

## Griswold appointed PAS interim director



Wendy Griswold, professor of sociology and Bergen Evans Professor in the Humanities at Northwestern, has been appointed interim director of the Program of African Studies for this academic year. A member of Northwestern's sociology and core African studies faculty since 1997, she was named the Arthur E. Andersen

Research and Teaching Professor in 2006 and the Bergen Evans Professor in the Humanities two years later. She is also affiliated with the School of Communication's media, technology, and society program and with the comparative literary studies and English departments. Previously she taught at Harvard University (1980–81), the University of Chicago (1981–97), the University of Oslo (2007–10), and Italy's IMT School for Advanced Studies, Lucca. Griswold has been an active member of the PAS community, serving on the program's executive committee and as coordinator of the Africa Seminar (AfriSem).

Well-known for her distinguished contributions to the sociology of culture and literature, Griswold is the author of eight books, with two more in preparation, as well as many articles and book chapters. In 1986 her revised dissertation—published as *Renaissance Revivals: City Comedy and Revenge Tragedy in the London Theatre, 1576–1980*—advanced the “cultural diamond” concept, which some scholars consider a central conceptual model in the sociology of culture. Her book *Bearing Witness:*

*Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria* (2000) won the 2002 best book award from the culture section of the American Sociological

## Farewell to Rachel Riedl

PAS director Rachel Riedl has left her position to become director of Cornell University's Einaudi Center for International Studies and the John S. Knight Professor in the university's department of government. PAS interim director Wendy Griswold is ensuring continuity in the program's ongoing projects, which include working with Weinberg College on hiring prospects; developing a foundation grant proposal for a master's program in coordination with the McCormick School's Department of Materials Sciences and Farley Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation; the Young African Leaders Initiative and Fulbright programs; ongoing collaborations with the Herskovits Library and the Block Museum; and active research clusters—Health and Healing; Environment, Human Security, and Economic Development; and Avant-Garde Africa—that intersect with research programs in the Pritzker, Feinberg, Kellogg, McCormick, and Medill Schools.

PAS thanks Rachel for her service, congratulates her on her new appointment, and wishes her every success in her future work.

Association. Griswold's work has contributed heavily to the “production of culture” perspective, which considers the social organization of situations in which cultural products (literature, art, music, etc.) are produced and the modes through which social organization shapes cultural output.

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## Northwestern hosts Mandela Washington Fellows

by Tiffany Williams-Cobleigh

For the sixth consecutive year, Northwestern hosted a summer contingent of Mandela Washington Fellows as part of the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI), a US State Department cultural exchange program. This year's 25 Northwestern fellows were among the 700 placed at host universities around the country. All these young adults from sub-Saharan Africa are leaders in their home communities.

Northwestern hosts fellows in business, with PAS handling administrative duties and the Kellogg School of Management providing executive education classroom sessions. In addition to business coursework, fellows went on weekly site visits to businesses and nonprofits in Chicago, participated in community service by mentoring Evanston youth at an entrepreneurship summer camp, and experienced American culture through Fourth of July activities, visits to Chicago museums, and other events. Site visits included the Industrial Council of Nearwest Chicago, a small business incubator; 321 Fast Draw, specializing in animated marketing and virtual reality; and a meeting with US Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL).

The fellowship concluded with all 700 participants meeting in Washington, DC, for three days of inspirational speeches and sessions on how to apply what they learned during the fellowship in their communities after returning home. The professional and personal connections built during the fellowship will serve these young leaders for years to come.

*Tiffany Williams-Cobleigh is the PAS coordinator of Northwestern's YALI fellows.*

## Griswold *(continued from page 1)*

Griswold's research, teaching, and administrative interests focus on sociological approaches to literature, art, and religion as well as comparative studies in Europe and Africa. She directs Northwestern's Culture and Society Workshop and serves on advisory and editorial boards of several academic journals in the United States and abroad.

Griswold is a recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, and most recently Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study and the National Humanities Center.

As interim director for 2019–20, Griswold plans to carry forward the many projects that departing director Rachel Riedl initiated. These include fostering the three research clusters (Health and Healing; Environment, Human Security, and Economic Development; and Avant-Garde Africa, the latter including a spring symposium), developing emergent partnerships between African universities and Northwestern (including the Libraries and the Department of Philosophy), canvassing African humanities candidates for a possible position, preparing a proposal for the Mastercard Foundation, and working with the staff to ensure that PAS's many regular programs and partnerships—including AfriSem, the Wednesday seminar, ISITA, undergraduate courses, and visiting scholars—continue to run smoothly.

## Reflections on Northwestern YALI

*Tokiso Nthebe, from the mountain kingdom of Lesotho, was one of the Mandela Washington Fellows hosted by Northwestern this summer. Hoping to spare others from making the same financial mistakes he made in young adulthood, he offers education and resources on financial literacy and retirement planning. What follows are his personal reflections about his YALI experience.*

After five weeks of hard work and countless team-building exercises, paradigm-shifting discussions, and network-building activities, we celebrate the postinstitute graduation ceremony of the 2019 Mandela Washington Fellowship program at Northwestern. I struggle to put this experience into words, but the purpose of this message is to share such experiences. The fellowship program at Northwestern was inspiring, fast-paced, emotional, eye-opening, and experiential all in one.

We arrived at Northwestern on June 19. How proud we all were: 25 of Africa's best young leaders, determined to showcase our countries as best as we could, from Lesotho, South Africa, Togo, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Niger, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Burundi, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Sudan, and Nigeria. There was a feeling of unity as we introduced ourselves but also an undertone of competition; after all, YALI is very competitive.

Fast-forward five weeks, after many leadership sessions, site visits, community dinners, and late nights—we have come full circle. We had incredible professors sharing business techniques and frameworks that we can apply immediately to our respective businesses. We had leadership sessions that challenged us to think differently and be intentional about leadership service. We've gone through all the phases of team development: forming, storming, norming, and performing. For a group as competitive as ours, we managed to complete many of our projects by working together as a team and delivering exceptional results. And here we are today: proud, young, and Kellogg certified.



*Tokiso Nthebe (left), holding his certificate of completion, and recent Kellogg MBA and YALI 2019 academic coordinator Sahar Jamal*

I reflect on this journey because I've seen the passion each fellow has for Africa, the phenomenal work each is doing, and how committed and determined each is to solving African problems—financial illiteracy, financial exclusion, education, health, youth unemployment, and access to technology among them. Some fellows are working relentlessly to provide opportunities for youth with the goal of making them employable. Others are manufacturing products to help youth gain self-confidence or helping small businesses gain access to financial products.

I am inspired and energized because I see that it is possible to build an Africa capable of delivering exceptional results. I see that it is possible to build a collaborative team where young people can contribute meaningfully to the continent's economy. I am excited about continuing to work with all the fellows to make a difference and to make our continent great.

As we head to Washington, DC, I leave Northwestern feeling empowered, inspired, and connected to a network of professors, coaches, and fellows who will contribute to building a financially literate and inclusive continent. Africa is alive with possibilities; we just need to take the leap of faith and act.

