Message from the Editors

In the previous newsletter, we suggested that it is an uncertain time for democracy across the world. But we also emphasized that not all signs point toward democratic recession. This is particularly true in Africa, where people continue to fight for their rights and demand that their voices are heard. Africanist social scientists must continue to study, document, and analyze these political experiences.

Over the past decade, it is clear that alumni of the APSA Africa Workshop are taking up this challenge. We are conducting and publishing high quality research. We are training a new generation of scholars working on uncovering the voices of the Electorate. We are supporting and using the Afrobarometer (http://www.afrobarometer.org/) to shed light on the perspectives of ordinary people in many African countries.

Over the past four issues, we have been proud to serve as newsletter editors and feature some of this work. We have tried to focus on the most significant social and political trends on the continent today, including the proliferation of competitive elections at the national and local levels; rapid urbanization; and the politics of higher education.

This month’s issue considers Africa’s place in today’s world. It is our belief that the future of Africa is critical for the development and success of the global community as a whole. But those inside and outside the continent are equal partners.

The APSA Africa Workshop community is just a small part of this partnership, but one that remains vital to the production of knowledge in politics, and trust between faraway allies. We are excited to share this responsibility with the next set of editors, and remain committed to strengthening the partnership in the years to come in other ways.

We hope you enjoy the issue, and we wish you the best in the months to come.

Jeffrey W. Paller
jpaller@usfca.edu

George M. Bob-Milliar
Gbobmilliar.cass@knust.edu.gh
Note from APSA

I hope this message finds all of our alumni doing well. It is with great appreciation for their efforts over the past two years that we thank George Bob-Milliar and Jeffrey Paller for serving as co-editors of this publication. This marks the 4th and final issue of their term. I want to thank them for the dedication, creativity, and efficiency they brought to the task of editing the Alumni Newsletter; it was a pleasure to work with you!

I am now soliciting proposals for a new 2-year editorial team. Please see the announcement in this issue or online: http://web.apsanet.org/africa/news-and-resources/. If interested, please contact me for details and submit your application by May 31.

As always, I encourage you to contribute to future newsletters through announcements, research submissions, and your feedback on how we can continue to improve this publication. I look forward to catching up with some of you at APSA’s upcoming Annual Meeting in San Francisco. Best to all in the coming months and stay well!

Andrew Stinson
Associate Director
APSA International Programs
astinson@apsanet.org

Call for Newsletter Editors

APSA is now accepting applications from alumni fellows and leaders interested in serving as co-editors of the Africa Workshop Alumni e-Newsletter. Co-editors will manage production of the bi-annual newsletter for a two-year period (fall 2017 – spring 2019). The editorial team will be provided a $1,500 grant for production, inclusive of a modest honorarium per issue, as well as two year’s APSA membership for each editor.

The two-person editorial team should consist of one US-based and one Africa-based scholar. Applicants with past experience managing a newsletter or listserv and an enthusiasm for encouraging interaction across multiple academic networks are encouraged to apply. Applications should be sent to astinson@apsanet.org no later than May 31, 2017, consisting of:

- Updated CV/resume
- One-page cover letter highlighting the skills/experience you bring to the position, why you are interested in the position, and any ideas/plans for future issues of the newsletter

Serving as co-editor of the Alumni e-newsletter is both an excellent networking opportunity and rewarding service to the alumni community. Feel free to contact Andrew with any questions.
AFRICA IN TODAY’S WORLD

INTRODUCTION TO THE SYMPOSIUM

By George Bob-Milliar (2012) and Jeffrey W. Paller (2012)

As the world enters uncertain geopolitical times, the role of Africa in today’s world will be more important than ever. This symposium examines where Africa fits in the global economy, as well as its political presence on the world stage. The continent has often been described as being too dependent on outside forces and foreign actors, but also marginalized in the global political economy.

This symposium addresses this challenge in the context of the changing geopolitical context, which will likely have significant implications for African economies, societies, and political systems. African countries might also play a more important role in world politics.

Major questions of our time

Major global events of the past year have left us with difficult questions. What is the role of the African Union in international politics, as well as its effect on domestic political systems? How will Trump administration policies affect African economies and politics? How is China’s emerging presence in Africa changing the continent, and what are the likely long-term implications of these ties? How is foreign direct investment – especially in land and property – affecting African societies? Where do African countries fit within global trade networks? If African countries leave the ICC, what does this mean for the international justice regime, as well as prospects for peace and justice at home? How does the threat of international terrorism shape security initiatives and state building in Africa, as well as migration policy globally?

Thankfully, Africanist social scientists across the world are attempting to answer some of these questions. In this symposium, we confront a few of them.

We start with a discussion of what recent political events in the West – namely in the USA and in France – means for democracy in Africa. Yacouba Moluh posits that political developments in these countries reflect a crisis of democracy, and suggests that it has real, potentially negative implications for Central African politics. He claims that trouble in Western democracies legitimizes authoritarian politics in the Global South.

Mashood Omotosho discusses the rising extremist threat, and the different approaches to combating terrorism. He concludes that African countries face real problems, but must collaborate with each other to find a lasting solution.

In the final essay, Abosede Omowumi Babatunde calls for a radical rethinking and reconceptualization of poverty. She pays close attention to the Yorùbá cultural belief system, and questions whether poverty can be understood separated from its historical and cultural context. She argues that the contribution of local belief systems to development discourses cannot be ignored.

All three of these essays provide important lessons to democracy promoters, counter-terrorism experts, and the development community, respectively. They highlight how Africa is connected to the global community, and how actions abroad affect African countries domestically. But they also emphasize the agency that African actors have in the construction of their own political and social systems. Finally, they demonstrate the importance of Africa in the development, peace, and prosperity of a global society.

1 George Bob-Milliar is Senior Lecturer in the Department of History & Political Studies at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology. Jeffrey W. Paller is Assistant Professor of Politics at University of San Francisco.
DEMOCRACY, WHERE ARE YOU? CENTRAL AFRICAN PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRACY IN AN ERA OF DOUBT

By Yacouba Moluh (2012)*

Although democracy can be perceived as asymptotical, that is something that cannot completely be achieved, what we are witnessing today is tantamount to a reverse “end of history” (Fukuyama 2002). Democracy is going through a stormy time worldwide. In consolidated democracies, a combination of negative effects of globalization, the economic crisis, corruption of political elites, and nepotism has led to democratic disillusionment. Democratizing countries still suffer from authoritarian practices that scholars have long classified into conceptual categories including “illiberal democracy,” “electoral authoritarianism,” and “delegative democracy” (Edozie 2009; O’Donnell 1994). While these conceptual categories may inform on the diversity of democracy’s understandings, they may also legitimize Giovanni Sartori’s warning that scholars who classify non democratic regimes as democratic run the risk of being guilty of revisionism (Edozie 2009: 128). Sartori suggests that there are universal and unquestionable features of democracy.

