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## EDITORIAL

### Change, Continuity and Challenge in African Studies

**Geoffrey Hawker**

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With this edition of ARAS a transition in the editorial team takes place, but the purposes and ambitions of the journal remain constant. We have lost our long serving editor Dr Tanya Lyons, president of the Association also from 2012 to 2017. It is important to explain to readers of the journal and to members of the Association that the change was forced upon us by a swingeing round of retrenchments at Flinders University that made it impossible for Tanya Lyons to continue to act as editor in the way that an academic securely placed can do.

Regular readers of this journal may well see more in this than just another round of economising in the tertiary sector. Tanya's editorials over the years have demonstrated that Africa-related teaching and research needs tenacious defence at all times in Australia's universities when the 'grain' of research funding, status and promotion seems to favour attention to the first world or to the developing and developed nations of Asia. The "Rudd period" of enhanced funding for African research and postgraduate study is now a diminishing memory. But if Tanya's work as a researcher and teacher in and on Africa is lost to one university, she is not lost to African scholarship more generally. At this time, the editorial team records their deep appreciation of her service both to the journal and to the Association.

The editorial team now in place is listed at the end of this editorial, and the international advisory board in the inside cover of this issue in the usual way. Invitations are open to act as guest editor of the journal for special issues. One such special edition is already in prospect: A Call for Papers on the theme of Governance in Africa under the editorship of Anne Bartlett is announced with this edition of ARAS. Details are shown below.

We call the attention of intending guest editors and authors generally to the guidance on style, length and associated issues on the inside front cover of this issue; and earnestly suggest a close reading also of the further guidelines on the AFSAAP web page referenced there.

Finally, we note that in November this year the annual conference of the Association will be held at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, convened by Professor Tony Binns. Readers are encouraged to attend and to circulate notice of the conference to others. The Call for Papers and details of registration and payment are in this edition of ARAS – see below.

\*\*\*

The work of the Association certainly continues apace, in addition to the scholarly articles, discussions, interviews and reviews supported by this journal. Events in Africa in recent months have focused world attention especially on the Sudan and members of the Association have been active in a number of ways in calling publicly for governments, non-governmental organisations and business interests to exercise influence where they can to promote a durable peace. Where possible and appropriate, members with established networks of contacts in diplomatic and political circles have also made direct approaches to individuals who have a capacity to intervene in the Sudanese situation. Such interventions are beyond the function of a journal such as this, but the description and analysis of African life, extending well into critique of the world's dealings with the nations and the peoples of the continent, is within our remit and must support reasoned approaches to the crises of our times.

\*\*\*

This edition of ARAS presents a range of scholarly articles, commentary on unfolding issues in Africa, an interview with a leading “Australian Africanist”, and reflections by the president of AFSAAP on the status of African studies in Australia, set in the context of related work in the USA and Europe. The four leading articles in this edition reflect well the twin focus of the journal as it has emerged over twenty years: on cross-disciplinary studies of Africa, across space and periods of time, and on the experiences of the African diaspora in Australasia.

The first two deal with historically formed issues of importance, both dealing with Ghana but with distinct substance and from very different perspectives. Kirsty Wissing explores Akwamu understandings of the Volta

and other rivers in Ghana – valued for their life-giving qualities – when they become the opposite: the cause of death by drowning. Through customary ritual practices, traditional representatives separate the Akwamu state, or society, from an individual’s bad, watery death and restore human-environment and inter-human order in social life on land. Stir the waters, however, and Akwamu understandings of rivers highlight a hierarchy in human-environment relations as well as undercurrents of power between humans. By analysing beliefs, interpretations, and ritual behaviours in response to drowning, the author reconceptualises Akwamu dynamics of power in reflections on environments as justice. An earlier version of this fascinating paper was the winner of the Cherry Gertzel / AFSAAP 2017 Postgraduate Prize.

The authors of the second article (James Boafo, Divine Odame Appiah and Peter Dok Tindan) explain the contemporary situation of farmers in Ghana’s bread-basket, the Brong-Ahafo region, who are tempted from food production for the local market to produce instead for the international commodities market, where prices are relatively high, though by no means always ‘trickling down’ to the farmers. Their case study of the production of cashew nuts suggests that patterns of dependence formed in the colonial period are being reproduced in our times, actively assisted by government policy that seems unwilling to consider the long terms issue of underdevelopment.

Taken together, the two articles point to the continued vigour of postgraduate work on African issues in some Australian universities, notwithstanding the general tenor of cutback and indifference prevailing generally.

The two papers following deal with the experiences of the African diaspora in Australasia in recent years. Those experiences have been the source of many articles in ARAS as the citizens and residents of Australia and New Zealand with African heritage make their way in challenging contexts - or, in all too many cases, struggle to establish a new way of life. Each article deals with aspects of that struggle, neither painting a picture of easy adjustment. Yet, each in different ways suggests that immigrants alone do not make the adjustments but that the host society also does, however reluctantly and still incompletely. Francesca Perugia examines the problems of access to stable housing in metropolitan Perth, concentrating on the experience of Sudanese immigrants and refugees. Her quantitative analysis draws upon census data in a strikingly original way and forms a sound basis for policy argument and prescription. Access to secure and affordable housing is notoriously a problem across Australian society, to be sure, and a

study like this reinforces our knowledge that socio-economic disadvantage and marginalised ethnicity are intertwined issues that call for radical thinking and solidarity across sectors of Australian society that are just coming to know and understand each other.

The second article of this pair counter-poses issues of vulnerability experienced by immigrants and refugees (in this case drawn from a sample in the south-east area of Queensland) with the lived capacity of individuals to show resilience in overcoming a shifting set of obstacles involving economic, social and cultural disadvantage and negative discrimination. This is a qualitative study that can be read as a companion piece to an earlier study by two of the authors (“*It still matters*”: The role of skin colour in the everyday life and realities of black African migrants and refugees in Australia”, Hyacinth Uduah and Parlo Singh, *ARAS*, 39, 2 December 2018, pp. 19-47: [http://afsaap.org.au/assets/39\\_2\\_19-47.pdf](http://afsaap.org.au/assets/39_2_19-47.pdf) ), and it shows that resilience can be found across age, gender, occupation and education. Not all lives show resilience it is true but many do, and the authors (those mentioned above, together with Dorothee Hölscher and Jennifer Cartmel) emphasise that the policy responses of government and employers can be the context that fosters a sense of resilience. Anti-racist education in schools, classrooms and workplaces is part of that context, they suggest, as is continued attention to assessing educational and overseas work experience fairly.

In the “Interviews, Commentaries and Viewpoints” section we return to Africa, as it were, with diverse contributions to our knowledge. Peter Alegi and Peter Limb report verbatim their interview with Norman Etherington, the “titan of African History in Australia”, who explains his intellectual development, his early sojourns in Africa and the well springs of his many publications, not least the cartographic. It is an encouraging read, even though his is a career unlikely to be matched!

Anthony Hevron and Michael Crowley take us in a different direction, into the sharply contested territory of the motivations and outcomes of Chinese activity in Africa. Their focus on investment, and perhaps the price that will be paid by those governments that accept the funding, contributes to a debate that seems likely to increase in intensity until the outcomes of such ‘development’ are indeed easier to assess. Their work can be read in conjunction with other papers in this debate, or better perhaps, controversy, that appeared in a special issue of *ARAS* (volume 38 number 2, 2017, online at [http://afsaap.org.au/ARAS/2017-volume\\_38](http://afsaap.org.au/ARAS/2017-volume_38)). We welcome further contributions that can add to our understanding of developments in Africa that may suggest lessons well beyond the continent.

Finally in this section Peter Limb, the AFSAAP president, draws on his extensive experience across the continents to map African studies in a broad way, including in his comparative review universities, publishers, libraries, the varied African communities of the diaspora, and the students of African life, past and present but also imagined in the future. His reflections on the prospects for African studies in Australia have a positive tone but also challenge those of us now active to think ahead – to renew and strengthen our focus on Africa itself, its people and their issues, at the same time as we work to strengthen the linkages between those in Australia who are willing to engage with Africa in some at least of its many dimensions.

**Editorial Team 2019-2020:**

Geoffrey Hawker (editor-in-chief), Peter Limb (president AFSAAP), Edson Ziso (secretary AFSAAP) and Tass Holmes and Mengistu Amberber (elected members), with Anne Bartlett (vice-president and convener of the 2018 conference).



The African Studies Association  
of Australasia and the Pacific

## Call for Papers

Promoting African Studies in the Australasia-Pacific region since 1978

### *Africa: Diversity and Development* Dunedin, New Zealand – 2019

The 42nd AFSAAP Annual Conference,  
26-27 November 2019

St Margaret's College, University of Otago,  
Dunedin, New Zealand

### **ABSTRACT SUBMISSION DEADLINE EXTENDED**

#### **Theme**

The African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP) invites submissions for its 2019 conference from academics, researchers, students, practitioners and policy makers, and the diaspora community, with interests in African studies, both on the African continent and in the Australasia and Pacific region. In 2019, the conference theme is '*Africa: Diversity and Development*'. The conference seeks to explore the richness of the continent and its diversity in a wide range of social, economic, political and cultural dimensions, while simultaneously discussing development options, challenges and experiences. Papers from all disciplines considering African issues in a broad range of topics, such as culture, history, literature, physical, social and economic development, environment, politics, geography, ecology, demography, health, education, migration, media, aid, climate change, natural and human-induced disasters, civil society and gender are welcomed.

#### **Abstracts**

Please send abstracts not exceeding 300 words in length to:

[AFSAAPconference@otago.ac.nz](mailto:AFSAAPconference@otago.ac.nz) by **31 July 2019**.

Acceptance of Abstracts will be notified from August.

## **Visas**

All non-Australian and New Zealand citizens will need to investigate whether they will need to obtain a visa to enter New Zealand in order to attend the conference. Visa applications can take up to 3 months.

## **Getting to Dunedin**

There are direct Virgin flights from Brisbane to Dunedin. Alternatively, delegates can fly from Melbourne, Perth or Sydney via Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch to Dunedin (or from Adelaide and Canberra via those cities). Regular flights (1 hour duration) connect Christchurch and Dunedin. Shuttle buses and taxis meet all flights at Dunedin Airport and can take delegates to the conference venue and accommodation.

## **Accommodation**

Accommodation is available at:

St Margaret's College <https://stmargarets.college/>; or

The University Executive Residence <https://www.otago.ac.nz/executive-residence/index.html>; or in the north end of the city close to the University, see *Dunedin Tourism and Accommodation*: <https://www.tourism.net.nz/region/dunedin>.

*Please note:* Delegates should book and pay for their own accommodation.

**Conference Programme:** To be advised in due course

## **Conference Registration & Payment**

AFSAAP 2019 Conference Registration is now open.

## **Terms, conditions, and privacy policy**

All presenters are required to register and pay by October 15 to present at the conference.

