pitcher, requested that we organize a prize competition, and screen the winning film. A committee of four people was constituted, including film scholars and filmmakers (Samba Gadjigo, Marissa Moorman, Jean-Marie Teno, and myself, Ken Harrow). We collected a considerable list of prominent films and vetted them over the summer. Our deliberations resulted in the following, a winner and two runners-up.

The Winner: *Whispering Truth to Power*, Dir. Shameela Seedat. After her appointment as South Africa's Public Protector in 2009, Thuli Madonsela immediately faces violent protests, court interdicts, political and personal attacks, and death threats, as this remarkably steadfast woman seeks justice in a country still coming to terms with its apartheid past. Filmmaker Shameela Seedat is a human rights law specialist turned filmmaker from South Africa.

First runner up: *Burial of Kojo*. Dir. Blitz (the Ambassador) Bazawule. Through a magical realist lens, *The Burial of Kojo* follows the story of Esi, as she recounts her childhood and the tumultuous relationship between her father, Kojo and her uncle, Kwabena. Directed by music composer and musician Samuel "Blitz" Bazawule, the film chronicles the tale of two brothers through the gifted eyes of a young girl who transports the audience to the beautiful lands of Ghana and other worlds that exist between life and death.

Second Runner up: *Rafiki*, dir. Wanuri Kahiu. (2018) *Rafiki* is the story of romance that grows between two young women, Kena and Ziki, amidst family and political pressures around LGBTQ rights in Kenya. The film had its international premiere at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival; it was the first Kenyan film to be screened at the festival. *Rafiki* was banned by the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB) "due to its homosexual theme and clear intent to promote lesbianism in Kenya contrary to the law."

Any of these three films could have deservedly been granted first place. What mattered most to us on the committee, and to those working in the field of African cinema, is that we could highlight the magnificent achievements of African filmmakers, and find a way to make them visible to African studies scholars and audiences. Many of the films we viewed have not had a distribution opportunity to the United States or Europe, and our hope is that by highlighting the award, we will give greater prominence to the films and help attract the notice of distributors. Gaining distribution can be very difficult, and awards and festivals are the primary path to doing so. We considered any feature length film, fiction or documentary, produced in 2017-2018. Our pool was considerable, and a large number were truly first-rate, making it difficult to narrow down our choices.

Rafiki has already achieved renown, not least because of its submission in Cannes, and the notoriety gained by its banning by the government of Kenya. *The Burial of Kojo* was made by a highly successful musician as well as creative cineaste, and his script was extremely original and brilliantly interpreted.

Our winner, *Whispering Truth to Power*, the first feature-length film by Shameela Seedat, marks the considerable achievements she has accomplished in her multiple careers. She was able to translate her human rights work for the South African Constitutional Court, the

UNDP/UNIFEM in New York, and the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) into a fascinating portrait of a tremendously courageous woman, the first female South African Public Protector (2009-2016), Thuli Madonsela.

Our goal is to continue the screening of subsequent winners at the ASA in the future, and to bring to greater awareness the considerable talent that marks African filmmaking today.

- Ken Harrow, Film Prize Committee Chair



In your own words, can you describe *Whispering Truth to Power*?

WHISPERING TRUTH TO POWER tells the dramatic story of South Africa's first female Public Protector, Thuli Madonsela (an official position similar to an Ombud) who fought against corruption amongst the country's most powerful politicians at great personal cost. During her tenure, she came to be seen as a game-changer for public accountability, governance and ethical leadership.

The film is part-portrait; we see Madonsela as boss, mediator, lawyer, single mother and public hero. It also plays out as a gripping political drama - Madonsela ends her last year in office with a dramatic final battle against the country's president who has been being accused of colluding with a wealthy family to 'capture the state.'

The story of Madonsela, her office and children also give a glimpse into urgent issues facing contemporary South Africa - around continuing economic inequality, racism, land redress and poverty and we see how these interact with the work of the Public Protector.

What inspired you to make this documentary?

I had seen Thuli Madonsela speaking at a conference in 2010, but she really caught my attention as an intriguing film subject when we got to witness first-hand (on TV and in the newspapers) her calm and quiet determination in insisting that the former president pay back public money unlawfully spent (following her 'Nkandla investigation') - despite a huge backlash. Whether you agreed with her or not, here was a determined and idealistic public office-bearer who was acting in concrete ways to back it up. But at the same time, for all her bold moves and determination, she was also attracting controversy and making some enemies.

So, personally, I was intrigued by this person at the helm of the Public Protector office, - a lawyer, an activist, a woman, a black woman - who had been confronting abuse of power at the highest levels in South Africa and who had fought a massive battle to see that her institution had real teeth and did so at great personal costs.

And it so happened that the year in which we did most of our filming, 2016, was the same one that

the state capture investigation arrived at Madonsela's door. As with Madonsela's Nkandla investigation, it revealed faultiness in South Africa's political landscape - which I was keen to explore. 2016 was also the year of the 'Must Fall' movement, which signaled the need for deeper changes in all facets of our country. This was all very interesting from a documentary maker's point of view.

What challenges did you face while filming *Whispering Truth to Power*?

The process of gaining access to film at the Public Protector Office in South Africa was a complex and lengthy one. And even after we obtained formal permission, the mechanics of actual filming were very unpredictable and at times I wondered whether the film would ever get made. Madonsela is a busy person, her schedule often changes, most cases dealt with by her and her team are confidential. My instinct as a filmmaker meant that I wanted to film everything; see cases as they develop, observe office dynamics, personal moments, see her with her family, how the media deals with her, how people use her for their own ends, and so on. But, we would often turn up at the office and the day's plan had completely changed and she was nowhere to be seen; it was impossible to keep to a filming schedule. But, once I recalibrated to a more zen approach, the possibility of actually having a film at the end, became clear. And in some ways, I think it worked to the film's advantage -we were forced to stand back, observe, think, reflect, talk to her colleagues, spend time with her children, and gauge people's feelings who came into the office. I think that the challenges ended up making it a richer experience.

What role do you feel that this film plays, if any, within the larger political conversation in South Africa?

Judging by post-screening discussions, viewers have remarked that they leave the

film with a human experience of how governance and leadership failures affect the most poor and vulnerable individuals and communities. Yet, while the film deals with current-day corruption in the public sector (this is the mandate of the Public Protector), it also brings to the fore the lingering effects of economic and moral corruption that happened during apartheid. All of this feeds into conversations that we are having in contemporary South Africa: What is muddying the collective fight against corruption? Can you excuse or justify corruption happening today because the past system was so corrupt and there has been no real accountability for that? And, then, beyond the fight against corruption, what else is needed to make South Africa fairer and more equitable - especially given the continuation of structural inequalities largely based on race? How do different generations view the path that South Africa has take since 1994 (the change to democracy), or that it should take, going forward? What are the challenges that women leaders face?

What role could film play in the scholarly study of Africa?

Documentary filmmaking offers the possibility to investigate aspects of life, people, politics and ideas in a more open-ended form. Films, I believe, can play an important role in scholarship as they can help to explore philosophical and emotional forces at play and observe the complexity of existence on the continent in a more timeless fashion. For me, the most compelling films are those made by African filmmakers on their own terms, presenting people on the continent in nuanced and complex ways and in a variety of situations. All of this, I believe, opens up new possibilities and insights And I think that fiction and documentary on the continent is as vibrant as ever - and what I am particularly excited about is the important work being done by filmmakers on the continent who are offering us new surprises, making thought-provoking and novel films form-wise, telling stories in their own fresh voice, often using low budgets as a strength, and not neatly slotting into expected boxes nor using old tropes or mimicking formulae.

How would you suggest engaging *Whispering Truth to Power* in the classroom?

The film presents universal themes and questions that I hope people in whatever country they live in, can reflect upon: inter-generational struggles, mother and daughter relationships, societies' battles worldwide for fairer and more equal societies, ethical and honest leadership, accountability of government and corporations, obstacles to anti-corruption work, gender dynamics in leadership and so on. Creating dialogue around these themes will hopefully lead to interesting insights.

We have also compiled a Discussion Guide to complement the screening of the film - which contains potential discussion areas around a variety of themes.

Do you have any advice for other female film makers?

It is easy to feel intimidated in the film industry, to be put down or be put off. I feel that you have to consciously fight against that and continue doing what you do with passion and with fresh eyes.. Work with like-minded and supportive people. And when it comes to more difficult projects where you have to fund-raise year after year, try your best to keep up the spirit. Idealism helps!

Do you have any film projects on the horizon?

I am currently working on a feature-length documentary called AFRICAN MOOT structured around the annual African Human Rights Court Moot Court Competition. It is a kind of SPELLING BEE-meets-human rights film, where young people from across the continent come together to debate migration issues and also to rethink the identity of their continent and its place in the world. It is being produced by Undercurrent Film and Television and is part of Steps International Generation Africa series.