But once we agree with Kidi Eozie that democracy extends beyond constitutions to citizens’ behaviors and attitudes, the events and authoritarian developments in consolidated democracies call into question the way we categorize regimes and measure democracy empirically (Edozie 2009: 130; Bollen 1991). My objective here is not to take sides in this debate or to cut it short. Instead, I wonder what standard will be used to frame and categorize democracy, now that this final form of human government is backsliding in some Western countries. Given this context, what can be the prospect for “democracy” in emerging democracies in the Global South? I argue that what is happening today in the consolidated Western political structures makes democracy elusive for countries in Central Africa.

I develop my argument in three parts. The first section provides a definition of democracy. The second section depicts the democratic situation in the USA and France. The third section maps Central Africa and closely links the bright future for authoritarian politics here to the doubt surrounding the future of democracy in the West.

Defining democracy

In Heywood’s own words, “a term that can mean anything to anyone is in danger of meaning nothing at all” (Heywood 2002: 68). Finding agreement with much of this view, I would add that attempts to define democracy are further complicated by the difference between its practice in ancient Greece and that of today (Lynn-Jones 1998). Building on the insights of Durkheim, who emphasized the importance of retaining and building on previous definitions, I follow in this path (Durkheim 1895).

Scholars have offered insightful definitions of the controversial concept of democracy. According to Abraham Lincoln’s seminal definition, democracy is a system of government of the people, by the people and for the people. From Huntington’s perspective, a twentieth century political system is democratic to the extent that “its most powerful collective decisions makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes, and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote” (Huntington 1991: 7). While Lincoln’s definition emphasizes the strong sense of community, Huntington emphasizes political participation. These are the characteristics of democracy that matter the most when we analyze recent political developments in the USA and France.

Depicting the democratic situation in the USA and France

As I stated earlier, democracy is going through a very stormy period and we cannot predict the future. In many Western countries, political democracy based on a sustained economic growth was often understood to be synonymous with economic and social equality. This likely justifies the developmental approach to democracy (Lipset 1959). But in the recent era of economic crisis, many people in Western countries blame their
political leaders, who are not perceived to be as rational, honest, and accountable to them as they previously believed. Rising globalization, international capitalism, and failing economic, social, and financial policies contributed to massive unemployment. Doubts surrounding the future have generated the rise of populism. A survey conducted in the USA shows that “Americans are seriously stressed about the future of the country” (Itkiwitz 2017). In Karl Marx’s own words, infrastructure determines the superstructure. When the infrastructure is bad, so is the superstructure. These economic conditions severely strained democracy.

Democracy and its supposed values are no longer taken for granted. Stated differently, democracy is being questioned, and is no longer considered “the only game in town,” as Juan Linz wrote some years ago (Linz 1993: 43). Many people, and even some scholars, no longer consider it as the “final form of human government.”

In support of this contention, I shall draw both theoretical and empirical arguments. Fukuyama thinks democracies can backslide (Fukuyama 2017). In the same vein, Amy E. Smith wonders: “Do Americans still believe in democracy?” Tackling the question from the perspective of whether Americans’ attitudes and civic culture still support democracy or not as compared to attitudes in other countries, Smith answers in the affirmative. But more telling perhaps in this respect is that in 2014 a study of political inequality in America led to the following finding: “Economic elites and interest groups can shape U.S. government policy- but Americans who are less well-off have essentially no influence over what their government does. Therefore, our worry is where is the “government of the people, by the people”? (Gidens and Page 2014).

The simple fact of questioning democracy in one its seminal and natural milieu is troubling. Some may say that it is rather a manifestation of democracy. From my point of view, this kind of argument is unchallengeable if it were isolated. But this does not seem to be the case. Moreover, the aforementioned findings are consistent with those of France where 63% of people no longer believe in democracy as the best form of government (Des Paroles, Des Actes 2014). Worse, many French citizens think their politicians are all the same and rotten.

At first glance, these viewpoints might simply highlight the dissatisfaction that people in both countries are expressing. But put together, they shed light on the crisis that democracy is facing today in the world’s strongest democracies. In the USA, for example, civil and political freedoms are under threat, and there are allegations that the last presidential elections were not fair and free. In France, a major liberal presidential candidate is accused of nepotism while the rest of the traditional political class is being blamed for poor leadership and losing the support of mainstream French society. That is to say, the democratic references are in serious trouble. Or, to put it in an ironic way, ‘the king is naked.’ This raises a serious question: does democracy remain an expansible value?

**Mapping Central Africa**

Central Africa generally refers to two different entities: the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) whose components are Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Chad, the Central Africa Republic, and Congo; and the Economic Community of Central Africa States (ECCAS) with as many constitutive members as Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Chad, Congo, the Central Africa Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Sao Tomé and Principe, and Angola.

States from both entities are comparable from a democratic perspective: The governing elites all claim to be democratic. But using academic categories, they are all either “illiberal democracies” or “electoral authoritarian.” Among other democratic deficits, their elections are hardly fair, free, and competitive. Hence, there is generally no alternation of power. They also have corrupt and nepotistic leaders who do not respect human rights, nor uphold other democratic benchmarks.

Congo’s president Denis Sassou Nguesso once commented that when African leaders talk of cooperation with their western counterparts, they raise the issue of democracy and human rights. But the Chinese propose economic infrastructure. This is often referred to as ‘the Asian model’ of
political and economic development. This is a partial explanation as to why Central African leaders have turned to Asia for cooperation, and therefore generating frustration in some Western countries. The emergence of this alternative model may indicate that liberal democracy is not appropriate, necessary, or appealing to many African governments.

What is happening in the USA and France in terms of suspicious elections, conflicts of interest, disrespect for women and other minorities’ rights, nepotism, and corruption is likely to breed jubilation among Central African leaders. Leaders will not care to improve the elections’ quality or to step down, because, as Fukuyama says, “when democracies start turning on themselves and undermining their own legitimacy, then you are in much more serious trouble” (2017).

Conclusion

Trouble in Western democracies legitimizes authoritarian politics in the global south. Democratic dysfunction in Western democracies is a fertilizer for authoritarian regimes of Central Africa. Without pressure from the West to behave democratically, the leaders who have been resisting pressure will further postpone the democratic agenda.