## **Registration and Payment**

*To register:* please complete your details, and submit either on the web-form at <http://afsaap.org.au/conferences/conference-registration>, then click "REGISTER"; or email your completed form to [AFSAAPconference@otago.ac.nz](mailto:AFSAAPconference@otago.ac.nz) and copy to [treasurer@afsaap.org.au](mailto:treasurer@afsaap.org.au) (please remember to send to **both** addresses)

NAME: AFFILIATION:

ADDRESS: EMAIL:

SPECIAL CONDITIONS/REQUESTS:

## **Registration Fees: waged AUD \$315; Student/Unwaged AUD \$225**

(\*This includes lunch, morning/afternoon teas/coffee and conference dinner and AFSAAP membership for 2020). Registration fees needs to be paid if your paper is accepted and you wish to attend the conference. All presenters will need to be fully registered.

### ***To pay registration:***

When you click “REGISTER” on the webform (see above) or email your form to both the Organisers and Treasurer, the Treasurer will send you an invoice with payment details, which should be made by EFT (electronic funds transfer) in Australian dollars or equivalent: when making for transfer complete ***all*** details including “AFSAAP2019 [your surname]” in the reference/message field of the transfer. This invoice, when paid will be your receipt.

### **Registration cancellations**

Conference registration cancellations received in writing by the Conference Secretariat by **October 1, 2019** will be accepted. Registration fees will be refunded, less a AU\$50 administrative fee. Cancellations received after this date will not be refunded. No refunds will be made for non-attendance.

### **Tax**

AFSAAP is not registered to collect GST in Australia therefore no GST has been included in the fees above. AFSAAP – ABN 69 603 514 951.

### **Privacy policy**

Identifiable information submitted for registration purposes will be used expressly for this purpose. Your registration at this conference gives you membership to AFSAAP for one year – **2020**, and your contact details – email or postal address will be passed onto the AFSAAP secretariat only for purposes of maintaining your membership with AFSAAP. Personally identifiable information is kept secure and will not be provided to third parties.

### **Further information**

For further information please contact the Conference Organisers at [AFSAAPconference@otago.ac.nz](mailto:AFSAAPconference@otago.ac.nz)

## **Call for Submissions: 'Governance in Africa' Special issue of ARAS**

**Submissions Due: September 15 2019  
Guest Editor: Anne L. Bartlett, UNSW, Sydney**

*The Australasian Review of African Studies* (ARAS) invites essays for a special issue on the subject of Governance in Africa.

We welcome submissions that explore changing forms of governance in Africa as well as relationships between Africa and the international community that have the potential to shape governance on the continent. We welcome contributions from scholars in academia, as well as from NGO practitioners and others working on these issues in the field. General themes that contributors can address in their essays include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Changing logics of governance
- Term-limit extensions
- The role of international donors in governance
- Civil society and governance
- International community norms and their role in governance decisions
- Authoritarian rule
- State sponsored violence
- Non-state actors and their relationship to the State
- Movements for democracy and change
- Center-periphery relationships
- Unequal development and the State

Submissions should not exceed 6000 words, excluding bibliography. Authors are requested to follow the submission guidelines available here: <http://afsaap.org.au/ARAS/submissions/>. Authors should read the ethical guidelines for submission and submit 2 copies for review. One copy should contain all of your details, and one copy should be 'blinded' (i.e. Please remove your name and any identifying features from the article that would suggest the author's identity). Send to [editor@afsaap.org.au](mailto:editor@afsaap.org.au)

Expressions of interest and questions to the guest editor are welcome: ([a.bartlett@unsw.edu.au](mailto:a.bartlett@unsw.edu.au)).



## Articles

### Environment as Justice: Interpreting the State(s) of Drowning and Undercurrents of Power in Ghana

Kirsty Wissing

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#### Abstract

This article explores Akwamu understandings of the Volta and other rivers in Ghana – valued for their life-giving qualities – when they become the opposite: the cause of death by drowning. By engaging with customary ideas of the environment as an active player, influenced by deities, I seek to map local Akwamu perspectives of the environment *as* justice onto international models that posit the environment *in need* of justice and guardianship through human management. Akwamu traditional authorities have described river environments as a fair and unbiased avenue through which to resolve disputes. By dwelling on drowning, I explore Akwamu and broader Akan notions of ‘good’ or ‘natural’ compared to ‘bad’ or ‘unnatural’ deaths, the latter thought to reflect human-environment and inter-human social breakdown as well as the moral worth of the drowned victim. Through customary ritual practices, traditional representatives separate the Akwamu state, or society, from an individual’s bad, watery death and restore human-environment and inter-human order in social life on land. Stir the waters, however, and Akwamu understandings of rivers highlight a hierarchy in human-environment relations as well as undercurrents of power between humans. By analysing beliefs, interpretations, and ritual behaviours in response to drowning, I reconceptualise Akwamu dynamics of power in reflections on environments as justice.

#### Introduction

One day in July 2017, I witnessed the opening of a new court building at a town called Senchi (Senkyi) in the Akwamu traditional area of southern Ghana. Judges from both national and district levels, police and immigration officials, politicians and the district chief executive all assembled as

representative authorities of judicial law on behalf of Ghanaian society. Seated directly opposite them were the Akwamu paramount chief and queen mother, their respective spokespersons and other senior traditional authorities for the Akwamu state of people on whose traditional land the court was established. Here were two courts of justice, each with representatives asserting authority to judge over individuals and sectors of Ghanaian society, positioned facing each other in a performance of mutual accountability and legal pluralism (Apoh, Wissing, Treasure and Fardin, 2017, p. 372; Mumma, 2005, p. 24; Ubink, 2008, pp. 20-21). However, such human courts are not the only avenues through which to seek justice.

For many Akwamu people in southern Ghana, concepts of social cohesion and justice are also embedded in their relationship to environments, including waterscapes. While rivers such as the Volta River have provided drinking water, cleanliness, trade, farming, fish, and other physical contributions, they also serve another important role: as a reflection and adjudication of disputes. The act of swearing, and cursing, on the Volta and other rivers is thought to glean evidence for or against people's claims in a dispute. For, as Nana Samanhyia Darko II – an advisor to the Akwamu traditional court – told me, "you can't lie and swear to the river" (personal communication, May 5, 2016).

With deities thought to control each fresh water river, human drowning and other water-related mishaps can signify more than mere misfortune. Rather, they are interpreted as reflecting non-human spiritual judgement of human morality. These interpretations highlight a hierarchy in human-environment relations as well as undercurrents of power between humans. Other religious understandings – particularly those of various Christian denominations and, to a lesser extent, Islam – are also present and sometimes co-exist with the worldviews of many Akwamu people in relation to environment. However, fundamental values of the Akwamu state regarding water and associated deities remain influential. Due to limited space, this article does not address Christian and other understandings, but rather focuses on pre-Christian Akwamu beliefs that persist today. In dwelling on death in water, this article contemplates justice and state(s) of power as explored through Akwamu interpretations of river drownings.

After briefly reviewing some international models of environment in need of justice, this article unpacks Akwamu understandings of their water environment as not only life-giving, but also life-taking, and asks how death by drowning can be seen as justice. To do this, I explore Akwamu and broader Akan notions of 'good' or 'natural' compared to 'bad' or 'unnatural' deaths, the latter thought to reflect human-environment and inter-human

social breakdown as well as the moral worth of the deceased victim. I analyse customary ritual practices that physically shift the drowning victim from watery ambiguity to certainty and finality on land. These rituals are also believed to symbolically shift the broader Akwamu state and society from uncertainty associated with an individual's bad death, back to an everyday social life that reinforces social order and hierarchy. By analysing beliefs, interpretations, and ritual behaviours in response to drowning, I reconceptualise Akwamu dynamics of power in reflections on river environments as justice.

### **Water environments: Victim, partner or overseer of humans?**

As a critical marker of environment, water has received much academic attention. This ranges from analysis of Indigenous water world-views (Austin-Broos, 2009; McWilliam, Palmer & Shepherd, 2014; Strang, 2005a; Strang, 2005b; Watts, 2008) to the political manipulation of water to manipulate people for (nation-) state purposes (Bichsel, 2016; Wittfogel, 1957) that emphasise links, rather than divisions, between nature and culture(s). Water has also captured the academic imagination at both the African continental (Drewal, 2008; Fontein, 2015; Peters, 1994) and Ghanaian level (Akyeampong, 2001; Amuquandoh, 2010; Cless, 2012, pp. 102-105; Greene, 2002; McCaskie, 2009; Opoku & Wicker, 2008; Rattray, 1927).

Emmanuel Akyeampong notes that “insights from ecological anthropology highlight the fact that, for African societies, the dichotomy or opposition between culture and nature is often inapplicable ... the cooperation between humans and nature is necessary to the production of culture *and* nature” (2001, p. 13, emphasis added). This article will focus on the nature of water, as an essential and intrinsically social resource, to analyse how it both “appears as a mirror” (Cless & Hahn, 2012, p. 16) but also co-produces human-environment relations in what Akyeampong refers to as an “‘eco-social’ history” (2001, pp. 2, 4) as well as inter-human relations. Krause and Strang term this connectivity “hydro-sociality” (2016; see also Anand, 2011; Linton & Budds, 2014). Such co-production of nature and culture is not always equal, but can be hierarchical. How that hierarchy looks, however, differs across global and local understandings of the environment.

Natural water and other environments are often depicted as being at the mercy of exploitation yet simultaneously in need of protection by humans. Discussions such as the “anthropocene” often begin from such a framework, emphasising the “major and still growing impacts of human activities on the earth and atmosphere ... [that caused] the current geological epoch ... [and]

will continue over long periods” (Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000, p. 17). Anthropocene scholarship focuses on world-wide connected, human-induced problems that leave limited space for non-human actors as may be understood at the local community level. This approach risks overlooking the ways that local beliefs and practices articulate with, or counter, national and global dynamics and offer alternate understandings of responsibility and justice that attribute the environment – or religious entities deemed responsible for the environment – an active and influential role.

An alternate model gaining global attention is legal recognition of the environment enmeshed into human society as part, rather than apart, of Indigenous kinship structures. For example, in New Zealand, the Whanganui River was granted the same legal rights as humans in March 2017 (Talbot-Jones, 2017). Gerrard Albert, a Maori Whanganui iwi (people, or tribe) member and lead negotiator in the case, explained that “the reason we have taken this approach is because we consider the river an ancestor and always have” (Roy, 2017). In *The Guardian* (March 16, 2017), Roy remarked: “the new status of the river means … the law now sees no differentiation between harming the tribe or harming the river because they are one and the same.” Maru-Lanning similarly echoes the inter-relatedness of Indigenous peoples and rivers in New Zealand: “Waikato River lies at the heart of Waikato Maori tribal identity and chiefly power” (2010, p. 17). For the Whanganui River, two human guardians have been appointed to act on its behalf, one from the crown and one from the Whanganui iwi.

These models understand the environment as either vulnerable victim or equal citizen yet still in need of human guardianship. Both models position humans as necessary protectors of environments, and neither affords the environment a completely superior role to humans. In contrast, Akyeampong (2001, p. 1), writing of the Anlo people in southern Ghana, describes a circumstance of “unequal battle between humans and nature” where the latter dominates the former. By embracing traditional ecological knowledge theory (Menzies, 2006) and engaging with customary ideas of environment as an active player, this article seeks to map local Akwamu understandings in Ghana of environment *as* justice onto more global “flows” (Rockefeller, 2011) and situate them among debates that posit the environment as needing justice through human management.