"FILMS, I BELIEVE, CAN PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SCHOLARSHIP AS THEY CAN HELP TO EXPLORE PHILOSOPHICAL AND EMOTIONAL FORCES AT PLAY AND OBSERVE THE COMPLEXITY OF EXISTENCE ON THE CONTINENT IN A MORE TIMELESS FASHION."



FIGHTING FOR FUNDING

A Member Experience at the 2019 Coalition for International Education Advocacy Event

Eric J. Schmidt, Boston University



While a PhD student in ethnomusicology, I came to appreciate the value of federal funding in international education in myriad ways. First, there were experiences of absence, moments of panic: In a grant-writing seminar, my colleagues and I lamented the constrained funding availability for dissertation fieldwork in our discipline; Fulbright-Hays funding was under threat and the Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad (DDRA) proposal scoring system had recently been revised to favor certain fields, making it harder for many humanities and arts projects to be competitive. Midway through my graduate studies, my home institution lost its Title VI funding as a National Resource Center (NRC) and Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship-granting institution. My goal of studying Hausa through FLAS seemed to evaporate. Yet while this posed serious challenges to my pursuit of rigorous research, this crisis taught me the significance of federal funding: I was able to piece funding together for summer language study through FLAS awards administered by other universities because of the US Department of Education's mandate that FLAS-granting institutions consider proposals by students from around the country.

Since completing my PhD in 2018 and joining the Boston University African Studies Center, where I manage Title VI programs, I've had the opportunity to see just how much can be achieved by robust, sustained funding of these programs. Students are better equipped to study less commonly taught languages to high levels of proficiency, and to move competently and confidently in the sociocultural settings in which these languages are spoken. This results in stronger research that does not rely solely on colonial languages—research that we know produces skewed, incomplete knowledge. Thus, when the ASA announced its travel awards for members to participate in the Coalition for International Education's advocacy event on March 13 and 14, I jumped at the opportunity.

The CIE event took place in Washington, DC the same week as the National Humanities Alliance's advocacy push. Things kicked off on March 13 when Miriam A. Kazanjian, who leads CIE, introduced participants to the dynamics of Congressional legislation that authorizes and funds Fulbright-Hays and Title VI. These include the Fulbright-Hays DDRA, Group Projects Abroad (GPA), and Seminars Abroad (SA) overseas programs authorized by the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act; and the Title VI NRC, FLAS, Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language (UISFL), International Research and Studies (IRS), Language Resource Center (LRC), American Overseas Research Centers (AORC), and Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) programs authorized under the Higher Education Act. We also heard from university federal relations officers, a Congressional staffer with experience in higher education appropriations, and others who provided insight on the funding and authorization processes.

One of the most striking things was Miriam's presentation of funding levels for these programs over time. Released just before the advocacy event, President Trump's Fiscal Year 2020 budget request proposed—for the third year in a row—to completely eliminate funding for Title VI and Fulbright-Hays. While this was unsurprising given the president's record of xenophobia, part of the rationale for this change stated in the budget request was that foreign language and international education programs are matters of national security, and that they are reproduced by State and Defense Department programs. (This is untrue: as we argued in our meetings, these are highly complementary programs, but Title VI and Fulbright-Hays establish year-round infrastructure and resources for international education that other programs often only set up during the summer.) Even before the Trump Administration, however, funding for Title VI and Fulbright-Hays had been seriously weakened. Their combined budgets were cut from \$125.9 million in FY 2010 to \$75.8m in FY 2011, and since FY 2014 have held steady at \$72.2m—less than 60% of the

FY 2010 level. In light of broad bipartisan support and the changed balance of Congressional power after the 2018 midterm elections, CIE felt it was the right time to push for restoring funding for these programs.

With over 90 participants from 22 states and DC representing 38 higher education institutions, my fellow advocates and I visited over 100 Congressional offices on the second day to propose \$106.1 million in funding for Title VI and Fulbright-Hays. This sum not only takes an important step towards restoring FY 2010 levels, but also represents the amount of funds that would have allowed the Department of Education to finance all quality, highly "fundable" proposals for Title VI and Fulbright-Hays support submitted in 2018. We encouraged members of Congress to include this sum in their proposals to the House Appropriations Subcommittees dealing with Health, Labor, Human Services, and Education, and to sign a Dear Colleague letter circulated by Reps. David Price (D-NC) and Don Young (R-AK) to encourage other members to support the request. Additionally, we encouraged House members to support the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, which funds Title VI; in the Senate, we asked for support for Senate bill S.342, cosponsored by Sens. Todd Young (R-IN) and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI).

Many of us traveled in teams consisting of faculty and staff from area studies centers as well as university federal relations officers, setting up several meetings with Congressional staff over the course of the day. In my case, I was fortunate to be supported by federal relations teams from Boston University and Harvard University, as well as by Melissa A. Torres, President and



CEO of The Forum on Education Abroad. Jennifer Grodsky, Director of Federal Relations, BU), Peter DeYoe (Assistant Director for Legislative Affairs, Harvard), and Jon Groteboer (Director of Federal Relations, Harvard) joined me and Melissa on Capitol Hill. We met with staff for Sen. Ed Markey and Reps. Ayanna Pressley, Bill Keating, Lori Trahan, and Katherine Clark; at our meeting at Rep. Trahan's office, we were also joined by Katy Button, Associate Vice President of Federal Relations at Georgetown University, as Rep. Trahan is a Georgetown alum.

For those like me who have limited experience on the Hill, having support from federal relations officers or other experienced hands can be a huge asset—not only for their aid in setting up appointments with staff but also for their ability to speak fluently on Congressional protocols. Their presence helped me to speak confidently on my international education program expertise without feeling nervous about my comparative unfamiliarity with the details of Congressional authorizations and appropriations. While our general goals for each meeting were similar—to obtain commitments to sign the Dear Colleague letters, promote the \$106.1m budget request, and support the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act—each session also required some specific tailoring.

We adapted our pitch to connect with each Representative's interests and leadership roles in Congress, touching on issues such as the student debt crisis, the affordability of higher education, and language and cultural competencies for foreign affairs and armed services personnel. At our briefing before the meetings on Capitol Hill, CIE provided us with a number of pamphlets to deliver to Congressional staff that detailed the value of Title VI and Fulbright-Hays. In addition, I prepared a handout specifically on Boston University's African Studies Center, highlighting some of the impact that we've had through Title VI funds. One thing that seemed particularly effective was a map I included, which documented all of the communities

"IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE SPEAK UP FOR PROGRAMMING THAT CULTIVATES CRUCIAL CULTURAL SENSITIVITIES..."

in Massachusetts to which our Outreach Program had distributed materials for teaching about Africa.

On the Monday following the Advocacy Event, I joined my fellow participants in a conference call organized by CIE, where each state's coalition reported the results of their meetings. In a sign of broad bipartisan support, there were a total of 106 signatories for the House Dear Colleague letter, the highest level in recent years. Indeed, some participants reported their pleasant surprise at the receptiveness that some Congressional staff showed, particularly among Republicans. One caller mentioned, for example, that Sen. Mitt Romney (R-UT) was quite supportive of Title VI because of his connections to Brigham Young University's Whitmore Global Management Center, a Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER).

These programs are not the end-all and be-all of international education or foreign language training in the US, and many of our colleagues have voiced legitimate concerns about the Cold War-era roots of area studies programs like Title VI. However, in a period of heightened xenophobia at home, it is imperative that we speak up for programming that cultivates crucial cultural sensitivities and linguistic competencies for a world that will remain deeply interconnected—no matter what barriers may be erected. Conviction in these values can strengthen us for action at moments where we may otherwise feel overwhelmed by the inertia of behemoth institutions like Congress. I encourage fellow ASA members to take heart in the invigorating experiences of my fellow advocates and to join us for future action.



ASA

MEMBER NEWS

Recent Member Publications

Jean Borgatti, Consulting Curator, Fitchburg Art Museum; Visiting scholar, Boston University and Clark University, *Recording the Okpella People - Enthomusicology Global Field Recordings*.

Jean Borgatti and Josephine Ebiuwa, *Ekasa: History, Image, Music, and Dance, Umẹwaen: Journal of Benin and Edo Studies*, forthcoming.

Anthony Diala, University of the Western Cape, 'Courts and transformative constitutionalism: Insights from South Africa' in SM Sterett & L Walker (eds.) *Research Handbook on Law and Courts* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019) pp. 95-104.

Anthony Diala, 'Curriculum decolonisation and revisionist pedagogy of African customary law' (2019) 22 *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal* 1-37 [DOI].

Anthony Diala, 'Peacebuilding and the interface of state law and indigenous market laws in Southern Nigeria' (2019) 64(1) *Journal of African Law*.

Anthony Diala, 'A butterfly that thinks itself a bird: The identity of customary courts in Nigeria' (2019) 51(3) *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* pp. 381-405 [DOI].