THE GROWING THREAT OF EXTREMIST GROUPS IN AFRICA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

By Mashood Omotosho (2009)

In the last one and half decades, many African countries have witnessed various insurgencies in the hands of deadly terrorists; they have also been challenged by the emergence of transnational terrorist groups that have turned the continent into a theatre of war. The religious fundamentalists also carried out attacks against both domestic and international targets. The activities of the extremists and terrorism is on the rise in Africa, between 1999 and 2015, Africa was rated the fifth most targeted region after Latin America, Western Europe, Asia and the Middle East for acts of terrorism (The Global Terrorism Index, 2017). In fact in the last two years, the activities of the religious extremist, ethnic militant insurgencies and terrorist attacks have taken a sharp turn for the worse. International dimensions of terrorist attacks in some parts of Africa, e.g. the 1998 United States embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, the 2002 bombing of an Israeli-owned hotel and airplane, and attacks against United Nations buildings in Algeria and Nigeria offer just a few examples of terrorist attacks carried out on African soil with a distinct international dimension. Africa has its own peculiar domestic collection of ideologically-inspired violent non-state groups, deadly ethnic militias and religious fundamentalists that are responsible for periodic bouts of murderous mayhem in different parts of the region. These include the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda, Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in North Africa and Boko Haram in Nigeria.

Some scholars have argued that the issue of terrorism has been a global phenomenon for many decades, and Africa has not been unscathed by it. Terrorism is just one of several types of political violence that has encapsulated the continent. Though in Africa, terrorism may not be seen as the most important security challenge faced by African states and their citizens; famine, drought, endemic poverty, diseases and other natural and man-made disasters have undermined human security and they constitute the forefront issues not only in Africa but among Western governments and international aid organizations (Forest and Giroux, 2011). The future of Africa’s security and the role that terrorism has played in the socio-political development is very pertinent given the combination of the unfolding activities of extremist and religious fundamentalists, the trends of political transformations in North Africa and what appears to be a transforming, if not growing, Islamist terrorism threat in North Africa and the Boko Haram insurgencies in the Northeastern parts of Nigeria.

The activities of the extremist groups in different parts of Africa have become a great concern to both African leaders and the entire world. Concern about the general rise of terrorism in Africa is creeping across continental borders. Recent murders, assaults and endangerment of

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3 Mashood Omotosho is lecturer in International Relations at Obafemi Awolowo University.
the activities of different terrorist groups on the continent have brought much attention to the latest acts of the Boko Haram in North-Eastern parts of Nigeria, Somalia's Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), as well as armed groups and the Uganda’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). It should be reiterated that, many African leaders have expressed great concern and worry over the rising rate of terrorism in Africa. In reference to a solution toward these clashes of police enforcement and activities of the religious extremist, African leaders under the auspices of the African Union have set out strategies towards addressing the threats from these extremist groups. The AU deploys a security apparatus and the African standby Force in particular to protect the governments, the people, institutions and the establishments that we pride ourselves in from the scourges of the terrorist.

The Activities of Extremist Groups in Africa

In different parts of Africa, terrorist activities have intensified. For instance, since 2006, Nigeria has witnessed the escalation of insurgencies on the part of the Niger Delta militia and the resurgence of the Islamist sect Boko Haram in 2009. Since then, Boko Haram has been responsible for a long list of violent attacks in the Northeastern parts of Nigeria. There are also the cases of domestic terrorism by Boko Haram and political violence carried out by this notorious group that has claimed hundreds of lives.

In the Southern parts of Nigeria there are other militant groups that carried out vandalization of oil pipelines and daily attacks on oil infrastructure and public targets, wreaking havoc on the country’s economy and making life miserable for thousands of people in the region. Likewise in Uganda, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) which dates back to 1987 has carried out numerous atrocities directed at civilians in the northern region. The movement has been operating as an ideologically apocalyptic Christian group opposing the central government in Uganda. Its operations in the region have been very violent and it threatened the civilians, intimidating and instilling fear in the Ugandan people and, more specifically, the Acholi tribe (Titeca and Fahey, 2016; see also www.LRACrisisTracker.com). Though its objectives are not always clear, the decades of indiscriminate violence with political undertones have made this group one of the more well-known rebel groups using terrorism as a method in their campaign. Furthermore, it has used the structural weaknesses of its host environment to diffuse across multiple borders, namely the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Southern Sudan and the Central African Republic (CAR).

Similarly, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which operated throughout much of the 1990s, was a rebel group based in Sierra Leone that sought to overthrow the central government. Its membership pool and financial support blurred the boundaries between the country and Liberia, while its activities included politically motivated attacks on local communities in an effort to induce widespread fear and submission. Its decade-long policy of youth abductions to build ranks and attacks that involved cutting off hands, arms, and legs of civilians and government troops resulted in thousands of child soldiers and amputees by 2002.

At the Great Horn of Africa, in Somalia, the situation is looking ever-more grim, with daily violence a tragically consistent part of life. Throughout 2012, Al-Shabab has launched several attacks against bars and shopping complexes in Nairobi and the port city Mombasa. In the last two years, hundreds of security workers have lost their lives in skirmishes at border towns like Dadaab and Garissa (Agbiboia, 2014). Furthermore, South Africa continues to experience some periodic episodes of political violence from both domestic and regional groups. For instance, in the mid-1990s Cape Town experienced a number of bombings and attacks on popular tourist spots that local officials attributed to the organization (Forest and Giroux, 2011).

There is the increasingly diffuse nature of the Jihadi threat and some Islamic fundamentalist across the Sahel, i.e. in Mauritania, northern Niger and the Northeastern parts of Nigeria, as well as Mali. The city was not considered at high risk of terrorist attacks and the incident has raised fears of a spread across the region to countries previously unaffected by Islamist violence. This would have significant economic consequences, deterring investors and tourists and hampering development projects.
Again in East Africa, a rebel group in Uganda comprised of self-identified “religious crusaders” from the Muslim Tabliq sect known as Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the group has been very confrontational with the central government in Uganda and usually they carried out terrorist attacks against local civilians and internally displaced persons in particular. The Al-Shabab group is also linked to the Al-Qaeda, is well known for its violent attacks in neighboring states such as Uganda and Kenya. Along the coasts of both these regions, commercial shipping vessels have to battle armed modern-day pirates who are scornful of the law enforcement abilities of the coastal states (Titeca and Fahey, 2016).

