

Africa in the Age of Obama

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With the inclusion of the following commentaries, “Africa in the Age of Obama,” the *African Studies Review* breaks one of its cardinal rules of not accepting opinion pieces on current issues for publication. However, there is always an exception to any rule. These three articles, originally presented at the Plenary Session of the 51st Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, present ideas of sufficient significance and centrality to Africanist intellectual discourses at this historical juncture to warrant this exception. Both individually and as a collection, these informative and provocative articles decenter common shibboleths of twenty-first century Africanist scholarship and replace these with suggestions for new paths and new ways of seeing and constituting “Africa” in the world today.

As *ASR* editors, we have been grappling with some of these issues over the past decade while putting together a “mission statement” for the journal, and we are pleased to see these subjects and perspectives presented so eloquently in this collection. Two perspectives from these narratives are of special interest to the mission of the *ASR*. First, they encourage a view of “Africa” not as an isolate, but rather as a nexus of complex global relationships in which Africa and Africans, as well as African ideas, practice, and voice—whether as subjects or objects of analysis—are the primary focus. Second, they give voice to, and encourage contributions from, an increasing number of scholars whose primary work, scholarship, and identity are on the continent. Implicitly they call upon these scholars to publish in the *ASR* and other journals and use these as a two-way conduit, whereby scholarship from the continent may continue to become a significant and integral part of twenty-first century global Africanist discourses.

These articles also suggest an important sea change in the analyses of African scholars, both from the continent and beyond. No longer is there an emphasis on “an African diaspora” or even on “African diasporas” in cur-

rent scholarship about Africa. Rather, there has been a dialogic process of decentering analyses from the traditional historical approach of the “West” and “Africa,” or the “North” and the “South,” with “developed countries” associated with the former and “Africa or African countries” designated as LDCs (“lesser developed countries”). Africanist intellectual discourses in the “Age of Obama” have become a sophisticated web of dialogic analyses within which African peoples, nations, and indeed the entire continent are become shaped by, and in turn are integral in shaping, the political economy of the global world at this historical juncture. Particularly significant in these developments are the relationships being forged between and among African nations and regions, as well as African involvements with parts of the globe far outside the purview of the “West” or the “North”—particularly with increasingly powerful states like China and other parts of Asia, Saudi Arabia, and other countries of the Middle East. These dialogic interactions, along with ideologies that often accompany them—such as a fundamentalist Islam and new visions of socialism, and evolving ideas of “freedom” and “democracy”—are vital not only in determining African lives, but also in shaping the future of the entire continent in an increasingly decentered global world. Africanist scholarship needs to be situated in this context of rapidly shifting relations of meaning and power that form both theory and practice in distinctly Africanist discourses today.