Anthony Diala, with B Kangwa 'Rethinking the interface between customary law and constitutionalism in sub-Saharan Africa' (2019) 52 *De Jure Law Journal* pp. 189-206 [DOI].

Lyombe Eko, Texas Tech University, *The Charlie Hebdo Affair and Comparative Journalistic Cultures: Human Rights Versus Religious Rites*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

Lyombe Eko, Legal Contexts in Reporting Scandal in the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia. In *Routledge Companion to Media and Scandal* (pp. 193-201). Howard Tumber and Silvio Waisbord (eds.), (Routledge, 2019).

Lyombe Eko, Couching Political Criticism in Humor: The Case of Musical Parodies of the Military in Cameroon and Congo-Brazzaville. In Uche Onyebadi (ed). *Music and Messaging in the African Political Arena*, pp. 87-107. (IGL, 2019).

Lyombe Eko, African Television in the Age of Globalization, Digitization, and Media Convergence, *In The Routledge Companion to Global Television*, Shawn Shimpach (ed.), (Routledge, 2019).

Austin Emielu, University of Ghana, Austin Emielu & Grace Takyi Donkor "Highlife Music without Alcohol?: Interrogating the Concept of Gospel Highlife in Ghana and Nigeria," *Journal of Musical Arts in Africa* vol. 16, 29-44.

Carl LeVan, American University, *Contemporary Nigerian Politics: Competition in a Time of Transition and Terror* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Melvin Page, Professor of History, *Distinguished Conduct: An African Life in Colonial Malawi*, (East Tennessee State University, Luviri Press of Malawi 2019).

Eve Sandberg, Eve Sandberg and Seth Binder, *Mohammed VI's Strategies for Moroccan Economic Development* (Routledge, 2019).

Maya Angela Smith, University of Washington, *Senegal Abroad: Linguistic Borders, Racial Formations, and Diasporic Imaginaries*, (University of Wisconsin, 2019).

Aili Tripp, University of Wisconsin-Madison, *Seeking Legitimacy: Why Arab Autocracies Adopt Women's Rights*, (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Adriaan van Klinken, University of Leeds, *Kenyan, Christian, Queer: Religion, LGBT Activism, and Arts of Resistance in Africa*, (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019).

Member Announcements

Jean Borgatti received a lifetime achievement award from The Yoruba Elders International Society, Rhode Island Chapter. She is a past president of the Arts Council of the African Studies Association (ACASA) and recipient of the ACASA lifetime achievement award in 2014. The organization established this award as part of an "Everyday Heroes" award program in support of the UN

General Assembly Resolution 68/237 proclaiming the decade 2015-2024 as the International Decade for People of African Descent, and promoting a greater knowledge of, and respect for the diverse heritage, culture, and contributions of people of African descent to the development of society.

Austin Emielu, was appointed by the Senate and Governing Council of Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa as Visiting Professor to the International Library of African Music, from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2022. It is an honorary appointment in recognition of his humble contributions to field of study, music.

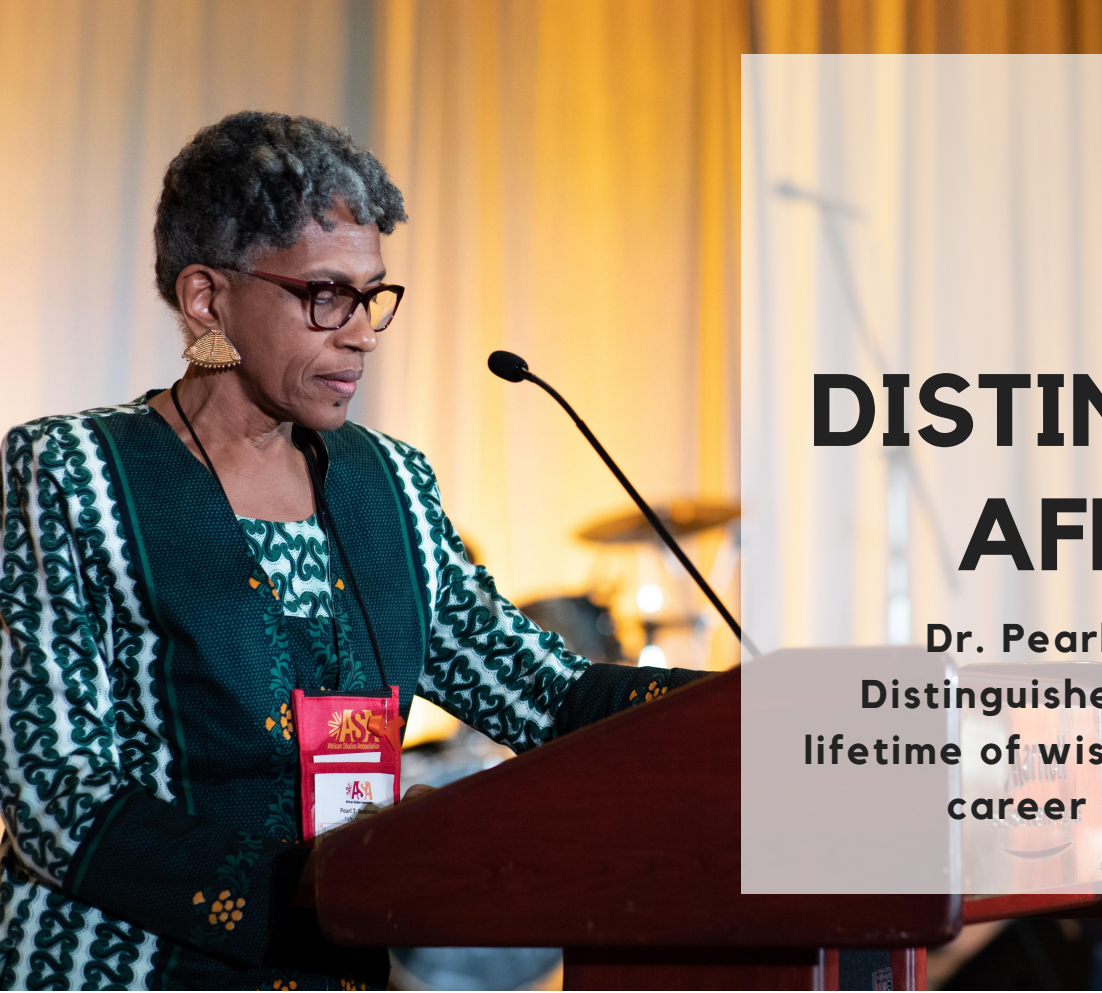
Jude Fokwang, Regis University. Fokwang's film, "Something New in Old Town" released in the summer of 2016 was awarded Best Documentary Film at the inaugural Lekki International Film Festival (Lagos, Nigeria).

Niels Weidtmann, University of Tuebingen, The Society for Intercultural Philosophy (<http://www.int-gip.de/home/>) has elected Niels Weidtmann for new Presidency. **Anke Graness** has been elected Vice-President.





Dr. Pearl T. Robinson sits in her Columbia University regalia for a photo-essay in Tufts Magazine entitled Regale Us. Copyright Trustees of Tufts College, reprinted with permission. Image by photographer Anna Miller/Tufts University.



LESSONS FROM A DISTINGUISHED AFRICANIST

Dr. Pearl T. Robinson, the 2019 Distinguished Africanist, shares a lifetime of wisdom gleaned from her career as a Scholar of Color.

What drew you to the study of Africa?

At some point in junior high and high school in Richmond, California I read Langston Hughes' poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." My mother owned an autographed copy of a book of Langston Hughes' poems. One day I picked up the book to look at Hughes' autograph, and when I opened it, the poem about rivers drew me in. I was born in New Orleans—the city at the mouth of the Mississippi. And here was a poem talking about New Orleans and the Mississippi River:

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

Just before mentioning the Mississippi, Langston Hughes referenced the Congo and the Nile – two African rivers. Somehow, they merged in my mind with the Mississippi—my original "home."

And then there was the refrain:

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

As a Black American (actually, we were "Negroes" at the time), this poem spoke directly to me. I frequently returned to Hughes' book of poems and would read "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" out loud. And I vowed one day I would see those rivers.

Years later, when I was an undergraduate at UC Davis majoring in French (1962-1966), I heard

about Négritude poetry. It wasn't taught in our French Department, but the Library had some books. I learned from those books about the connection between the Négritude movement and the Harlem Renaissance. Knowledge of this connection brought me back to Langston Hughes and "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." I spent my Junior year at that the University of Bordeaux during the first decade of African independence. I took my first course in African Politics at Bordeaux. By the end of the academic year, I decided to declare a second major in Political Science. More importantly, I knew that I wanted to spend the rest of my life learning about Africa and sharing that knowledge with others. I was 19 years old at the time. That commitment has never waned.

What challenges did you face as a young scholar?

My biggest challenge was sticking with my decision to stay the course.