## Methodology

This article draws on information collected during fourteen months of research conducted in southern Ghana in 2016, 2017 and 2019. Data collection methods included participant observation, individual and group

interviews, and archival and literature reviews. All information marked as personal communication in this article refers to interviews. Research participants who informed this article included Akwamu representatives such as chiefs, queen mothers, “linguists”,<sup>1</sup> shrine priests, community opinion leaders and other local residents. Although many people quoted in this article hold traditional titles, they often live among and undertake similar livelihood activities to other Akwamu community residents. Titled research participants engage in farming, trading, the textile industry and local radio broadcasting among other economic activities. This article primarily considers Akwamu attitudes to the Volta and other rivers; however, I also conducted research with non-Akwamu actors. These included representatives of the Volta River Authority, the Water Resources Commission, the Water Research Institute, the Environmental Protection Authority and the Volta River Basin Project based at the University of Ghana. I conducted research in communities surrounding the Volta River including Akwamufie, Akosombo, Atimpoku, Adjena Pesse, Dwenease, Abidjan Mami Wata Village, as well as in Ghana’s capital city, Accra. During research, the author lived in Akwamufie and Akosombo, and most, but not all, of the ethnographic material is from these communities.

## Water and people in southern Ghana

In this article, I focus on the Akwamu, who are a Twi-speaking people located in the Eastern Region in the southern part of Ghana. This group share similar cultural and linguistic traits with other groups such as Ahanta, Akim (Akyem), Akwapim (Akuapem), Ashanti (Asante), Brong, Fante (Fanti), Denkyira, Kwahu (Kwawu), Nzema, Sefwi, and Wassa, who at times identify under a larger group identity as Akan (Adinkrah, 2016, p. 140). Originally a large, militarily organised people with vast territories in what are now modern-day Ghana, Togo, and Benin (Agyekum, 2015; Akyeampong, 2001, p. 7; Wilks, 2001), the Akwamu now claim ownership over a much smaller territory that straddles the Volta River and Lake, and includes the Akosombo Dam.

In similarity with other societies in southern Ghana (cf. Beecham 1968 [1841], pp. 174-175; McCaskie 1995, p. 109), Akwamu people understand spiritual forces/beings to be unalienably associated with natural features.

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<sup>1</sup> For Akan cultural groups, a linguist is a traditional spokesperson who acts as an intermediary between chiefs and queen mothers and people that come to speak to them. In doing this, linguists endorse as well as share the responsibility of the content of words of chiefs and queen mothers.

Thomas McCaskie writes “Asante culture and society were quite literally hacked out of nature” (1989, p. 521). While this was in relation to them utilising and mastering unruly nature on land, there are also strong links between society and water environments in much of southern Ghana (cf. Akyeampong, 2001; and Greene, 2002 for the Anlo people; and McCaskie, 1995, pp. 109, 117-118; and Rattray, 1923, 1927 for the Asante).

Akyeampong remarks of the Anlo ethnic group residing near the Volta’s estuary: “on the Anlo coast humans were involved in a dynamic relationship with their environment, changing and being changed by it” (2001, p. 2). Further upstream, the Akwamu also adjust, and are adjusted by, the Volta River, known locally as *Asuo Firaw*, which is said to be a god (Asuogyasan Yaw Boadu IV, Akwamu chief of the rear guard, personal communication, November 10, 2017).

In thinking about water, Akwamu and broader Akan perspectives counter ideas of a hydro-social hierarchy where nature is vulnerable victim. Rather, nature, as controlled by deities, holds an ever-present potential to overrule humans/culture and when sociality breaks down to punish accordingly. A worldview of environment as, rather than in need of, justice does not necessarily flatten out or discard human hierarchy. Instead, I propose that Akwamu interpretations of the impacts of nature, specifically drowning in water, actually reinforce human social order and benefit some humans over others.

As the Asante viewed the River Tano as spiritually potent and able to heal a person from acts of bitterness by their enemy (McCaskie, 1995, p. 118), so too the Akwamu understand the spirits that control the waterscapes to be friendly and protectors. For instance, Odeneho Kwafo Akoto III, Akwamu paramount chief, explained that *Odaasekyi*, the god of cataracts, prevents and protects people from capsizing their canoes on the Volta River during a storm (personal communication, June 27, 2016). This has implications for how the Akwamu interpret drownings and attribute responsibility or blame.

Hans Peter Hahn reflects that “water is relevant not only as something useful, but also as a threat to people” (2012, p. 24). Veronica Strang has remarked, “in creating ‘life’, water creates form and order, and death, with its de-forming dis-incorporation, is the ultimate dis-order” (2004, p. 65). Therefore, what happens when water as the source of life inverts to become the cause of physical death? Can persons and social stability as related through the prism of water as life be achieved, maintained, or retracted in the context of death by drowning?

## Dwelling on death in water

In Ghana, as in many other places, death is generally undesirable (cf. Nketia, 1955, p. 6, and Sarpong, 1974, p. 22, as discussed in Sjaak van der Geest 1980, p. 166). This is even more so for death by drowning which is viewed as shocking and premature. Premature deaths in general are “regarded as much less natural” (van der Geest, 1980, p. 168) and need both explanation and classification. For various Akan groups, deaths can be classified as “good” and “bad” (cf. Adinkrah, 2016, p. 143; McCaskie, 1989, p. 429; van der Geest, 2004, p. 904), or sometimes as “natural” and “unnatural” (Adinkrah, 2016; see also van der Geest, 1980, pp. 167-168). Within the classification of bad or unnatural deaths, there seems further division into two categories: “the first consists of accidental deaths. The second comprises self-inflicted deaths or those deaths where the decedent deliberately caused his own death” or spiritual wrath (Adinkrah, 2016, p. 150). The Akwamu classify drowning as bad, and then further categorise the drowning as an accident or spiritual curse. I suggest these classifications highlight and reinforce existing power relations.

From discussions with some Akwamu chiefs, a shrine priest, and community opinion leaders, it seems an accidental, albeit bad death by drowning is said to have taken place if the corpse is bloated with water. Moreover, it is believed that the body will come out of the river of its own accord (without ritual ceremony) and in the same place that the drowning occurred. In contrast, if a drowning is thought to be spiritually invoked, the victim will not resist the drowning and their corpse will not contain water. As Nana Samanhyia Darko II remarked, “those who they have cast spell they don’t drink water. Most of them don’t even struggle” (personal communication, May 11, 2016). He continued to explain that if an accident such as a boat capsizing happens then those who know how to swim could rescue people. However, if a spell is cast on a person and they fall into the river, they will die.

Bad, or unnatural, deaths are known in the Akan Twi language as “*ɔtɔfɔ*” (Nana Afrakoma II, paramount queen mother, personal communication, September 15, 2017; Nana Appiah-Nti III, chief of Appiahkrom, personal communication, June 18, 2016 and April 12, 2019, using the Akwamu/Akwapim Twi spelling<sup>2</sup>), “*ɔtɔfɔɔ*” (Adinkrah, 2016, p. 150, using the Asante Twi spelling) or “*atofo*,” (McLeod, 1981, pp. 37-38). Mensah Adinkrah notes that

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<sup>2</sup> Because this article relates to the Akwamu Traditional Area, Akwamu/Akwapim Twi spelling will be used unless another author’s work is directly quoted.

Among the Akan if a person dies through an accident, the death is not considered natural .... Such deaths are called *atɔfowuo* and the decedent is described as *ɔtɔfo*. Unnatural deaths (*ɔtɔfowuo*) signifies a cursed death, a bad death, or a dishonourable death and the decedent (*ɔtɔfo*) is said to have been cursed” (2016, p. 150).

Other terms might also apply such as B. R. Stucki’s use of the term *anwobabu* (1995, p. 141, cited in van der Geest, 2004, p. 904).

J. H. Nketia notes that the Akan juxtapose accidental death, death by suicide, death through childbirth or “death suspected to be caused by witchcraft, sorcery, or poison” (1969 [1955], p. 5) – which might be classified as *ɔtɔfo* – as distinct from death after a known illness or from old age. Old age is “considered natural because it is presumed that the decedent died his or her destined<sup>3</sup> death (*wawu ne krawuo*)” (Adinkrah, 2016, p. 145). van der Geest (2004, p. 904) unpacks the work of Miescher (1997, p. 529), Sarpong (1974, p. 35), Baaré (1986, pp. 55-56) and Bartle (1977, pp. 393) to also discuss distinctions between, and examples of, a good and bad death. Cases classified as *ɔtɔfo* deaths include drowning, a vehicle accident, death by fallen tree, lightning strike, or snake bite, war or military combat, or maternal mortality during pregnancy or childbirth, or thunderstruck (lightening) (Adinkrah, 2016, p. 150). These deaths are not only considered bad, but also inauspicious (McLeod, 1981, p. 37).

Drowning and other tragic, untimely deaths “were believed to be punishments for sins” (van der Geest, 2004, p. 5) and moral transgressions. Accordingly, they were and are socially stigmatised. For, as McLeod writes, “the defining characteristic of all these people ... [is] that they were, in some sense, damaged or incomplete beings” (1981, p. 37). The Akwamu people see the Volta River, and the Akwamu deity *Mfwodwo* thought to control this river, as transparent and able to judge fairly rather than maliciously. With this assumed transparency, then, river drownings are interpreted as punishment for something morally wrong with the drowning victim. Nana Samanhya Darko II remarked that even if you fall into the river and do not know how to swim, “we will save you, but if there is something wrong with you no matter what, we cannot save you” (personal communication, May 11, 2016).

In Akwamu understandings, humans are seen as inferior to deities that control the water environment, and human arrogance toward the environment is considered punishable. For example, Nana Tete Amo, the Akwamu shrine

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<sup>3</sup> See Fortes (1959) for the role that destiny might play in “bad deaths,” or misfortunes, as a deviation from a “good destiny” or as the result of a bad spirit (Greene 2002, pp. 87-88).

priest responsible for the deity *Mfwodwo*, advised that he is not allowed to cross the Volta River, which is viewed as more powerful than even this senior religious authority (personal communication, June 22, 2016). Should he challenge this hierarchy and breach the taboo, it is feared that *Mfwodwo* will inflict spiritual punishment and trouble will follow.

Other social breakdowns include disrespect of, or lack of adherence to taboos, such as fishing and swimming in the Volta River during the sacred day of *Akwasidae* and before the annual yam offering festival. These times are considered very dangerous for an individual to visit the water, but some people still proceed. Nana Tete Amo said that breaching this taboo will incur a fine of one pure white ram, two bottles of schnapps and some money (personal communication, June 22, 2016). Neglect of ceremonial obligations is also said to upset the gods and leave Akwamu people vulnerable to death through drowning.

Adinkrah writes that Akan see unnatural deaths as “symptomatic of some taboo violation by the decedent and … punishment for such an infraction” (2016, pp. 150-151). Nana Tete Amo said that if it is the Volta River that “picks” or subsumes a person as a form of punishment, this person will not be seen again until a shrine priest performs the necessary rituals after which the river will release the victim’s body again, and return it to the bank (personal community, June 22, 2016).

