



## Chris Abani receives 2023 UNT Rilke Prize and is named a finalist for the 2024 Neustadt International Prize for Literature

Chris Abani has received the 2023 UNT Rilke Prize for *Smoking the Bible* (Copper Canyon Press). The prize recognizes a book written by a midcareer poet published in the preceding year. *Smoking the Bible* is an intriguing collection of poems that reveal the personal story of two brothers—one elegizing the other—and the larger story of a man living in the realities of exile, culturally, geographically, and emotionally. It encompasses a variety of multicultural artistic, intellectual, and beliefs from Africa, Euramerica, and beyond. In this volume, Abani memorializes a brother who has a terminal diagnosis. His poems reflect on migrations to new countries and the nostalgia invoked through memory and travel

from Nigeria to midwestern America. *Smoking the Bible* is uneasy about the translation of languages, cultures, and time.

In addition, Abani has been named a finalist for the 2024 Neustadt International Prize for Literature, a prestigious prize recognizing significant contributions to world literature and has a history as a lead-up to the Nobel Prize in Literature.

## Parallel Perspectives interview series highlights current highlights issues in contemporary African arts

Kelly Coffey

This fall, the Program of African Studies introduces a video interview series, “Parallel Perspectives.” It invites African artists, curators, academics, and educators to discuss arts topics in Africa and the diaspora from many perspectives. The hosts are Uche Okpa-Iroha, a graduate student in art history at Northwestern, and Benita Nnachortam, a professional photographer. Okpa-Iroha is a founding member of the Nigerian photography group known as the Blackbox Photography Collective and a founding member of the Invisible Borders Trans-African photography travel group. Benita

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Uche Okpa-Iroha (left) and Benita Nnachortam (right) on set at the Program of African Studies.

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## Message from PAS director



Walking across campus the other day, I was struck by a spider web speckled with dew waving from a shrub. Something so ordinary and yet so magnificent – an ease almost. The way transcendence happens without visible effort, and I thought immediately of the word *Asampete*. *Asampete*, in Igbo, is something akin to awe and yet not one that alters to distance, to spectacle, though it may shimmer with the spectacular. *Asampete* has all the elements of an intimate encounter. The fact that the spider web had been there perhaps for many days and yet may have gone unnoticed or even when noticed, unremarkable to others, and yet in the particularity of my encounter—timing, synchronicity, wind, light, water, and even coincidence, rendered it as joy to me.

*Asampete* has the texture of silence to it, or at least the difficulty for speech to capture it. Writing is even more clumsy. As a child, an elder close to me, a priestess of the earth, used the word all the time. When pressed for a translation, she said, “It is akin to the shimmer of light through the drops of water on an eagle’s wing in flight.” When I protested that I had never seen it, she smiled and said, “But you know it.” And she was right. I heard her use it to describe the

collecting of dew into a small coin-sized pool in the center of a giant cocoyam leaf in the soft of dawn. Or even in praise of a beautiful woman walking elegantly but unexpectedly by, the load balanced on her head in a perfect sway with her body. Or to describe an amazing play in a soccer game.

Always she would say, “*Giri i’mpete* (See awe).” But a better translation would be, “Behold awe.” But an even better translation would be, “drink in the aweing.” It’s in a verb, as if awe is a doing, not a being. A thing that is doing all the time if we can notice it, like “*anwu na mi na azu agwo igu, amuma*” (The way the sun slides across the back of the fast-moving green palm snake; lightning). When I asked her, “What ‘does’ awe,” she said, “*Obu chi, buru mmodu, buru ihe*” (It is spirit (really, consciousness), it is the human, it is light). Seeing my confusion, she asked, What is chi? (Consciousness). But human is also consciousness, as is light. There is only consciousness, and it is always doing. *O di ebube, o di mpete. O bu asampete*. (It is glorious, it is awe, that is *asampete*, the sweetness of life. It is life.)

It is fall as I write this, and I think the easiest way in this season to understand *asampete* is to think of the glorious turning of the leaves, the miraculous interplay of the light and rain with it all. I am also struck by the spirit of Ama Ata Aidoo, a magnificent human being at once beautiful, a gift to Africa, at once dreadful, at once an immeasurable doing of consciousness, and how we lost her to the doing. Later in these pages, I hope to offer a suitable obituary for her.

As we travel daily this season, may we all be aware and enriched by the doing. May our daily, hourly prayer be the grip of awe: *asampete*.

Chris Abani

*continued from page 1* Nnachortam has recently obtained her master’s in art administration from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Before coming to Chicago, she served as an official photographer in the Ogun State Governor’s Office. In addition, she is also the founder of BenTeller Media and creative director of the Kuta Arts Foundation, a pro-youth organization in Ogun State.

In upcoming episodes, Okpa-Iroha and Nnachortam talk with working artists, like Joseph Obanubi, about their process

or ever-changing landscape of their careers, and to curators about the unique challenges they face. For example, they speak with Jodi Minnis, artist and curator of the TERN Gallery in the Bahamas, and the struggle to archive and preserve while located in a location vulnerable to climate change. These videos will be available on the PAS Youtube channel at [youtube.com/@programofafricanstudies106](https://youtube.com/@programofafricanstudies106).

*Kelly Coffey is PAS business administrator.*

## PAS welcomes new visiting scholar



PAS welcomes Arthur Banshayeko, popularly known as Arthur Ban, as Ama Ata Aidoo Visiting Scholar in the fall quarter.

Arthur is a Burundian actor-director who believes that art is the best way for people to meet and discuss freely. It helps people to see and love difference. He observes: “When we tame the beast of otherness and admire difference, we heal, live, and

grow!” Arthur’s works focus on memories, legacy, and identity. He uses a technique called Corps-Parole-Choeur (CPC) in his *mise en scènes*, in which he continuously searches for harmony between speech, the body, and connection. He has engaged in many awareness-raising projects on identity, peace and reconciliation, gender equity, human rights, and

mental health through the screen, the radio, and the stage. His projects have been showcased in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Belgium, Tunisia, Germany, Uganda, Kenya, France, Malawi, Togo, Switzerland, Austria, Romania and Rwanda.

Arthur is an alumnus of the 24th class of the Lincoln Center Theatre Directors Lab. He is passionate about the 3rd sustainable development goals (SDG): good health and well-being; and SDG 5, gender equality. He has worked as an actor or director on short and feature films like: *Imashoka*, *Après la pluie*, *Les gros cailloux*, *Arretez Elsie*, *La tentation*, *Umutwe w’inkuba*, *Aborted vow*, *Gahanga*, *L’irreprochable démasqué*, *Them*, among others.

Arthur’s most recent production was a Burundi-Germany musical collaboration about King Mwezi Gisabo’s resistance against the German occupation from 1896 to 1903 in Burundi and resistance in Gerhart Hauptmann’s *The Weavers* (1892). He is now the artistic director of Diridiri Festival, Burundi’s first Theatre Festival for Young Audiences.

## 2023 African Studies PhDs

Chernoh Bah, “Resolving an Empire Problem: Public Health, Convict Labor, and the Revenue Crisis in Colonial Sierra Leone, 1914–1944,” History. Advisors: Sean Hanretta and Helen Tilley.

Colin Bos, “Conservators of the World: Sacred Objects, Archaeology, and the State in Southwestern Nigeria,” History. Advisor: Helen Tilley.

Bright Gyamfi, “Dreaming of Pan-African Unity: Nkrumahist Scholars and the Global Development of African Diaspora Studies,” History. Advisor: Sean Hanretta.