My father had four strokes during my Study Abroad year in France. He would die of a fifth stroke during semester break of my Senior year. Facing death, one thing that gave him comfort was the knowledge that I had just about completed my French major and within a year would have a secure job teaching second grade. When I returned from France and informed my parents that I was declaring a second major in Political Science and planned “to do Africa,” they were dumbfounded. They wanted to know if I could do all of that in one year and end up with a job. I didn’t think so, but I didn’t dare say so. I went forward with my plans without sharing them with my parents.

When my father died, I assumed full responsibility for paying my own way. Thank goodness, the University of California system was tuition-free. The combination of a job in the campus library and an RA position in the dorm covered my living costs. This financial independence freed me to share my plans with my mother, who embraced even my wildest dreams with unwavering love and support.

My second biggest challenge was landing a dissertation field research fellowship that would enable me to have the kind of academic training required to operate at the top of my field as a research scientist.



Once I committed to spending the rest of my life “Doing Africa,” a path to success seemed to unfold in front of my feet. UC Davis’ Political Science Department hired Professor Donald Rothchild to teach its first ever courses on African Politics. I took 2 African Politics courses each semester, and Rothchild became my mentor. Rothchild was working on a project about the Algerian Liberation Movement and needed a research assistant who could read French; he hired me. I had even taken a course on the subject at Bordeaux. Rothchild suggested that I consider going to graduate school and encouraged me. Up to that time, I figured I would “Do Africa” as a primary school teacher. Taking courses in Political Science & Anthropology, doing research for Rothchild and then writing my on MA thesis made me acutely aware that I needed to go to Africa, learn to speak an African language, and get to know some non-Western educated rural folk in their own

settings. I was able to get that experience by joining the Peace Corps and working for 2 years in Niger as a public health educator in a rural Hausa town. I applied to graduate school from Niger and was admitted to Northwestern, the University of Wisconsin-Madison; and Columbia. All 3 institutions have an African Studies Center, teach Hausa, and had Political Science Departments with top scholars in African Politics and African American Politics. I chose Columbia University in the City of New York.

Columbia was a life-changing experience. For the first time since leaving New Orleans, where I attended a segregated primary school, I had 3 Black Professors: Elliot Skinner (Anthropology), Charles V. Hamilton (Political Science), and Wilfred Cartey (African Literature). Skinner and Hamilton held endowed Chairs, and Skinner was Chair of the Anthropology Department. I also had 2 female professors: Barbara

Ward (Development Economics) and Margaret Meade (Anthropology). For icing on the cake, I was a research assistant for Historian Hollis Lynch, who was Director of the African Studies Program. The combination of teacher/scholars, mentors and role models was thrilling – and immensely empowering.

When I received a rejection letter for the SSRC Dissertation Fieldwork Fellowship, I was crest-fallen. It seemed I would be denied the opportunity to become a well-trained Africanist scholar.

In your acceptance speech, you celebrated many of your colleagues. What impact have these relationships had on your work and overall career?

THE MENTORS:

•Elliott Skinner (Franz Boas Professor of Anthropology & Chair of the Anthropology Dept) was notoriously “difficult.” I had decided to become a Political Scientist who has some understanding of African cultures, so I began taking African Anthropology courses as an undergraduate and continued. Skinner served as US Ambassador to Burkina Faso when I was next door in Niger, and one of his areas was Political Anthropology. We had many overlapping interests—including theory— so we had many overlapping interests. He was a mentor whose office door was always open, schooled me in the life of the academy, allowed me to witness his interactions with lay scholars in the Harlem community and took a deep interest in every step of my career. It was Skinner who came up with an alternative Ford Foundation dissertation field research fellowship

for African-Americans after I failed to get the SSRC grant. We became good friends after I received my PhD, and it was Skinner who told me it was time for me to become President of the ASA a year before the thought entered my mind. Most importantly, when I landed a job at Tufts University and prepared to move to Boston, it was Skinner who advised me to introduce myself to “the Elders” who were potential mentors. He gave me the names of 3 African American Professors who studied Africa: Martin Kilson (Political Scientist, Harvard), Willard Johnson (Political Scientist, MIT) and Adelaide Cromwell Hill (Sociologist, Boston University). Meeting these people connected me to professional opportunities such as post-docs and invited seminars, social access to other senior scholars, as well as the historical and cultural life of Black Boston.

•After knowing Kilson for decades, a casual conversation about a year ago revealed that Ralph Bunche was his informal dissertation advisor, and Informant #1 for information about the internal workings of the UN Trusteeship Council. My final interview with Kilson provided invaluable insights for the intellectual biography I’m writing about Bunche.

•Adelaide Cromwell, who was one of the 3 founders of BU’s African Studies Center and the Founding Director of BU’s Graduate Program in African American Studies, was a mentor who became my surrogate mother and introduced me to the power of transgenerational friendship. All three cushioned me against the scourge of alienation.

•Willard Johnson recruited me

into TransAfrica – the African American political lobby for Africa and the Caribbean. We worked together in the Boston Chapter and I eventually joined him on the TransAfrica’s national board.

What is the most valuable advice that you received concerning your work and/or career? Were you ever given any bad advice?

The most valuable advice I’ve received was Skinner’s push to introduce myself to the Elders. Mentorship is especially important to people with no previous exposure to the life of the academy. Moreover, a particular type of mentorship is important for Black academics. I should admit that I’ve sometimes ignored good advice. That’s because I’ve tried to combine a commitment to forms of intense civic engagement with the rigors of the academy. Sometimes you can’t do both and thrive.

The only “bad advice” that sticks with me came from Skinner. In addition to applying for an SSRC dissertation fieldwork fellowship, I applied for a Fulbright dissertation award. When I got word that I received the Fulbright, Skinner advised me to decline it, and to take instead the Ford Foundation fellowship for African Americans. He told me that the Fulbright program would survive, but the Ford Fellowship was an experiment to address the problem that so few Blacks received the SSRC grant. By showing that there were in fact good candidates who could be served by this new program, I would contribute to an expansion of opportunities for future Black graduate students such as myself. What I didn’t know, however, was that this special “opportunity”

for Blacks did not include the possibility for an additional year of support to write-up the research findings and complete the dissertation. As a result, I returned after 14 months of fieldwork penniless, and had to work fulltime while writing my dissertation. It took me a while to forgive Skinner for not being aware that the Ford Foundation dissertation Fellowship for African-Americans was designed to be a temporary patch – one that no longer exists.

I have forgiven Elliott Skinner now because accepting that Ford Fellowship made me part of a special cohort of African American Africanists. Some of us have become good friends, we have supported each other professionally in our various scholarly endeavors, and we have made the field of African Studies a more vibrant enterprise. Indeed, five members of our cohort have become President of the ASA: Edmond Keller, Gwendolyn Mikell, Pearl Robinson, and the current President, Carolyn Brown.

What do you see as the relationship between your research and your pedagogy?

I teach what I research and research what I want to teach. I have had an ongoing research interest in African-American Africanists. Sometimes my research findings may feed into forms of activism. But these days I'm more focused on the production and dissemination of knowledge about African American Africanist. It's an attempt to remedy the erasure of past accomplishments. My current book project is an intellectual biography of Ralph Bunche.

Do you have any advice for women of color in academia?

Build a cohort, and mentor young Scholars of Color – male and female. If you're inclined to become an institution-builder, go for it.

Where do you believe African Studies as a discipline is headed?

The discipline is strong. The question is, Who will practice it? I think Continental Africans and the New African Diaspora will provide increasingly strong leadership. I worry that emerging generations of African Americans who are the legacy of slavery are looking elsewhere to make their mark.

Do you currently have any books or major research projects in the works?

RALPH BUNCHE THE AFRICANIST: AN INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

This book is the first comprehensive treatment of Ralph Bunche's intellectual legacy as a scholar of international affairs. It recovers and historicizes his pioneering contributions to the study of International Relations as a discipline –and to the practical purposes of ethnographic knowledge. I argue that Ralph Bunche's intellectual interests in Africa shaped the trajectory of his career—as an academic, a wartime military intelligence analyst, a State Department officer and a UN diplomat. The biography is structured around relationships with people who shared some aspect of his intellectual interests in Africa – including Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Melville Herskovits, Isaac Schapera, Jack

"BUILD A COHORT, AND MENTOR YOUNG SCHOLARS OF COLOR – MALE AND FEMALE. IF YOU'RE INCLINED TO BECOME AN INSTITUTION-BUILDER, GO FOR IT."

Harris, Eslanda Robeson, Alger Hiss, Eleanor Roosevelt, Alain Lock, Charles H. Thompson, Raymond Leslie Buell and Martin Kilson.

RALPH BUNCHE'S INTELLECTUAL LEGACY: FOLLOWING THE ARCHIVAL TRAILS

I'm working on a Digital Humanities project to produce a Map Journal that traces the location of archives housing documents related to Ralph Bunche's intellectual legacy. Based on my research for my Bunche biography, the storymap is organized around personal relationships associated with his intellectual interests in Africa. Each of these relationships can be situated in particular geographical places that have their own histories. My travels to document these relationships have taken me to 16 widely dispersed archives in the US and the UK.

