MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Mayaki Kimba

PHD CANDIDATE | COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

How did you learn about APSA? When did you become a member of APSA, and what prompted you to join?

My department sponsors an APSA membership for all first-year PhD students. Therefore, I naturally joined APSA as I began my doctoral program. Because the start of my PhD trajectory coincided with COVID, the APSA membership was a welcome way to feel connected to the professional field at a time when in-person opportunities to meet other political scientists were (for good reason) few and far between.



How have APSA membership and services been valuable to you as a student?

The APSA Annual Meeting has been an excellent occasion to catch up with peers doing their PhD at other institutions. Cultivating and partaking in an epistemic community remains immeasurably valuable in situating your own work and gaining new ideas—not to mention the mutual support that any graduate student can only use in droves!

Can you tell us about your professional background and your research?

Originally from the Netherlands, I gained my BA at Reed College in Portland, OR and I am entering the final year of my PhD study at Columbia University. My research focuses on the relationship between activism and the administrative state. Notwithstanding the intuitive appeal of a natural opposition between the impassioned and politically engaged activist and the dispassionate and impartial bureaucrat, empirical work has shown that activists and bureaucrats can maintain close relations, and at times bureaucrats even identify as activists. The question remains what to make normative of the relationship between activists and the administrative state: from the perspective of democratic theory, should we want close relations between activists and bureaucrats, or should bureaucrats only let themselves be guided by norms of impartiality and the directives of elected officials? I explore this question by reconstructing five microhistories drawn from Britain, France, and the Netherlands during the long 1970s in which conundrums arose as activists and bureaucrats encountered one another, sometimes in a collaborative and other times in an antagonistic mode. I then question to what extent received theories of the administrative state have descriptive and normative purchase on the conundrums that I identify. Because I focus on activists from (former) overseas territories of Britain, France, and the Netherlands, the conundrums that emerge from the microhistories emphasize the particular problems that the afterlife of empire posed for European administrative states, as well as the problem of governing individuals in a liminal space between migrant and citizen.

APSA member since 2020

Which APSA programs or events would you recommend to people who are not members of the association, and why?

I would again mention the annual meeting, and emphasize that the plethora of panels at the annual meeting provides an excellent opportunity to learn where the field is moving and what scholars are working on topics that also interest you. The biggest problem is of course avoiding an overflowing agenda, as there is always so much to see!

Is there anything else you'd like people to know about you or the work that you do?

Next to my dissertation project on the administrative state, I maintain a research interest in Black and anticolonial political thought, especially from Suriname and the Dutch Caribbean. In my spare time, I enjoy exploring the New York theater scene and opining on (the perennially crisis-ridden world of) opera.■

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