The likely spread of the activities of the extremist and the fundamentalist, for instance, the recent activities of the Islamist Jihadist in Burkina-Faso. It should be reiterated that, the Burkinabè capital was not regarded as at high risk before the January 2016 attack. In the recent time the activities of religious fundamentalists have spread into border areas of western Niger, central and southern Mali, and also to Ouagadougou, with attacks on army and gendarmerie posts, local government buildings, and hotels and bars popular among Westerners. Such a geographically diverse threat, with attacks staged by small groups of militants willing to sacrifice their own lives, is exceptionally difficult to guard against. The list of potential targets is long, and standard security precautions can offer only limited protection. The al-Qaeda network to the Southern Libya, where no governing authority prevails, provides a safe anchorage for the militant’s activities that move across the Sahelian countries. It has been reported that the Boko Haram that operates in north-eastern Nigeria, the Lake Chad Basin and Northern parts of Cameroon, has been greatly influenced by eternal networking.

The insurgencies on the parts of the religious extremist groups and the terrorist movements on the continent have a deep socio-economic impact. Increased terror threats in Africa have triggered geopolitical wrangles between African countries, which have further led to serious economic disruption. A good example is the latest decision by the Kenyan government to repatriate Somali refugee living in Dadaab Camp to war-torn Somalia, citing insecurity issues. Other East African countries like Ethiopia and Uganda have tightened security at their border points, which has ultimately affected free movement between countries, placing more constraints on trade interactions.

Also, Tourism, a major economic pillar for most African countries, has been negatively affected by the activities of the religious fundamentalist in the wake of deadly, high-profile attacks that seem to target innocent civilians and foreign visitors. Extremist groups including Al-Shabab often set their sights on commercial centers and tourist attractions where the victims are more likely to be affluent. This tactic allows Al-Shabab to position itself as a defender of the downtrodden, a message with wide appeal. Even within thriving economic hubs in Africa, growth is rarely broad-based. In Kenya, unemployment is up around 40 percent, and at least one-third of the population lives in poverty (Kaminchia, 2014). Recent incidents in Tunisia, Cote d’Ivoire, Mali, Nigeria and Somalia have led most western countries to issue travel advisories to caution their citizens. In the wake of expanding terrorism, many African governments have been forced to dedicate most of their resources to security operations, neglecting other critical areas of economy such as creating employment and improving food access. Nigerian and Kenyan governments are spending billions of dollars on combating militant insurgencies and terrorist activities.

**African Union (AU) Strategies and Mechanisms Toward Fighting Extremism**

Contemporary and historical scholarship on terrorism in Africa, particularly since the early post-colonial years, has highlighted themes of international terrorism (which emerged most prominently during the 1970s) as well as domestic incidents where terrorism was employed. In terms of the former, Africa has played a role in several high profile events and movements that originated in other parts of the world. The AU did not relent in its efforts towards formulating an effective Counter Terrorism (CT) research and policy agendas for Africa in the 21st century. The efforts of the African leaders in preventing and combating terrorism can be traced back to the early 1990’s. In 1992, the Organization of African
Unity (OAU) (now AU), meeting at its 28th Ordinary Session, held in Dakar, Senegal, adopted a Resolution on the Strengthening of Cooperation and Coordination among African States (AHG/Res.213, XXVIII) in which the Union pledged to fight extremism and terrorism. At its 30th Ordinary Session held in Tunis, Tunisia, in June 1994, the OAU adopted the Declaration on the Code of Conduct for Inter-African Relations (AHG/Del.2 (XXX), in which it rejected all forms of extremism and terrorism, whether under the pretext of sectarianism, tribalism, ethnicity or religion. The declaration also condemned, as criminal, all terrorist acts, methods and practices, and expressed its resolve to enhance cooperation to combat such acts (Frias, Samuel and White, 1999).

The efforts of African leaders towards combating the issue of extremists, religious fundamentalists and terrorists also reflected in the 35th Ordinary Session of the OAU Summit held in 1999 in Algiers, Algeria and over 44 members adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism. The Convention requires that State Parties criminalize terrorist acts under their national laws as defined in the Convention. It defines areas of cooperation among states, establishes state jurisdiction over terrorist acts, and provides a legal framework for extradition as well as extra-territorial investigations and mutual legal assistance. The Convention entered into force in December 2002 when the AU High-Level Inter-Governmental Meeting on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in Africa, held in Algiers in September 2002, adopted the AU Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism. The Plan of Action adopts practical measures that substantially address Africa’s security challenges, includes measures in areas such as police and border control, legislative and judicial measures, financing of terrorism and exchange of information (Sturman, 2002).

As part of the implementation of the 2002 Plan of Action, the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSR) was established in 2004 in Algiers to serve as a structure for centralizing information, studies and analyses on terrorism and terrorist groups and to develop Counter-Terrorism (CT) capacity building programs. The ACSR also provides a forum for interaction and cooperation among Member States and Regional Mechanisms. The Centre plays an important role in guiding the AU’s CT efforts and works in collaboration with a number of regional and international partners to ensure coherent and coordinated CT efforts in the continent (Ibid).

An additional Protocol to the 1999 Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism was adopted by the 3rd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, held in Addis Ababa in July 2004. 28 heads of states met in Dakar, on 17 October 2001, to adopt the Dakar Declaration Against Terrorism. The Protocol recognizes the growing threat of terrorism on the continent and the growing linkages between terrorism, drug trafficking, transnational organized crimes, money laundering, and the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The Protocol aims to give effect to Article 3(d) of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, which states that the objective of the Council, inter alia, is to ‘co-ordinate and harmonize continental efforts in the prevention and combating of international terrorism in all its aspects.’

The follow up to the decision of the Assembly of the Union (Assembly/AU/ Dec.311(XV) on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, was adopted at its Kampala Session in July 2010, where it underscored the need for renewed efforts and increased mobilization towards Counter-Terrorism Cooperation. The Special Representative serves, concurrently, as the Director of the ACRST. Since his appointment, the Special Representative undertook a number of important assignments to mobilize support for the continent to fight the scourge of terrorism, assess the situation in various Member States and identify, with the concerned national authorities, priority security issues to be addressed.

As part of the implementation of the relevant provisions of the 2002 AU Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, which entrusts the Commission with providing advice on matters pertaining to counter-terrorism action, including preparation of model legislation and guidelines to assist Member States, the Commission developed the African Model Law on Counter Terrorism, which was endorsed by the decision (Assembly/AU/Dec.369(XVII) adopted
by the 17th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, held in Malabo, in July 2011. The decision welcomed the elaboration of the Model Law and encouraged Member States to fully take advantage of it to strengthen and/or update their national legislation. The Model Law is developed to assist Member States in implementing the provisions contained in the various continental and international counter-terrorism instruments, including the 1999 OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism and its related Protocol. (“African Union Counter Terrorism Framework” (2015).