CHAPTER 19 – RANDALL ROBINSON: A PANAFRICAN FOREIGN POLICY VIRTUOSO

This is my contribution to *The Pan-African Pantheon of Key Thinkers and Activists*, Adekeye Adebajo (ed), forthcoming July/August 2020 by Macmillan.



RESPONDING TO HARASSMENT

The African Studies Association is committed to creating and maintaining an inclusive environment for all participants in all of its activities, free from harassment. In light of the global outcry against harassment in a variety of personal and professional settings, we felt that it was essential to develop our own anti-harassment policy, which was ratified by the board in 2019. The full policy can be found on our website as well as a secure form for reporting. See <https://africanstudies.org/anti-harassment-policy/>

Perhaps most importantly, we want to introduce our newly-appointed Ombudsperson, Mary Osirim. She comes to the position with experience in anti-harassment policy implementation and has graciously agreed to serve our community in this role. We consistently strive for a better ASA, and we believe that this policy brings us one step closer to safer space for all.

To fill out a report, visit <https://africanstudies.org/anti-harassment-reporting-form/>

*ASA Secretariat
January 2020*

At the African Studies Association's (ASA) Annual Meeting in November 2019, I was asked by the Board of Directors to serve as Ombudsperson for the Association, a position which I have accepted. In keeping with the Association's Anti-Harassment Policy, I am committed to investigating and addressing reports of harassment at our meetings, workshops and related events. Such harassment includes verbal and/or physical conduct concerning any and all identities that is unwelcome, pervasive or severe and interferes with the safe environment that the ASA intends to provide at all meetings and events. My role will involve interviewing the alleged violator of our policy, as well as the target of harassment and possibly any witnesses to the action. Working with the Executive Director, other members of the Secretariat and the Board, I will participate in the decision-making process concerning each case.

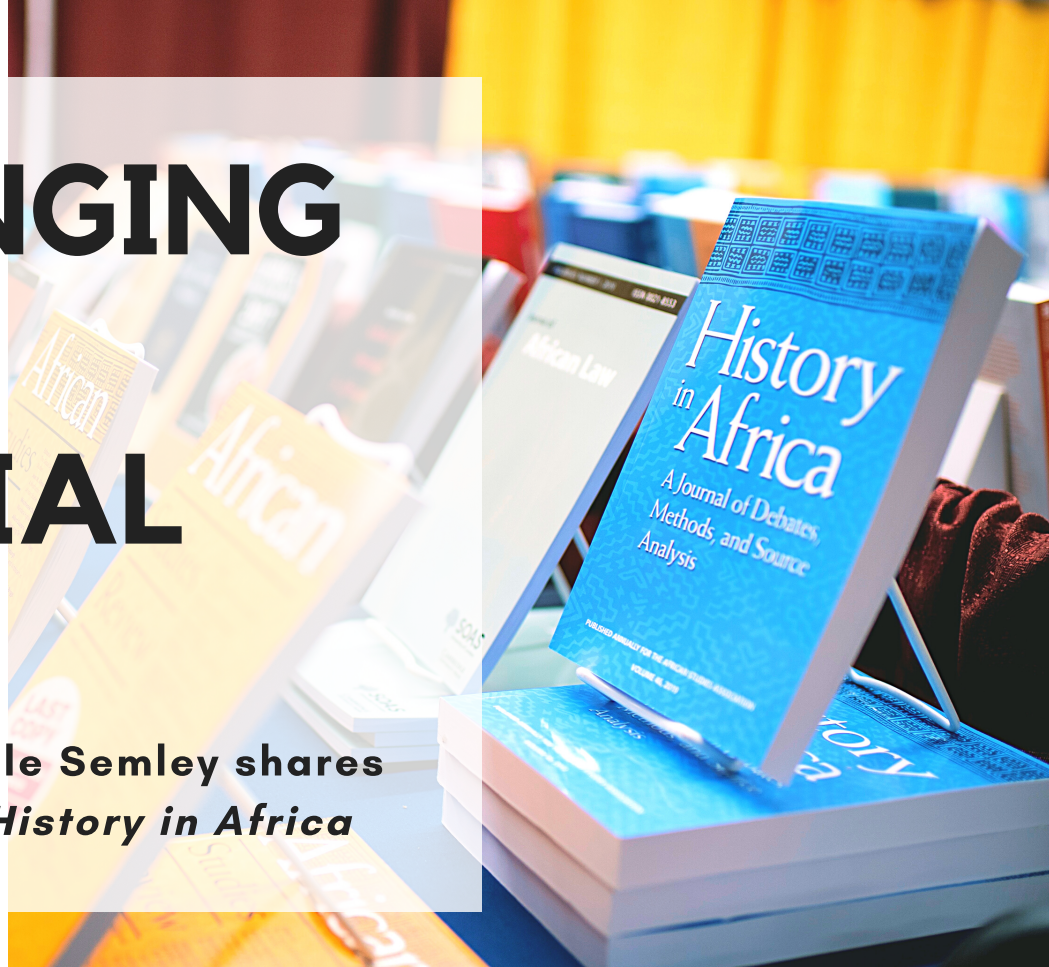
As Provost at Bryn Mawr College over the past 6.5 years, I have experience in providing harassment prevention programs and planning Title IX educational opportunities for our faculty. In addition, I have worked as part of an administrative team concerning investigation and decision-making about harassment claims at my institution.

ASA members, employees, volunteers and guests in Annual Meetings and other events of the Association who have been the target of harassment or have witnessed such behavior and wish to report it can reach out to me at: mosirim@brynmawr.edu or complete the ASA reporting form as indicated in the ASA's Anti-Harassment Policy. It is most important that our meetings continue to be inclusive and welcoming sites of scholarly exchange about Africa and the Diaspora for all participants!

Statement from ASA Ombudsperson, Mary Osirim
January 18, 2020

A CHANGING OF THE EDITORIAL GUARD

Incoming editor Lorelle Semley shares a fresh approach to *History in Africa*



Lorelle Semley, College of the Holy Cross, is a member of the incoming editorial team at *History in Africa* along with Teresa Barnes, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Bayo Holsey, Emory University, Egodi Uchendu, University of Nigeria.



What do you anticipate will be the most exciting part of becoming an editor for *History in Africa*? What will be the most challenging?

It will be most exciting to learn about the latest developments in the field from emerging scholars as well as hear from more established scholars who are taking their research in new directions. One challenge -- that I rather think of as an opportunity -- is expanding the reach of *History in Africa* which may seem like a niche or specialist journal. Because of its methodological focus, *History in Africa* does enjoy some readership beyond the Africanist community; we would like to expand that reach.

As a scholar, the courses you teach are interdisciplinary by design. How do you think this mindset will impact your work as an editor?

First, while interdisciplinarity has been a buzz word for some time, I don't think that all scholars are not able to work across disciplines and methods as much as they would like. As Africanists, we are often trained in interdisciplinary ways that shape our development as scholars. Because I regularly engage with literature, anthropology, political science and the arts in the classroom, I am interested in bringing in scholars from other disciplines and offering a space to historians who are exploring interdisciplinary approaches in their own work.

Are there any aspects of History as a discipline, or scholars who present history, that you feel are underrepresented and thus hope to champion as an incoming editor?

I think that one aspect of historical work that could be addressed and explored is the style of historical writing. I would like to support innovative narrative approaches to history. By inviting a range of historical articles including typical essays as well as interviews and other thought pieces, we can think more intentionally about the dynamic between how we research and how we write.

The editorial team chose digital humanities as the first themed issue under your tenure. Why was this particular topic selected and what themes do you hope the issue will discuss?

Digital Humanities is a burgeoning field across all of academia and Africanists have been addressing the innovative uses and the problematic aspects of the "digital turn" for some time. On one hand, we want to remind our colleagues of this long-term focus on digital humanities in African Studies. On the other hand, by addressing both the practical and ethical aspects of digital humanities in African history, we can highlight how Africanists are at the forefront of these questions in our discipline.



HiA is subtitled "A Journal of Debates, Methods, and Source Analysis" - do you see any emerging debates in the field that will appear in upcoming editions of the journal?

Together with the other members of the editorial team, we have discussed a range of other options for future CFPs and we want to think carefully about future themes that are distinct and cutting edge. Many of the things that have been fashionable in recent years such as transnationalism or decolonial approaches have had a long history in Africanist scholarship so we want to identify new frontiers rather than revisit old ones. But for now, it may be best to say "stay tuned" as we are still planning.

As the print publishing landscape continues to shift, what opportunities do you see for the future of academic journals broadly?

As print publishing engages with new strategies, it will be important to think creatively in terms of ways to expand our domestic and international audiences.

In your opinion, what sets *History in Africa* apart from other academic journals?