The Volta River is also thought to reflect judgement about inter-human social discord. Nana Samanhya Darko II advised that if a person wanted to avoid chiefs or court processes but sought to uncover the truth of a matter, then such a person would take someone they suspect of doing them wrong - such as a friend cheating on them with their wife - to the river (personal communication, May 11, 2016). He continued that if the person is guilty, it will not even take three days for the offender to walk into the river and die. This death is interpreted as the river meting out justice for (socially defined) human wrongdoing seen to cause disharmony.

In addition, river drownings can shed light on inter-ethnic human sociality in the case of Akwamu-‘stranger’ (non-Akwamu) relations. Nana Samanhya Darko II stated that “it will be rare to hear of an Akwamu die in the river. Why? Because we respect and revere the river.” This was in contrast, he said, with “the squatters,” often fishing communities from a different but neighbouring Ewe language group, that he claimed disrespect and defecate into the river and also drown (but see Opoku and Wicker (2008) for the migratory history and water beliefs of certain Ewe people residing in the Akwamu traditional area of this research study).

This does not mean that Akwamu people cannot also breach taboos or drown. Rather, it highlights some inter-ethnic contestation over control and appropriate uses in/of the Volta River. These have, in the past, come to a head between Akwamu traditional authorities and non-Akwamu (mainly Ewe) night fishermen that, the former claim, breach Akwamu customary taboos by fishing during sacred days. Interpretations such as that of Nana Samanhya Darko II about non-Akwamu drownings as spiritual punishment by an (Akwamu) deity could be read as a claim for superior Akwamu understandings of and relations to this particular water environment.

### **(Social) life after death? Restoring hydro-social balance**

For the central African region, J. Matthew Schoffeleers has written that “serious abuses in a community lead to ecological disaster, which in turn threatens the life of the community” (1979, p. 5). In the Akwamu context in Ghana, an individual’s serious social breach is believed to manifest in environmental upheaval that not only brings punishment via drowning to the individual, but also threatens society more generally. To restore the balance and the hierarchy of Akwamu human-environment relations with their deities, pacification rituals are necessary. These follow three stages: retrieval, restoration, and retribution.

The first stage, retrieval of the body, is conducted by the shrine priest or linguist. Nana Tete Amo explained that the family of the deceased member must provide two bottles of schnapps or gin for retrieval rituals and a white ram for restoration rituals (personal communication, June 22, 2016). The shrine priest or linguist will pour the alcohol as libations at the river site where the drowning occurred. While doing this, they will call the specific river deity’s name, ask for forgiveness, and request for the body to come out of the river. Nana Samanhya Darko II noted that if a person goes into the river once pacification rituals have happened but before the drowned body has come out, it is believed that this person will die within twenty to thirty minutes (personal communication, May 11, 2016). In this way, the water environment is the domain of deities, with human attempts to override this control seen as unstable and dangerous.

The second stage is to restore human respect of the deity and to re-establish an already determined order.<sup>4</sup> When the body has been retrieved from the river, the ram and schnapps or gin will be taken to the chief’s palace

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<sup>4</sup> See McCaskie for how Asante shrine priests conducted rituals to return to an ordered past rather than a revolutionary future and, by doing so, were “restating the fundamentals of the relationship between Asante society and the *abosom* [gods/deities]. They castigated the present as error and deviation, but cast the future as a return to the past” (1995, p. 124).

of the jurisdiction – of both land and water – where the victim drowned. The chief then uses these items for purification customs, appealing to the gods and the ancestors to separate himself and other traditional authorities on behalf of Akwamu society from this watery death and to ensure that something like the *ɔtɔfɔ* drowning does not happen again (Nana Tete Amo, personal communication, June 22, 2016).<sup>5</sup> Such rituals seek to restore human-environment relations by acknowledging the latter's superior power.

The third stage is to seek retribution for the drowning. Sometimes a drowning might be interpreted as the result of human violence or caused by evil spirits/witchcraft acting on the request of a human. For such an inauspicious death, once the pacification ceremony is completed and the corpse comes out, the shrine priest or linguist will ask the gods to identify the person who killed the drowned victim. Kwadwo Nyarko, an opinion leader in the community of Dwenease, explained that if the appropriate customs are done, it is believed the gods will spiritually attack the perpetrator who has been the cause of the death, and that this person will confess with their own mouth (personal communication, June 28, 2016). As noted by van der Geest (1980, p. 168) for the town of Kwahu-Tafo in Ghana, and Fontein (2015, p. 50) in relation to Lake Mutirikwi in Zimbabwe, bad or unnatural deaths can also offer opportunity for witchcraft or other accusations based on already-simmering social tensions.<sup>6</sup>

There are also strict distinctions between the life of the community through which the drowned person socially existed and their unnatural death by drowning. In contrast to Akan customary efforts for a “lineage to bury their *naturally* deceased relatives in a fitting way” (Adinkrah, 2016, p. 153, emphasis in original), a victim of an *ɔtɔfɔ* death will not be laid in state in the family home and they will not be given a funeral (Nana Afrakoma II, personal communication, September 15, 2017).

Instead, the bodies of the drowned are “consigned to the midden, the place of the dirty and broken” which was historically separated in the cemetery from the area “reserved for their lineage” (McLeod, 1981, p. 38, see also p. 36). Such a person might simply be buried in the ground by the river where the body was retrieved (Okyeame Ampadu, senior Akwamu linguist, personal communication May 6, 2017; Nana Appiah-Nti III, personal communication, June 18, 2016). Otherwise, the corpse is taken from the river

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<sup>5</sup> See also Adinkrah (2016, p. 156) for a similar account of cleansing rituals after a suicide.

<sup>6</sup> Van der Geest (1980, p. 168) argues that spiritual/witchcraft accusations also occur in cases of a natural death, for purposes of resisting the idea of death in general, and to address social grievances. For instance, witchcraft may be suspected for a “good” death as a result of long-life when other relatives die early (Van der Geest, 2004, p. 907).

via the outskirts of the town to the cemetery located just beyond the threshold of social life and community (Okyeame Ampadu, personal communication, May 6, 2017).

These practices reflect the Akan proverb that “*se wo wu atɔfowuo a, yesie wo atɔfosie* (if you die an unnatural death, you are given an unnatural burial)” (Adinkrah, 2016, p. 153), and Bartle suggests “the more shameful the circumstances of death, the less elaborated and ostentatious are the funeral rites” (1977, p. 392; but see disagreement by van der Geest (2004, p. 905)). Nana Appiah-Nti III reasoned that if a funeral is conducted for an unnatural death, this accident will occur to someone else in the society. Adinkrah similarly writes, “Akans believe that if such deaths were granted elaborate ritual observances, more of such deaths would occur in the future” (2016, p. 151). Not to be given a fitting funeral in death is to suffer “the ultimate disgrace” (van der Geest, 2004, p. 901; see also Gilbert 1988, p. 297 for the Akuapem).<sup>7</sup>

By shortening or circumventing funerary and burial practices for *ɔtɔfo* deaths, community members seek to protect the centre – the home/village/and land based understandings of order – from the unnatural and difficult to understand space of drowning as embodied in the corpse. This protection of the centre is also reflected in the customary rule that a chief should not see the corpse of an unnatural death. Ellis (1966 [1890], p. 160) notes the requirement of purification post-contact with a corpse among the Ewe, and Huber (1958, pp. 167-168) outlines purification rituals required in Adangme culture if a person is killed in an accident. In a similar manner, if an Akwamu chief does see a dead body, he must be purified.

During fieldwork, I observed and participated in four such purification rituals where Akwamu chiefs, as well as queen mothers and linguists, were cleansed by a combination of water mixed with schnapps or gin poured as libations and the blood of a sacrificed ram. Through this process, the chief and traditional authorities – on behalf of broader society – are believed to transition from death back into a state of social life where they can return to everyday domestic activities such as eating and resting in their residence. What is key for this article is the space in which this purification ritual occurs. A drowned victim is spatially constrained to the river banks and the cemetery – the peripheries of land-based hierarchy of humans with their deities in ordered social life. In contrast, although also using water, a purification ritual

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<sup>7</sup> Van der Geest observed that the indignity continues as those who died unnaturally, or tragically, will not have their name articulated during alcoholic libations to remember the family dead: “to be mentioned or not ... during libation is indeed one of the most ‘objective’ indications of good and bad death” (2004, p. 905).

for a chief occurs in their palace compound – within the village land considered central to Akwamu traditional authority.

To illustrate some of the understandings above, while on fieldwork I heard that a boy had drowned and his community had brought the drowning victim's body into the village to hold a funeral, a cultural taboo. Nana Appiah-Nti III described this as a violation of customary law and said that the fine was seven sheep and seven schnapps as well as some money as required for pacification and purification rituals (personal communication, June 18, 2016). He said that the people who violated this taboo in this case were Ewe, not Akwamu, reflecting inter-ethnic tensions as depicted through hydro-sociality. The case was referred to the Akwamu chief in charge of the jurisdiction to resolve the matter. While I later learnt that there had been a misunderstanding and the corpse was not in fact brought into the village, the seriousness with which these taboos continue to be taken, the hierarchy of who oversees such cases and the economic as well as social costs that the flouting of such taboos can bring is significant.

### **Undercurrents of power: Interpretation**

Van der Geest notes that “concepts of ‘good’ and ‘bad death’ … are not fixed and unchangeable categories … the definitions allow some room for manoeuvring” (van der Geest, 2004, p. 908). Akwamu traditional authorities interpret a bad or unnatural death by drowning to reflect breakdowns in human-environment and/or inter-human relationships. Such interpretation, however, does not happen in a vacuum. Rather, interpretations of drowning as a non-human, spiritual and environmental judgement of the moral character of other humans is a form of manoeuvring that both reflects and helps constitute social and economic power relations in Akwamu society. (Male) shrine priests, (usually male) linguists, and other traditional leaders possess the authority to interpret drownings. They also have authority to impose sanctions on those who violate mortuary customs and taboos designed to limit the chance of spiritual retribution.

Two factors ensure that interpretations of drowning victims as immoral are unlikely to be challenged. First, the drowned victim has no opportunity for rebuttal of the interpretation since they are physically dead. While there is a belief in spiritual life after physical death, the omitted or truncated mortuary and funeral rites discredit the deceased person's legacy and any spiritual influence over family since not all spirits are considered suitable to become ancestors (van der Geest 1980, pp. 161-162). Therefore, the judgement and assumed justice believed to be delivered by the gods via river drownings, as interpreted by humans, seems to go unchallenged by the

accused and now-deceased victim themselves. Bleek observed a similar pattern of accusing already deceased people of immoral activities, noting a high proportion of those accused of witchcraft (victim or perpetrator) being deceased family members (1976, p. 528). Second, there is a cultural fear of future repetition of such an unnatural drowning, as well as the blame for a repeat of such an event. This discourages the drowning victim's family and the broader community from questioning the interpretation.