Dela Kuma, “Legitimate” Trade: Local Taste Practices & Consumer Power in Southeastern Ghana, Amedeka (19th to early 20th C A.D), Anthropology. Advisor: Amanda Logan.

Salih Noor, “The Legacies of Liberation: Anti-Colonial Struggles, Critical Junctures, and Political Development in Southern Africa,” Political Science. Advisor: Will Reno.

Moussa Seck, “The Making of the Stranger in the Francophone Migration Novel,” French and Francophone Studies. Advisor: Nasrin Qader.

Gorgui Ibrahima Tall. “The Mechanisms of Cultural Production in the Postcolony: Plurality, Relationality, and (Auto)-Translation in the Senegalese Novel.” French and Francophone Studies. Advisor: Nasrin Qader.

Veiwpoint

# Quo vadis, America? US engagement with Africa in need of urgent reset

*Musifiky Mwanasali*

## Directives on US engagement with Africa

After years of professing Africa’s irrelevance to its global agenda, the United States issued three foreign policy directives on Africa in 2022.

The first, “Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act,” was adopted by the US House of Representatives in April 2022 as HR 7311. Its peculiarity resides in punishing African countries for doing business with the Russian Federation, thus breaking with the bipartisan consensus that, according to President Barack Obama, Africa once enjoyed among US lawmakers. African reactions to HR 7311 ranged from indignation to outright condemnation, as the SADC regional block did at its 2022 summits in Kinshasa and Windhoek. HR 7311 languished in the US Senate, but threats and sanctions continue unabated due to Africa’s expanding partnership with China and Russia.

The second, “US Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa” (hereafter the Strategy), is the product of President Joe Biden’s administration. Issued in August 2022, its uniqueness stems from the administration’s declaration that “the United States must reset its relations with [its] African counterparts. . .” (p.12). Also unique is the administration’s pledge to “graduate from policies that inadvertently treated sub-Saharan Africa as a world apart and have struggled to keep pace with the profound transformations across the continent” (p.5).

Third was the “US-Africa Leaders’ Summit” in December 2022. There, US officials appeared conciliatory, treating their guests respectfully and insisting with President Biden on US’s unwavering commitment to mutually beneficial cooperation based on African priorities and the African Union’s Agenda 2063.

I agree that US engagement with Africa needs a reset. The overhaul is even more urgent now, considering the downward trajectory in US-Africa relations and the uncertainties it has generated on the prospects for Africa’s transformation agenda.

But to be helpful, the reset must integrate African perspectives. These perspectives reflect the positions African states collectively agree to implement domestically and defend globally, even though they are not precluded from having their stance. (This essay uses Africa and Africans in this collective sense).

US officials concede that it is “impossible to meet this era’s defining challenges without African contributions and leadership” (p.4). Yet the Strategy is replete with assertions about what the US will do in (not with) Africa. It barely mentions the AU and repeatedly uses the term “sub-Saharan Africa” despite its colonial and racially divisive overtones and against the administration’s own undertaking to “address the [US] artificial bureaucratic division between North and sub-Saharan Africa” (p.12).

## Transformation and its discontented

Momentous changes are taking place in Africa. Regionalism is thriving as African states rely increasingly on regional and continental cooperation as the surest insurance for their security and prosperity. Meanwhile, continental and regional institutions steadily advance with the common unity and integration agenda.

The most striking examples are in the ever-expanding scope of the AU Development Agency (known by its former NEPAD acronym), the centrality of the Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), designed to improve access to regional and continental infrastructure networks and services, or the African Peer Review Mechanism, the peer-reviewing and monitoring instrument that AU member states adhere to voluntarily to improve their domestic governance practices. And African leaders are noticeably more vocal in global affairs, advocating for multilateralism under the aegis of the United Nations (UN) charter while pushing for Africa’s greater involvement in managing global issues.



But many obstacles remain, notably due to flaws and weaknesses in the execution by African governments of their sovereign functions. Challenges are of three orders: the unpredictability of foreign investments, state fragility vis-à-vis foreign capital, and challenges dealing with an increasingly restive civil society (especially the youth).

Take foreign investments. Historically, Africa is the world's lowest recipient of foreign direct investments (FDIs). According to the statistics portal Statista, global FDI flows increased between 2020 and 2021 worldwide except in Africa. In 2020, Africa received \$39 billion out of \$929 billion globally, and in 2021, only \$38 billion out of \$1,647 billion. In both years, FDI amounts to Africa represented less than one-tenth of one percent of global flows (0.042% and 0.023%, respectively).

Capital is, by its nature, domineering. It imposes unfavorable conditions (leonine contracts, profit repatriation, or tax exemption terms) that leave the recipient bloodless. Attempts to rein in (by tracking illicit financial flows or sales tax evasion from global online transactions) usually fail, leaving the recipient state vulnerable domestically and compliant internationally to avoid sanctions. Hence the rise of anti-imperialist protests flooding the streets of many African capitals, where it is no longer uncommon to watch young people bringing the French Tricolore down and raising the Russian flag (the colors are similar).

## What Africa wants

The AU Agenda 2063 is essential for understanding what Africans want. Adopted at the AU summit of Sandton, South Africa, in 2015, it is the blueprint of the "Africa We Want" and the core of Africa's transformation agenda.

Burdened by enormous socioeconomic challenges due to unsustainable levels of external debt and fluctuations in the prices of their primary raw materials in the global markets, not to mention donor-enforced sanctions, African states have collectively adopted a dynamic approach to multilateral cooperation and built a network of strategic and win-win partnerships with countries like China, Russia, Turkey or India, and intergovernmental institutions such as the League of Arab States and the European Union.

They also began exploring alternative ways to strengthen the resilience of their economies by increasing intra-African cooperation and reliance on their own resources. The AU initiative to capture the flow of remittances from the African

diaspora is one example. According to the World Bank, remittances from the Nigerian diaspora are estimated at \$11 billion annually. Equally significant are the amounts remitted home by the vast Ethiopian diaspora. Estimated at \$40 billion in 2018, Africans are hopeful that remittances could serve as a long-term strategy to compensate for dwindling FDIs and public assistance.

These changes have not gone unnoticed by the Biden administration. The Strategy recognizes that "the world is keenly aware of Africa's importance, spurring countries to expand their political, economic and security arrangement with African states" (p.5). Paradoxically, these otherwise positive trends are also a source of uneasiness. US officials recognize the opportunities that arise from the growing international interest in Africa. But they are also growing extremely nervous about the expanding footprint of their adversaries on the continent. For them, none of the African partners exerts such a "malign influence and activities" as China and Russia (p.5).

In particular, the Strategy is alarmed that "the People's Republic of China sees the region as an important arena to challenge the rules-based international order, advance its own narrow commercial and geopolitical interests, undermine transparency and openness, and weaken US relations with African peoples and governments" (p.5).

The Russian Federation is just as malevolent because it "views the region as a permissive environment for parastatals and private military companies, often fomenting instability for strategic and financial benefit" (p.5). Worse still, Russia "uses its security and economic ties, as well as disinformation, to undercut Africans' principled opposition to Russia's further invasion of Ukraine and related human rights abuses."

## Don't sanction. Compete!

Africans are confused about the trajectory of the US foreign policy and worried about other physical threats, such as sanctions, for their shared position on unfolding global issues. Likewise, there is mounting irritation, among the youth especially, about US double standards in dealing with Africa. US officials ought to be mindful of this growing resentment if they wish to maintain the reservoir of goodwill they still enjoy on the continent.