As a journal focused on methods and debate from an Africanist perspective, we have the potential to bridge regional and thematic differences in our discipline while modelling the core approaches that define us as historians.

ABOUT THE AFRICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION

Established in 1957, the African Studies Association (ASA) is the flagship membership organization devoted to enhancing the exchange of information about Africa.



Based in the United States, the ASA supports understanding of an entire continent in each facet of its political, economic, social, cultural, artistic, scientific, and environmental landscape. Our members include scholars, students, teachers, activists, development professionals, policymakers and donors.

Mission

The African Studies Association encourages the production and dissemination of historical and contemporary knowledge about Africa. The ASA is based in the United States and aims to cultivate a better understanding of the continent, taking a holistic approach to its areas of focus. This includes all facets of Africa's political, economic, social, cultural, artistic, scientific, and environmental landscapes, to name a few. Our members include scholars, students, teachers, activists, development professionals, policymakers and donors.

Engage with the ASA!

Our members are top knowledge producers in their fields, and many are willing to serve as experts if needed. This includes testifying to committees, providing background information and more.

African Studies programs across the United States run events, lectures, and other programs open to their community.

The ASA will host its Annual Meeting in Washington, DC, November 19-21, 2020. To learn more about the meeting, please visit: www.africanstudies.org/annual-meetings

ASA Task Force for the Protection of Academic Freedom

In the summer of 2018, the African Studies Association launched the ASA Task Force for the Protection of Academic Freedom. This group works to defend and advance scholars' ability to freely pursue, distribute, and discuss their research in academia and in public life. Through the Task Force, the African Studies Association (ASA) monitors infringements on academic freedom in Africa, in the United States, and worldwide. To date, the ASA has issued statements on infringement on academic freedom in Uganda, Iran, Sudan, and Angola.

The ASA Supports

As a member of the Coalition for International Education, the ASA supports the CIE's FY 2021 recommendations of \$106.1 million in funding for the Department of Education's Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs, including \$95.7 million for Title VI and \$10.4 million for Fulbright-Hays.



Photography by
BENJAMIN J. AUSTIN
SAMUEL J. BREWER



2019 BOSTON HIGHLIGHTS

The 2019 ASA Annual Meeting was held in Boston Massachusetts, November 20–23. With more than 2,200 people in attendance the Boston Copley Marriott was filled with academics, students, professionals, and publishers from around the world.

The ASA announced their 2019 prize winners on Saturday, 23 November during the closing ceremony. The honors included:

Pearl T. Robinson, (PhD, Columbia University) was honored as the 2019 Distinguished Africanist. She is one of the most respected and well-known scholars of Africa today. Robinson has authored more than 40 articles and book chapters on African and African American politics. She is a past Director of Tufts' International Relations Program and has taught at Makerere University in Uganda and the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. Robinson served as

President of the African Studies Association in 2006–2007.

The ASA Book Prize was awarded to **Michael A. Gomez** of New York University for his book, *African Dominion: A New History of Empire in Early and Medieval West Africa* (Princeton University Press). The award recognizes the most important scholarly work in African studies published in English and distributed in the United States during the preceding year. The ASA began awarding the prize in 1965.

The Bethwell A. Ogot Book Prize honored Michigan State University professor **Laura Fair** for her book, *Reel Pleasures: Cinema Audiences and Entrepreneurs in Twentieth-Century Urban Tanzania* (Ohio University Press). Initiated in 2012, this prize was made possible by a generous bequest from the estate of the late Professor Kennell Jackson.

The ASA Board of Directors honored four individuals with the 2019 ASA Service Award: **Michel Doortmont**, University of Groningen, **John Hanson**, Indiana University, **Jan Jansen**, Universiteit Leiden, and **Dmitri van den Bersselaar**, Universität Leipzig for their decade of service as editors of *History in Africa*.

The 2019 Paul Hair Prize recognized *Dedan Kimathi on Trial. Colonial Justice and Popular Memory in Kenya's Mau Mau Rebellion* (Ohio University Press), edited by **Julie MacArthur**.

The winner of the 2019 ASA Graduate Student Paper Prize was **Mary Victoria Gorham** (University of Florida) for her paper, "Displaying the Nation: Museums and Nation-Building in Tanzania and Kenya." The ASA Board of Directors established the annual Graduate Student Paper Prize in 2001 and singles out an essay presented at the previous year's Annual Meeting.

The inaugural ASA Film Prize honored director **Shameela Seedat** for her film *Whispering Truth to Power*. The ASA Film Prize is awarded to an outstanding film, whether fiction or documentary, made in the preceding two calendar years by an African filmmaker. The prize winner is an innovative, probing, work that helps audiences think about social, political, economic, and cultural questions pertinent to the lives of Africans and dynamics on the African continent.



The Cover Art Prize was awarded to artist and scholar **Diana Adesola Mafe** (Denison University) for her painting "Iya ni Wura." The Cover Art Prize is awarded annually to a living artist whose work directly addresses the theme of the Annual Meeting.

The Gretchen Walsh Book Donation Award committee has selected the **University of Makeni library in Makeni, Sierra Leone**. The African Studies Association, with the support of the Africana Librarians Council Gretchen Walsh Book Donation Committee, offers an annual grant to assist book donation projects with shipping costs to send books to African libraries and schools.

The African Studies Association honored the **eight 2019 Presidential Fellows**, Patricia Serwaa Afrifa, Aymar Nyenyezi Bisoka, Austin Emielu, Jimoh Ganiyu, Susana Molins Lliteras, Bernard Matolino, Evarist Ngabirano, and Babajide Ololajulo, who all participated in the 2019 ASA Annual Meeting as well as conducted institutional visits.

The African Studies Association honored **twelve 2019 Carnegie Corporation of New York Fellows**, Patience Adzande, Deborah Alio, Sewoenam Chachu, Frank Chidawanyika, Daniel Olisa Iweze, Debbie Jewitt, Nicodemus Minde, Khangelani Moyo, Titilope Ajayi, Gbemisola Animasawun, Sylvia Esther Gyan, and Gabriel Karubanga, who all participated in the 2019 Annual Meeting.



After honoring all of the 2019 Prize Winners, the front of the hall was cleared and members danced the night away to music from Kina Zoré, a Boston-based Mozambican band.

The Boston LAC prepared several special activities, including the welcome reception, four sponsored panels, four off-site tours in the Boston area, two special exhibits, and a farewell networking breakfast.

One of the highlights of the LAC activities was their innovative Farewell Breakfast on Sunday morning. The event was a LAC-hosted reception on-site at the hotel for 150 attendees. The event served as a final opportunity for attendees to network as well as enjoy some music before their long travels home. The ASA congratulates the LAC Co-Chairs Abel Djassi Amado, Rita Kiki Edozie, Kwamina Panford, and Eric J. Schmidt on a fantastic annual meeting and is deeply grateful for their service.

Many of the keynote sessions of the 2019 ASA Annual Meeting were professionally recorded. These sessions allow you to relive some of the fantastic presentations and debates each year, and make wonderful classroom material. If you missed something exciting, these videos can be found on the ASA's YouTube channel and a new video from 2019 will be promoted each Friday during the spring until each one has been uploaded for your viewing pleasure. If there is something that you would like to see that you believe was recorded but you cannot find online, simply email us at members@africanstudies.org and we will do our best to locate the recording.

The 2019 Annual Meeting was a fantastic gathering of academics, practitioners, students, and government officials and we look forward to working with everyone to enrich the exchange of information about Africa throughout 2020.





Dr. Nada Mustafa Ali (University of Massachusetts, Boston) working at the 2019 Annual Meeting during a specialized publishing workshop for Emerging African Studies Scholars organized by *African Studies Review* and Islam in Africa Studies Group.

FROM DC TO MAKENI

American University professors donate books to the University of Makeni library with the Gretchen Walsh Book Donation Award.

The 2019 Gretchen Walsh Book Donation Award went towards shipping books donated by professors at American University in Washington, DC to the library at the University of Makeni in Sierra Leone. Susan Shepler, an Associate Professor in the School of International Service at American University, organized the book donation drive among her colleagues. She did this ahead of spending the 2019-2020 academic year as a visiting professor at the University of Makeni (UniMak) in Sierra Leone, where she is currently lecturing modules on theories of development and on research methods in the postgraduate program on sustainable development.



Donating the books on behalf of her colleagues, Shepler said access to the latest materials is a necessary component of quality higher education. “These days, many of the prominent scholarly journals are available online but there is certainly still a place for old-fashioned books in the learning of any university student.” Professor Shepler said many institutions of higher education in Sierra Leone still struggle to access high quality printed materials.