## AfriSem conference addresses decolonizing African studies

by Bright Gyamfi

AfriSem, the Program of African Studies' graduate student seminar, held its annual conference in early April with the theme "African Studies Now: Decolonizing the Field." Recent movements such as #RhodesMustFall have claimed that approaches to organizing and disseminating knowledge about Africa have changed little since the inception of African studies as a field of intellectual inquiry. Scholarship about Africa underpins specific cultural viewpoints and political interests, often failing to consider knowledge production that emanates from the continent outside academia's privileged spaces.

The keynote speaker was Robtel Neajai Pailey, whose 2016 *African Arguments* article "Where is the 'African' in African Studies?" discusses the state of African studies today and the importance of decolonizing the field. Her conference address, "You Can't Decolonize African Studies without Decolonizing Africa," further explored ideas from that article; the speech was livestreamed by the Herskovits Library. An activist scholar from Liberia, Pailey earned her DPhil at Oxford University and is currently a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at Oxford's department of international development, where she researches African sociopolitical issues connected with migration, citizenship, conflict, postwar recovery, and governance.

With AfriSem students serving as panel chairs and volunteers, 30 presenters engaged in a multidisciplinary dialogue reevaluating the origins and contentions of African studies and conceptualizing the study of Africa. The University of Wisconsin–Madison contingent of nine participants was the largest; others came from the University of Maryland, University of Louisville, and Harvard, Yale, Georgetown, Purdue, Ohio State, Michigan Technological, and Pepperdine Universities. Seven three-member panels discussed their respective themes—language and literature; imagining Africa; decolonizing teaching; gender and sexuality; identity and globalization; memory and social representation; and African Studies and identity.

The conference received support from the Program of African Studies, the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, the Chabraja Center for Historical Studies, the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa, the Program of International Studies, and the Departments of Anthropology and of French and Italian. My fellow AfriSem coordinators, Lamin Keita and Esther Ginestet, were instrumental in making the conference a great success.

*Bright Gyamfi, a history graduate student, served as AfriSem conference coordinator.*



## PAS and ISITA summer 2019 visiting scholars



**Richard Banégas**, professor of political science at Sciences Po, spent the month of June as a visiting scholar at PAS. His current projects explore issues of citizenship, violence, and youth mobilization in Côte d'Ivoire and other parts of West Africa. Previous publications explored democratization processes in Benin and Uganda. He has served as the head of the African studies master's program

at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne for a decade and a half and codirects the Joint African Studies Program with Columbia University. Director of Karthala Publishers' *Les Afriques* book series, Banégas is a member of London's International African Institute, a member of the editorial board of the journal *Politique africaine*, and president of the Association des chercheurs de Politique africaine. In addition, he is the permanent consultant on Africa for the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs' policy planning unit.



**Abdulbasit Kassim** is a PhD candidate in religion at Rice University. His research focuses on the intellectual history of Islam in Africa, African and African diaspora religions, Islam and race in America, gender and sexuality in Muslim societies, and religion in international relations. He earned an MA in politics and international relations at Keele University (2013) and a BSc in international studies at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

(2011). His first book, *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State* (2018), coedited with Michael Nwankpa, offers an unprecedented collection of primary source texts, audiovisuals, and nashīds (martial hymns)—translated into English from Hausa, Arabic, and Kanuri—tracing the history and evolution of the Boko Haram movement. Kassim has published articles in the *Journal of Politics, Religion, and Ideology* and *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*. While at ISITA and PAS this summer, Kassim used the Herskovits Library's collection of Arabic/Ajami manuscripts to conduct research for his dissertation, "Old and New Debates on Islamic Reform and Jihad in Islamic Africa." Members of the PAS community will recall his fascinating talk on campus last November about *The Boko Haram Reader*.

### PAS graduate student awards 2018–19

#### Language awards

Bright Gyamfi  
Andrew Kim  
Dela Kuma  
Desmond O'Shaughnessy  
Patrick Mbullo Owuor  
Moussa Seck  
Mariam Taher

#### Panofsky travel awards

Chernoh Bah  
Nora Gavin-Smyth  
Esther Ginestet  
Bright Gyamfi  
Raja Ben Hammed  
Patrick Mbullo Owuor  
Moussa Seck  
Mariam Taher

#### Richard Lobban and Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban Anthropology Research Award

Patrick Mbullo Owuor

## The sociology and economics of khat

by Florence Nthiira Mugambi

Continuing to highlight the variety of its resources, the Herskovits Library devoted its spring quarter exhibit to khat, a controversial plant native to parts of Africa. Khat (*Catha edulis*) is a wild evergreen shrub that grows best at altitudes of 5,000 to 8,000 feet and can grow as high as 80 feet in equatorial climates. About 20 million people in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian peninsula chew its fresh, young leaves for their psychostimulant effect. Using khat is deeply ingrained in the two regions' society and culture, largely as a social activity, and is usually accompanied by consumption of a beverage, since users experience dryness of the mouth. The plant is known by various local names: *qat* or *chat* (Ethiopia), *miraa* (Kenya), and flower of paradise. The dried leaves are known as Abyssinian tea, African tea, Arabian tea, or Bushman tea.

Khat is controversial because of its use in a wide variety of social rituals, its pharmacology and effects, and its value as a crop for local farmers and national economies. In 2005, for example, khat was estimated to surpass coffee as Ethiopia's major export commodity. In 2018 Kenya classified *miraa* as a cash crop, and its treasury allocated one billion Kenya shillings to revive that agricultural sector. In Yemen, *qat* is the nation's biggest crop and is chewed by a majority of the population—up to 90 percent of men, up to 70 percent of women, and 15 to 20 percent of children under 12.



According to one of many Somalian accounts of khat's origin, it was introduced by religious sheikhs spreading Islamic teachings. The sheikhs believed that khat helped them stay awake for long recitals of the Qur'an and that it possessed medicinal qualities, including the treatment of malaria, coughs, and stomach pain. In the 1960s, as khat consumption spread and its negative effects became more evident, a campaign was started to ban it in Somalia. According to the nation's minister of information and national guidance, "khat threatened to endanger the basic health, culture, religion, and social well-being of the people."

Consequently, on March 19, 1983, Somalia banned the importation, sale, and cultivation of khat with a law that mandated the destruction of existing plants within two years. The ban ended in 1989, ushering in an era of widespread use of the substance. Khat is credited with a role in

early-1990s peace negotiations, as various state and nonstate actors sought control over the lucrative khat trade. Today, Somalia is one of the major destinations of khat from Ethiopia and Kenya.

To most Yemenis, *qat* represents social interaction, communal consumption, commitment and conformity to ephemeral groups, giving gifts (whether shared in a group or offered to individuals), and conspicuous consumption. Up to a third of all agriculture in Yemen is dedicated to khat, embraced by farmers because it is the only profitable crop. The cheapest bag of khat costs about \$5, a monetary amount that can feed a family for a whole day. Yemen's agricultural ministry estimates that the population spends \$12 billion a year on khat, yet millions of people face famine.