For the Asante, Marleen de Witte (2003) noted an economic relationship to natural deaths, as realised in the space of funerals and beyond. For the Akwamu, unnatural deaths can also bring economic costs to the deceased's family in funding the materials for pacification and purification rituals as outlined above (Nana Afrakoma II, personal communication, September 15, 2017). At times, the same people that interpret the drowning as evidence of deities inflicting justice via the environment may materially benefit from this interpretation through the ram, schnapps/gin and, sometimes, monetary fines provided as part of follow-up rituals of retrieval, restoration and perhaps also retribution.

Adinkrah wrote of a case of aggravated youths in Atimpoku, a community within the Akwamu traditional area, who stormed the local chief's palace and accused traditional authorities of taking fines from families who had experienced a relative's unnatural death (2016, pp. 158-159). They also reported requests (with financial incentive) made to chiefs and elders to ask pardon from the ancestors and other spirits to hold a funeral for bad deaths that inevitably came in contravention of the dictates of tradition (Adinkrah, 2016, pp. 158-159). This suggests a level of negotiability even in seemingly rigid customs. It seems that the power of interpretation of unnatural deaths, such as that of drowning, can provide an opportunity for social and economic gain by some humans over other humans. Water as disorder and death operates to reinforce social order and life on land.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have explored how river water – valued for its life-giving qualities – is interpreted when it becomes the opposite: the cause of death by drowning. Akwamu classify drowning as a bad or unnatural death and further categorise it as either accidental or spiritually invoked, the latter of which is interpreted as a non-human spiritual valuation of human morality.

The interpretation of an unnatural death in water highlights a breakdown in social relationships – both human-environment and inter-human – with drownings framed as the environment enacting justice. Such breakdowns are mitigated and restored through pacification and purification rituals. These

involve the retrieval of the body, recognition of water deities as the higher authority of humans to restore order and, on occasion, also retribution by appeasing the river deity to draw out a confession from the killer of the drowned victim, and to judge and punish appropriately. Moreover, taboos strongly demarcate the widely-understood, grounded, everyday state of Akwamu society from the character of an unnatural, watery death. Drowned victims are denied burial and funeral rites of ‘naturally’ deceased members of society and are also disqualified from becoming desired ancestral spirits (Adinkrah, 2016, pp. 143-144).

Akwamu authorities such as chiefs and shrine priests have described river water, governed by related deities, as a fair and unbiased avenue through which to resolve human disputes. In this understanding, drownings are thought to reflect transparently the true moral worth of the drowned victim. The Akwamu people see their water environment as, rather than in need of, justice. But stir the waters and you will find that interpretations of drownings may serve some human interests over others and work to reinforce social hierarchy. Because dead victims cannot talk back and families fear blame for repeated misfortunes, contestations to social (re-)order are pre-emptively silenced. It appears Akwamu reflections on rivers as justice may carry a powerful undercurrent.

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## **Drivers of export-led agriculture in Ghana: The case of emerging cashew production in Ghana's Brong Ahafo Region<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

The Brong Ahafo region, often referred to as the ‘breadbasket’ of Ghana, in the last decade has become the centre of increasing expansion of cashew nuts production for export. Farmers in the region are increasingly devoting their time and lands to the production of raw cashew nuts for the export market instead of producing food for the local market. We adopt a political ecology approach to demonstrate how the historical legacy of export-led agriculture and its integration of local agriculture into the global market drives the production of cashew nuts in Ghana. Our analyses were informed by interview responses from farmers, and a review of critical agrarian scholarship, policy documents and cashew production and consumption reports. We find that historical legacies, government policy narratives and global market integration are driving the commodification of local agriculture in Ghana and conclude that there is an urgent need to plan for an agricultural transition that considers both immediate and long-term impacts.

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## **Introduction**

Developing countries have acted as the global breadbasket, including as providers of raw agricultural commodities, over a long history dating back to at least fifteenth century colonial extractivist regimes (Campbell, 2013). To this day, many developing economies, including post-colonial economies, remain enrolled in the global economy as suppliers of cheap primary commodities (McMillan, Rodrik and Verduzco-Gallo, 2014). Despite the poor economic growth of commodity-dependent economies, especially compared to industrialised countries, governments of developing countries continue to target export-led agriculture as the basis for delivering export-oriented growth (Gwynne, 1999). The integration of the agricultural sectors of developing countries into the global economy as part of a broader structural transformation of agriculture is driven by multiple complex factors across different scales. To understand some of the factors, this paper<sup>2</sup> provides an analysis of historical and contemporary agricultural production in Ghana through a case study of cashew nuts production in the Brong Ahafo region.<sup>3</sup>

The commercial production of cashew nuts in Ghana is an emerging sector that to date has attracted limited academic attention. Evans, Mariwah and Antwi (2015) have investigated the gendered and generational power relations regarding land access, property rights and decision-making in a cashew growing community of Seketia, in the Brong Ahafo region. Amanor (2009) has examined how the development of tree plantation including cashew in the region has affected land tenure relations. Peprah et al. (2018) have analysed whether cashew nuts production will permanently reduce poverty among farmers in the region. Aside from these scholarly works, there are reports (see for instance Heinrich, 2012; Osei-Akoto, 2010) that have analysed the cashew value chain in Ghana. We advance these studies by analysing the drivers of cashew nuts production in Ghana.

This article adopts a political ecology approach (Offen, 2004; Peet, Robbins and Watts, 2011; Robbins, 2012; Watts, 2000, 1983) to analyse multiple factors including historical legacies, the role of the state, and global market forces shaping the livelihoods of peasants in Ghana. We base our argument largely on six-months of fieldwork conducted in 2016 with farmers

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<sup>2</sup> Sections of this paper are part of a PhD thesis submitted to the University of Queensland, Australia by the first author.

<sup>3</sup> Note that after the fieldwork in 2016, the Brong Ahafo region was divided into three administrative regions, namely Bono East, Brong Ahafo and Ahafo through a referendum in 2018. In this paper, Brong Ahafo Region is a collection of the three regions. All the administrative regions mentioned below refer to regions of Ghana from 1982 to 2018.

in the region and representatives from government, an analysis of the historical emergence of plantation agriculture, and a review of relevant cashew reports and government policy narratives. We find that the increasing production of cashew nuts in Ghana for export is shaped by historical legacies of the integration of farmers into the global market, government policy supports, and the current high demand for tree nuts at the global level due to the growing awareness of their health benefits. We conclude that while farmers may be earning seasonal incomes from the production of cashew nuts, continuous support for export-led agriculture is reinforcing traditional specialisation patterns that have reduced incentives to diversify the Ghanaian economy towards modern manufacturing.

We begin by providing an overview of the political ecology framework that has informed the research approach and analysis. This is followed by a brief review of the historical trajectories of export-led agriculture in Ghana with specific focus on cashew nuts production. We then introduce the case study, the Brong Ahafo region, and give an overview of the methods adopted for data collection and analysis. We then present our findings, including discussions of government policy narratives, key global trends of cashew consumption, and how all these are reinforcing export-led agriculture in Ghana, including production of cashew nuts for the export market.

### **A political ecology approach**

The agrarian histories of Ghana shaped by colonisation have set the scene for a political ecology analysis of the processes shaping cashew nuts production in the country. Political ecology emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a way of analysing the historical, political and economic processes shaping human-environment interactions (Schubert, 2005), using historical, power and scalar analyses to understand the multiple processes that shape environmental outcomes (Peet and Watts, 2004; Robbins, 2012; Watts, 1983; 2016). The approach emerged through analyses of the integration of former colonised states into the global economy through the colonial project, and emphasised the similarities between countries of the global South, which were widely understood as having been shaped by colonial legacies, trade regimes and global power dynamics (Hanna , Clark and Slocombe, 2008; Moseley, 2017). Among many concerns, political ecology insists that any explanation of environmental outcomes, particularly in former colonised states, must seriously consider questions linked to historical political economy, such as colonial economic policies, global market integration, the role of the state and private capitalist development.

Reflecting this, we adopt a historical analytical approach in this paper to understand colonial legacies in driving the commodification of agriculture in Ghana. We adopt historical analysis (Campbell, 2013; Offen, 2004; Watts, 1983) of political ecology to analyse how colonial economic production has structurally tied Ghana's economy to the production of primary commodities and how these legacies continue to shape agricultural policies and narratives of the Ghanaian postcolonial state. By doing this, we aim to render transparent how the transfer of political economies and their attending ideologies from the metropole to colonies (such as Ghana) shaped patterns of resource use and livelihoods of local people (see also Offen, 2004).

We therefore analyse the historical developments of plantation agriculture in Ghana, and how it reconfigured the local economy from subsistence to an export-led economy (see next section). By doing this, we aim to establish a connection between colonial plantation development and the contemporary expansion of export-led agriculture in Ghana. In addition to drawing from historical narratives of plantation agriculture, we analyse current export-led agricultural policy narratives and how they reinforce historical legacies of export-led production – the latest of which is the production of cashew nuts for export. We also situate our analysis of cashew production within the global commodity market by analysing how the integration of Ghana into the global commodity chain as a supplier of primary commodities is incentivising cashew production.

Informed by the political ecology analytical approach, we argue that the increasing production of cashew nuts in Ghana is tied to colonial legacies of plantation development, global capitalist political economy – including growing international consumer demand for cashew nuts – and national neoliberal policies (see also Neumann 2009; Tan-Mullins 2007). We now review briefly the emergence of export-led agriculture in Ghana and how this has led to a commodity-dependent economy.

### **History of plantation and cashew production in Ghana**

From the fifteenth century, the Gold Coast (now Ghana) was integrated into the global economy in three ways: through the supply of gold, through the supply of slaves for work in plantations in the new world, and through export crops (Campbell, 2013). Although slavery was abolished by the mid-nineteenth century, gold, timber and agricultural export commodities remained the major exports of Ghana for almost two centuries (Boame, 1998). Export-led agriculture in particular, introduced to Ghana by the Dutch in 1788, integrated the rural economy into the global economy (Awadzi et al., 2001). During this era, slaves became plantation labourers in the

production of sugarcane, tobacco and other tropical commodities, for export to Europe (Awadzi et al., 2001). The rationale for the use of slave labour by the Dutch was to avoid the cost of transporting them to the new world, instead using them locally to produce agricultural commodities for export (Awadzi et al., 2001). However, the Dutch plantations failed to gain acceptance among smallholder farmers in Ghana for socio-cultural and ecological reasons (Awadzi et al., 2001; Yaro, Teye and Torvikey, 2016). For example, the plantation system comprised mainly tree crops requiring a long gestation period inconsistent with native perennial cropping, and so was out of step with the local economic and social systems, as well as communal land tenure arrangements.

