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CONTENTS

Editorial

- African challenges and challenges to African Studies 3
Tanya Lyons and Max Kelly

Articles

- Sexual Violence in the Congo Free State: Archival Traces and 6
Present Reconfigurations
Charlotte Mertens

- Preventive Arbitration: Towards Strengthening the African Union's 21
Mediation Capacity for Human Protection
Obinna Franklin Ifediora

- The Power of Non-Governmental Organizations in Sudan: 52
Do Structural Changes Matter?
Nawal El-Gack

- Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform Programme: Beyond 73
Emancipation, Towards Liberation
Tinashe Jakwa

- Ethnomusicology, World Music and Analysis in African Music 95
Tony Lewis

Book Reviews

- Richard Bourne. *Nigeria: A New History of a Turbulent Century* 118
Matthew Neuhaus

Andrew Walker. <i>'Eat the Heart of the Infidel' The Harrowing of Nigeria and the Rise of Boko Haram</i> Nikola Pijovic	120
Chris Vaughan. <i>Darfur: Colonial violence, Sultanic legacies and local politics</i> Wendy Levy	122
Ali Mumin Ahad. <i>Somali Poetry and the Failed She-Camel State: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Deelley Poetry Debate (1979-1980)</i> Lidwien Kapteijns	125
Cherry Leonardi. <i>Dealing with Government in South Sudan: Histories of Chiefship, Community and State</i> Ryan Joseph O'Byrne	128
D. M. Bondarenko, <i>The Shades of Black: Cultural Anthro-po-logical Aspects of Mutual Perspectives and relations between African-Americans and African Migrants in the U.S.A.</i> O. Igbo Natufe	130
AFSAAP 2016 – 39 th Annual AFSAAP Conference Call for Papers	134
ARAS Submission Guidelines	136

EDITORIAL

African challenges and challenges to African Studies

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The articles in this issue of ARAS offer very unique views on a range of issues that are relevant to the countries of Africa - the legacies of sexualized violence in conflict; suggestions for preventing conflict; human development; sovereignty and the role of international political and economic imperatives; and the way we understand 'world music' in the age of globalization.

In the article *Sexual Violence in the Congo Free State: Archival Traces and Present Reconfigurations*, Charlotte Mertens presents her extensive archival research conducted in Belgium, and ethnographic research conducted in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Mertens brings to light the ghosts of the past, still haunting this central African nation. Her focus on sexual violence during King Leopold's Congo Free State, and more recently as a result of the ongoing conflict in the DRC, draws our attention to the ongoing legacies of sexualized violence, in particular against women. Mertens argues that this current violence is intricately connected to the colonial past, and is unfortunately enduring into the future.

Obinna Franklin Ifediora argues in his article *Preventive Arbitration: Towards Strengthening the African Union's Mediation Capacity for Human Protection*, that the African Union Commission could strengthen its conflict resolution and pacifying mechanisms through 'preventive arbitration', thus offering the many stakeholders, minority and opposition groups access to relevant and timely mediation, creating enduring peace and human security. Ifediora argues that the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) needs to be restructured to bring 'mediation' into the role of the African Governance Architecture,

and that 'arbitration capacities' must also be developed and included to ensure human protection is enhanced.

In the article *The Power of Non-Governmental Organizations in Sudan: Do Structural Changes Matter?*, Nawal El-Gack explores the capacity of NGOs to contribute to structural and social challenges, in the context of the rapid expansion of NGOs in Sudan. This article identifies considerable limitations to effective NGO operations in Sudan with limited accountability to communities, lack of trust, donor dependency, and interagency competition for scarce funding. The potential for effective community driven development through highly functioning civil society is currently not being met through the NGO sector.

Moving from El-Gack's analysis which highlights the pervasive influence of western development thought and implications for human development, Tinashe Jakwa's article *Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform Programme: Beyond Emancipation, Towards Liberation*, takes a very different stance by adopting a decolonial perspective to critique the international relations notion of judicial sovereignty in Zimbabwe's ongoing saga of land reform. Jakwa's article argues that judicial sovereignty is driven by interests external to a nation, and can contribute to the ongoing subjugation of marginalized nations. She concludes that this can reinforce the embedded violence of modernity, and argues that we need to question the emancipatory potential of judicial sovereignty, and seek instead liberatory outcomes.

Finally, in the article *Ethnomusicology, World Music and Analysis in African Music*, Tony Lewis provides a fascinating discussion about the challenges and debates in the study of African music. With its origins in the colonial project, ethnomusicology has been transformed with globalization, and has made much of the 'world music' phenomena. He provides an informative overview of the literature critiquing the study of African music, and challenges the 'us-and-them' dichotomy which has dominated these studies in the past. His article is compelling reading for world music festival goers.

Cross cutting themes of colonial legacies, and conflict provide an excellent counter to reconceptualised modern Africa, politically, legislatively, and culturally. This is perhaps the great contribution of African Studies in Australasia. There is a wonderful breadth and depth of research of Africanist scholars, within the Australasian region. Nonetheless, while the academic goal posts seem to be constantly moving for us, AFSAAP continues to grow. The 2016 Annual Conference is shaping up to be one of the biggest African studies conferences held in recent years. We hope the theme of this year's

conference, 'Africa: Moving the Boundaries' inspires even more high quality article submissions to this journal.

ARAS maintains the highest academic standards, and through the double blind peer review process, and with its expert panel of academics on its international editorial board, meets all of the criteria and standards of comparable journals in African studies. These articles represent the efforts of many other dedicated Africanist scholars who step up to review the submissions to this journal. Over 80 academics and experts in the field have given up their time in the past 2 years alone, to provide expert commentary and opinion on the quality and content of the articles submitted to ARAS by hopeful authors. The ARAS editorial team would like to thank them all.

At ARAS we are cognisant of the pressures of publishing as an academic, and as such strive to ensure that ARAS retains the highest academic standards. Journal 'rankings and impact' are relevant in an academic environment, despite significant issues with this system. ARAS is proudly published independently by the *African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific* (AFSAAP), and is not beholden to the demands of a corporate publisher. However, with due respect to our authors and members of AFSAAP, we have been applying for the various rankings in recent years, but certain compromises have had to be made (for example, beginning with this issue we must now include the author's email address on the article's title page, as required for an ERIH ranking), and for an ISI ranking we were required to send multiple free copies to an address in Philadelphia on time for at least 3 years. Yet, this latter ranking also demands that we are beholden to the matrix of electronic citations, which clearly favour corporate publications and not independent African Studies journal in this region.

On this latter point, ARAS requests that readers continue to cite all of the relevant articles published in this journal in all of your future publications, so we can register the required citations. You will find a convenient Table of Contents of all back issues, on our website at <http://afsaap.org.au/publications/aras/>. This will add substantially to our overall citations and therefore our rankings, which is of benefit to all.

While Africanists and African Studies have and will face challenges into the future, we look forward to the continuing high quality submissions to ARAS, and the ongoing growth and substantive contribution of AFSAAP to African studies in the region, and globally.