From 27 to 28 October 2014, the AU Commission organized symposia which, inter alia, urged and put necessary strategies in place to end the dehumanization of victims of terrorism and called on member States to put in place national systems of assistance that would promote the needs of victims of terrorism and their families and facilitate rehabilitation of affected citizens. As part of their strategy members also pledged to strive to promote international solidarity in support of victims and foster the involvement of civil society in a global campaign against terrorism. Furthermore the AU organized a symposium on Victims of Terrorist Acts, the first event of its kind to be held in Africa. The Symposium was held at the initiative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, who emphasized the need for a forum at the level of the AU to give a face and a voice to the victims of terrorism in Africa. The Symposium was also held within the framework of the United Nations (UN) Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy of 2006. The Symposium was attended by a number of AU Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), AU partner states, international organizations, United Nations and media representatives. Key among the participants were representatives of African civil society and non-governmental organizations established by victims of terrorist acts and their families from a number of African countries including Algeria, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda (“African Union Commission organized the Symposium on Victims of Terrorist Acts”, 2007).

The AU despite its multifaceted nature of the challenge, the principal strategy of the organization and their international allies in countering the terrorist threat basically centered on security and military measures. The context for combating terrorism in Africa, both in its domestic and transnational forms, has changed in recent decades. At the same time, however, there is an emerging consensus in the scholarly community that local non-state actors can and often do play a critical role in confronting the efforts of armed groups within their communities. For example, senior leaders of the Sufi Islamic community in Nigeria have roundly condemned the violent actions of Boko Haram.

The AU has remained at the forefront of addressing the issue of the terrorist and religious fundamentalism in the region. For instance when the Boko Haram became a trans-boundary threat, affecting neighboring Chad and Cameroon, the AU authorized a multinational. These and several other instances of inaction or belated action by the AU in response to crises in Africa should attract greater attention. The Africa Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has used troops from various African countries to fight the militants since 2007, but Kenya’s ramped-up involvement since October 2011 has been instrumental in pushing Al-Shabab out of its most important strongholds, including Mogadishu and the port town of Kismayo. In recent activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Shabab in Kenya has shown an increasing willingness by the AU and other Western countries to fund joint training exercises and other initiatives meant to foster cross-national collaboration in countering terrorism. Perhaps more importantly, we are also seeing an increasing williness among African nations to participate in these initiatives.

Addressing the threat of terrorism in the continent requires the rudimentary level of local political will and security capacity, particularly in terms of intelligence and law enforcement. In Africa, outside intervention has sometimes been necessary for bolstering a state’s capabilities in these areas. In this respect, the AU has made some strides in assisting its members to develop the appropriate legal frameworks and institutional capacity to address the issues of terrorist activities. The AU also assigns certain responsibilities to the AU Peace and Security Council on issues that deal with counter-terrorism measures at state level and the need for inter-state cooperation to combat terrorism. In
order to preserve ongoing cooperation arrangements, the AU has consistently looked at strategies that will ensure that security objectives are not pursued at the expense of democracy, military professionalization and respect for human rights. These security strategies are being complemented by targeted development initiatives, to strengthen food security, economic development, and basic education and health services, as well as tackling migration, trafficking and radicalization (Engel, 2014).

**Major Challenges**

There are various challenges confronting the AU in its efforts toward confronting the nefarious activities of the extremist groups on the continent. For instance, the unpredictability of pledges made by member states; lack of support due to gaps in procurement, human resources and experience with mission support systems; failure to develop the African Standby Force’s own resources, including financial resources. The AU has kept the reports and protocols that centered on CT and Declaration Against Terrorism secret. Nevertheless some of the reports reached a wider audience. It finds that full operational capability will not be achieved in 2015 given the current pace and scope of the AU’s efforts. This is despite the African Standby Force being established in 2003 to provide a quick reaction capacity that would enable African institutions to respond swiftly to crises.

Another barrier to action by the AU is the almost unconditional claims on the part of member states regarding sovereignty and independence and policy of non-interference. This is even so in cases where these qualities of statehood are absent. State measures remain the main instrument in the combating of terrorism.

The infiltrations of the activities of the Al-Qaeda into some parts of the continent have aggravated the level of insurgencies of the fundamentalist. For instance, the international networks such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and one of its offshoots, al-Mourabitoun, and locally rooted factions such as Mali’s Ansar Deen and the Front de libération du Macina.

Another major challenge is the high level of poverty in the continent. The poverty and difficult socioeconomic conditions that prevail across the region, notably the shortage of secure livelihoods for young men, are unhelpful and facilitate the recruitment of youths into the extremist groups. The case of Boko Haram in Nigeria shows how a persistent failure to tackle such issues can fuel the spread of violent extremism. Moreover, many communities in the region lack meaningful political participation. This fuels marginalization and resentment towards central governments, potentially making it look attractive to join terrorist or criminal networks, the distinction between which is becoming increasingly blurred. Hence, to tackle the threat posed by terrorist groups, interventions are required on multiple levels, including efforts to boost provision of education and livelihood opportunities and increasing political participation and communities’ say in political affairs, as well as more traditional security-focused approaches.

**Conclusion**

To some extent, it can be argued that the AU has moved toward promoting an adequate response to the activities of the various terrorist groups, there is the need by the AU to strengthen the role of civil society in counter-terrorism, in line with the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and also ensure the implementation of its relevant instruments and frameworks, e.g. the AU Action Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, and the mandate of the AU Special Representative for Counter-Terrorism Cooperation. More importantly, the AU should also engage civil society in the areas of peace, security and socio-economic development. Given its current economic shortcomings, Africa remains very vulnerable to terrorism. It is therefore necessary for African governments to form joint strategies and effective policies that will help to address acts of terror now and in the future.
The phenomenon of poverty has to be understood both as a painful reality experienced by millions of human beings and as a construction of competing conceptualizations, definitions and measures. Poverty has been defined in several ways depending on the context of the situation in which the definition is placed and the views of the person defining it. It has been acknowledged by most researchers that any definition has to be understood, at least in part, in relation to particular social, cultural and historical contexts.