Khat is not widely used outside the regions of its tradition and culture, but refugees from the Horn of Africa have spread the khat-chewing custom to their

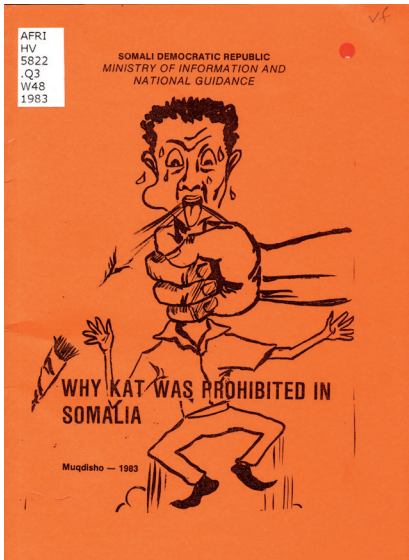


*Catha edulis* (b), plate 98 from Luigi Balugani's Drawings of African Plants: From the Collection Made by James Bruce of Kinnaird on His Travels to Discover the Nile, 1767–1773. Paul Hulton, F. Nigel Hepper, and Ib Friis. New Haven: Yale Center for British Arts, 1991.



## If you build it, they will come. And they did.

by Esmeralda Kale



host nations. The growing prominence of khat has prompted many governments to consider banning its use and trade. In 1964 the World Health Organization decided that khat use needed further study, even though it was confined to a few countries and possibly not an issue of international regulation. But in 1980, the WHO classified khat as a drug of abuse that can produce mild to moderate psychological dependence.

Khat's most active ingredients are cathinone, cathine, and norephedrine; when the leaves are chewed, cathine and cathinone are extracted. But because chewing limits those substances' effects, the actual results of that consumption method are unclear. Currently, khat is on lists of banned or controlled substances in several countries, including the United Kingdom, the United States, the Netherlands, Jordan, and Turkey. It is legal in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Yemen.

*Florence Nthiira Mugambi is the Herskovits Library's African studies librarian.*

In a series of rewarding discussions between the Herskovits Library and student leaders over the last few years, the stars seem to have aligned. Our goal of increasing awareness of the Herskovits among African students, irrespective of their course of study, is apparently being realized. As we build a community and provide a space within the Herskovits for all Africans, our own little version of the fictional Wakanda (as in the movie *Black Panther*) continues to take shape.

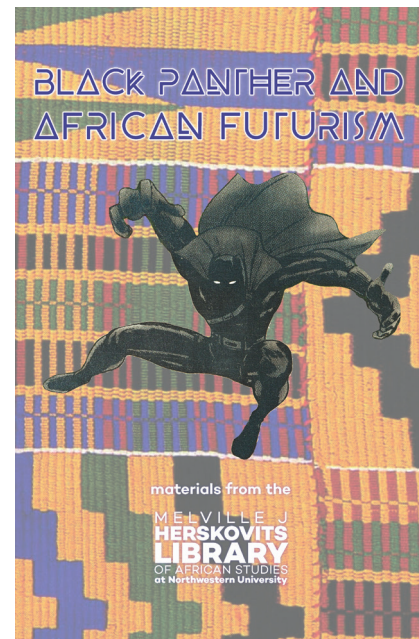
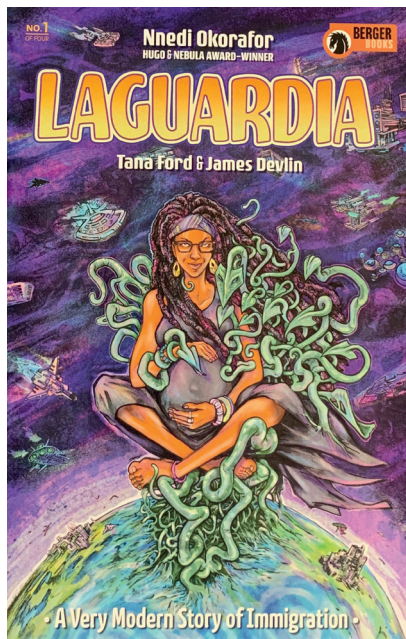
We kicked off the quarter with a March networking event bringing together students from the African Students Association, the Alliance of African Scholars, AfriSem, and the Kellogg School of Management's Africa Business Club. Our objective was to provide newcomers with a welcoming space, give them a glimpse of the collection, and show how we can support them. We encouraged them to sign up for the Listserv we created for all students interested in anything to do with Africa. Immediately recognizing the value and benefits of being able to communicate with one another, their leaders submitted membership information. Wakanda indeed!

African business students contacted us in March for assistance in highlighting Africa Week at the Global Hub. We lent puzzles, maps, games, and other items for their exhibit. An AfriSem graduate student had mentioned the Herskovits Library to the Black Graduate Student Association, which invited us to participate as exhibitors in their spring conference on Afrofuturism. We seized the opportunity to display our graphic novels, comics, and material culture related to *Black Panther* and Wakanda.

*Continued on page 9*

## Wakanda comes to the Herskovits

by Gene Kannenberg Jr.



(Left to right) From *Shuri* #1, Nnedi Okorafor (writer) and Leonardo Romero (illustrator); Cover of *LaGuardia* #1, Nnedi Okorafor (writer) and Tana Ford with James Devlin (art); Herskovits Library exhibit poster for Black Graduate Student Association conference, April 13, 2019

With the phenomenal success of director Ryan Coogler’s 2018 film *Black Panther*, public interest in all things Africa reached a new intensity. The Herskovits Library began collecting items of material culture related to the character—books, T-shirts, coffee mugs, and even sculpture. We now have a good-sized collection that augments our already strong holdings in comics from and about Africa (highlighted in our 2015 exhibit *African Cartoon Art: Voices and Visions*).

One new comic book we have subscribed to is *Shuri*, written by World Fantasy, Hugo, and Nebula Award-winning Naijamerican author Nnedi Okorafor, a Chicago native whose parents came from Nigeria. The character Shuri is the STEM-embodiment genius sister of T’Challa, the Black Panther.

Okorafor and artist Leonardo Romero begin with a story rooted in both technology and Shuri’s relationship with the Elephant’s Foot, a group of women advisers to the country’s ruling council who meet beneath a giant baobab tree. While definitely a superhero series, *Shuri* is nevertheless a piece with Okorafor’s science fiction and fantasy novels in telling stories with strong, direct ties to African cultures.

Another of Okorafor’s comics is *LaGuardia*, a four-issue series that takes place in a future when Lagos welcomes Earth’s first visitors from other planets. With artists Tana Ford and James Devlin, she crafts a tale centered around immigration, prejudice, and neo-Biafranism. The story’s title refers, of course, to New York’s LaGuardia Airport, where Okorafor herself has

experienced difficulties with customs and immigration officials upon returning from Nigeria and other African countries. In this story, *LaGuardia* is one of only a handful of terrestrial airport immigration sites with interplanetary travel services, but those services do not come without prejudice and sometimes hatred.

We’ve also been acquiring titles from YouNeek Studios, a company founded by Roye Okupe, who was born in Lagos but now lives in the United States. Featuring African superheroes and historical fantasy, YouNeek’s comic books and animation take as their starting points the histories and tales of regions across western Africa. For example, each chapter of the historical fantasy graphic novel *Malika: Warrior Queen*, volume 1, includes a



map of the region where its story is set, focusing on the area's story significance as well as presenting historical information about that region in the 15th century.