No US official has so far bothered to explain why Africans—and only them—are subjected to threats and



From left to right: Dela Kuma, Delali Kumavie, Augustin Fosu, Bright Gyamfi, Bernard Forjwuor, Esmeralda Kale, Kofi Takyi Asante, and Fortunate Ekwuruke.

## PAS participation in Ghana summer conferences

*Bright Gyamfi*

Northwestern faculty and alumni made an impressive turnout at the 47th International Traditional Music World Conference and the Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Worldwide Diaspora (ASWAD) held in Ghana this summer. The world music conference in Accra featured a panel, “Antagonistic Moves Towards Activism and Militarism: Gender and Its Resonances in Popular Dance Music in Syria, Nigeria, and Turkey” comprising NU scholars: **Dotun Ayobade** (School of Communications), who presented a paper,

“Killin Dem”: Masculinity and Ambivalent Activism in Burna Boy’s Stagecraft,” **Shayna Silverstein** (School of Communications), who presented “And if We Die, We Die by Dancing”: Masculinity, Militarism, and Social Dance in the Syrian War; and **Olabanke Oyinkansola Goriola** (graduate student, performance studies), who presented “Dissenting Bodies and Gender Freedom in Afrobeats: Hermes Iyeye’s Dance Experiments.”

The ASWAD conference theme was “Repatriating African Studies,” held at the University of Ghana, Legon in August. Former PAS visiting scholar **Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mongoué** presented a paper, “Esther Dreams: Pan-African Lives, Racial Politics, and Belonging in Africa,” and alumnus **Bright Gyamfi** presented a paper, “Institut Africain de Développement Economique et de Planification and the Underdevelopment of Africa.” Other Northwestern faculty, alumni, and students who attended the conferences included: **Esmeralda M. Kale** (Herskovits Library), **Sally Nuamah** (human development and social policy), **Bernard Forjwuor** (Kellogg Institute for International Studies), **Nana Akua Anyidoho** (sociology, 2005), **Dela Kuma** (anthropology, 2023), **Kofi Asante** (history, 2016), **David Donkor** (performance studies, 2008), **Delali Kumavie** (English, 2020), **Fortunate Ekwuruke** (graduate student, human development and social policy), and **Augustin Fosu** (economics, 1977).

*Bright Gyamfi is assistant professor in history at the University of California at San Diego.*

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sanctions for doing business with China and Russia. Former AU chairperson and Senegalese President Macky Sall raised it with President Biden at the US-Africa Leaders’ Summit. And last year, the African Group at the UN slammed their US counterpart regarding double standards.

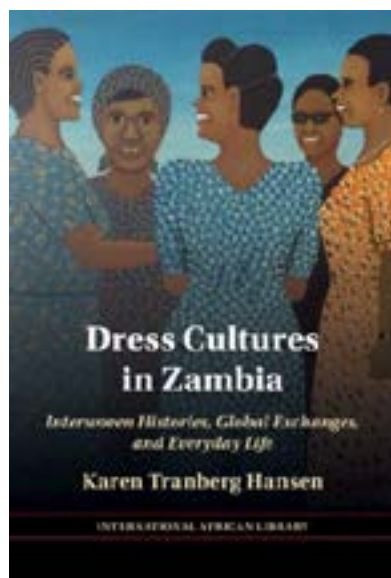
Africans know that their foreign partners are self-interested in the continent, but, as President Sall observed, “Africa has suffered enough from the burden of history... It does not want to be the home of a new Cold War but a pole of stability and opportunity open to all its partners on a mutually beneficial basis.” And further, he reminded foreign partners his reminder that “Africa...wishes to engage with all its partners in reinvented relationships, which transcend the prejudice that

who is not with me, is against me.”

No longer bound by their colonial legacy, Africans (especially the youth) are keen to engage with the rest of the world fairly, on an equal footing, and in a spirit of mutual respect. Acknowledging this reality is an excellent first step for successfully resetting US engagement with Africa.

*Alumnus Musifiky Mwanasali (political science, 1991), spent over two decades working for the AU and the UN. He is presently a Pius Okigbo Fellow at Northwestern’s Program of African Studies, focusing on the challenges and opportunities of Africa’s transformation amidst current global uncertainties. Dr. Mwanasali spent this past summer as a UN consultant to operationalize the conflict early warning system at the secretariat of the East African Community based in Arusha, Tanzania.*

## PAS bookshelf



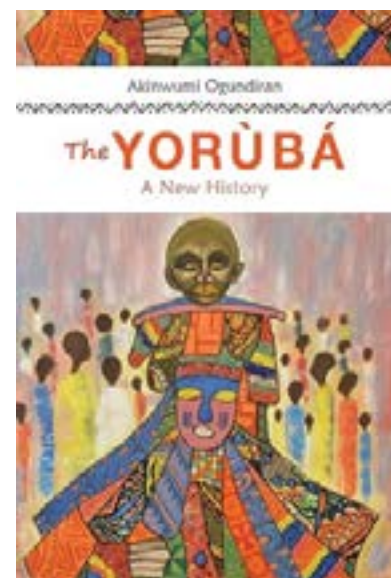
***Dress Cultures in Zambia: Interwoven Histories, Global Exchanges, and Everyday Life***  
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023)

Emerita Karen Tranberg Hansen (anthropology) distills five decades of research in Zambia and East Africa in this history of the evolution of dress practices from late colonialism to the present. She argues that the dressed body serves as the point of contact between personal, local, and global experience, and shows how dress illuminates political power as well as personal style. Hansen shows Zambia's contribution to global fashions, particularly the vibrant Chitenge fabric that spread across colonial trading networks. Replete with color illustrations and personal anecdotes, this volume highlights dress as an important medium for negotiating Zambian identities and an important driver of history.



***Insignificant Things: Amulets and the Art of Survival in the Early Black Atlantic***  
(Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023)

Former PAS Visiting Scholar Matthew Rarey follows the history of the African-associated amulets (mandingas) that enslaved and other marginalized people carried in the Black Atlantic world from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. He draws on myriad sources, including Arabic-language narratives from the West African Sahel, the archives of the Portuguese Inquisition, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European travel and merchant accounts of the West African coast, and early nineteenth-century Brazilian police records; Rarey argues that mandingas represented portable archives of their makers' experiences of enslavement, displacement, and diaspora.



***The Yoruba: A New History***  
(Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020)

Akinwumi Ogundiran (history) presents the first transdisciplinary study of the evolution of the Yoruba people from ca. 300 BC to 1840, from their origins on the Niger-Benue confluence in present-day Nigeria to their current situation as one of Africa's most populous cultural groups. Using diverse sources—archaeology, linguistics, environmental science, oral traditions, material culture, and mythology—Ogundiran examines local, regional, and global aspects of Yoruba history. It covers the events, peoples, and practices, as well as the theories of knowledge and social valuations that shaped the Yoruba experience through time.