In the Nigerian context in particular, I argue in this paper, knowledge of local belief systems is crucial to understanding and interpreting the phenomenon called poverty, and the way individuals view their chances of escaping from poverty. Poverty has often been defined as the inability to afford three meals a day and lack of access to basic human needs of food, clothing and shelter. The World Bank (2008) pointed out that poverty comprises many dimensions and has to do with pronounced deprivation in well-being. It relates income and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. In its latest report on the world’s poverty index, the World Bank stated that Nigeria is one of the top five countries with the highest population living in extreme and abject poverty. Nigeria is ranked third among countries in the world with the highest number of people living in extreme poverty and it was reported that 7% of the world’s poor live in Nigeria (The World Bank 2014)

Although, this study situates the conceptualisation of poverty within the context of Yoruba cultural belief system, it, however, acknowledges the existence of universal concept of poverty. The point is that poverty can also be interpreted within a particular historical and cultural contexts. In this way, we are able to transcend a rather secular approach to poverty conceptualisation or definitions. Within this context, it is necessary to pitch the conceptualisation of poverty within religion (non-material) end of the spectrum, thereby highlighting the distinction between development discourse and religious (personal belief systems) interpretation of poverty. This is important, in order not to lose sight of the condition’s wider meanings and of the interpenetration of the material and the relational or symbolic conceptualizations of poverty which this study explores. While this belief system seems to be at variance with the World Bank and other international organizations’ notions of poverty and suggested measures to eradicate it, I argue that the contribution of local belief systems to development discourses cannot be ignored. Local knowledge and understandings of poverty are informed by a range of discourses, including Yoruba religion, Islam and Pentecostalism.

In the academic literature on religion in Africa, scholars have tended to focus mainly on the potential of religion as a medium of peacemaking (Cox et al. 1994; Galtung, 1997; Abu-Nimer 2001; Dahal, and Bhatta, 2008). Calling attention to the significance of African traditional religion and by extension cultural belief system, Osaghae (2000) observed that with regard to religion, it is possible to discern common religious ideas and assumptions about the universe held throughout Africa, which provide a world view that may be described as African. Exploring the role of religion in analysing and interpreting social phenomenon is essential in determining the linkages between culture, religion and poverty.

There are many curious phenomena human beings can really never explain. In Yoruba cosmology, it is these complex phenomena, which humans have summed up as Ọyànnọ (predestination) expressed in the concept of Ọrí and Ọlédàà, that determine who would be in a state of poverty or wealth and who would not be. The hardship experienced in poverty situations often requires symbolic interpretation found within collective Yoruba cosmologies of Ọrí and Ọlédàà to interpret and alleviate the poverty. In this way, poverty eradication strategies are closely related to distinctive conceptions of belief in Ọrí and Ọlédàà, by illuminating the prerequisite for wealth to be achieved and experienced. To

4 Abosede Omowumi Babatunde teaches in the Centre for Peace and Strategic Studies at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria.
demonstrate the significance of the Yorùbá belief in Ori and Elédáá in understanding and conceptualising poverty, some insights from the litany for Ori with regards to fortune and misfortune is drawn from the Yorùbá which is addressed to their Elédáá, that is, Creator. This is a common expression among the Yorùbá:

Elédáá mi, se Ori mi níre.
Jé kí Ori kó gbè mí
Orí gbè mi dê ībi ire
My Creator, let my head be fortunate. My Creator, let my head prosper. My Head, lead me to my good fortunes. The crux of this maxim is that it is the head that brings good luck to any individual.

Conceptualizing Poverty within Ori and Elédáá Yorùbá belief system

It is imperative to carefully situate the concept of poverty within the context of Ori and Elédáá in the Yorùbá belief system, while highlighting the continued relevance of the belief system in contemporary Yorùbá society. The dominant argument is that poverty is attributed to Ori and Elédáá which can be explained in two ways: (i) Ori of the person in a state of poverty is not fortunate and (ii) Elédáá is not supporting him/her who is in a state of poverty. A popular Yorùbá maxim says: Orí ni a fì ìgbé ire kọ ní (It is the head that brings fortune to human being).

In Nigeria, articles and reports by both local and international organizations have identified several factors as being responsible for the pervasive poverty witnessed in the society. These factors include poor governance, corruption, mismanagement, misappropriation, social injustices, inequity, inadequate access to resources among others. All these constitute causal factors for the present lack of development in Nigeria. These commentators failed to take into cognizance the crucial role of local belief systems in conceptualizing poverty situation in spite of the importance attached to these local belief systems in the society. Indeed, the local belief systems provide crucial insights into the way poverty is understood and interpreted in the society.

The perception is that, regardless of the developmental challenges, people have been able to ‘weather the storm’ and become rich within the harsh environment without soiling their hands in shady deals as a result of their fortunate head (Ori) and support of their creator (Elédáá). Some are perceived to have a ‘Midas touch’ in the sense that anything they touch or deal with, becomes profitable or bring wealth. On the other hand, a person without a fortunate head (Ori) and supportive Creator (Elédáá) will experience hardship, stagnation and poverty, no matter how hardworking he or she may be.

This assertion was corroborated by the respondents who confirmed the intricate belief of the typical Yorùbá in the concept of Ori and Elédáá. According to a key informant from Osun state, a person who continues to experience hardship or misfortune in spite of hard work is usually told to appeal to his Ori and Elédáá. The assertion of key informants in Oyo and Osun on Yorùbá typical litany offers pertinent examples of liturgical expressions with deeply rooted conceptions of Ori and Elédáá in poverty conceptualization. The following samples are most instructive:

Orí mi ... dákun má gbàgbé mí
Orí mi àpésìn.Orí mi àpélà sí rere
Orí mi dákun má gbàbòdè fún mi
Orí mi sìnmi débi ire mi
Ìwọ Orí yíí, lànà fún mi
Orí jé kí n bójú rere âti àánnú Elédáá pàdé ...
Kíre mi le di itéwógbà!!!

My head ... do not forsake me
My head can bring fortune and good luck.
Please, do not bring me bad luck and misfortune
My head, lead me to my good luck and fortune
My head, bring good luck to me
My head, pave way for my fortune.
My head let me get favour and mercy from my Creator
So that my good luck and fortune will be achievable

In addition, the following Yorùbá proverbs as succinctly expressed by one of the traditional chiefs in Èkìtì further illustrate this belief:
Àyànmó ọ gbóògùn, Òrí ọ̀gbọ̀ọ̀rọ̀
Ibi Òrí ọ gbé ni re, ki ọṣ. è máa sin ni lọ ni
Àkùnleyànn i ìàdáyé bá, a dé îlè Ayé tàn, ojú ń kán ni
Kiràkità ọ dòlà, Òrí ló mọ ọ̀lọ̀lù bò dòlà
Kọ si eni to le sare koja Òrí

Destiny is incurable
A man merely tows the path laid down for him by fate
A man’s impatience would not change his destiny
Wealth comes not from struggles but from destiny
No one can outrun his destiny

In the contemporary Òrùbá society, the
continued relevance of Òrí and Èlédáá in poverty
conceptualization and as determinant of a person
destiny to be rich or poor, which is perceived as
sacrosanct gives credence to the Òrùbá musician,
Chief Ebenezer Obey’s song on Òrí and Èlédáá:

