

# EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to introduce Volume 59, Number 1, of the *African Studies Review* of 2016. In this issue we continue our commemoration of *ASR's* long engagement with African women's and gender studies with the second part of the Forum on Women and Gender in Africa, guest edited by Judith Van Allen and Kathleen Sheldon. The first installment of the forum was featured in the December issue (Volume 58, Number 3), and focused on women in southern Africa. This group of essays includes articles on women in Uganda, Ghana, and Senegal, plus a featured commentary on a new graphic history of women's political resistance in Crossroads, South Africa. But we start with five individual articles that broaden the disciplinary and topical scope of this issue.

In "Misguided and Misdiagnosed: The Failure of Decentralization Reforms in the DR Congo" (5–32) Pierre Englebert and Emmanuel Kasongo Mungongo analyze the sweeping political reforms initiated in 2006 that attempted to move power out of the political center as an example of similar reform efforts elsewhere on the continent. Paradoxically, in the D.R. Congo reform measures have in fact perpetuated some of the old political problems and spawned new ones: specifically, predatory extraction and a lack of political accountability have continued, while power has become centralized at the provincial level, thus perpetuating the worst aspects of top-down governance. The authors draw on significant empirical data to suggest that the reforms, while intended to promote accountability and the broadening of local access to government programs and officials, were ultimately based on a faulty understanding of the issues that contributed to corruption and lack of transparency in governance prior to 2006. They conclude: "Congo's decentralization problems illustrate the frequent disconnect in Africa between governance reforms and deeper politics" (27).

Scott Ross's "Encouraging Rebel Demobilization by Radio in Uganda and the D.R. Congo: The Case of 'Come Home' Messaging" (33–55) investigates the efficacy of radio messages in persuading members of the Lord's Resistance Army to leave the rebel group and surrender to authorities. While the elusive leader of the LRA, Joseph Kony, has shifted his base of

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operations from Uganda to the D.R. Congo, more international actors have become involved in the messaging process and have experimented with new forms of messages. The results of these “Come Home” messages have created new ways of understanding how communications media may have complemented traditional counterinsurgency measures in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Andrew Hernann investigates the culture of joking among internally displaced persons and refugees in Mali in his article, “Joking Through Hardship: Humor and Truth-Telling among Displaced Timbuktiens” (57–76). Drawing on interviews and observations among refugees from Timbuktu in 2010, Hernann places joke-telling at the heart of many social interactions. He notes that jokes help to build social networks and ease tensions among people who find themselves newly rootless after fleeing the Islamic extremist takeover of Timbuktu. But beyond these functions, Hernann argues, jokes also allow both the joke-tellers and their audiences to make sense of wider political events, and jokes allow them to voice their anxieties and resentments as they rebuild their lives in a context that many find culturally and ethnically alien. Hernann concludes that by taking joking seriously, we can “enrich our understandings of how refugees and IDPs experience, conceptualize, and navigate the hardships of crisis and displacement” (72).

Turning to the historical trajectory of development projects in Tanzania, Robert Ahearne, in his article “Development and Progress as Historical Phenomena in Tanzania: ‘Maendeleo? We Had That in the Past’” (77–96), develops a finely grained analysis of how individual people and villages remember and talk about past and present development projects. He suggests that older people in particular have nostalgic feelings about development projects of the past, even ones, like the Tanganyika Groundnut Scheme, that are commonly discussed in the scholarly literature as abject failures. Ahearne ties this nostalgia to some of the broader social and cultural meanings that his informants have infused into the concept of “development”: a sense of progress, of not being marginalized, and of making material sacrifices in order to achieve loftier goals in the future. The disappointment of development for them is less about material failures and more about the loss of their sense of being engaged in an uplifting national narrative.

John Galaty questions the certainties that international boundaries seem to convey in his article “Boundary-Making and Pastoral Conflict along the Kenyan–Ethiopian Borderlands” (97–122). These borderlands are inhabited by pastoralist groups who have defied attempts by colonial and postcolonial state authorities and development projects to fix them in place. But even as these peoples have continued a mobile lifestyle, the facts of boundaries and boundary-making have affected them, and they have responded by trying to use the boundaries for their own purposes. Based on field research on conflicts in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia, Galaty’s work uses the idea of the border as a source of entropic energy to confront theories of violence in the region. Borders, he concludes, have fostered

more conflicts among pastoralists than they have mitigated: “Borders are an aggravation for mobile people who feel they have rights over territory and resources that lie on the other side; . . . Clearly there is something about pastoralists that doesn’t like a fence” (115).