## In memoriam



### Lansiné Kaba (1941-2023)

Marcia Tiede

We were saddened by the unexpected loss of Lansiné Kaba on May 27 in Conakry, Guinea, the victim of a stroke suffered earlier. He was buried in his birthplace of Kankan, as he would have wished. To echo his remembrance of his friend I. B. Kaké: *“La mort [est] compagne inséparable de la vie*

*... La vie a ses mystères; et les secrets de Dieu, notre Créateur omnipotent et éternel, sont inscrutables.”*

Kaba was a historian of West Africa and of Islam in Africa. He was a respected professor and engaging teacher, a persistent critic of Guinean politics, an omnivorous interdisciplinary reader of religion, history, politics, and literature, a willing public speaker in various media, and a collector of books and African art. In his 2000 presidential address to the African Studies Association (ASA), he described his early Qur’anic education and how those teachers and elders imprinted him with “a respect for learning and spirituality as a path to self-knowledge and social consciousness” and with firm ethical perspectives. He was placed in the French colonial education system at a young age by his paternal uncle (his father died in 1948). In 1956, he entered the prestigious classical Lycée Henri-IV in Paris (*baccalauréat* 1959), followed by the Sorbonne (*licence es-lettres* 1965). During a campus lunch break, he met Sheridan Bell, a Princeton graduate in Paris on a Fulbright grant. They became friends, and Bell invited Kaba to visit his family in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, during the summer of 1965.

The US agreed with him, and Kaba returned in the spring of 1966 to teach French at a Friends’ school in Philadelphia. The director there connected Kaba with a Winnetka friend, and he was invited to teach French at North Shore Country Day School in Winnetka, where he heard about Northwestern. He was impressed by his initial

visit: *“L’atmosphère du campus situé au milieu du parc et au bord du lac et dans un coin paisible, créait une impression de fraîcheur et de calme favorable au dialogue et à l’acquisition des idées.”* He found the US educational system more open, merit-based, and streamlined. He applied to Northwestern and was admitted in 1967 to the Graduate School. Kaba completed his doctorate in 1972. His book *The Wahhabiyya: Islamic Reform and Politics in French West Africa, 1945-1960* (Northwestern University Press, 1974), based on his doctoral thesis, earned the ASA’s 1975 Melville J. Herskovits Prize for best work in English in African Studies.

Kaba considered returning to Guinea upon completing his doctorate, but his uncle warned him not to, given Sekou Touré’s relentless purges of intellectuals and others. Instead, Kaba accepted a position teaching African history at the University of Minnesota in 1970, where he remained until 1985. During that time, Kaba spent 1981–1982 in Senegal as a Fulbright scholar.

In 1986, Kaba became head of the Department of African American Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. There, he served as dean of the Honors College from 1996 to 2001. In the 1990s, he also had a brief foray into Guinean politics, cofounding the Parti national pour le développement et la démocratie (PNDD).

From 2006–2007, Kaba served as Madeleine Haas Russell Distinguished Visiting Professor at Brandeis University. A colleague here, French professor Jane A. Hale, observed: “Lansiné Kaba is an elegant example of a highly cultured, globally educated person who can move among cultures with grace, putting those he meets at ease, too, while he remains very clear to himself and others about who he is and where he comes from.” While at Brandeis, Kaba testified at a hearing of the US House of Representatives Committee on Africa and Global Health regarding conditions in Guinea during the turbulent transition after a general strike and President Lansana Conté’s resignation.

In 2009, Kaba became Distinguished Visiting Professor



of African History (later Thomas M. Kerr Distinguished Career Professor) at Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar. In that capacity, he also gave occasional lectures at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh. He officially retired from there in 2022, though he had returned to the US in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Kaba's book *Cheikh Mouhammad Chérif et son temps, ou Islam et société à Kankan en Guinée (1874–1955)* was published in 2004 by Présence Africaine. That was a particularly personal project, rooted in his own “lived (and living)” childhood memories of the ethnically complex and religiously devout Kankan community and recapturing the life and milieu of an influential Muslim figure of preindependence Guinea. He revised and expanded it as *Cheikh Mouhammad Chérif, le Saint de Kankan: Islam et société en Guinée, ca. 1865-1955* (Présence Africaine, 2017).

Kaba was present at the 1986 ASA meeting in Madison, Wisconsin when the Mande Studies Association (MANSA) was formed. Since 1993, MANSA has organized triennial conferences. Kaba also served on the advisory board of MANSA.

In 1999-2000, Kaba served as president of the African Studies Association. His presidential address was a forceful response to Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s “The Wonders of Africa” television series with its accusation of African responsibility for enslaving the ancestors of African Americans. He also served on the advisory board of MANSA. Upon the news of his passing, he was remembered by the MANSA community as a gentleman and scholar; a wonderful colleague, friend, and historian; a pioneering historian and true statesman; one who walked with dignity and pride while encouraging others; and

an insightful commentator on the interface between tradition and modernity.

Other than knowing him as a figure in MANSA's history and attending his 2018 talk at the Program of African Studies, my glimpses of Lansiné Kaba were mostly through editing a text on Cheikh Mouhammad Chérif for him in early 2022 via email and phone calls, with him communicating in his ever-courteously French. This 47-page ‘brochure,’ *La piété de Cheikh Mouhammad Chérif de Kankan: (retourné vers La Lumière le 8 septembre 1955)* with its reverential phrasing and emphasis on the Cheikh's mysticism, was intended to complement his second book on Cheikh Mouhammad Chérif (2017). My assumption was that it was destined for a more local audience. Lansiné and I eventually met in person, and we discussed the 1972 SOAS conference, the proceedings of which I had just cataloged at Northwestern's Herskovits Library. He invited me to his home to see “where he did his work”—an offer I didn't follow up on soon enough. Since his death, I have been working with his wife, Fanta Traoré, to inventory his vast book collection at their home in Evanston.

Kaba's last trip to Guinea was timed for him to be in Kankan on January 15 – a day of major pilgrimage to the grave of Cheikh Mouhammad Chérif.

(Many thanks to Fanta Traoré for her useful information and comments, and to Stephen Belcher for providing helpful documentation.)

*Marcia Tiede is Africana cataloger, Northwestern University Libraries, and secretary-treasurer of the Mande Studies Association.*

**Northwestern University Archives has recordings of two lectures by Kaba, part of a collection of PAS lectures (1965-1979) that will soon be available online: “New Islamic Thought in West Africa: The Significance of the Wahhabi Movement in West Africa” (1972), and “Developments in Contemporary Guinea” (1977). In 2018, he gave a noontime presentation as part of PAS's Alumni Lecture Series, “The 1591 Moroccan Invasion of Songhay.”**

## Ama Ata Aidoo (1942-2023)

Chris Abani

*“Humans, not places, make memories.” – Ama Ata Aidoo*



The position of early post-colonial writers was a difficult one, navigating the recuperation of loss, defining the scope of nation and citizenship, and working through these new layers of interaction overlaid on the deeper human interactions. In this light, the quote above by Ama offers a clarity

that is striking. If we replace the word memories with history, then we begin to see the ethical interrogation at the heart of Ama’s work—where the human fits in the narrative of history. This is why she remains so compelling in global letters; this insistence on exploring the dignity and inner lives of everyday Africans played against the larger forces of humanness—love, death, loyalty—and set on the edge of politics, global capitalism, and larger forces pushing toward the erasure of said dignity.

This insistence on dignity, for women particularly, but also for men, caught in the complexity of patriarchy and post and neocolonialism, is approached with an intense and often unsentimental and unforgiving yet always compassionate lens. This lack of sentimentality enabled her to produce a lasting, searing, and achingly beautiful oeuvre of books. Her Africans have global imaginations, deep, commonly held human flaws and graces, and a very local and specific sense of self that, by its very complicated specificity, achieves cosmopolitan dimensions.