Often, books sent to Africa from abroad are out of date or unrelated to the curricular needs of the educational institutions. With this fact in mind, before coming to UniMak Professor Shepler received from the administration a list of the degrees offered at UniMak and asked her colleagues at American University to donate recent books on the topics covered in the UniMak curriculum or books that dealt with issues related to Africa generally. The topics covered include Sustainable Development, Education Administration, Finance, Accounting and Banking, Agriculture and Food Sciences, Business Administration, Development Studies, Education, Human Resources Management, Information Technology, Law, Mass Communication, Philosophy, Public Administration, Public Health, Special Needs Education, Economics, Procurement Logistics and Supply Chain Management, Urban Planning, and Psychosocial Counseling.

Professor Shepler said, “I was really impressed with how generous my colleagues were and how quickly they managed to fill up the barrel with books. Some of them donated copies of books they themselves had authored, hoping that Sierra Leonean students would contact them if they were interested in the topics covered.”

The Gretchen Walsh Book Donation Award pays for the shipment of books to African institutions with whom members of the ASA have working relationships. The award was announced on November 23, 2019 at the annual meeting of the ASA held in Boston, Massachusetts.



STATE OF THE ASSOCIATION

After the 2019 Annual Meeting, the ASA Board of Directors voted on the action items listed below. The 2020 board members are:

Ato Quayson, *President*

Carolyn Brown, *Vice President*

Maria Grosz-Ngaté, *Past President*

Akosua Adomako Ampofo, *Member*

Leonardo Arriola, *Member*

Didier Gondola, *Member*

Bessie House-Soremekun, *Member*

Sean Jacobs, *Member*

Dumi Moyo, *Member*

Ebenezer Obadare, *Member*

Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, *Member*

Mary Osirim, *Treasurer*

Lahra Smith, *Member*

Yusuf Serunkuma Karuja, *Emerging Scholars Rep.*



2020 Board Decisions

- The Board approved a motion for the Senegambian Studies Association's conversion from Affiliate to Coordinate Organization. Congratulations to our newest Coordinate Organization!
- The Board approved a motion to accept the 2020 Budget.
- The Board approved a statement by the advocacy committee on the suspension of Professor Taban Lo Liyong by the University of Juba.
- The Board approved a statement by the advocacy committee on the US Travel Ban.
- The Board voted to delay the 2020 elections to open in April as a result of candidate withdrawal.

63rd African Studies Association Annual Meeting

Washington, D.C. November 19-21, 2020



The Hour of Decision: Power, Persistence, Purpose, and Possibility in African Studies

Program Chairs: Carina Ray, Brandeis University and Prinisha Badassy, University of Witwatersrand

The theme draws its inspiration from the persistent calls to action made by African Studies scholars. Their demands for transformative change date back to the early decades following the ASA's founding in 1957, yet even with appreciable changes in the Association's membership, leadership, and priorities, the ASA-and the disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields of study it represents-have not yet transcended the old divisions, hierarchies, and exclusionary practices that have long plagued them. Indeed, silos in African Studies still persist despite the deepening transnational epistemological links which have narrowed the divisions between scholars in the US and on the continent. The renewed sense of urgency to confront these challenges-has-tened not only by the Association's recent 60th anniversary but also by the increasing tyranny of our contemporary moment and the brave resistance to it, whether on the streets of Khartoum, Monrovia, Algiers, or Ferguson-offers African Studies scholars a unique opportunity to seize this "hour of decision" to redefine who we are as an association, as a field, as scholars, as activists, and as practitioners. To this end, we invite you to explore the manifold ways that African Studies has been and continues to be a site of power, persistence, purpose, and possibility.

Such an endeavor is a critical step towards fashioning a twenty-first-century pluralistic approach to African Studies that breaks with provincial and parochial modes of engagement. Rather than a prescriptive prompt, we call on scholars to consider the conference theme as an invitation to explore new possibilities in their own research and in the field at large; to contemplate the purposes to which African Studies has historically been put, and to reimagine the purposes to which it might be put now and in the future; and to contend with how power and the structures it produces shape the contours of the field, from curriculum development; graduate training; access to research materials, publishing opportunities, funding, prizes and awards; to the fundamental right to academic freedom, including the freedom to travel across an increasingly fortified global North-South divide.

The conference's thematics also offer ample opportunities for scholars to engage questions of power, persistence, purpose, and possibility in relation to the African past, present, and future in ways that go beyond the organizational and intellectual history of African Studies as a field. We also invite scholars to consider the questions of temporality, imperative, resolve, and political fate bound up in Kwame Nkrumah's famous phrase, "The Hour of Decision," which captured the urgency of African independence as the starting point rather than the conclusion of the struggle for African liberation.

Subthemes:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) Gender, Sexuality, and African Feminisms | 12) Policy, Politics, International Relations |
| 2) Race/Blackness/Africaness | 13) Religion and Spirituality |
| 3) Environment, Conservation, Food Security | 14) Literature |
| 4) Indian Ocean Studies | 15) Music, Performance and Visual Arts |
| 5) Politics and Political Economy | 16) Popular Culture & Media |
| 6) Anthropology | 17) Migration/Border Studies Refugees |
| 7) History and Archaeology | 18) Interrogating African Studies |
| 8) Urban Studies and Spatiality | 19) Digital Humanities |
| 9) Health/Healing/Medical Humanities | 20) Sociology |
| 10) African Philosophy | 21) Peace and Security |
| 11) Education/Teaching/Pedagogy | 22) Special Topics |

BOOKS TO ENRICH YOUR SOCIAL DISTANCING

ASA President Ato Quayson shares his annotated reading list of books to read and reread in this time of social distancing

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

This is deservedly one of the most widely-read books in African literature. Okonkwo's suicide at the end is conventionally interpreted as the outcome of the unhappy encounter between colonialism and a viable African culture. Few note the fact that Okonkwo has a very bad stammer, and that in a culture that prizes language and its multiple usages, his stammer is a great disability. Thus, when he beheads the district commissioner's messenger close to the end, he does so against the background of his clan's meeting at the ilo (or marketplace) when various clan leaders make speeches weighing the pros and cons of taking the battle to the white man. But what happens when we re-read the entire novel through a perspective of disability?

Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman*

This play by the Nigerian Nobel Laureate is one that I think satisfies many of the terms on tragedy laid out in Aristotle's *The Poetics*. But the play has one element that eluded Aristotle in his account of tragedy, and that is that it has a highly elaborate soundscape of different kinds of drumming from the beginning to the end of the play. (Aristotle discounts music entirely as a significant element and focuses his attention exclusively on plot, which he describes as "the soul of tragedy"). The drumming in Soyinka's play not only acts as an intricate modulation of the action, but, for those who understand African drum talk, a potential character in itself since it "speaks" in various ways to both augment and perhaps thwart the meanings unfolding in the foreground of the play.

Fiston Mwanza Mujila, *Tram83*

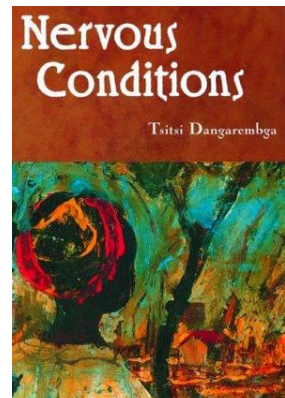
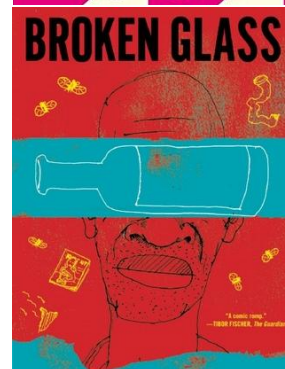
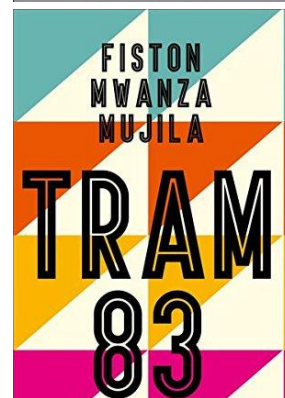
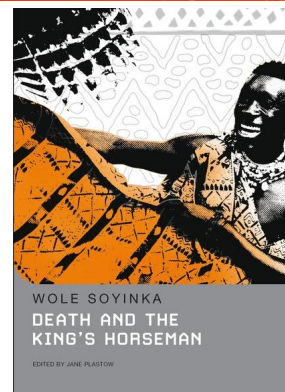
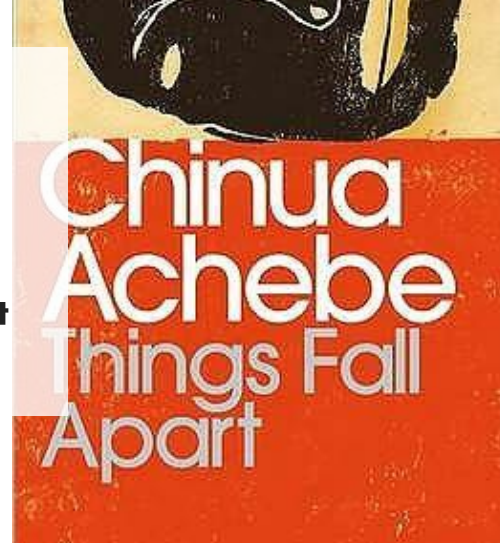
Sticking with the theme of music, Mujila's novel is best read with some jazz, rhumba, hiphop, or afrobeats music playing low in the background. Mujila has said that he wrote the novel to jazz music, and there is evidence of musicality everywhere to be found, from the central place of the Tram83 club to the highly rhythmic prose that combines lyrical interludes with repeated refrains of "Have you got the time?" I am going to leave you to find out what this apparently innocuous question refers to.