Part 2 of the Forum on Women and Gender in Africa, consisting of three articles plus a short commentary, presents a wide-ranging set of articles that expands the analyses and topics explored by the first set of three articles published in the December 2015. The forum opens with a brief introduction (123–25), written by the guest editors, Judith van Allen and Kathleen Sheldon, who set the stage for the stimulating articles that follow. The first forum article is by Rhiannon Stephens: “‘Whether They Promised Each Other Some Thing Is Difficult to Work Out’: The Complicated History of Marriage in Uganda” (127–53). Stephens uses historical linguistics to tease out the changes in marriage contracts and in the stability of sexual relationships going as far back as 700 CE. In demonstrating that considerable change and innovation occurred in these relationships, she dispels the notion that the diversity of marriage arrangements witnessed by missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was simply a result of the political upheavals of the nineteenth century. “Thus,” Stephens writes, “marriage in Uganda at the dawn of the twentieth century was not a single institution undermined by violence and social dislocation, but rather an assemblage of practices and ideas that served a wide range of social, economic, and political needs” (147). As a result, many women were able to use marriage as a site of agency and a source of social connections despite the upheavals in the region.

The forum then shifts the focus to contemporary marriage in Senegal with H  l  ne Neveau Kringelbach’s contribution, “‘Marrying Out’ for Love: Women’s Narratives of Polygyny and Alternative Marriage Choices in Contemporary Senegal” (155–74). Kringelbach draws on interviews with Muslim women of middle-class, mostly urban backgrounds, many of whom have decided to “marry out”—to marry European, non-Muslim men—for love. The women consciously chose to avoid polygynous marriages with Senegalese men, often as a result of witnessing relatives’ and friends’ unhappy experiences as wives in polygynous households. They also chose to marry Europeans as a way of achieving companionate marriages and to take on more cosmopolitan identities. Kringelbach delves into the autobiographical narratives constructed by her informants to consider these women’s sense of agency as individuals, of their identity as Muslims, and of their familial obligations to their Senegalese kin.

In “Expressions of Masculinity and Femininity in Husbands’ Care of Wives with Cancer in Accra” (175–97), Deborah Atobrah and Akosua Adomako Ampofo discuss the stresses imposed by gender identities as they examine how husbands and wives engage with debilitating illnesses. Based on in-depth interviews with five married couples and their kin, Atobrah and Ampofo explore how contemporary ideas of companionate marriage, when combined with a sick wife’s pressing need for loving and sometimes

expensive care, have complicated the performance of more traditional gender identities. The authors find that husbands were committed to providing financial support for their wives' care, although some of the husbands struggled to find the means to do so. Emotional support, though, was harder for the husbands to provide, and the lack of the man's emotional support left husbands and wives both expressing regrets. Ultimately, the authors conclude, the men could not easily alter their ideas of proper masculine behavior, regardless of the pressing needs of their wives: "Marital relations remain[ed] patriarchal both practically and symbolically" (191).

Rounding out the forum on women and gender is an essay by Koni Benson: "Graphic Novel Histories: Women's Organized Resistance to Slum Clearance in Crossroads, South Africa, 1975–2015" (199–214). Benson writes about her experience researching the history of African women's resistance to attempts at slum clearance outside of Cape Town, and her decision to make that history more available to a wider audience via a graphic history format. She, along with the graphic artists André Trantraal and Nathan Trantraal (the Trantraal Brothers) and Ashley Marais, wrote and illustrated *Crossroads: I Live Where I Like* as a six-book comic book series that draws upon interviews with sixty women squatters who protested their living conditions at the peak of apartheid, and again in 1998 when the ANC government once again tried to clear the informal settlement. (Six of the graphic frames have been reproduced in black and white in the print version of the *African Studies Review*; full-color versions are reproduced in the on-line version). In the essay, Benson discusses the difficulties and the rewards of translating a scholarly work which had an intended audience of other academics into a graphic one intended to engage a popular audience: "With minimal words . . . , the pictures had to then show the knots, the contradictions, the dilemmas, the debates, the seen and unseen elements of the story as it changed over time" (210).

This *ASR* issue ends with a relatively small number of book reviews and film reviews; we know that our readership depends on the reviews to keep them up to date with developments in the fields of research and film, and we are dedicated to enhancing the reviews over the next several issues.

We hope readers of the *African Studies Review* enjoy the individual articles as well as the articles included in the Forum on Women and Gender.

With best wishes,

Elliot Fratkin and Sean Redding  
Editors, *African Studies Review*