EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

Serving the African Studies Association as Editor-in-Chief of the *African Studies Review* has been one of the great privileges and honors of my academic career. In July 2021, we received the exciting news that the ASR's Impact Factor for 2020 rose to 1.706 [see https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/african-studies-review/information/impact-factor]. This marked a dramatic improvement from the 2019 figure of 1.034, and a more than 100 percent improvement from 2017, when our team took over the reins. The ASR is now the top-ranked African Studies journal based in North America and the second most cited in the world after *African Affairs*.

These remarkable achievements did not occur overnight, however. Rather, they are the result of tireless work by an exceptional team of deeply committed scholars and staff, the vast majority of whom are volunteers. Over the past several years, working as an editorial collective, we have reshaped the organizational structure of the journal's operations to make it more inclusive, more representative, more diverse, and more rewarding for participants as well as for readers. We have developed a journal editorial model that respects the fact that all the service work performed by the scholar volunteers of the team's membership is unpaid. But it is also designed to ensure that participation is enjoyable, not onerous, and commensurate with the service expectations of research universities. We want our editors and editorial review board members to be active and involved, and to recommend the experience to others when they term out.

Achieving this distinction has been a product of teamwork. In tandem with the ASA's Executive and the Publications Subcommittee, the new team developed a strategic five-year plan that outlined a series of goals. One priority among these goals was to increase the Impact Factor (IF) of ASR. We set what we thought was a plausible goal of raising the IF to 1.10 by 2020. The IF is a measure of the frequency with which the average article in a journal has been cited in a particular year, and it is used to measure the importance or rank of a journal by calculating the times its articles are cited. It

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is but one of a number of aggregate scores available to editors and publishers. We recognize that some readers may question the apparent obsession with scorecards and points, or raise issues about a journal development plan that is centered on particular numerical outcomes. To this we have two responses. The first is that we play the cards we are dealt. Journals are assessed this way, for better or worse. Until the metric changes, we are stuck with it. And second, scholars who seek job security or promotion appropriately consider these matters when they decide with whom they wish to publish their work. To attract the best work, we need to attend to the IF.

The mission of the ASR [see https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/african-studies-review] is to publish the best scholarship in disciplinary and interdisciplinary African studies [see https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/african-studies-review/information/statement-of-interdisciplinarity]. An improved IF attracts new scholarship and new readership, and it also draws people further into the ASA to embrace the many benefits of ASA membership. A journal's IF is only one way of measuring the journal's quality and reputation, but as it continues to play a major role in academic life, we have little choice but to engage with it. Journals that hesitate in promoting their own publications or celebrating their achievements have no business soliciting new scholarship. Implicit at the core of the IF is a form of secondary post-peer review. Once an article is in print, it takes on a second life. While many scholars think their work is done once their article appears in print, journal editors look at this differently. We highlight new publications on social media, such as our Facebook page [https://www.facebook.com/AfricanStudiesReview/] and Twitter feed [https://twitter.com/ASRJournal]. We endeavor to draw people into the ASR, first to read, and then hopefully to cite compelling and innovative new research.

Many universities consider a journal's IF as they assess candidates for employment, promotion, and tenure. And many universities have official lists of journals in which applicants for jobs or promotion may or ought to publish. A number of other aggregators guide prospective authors in addition to IF, such as Journal Citation Reports, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, and SCIMago. Scholars seeking to disseminate their findings select publication venues based on a number of considerations, but besides acceptance rates, chief among these is whether their work will be read, circulated, promoted, and ultimately cited. What these aggregators don't convey, however, is the behind-the-scenes operations of the journal team in promoting new issues and new publications. The ASR also encourages its authors to promote their own work. While some scholars may grumble that their work is ignored or uncited, our first response to such complaints is to ask what they personally undertook to promote their work once it appeared in print or online.

When I was first approached by then-Executive Director Suzanne Moyer Baazet about the prospect of editing the ASR, I was a little unsure whether I had the capacity or the skill to oversee such an important component of the ASA's public profile and intellectual mission. I hesitated at first. I also doubted my ability. But I soon realized that I would be part of a team. No

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single person can run a journal the size and impact of the ASR. After consulting with friends and colleagues about the possibility of working together as a team, I realized that I had been offered an invaluable opportunity, the sort of chance that rarely comes along twice. Over the past four years, our team has redesigned the reviewer system, streamlined the pipeline of production to ensure that articles are released in a timely fashion on FirstView [https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/african-studies-review/firstview] (now included in IF), made abstracts available in Portuguese, expanded publishing articles in French, and transformed the Book Review and Film Review procedures so that the reviews are now free, widely circulated, and include links to relevant or related research articles. As a result of these and other initiatives, such as the collaborative ASR Seminars and PEASS workshops and three new prizes [see https://africanstudies.org/peass-workshops/], we have dramatically increased the number of Africa-based scholars who publish with us, review for us, and read and cite us. A number of these scholars are now joining or have already joined the editorial team in a variety of capacities.