Ama’s range was impressive—plays, poetry, and prose—and all done to the same level of excellence we might expect from a single genre master. As a person, Ama was as provocative and uncompromising intellectually and politically as she was a writer, and this consistency was something I have admired over the years. The fire of her work was difficult for

many readers and critics, but she took it in stride. For her, it seemed, was the cost of her fierce love for her people and for all those who might be considered marginalized. A true feminist, she was a lifelong advocate for women, not only in terms of their daily lives but also via her work. She rendered African women in detail and depth and the full range of their majesty and contradictions.

In the same way that Baldwin and Morrison grounded their aesthetics and politics in a deep abiding love—love as sentiment, as politics, as the most potent language for transformation, Ama held the same line. She chose a style that was elegant and accessible yet rigorous and enjoyable. Her influence as a human, a woman, and a writer is visible among her peers and in the subsequent generation of writers. Like Anansi, she was the ultimate trickster, teacher, and guide.

She also had a great sense of humor about herself and the work, never taking it more seriously than was necessary. Ama was one of a handful of female writers in her generation in an industry dominated by men. Her contemporaries—Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Nadine Gordimer, and Margaret Busby—all had to make space for themselves in this arena. Now that female writers dominate African literature, it can be easy to forget the women who made it possible. Ama joked herself, “They have always told me that I write like a man.” Ifie Amadiume and Tess Onwueme drew power from her, as did my generation, with Adichie perhaps the most visible.

Her impact on the imagination of not just writers and readers but on the very culture itself is undeniable. Thanks to her work, her interviews, and other interventions in the world, she still resonates with us, but still, we will miss her. Ama *iya*, great mother, brilliant writer, defier of norms and expectations, roles, original. We will remain in the awe of what you made, *Giri ‘mpete*.

The Program of African Studies has named a research fellowship after Ama Ata Aidoo.

*Chris Abani is the director of the Program of African Studies and Board of Trustees Professor of English, Northwestern University.*

## Hannah Abeodu Bowen-Jones (1934-2023)

*Florence Mugambi*

Hannah Abeodu Bowen-Jones died on July 9, 2023. Bowen-Jones was the first PhD in African history at Northwestern. Her 1962 dissertation was entitled “The Struggle for Political and Cultural Unification in Liberia, 1847-1930.” She was also the first Liberian woman to obtain a doctorate. She completed her BA in history at Cuttington College in 1956 and then came to Northwestern on a Liberian government scholarship. After graduating from Northwestern University, she returned home and joined the faculty of the University of Liberia, where her colleagues nicknamed her “the Department of History” because she was the staff’s only Liberian with a doctorate and its only professor of history. Later, she completed postdoctoral study at the Rehovot Institute of Development Planning and Implementation in Rehovot, Israel, and taught at the Liberian Foreign Service Institute and the B. W. Harris Episcopal School. She also taught at Chicago State University, from which she retired in 2015.

Bowen-Jones belonged to the generation of African scholars who reframed the writing of African history in the 1960s. She was the director of UNESCO’s oral history research on Liberia (1968-1972), and from 1980-1990 served as a member of UNESCO’s Institute Committee that drafted



the eight-volume *General History of Africa*. She founded the Historical Society of Liberia and served as a visiting professor on Oxford University’s Round Table from 2005-2010. Bowen-Jones also authored and collaborated on several historical studies and books on Liberia. She coedited

*The Official Papers of William V.S. Tubman, President of the Republic of Liberia: Covering Addresses, Messages, Speeches, and Statements 1960-1967* (1968), coauthored the Liberia entry in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* with Svend Holsoe and Donald Rahl Petterson. She also authored the chapter on Liberia in J. F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder’s second volume of *History of West Africa* (1973).

Besides her academic career, Bowen-Jones served Liberia in two administrations. From 1975-1978, she was the only woman on President William R. Tolbert Jr.’s cabinet, where she served as the Minister for Postal Affairs and Telecommunications (1976-1977), and Minister for Health and Social Welfare (1977-1978). During the next decade, she served as a member of the constitutional commission of Liberia in 1981 and as the country’s ambassador to the UN from 1981-1985. During her service at the UN, she was the vice president of the General Assembly in 1983.

*Florence Mugambi is a Librarian for African Studies and Economics at Northwestern.*

## Keith Weghorst (1984-2023)



Alumnus Keith Weghorst (undergraduate, political science) died on March 30, 2023, after a battle with leukemia. Keith contributed to the study of electoral authoritarianism, political parties, and electoral competition in Africa. He obtained a PhD at the University of Florida. He served as assistant professor of political science at Vanderbilt University, assistant professor of political science at the University of Gothenburg, and deputy director of the V-Dem Institute. His book *Activist Origins of Political Ambition: Opposition Candidacy in Africa’s Electoral Authoritarian Regimes* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) explains why opposition candidates run for political office in electoral authoritarian regimes despite relatively small chances of winning and high prospects of violence. He argued that swing voters and opposition supporters are motivated by developmental priorities rather than conventional clientelist motivations dominant in the political science literature. Keith advised USAID, V-Dem, Freedom House, and the International Law and Policy Institute on democracy and civil society initiatives.

## The Lansine Kaba Symposium

The Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa has organized a half-day symposium October 25, 2023 to celebrate the life and work of historian and Northwestern alumnus Lansiné Kaba (PhD 1970). While Kaba wrote about a wide range of topics, this symposium is structured around themes and questions raised by Kaba's pioneering study, *The Wahhabiyya: Islamic Reform and Politics in French West Africa, 1945-1960* (Northwestern University Press, 1974). We expect a lively conversation across area studies boundaries about what it means to be Wahhabi or to be labeled as Wahhabi, in Africa or elsewhere.

The three symposium guests were chosen for their recent books on this discourse: Cole M. Bunzel wrote *Wahābism: The History of a Militant Islamic Movement* (Princeton University Press, 2023) Ousman Murzik Kobo is the author of *Unveiling Modernity in Twentieth-Century West African Reforms* (Brill Academic Publishers, 2012), Zakyi Ibrahim has published *Islamic Thought in Africa: The Collected Works of Afa Ajura* (1910-2004) and the *Impact of Ajuraism on Northern Ghana* (Yale University Press, 2021).

### Preliminary Schedule

**12-1 pm:** ISITA Lunchtime talk: “Wahhābism: The History of a Militant Islamic Movement: A Book Discussion with Cole Bunzel”

**1:30-4:00 pm:** The Lansine Kaba Symposium

Welcome, and reading of Kaba's obituary

Remarks by Ousmane Kobo, Sean Hanretta, and Zakyi Ibrahim

General discussion, including Bunzel, Kobo, Ibrahim, Hanretta, and audience



### *Manuscripts and Arabic-Script Writing in Africa*

(Isle of Man: The Islamic Manuscript Association in association with Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2023)

Charles Stewart (emeritus University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign and former ISITA director of programming) and Ahmed Chaouki Binebine have coedited *Manuscripts and Arabic-Script Writing in Africa*. This trilingual (English, Arabic, French) volume explores the Arabic script in its widest usage in Africa: in Arabic texts; as a sacred Islamic script; and as a script for writing African languages. Most of the essays were initially presented at a conference convened by Bibliotheca Alexandrina and The Islamic Manuscripts Association (TIMA), jointly with the library's Manuscripts Center and the Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation, held virtually September 16–21, 2021. The volume is beautifully illustrated, with full-color reproductions of some of the manuscripts being discussed alongside photos of African manuscript libraries, the scholars who frequent them, and the surrounding environment.

Charles Stewart's concluding essay, “Literary Authority in West African Islam,” was originally presented as a talk for ISITA in May 2022. The video of the talk is available for viewing on ISITA's YouTube channel ([youtube.com/@isitanorthwestern2145/featured](https://youtube.com/@isitanorthwestern2145/featured)).