Cocoa, however, introduced during British colonial rule by Tetteh Quarshie, a native of Ghana, gained wide acceptance among native farmers of the forest regions in the early part of the 1890s (Ludlow, 2012). The British colonial government actively supported its production, and thousands of cocoa tree seedlings were sold to smallholder farmers by the 1890s (Ludlow, 2012). On this basis, cocoa production gradually spread across the whole of Ashanti – a region that became the centre of economic activities in the colonial days, continuing to the present day because of its natural resource endowments (Berry, 1993; Whitfield, 2018). The export of native-grown cocoa to Europe integrated Ghanaian family farmers into the global economy (Grier, 1981), especially when the second industrial revolution in Europe created markets for tropical commodities including cocoa (Austin, 2007). This incentivised farmers in Ghana to expand production into new frontiers, producing about 40% of the world's cocoa demand by the 1920s (Green and Hymer, 1966; Whitfield, 2018). During the Second World War, the British colonial government monopolised the cocoa market by buying and selling cocoa beans to the British Ministry of Food (Leith and Soderling, 2000).

Reflecting this, the Ghanaian economy became an extension of the economies of Britain and other European nations, through the supply of raw materials (for example, cocoa) to feed their industries during the colonial period (Berry, 1993; Whitfield, 2018). This system of production that emerged ensured the colony's economy remained integrated into the global economy in a peripheral way, through the supply of export commodities in the postcolonial period. Since economies involve countless deliberate individual decisions (Bell, 2012), it can be argued that the structure of Ghana's economy characterised by export of primary commodities is an economic and political construct by European colonial masters, and emerging through the dynamics and distribution of global power. The colonial economic design has tied both the national and local economies to

the production of export commodities as dominant economic activity. The colonial production systems commoditised land and commercialised social production relations as well as dislocated the local subsistence economy, producing famine in former colonised African states (Campbell, 2013; Rodney, 1973; Watts, 1983).

At independence in 1957, cocoa was a major source of national revenue, contributing about 60% of the nation's foreign exchange earnings (Sowa, 1991). Successive governments in the postcolonial era supported the production of cocoa and encouraged a diversification of the export-base through the introduction of new export crops to widen participation in international trade to achieve export-oriented growth. Cashew was introduced in the 1960s as part of the diversification strategy but production failed due to several challenges including lack of markets and inadequate support from government (Government of Ghana (GoG), 2000). However, within the same period there was an acceleration of cashew production in Côte d'Ivoire, which is now the world's largest exporter – mainly to India and Vietnam – of raw cashew nuts (Kone, 2010). Cashew nuts production expanded gradually into Ghana's Brong Ahafo region through farmer networks in the late 1970s from communities along the Ghanaian–Ivorian border, such as Banda, Seikwa, and Kejetia (Amanor, 2009; Evans, Mariwah and Antwi, 2015).

In the 1980s, Ghana adopted structural adjustment programmes that liberalised the commodity market and incentivised the production of export commodities in particular (Moseley, Schnurr and Bezner Kerr, 2015; Yaro, Teye and Torvikey, 2016). Cashew nuts became one of the non-traditional commodities developed as part of the government's export diversification strategy (GoG, 2000). Farmers were incentivised through the liberalisation of export markets to re-establish abandoned cashew farms and establish new ones. Through these supports for market and production, Ghana exported 15 metric tonnes of cashew nuts in 1991, marking the beginning of cashew export from Ghana (GoG, 2000). By 1997, the quantity of export had increased to 3,571 metric tonnes (GoG, 2000).

The increasing interest in cashew production culminated in the commissioning of a study by the Ghanaian Ministry of Food and Agriculture in 1998 to assess the status and potential of cashew nuts production in the country. It found that Ghana had endowed potentials including available land to increase the area under cultivation of cashew. More than three million hectares of land was thought to be suitable, largely in the Northern and Brong Ahafo regions. The study also rationalised the production of cashew as necessary to increase income of farmers, leading to poverty alleviation (GoG,

2000). With these outcomes from the study, the government implemented the Cashew Development Project in 2002 with the aim of increasing production across five regions. Despite the implementation of the project in all these regions, production of cashew nuts is largely concentrated in the Brong Ahafo region.

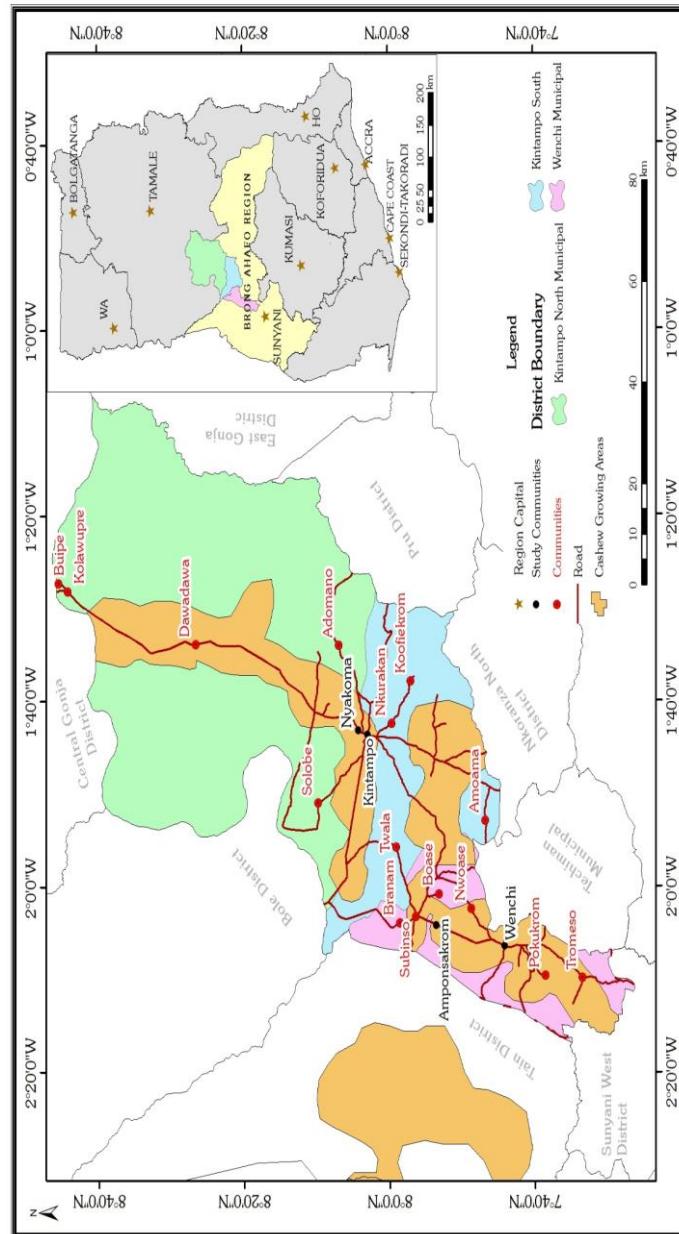
There have also been efforts from donor agencies and Non-Governmental Organisations to support production of cashew nuts and other tree crops in the region. For instance, Adventists Development and Relief Services (ADRA), Technoserves, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the German Development Agency (GIZ) have all played important roles in promoting cashew and tree crop production in the Brong Ahafo region (African Cashew Alliance (ACA), 2016; Amanor, 2009). Through this state and non-state support, Ghana currently produces about 70,000 metric tonnes of cashew nuts annually (World Cashew Convention, 2017). Cashew has become a leading non-traditional agricultural export of Ghana with export revenue in 2016 of US\$197 million (Ghana Business News, 2018). Although the nation as well as farmers continue to earn revenue from export-led agriculture, our major concern is to bring to light the historical and contemporary processes that continue to tie Ghana to this system of agriculture as the dominant economic activity. The next section introduces the case study and research methods that were adopted to gather data.

### **The research case study**

Ghana is an agrarian economy, with almost 50% of the population engaged in the sector (FAO, 2015). As noted, export commodity production has a long history, dating back to the eighteenth century, and the production of export crops continues to dominate the agricultural sector, and the wider economy. Our study was conducted in the Brong Ahafo region, which produces about 30% of national food needs and leads in the production of local staples such as maize, yam and cassava (Amanor, 2009; Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). Urban dwellers in Ghana largely depend on food from this region (Amanor and Pabi, 2007). The region has become a major area in recent decades for the cultivation of tree crops such as mango, citrus, teak and cashew for both the domestic and export markets (Amanor, 2009). The production of cashew nuts in particular is one of the tree crops that is widely gaining acceptance among farmers there (Evans, Mariwah and Antwi, 2015; Peprah et al., 2017).

Fieldwork was conducted in four cashew-growing communities of the region namely Wenchi, Kintampo, Amponsahkrom and Nyakoma. These

**Figure 1: The cashew growing communities including the case study communities in the Brong Ahafo region.**



Source: Modified from Center for Remote Sensing and Geographic Information Service (CERGIS), University of Ghana

communities were selected on the basis that livelihood activities in them are undergoing transformation including the shifting of land and resources towards export-oriented agriculture. Figure 1 shows the cashew growing communities included in the case study.

We have adopted a qualitative case study design, including interviews, observation and document analysis to gather data from different actors involved in the cashew sector. The fieldwork was carried out over a six-month period (June 2016 to November 2016), when 39 cashew farmers, nine local agricultural actors, seven traditional/assembly members and one representative from the Ministry of Food and Agriculture participated in the study. The main themes of the interviews were focused on drivers of cashew nuts at the local level. Five cashew farms were also visited to observe the emerging land use changes. Each interview lasted for at least one hour, and was audio recorded with permission from the participants. The interviews were conducted in Akan, the most widely spoken language in the study communities. The first author, whose first language is Akan, undertook the fieldwork. The interviews were later transcribed into English, followed by coding and analysis.

Scholarly articles (for example, Amanor, 2009; Evans, Mariwah and Antwi, 2015; Peprah et al., 2017) and reports on cashew production from the African Cashew Alliance (ACA), the World Cashew Convention, and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) were reviewed. The tree crops policy of Ghana was also analysed to understand how government, with the support of donors, is driving export-led agriculture through policy narratives (Teye and Torvikey, 2018). We now present our findings.

### **Government policy interventions drive cashew production**

In this section, we trace how government and donor-sponsored market-oriented policies, especially the tree crops policy and Cashew Development Project, are reinforcing the colonial and structural adjustment legacies of export-led agriculture in Ghana. The tree crops policy was designed in 2012 with the aim of providing a comprehensive approach for development of the tree crop sector. The policy was inspired by the view that cocoa contributes significantly to national revenue and that a well-developed tree crop sector can thus increase national revenue and contribute to economic growth. Despite the contributions of cocoa to national revenue, international and national development actors have argued that it is risky to rely on cocoa alone as a major source of foreign revenue, given the volatility of the global commodity market (Teye and Torvikey, 2018). The tree crops policy therefore represented a move to the diversification of export crops, with

farmers encouraged to produce non-traditional export crops to increase their participation in the global commodity market. The government argues that Ghana has a number of comparative advantages in the production of a large number of tree crops including “political stability, geographic location and access to large regional and European markets, adequate seaports, [and] good agricultural environment (arable land, forests and water resources) suitable for the cultivation of different tree crops” (MOFA, 2012, p. 4).