We've already begun to use the Black Panther materials, as well as other Afrofuturist items in our collections, for outreach. At this year's Northwestern Black Graduate Student Association conference, "Afrofuturism: Black to the Future," the Herskovits Library's Florence Mugambi and I created a large display, "Black Panther and African Futurism," that attracted much attention and conversation. In addition, groups of visiting school-children have been drawn to these materials, and we can use that interest to draw them further into true African cultures: "What do you like most about Wakanda? History? Fashion? Politics? Spirituality? Science? Let us show you some of the real African materials that inspired the ideas in the comics books and films."

This collection is part of the growing Herskovits focus on material culture, along with our soon-to-be-online Africa Embracing Obama collection. Watch for announcements about that online repository as well as more events featuring our Afrofuturism materials. (Note: Some of the single-issue comic books we have purchased from Marvel Comics include digital editions. To read these digital comics, log into [comicstore.marvel.com/my-books/lists](http://comicstore.marvel.com/my-books/lists) with username `africana@northwestern.edu` and password `Llibrary!`)

*Gene Kannenberg Jr. is a research and media assistant at the Herskovits Library.*

## If you build it *(continued from page 7)*

We continue to support our graduate students with our increasing participation in the AfriSem conference—facilitating meetings with graduate students from other institutions and showcasing parts of the collection that are of interest. We provided reference consultations to this year's participants and hosted conference dinners within the library. Our Listserv, created in March, allowed students outside the AfriSem cluster to participate, satisfying our goal of bringing African students together.

In mid-April the Alliance of African Scholars requested space within the Herskovits Library to hold a meeting, dinner, and film screening to commemorate the Rwandan genocide. To place the genocide in context, we developed an exhibit of materials documenting its underlying causes and tragic aftermath. Late April saw us working with the African Students Association to decorate a space in Norris Center for the African Ball. Our team continues to be amazed by the different ways we can serve the various campus communities with our collection's materials.

Our next event was our first-ever African Game Night. It allowed our students to blow off steam and in some cases to exhibit their competitiveness. The African puzzle did not disappoint; it is always interesting to see if students know the location of each country on the African continent. Old favorites such as mancala, ludo, and Monopoly (with game boards from Nigeria, South Africa, and Ghana) joined new releases such as *How Nigerian Are You?* and *You Know You Are African When*.

We closed the quarter by participating in the Evanston Literary Festival. Even though the event lies outside the Northwestern student community, I include it because of the large percentage of student participants. In addition to displaying artists' books, we invited MFA graduate student and playwright Nikkita Duke to present a reading of one of her works. She decided on her new play *Cracked* and enlisted students to play the characters. This led to a lively, laugh-filled evening of entertainment, with many African business students participating. The play reading attracted new faces: colleagues of Duke in the MFA program, friends of the student readers, and those interested in hearing a play set in Nigeria.

None of this would have been possible without a great deal of invaluable support from colleagues at the Program of African Studies, student leaders, the library administration, and all supporters and friends of the Herskovits Library. We will continue to build our own little Wakanda and hope they will continue to come.

*Esmeralda Kale is the George and Mary LeCron Foster Curator of the Herskovits Library.*

## ISITA initiative supports early-career scholars

by Rebecca Shereikis

On an afternoon in early May, four recent PhDs in the field of Islam and Africa listened as Trevor Perri, acquisitions editor at Northwestern University Press, helped demystify the process of transforming a dissertation into a book and getting it published. “Publishers need to do more to make this process clearer and more transparent,” observed Perri, whose talk covered how and when to approach publishers, what to include in a proposal, the peer review process, and more.

The session was part of the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa’s first Book Development Workshop for Early Career Scholars of Islam in Africa, designed to support recent PhDs in preparing their book manuscripts for publication. Three participants were selected through international competition: Chembea Suleiman (Bomet University College in Kenya), Sumayya Ahmed (University College London in Qatar), and Jeremy Dell (Dartmouth College). They were joined for some of the sessions by Buffett Institute postdoctoral fellow Wendell Marsh.

On the workshop’s second day, established scholars in the field from Northwestern and other institutions offered the authors critical analysis, advice, and encouragement based on close readings of the manuscripts. Carl Petry (history) and Elke Stockreiter (American University) commented on Suleiman’s “Competing and Conflicting Power Dynamics in Waqfs in Kenya, 1900–2010.” Chouki El Hamel (Arizona State University) and Bruce Hall (University of California, Berkeley) discussed Ahmed’s “To the Nation Belong the Archives: The Search for Private Heritage Collections in Morocco.” Stockreiter and Sean Hanretta (history) offered feedback on Dell’s “Saving Tradition: Archiving Islam in the Western Sahel.” Robert Launay (anthropology) and Wendell Marsh also contributed to the discussion.



According to ISITA director Zekeria Ahmed Salem (political science), the application process gave ISITA a chance to take stock of current research in the field of Islam in Africa. “We were fortunate to have these three talented emerging scholars, along with more senior scholars, for a day of very meaningful discussion,” said Salem. “My hope is that with this event, ISITA can impact the kind of research being produced and help the field develop even further.”

For Suleiman, participating in the workshop accorded him the opportunity to “interact and hear from the best in my area of specialization. It is one thing to read their work and another to be with them and hear their thoughts on a developing work like mine. The response I got from them is immense and very useful in realizing the publication. The session opened the door to be closer to them for further guidance on the project.”

*Rebecca Shereikis is associate director of ISITA.*

# Sudan historian Rex Seán O’Fahey dead at 76

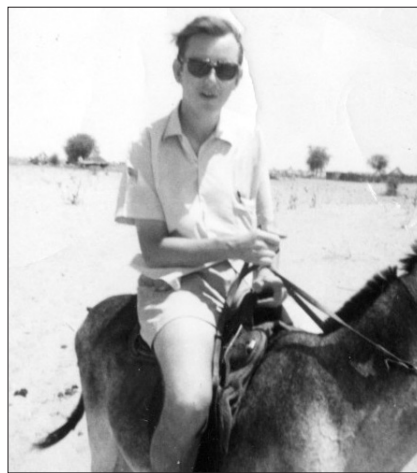
## In memoriam

by Rebecca Shereikis

ISITA cofounder Rex Seán O’Fahey (1943–2019), eminent historian of the Sudan, died April 19 in Oslo. O’Fahey was professor emeritus of history at Norway’s University of Bergen.

During his childhood, O’Fahey’s Irish-British parents worked in Mombasa, Kenya, and his time there sowed the seeds for a lifelong interest in Africa and Islam. In 1967 he earned a BA in African history at the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). “Those of us who came into African history in this period did so with a very activist agenda,” O’Fahey recalled in a 2016 *Islamic Africa* interview with Anne K. Bang. “It had a clear anticolonial tone, but how you interpreted this depended upon your own inclinations. For me, it was to give Africa the dignity of having a history.”

PhD studies at SOAS followed, taking O’Fahey to Darfur for the first time in 1969. Initially he went into the field armed with the methods of Jan Vansina, expecting to collect oral traditions. Instead he found a treasure trove of written documents, mostly land cases that came before the Native Administration Court. Although written in Arabic, they incorporated words from Fur and other local languages. “I did not have a camera then,” he recalled, “so we took the documents to the local portrait photographer, who simply pinned them to the wall and started shooting away.” This was the



Rex Seán O’Fahey in Darfur (1970s photo)

first of his many documentation projects. O’Fahey received his PhD from SOAS in 1973 with a thesis on the history of Darfur’s Keira Sultanate.