Orí mi kò ní burú o
Létà t’Olúwa bá kọ, kọ séni tó lè pa á dà
Orí mi kò ní burú o ...
Olúwa kó má gbàgbé mí
Ire kálu kù o, lówó Èlédáá ló wà
Olúwa kó má gbàgbé mí
(Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey ‘Orí mi kò ní burú’1970)

My head will not encounter misfortune
What my Creator has destined for me, no human
being can change it
My head will not encounter misfortune.
My creator, do not forget me
The destiny of each person is in the hand of his
Creator
My Creator do not forget me

The belief of the typical Òrùbá in Òrí and Èlédáá
overshadows religious difference. To a large
extent, the African (Òrùbá) belief in Òrí and
Èlédáá shares a lot in common with Christian and
Islam’s spirituality. The Òrùbá traditional
religion worshippers, Christian and Muslim
respondents acknowledged that the belief in Òrí
and Èlédáá is crucial to determining a person’s
well-being in life.

In addition, findings revealed that some
respondents who are Christian and Muslims
subscribed to a relative interpretation of the
belief in Òrí and Èlédáá in understanding their
poverty situation. Mostly, all the respondents
tended towards an absolute interpretation of the
significance of Òrí and Èlédáá in understanding
poverty situation. Those who subscribed to the
relative interpretation hinged their perception on
their belief that God or Allah through Jesus
Christ or Mohammed, respectively, can change
their Ori from being unfortunate to fortunate.
They do not ascribe to the belief that individuals
came to the world with a particular Ori which may
be fortunate or unfortunate and which cannot be
reversed.

The implication of the belief in Òrí and Èlédáá in
conceptualizing poverty is that people tend not to
attach their poverty situation or plight to poor
governance and other structural factors in
society. Rather, they tended to lean more on the
religious interpretation and as such believe that it
is only through this belief that they can
understand, interpret and alleviate their poverty
situation. Therefore, it would seem that the belief
system may condone governmental lack of
political will to genuinely address poverty in
society.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of poverty has to be understood
both as a painful reality experienced by millions
of human beings and as a construction of
competing conceptualizations, definitions and
measures. The Òrùbá cultural belief in Òrí and
Èlédáá in conceptualising poverty is instructive.
Even though the indigenous system in Africa has
been eroded and lost a great deal of its relevance
in the contemporary period, yet it is a truism that
the traditional cultural belief systems have
continued to be relevant to the people in
interpreting and unravelling social phenomenon
such as poverty.

In addition, implicit in definitions are
explanations of poverty and its distribution,
which generally reflect individualistic, structural
as well as religious perspectives. The
individualistic perspective attributes the main responsibility for poverty to the ‘the poor’ themselves; the structural perspectives point to how economic, social and political structures and processes, be it from the global to the local, create and perpetuate poverty. The religious perspectives, which this study explored, conceptualize poverty within a cultural and spiritual dimension. A religious interpretation of poverty is vital in order not to lose sight of what is unique to the phenomenon.

Moreover, such a conceptualization needs to be understood within a wider social scientific framework concerning knowledge about religion, spirituality and poverty and must be approached in a way that it recognizes the crucial role that traditional belief systems play in conceptualizing and interpreting distinct social phenomenon such as poverty. This religious conceptualization of poverty is not only significant but must be properly analysed, understood and situated within any policy framework for poverty alleviation. These perspectives and broader conceptualizations need to be combined to shape policy responses to the phenomenon called ‘poverty’.

*The full-length version of this essay was published in the Journal of African Cultural Studies and can be accessed here: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13696815.2017.1286968
References

DEMOCRACY, WHERE ARE YOU? CENTRAL AFRICAN PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRACY IN AN ERA OF DOUBT


THE GROWING THREAT OF EXTREMIST GROUPS IN AFRICA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES


ORÍ AND ËLÈDÁÁ IN POVERTY CONCEPTUALIZATION IN TRADITIONAL YORÚBÁ RELIGION: CHALLENGING DEVELOPMENTAL AND AID ORGANIZATIONS’ UNDERSTANDINGS OF POVERTY

**Announcements**

**ALUMNI NETWORKING GRANTS**

An additional, final round of Alumni Networking Grants was held in December 2016. Made possible by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the grants program supported alumni participation in activities such as presenting at an academic conference, organizing a mini-workshop, or advancing current research towards publication. From August 2013 – December 2016 APSA awarded over $136,000 in small grants to 49 Africa Workshops alumni. December 2016 awardees include:

- Alfred Babo (2008) – $1,680 Professional Development Grant
- Keith Weghorst (2009) – $1,000 Professional Development Grant
- Janet Monisola Oluwaleyे (2012) – $1,680 Professional Development Grant
- Doreen Alusa (2015) – $1,800 Professional Development Grant
- Bamlaku Mengistu (2015) – $1,800 Professional Development Grant
- Felicia Odame (2012) – $2,000 Workshop Grant
- Edmond Mballa Elanga (2013) – $2,000 Workshop Grant
- Taiwo Owoeye (2013) – $1,700 Professional Development Grant
- Bonnie Ayodele (2010) – $1,540 Professional Development Grant

Congratulations to these alumni! Additional information can be found online at [http://web.apsanet.org/africa/alumni-grants/](http://web.apsanet.org/africa/alumni-grants/).

**ALUMNI NEWS AND PUBLICATIONS**

Over the past year, many of our alumni (both participants and co-leaders) were invited to present their research and participate in conferences across the United States, including at APSA’s Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, PA, and the African Studies Association’s Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. See “Conference Presentations” on the website for more information: [http://web.apsanet.org/africa/conference-presentations/](http://web.apsanet.org/africa/conference-presentations/).

If you would like to submit an announcement to be included in future Alumni News, send your updates directly to [africanewsletter@apsanet.org](mailto:africanewsletter@apsanet.org). Please join us in congratulating the following alumni for their continued professional accomplishments!

**2009 Alumni – Accra, Ghana**

- Kristin Michelitch (Vanderbilt University) and Keith Weghorst’s (Vanderbilt University) paper “Islam, Christianity, and Attitudes Towards Women: Evidence from Mixed-Religion Countries in sub-Saharan Africa” is part of the Kellogg Working Papers Series (#418).
- Kristen Michelitch (Vanderbilt University) and Jaimie Bleck’s (University of Notre Dame) article “Capturing the Airwaves, Capturing the Nation? A Field Experiment on State-Run Media Effects in the Wake of a Coup” is forthcoming at *Journal of Politics*.
- Kristin Michelitch (Vanderbilt University) received the 2017 Andrew Carnegie Fellowship.
2010 Alumni – Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

• Herman Touo (University of Ngaoundere) was promoted to Associate Professor in January 2017. He published his article “Decentralization, crisis of governance and citizens’ participation in Cameroon” in African Journal of Political and Strategic Studies, no. 1 2016.