## Robert Launay to serve as next editor of the *Journal of Religion in Africa*

Robert Launay (anthropology) has been appointed the executive editor of the *Journal of Religion in Africa*, published by Brill Academic Publishers. Founded in 1967, the *Journal of Religion in Africa* publishes studies of the forms and history of religion on the African continent, with particular emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa and the relationships between Christianity and Islam in the region. It is the only English-language journal dedicated to the study of religion and ritual throughout Africa.

A social/cultural anthropologist, Launay has authored several landmark studies in the anthropology of Islam, investigating Islamic identity in West African societies (especially Ivory Coast) and the roles of Muslim minorities historically specializing in trade. He is the author of *Traders without Trade: Responses to Change in Two Dyula Communities* (Cambridge University Press, 1982) and *Beyond the Stream: Islam and Society in a West African Town* (University of California Press, 1992), which won the Amaury Talbot Prize for best African ethnography in England in 1992. Launay's edited volume on *Islamic Education in Africa: Writing Boards and Blackboards* was published by Indiana University Press in 2016. He has authored over seventy book chapters, encyclopedia entries, and articles in peer-reviewed journals.

After years of teaching the history of anthropology to undergraduates and graduates, Launay began research on the

history of the discipline, publishing several articles on the history of ethnography in Africa and, more extensively, on the "prehistory" of the field. His book, *Savages, Despots, and Romans: Thinking about Others from Montaigne to Herder* (University of Chicago Press, 2018) traces the ways in which "modern Europeans" came to define themselves with reference to nonmoderns (ancient Greeks and Romans in particular) and nonEuropeans from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries. He has edited an anthology of early sources in anthropology, *Foundations of Anthropological Theory: From Classical Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Wiley/Blackwell, 2010).

Launay has served on the editorial boards of journals including *American Anthropologist*, *Mande Studies*, and *Islam et Sociétés au sud du Sahara*. He has been a deputy editor of the *Journal of Religion in Africa* since 2019.

Launay succeeds Elias Bongmba as executive editor of the Journal. "Elias is a distinguished and prolific scholar who straddles the boundary between the fields of Religious Studies and Theology. This is no easy task," Launay observes. "For the past few years, he has tirelessly devoted himself to keeping the Journal up to date and at the forefront of the field. His tenure has also enabled a shift in the field from one dominated by Europeans and North Americans to one where the contributions of African to the study of African religions has taken an ever more central role. It is a challenge to follow in his footsteps, and I am humbled at the prospect."



## Mauritanian calligrapher in residence



October 16-19, ISITA hosts visiting calligrapher Mohameden Ahmed Salem Ahmedou. A self-taught calligrapher and Arabic manuscript researcher based in Noukachott, Mauritania, Ahmed Salem also helps to oversee his family's distinctive collection of manuscripts—the Library

of Muhammadin 'Abd as-Samad—in Trarza, Mauritania. He has completed several decorated copies of the Holy Qur'an, including the *Mauritanian Mushaf* (the first Mauritanian printed copy of Qur'an), with a cover and extensive decorations inventively adapted from Mauritania wall art.

Committed to reviving the calligraphic traditions of West Africa, Ahmed Salem and other calligraphers have created a Mauritanian Association of Arabic Calligraphy and Ornamentation and are establishing an institute for these arts—the first of its kind in Mauritania.

October 18, Ahmed Salem will give a talk drawing from his recent book, *Calligraphy and Manuscripts in "Bilad Shinqit" (Mauritania): From the Origins to the Late 20th Century* (*Wizārat al-Thaqāfah wa-al-Şinā'ah al-Taqlīdīyah wa-al-'Alāqāt ma'a al-Barlamān*, 2020) (English translation of the Arabic title). He also visited Arabic language classes and held an open workshop to teach Arabic calligraphy.

Ahmedou designed the calligraphic image featured on the ISITA website ([isita.northwestern.edu](http://isita.northwestern.edu)).

## Community news

Alumnus **Marcos Leitão de Almeida** (Mellon postdoctoral fellow, history) published “The Internal African Slave Trade as History and Representation,” in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, 2023, doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190854584.013.339

Alumnus **Chernoh Bah** (2023) has been appointed a postdoctoral fellow at the Nicholas D. Chabraja Center, Department of History, Northwestern University.

In September, Visiting Scholar **Eric Berman** was a featured speaker at the 21st International Forum on Police and Science of the Zhejiang Police College in Hangzhou, China, cohosted by the China Association for Friendship and the Secretariat of Global Public Security Cooperation Forum. He spoke on “Challenges Faced by the United Nations, African-led Peace Operations and National Security Forces in Conflict Areas: Implications for China.”

Alumnus **Colin Bos** (2023) has been appointed a Nicholas D. Chabraja Center Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow, Department of History, Northwestern University.

Alumnus **Christopher Day** (political science, 2012) coauthored “Ranger/Soldier: Patterns of Militarizing Conservation in Uganda,” in *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 17(1–2), 2023: 57–78.



**Jonathan Glassman** has retired after 34 years of teaching in the Department of History. His colleague, David Schoenbrun, has written a moving tribute to Jonathan’s contribution to African history and Northwestern at [history.northwestern.edu/about/newsletter/spring-2023/retiree-spotlight.html](http://history.northwestern.edu/about/newsletter/spring-2023/retiree-spotlight.html).

**Esther Ginestet** (history graduate student) received a grant from the Martine Aublet Foundation to support her dissertation research.

Alumnus **Bright Gyamfi** (2023) is now an assistant professor, Department of History, University of California at San Diego. He has published “The Africa-Diaspora Orbit: Anani Dzidzienyo’s Contributions to African/Black Studies and Black Liberation” in *African Studies Review* 66(2), 2023: 464–489.

**Karen Tranberg Hansen** (emerita, anthropology) published “Colonial Fashion Histories,” in *The Cambridge Global History of Fashion*, v.2, edited by Christopher Beward, Beverly Lemire, and Giorgio Riello, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023): 1190–1218.

**Brannon D. Ingram** (religious studies) has been named a 2023–2024 faculty fellow in the Alice Kaplan

Institute for the Humanities. His project is “Debating ‘Religion’ in Muslim South Asia: On the Colonial Pathways of a Modern Category.”

**Peter Mwangi** (Swahili) participated in a panel discussion on How to Make Foreign Language (FL) Textbooks Linguistically and Culturally Gender-bias-Free and Inclusive: Challenges and Recommendations at the 2023 Chicago Language Annual Symposium, Northwestern University in May. At the same conference, he also copresented a paper, “Toward a Universal Design for Learning in Less Commonly Taught Languages: Mellon Curriculum Design.”

**Peter Mwangi** (Swahili) and **Faith Chebet** (Swahili FLTA) copresented a paper “Student-Athletes in LCTL Classrooms: NU Swahili Experience,” at the 2023 African Language Teachers (ALTA) annual conference at Howard University, Washington, DC in April.

Alumnus **Salih Noor** (2023) has been appointed Collegiate Assistant Professor in the Social Sciences Division and Harper-Schmidt Fellow in the Society of Fellows at the Liberal Arts, University of Chicago. He presented a paper, "The Legacies of Liberation in Southern Africa," at the 2023 American Political Science Association in Los Angeles.