Many people have accompanied us on this journey since 2017–2018. Associate Editors, Film and Book Review Editors, and ERB members rotate on and off on three-year and four-year cycles, and the ASA's Publications Subcommittee likewise revolves based on annual elections. Literally thousands of anonymous peer reviewers have agreed and delivered their considered opinions. And innumerable contributors of articles, reviews, and opinions have shared their work. The 2020 IF is testament to this extraordinary journal teamwork.

This September issue contains an inimitable bounty of exciting and original research in media studies, music and performance, poetry and literature, history, anthropology, sociology, and political science. We are pleased to feature scholarship about Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Africa writ large, along with a forum on land. We open this issue with a pair of articles that speak to the power and capacity of image, object, and performance. In a fascinating account of recent developments in digital media, "From Google Doodles to Facebook: Nostalgia and Visual Reconstructions of the Past in Nigeria" [https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2020.118], James Yékú and Ayobami Ojebode scrutinize the political connections of internet space and the use of striking visual imagery. The authors explore the role of the Nigerian government in attaching cultural meaning to digital images and consider the historical and performative dimensions of content sharing.

In Ghana, Kwasi Ampene reconsiders the ancestral Black Stools, the source of political power and kingship legitimacy in Asante. In "Power and Responsibility: Royalty and the Performing Arts in Asante-Ghana" [https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.13], Ampene examines the sacred and exclusive attributes of stoolship rituals. With a focus on the Grand Worship, at the

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center of which is the Asantehene, he argues that artistic performance defines and enhances the power of chiefly rulers.

In "Zulu Poems of (and for) Nature: Bhekinkosi Ntuli's Environmental Imagination in *Imvunge Yemvelo* (1972)" [https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2020.135], Oliver Nyambi and Patricks Voua Otomo examine the tropes of "lady nature," nostalgia, and dystopia in the work of the Zulu poet and novelist. Ntuli began writing in isiZulu as a teenager and has been the recipient of numerous prizes, awards, and distinctions. The authors recount Ntuli's preoccupations with local and indigenous knowledge and the relationship between humans and their environment, set against a cross-current of decolonial and anti-imperial epistemologies.

Moving across the continent, in "Medina Gounass: Constructing Extra-National Space in a West African Borderland" [https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2020.130], David Glovsky interrogates the historical autonomy of a Muslim community in Senegal. The location of the city in a border region is a factor in its development of an alternative geography of detachment from colonial and postcolonial power. The author investigates the emergence of parallel government structures, deeply informed by Islamic law, with wider implications for the study of territoriality and political power in contemporary Africa.

This issue features a forum on the practices and possibilities created by land deals in postcolonial and contemporary Africa, introduced and edited by Youjin Chung and Marie Gagné. As the forum's subeditors explain in their brief introduction [https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.73], land disputes have long formed a central node of research in African studies. Land ownership, control, theft, inheritance, grabbing, and seizure are just some of the most urgent and salient issues. In "The Curious Case of Three Male Elders: Land Grabbing, Lawfare, and Intersectional Politics of Exclusion in Tanzania" [https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2020.125], Chung deciphers a lawsuit filed by elders against the government and a foreign investor to reveal how the gendered lawfare tactics excluded women's considerations. In "'This Mine is for the Entire Casamance Coastline': The Politics of Scale and the Future of the Extractive Frontier in Casamance, Senegal" [https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.54], Ashley Fent investigates the politicization of small-scale mining to reveal the relationship between scale and conflict on the local and national level. In "When Land becomes a Burden: An Analysis of an Underperforming Zambian Land Deal" [https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.65], Tijo Salverda and Chewe Nkonde consider an incomplete land deal and development project, and the accompanying slow-moving but ongoing conflict, to shed light on how larger land deals often leave investors and local populations in limbo. And Gagné, in "Corporate Repertoires of Control and Performances of Power in a Contested Land Deal in Senegal" [https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.90], explores the give and take between investors, government agents, and local populations to reveal the adaptation and performance employed to sustain the acquisition and exploitation of larger land deals.

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Our final essay, the latest installment in the African Studies Keywords (ASK) [https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.10] series, considers "Democracy" [https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2021.43], one of the most compelling and persistent political forms and social ideals. Nic Cheeseman and Sishuwa Sishuwa begin by considering whether democracy is a colonial imposition, before turning to various debates around democratization and what they term "consensual democracy." Our volume is completed by the usual collection of excellent book and film reviews, all of which are available online and accessible freely.

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