African Studies Review (2026), 1–4
doi:10.1017/asr.2026.10360

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Editorial: Held in Trust

One of the highest trusts that the profession can confer on a scholar is the editorship of a journal, especially one as significant as the *African Studies Review* (*ASR*), the flagship journal of the African Studies Association (ASA). I assumed the editorship of the *ASR* in December 2022, humbled by this trust and mindful of the responsibilities. I began my tenure as African studies grappled with its complex histories amid the COVID-19 pandemic and in the wake of the racist killing of George Floyd and other Black people in the United States. Closer to home, the journal faced its own scrutiny over its publication practices. Within this context, I committed my tenure to three aims: to promote an expansive range of African studies scholarship, including humanist work historically underrepresented in the journal; to catalyze exciting research in new directions; and to provide a forum for work foregrounding understudied/marginalized ideas and individuals. Working with my deputy editor Kate Luongo, associate editors, and book and film reviews editors, we advanced that agenda and we leave the journal in great shape for the next editorial team.

I came to the editorship committed to promoting scholarship on topics, geographies, and (inter)disciplines underrepresented in *ASR*. To that end, I devoted one of the issues early in my term to humanities work. That stated commitment brought a rise in submissions of quality work and prompted a reassessment of our editorial principles so that they would no longer privilege the social sciences that have traditionally dominated the journal. We continued to receive and publish excellent work in history, anthropology, and political science. We also made real progress in literary studies, art history, digital humanities, and work at the intersection of humanistic fields. For instance, Doyle Calhoun's 2025 article, "'A Kind of Literary Archeology': Excavating Morocco's Slave Past Under the Protectorate (1912–1956)," has just won the ASR Best Article Prize. Chijioke Onah's "#BringBackOurGirls: Transnational Activism and the Remediation of the 2014 Chibok Girls' Kidnapping in Nigeria," from 2024 was a finalist for the Association for the Study of the Worldwide Diaspora Article Prize. Alongside them, articles on crowdsourced poetry in digital spaces and on visual propaganda and Biafran national identity, among others, show that we widened the journal's scope without compromising the quality it is known for.

We also broadened access to the journal in other ways, particularly regarding the book review process. The crowdsourcing of books for review has increased both the number of books reviewed in the journal and lengthened our list of reviewers, including colleagues working on the continent and junior scholars. Our recalibrated review forums have deepened the evaluation of new books in

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the journal, while the introduction of film review forums and reviews of film festivals marks progress in the journal's engagement with African film and media.

I was convinced in 2022, as I am now, that the best journal should not only reflect the best scholarship in its field but also steer the conversation in new directions. To that end, we used special topic forums to stimulate new research. The forum on "Cultural Dimensions of Africa-China," published in the June 2026 issue, addressed the overconcentration on political economy and statecraft in Afro-Asia discourse. A forum on "Decolonization and the Cultural Underground" (2025) contributed to several fields at once. Together with the Africa-China forum and other articles, it expanded *ASR*'s offerings on cultural productions. I am pleased that this work will continue after my tenure, with forums underway on African Studies and Black Studies, Africa and Artificial Intelligence, Democratization in Africa, Sea Matters and Africa's Archipelagic Worlds, and Political Ecology.

The political ecology of African studies in 2022 called for a platform for thinkers and ideas that had not received their due. I inaugurated the Neglected Voices in African Studies series to highlight important but understudied works by African and African diasporic thinkers whose contributions broadened the horizons of their fields. Many of these scholars worked on the continent in the mid-to-late twentieth century, developing theories drawn from African epistemes and experiences, yet their work, or some aspect of it, has not been adequately examined. The series has generated strong interest since its debut, with published pieces on the literary critic Chinweizu and the art curator Bisi Silva (in this issue), and a forthcoming series of essays on the writer, theorist, and politician Mário Pinto de Andrade.

None of these accomplishments happened singlehandedly. They are the work of a team of dedicated associate editors, and book and film reviews editors who believed in our vision and helped realize it. I am grateful to my deputy editor, Kate Luongo, and to all the other editors for being remarkable partners in this shared project. My thanks go also to the journal's managing editor, Tracey Anderson, whose administrative and logistical support made the journal's smooth functioning possible. ASA Executive Director Alix Saba supported our work in meaningful ways, and I am grateful to her and to successive ASA presidents for their commitment to *ASR*. At my home institution, I was fortunate to work with extraordinary editorial assistants: Gbolahan Adeola, Charlotte Bednarski, Breeanna Elliott, Vu Horwitz, and Michaela Feinberg. Their intellectual and administrative contributions enriched the journal's editorial and marketing practices. I also thank the editorial board, the reviewers, whose labor appears nowhere in print, and the authors who trusted us with their research.

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The research featured in this issue underscores the multidisciplinary range for which the journal is known. It includes work on minority rule in Rhodesia, informal urban transportation in Zimbabwe, the history and practices of the Angolan war, the economics of music and performance in Kenya, and the role of

faith and religion in managing chronic illness in Senegal. These essays show how people make lives and meaning amid constraints, claiming authority over themselves and their communities.