Arriving at the University of Bergen in 1971 as its first research fellow in non-European history, O’Fahey spent the rest of his career there, becoming a professor in 1985. He was central to the university’s transformation into a vital hub for studies of Sudan, the Middle East, and Sufism.

He met John O. Hunwick in 1964, when SOAS sent O’Fahey to Nigeria’s University of Ibadan on an exchange program. Hunwick was a lecturer in Arabic at the university and was starting a documentation center for Arabic manuscripts. The two were kindred spirits; between dancing at Ibadan’s nightclubs, they talked about the need to document written sources for African history.

After Hunwick joined Northwestern’s faculty in 1981, O’Fahey visited frequently to work with him. Their collaboration eventually yielded Brill’s multivolume *Arabic Literature of Africa* reference series (of which O’Fahey edited two volumes on eastern Africa) and the journal *Sudanic Africa* (now *Islamic Africa*).

Ultimately, the partnership culminated in the creation of ISITA—the first research institute to focus uniquely on Islamic intellectual traditions in Africa. With Hunwick, O’Fahey cowrote the proposal to the Ford Foundation that established ISITA at Northwestern in 2001, and he served as ISITA’s executive director in the crucial early years. During frequent residencies at Northwestern, where he held an adjunct professorship, O’Fahey helped build ISITA’s foundations—by organizing conferences, hosting visitors, and, especially, mentoring early-career scholars from Africa who participated in ISITA’s fellowship programs.

Remembrances from former students and colleagues throughout the world can be found at [isita.buffett.northwestern.edu/about/in-memorial-r-s-ofahey.html](https://isita.buffett.northwestern.edu/about/in-memorial-r-s-ofahey.html). They describe a man of remarkable wit, warmth, and generosity—a great storyteller with “boundless and genuine intellectual curiosity.” He will be sorely missed.



## A remembrance

by Rüdiger Seesemann

The world of Sudan studies mourns the passing of one of its icons, Professor Rex Seán O’Fahey, in Oslo, Norway, on April 9, 2019. He held a BA from the School of Oriental and African Studies and a PhD from the same institution. Although based in Bergen (where he held a professorship in history) for almost four decades, Seán O’Fahey was a cosmopolitan who spent many years in Kenya, Sudan, and the United States dedicated to his studies, teaching, and research. Widely known for his pioneering work on the history of Darfur, he also took a keen interest in the Arabic literary production of Sudan and the writings of the Muslim peoples of East Africa and the Horn. His numerous publications in these fields (see list at right) will remain a prime reference for future scholarship.

I feel compelled to include a personal note here. I still vividly recall my first encounter with Professor O’Fahey back in 1994, when I, a freshly baked PhD holder, visited the University of Bergen due to my interest in doing research in Darfur. Prepared for a sobering encounter with a stern academic, I was surprised to find a warm and welcoming person who took me on a tour of Bergen’s nightlife. The following day, he introduced me to his vast collection of precious materials gathered over the course of 30 years of research in Sudan and, at the time, kept in a large archive room at the history department. After explaining the order in which the collection was organized, he simply handed over the key

to me and said, “Feel free to enter any time and help yourself!”

This is just one example of how Seán O’Fahey generously shared his time, resources, and knowledge with others who were eager to study what he was passionate about: the history of Sudan, especially Darfur, but also Arabic literature of eastern Africa and 19th-century Sufism. His research acquaintances—such as the Sudanese academic and Sufi leader Hasan al-Fatih Qariballah, the polymath Awn al-Sharif Qasim, the charismatic Shaykh Ibrahim Sidi from El Fasher, or Muhammad Ibrahim Abu Salim, the longtime director of the National Records Office in

Khartoum—not only shared his passions but also became personal friends. He knew his material, and he also knew what he was talking about out of first-hand encounters and experience.

His generosity notwithstanding, Professor O’Fahey could also come across as terse when he thought that someone failed to attain what he considered the proper research standard. I remember his being present when I gave a lecture in front of a large audience on the development of Islamic educational institutions in coastal Kenya in the 20th century. Time constraints forced me to treat the topic in a rather cursory manner, and after the talk was

### Major publications by Rex Seán O’Fahey

*Kingdoms of the Sudan*. London: Methuen & Co. (with Jay Spaulding), 1974.

*State and Society in Dar Fur*. London: Hurst, 1980.

*Land in Dar Fur: Charters and Related Documents from the Dar Fur Sultanate*. London: Cambridge University Press (with Muhammad Ibrahim Abu Salim), 1983.

*Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition*. London: Hurst, 1990.

*The Writings of Eastern Sudanic Africa*, compiled by R. S. O’Fahey et al. (Vol. 1 of *Arabic Literature of Africa*, ed. John O. Hunwick and R. S. O’Fahey). Leiden: Brill, 1993.

*The Exoteric Ahmad ibn Idris: A Sufi’s Critique of the Madhahib and the Wahhabis*. Leiden: Brill (with Bernd Radtke, John O’Kane, and Knut S. Vikør), 2000.

*The Writings of the Muslim Peoples of Northeastern Africa*, compiled by R. S. O’Fahey et al. (Vol. 3, fasc. A, of *Arabic Literature of Africa*, ed. John O. Hunwick and R. S. O’Fahey). Leiden: Brill, 2003.

*The Darfur Sultanate*. London: Hurst, 2009.

*Darfur and the British: A Sourcebook*. London: Hurst, 2016.

over he raised his hand and said, “I am appalled to hear a paper on Islamic education in Kenya where the name of Alamin Mazrui is not mentioned.” His own interventions were usually based on mastery of the material and the setting; therefore, he expected others to attain a similar level of academic scrutiny and love for details.

O’Fahey’s many research projects, as well as those of his students (who became eminent academics in their own right, such as Anders Bjørkelo, Ali Salih Karrar, Knut Vikør, Albrecht Hofheinz, Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk, and Anne Bang), mirror this perfectionist attitude. His work on Ahmad ibn Idris helped revise the earlier concept of “Neo-Sufism”; his studies of Sudanese history are priceless; his bibliographical reference works constitute unique scholarly resources.

The latter developed as an extension of the work he started at the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies in Bergen in the 1980s with Northwestern’s John Hunwick. In 1985 they established the *Bulletin of Arabic Literature in Africa*, which they edited, along with Hunwick’s earlier *Fontes Historiae Africanae*, both important publishing venues for bibliographical research and works on Arabic sources. The *Fontes* later evolved into *Sudanic Africa: A Journal of Historical Sources* (1990–2005), where Knut Vikør eventually took over as the main editor. Building on this foundation, O’Fahey and Hunwick subsequently embarked on the monumental task of compiling the equivalent of Carl Brockelmann’s *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* for the Arabic literary production in sub-Saharan Africa that appeared in E. J. Brill’s *Arabic Literature in Africa* series.

Later, O’Fahey teamed up once again with Hunwick to set up Northwestern University’s Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA), the first of its kind in North America, which was instrumental in changing the perception of Islam in Africa.