**Akin Ogundiran** (history) won two prizes in 2022 for his book *The Yoruba: A New History* (2020). The first is the Isaac Oluwole Delano Prize for Yoruba Studies, jointly awarded by Babcock University, the Isaac Oluwole Delano Foundation, and the Pan-African University Press. It is named after an influential Nigerian writer, educator, political activist, broadcaster, teacher, and lexicographer. The second prize was the 2022 Vinson Sutlive Prize (William and Mary College) for the best book utilizing anthropological perspectives to examine historical contexts.

**Carl Petry** (emeritus, history) gave a lecture, "A Child Custody Dispute between a Habashi Slave and her Jewish Owner: Issues of Gender and Ethnic/Racial Identity in Medieval Egypt" at the Center for International Studies, University of Michigan

**Will Reno** (political science) published "The International Factor in African Warfare" in *Africa in World Politics: Sustaining Reform in a Turbulent World Order*, edited by John W. Harbeson and Donald Rothchild (Routledge, 2023). In addition, he coauthored with alumnus **Jahara**

**Matisek** (political science, 2018) and Sam Rosenberg "Ukraine's Other Allies: The West Should Assist the Private Actors Helping Arm Kyiv," *Foreign Affairs*, July 19, 2023., [foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/kyiv-ukraines-other-allies](https://foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/kyiv-ukraines-other-allies).

Alumnus **Moussa Seck** (French and Italian, 2023) has been appointed assistant professor, Department of Political Science, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Alumnus **Jose Maria Munoz** (anthropology, 2009) published "Withholding Trust: Business Taxpayers and the Value-added Tax in Cameroon" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Economy of Cameroon* (Oxford: Oxford University

Press, 2023): 501–512; and "A Time for Realignment? Retrofit in the Golden Era of the Cameroonian Railways," in *Transport Corridors in Africa*, edited by H. Lamarque and P. Nugent, 180–210 (Martelsham, Suffolk: James Currey, 2022).

Alumna **Jessica Pouchet** (anthropology, 2019) authored "Negotiating Expendability in Crisis: Conservation and Biopolitics in Tanzania," *American Ethnologist* 49(1), 2022: 50-63.

Alumnus **Gorgui Tall** (French and Italian, 2023) has been appointed assistant lecturer in French at Loyola University, Chicago.

#### Meet the newest members of PAS:



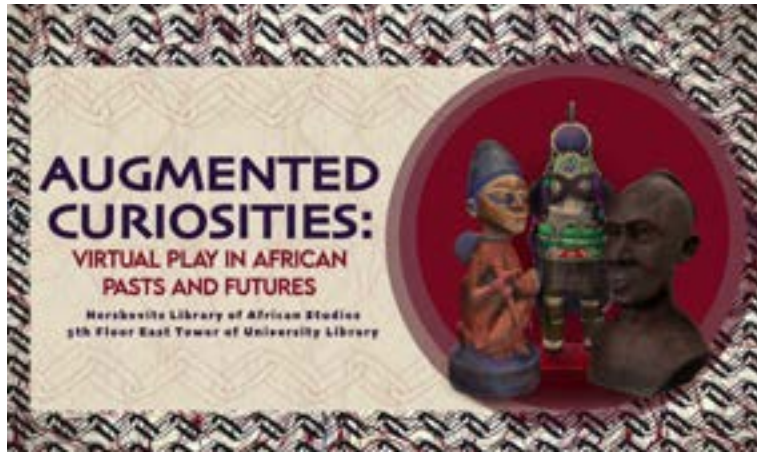
Elliott George Leggette, born July 21, 2023 to Kathirine Danforth-Leggette and Myles Howard Leggette.



Nina Eliana Naylor Akchurin, born 11:54 AM on June 6, 2023 to Visiting Scholar Paul Naylor and Maria Kchurin.

Send your news updates to [laray.denzer@northwestern.edu](mailto:laray.denzer@northwestern.edu) so that PAS can share word with the African Studies community at Northwestern and beyond.

## Herskovits Library



Poster from the exhibit.

## Augmented Curiosities virtual experience exhibit at the Herskovits

“Augmented Curiosities: Virtual Play in African Pasts and Futures” is the Fall quarter exhibit at the Herskovits Library. It uses augmented and virtual reality to bring African artifacts to life and is designed to be interactive and give objects more in-depth backstories. For those unable to visit in person, a digital version of the exhibit is also available online: [libguides.northwestern.edu/augmentedcuriosities](http://libguides.northwestern.edu/augmentedcuriosities)

According to Craig Stevens, an anthropology graduate student who curated the exhibit, the exhibit’s title refers to the “cabinets of curiosity” that some European aristocrats assembled and displayed to show off their taste and worldwide reach. This method not only established the framework for contemporary museum acquisition, but it also classified African and other artefacts as “curiosities.” The Herskovits exhibit, however, disrupts from this trend by making objects more accessible and presenting them with a consciousness of their cultural context.

This exhibit features six unique objects from the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies. Each is presented by a member of the Northwestern community with a direct connection to the object. Alumnus Bright Gyamfi (history, 2023) discusses a Black Stars Makarapa designed as fan memorabilia for the Ghanaian National Soccer Team during the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa. (2) Antawan Byrd (art history) talks about a bust carved by the renowned Nigerian sculptor Felix Idubor in 1955. (3) Chris Abani (PAS

director and English) describes a Yoruba figure from the Oyo region of Nigeria and its uses in shrines in the late 19th-early 20th century. (4) Craig Stevens (graduate student in anthropology) explains the uses of the Nuna smoking pipe made in the 1970s in Tamale, Ghana. (5) Esmeralda Kale (George & Mary LeCron Foster Curator, Herskovits Library) reviews a wooden and paper fan that commemorates the 1951 reelection of Liberia’s 19th president, William Vacanarat Shadrach Tubman. (6) Natalia Molebatsi (poet and graduate student, performance studies) reflects on a beaded fertility doll from KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, designed by a participant in the Rural Craft and HIV/AIDS Awareness Project administered by M.L. Sultan Technikon in Durban and Middlesex University in London.

For more information about this exhibit, see [libguides.northwestern.edu/augmentedcuriosities/home](http://libguides.northwestern.edu/augmentedcuriosities/home). See also, [news.northwestern.edu/stories/2023/09/augmented-curiosities-exhibit-at-herskovits-library](http://news.northwestern.edu/stories/2023/09/augmented-curiosities-exhibit-at-herskovits-library).



## Recent additions to the Herskovits Library

The archives of the historian Dr. Jean Herskovits have recently been deposited at the Herskovits Library of African Studies. Jean was the daughter of Melville J. Herskovits and Francis S. Herskovits. She was awarded a DPhil in African history from Oxford University in 1960. Her country of interest was Nigeria, a country to which she returned quite often throughout her life. Herskovits taught at a number of US institutions, including Brown University, Swarthmore College, the City College of New York, and the State University of New York at Purchase. Her papers reflect her research and writings on causes related

to Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Books from her library published in Nigeria will strengthen the collections of the Herskovits Library. This archive will be processed in the coming years.

The Herskovits Library has also strengthened its collection of materials on Cameroon with items from the personal library of Dr. Virginia Delancey. A retired, longstanding member of the Program of African Studies, Virginia and her family spent a considerable amount of time living in and doing research on Cameroon.