The issue opens with "White Minority Rule in Rhodesia Reexamined: Urgent Lessons from the Past," a revised version of Elizabeth Schmidt's ASA Presidential Lecture, brought here to a wider audience. Drawing on archival research in declassified US documents, Schmidt shows how Western powers enabled white-minority-ruled Rhodesia by violating United Nations sanctions and shielding the regime from the use of force. In Schmidt's telling, the case holds urgent lessons for understanding the past and for grappling with present democratic erosion in the United States and globally.

Zimbabwe after the end of white minority rule is the context for "*Mushikashika*: Mobility, Informality and Subaltern Urbanity in Harare, Zimbabwe, 2008–2018," by Hellen Chido Doisi and Eric Kushinga Makombe. Doisi and Makombe study the informal taxis that connect Harare to the peri-urban settlements around it. Understanding the taxis as infrastructure from below, the authors contend that *mushikashika* is an alternative system created by the urban poor in the absence of formal transport structures. Yet this decentralized network does not escape elite control. As the authors write, "this infrastructure is situated within frameworks characterized by asymmetrical accumulation. Vehicle ownership is frequently concentrated among politically connected actors and members of the security apparatus, while drivers and touts absorb the risks of enforcement, volatility, and accidents on precarious margins."

Jon Schubert turns to the margins of the Angolan war in "UNITA's Northern Front in the Angolan Civil War: A Tale of Two Captivities." Looking to Uíge in the north, away from the southern center of UNITA's activities, Schubert draws on interviews with civilians and former commanders to show how the National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA) legitimized its struggle against the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and how civilians responded to the group's actions. UNITA's operations in the north, sometimes in alliance with armed groups of the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), produced a "complex, unstable mosaic of territorial control, marked both by coercion and the cultivation of consent through the deployment of repertoires of state authority and services to the population." The article contributes to the literature on rebel governance and offers new perspectives on the history of the Angolan war.

The next article, "Economic Activities and the Practice of *Utu* Among Kenya's Mijikenda Acrobats," moves from war as a means of survival to skill as a means of livelihood. Drawing on open-ended interviews across Kenya, Nina Berman shows that, in navigating their marginalization, the formation of acrobatic troupes allows the men to earn a living. Acrobatics also carries a non-economic significance: "Acrobatic activities, grounded in practices of *utu* as essential expressions of African humanism, allow acrobats to live dignified lives and to connect social practices both past and present."

The role of performance as a mechanism of survival also underpins Tom Michael Mboya's "'Listen to Music in Times of Trouble': Awillo Mike, Kenyan Live Band Music, and Surviving the COVID-19 Pandemic." Focusing on the musician Awillo Mike, Mboya underscores how the pandemic heightened the precarity of

artists' lives as performance opportunities evaporated. Yet music also served Awillo and his community as a means of survival. Through musicking, from song composition to virtual performance, he supported himself while offering lyrics and sound that encouraged the public to endure the crisis. In Mboya's words, music "became instrumental in Kenyan society's navigation through and beyond the pandemic. Beyond entertainment, musicking was a tool for community survival and adaptation."

Mboya's article shares its preoccupation with adaptation with Emma Bunkley's "Allah's Will: Acceptance, Faith, and Duty Amid a Chronic Epidemic in Senegal." Bunkley centers women living with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, kidney disease, and hypertension, and finds that faith and religion are central to their lives and to how they understand their ailments. In her words, "Senegalese women with metabolic disorders and their caregivers mobilized Islam as a way of accepting the chronicity of disease, maintaining good moral standing within social networks, and making meaning of why they were experiencing such hardship." Her work underscores the psychological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of illness and adds to the growing body of scholarship on healing and caregiving in African contexts.

The issue also includes articles in our Neglected Voices in African Studies and Keyword series. In her essay, "Reconfiguring the Epistemic Map: Bisi Silva and the Construction of Intellectual Authority in African Art," Stacey Elizabeth Anne Kennedy evaluates the curatorial, pedagogical, and institutional-building contributions of the Nigerian curator Bisi Silva. For Kennedy, "Bisi Silva reconfigured the epistemic foundations of contemporary art from Africa by building institutions that relocated intellectual authority to the continent itself," including the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos, and Àsìkò Art School. In another instance where agency is relocated away from the West, Christopher J. Lee's Keyword essay on "Afro-Asianism" considers the emergence of the term, its function as an analytical framework, and its possibilities for rethinking African and Asian identities and decolonizing area studies more broadly. The rest of the issue includes a scholarly review essay by Gretchen Bauer on women's participation in politics in Africa, review forums on recent books, and a panoply of book and film reviews.

I am delighted to leave the journal in the hands of its next editor-in-chief, Claudia Gastrow, and her editorial team. Claudia brings deep experience of *ASR* to this new role, having served as associate editor since 2018. I am grateful for her service to the journal and wish her every success. I leave *ASR* in awe of the outstanding work across African studies, as this issue demonstrates, and with gratitude to the ASA for entrusting this journal to me.

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Cite this article: Iheka, C. 2026. "Editorial: Held in Trust." *African Studies Review* 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2026.10360