The eruption of the Darfur civil war in 2003 came as a shock, though not as a surprise to Professor O’Fahey. Darfur, this remote and widely ignored area, suddenly moved into the limelight of international news headlines. The issues that lay at the root of the civil war—land, race, ethnicity, and social and political organization, as well as the legacies of domination (whether by British colonialism or the modern Sudanese nation-state)—were all topics O’Fahey had studied in his earlier work. Accordingly, his historical studies gained unexpected relevance for the understanding of the protracted conflict, and his expertise was very much sought after in international diplomacy.

For those who knew Professor O’Fahey, there can be no doubt that he was one of a kind. For those who did not, his publications and his vast collection of historical materials—a catalogue of which will soon become available ([www.uib.no/en/rg/smi/90567/r-sean-ofahey-collection](http://www.uib.no/en/rg/smi/90567/r-sean-ofahey-collection))—will remain a veritable treasure for decades to come.

*Rüdiger Seesemann is chair of Islamic studies at the University of Bayreuth. This remembrance was originally published in Research Africa Reviews, vol. 3, no. 1, April 2019. Reprinted with permission of the editor and author.*

## ISITA and Harvard cosponsor conference

ISITA director Zekeria Ahmed Salem delivered the keynote address at the September 19–21 conference “Africa, Globalization, and the Muslim Worlds” at Harvard Divinity School. Organized by the school’s Alwaleed Professorship of Contemporary Islamic Religion and Society in collaboration with ISITA, the conference was a follow-up to the “Islam in Global Africa” conference ISITA organized at Northwestern in April 2018. Salem’s address, “Global *Shinqit*: Mauritanian Islamic Scholars and the Remaking of Religious Authority in the Muslim World,” was followed by panels addressing the long presence of African Muslims in the Americas, dimensions of transnational Islam, and emerging paradigms in the study of Islam in Africa.

The conference also featured the participation of the Baraka Boys—a group of Muslim musical artists based in the UK—who gave a performance and participated in a roundtable discussion about their experiences asserting identity and expressing spirituality as young Muslims in the West.

## Community news

In April, **Chris Abani** (English) joined over 1,450 poets, writers, and artists from 168 countries in signing an open letter urging world politicians to promote a peaceful world without walls and ensure the core values of humanity: peace, dignity, justice, and respect for individual and collective rights in all countries.

**Chernoh Bah** (history graduate student) was interviewed on San Francisco radio station KPFA's *UpFront* about the Congo's ongoing Ebola outbreak. It can be accessed at [kpfa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/0.48-Chernoh-M.-Bah-on-Ebola-outbreaks.mp3](http://kpfa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/0.48-Chernoh-M.-Bah-on-Ebola-outbreaks.mp3).

Alumnus **Marco Boccese** ('18) wrote the article "Gbagbo's Lost Bet: When Inviting External Judicial Scrutiny Backfires," published in the *International Journal of Human Rights* (DOI.org/10.1080/13642987.2019.1624537).

**Colin Bos** (history graduate student) has received both a Council on Library and Information Resources–Mellon Fellowship and a Social Science Research Council International Dissertation Research Fellowship to support research on his dissertation topic, "'The Science of Our Fathers': Ifá Divination, Textuality, and Epistemic Change in Southwestern Nigeria, 1870–1950."

The Lagos-based artist collective Àkète Art Foundation, founded in 2017, has appointed art history graduate student **Antawan I. Byrd** to the curatorial team for the second edition

of the Lagos Biennial, *How to Build a Lagoon with Just a Bottle of Wine*. The exhibition will explore the current composition of the city's built environment. Byrd is also an assistant curator of photography at the Art Institute of Chicago and was cocurator of *Kader Attia: Reflecting Memory* (2017) at Northwestern's Block Museum of Art.

**Huey Copeland** (art history) received the 2019 David C. Driskell Prize from Atlanta's High Museum of Art in recognition of his contribution to contemporary African American art history.

**Mitch Edwards** (history graduate student) was invited and funded to participate in the International Committee of the Red Cross's Global Humanitarianism Research Academy this summer in Mainz, Germany, and Geneva, Switzerland.

**Bright Gyamfi** (history graduate student) received summer funding from the Social Science Research Council Dissertation Proposal Development Program.

Professor emerita **Karen Tranberg Hansen** (anthropology) wrote the chapter "Chiluba's Trunks: Consumption, Excess, and the Body Politic in Zambia," published in *Conspicuous Consumption in Africa*, edited by Deborah Posel and Ilana van Wyk (Wits University Press).

Alumnus **Buddhika Jayamaha** ('18) has been appointed assistant professor at the US Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

**Christa Charbonneau Kuntzelman** (political science graduate student) presented the paper "Examining Variation in Tactics and Targets of Refugee Political Behavior in Uganda" in March at the Oxford Refugee Studies Centre's Conference on Democratizing Displacement.

**Jacob Henry Leveton** (art history graduate student) presented the paper "Otobong Nkanga: Cartographies of Ecological Critique?" in June at the Fourth Lagos Studies Association Conference in Lagos, Nigeria.

Alumnus **Jahara Matisek** ('18) wrote the article "An Effective Senegalese Military Enclave: The Armée-Nation 'Rolls On,'" published in the online journal *African Security* (DOI: 10.1080/19392206.2019.1593004).

**Peter Mwangi** (Swahili) presented papers in April on aspects of less commonly taught languages at the Contemporary and International Education Society annual conference in San Francisco and at the annual conference of the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages and African Language Teachers Association in Atlanta. In addition, he served as keynote speaker at a Glenview meeting of the Illinois chapter of Kenyan Women in the US, gave a presentation on the role of Swahili in preserving the culture of East Africans living in the diaspora, and participated in the 2019 STARTALK/NHLRC Teacher Workshop at UCLA in June.

Alumna **Sally Nuamah** ('16) has been named a 2019 Andrew Carnegie fellow



for her study “How the Punishment of Black Women and Girls Affects Our Democracy.” For details on her new book, see page 18.

**Will Reno** (political science) presented the papers “State Collapse and the Challenge of Ending War in Africa” at Japan’s University of Hiroshima and “Armies without States: The Politics of Security Force Assistance in the Sahel” at the International Relations–Political Science Research Colloquium Series at the Graduate Institute Geneva.

**Jeff Rice** (political science) authored the *Chicago Tribune* opinion piece “I Damaged the ROTC Offices at Northwestern. Here’s How—and Why—I Atone” ([www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-perspec-rotc-military-service-draft-20190614-story.html](http://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-perspec-rotc-military-service-draft-20190614-story.html)).

**Zekeria Ahmed Salem** (ISITA and political science) spoke on “How to Get Away with Blasphemy: The Politics of Religious Offense in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania” at the University of Michigan in April and “Saharan Imaginations” via Skype for Williams College. He was appointed to the executive and advisory board of the Center for Maghrib Studies, a new interdisciplinary research program at Arizona State University. His recent articles include “Hands Off My Nationality! Biometric Enrollment and Controversies over Identification in Mauritania” (in French) in *Politique Africaine*, no. 152 (2018): 77–99; “What Is the Concept of Radicalization Good For?” ([www.cairn-int.info/abstract-E\\_POLAF\\_149\\_0005--what-is-the-concept-of-radicalization.htm](http://www.cairn-int.info/abstract-E_POLAF_149_0005--what-is-the-concept-of-radicalization.htm)),

Send your news updates to [laray.denzer@northwestern.edu](mailto:laray.denzer@northwestern.edu) so that PAS can share word with the Africanist community at Northwestern and beyond.

coauthored with Roland Marchal; and a contribution to the catalog *Sahara, Mondes connectés*, edited by Charles Gremont, Titouan Lamazou, and Mariann Pourtal-Sourrieu (Paris: Gallimard, 2019).

