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CONTENTS

Editorial

- African Studies and the 'National Interest' **3**
Tanya Lyons

Special Issue - Editorial

- Towards Afrocentric Counternarratives of Race and Racism in Australia **6**
Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo and Virginia Mapedzahama

Special Issue - Articles

- '*It still matters*': The role of skin colour in the everyday life and realities of black African migrants and refugees in Australia **19**
Hyacinth Udah and Parlo Singh

- Making and maintaining racialised ignorance in Australian nursing workplaces: The case of black African migrant nurses **48**
Virginia Mapedzahama, Trudy Rudge, Sandra West and Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo

- The 'Culturally and Linguistically Diverse' (CALD) label: A critique using African migrants as exemplar **74**
Kwadwo Adusei-Asante and Hossein Adibi

- Black bodies in/out of place? Afrocentric perspectives and/on racialised belonging in Australia **95**
Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo and Virginia Mapedzahama

- Educational resilience and experiences of African students with a refugee background in Australian tertiary education **122**
Alfred Mupenzi

Articles

- Africa Focussed Mining Conferences: An Overview and Analysis **151**
Margaret O'Callaghan
- Africa and the Rhetoric of Good Governance **198**
Helen Ware
- Togoland's lingering legacy: the case of the demarcation of the Volta Region in Ghana and the revival of competing nationalisms **222**
Ashley Bulgarelli
- The African Philosophy of Forgiveness and Abrahamic Traditions of Vengeance **239**
Biko Agozino



EDITORIAL

African Studies and the ‘National Interest’

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If there was ever a time that African Studies scholars in Australia could demonstrate a ‘national interest’ in their (officially unrecognised) ‘Field of Research’ – it is now! With the media attention on so-called ‘African-crime gangs’ (as seen on *ABC Four Corners*, 5 November 2018) impacting negatively upon the lives of so many African-Australians, now is the time to be heard! These last 39 volumes of the *Australasian Review of African Studies* have amply analysed, discussed and presented the evidence based research on the issues facing the African diaspora and African-Australian/NewZealand community, and it is clear this academic research is needed now more than ever. The ‘shock jocks’ in the commercial media outlets continue to find angles to exaggerate and implicate Africans (with black skins) into ‘the horror, the horror’ of suburban crimes – despite the figures revealing their minute involvement. Thankfully, as a result of the 2016 Annual AFSAAP Conference held at University of Western Australia, two academics led a panel on the theme of race and racism in Australia, and now here as our guest editors for this *Special Issue* embedded within the pages of ARAS Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo and Virginia Maphedzahama are able to present the outcomes of that evidence-based research. Their editorial below sets out the debates and background context for these ongoing tensions and challenges within Australian society, that are explored in depth in the five articles devoted to this *Special* theme.

The ‘National Interest’ of African Studies is also demonstrated in the articles included within this issue of ARAS, but in addition to those on Kwansah-Aidoo and Maphedzahama’s theme. Firstly, Margaret O’Callaghan

has prepared and shared with us her painstaking research into the mining sector, so crucial to the business and trade justifying Australian foreign policy interests in African states. Her article titled *Africa Focussed Mining Conferences: An Overview and Analysis*, is a comprehensive analysis of the mining conferences held in Australia and Africa, where she examines the roles of government, non-government and activist perspectives.

Helen Ware's contribution to these pages is also timely and relevant in terms of the national interest when it comes to African Studies. She provides a critique of governance across Africa and compares the rhetoric with reality, with a particular focus on the impact on the lives of actual people living their lives day to day in this context of charters, elections, 'democracy' and governance. Ware concludes as Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has stated – *people should be judged on what they do, not on what they say*. A state can sign as many agreements and charters as they need to, to gain international support, but unless they implement those ideas or requirements, it means nothing. This would also apply to the mining companies and their rhetoric on sustainable development and environmental management, which O'Callaghan notes in her article.

Ashley Bulgarelli's contribution here is a timely examination of Ghanaian nationalism with the demarcation of the Volta Region. Entitled *Togoland's lingering legacy: the case of the demarcation of the Volta Region in Ghana and the revival of competing nationalisms*, Bulgarelli argues that the demarcation and thus creation of the new Oti Region 'threatens to redefine the future of nationalisms' and 'give rise to a dominant Voltarian identity'.

The final article in this issue of ARAS is poignantly the last word for Volume 39. Biko Agozino's papyrus demonstrates from an African historical perspective, the concept of forgiving the unforgiveable. Agozino calls "for people of African descent to apply this philosophy of forgiveness to one another and demand that the principle be integrated into public policy along with policies for reparations of historic wrongs." This beautifully woven argument is further demonstration of the 'national interest' to African Studies, given the importance of African traditions to global peace and security – forgiveness being something for all peoples, communities and states around the world.

This brings me to reflect on the last 40 years of the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific and its journal ARAS. Has anything really changed in this time? Has the focus on African Studies in Australia and New Zealand provided a forum of understanding from which we can demonstrate an effect of positive relations between Africans or African states and Australia and New Zealand? Judging by the array of

articles published in these volumes of ARAS – Yes! – the effect and impact has been positive and outstanding (see Lyons, 2018). As the outgoing editor of ARAS for this last decade, I have had the privilege of working with many of these researchers at varying stages of their academic careers. They have chosen to focus their academic interests on African Studies as their field of research, and publish their articles in these pages, which has created an enduring legacy of the importance of African Studies in Australia and New Zealand. Now it's their turn to take AFSAAP and ARAS into the future and ensure domestic and foreign policy in Australia is an expression of social justice for all. My only hope for the forthcoming volumes of ARAS is that the articles published on the African diaspora and racism in Australia will all be historical.

Bibliography

Lyons, Tanya (2018). Celebrating 40 Years of the Australasian Review of African Studies: A Bibliography of Articles, *Australasian Review of African Studies*, 39, 1, pp. 144-169 doi.org/10.22160/22035184/ARAS-2018-39-1/144-169