

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to introduce Volume 58, Number 3, of the *African Studies Review* of 2015. This issue features two forums: first we bring film to the front of the issue with a forum titled "What's New in African Cinema?" guest edited by the *ASR* film editor Kenneth Harrow; and we commemorate the *ASR*'s long engagement with African women's and gender studies with the second Forum on Women and Gender in Africa, guest edited by Kathleen Sheldon and Judith Van Allen. In addition, we have included two independent articles, one by Julius Amin titled "Sino-Cameroon Relations: A Foreign Policy of Pragmatism," and the second by Bill Miles on "Postcolonial Borderland Legacies of Anglo-French Partition in West Africa," which broaden the disciplinary scope of this issue.

The issue begins with an exciting forum on current cinema in Africa guest edited by Kenneth Harrow. As Harrow notes in his introductory essay (5–11), all of the articles address the influence of Manthia Diawara's 2010 work *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics*. His article, "Manthia Diawara's Waves and the Problem of the 'Authentic'" (13–30), tracks how the delineation of "New Cinema" in Diawara's 2010 work differs significantly from his initial study on African cinema published in 1992. Discussing Diawara's three successive waves of African cinema, Harrow traces the development of the desire for "authentic" African voices: "Diawara both mocks a certain position of overly defensive Africanness, which he associates perhaps unjustly with those working on the continent, while at the same time asserting the need for African voices to remain 'authentic'" (20). This essay underscores the significant contributions to analysis of African film made by Diawara's insightful scholarship, and the way in which that scholarship has developed and deepened.

The next article, Moradewun Adejunmobi's "Neoliberal Rationalities in Old and New Nollywood" (31–53), proposes that Diawara's idea of successive waves in African cinema has created "new space for tension over ideological claims and narrative coherence" (31). Distinguishing the new from the old Nollywood of Nigeria, Adejunmobi demonstrates shifts in narratives from the 1970s period of the Nigerian oil boom and nation-building

African Studies Review, Volume 58, Number 3 (December 2015), pp. 1–4

© African Studies Association, 2015
doi:10.1017/asr.2015.80

through the 1980s period of neoliberal structural adjustment programs that led to privatization, deregulation, and retrenchment of the state. The 1980s has been cinematically represented by themes of greed and materialism on the one hand and by Christian revival and evangelism and claims for a moral economy on the other. The New Nollywood of the past decade has pursued new levels of professionalism and directorial creativity, the end to old narratives (including challenging predictably happy endings), and a greater investment in “economies of self-governance and unfettered subjectivity” (36). Nevertheless, the author finds commonalities in the Old and New Nollywoods, and provides an important analysis of how film and society interrogate each other.

Connor Ryan’s “New Nollywood: A Sketch of Nollywood’s Metropolitan New Style” (55–76) argues that New Nollywood films and the cinemas in which they appear “appeal directly to spectators’ senses by promising not only a movie and shopping, but also an affective experience closely bound up with global consumerism.” Describing how new Nollywood films have emphasized sophisticated production and marketing tools, including viewings in upscale multiplex cinemas, Ryan’s essay highlights how both old and New Nollywood have immediately connected with the popular imaginations of their intended audiences, demonstrating that “New Nollywood—with its emphasis on images and style—is a direct expression of the cultural and economic forces shaping life in Lagos today” (55).

The final article in the forum on African cinema is MaryEllen Higgins’s “The Winds of African Cinema” (77–92). Higgins also uses Diawara’s *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics* as a point of departure for her own analysis. She suggests that instead of thinking about African film in terms of waves, we might reach a deeper understanding by thinking in terms of intersecting winds: “winds that sweep in and change the direction of currents in the international oceans of cinema” (10). Using cinematic examples from throughout the African continent, as well as leading works of African literature, she concludes that African cinema is “not running behind Euro-America, but ahead of it” (88).

The Forum on Women and Gender in Africa presents three articles in this issue, to be followed by additional articles in the April 2016 issue. Following the Introduction (93–95), written by guest editors Judith van Allen and Kathleen Sheldon, the first article is by Judith van Allen: “What Are Women’s Rights Good For? Contesting and Negotiating Gender Regimes in Southern Africa” (97–128). Van Allen writes that, despite the fact that South Africa has the most progressive constitution in the world, one that explicitly stresses the importance of women’s rights, South African women face some of the highest rates of domestic abuse and violence against women in the world. This paradox leads van Allen to ask, “How are ‘rights’ being reconfigured or transformed for different contexts? How are women using alternative ways of claiming obligations from others?” (98). Focusing on political activists on the

ground, van Allen exposes the complex reality of gender relations in South Africa.

Historian Elizabeth Thornberry's article "Virginity Testing, History, and the Nostalgia for Custom in Contemporary South Africa" (129–48) contributes to the current debate in South Africa between people advocating the protection of traditional "customs" and those pushing for greater gender equality. Feminist organizations such as the Women's League of the ANC have lobbied strenuously for protection of gender equality and women's rights, but the protections of "traditional customs" that are built into the South African Constitution often work against gender equality. Thornberry argues that although virginity testing in precolonial times protected women from some sexual violence and abuse, the current call for a revival of the custom of virginity testing reflects continuing gender inequalities and injustices.

Signe Arnfred's article, "Female Sexuality as Capacity and Power? Reconceptualizing Sexualities in Africa" (149–70), asks why African scholars of women and sexuality are less likely than Western ones to focus on women's subjugation and objectification. Based on her research in Mozambique, Arnfred argues that sexuality in Africa needs to be viewed as a site of female capacity and power, and that "the need for critical analysis may not have been felt as urgently, and not in the same way, as for feminists in the North" (150).

Following the forums are two independent articles that take on topical issues. Julius Amin's article, "Sino-Cameroon Relations: A Foreign Policy of Pragmatism" (171–89) contrasts two opposing sets of scholarship on China in Africa. One set is optimistic and argues that China's policies toward Africa are "a welcome change from Western . . . neocolonial pronouncements of corruption, backwardness, and inefficiency"; the second set sketches a pessimistic view that China's economic engagement remains predicated on extraction of oil, minerals, raw materials, and securing markets for manufactured goods, with policies contributing to pollution, forest loss, and destruction of emerging industries. The author focuses on Cameroonian perceptions of Chinese activity on the ground, and how both government and business communities are following a pragmatic path. As an increasing number of scholars try to map the broader contours of China's engagement with Africa, this focused study of a single country provides a needed check on some of the most extravagant predictions, either optimistic or pessimistic.

William Miles's "Postcolonial Borderland Legacies of Anglo–French Partition in West Africa" (191–213) discusses how the legacy of colonial rule created Anglophone–Francophone borderlands in West Africa. But Miles suggests that the indigenous bases of association and behavior "continue to define life along the West African frontier in ways that undermine state sovereignty" (191). Thus, West African sovereign states are not mere postcolonies, but are engaged in far more complicated regional and cross-border networks.

We hope readers of the *African Studies Review* enjoy the forums; it is a format we are increasingly favoring as editors as it presents a focused treatment of several related articles, all of which are timely but which take on additional resonance by being published together.

With best wishes,

Elliot Fratkin and Sean Redding

Editors, *African Studies Review*