**David Schoenbrun** (history) spent March at Sciences Po Paris discussing his book manuscript on ethnogenesis in East Africa over the past millennium and conducting workshops on the importance of early African history to today’s Africa. In November 2018 his article “Early African Pasts: Sources, Interpretations, and Meanings” was published online in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (DOI:10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.147).

**Noelle Sullivan** (global health studies) has been named a 2019–20 faculty fellow of Northwestern’s Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities. Her research project “Consuming the Hospital: International Voluntourism in Tanzanian Health Facilities” will explore the rhetorics and practices of voluntourism in health facilities, from companies’ advertisements to foreign volunteers and Tanzanians’ interactions in practice.

**Angela Tate** (history graduate student) received a summer grant from the Social Science Research Council Dissertation Proposal Development Program as well as a 2019 Digital Humanities Fellowship Award from

the History Makers and a 2019–20 graduate fellowship from the Field Foundation of Illinois.

Alumna **Rachel Taylor** (’18) has joined the University of Oxford’s history department as a postdoctoral research associate for the Comparing the Copperbelt project, led by Miles Larmer.

**Helen Tilley** (history) wrote the historiographical essay “The History and Historiography of Science,” published online in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (2018), and the article “A Great (Scientific) Divergence: Synergies and Fault Lines in Global Histories of Science,” published in *Isis*, vol.110 (2019): 129–136.

**Jessica Winegar** (anthropology) has been appointed coeditor with Jessica Greenberg of the *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, the journal of the Association for Political and Legal Anthropology. This journal is a critical anthropological outlet for understanding this changing terrain and defining intellectual responses within it.

**Sera Young** (anthropology and Institute for Policy Research) has been named to the fifth class of Andrew Carnegie Fellows. One of 32 fellowship recipients, Young will use her grant to bring attention to what the measurement of water insecurity can teach us about peace, prosperity, health, and policy.

## Student association hosts first African Ball

by Oluwaseyi Adedoyin



On April 26 the African Students Association organized the first-ever African Ball at Northwestern. Held at Norris University Center, the event was inspired by similar events organized by African communities all over the diaspora to celebrate African culture, food, and music. Planning started last fall, when the executive board put this project on Catalyzer, a platform for Northwestern students to raise money from alumni, friends, and family. Other funding came from the Program of African Studies and the Herskovits Library. Crystal L. Martin of the Herskovits Library arranged for the decorations.

Over 100 guests from Northwestern and beyond attended. Everyone came dressed to impress and well prepared to have fun. It was truly a night filled with stunning outfits, great food, unrivaled dance moves, and music.

*Oluwaseyi Adedoyin is a chemical engineering major from Nigeria.*

## Africanist students present papers at migration conference

The Department of History's Nicholas D. Chabraja Center for Historical Studies hosted a graduate student conference, "Walls and Bridges: Migration and Its Histories," on April 12. Papers were presented by Northwestern Africanist history graduate students **Miles Reding** ("Decolonization and North African Families in French Social Thought"), **Mitch Edwards** ("Discourses of Displacement: 'Sudanese Refugees' in Late Colonial and Early Postcolonial Uganda, 1955–1967"), and **William FitzSimons** ("'Restless Feet': Migration and Climate Change in Ateker-Speaking East Africa, c. 500 BCE to 1200 CE"). In addition, Emmanuella Amoh of Illinois State University presented the paper "'Garveyism' Redefined: African Americans in Nkrumah's Ghana, 1957–1966." Africanist history faculty Sean Hanretta and Helen Tilley served as commentators.

## Saharan Futures conference

by Danny Postel

In partnership with ISITA, the Middle East and North African Studies Program, and the Block Museum of Art, PAS hosted the conference “Saharan Futures: Migrations, Identities, and Economies” on April 11 and 12. Presented in coordination with the Block exhibition *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange across Medieval Saharan Africa*, the conference convened scholars from multiple disciplines to examine contemporary realities of migration, security, regional and international economic exchange, ideational flows, and identities across the Sahara.

Kicking off the proceedings at the Block Museum, University of Alberta history professor Ann McDougall delivered the keynote lecture, “Shifting Desert Sands: Mobility, Migration, and Memory in Saharan Time and Space,” followed by a reception. A scholar whose work explores precolonial to contemporary Saharan societies in Mali, Mauritania, and southern Morocco, McDougall offered a wide-ranging, big-picture overview, setting the intellectual stage for the second day’s three sessions.

The morning panel, “Migrations, Identities, Belonging, and Borders,” featured Brahim El Guabli (Williams College), a specialist in Arabic, francophone, and Amazigh literatures of the Maghrib and the Middle East; Alice Wilson (University of Sussex), author of *Sovereignty in Exile: A Saharan Liberation Movement Governs* (2016); and Isabella Alexander-Nathani (Emory University), author of *Burning at Europe’s Borders: Migration in the Age of Border Externalization* (forthcoming). They spoke, respectively, on “Remapping the Maghreb: Maghrebographies on the Sahara”; “Resources, Mobility, and Innovation among Sahrawi Refugees”; and “The Burning: The Untold Story of Africa’s Migrant Crisis.”

The afternoon panel, “Economies and Security,” featured Rahmane Idrissa (African Studies Centre, Leiden University), author of *The Politics of Islam in the Sahel: Between Persuasion and Violence* (2017); Hannah Armstrong (International Crisis Group), based in Dakar; and Olivier Walther (University of Florida and University of Southern Denmark). They spoke, respectively, on “‘Sahel’: What’s in a Name?,” “Managing Illicit Economies in Niger,” and “Transnational Insurgencies in the Sahel-Sahara.”



The closing session, “Security in the Sahel: Prospects for Sustainable Peace,” was hosted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and consisted of a panel discussion with Hannah Armstrong and Isabella Alexander-Nathani, joined by John Campbell, Ralph Bunche Senior Fellow for Africa Policy Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. The discussion was moderated by Zekeria Ahmed Salem (political science and ISITA director). A video of that discussion is available at [www.thechicagocouncil.org/event/security-sahel-prospects-sustainable-peace](http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/event/security-sahel-prospects-sustainable-peace).

*Danny Postel is assistant director of the Middle East and North African Studies Program.*

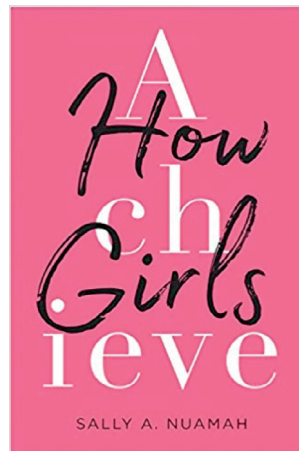


## PAS is prominent at European Conference on African Studies

Five PAS affiliates and alumni took part in the Eighth European Conference on African Studies June 11–14 at the University of Edinburgh’s Centre of African Studies. Organized on behalf of the Research Network of African Studies Centres in Europe, ECAS is Europe’s largest and most international conference focused on African issues. With the theme “Africa: Connections and Disruptions,” the event attracted some 1,500 researchers, policy makers, and leaders and offered a complementary series of networking and capacity-building events for the next generation of African researchers.