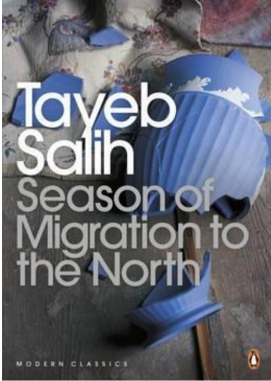
Alain Mabanckou, *Broken Glass*

Mabanckou's novel is distinctive for not having a single full stop in the entire novel either in the original French or in the English translation. It is set in a drinking bar called Credit Gone West in the capital of modern-day Congo Brazzaville and focuses on the eponymous protagonist's strenuous attempts to write down the biographies of the bar and of all its regular attendees while much of the time himself drunk. Like Mujila's novel, *Broken Glass* is a trenchant critique of the postcolonial nation-state but without the sense of bitterness that marked an earlier generation of such critiques from the likes of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, and Yambo Ouologuem, among others. But what amounts to a splitting of the sense of post-Independence malaise away from the description of conditions of material disaster and decrepitude that marked the novels of the late-60s and early-70s also means that the form of the African novel has been freed to do other things with the idea of critique.

Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*

This classic of feminist African literature is a must-read for anyone interested in seeing the intersection between late colonialism, patriarchy, female rebellion, and the nervous conditions of its title. What reads on first encounter as a coming-to-age novel really defines two distinct developmental arcs: one is that of the narrator Tambu, who escapes from the homestead and is desperate to get an education and thus enjoy all the benefits of colonial modernity, and the other is that of Nyasha, her widely-read cousin who has gazed at the existential abyss that is her





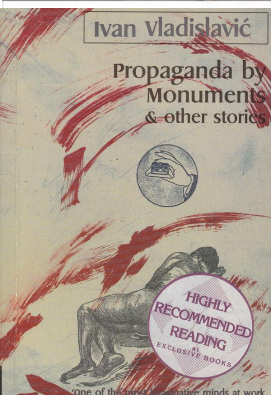
Western education and instead sets up a series of running battles against her father, the redoubtable headteacher and patriarch Babamukuru. The cousins live together under the tutelage of this tyrant, but that they are moving in opposite directions in their understanding of colonial modernity is one of the superb gifts of this insightful novel.

Tayeb Salih, Season of Migration to the North

Mirroring plays a very important function in Salih's novel, which is set partly in London of the 1920s and in a village in the Sudan in the 1950s. The mirroring takes place along different axes, among them mediated through the history of Western and Arabic literature, (The Arabian Nights, Othello, and Heart of Darkness are only three of the most recognizable ones), between Mustafa Sa'eed, the returnee from London and his unnamed interlocutor and the narrator of the novel, and between the different archetypal female principles of madonna and whore that both organize and displace the representation of women in the novel.

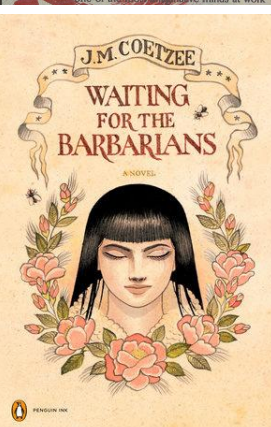
Ivan Vladislavic, Propaganda by Monuments

Vladislavic is one of those regrettably unsung African writers who nevertheless has an incredibly dedicated fan base. There is no one I know who has read Vladislavic that does not feel immediately converted. The title story of this short story collection is set in the early 1990s and is about an entrepreneurial denizen of Johannesburg who reads in the local newspapers that the Russians have decided to tear down all public monuments of Vladimir Illyich Lenin and so writes to their Ministry of External Relations asking them to send him one of the giant busts. His purpose is to place the huge cement bust they promise him in front of his new tavern, suitably named, V.I. Lenin Bar & Grill. The end of apartheid is made to speak to the end of communism in ways that are both thought-provoking and utterly hilarious.



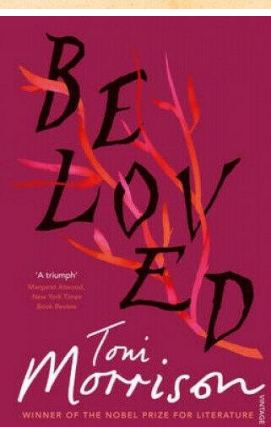
J.M. Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians

This Coetzee novel is much-loved, and for good reason. But one of the things that I find really fascinating about Coetzee is how his characters (typically male), are almost always afflicted by second thoughts. That is to say that they are essentially self-revisionary men. They are obsessed with revising anything that enters their mind and are given to self-doubt at all times. Whether with the Magistrate (Waiting for the Barbarians), David Lurie (Disgrace), Paul Rayment (Slow Man), or any other of his characters, they always pause so they can think a second, or third, or fourth time before they act. That is if they act at all. Unlike Okonkwo, for example.



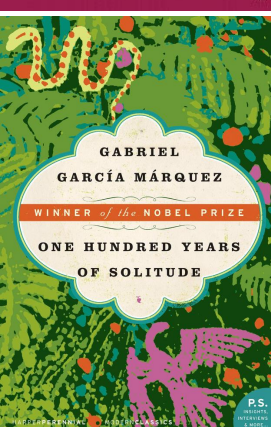
Toni Morrison, Beloved

This lyrical fictionalization of a most traumatic episode in the life of a slave woman who kills her daughter to rescue her from certain re-enslavement is one of the most thought-provoking novels of American and world literature. And it has a cast of highly memorable characters, including Sethe, the slave woman in question, and Baby Suggs, her mother-in-law, who preaches and asks out of the fullness of her big heart that the members of her ex-slave community learn to love each aspect of their bodies piecemeal and with great attention. But then she bears witness to Sethe cutting the throat of her "crawling-already?" two-year-old with a handsaw and unsuccessfully attempting to swing the heads of her three other children against the wall of the barn. Unable either to condemn or endorse her daughter-in-law's terrible choice, Baby Suggs takes to her bed to contemplate colors. "Blue. That don't hurt nobody. Yellow neither," she says. Hauntingly beautiful.



Gabriel Garcia Marquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude

This rambling family saga is one of the most hilarious to have come from the pen of the Colombian Nobel Laureate. In its mixture of mythology (Greek, Biblical, other), fictionalized segments of real Colombian history (the 1000-day war; the Banana Plantation Massacre) and a generous dollop of purely fantastical elements (flying carpets, virgin sirens, a blind matriarch who "sees" everything by listening to the different tempos and rhythms of people in her household, a resurrecting and invisible gipsy), it is an extraordinarily good yarn, and a prime example of the genre of magical realism.



-Ato Quayson, African Studies Association President



The ASA Invites Submissions for the 2020 Graduate Student Paper Prize

In 2001, the ASA Board of Directors established an annual prize for the best graduate student paper. The prize is awarded at the Annual Meeting for an essay presented at the previous year's Annual Meeting. Graduate students should submit papers they wish to be considered for the prize, together with a letter of support from their faculty adviser, by March 15, 2020 to the ASA.

The winning essay will be submitted to the *African Studies Review* for expedited peer review. If the essay is recommended for publication it will appear in the year following the Annual Meeting in which the prize is awarded. It is the expectation that conference papers will be formalized into draft articles that are viable for publication. To prepare their papers for submission, graduate students should adhere to the "General Guidelines for Manuscripts" [www.cambridge.org/core/journals/african-studies-review/information/instructions-for-contributors] that are used by the *African Studies Review*.

Recent winners include:

2015 - Kathleen Klaus, "Contentious Land Claims and the Non-Escalation of Violence: Evidence from Kenya's Coast Region"

2016 - Moritz Nagel, "Precolonial Segmentation Revisited: Initiation Societies, Talking Drums and the Ngondo Festival in the Cameroons"

2017 - Amanda B. Edgell, "Vying for the 'Man's Seat' - Constituency Magnitude and Mainstream Female Candidature for Non-Quota Seats in Uganda and Kenya"

2018 - Shaonan Liu, "Symbol of Wealth and Prestige: A Social History of Chinese-made Enamelware in Northern Nigeria"

2019 - Victoria Mary Gorham, "Displaying the Nation: Museums and Nation-Building in Tanzania and Kenya"

If you have any questions about the Graduate Student Paper Prize, please contact the ASA at kathryn@africanstudies.org