### Collections now available for use

#### **The Pier M. Larsen archive**

This multilingual archive reflects 35 years of Pier Larsen's teaching and research interests. He specialized in the history of Madagascar and the Indian Ocean islands, focusing on the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. He focused on the history of East and southern Africa, Madagascar, and the Francophone islands of the Western Indian Ocean, especially the topics of slavery, literacy, religion, and French imperialism. His wife, Michelle Boardman, along with Norge Larson and Arlene Libby, Pier's brother and sister-in-law, provided a generous gift that made it possible to make this collection available to researchers this quickly.

#### **The Lydia Luhman Pederson collection**

Lydia Luhman Pederson held a degree in taxation and owned a foundry and a pony farm in Caledonia, Illinois. She traveled extensively with her dog, visiting Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the trans-Canadian pipeline. (She visited the pipeline while it was being constructed and stayed in the cabins of the construction workers.) She documented her travels with photographs, motion pictures, and artifacts. This collection is of her 1953 trip from Cape Town, South Africa, to Cairo, Egypt. She hired cars with drivers

who spoke the local languages, which made it possible to include audio in her films describing what she saw. Upon her return, she gave talks about her travels in her local community. Luhman-Pederson documented her entire trip, from maps, letters of introduction, travel itineraries, and the items she bought. In addition, this collection includes materials from Sonjia and Jim Olstad, Luhman-Pederson's niece and nephew-in-law, who stayed in Nigeria in 1967. Digital images of items within this collection can be found in the library's digital collections.

#### **The papers of Marilyn Greene**

The papers of journalist Marilyn Greene shed light on her work as a reporter for key news outlets in the United States in the last 40 years. They comprise 36 boxes of newspaper clippings, travel itineraries' photographs, slides, and photo negatives; internal communications and awards from Gannett; Greene's press credentials, expired passports and tickets to events she covered; correspondence Greene wrote and received during her travels; materials from her two fellowship stays in Hawaii/Asia; and mementos from trips to Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Of particular interest is her work in Cameroon, where she spent three months teaching seminars on press freedom and meeting local journalists.

## Update on the African Poetry Digital Portal collections

*Esmeralda M. Kale*

The spring conference of the African Poetry Digital Portal was convened on April 27–29, 2023, at the University of Nebraska. Representatives from the University of Cape Town, the University of Lomé, the University of Ghana, the University of Oxford, Cambridge University, the University of Michigan, and Northwestern University, met with Kwame Dawes, professor of English, and Lorna Dawes, associate professor of University Libraries, and the collections team in Lincoln, Nebraska or via Zoom.

The conference discussed how to expand the goals of the APDP collections hub. The APDP working teams reported on their institution’s African poetry collections and the current status of the APDP work in their institution. Data for each institution varied due to location, collection development interests, language, and type of material. There was a lively conversation about what can be considered poetry. Graduate students and scholars working on various aspects of the project shared their research and work on the portal. The technology team discussed their work on the prototype, especially design details and the possibilities based on initial findings and data.

In addition to discussing the group meeting, Dr. Ama Bemba Adwetewa-Badu, the recipient of the APDP’s 2022–23 Digital Humanities Grant, presented her project, “Network Poetics: The Big World of African Little Magazines.” The African



*Left to right: Patricia Jabbeh Wesley, Liberian poet and Professor of English and Creative Writing, Pennsylvania State University; Mahtem Shiffrewa, writer visual artist from Ethiopia and Eritrea; Tetsi Jaji, Zimbabwean poet and Associate Professor of English, Duke University; and Kwame Dawes, Ghanaian poet, Professor of English, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.*

Poetry Fund also organized a campus-wide conversation on “Contemporary African Poetry at the Intersections of Gender” at The Sheldon Museum of Art. Authors Patricia Jabbeh Wesley (Liberia), Tsitsi Jaji (Zimbabwe), and Mahtem Shiferraw (Ethiopia/Eritrea) read their work and then discussed poetry, gender, scholarship, their roles as African poets, editors, researchers, teachers, and arts organizers.

*Esmeralda Kale is the George & Mary LeCron Foster Curator of the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies.*

## 2023-24 Fulbright Swahili Foreign Language Teaching Assistant



Zainabu Marucha Momanyi will be assisting in the Swahili program through her fellowship as a Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant. She has an honors degree from the University of Johannesburg where she held the prestigious Mandela Rhodes Scholarship. Her academic focus was on education leadership and management, reflecting her commitment to fostering educational excellence. In addition, Zainabu is the founder of Brighten a Soul Foundation, a nonprofit organization in Kenya, established to provide support to vulnerable children in Nairobi. Zainabu aspires to a career in education policy making in Africa, especially Kenya.

## Student reflections on their experience as Fulbright-Hayes awardees this summer in Kenya

**Nick Bucciarelli** writes “This was my first trip to Kenya, and my first to Africa. Kenyans are proud to be Africans, which is funny since I’ve never seen anyone proud to be North American. Upon seeing the miraculous variety of dress, dance, and language throughout the country, I began to believe that culture back in America is dead. However, the more I was exposed to the Kenyan lifestyle (and being regularly questioned, “You don’t drink tea?!”), the more I realized I was just oblivious to my own culture. Abroad, I learned that the only way you can truly examine yourself is from a distance. This is best exemplified by several instances in which I observed Kenyans readily preferring room-temperature water over ice-cold, all as I gawked in astonishment. In all seriousness, I do think that Americans should adopt the word *Shikamoo* (meaning “I pay you my respect”), and everyone should say it to their respected elders, including my little sister.”

**Chelsea Angwenyi** writes: “Going to Kenya for the Fulbright-Hayes intensive language and cultural immersion was an incredibly memorable experience for me. The program started in Nairobi, and once there, I had the opportunity to visit some of my family that I hadn’t seen since the last time I visited, 13 years ago. Apart from our daily Swahili classes, our time was filled with experiences like watching a bullfighting tournament, walking through ancient ruins, visiting primary schools, and going to several cultural centers where we learned about Kenyan culture, history, and the Swahili language. We also were able to go on a safari at Tsavo National Park. Getting to see animals in their habitat was amazing. The program finished in the town of Kilifi, which I loved not only because the coast was beautiful but because we were able to interact with locals in Swahili.”

## The community-changing power of *harambee*

Mychaela Mathews



“*Harambee*,” the Swahili word meaning “all pull together”, has guided my passion for human service at Northwestern. The first time I heard the word “*harambee*” was in the winter quarter of my freshman year when my Swahili class was preparing to perform in a talent show. Professor Mwangi explained that this word symbol-

izes unity, harmony, and teamwork in East African culture. When everyone “pulls together” to achieve a goal, tasks that appear impossible for an individual to accomplish can be more easily reached when everyone contributes. For example, “*harambee*” is used to bring community members together to raise money for medical treatments or pay school tuition. The cultural and social implications of this word will continue to remind me of the importance of community, no matter where I am in the world or what language is spoken.

As an aspiring physician, “*harambee*” has driven me to be an altruistic force in my community. The significance of

“*harambee*” has encouraged me to think of ways that I can “pull together” with others to make a positive change in my community. Currently, I facilitate a support group with Rainbows for All Children, an Evanston-based organization, to allow youth to process feelings associated with loss and grief. I cannot imagine confronting an issue as complex as adolescent mental health if I did not remember the essence of the word “*harambee*”: together we are stronger. In Swahili, Professor Mwangi cultivated my passion for communicating in a new language, but he also taught me the importance of unity through language and culture.

One day, I hope to impact future patients with the principle of “*harambee*” in the face of a lifealtering diagnosis to remind them that if we all pull together, no challenge is too difficult to confront.

*Mychaela Mathews is an undergraduate studying neuroscience at Northwestern University.*

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