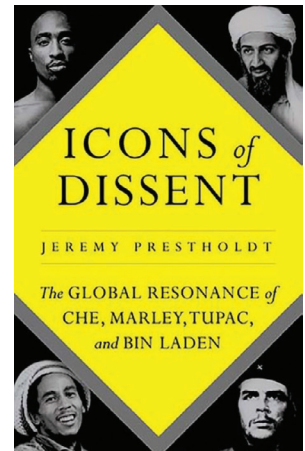
**Will Reno** (political science) presented the paper “Building Armies before States: The Politics of Security Force Assistance in Very Weak States,” which examined the unintended consequences of such assistance. As cochair of the panel “The Past Is Present: African Primary Sources and Cultural Materials in the Digital Age,” **Esmeralda Kale** (Herskovits Library) presented the paper “Africa through the Photographer’s Lens: The Herskovits Library’s Winterton and Duckworth Photograph Collections,” discussing the modalities of access, publication, and instructional use of 19th- and 20th-century African photographs. Graduate student **Susanna Sacks** (English) gave the paper “Decolonizing the Canon: Lingua Franca Spoken-Word Movement and the Transformation of South African Poetry Institutions,” analyzing how the movement created literary spaces for anticolonial poetry production and education. Alumni presented papers as well: “Thirty Years after Resettlement: Perspectives and Standards of Living among People Displaced by the Manantali Dam in Mali” by **Dolores Koenig** (’77) and “Urban Governance and the Humanitarian Apparatus in the Cameroon-Central African Republic Border” by **Jose-Maria Munoz** (’09) and coauthor Martial Massike Loke.

## PAS Bookshelf



### *How Girls Achieve*

Alumna **Sally A. Nuamah** (’16) examines the unaddressed barriers—from sexual violence to unequal resource access—faced by black girls seeking an education. Based on her work in the United States, Ghana, and South Africa, Nuamah urges the establishment of feminist schools that aim to help girls develop confidence and strategic outlooks by providing a better environment for all students. She shows the limitations of education emphasizing individual resilience and provides compelling examples of institutional changes that can dismantle systemic racial and gender barriers, empower girls, and encourage them to become agents of social change.



### *Icons of Dissent: The Global Resonance of Che, Marley, Tupac, and Bin Laden*

Alumnus **Jeremy Prestholdt** (’05) explores the impact of shared global imagery and queries why the embrace of these controversial personalities was worldwide. By highlighting the careers of these iconic figures, Prestholdt offers new insights into transnational symbols and idioms in the evolution of political sentiment since the 1960s.

## Embracing my culture

by Rebecca Kamau



I was born in Kenya and lived there until I moved to the UK at age 10. This transition from the third to the first world was eye opening. Even if my 10-year-old self didn't appreciate it then, the 19-year-old I am today is forever grateful for my upbringing.

Although I had a privileged life in Kenya, which I am aware cannot be said of the vast majority of its population, as I look back at my life then and compare it with that of my peers both in America and in England, it is clear that these privileges are very relative. By this I mean there are so many things that, if I had not lived in Africa, I would take for granted in a developed country.

Now that I have received enormous support and privileges at Northwestern, going home to Kenya recently was truly remarkable for me. Things aren't what I remember. Although I had indeed seen a lot of the chaos, I had been sheltered. As I continue to mature, I have such a different perspective. I have so much gratitude for the education and support that I now receive. I am exposed to facilities that only a few Kenyans could even dream of.

Having said all this, I feel as though the least I could do to give back to my heritage is to properly learn my national language. Being brought up in an international school, I spoke only English in and out of the house. This didn't really bother me when I was younger, but now it frustrates me that I am not fluent in Swahili. Despite knowing a lot of Kenyan slang and culture, I am excited to have the

opportunity to learn Swahili in an educational setting with Professor Peter Mwangi and connect back to Kenya in a thoughtful way.

So far in Swahili class we have covered things that have unlocked elements of my childhood—things I had forgotten but that have floated back to the surface as we discuss their importance to Kenyan culture. These range from popular culture to simple things I would have seen in everyday life that I wouldn't have thought about twice when I was younger. I am really excited to see what the rest of the course holds and to feel confident in Swahili at the end of it. I am also looking forward to embracing elements of my culture further and taking advantage of the African studies program at Northwestern.

*Rebecca Kamau is an undergraduate Swahili student.*

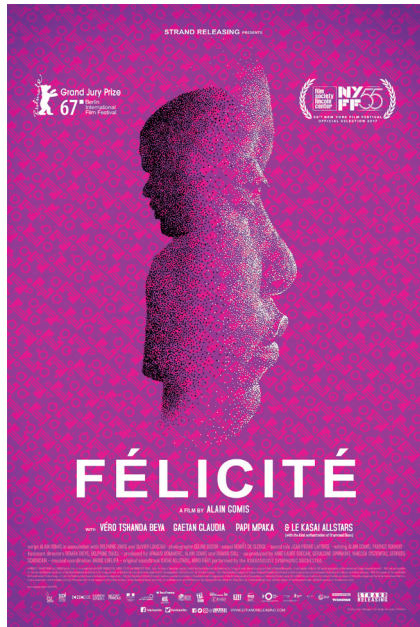
## Fulbright teaching assistant for Swahili

PAS welcomes Seline Okeno as a 2019–20 Fulbright foreign-language teaching assistant for Swahili. Okeno has been an English and literature instructor in Kenyan and Tanzanian schools since earning her BEd degree at Maseno University in 2012. In addition, she has worked with the British Council Nairobi, ensuring that policies for its various examinations are upheld.

Okeno believes in the importance of a passionate teacher for young learners and strives to create respectful spaces where learning is student centered. Her ultimate objective is to remedy her village's ever-growing dropout rates by establishing a resource center where children can access supplemental books, tools, and free tutoring over weekends and school holidays.



## Film director Alain Gomis visits Northwestern



On September 27 the PAS Avant-Garde Africa research cluster cosponsored, with the Block Museum, a visit by Senegalese-French film director Alain Gomis and a screening of his film *Félicité*. A postscreening discussion was led by a panel of Africanist graduate students and faculty: Esther Ginestet (history), Scott Newman (English/comparative literature), David Peyton (political science), Moussa Seck (French and Italian), Gorgui Tall (French and Italian), and ethnomusicologist Stephen Hill (Office of Fellowships).

*Félicité* features Congolese singer Véro Tshanda Beya Mputu in the title role. While working as a nightclub singer in Kinshasa, Félicité learns that her teenage son has been gravely

injured in a motorcycle accident. As she hurries across the city to raise money for her son's operation, Gomis builds tension with a soundtrack featuring performances by Mputu and her ensemble, the Kasai Allstars. At once stirring and dreamlike, *Félicité* illuminates the challenges of everyday life in the contemporary Democratic Republic of the Congo, offering broader insight into the sacrifices demanded of mothers not only in Kinshasa but throughout Africa. *Félicité's* journey reminds us of the struggles and contradictions faced by mothers in such novels as Ousmane Sembène's *God's Bits of Wood* and Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*.

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