

# EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to introduce Volume 60, Number 2, of the *African Studies Review* of 2017. This issue features the 2016 *African Studies Review* Distinguished Lecture delivered by Peter Geschiere at the 59th annual meeting of the African Studies Association, as well as the Presidential Address delivered by Dorothy Hodgson. The scholarly articles range from two articles that provide important insights into the impact of violence on voting behavior, two fascinating articles on political life in Zimbabwe, as well as considerations of urban life and culture in Zanzibar, Angola, and Ghana. Rounding out the issue is a Commentary on migration within Africa and beyond. The book review and film review sections provide several timely reviews of new releases.

The issue begins with Peter Geschiere's "A 'Vortex of Identities': Freemasonry, Witchcraft, and Postcolonial Homophobia" (7–35). When this article was presented as a lecture at the 2016 ASA meeting it stimulated intense discussion, as it brings together two of the signature topics of the author's scholarly publications—witchcraft and the supernatural, and sexuality and homophobia. Acknowledging the timeliness of these topics, both for African studies and queer studies, Geschiere roots his analysis deeply in his Cameroonian fieldwork and his experiences of Cameroonian culture and politics. This is a wide-ranging and fascinating piece that connects the rise of homophobia with the morass of postcolonial politics, and the practices of Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry with indigenous occult beliefs. Rather than simply trying to separate and name these different cultural strands, Geschiere shows the interconnections that are sometimes obscured by studies and analyses that pursue narrower research agendas. Geschiere ends with a suggestion that scholars of African studies heed "Michael Taussig's call from 1987 that, as academics, we must dare to lose ourselves in 'epistemic murk'" (26).

Dorothy Hodgson's Presidential Address, "Africa From the Margins" (37–49), engages an equally significant topic for scholars of African studies—the continuing relevance of the lives of Africans living in rural areas, or living in informal settlements beyond the gaze of global metanarratives.

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Taking as her prime example the historical and continuing marginalization of the Maasai in East Africa, Hodgson asks, “What we can learn from an illiterate rural woman struggling to support her household in a dusty, deforested plain? Or from a young man from the same remote area desperately seeking work, wealth, and, eventually, marriage?” (38). She argues that colonial rule, followed by nationalist rhetoric and state formation in the postcolonial period, marginalized the Maasai and positioned them as a “tribal” people without history while simultaneously denying them a political voice. But, as Hodgson points out, Maasai have stories to tell that challenge dominant narratives of “Africa rising” or of “modernity.” Their stories “from the margins” also perhaps contain the seeds of new social movements and economic innovations. “Stories from the margins” and the ways in which these stories confound and complicate the conventional wisdom is a recurring motif for all of the subsequent articles in this issue.

The next two articles consider the role of violence in swaying election results. Kathleen Klaus considers how claims to land have factored into the precipitation of election violence in “Contentious Land Narratives and the Nonescalation of Election Violence: Evidence from Kenya’s Coast Region” (51–72). Klaus contrasts the political behavior of counties from two regions in Kenya—the Rift Valley and the Coast Region, both of which have a history of sharp competition over land. In the Rift Valley this competition has fed into political violence, while in the Coast Region it has not, and it is this relative restraint from violence in the Coast Region that Klaus investigates. She shows how the distinctive histories of the two regions have affected people’s willingness to engage in political violence. Surprisingly, Klaus shows that although people in the Coast Region actually have less security of tenure than do people in the Rift Valley, they have engaged in electoral violence much less frequently. This relative pacifism has resulted from several factors, ranging from somewhat greater tolerance of outsiders to a general belief that given their own political marginalization, there is relatively little that politicians of any party can do—or will do—to assist them. But Klaus also notes some disturbing trends in the Coast Region that may indicate a shift toward the use of violence for political ends. The article concludes that political violence is less the result of elite manipulation of peasant or nonelite grievances and more often the result of multiple historical, social, and economic factors that may (or may not) predispose the electorate to see violence as a viable political strategy.

Dorina Bekoe and Stephanie Burchard explore political violence both in Kenya and on a wider scale in their article, “The Contradictions of Pre-election Violence: The Effects of Violence on Voter Turnout in Sub-Saharan Africa” (73–92). While some previous studies have suggested that political violence in the pre-election period depresses voter turnout, the evidence that Bekoe and Burchard present paints a far more complicated picture. They show that aggregate data across a large number of African countries do not routinely support the idea that voting is suppressed by pre-election violence. In looking at the specific case of Kenya, Bekoe and Burchard note

that various acts of pre-election violence have often been perpetrated for different reasons: either to try to intimidate opposition party supporters, or to exact punishment for the outcome of the previous election, or, in some cases, to scare people into voting in a particular way. Their data show that in different circumstances “voters seemed to know what message was being sent and responded in various ways: they fled, they ignored the message, or they voted in large numbers” (85). They conclude that understanding political violence as the product of multiple possible intentions—rather than as a one-dimensional political strategy for suppressing the vote—may yield a deeper comprehension of the political challenges faced by democracies.

The political realities of life in Zimbabwe come into focus in the next two articles. Godfrey Maringira’s “Politics, Privileges and Loyalty in the Zimbabwe National Army” (93–113) analyzes the ways in which the military has come to dominate Zimbabwean politics. Drawing on extensive open-ended interviews with fifty-eight deserters from the army, he shows how, in the decades since independence, the army became politicized and politics became militarized. Writing as a former soldier himself, Maringira describes competing factions within the military: one group comprising those who see themselves as professional, nonpolitical soldiers, and the dominant faction, which practices what Maringira (following Murphy 2003) calls “military patrimonialism.” The practice of favoring political loyalists, particularly in promotions, while demoting soldiers suspected of supporting the opposition MDC party, has helped to ensure military loyalty to President Mugabe and ZANU-PF. The excerpts from Maringira’s interviews supply vivid insider accounts of grievances within the military from those who felt that they had no option but to desert.