In addition, the policy claims that increased prices of some commodities on the world market and improvements in private sector participation in the tree sector provide incentives to promote the production of specific export tree crops in the agroecological zones of the country. Demonstrating this, production of cashew is widely gaining acceptance in the transitional zone (Brong Ahafo) and northern savannah zones of Ghana, often justified on the basis of favourable climatic and vegetative conditions. One of the key assumptions underlying the tree crops policy is that the “poorest farmers who are prone to food insecurity and poverty are those whose incomes are highly dependent on a single commodity....with strong seasonal price variations and poor value chain organization” (MOFA, 2012, p. 5). Reflecting this fact, the policy argues that farmers in poor regions including Brong Ahafo need to diversify their production into export-oriented crops to generate additional income and, by default, enhance food security. Such policy narratives and assumptions have driven the promotion of cashew production throughout the Brong Ahafo and northern regions of Ghana.

The tree crops policy also aims to learn from, and replicate, previous interventions to develop tree crops in Ghana. One such intervention is the Cashew Development Project, implemented in the cashew growing areas in the 2000s. The project spanned eight years, during which 26,000 hectares of cashew farms were established. This was achieved through the distribution of improved cashew planting materials to farmers, as well as training them in cashew production techniques. Through this project, production of cashew has increased, particularly in the Brong Ahafo region.

Currently, production and multiplication of improved cashew planting materials are the work of the Wenchi Agricultural Research Station, one of the study communities. Its mandates include multiplication and trial of improved planting materials for farmers, alongside conservation of germplasm. The station also serves as a resource centre for farmers and researchers. The Chief Technical Officer of the station described how, during the Cashew Development Project, the station was tasked with producing improved cashew seedlings for farmers. He explained, “When we started, we were just preparing the ground and monitoring the crop to see how it behaves,

so that if farmers come for advice, we will have something to tell them. We are now at a stage where we are cloning cashew planting materials and doing grafting for farmers to have grafted seedlings to plant" (Interview, 19/07/2016).

Further inquiries from the Chief Technical Officer revealed that the station has produced improved cashew planting materials (grafted) and sold to farmers at a low cost (GH¢1.50) to attract more farmers to plant cashew. The price was low because the government subsidised it, as well as providing all the logistics needed to raise enough cashew seedlings for farmers. The Ministry of Food and Agriculture confirmed government support of raising cashew seedlings for farmers:

The Ministry supported the multiplication and distribution of 150,000 improved cashew planting materials at the Wenchi Agricultural Station and CRIG [Crop Research Institute of Ghana] Station at Bole to plant 750 hectares of land. The Ministry also maintained scions [graft] banks at the Wenchi, Bole and Nkwanta [stations] which serve as the main source of cashew nursery materials (Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), MOFA, 2018, p. 6).

As noted above, the increasing production and distribution of cashew seedlings to farmers is premised on a recommendation derived from a study that concluded Ghana had enough land to develop up to 100,000 hectares of new cashew farms by 2020 (GoG, 2000). This recommendation – alongside the broader consideration that cashew production represented an export diversification strategy to increase national revenue and incomes of farmers as well as enhance food security – led to implementation of the Cashew Development Project in the 2000s. Despite the claim that land is available for cashew production, the tree crops policy acknowledges that access to land is a hindrance to development of tree crops, given the complex nature of the customary land tenure system in Ghana. This is true, and indeed the expansion of cashew production appears to be reinforcing the complexity of customary land tenure systems, including land concentration and accumulation by local elites in the Brong Ahafo region (Amanor, 2009; Boafo and Lyons, forthcoming; Evans, Mariwah and Antwi, 2015).

The discussion so far demonstrates that through policy supports, government and donors are promoting the production of cashew nuts in Ghana. The narratives of the tree crops policy in particular are reinforcing colonial and structural adjustment legacies of export-led agriculture as well

as traditional specialisation patterns in Ghana. Thus through government and donor supports, Ghana continues to demonstrate a comparative advantage in the production of primary commodities, an economic structure that has provided few incentives to diversify into manufacturing since the eighteenth century (McMillan, Rodrik and Verduzco-Gallo, 2014). While specialising in the production of primary commodities for export has not provided any gainful employment opportunities or even driven rapid growth and transformation of the economy, planning of the Ghanaian economy continues to reinforce such traditional production patterns with outcomes that often (re)produce poverty among farmers (Amanor, 2009; Austin, 2007, 2010; Yaro, Teye and Torvikey, 2016, 2017). Support by government for the development of tree crops is premised on the fact that there is high global demand for commodities, particularly tree nuts. We now turn to analyse how global demand for cashew nuts is driving its production in Ghana.

### **High global cashew demand drives cashew production in Ghana**

Global demand for cashew nuts has been growing at a rate of 7% per annum over the last decade, and demand for cashew kernels – processed from raw cashew nuts – is expected to grow by 85% in the years ahead (Heinrich, 2012; World Cashew Convention, 2017). The world's largest consumers of cashew nuts are concentrated in India, the United States, Europe, the United Arab Emirates and Australia. India alone consumes around 200,000 metric tonnes of cashew nuts per year, making it the world's largest consumer (Rabany, Rullier and Ricau, 2015). The United States is the second largest consumer, with an annual consumption level of about 150,000 metric tonnes, followed by Europe, which consumes 110,000 metric tonnes. In China, the growing middle class provides a sizeable market for cashew nuts, with an annual consumption rate of 50,000 metric tonnes. The United Arab Emirates and Australia each consume 15,000 metric tonnes per year (Rabany, Rullier and Ricau, 2015). These consumption rates are predicted to remain high due to the growing awareness of the health and nutritional benefits of cashew nuts (World Cashew Convention, 2018). In addition, the growing consumption of vegan diets has induced high demand for products of tree nuts – such as cashew nut milk and cheese – that are used as substitutes for dairy products.

Except for India, the major cashew consuming countries are not major producers – an indication that consuming countries largely depend on cashew nuts produced from the global South. For instance, Africa – where cashew is not a staple – currently produces more than 50% of the world's cashew demand (Ghana News Agency, 2018). About 90% of cashew nuts produced in Africa is exported in its raw form mainly to India and Vietnam, where it

is processed into cashew kernels and exported to Europe, the United States, the Middle East and China for onward processing and consumption (Africa Cashew Alliance, 2016; Oteng, 2011). Currently India and Vietnam together process about 90% of global raw cashew nuts and are the two largest exporters of cashew kernels to these consuming countries (Trade for Development Centre, 2018). The growth of Indian and Vietnamese cashew sectors – resulting from increasing consumer demand for cashew nuts in the global North – has led to sourcing of raw cashew nuts from Africa to meet the high processing requirements (Tessmann and Fuchs, 2016). The African cashew sector in particular became attractive to the Asian traders and processors because at the initial stage, there was no official reference price of raw cashew nuts – an incentive that offered unique opportunities to Asian traders (Tessmann and Fuchs, 2016). For instance, 75% of India's raw cashew nuts imports came from West Africa in 2016 (International Nut and Dried Fruit Council Foundation, 2017/2018). The huge importation of cashew nuts from Africa was confirmed by Mr. P Sundaran, chairperson of the Cashew Export Promotion Council of India. He stated that India is not self-sufficient in the production of raw cashew nuts as the processing capacity of the country is more than double the production, and the huge production deficit is met by imports “mainly from African countries” (World Cashew Convention, 2017, p. 24).

While India imports more than half of its annual processing requirement from Africa, Vietnam has overtaken India as the largest importer of raw cashew nuts from Africa, importing 1.1 million metric tonnes from the continent in 2017 (Xinhua, 2017). The huge processing requirements of both India and Vietnam suggest that there is an intense competition between the two countries over raw cashew nuts in Africa. The competition is further intensified by demand from local cashew processors, a process that drives the farm gate price of cashew nuts higher, thereby incentivising farmers to shift from food production to cashew nuts in African countries. Asian cashew exporters, rather than local processors are better able to afford the high farm gate price of raw nuts because the former can access credit facilities at preferential interest rates from their countries (see also Tessmann and Fuchs, 2016).

Interviews with farmers in Ghana's Brong Ahafo region revealed that they became aware of the high global demand for cashew nuts through the presence of Asian cashew exporting companies at the local level. As noted above, the cashew market expanded into Ghana from neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, the world's largest exporter of raw cashew nuts (Kone, 2010; Osei-Akoto, 2010). Côte d'Ivoire taxes the export of raw cashew nuts, but the

Ghanaian export market has no such tax (Kone, 2010), resulting in a proliferation of Asian cashew nut exporters in Ghana exposing farmers in the Brong Ahafo region to the high global demand for cashew nuts. The proliferation of Asian cashew nuts exporters at the local level was confirmed by the local chairperson of cashew farmers in Wenchi who noted that “the buyers of cashew nuts come from India, Vietnam, Indonesia and Europe, but the European buyers buy only the processed cashew nuts [kernels] while the Asian buyers buy the raw nuts and export to their countries to process” (Interview, 27/06/2016). In two separate interviews in Amponsahkrom and Kintampo, two farmers explained that availability of market is largely incentivising production of cashew nuts in their communities. In Amponsahkrom, a farmer indicated that there is “a ready market for cashew nuts, if you harvest today, you will sell today. This is because during the cashew harvesting season, the buyers come here to buy the nuts” (Interview, 02/09/2016). Another farmer in Kintampo reiterated that many farmers were planting cashew “because of the availability of market for cashew nuts” (Interview, 16/09/2016). These findings resonate with the International Trade Centre (2015) report which documents that African farmers’ interest in the cashew sector relates to the availability of ready market due to the high import demand for raw cashew nuts by Asian processors.

During the cashew harvesting season – February to April each year – local agents buy the raw cashew nuts at an agreed farm gate price, and then onward sell to the export companies. The farm gate price of cashew is determined through a negotiation between lead farmers and local cashew buying agents, and is based on international rates. Although the process of determining the price of farm produce in Ghana is understood as reducing profit margins accrued by farmers, many of them explained they had never received farm gate prices as high as those received for cashew nuts. The local chairperson of cashew farmers in Wenchi, who was involved in the negotiation of the price, revealed in an interview that in 2016 “a kilo of cashew nuts was selling at GH¢5, so 50 kilos of cashew nuts was GH¢250, which was high. Because of this, farmers are now moving into the production of cashew nuts” (Interview, 27/06/2016). Although farmers earn income from cashew nuts production, this income is seasonal, as it is only realised during the cashew harvesting season. This means that cashew does not bring all-year round income, an indication that cashew cannot permanently reduce poverty among farmers in the Brong Ahafo region (see also Peprah et al., 2017). Despite earning only seasonal income from cashew, land in the region is increasingly being tied to cashew production thereby limiting available land for food

production, an all-year round livelihood activity (see also Boafo and Lyons, forthcoming; Evans, Mariwah and Antwi, 2015).

The discussion so far indicates that multi-scalar processes and actors are shaping the production of cashew nuts in Ghana for export. The processes and actors include government national policy interventions and high global demand for cashew nuts, demonstrated at the local level through the proliferation of Asian cashew exporters. With such a proliferation in Africa in the past decade, it can be argued that the neoliberalised agricultural regime does not always benefit developed economies only, but also powerful emerging economies in Asia that have sought to expand access to global markets to sustain high economic growth (Debrah, Yeboah and Boafo, 2015). The scramble for commodities, including cashew nuts in Africa by the Asian processors, reinforces traditional specialisation patterns that emerged during the expansion of mercantile colonisation in Africa. Such processes have further deepened the vulnerability of African peasant farmers to market integration and its exploitative relations. Demonstrating this market integration, cocoa production in the colonial days was marked by the significant integration of family farmers into the global market economy, as European merchants bought and shipped cocoa beans to feed industries in Europe (Grier, 1981).