• Peace Medie (Princeton University) published the article “Rape reporting in post-conflict Côte d’Ivoire: Accessing justice and ending impunity” in African Affairs (online first, March 2017); she also published the essay “Intimate Partner Violence: The Hidden Threat to Women’s Security” on Kujenga Amani on March 6: http://forums.ssrc.org/kujenga-amani/2017/03/06/intimate-partner-violence-the-hidden-threat-to-womens-security/#.WO_YdoeGPIU.


HERMAN TOUO RECEIVING HIS ACADEMIC ROBE AND HOOD FROM PROFESSOR JANVIER ONANA, DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF LAW AND POLITICAL SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF NGAOUCNDEC, CAMEROON

2011 Alumni – Nairobi, Kenya


2012 Alumni – Gaborone, Botswana


• Azeez Olaniyan (Ekiti State University) has taken a six-month fellowship at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society at Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich, Germany: http://www.carsoncenter.uni-muenchen.de/staff_fellows/carson_fellows/index.html.


• Lauren Morris MacLean (Indiana University) received the 2017 Andrew Carnegie Fellowship.
2013 Alumni – Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

- Blessing Nonye Onyima completed her PhD in December 2016 in the Department of Archaeology & Anthropology at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, on the topic of Pastoral Environment and Access to Healthcare Systems.

2014 Alumni – Maputo, Mozambique

- Isaac Adegbenga Aladegbola (Ekiti State University) was awarded an APSA Centennial Center grant of $1,700, from the Alma Ostrom and Leah Hopkins Awan Civic Education Fund, to support research entitled “Agenda for Non-Violence Studies in Post Conflict Society: A Case Study of Jos Plateau, Nigeria.”

2015 Alumni – Nairobi, Kenya

- William John Walwa (University of Dar es Salaam) has co-edited a special issue of The African Review on “Avoiding the Resource Curse in East Africa” Vol 43, no. 2, featuring his article “Large-scale mining and the right to a clean, health and safe environment in Tanzania,” among others. The special issue arose, in part, from papers presented at a May 2016 conference on Avoiding the Resource Curse in East Africa hosted at UDSM and organized by William with support from an APSA Africa Workshops Alumni Grant.
- Jacob Dut Chol (University of Juba) published the article “The Reality of Petroleum Resource Curse in South Sudan: Can this be avoided?” in the special issue of The African Review Vol 43, no. 2.
- Seidu Alidu (University of Ghana) published the essay “Ghana: Another Peaceful Alternation of Power” on Kujenga Amani on January 12: http://forums.ssrc.org/kujenga-amanii/2017/01/12/ghana-another-peaceful-alternation-of-power/#.WO_e44eGPIW.
WORKSHOP ON “INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: MIGRANTS’ CHALLENGES IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

By Cori Wielenga (University of Pretoria), Ahmed Sharif Ibrahim (City University of New York), and Aditi Malik (California State University San Marcos)

In July 2015, we had the opportunity to participate in the final APSA Africa Workshop, which was held in Nairobi, Kenya. The theme of the workshop was “Conflict and Political Violence.” All three of us had been conducting research on this topic—from varied disciplinary perspectives—over the last several years. At the same time, the questions that we had been working on were quite different from each other. As such, the Nairobi workshop provided us with a unique opportunity to engage with research on conflict through a common lens.

Following the workshop, the three of us decided to apply for an APSA Africa Workshop Alumni Networking grant. During our time in Nairobi, we had been struck by the fact that scholarship on conflict rarely engaged with issues of displacement, except when displacement was understood to be a consequence of violence. And yet, we were also aware that sub-Saharan Africa had experienced migrant and refugee crises since the 1960s.

Our common interest in this area—and specifically in questions of a) how migrants navigated these processes in the African context and b) how they carved out places for themselves in host countries—led us to develop a proposal that would examine such themes in depth. We were especially interested in the case of Somali migrants (given the protracted conflict there and the massive displacement of the Somali population from the Horn of Africa into the rest of the continent and beyond), and took a two-pronged approach to our workshop. One half of our group addressed broader trends in migration in sub-Saharan Africa while the other half consisted of scholars whose research is focused specifically on Somalis. We were especially fortunate to receive support from the Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation (Govinn) at the University of Pretoria who hosted our four-day workshop in May 2016.

The workshop included in-depth dialogue sessions between academics (PhD candidates, junior and more seasoned faculty) from several disciplines as well as a public seminar which brought together scholars and policymakers. During the public seminar, Professor Loren Landau, Director of the African Centre for Migration and Society (ACMS) at the University of Witswatersrand, Professor Francis Nyamnjoh from the University of Cape Town, and Dr. Chris Nshimbi from Govinn shared their perspectives on trends and developments with regard to migration in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as the challenges that migrant communities face in the region.
Although the workshop generated more questions than answers, what was apparent was the urgent need for more interdisciplinary engagement on questions of migration. Particularly, we felt that greater dialogue between anthropologists and sociologists on the one hand—who are able to gather rich and granular data on these subjects—and political scientists on the other, who are trained to conduct research that identifies broader trends would be necessary for developing a better understanding of the complexities of contemporary migration in Africa. Furthermore, we felt that an interdisciplinary perspective would have much to offer policymakers.

Since our workshop in May, we have created two work-streams—one, which is Somali-specific and the other, which is broader in scope. On the basis of the research interests of the members of the two work-streams, we are currently developing two-panel proposal, which we will submit for consideration to the African Studies Association’s 2017 conference. We hope that the unique group of interdisciplinary scholars we have brought together to engage with this topic will make a meaningful contribution to research on questions of migration, displacement, and place-making in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa.


Alumni who co-organized this workshop:

- Cori Wielenga, University of Pretoria
- Ahmed Sharif Ibrahim, City University of New York
- Aditi Malik, California State University San Marcos

Workshop participants:

- Sophia Balakian, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- Abdu Hikam, African Centre for Migration and Society (ACMS), University of Witswatersrand
- Zaheera Jinnah, African Centre for Migration and Society (ACMS), University of Witswatersrand
- Emme Lochery, Universite de Liege
- Nereida Muniz, African Centre for Migration and Society (ACMS), University of Witswatersrand
- Pragna Rugunan, University of Johannesburg
- Amanuel Tweolde, University of Pretoria
- Beth Elise Whitaker, University of North Carolina at Charlotte