Rodwell Makombe’s “Literature as a Medium for Social and Political Activism: The Case of Mashingaidze Gomo’s *A Fine Madness*” (115–38) scrutinizes Gomo’s 2010 poetic novel both “as a socially and politically engaged text and to interrogate the text’s ideological convictions” (117). Makombe explores the limits of “Afropolitanism” by juxtaposing it alongside the bitter inequities experienced by the most marginalized Africans: “The Zimbabwean cultural and political landscape since 2000,” he says, “exemplifies a complex postcolonial reality that cannot be explained away by Afropolitan ideals of embracing fluidity and celebrating a ‘contaminated’ African culture” (120). Gomo’s novel, told from the point of view of a Zimbabwean soldier during the military’s intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo war in the late 1990s, tears down various elite formulations of states and national identities and Western notions of “African history,” and questions the motivations of neoliberal international interventions and political assistance. Makombe argues that the novel complicates our understanding of what it means for an African writer to be politically engaged and historically aware.

The following three articles shift the focus to urban life and its historical and cultural constructs in Zanzibar, Angola, and Ghana. Michelle Greenfield-Liebst writes about former slaves in Zanzibari mission stations in

“Sin, Slave Status, and the ‘City’: Zanzibar, 1865–c.1930” (139–60). Her research shows that the interactions of missionaries and people with the status of “slave” was always fraught, not least because of the preconceptions that (white) missionaries had about slavery as an institution and their idea of a sharp distinction between “slave” and “free” in a society that had multiple categories of unfree status. Missionaries also believed urban life to be innately sinful, especially because of the greater possibilities for sexual temptations in the city. Yet the city also provided opportunities both for missionaries and ex-slaves. For their part, the former slaves who arrived at the missions were often socially marginalized people, and they sought to establish social networks that would provide them with both safety and a social identity. Drawing on archives and multiple interviews with descendants of former slaves at the missions, Greenfield-Liebst concludes that it was the missions rather than the missionaries that helped the former slaves; the missions became sites of the social networking and education that former slaves valued, while the impact of the missionaries as moralizing forces was often fleeting.

We enter the postcolonial period to look at transformations in Angola’s urban life in Cristina Udelsmann Rodrigues’s article, “Changes to Urban Society in Angola: From Limited to Multi-Criteria Stratification” (161–81). The past twenty years have seen Angola emerge from a long-running civil war and, as Rodrigues argues, urbanization of the population has accelerated while the cities have also become more rural in character. Rural culture has persisted despite the extensive modernization programs that the state has embarked upon, but rural culture has also become a marker of not being well-integrated into urban life. As a result, social stratification has taken on new forms and meanings. Angolan cities have increasingly mapped their social geography onto their physical geography so that where one lives signals one’s degree of urbanity and upward social mobility. The foods that people eat, or that the younger generation refuses to eat, signal their degree of integration into a globalized culture; the language that they speak signals their educational levels, their employment possibilities, and their social networks. The developing urban culture thus provides new opportunities for individuals, but it also leaves those without formal jobs or with little education, and those who wear the “wrong” clothes, more firmly located at the economic and social margins.

The third article exploring urban culture is Christey Carwile’s “The Clave Comes Home: Salsa Dance and Pan-African Identity in Ghana” (183–207). Carwile looks at the embrace of the popular dance in Accra and other major cities, and shows that young Ghanaians who “learn the ‘language’ of salsa,” become part of a larger global salsa network that “has the potential to place a dancer within a different social category and may offer a new avenue for constructing his or her social identity” (192). The “salsa identity” partakes of the global, while the dance itself is integrated into local dance and performance forms and then recast as a pan-African dance; salsa clubs break down ethnic and religious identities and cross national boundaries.

Carwile portrays this trend as a form of cosmopolitanism practiced principally by urban middle-class youth, but cautions that readers should not underestimate the power of salsa dancing by disparaging it as an elite pastime. Instead she sees urban youth constructing networks with salsa dancers throughout the Global South, particularly people in the African diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean, and using their participation in the dance as a way to control the nature and pace of their own incorporation into global culture.

We conclude with a Commentary by Beth Whitaker, "Migration within Africa and Beyond" (209–20). This wide-ranging and incredibly timely piece looks at the problems that African migrants face, whether they remain on the continent or attempt the hazardous crossing to Europe or elsewhere. As individuals or members of particular ethnic groups, they may encounter xenophobia that can range from being shunned to becoming the targets of violence; they may be denied entry or kept from taking jobs or attending school; they may be depicted as security threats and used to leverage military and humanitarian aid; they may become political pawns in power struggles and political contests in their host countries; and as diasporic populations they may wield a somewhat unpredictable power over the politics and cultures of their countries of origin. Whitaker stresses that African migration can take many forms, and its causes and effects cannot easily be analyzed using a single rubric. She looks beyond the occasionally histrionic headlines about migration to Europe and the U.S. to focus mainly on migration within the continent.

The issue concludes with a number of book and film reviews to keep ASA members up-to-date on the latest publications and cinematic offerings. The book review section features four reviews written by graduate students from a history seminar taught by Emily Callaci at the University of Wisconsin; these pieces emerged out of the broader discussion of the books in the seminar, and the *ASR* is excited to encourage the development of new scholars in the field. We hope you enjoy reading these as much as we did.

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