The global cashew value chain, which occurs in different parts of the world as seen above, demonstrates a globalised food system as a result of the economic integration of regions. Africa became part of the global economy system during the expansion of mercantile colonisation and a global system continues to shape political and economic decisions in African countries. Thus, production of cashew nuts in African countries such as Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya and Tanzania reflects these colonial legacies of export-led agriculture and global market integration, including through Asian traders buying and exporting cashew nuts produced by local farmers.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

In this paper, we adopted a historical perspective of political ecology to analyse the processes shaping the expansion of cashew production in Ghana's Brong-Ahafo region. We have argued that the expansion of cashew production is the latest manifestation of the legacies of colonial and postcolonial practices that have shaped and still shape export-led agriculture and global market integration. Colonial rule in Ghana and much of Africa was characterised by the extensive development of export crops as raw materials for a rapidly industrialising Europe (Austin, 2010; Campbell, 2013;

Settles, 1996). Primary commodities from colonies including Ghana drove the industrial revolution and increased efficiency of machine production; they were also used in the manufacturing of consumer goods (Settles, 1996). The continuous demand for tropical commodities in developed economies has traditionally tied land use in developing countries to the production of export commodities, even in the postcolonial era. Development economists argue that countries with comparative advantage or specialisation in the production of primary commodities are at a distinct disadvantage because such a specialisation reduces incentives to diversify towards modern manufacturing (McMillan, Rodrik and Verduzco-Gallo, 2014). This partly explains why Ghana has not yet achieved productivity-enhancing structural changes (McMillan, Rodrik and Verduzco-Gallo, 2014).

We have also demonstrated that although the production of export commodities in Ghana is a colonial legacy, this legacy does not benefit only the colonial masters but also emerging economies in Asia that are seeking to expand access to natural resources in Africa to industrialise their economies (Cheru and Obi, 2010; Debrah, Yeboah and Boafo, 2015). The proliferation of Asian cashew buyers in Ghana provides market opportunities for local cashew farmers but also further integrates them into the global market and reinforces traditional specialisation patterns of commodity production. This specialisation has not, however, yet provided the needed economic transformation evident in job creation, poverty reduction and high standards of living in the country (Kolavalli et al., 2012; McMillan, Rodrik and Verduzco-Gallo, 2014). The integration of local farmers in Ghana into the global markets renders them indecisive as to what crops to produce; the choice of crops is decided, rather, by the market. Thus, the decisions of local farmers are largely formed in a predetermined market, a process that leaves them vulnerable to the forces of the global market.

We have seen how global market forces are shaping the decisions of farmers in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana to shift resources into the production of cashew nuts for the global market rather than produce food for the local market. As Lawrence (2017) and Rosin, Stock, and Campbell (2012) argue, farmers in many parts of the global South are increasingly abandoning local food production to cultivate commodities that can be exchanged for money on the international market. Although farmers earn seasonal incomes from the production of cashew nuts in the case we have examined, it is unclear this situation will continue. It will depend upon factors including income levels and the purchasing power of the growing middle classes and their associated consumer demand for cashew nuts in the emerging economies. Consumption patterns, for example, may shift towards

new commodities, thereby reducing the demand for cashew nuts. At the producer level, farmers may also either benefit or lose from government trade regulations, barriers and border interventions. The entire value chain of cashew rests on such factors, which amount to a volatile future for the sector.

Despite the uncertainty of the global commodity market, investment in cashew nuts production will likely continue to grow at the expense of local food production, with outcomes that may threaten local and national food supply, and reinforce land commodification (see Boafo and Lyons, forthcoming; Evans, Mariwah and Antwi, 2015). These impacts require further research and public policy attention, with a particular focus on ensuring national and regional agricultural policies commensurate with ensuring local food security. Further consideration should also be directed towards the opportunities for investment in the cashew sector to build in-country processing and encourage value addition, thereby leveraging further economic opportunities for Ghana in the face of a still-growing value chain for cashew production.

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## The Slow Road to a New Home: The Experiences of the First Generation of South Sudanese Western Australians Settled in Perth<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Most refugee migrants entering Australia have limited financial resources. In Australia, low-income migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds—also referred to as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) migrants—feature as one of the groups suffering from the current Australian housing crisis, experiencing difficulty in navigating the housing market and achieving sustainable housing outcomes. This article analyses the case study of the South Sudanese migrants and profiles this group, analysing factors that contribute to improving their financial independence (education, employment and income) and housing outcomes, with the aim to evaluate their overall economic position in relation to accessing the housing market. Data shows that after an average of ten years beginning from their initial arrival in Australia, this migrant group is still struggling to improve their financial position. The article concludes by questioning the current approaches to the resettlement process concerning the attainment of suitable housing outcomes.

### Introduction

For the fourteenth time consecutively, the Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey (2018) scored Australian housing markets as severely unaffordable.<sup>2</sup> Australia has been experiencing housing market affordability problems since the 1990s. However, the housing scene in Western Australia (WA), and Perth, in particular, has

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<sup>2</sup> This survey rates housing affordability using the “median multiple” which is calculated dividing the median house price by the gross annual median household income.

changed since the early 2000s, with the effects of the crisis alleviated by an increase in the rental vacancy rates and a decrease in both median rental and sale housing prices. Even if the peak of the housing crisis has passed, affordability problems remain across Australia, especially for low-income households. As Madden and Marcuse observe, “the idea of crisis implies that inadequate or unaffordable housing is abnormal, a temporary departure from a well-functioning standard. But for working-class and poor communities, housing crisis is the norm” (2016, p. 9). This article investigates the experience of one of these low-income communities. It studies the first generation of South Sudanese migrants that have settled in the metropolitan area of Perth (WA). This study is part of a comprehensive investigation into the South Sudanese migrants’ territorial distribution and their housing choices within Greater Perth, the major urban conurbation in WA. The settlement of this group of migrants in WA coincided with the increased African refugee migration to Australia. Between the late 1990s and the early 2000s, Australia opened its door to refugees from African countries involved in enduring civil conflicts and wars. Since their initial settlement in Australia, the Sudanese<sup>3</sup>-born population has rapidly increased in number—more than any other refugee group from the African continent. During the decade up to 2011, almost 27,000 Sudanese people permanently resettled in Australia (DSS 2014). As Robinson (2013, p. 17) notes, “For many Australians, South Sudanese are the face of Africans in Australia”. Between 2001 and 2006, Perth welcomed 11% of the Sudanese entrants, third after Melbourne (33%) and Sydney (21%) (DIAC 2007). Moreover, according to the 2011 census data, WA recorded the highest density of Sudan and South Sudan-born people: 1.43 per 1,000 (Robinson 2013). In 2006, Perth<sup>4</sup> was home to almost 99% of the Sudanese population present in WA, and according to the most recent census (ABS 2016b), these figures have not changed much over time with 98% of the Sudanese population in WA still settled in Perth.

Using the three latest Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census databases (2006, 2011 and 2016),<sup>5</sup> in this paper I analyse data relative to demographics, education, employment and income to evaluate advancement in economic independence over time, and therefore to assess the increase in

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3 From here on, when using the term ‘Sudanese’ population, I refer to the sum of Sudan- and South Sudan-born populations, as per census data.

4 Perth refers to the Greater Perth metropolitan region, identified for statistical purposes in the ABS (2011) “2901.0.Census Dictionary, 2011” and represents the functional extent of WA’s capital city and labour market, including Mandurah and Pinjarra areas.

5 Findings are based on ABS TableBuilder census data: see ABS (2006b), ABS (2011b), and ABS (2016b).

opportunities and choices for the Sudanese population when accessing the housing market. The considered census years correspond to the main stages of the settlement of this ethnic group in WA, allowing for a precise description of their settlement process. The year 2006 corresponds to the initial large-scale arrival of Sudanese refugees in Australia, the year 2011 to a stabilisation in the number of Sudanese entrants following the initial migration peak, and the year 2016 to a period of continued settlement, permitting an evaluation of the settlement outcome—as the majority of Sudanese migrants have, at this point, lived in Perth for at least five years. The paper opens by discussing the current experience of refugee migrants in finding suitable housing. I then explain the research methodology discussing research findings by analysing the demographic profile, income, work, and level of education, including language skills, of the Western Australian Sudanese population. The data shows that the first generation of Sudanese migrants settled in WA have had a slow start in reaching economic independence and therefore in emerging from below the poverty line even after having been in Australia for five to ten years. I conclude by discussing and querying the current literature, which suggests an average of only five years for a complete resettlement process.

### **Resettlement, Housing and Home**

Most refugee migrants entering Australia have limited financial resources and rely on social housing when looking for accommodation. However, in the timeframe considered in this study, the demand for social housing significantly exceeded the supply, leaving no options for migrants other than seeking affordable private housing opportunities in a rental market where affordability represented only a marginal share (Lejukole 2013; Australian Human Rights Commission 2010). Migrants arriving at the beginning of the new century to Australia experienced the “lack of affordable housing in the private rental market; the tightening of eligibility for public housing; long waiting lists for public housing; and a decrease in public housing stock” (Fozdar and Hartley 2013, p. 6). Adding to this long list, they also faced “a lack of knowledge regarding tenancy issues; the need to be employed; lack of capital and low incomes” (Fozdar and Hartley 2013, p. 6). Moreover, refugee entrants had: a) difficulty in applying for rental property due to lack of rental history or references and/or language barriers; b) trouble in finding suitable housing regarding size and location (accommodating large families and single men in particular); c) struggles with unrealistic expectations and/or suffering the after-effects of torture and trauma; and d) suffer from discrimination from landlords and real estate agents (RCOA 2013; Fozdar

and Hartley 2012; OMI 2009; Pittaway, Muli, and Shteir 2009; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2008). Fozdar and Hartley (2013) note that discrimination is especially relevant for “visibly” different migrants. Similarly, the Australian Human Rights Commission (2010, p. 24) remarks that “racial discrimination—both direct and indirect—was the most common barrier that African Australians said they faced when attempting to find affordable and appropriate housing”.

These disadvantages have a profound meaning for migrants. Existing scholarship emphasises the crucial role of “home” and “homemaking processes” in migrants’ settlement experiences. The literature identifies the dwelling as the setting for the development of complex socio-spatial relations connected to feelings of belonging and expressions of cultural identity (Azriel 2010; Hadjiyanni 2007; Graham and Connell 2006; Head, Muir, and Hampel 2004; Jacobs 2004; Kılıçkiran 2003; Jacobs 2011). As Kılıçkiran (2003) explains, the house is the primary environment where migrants establish roots in the new country through revived home country habits, while also expressing personal changes. For refugee migrants, the homemaking process goes beyond the individual and emotional experience. Firstly, safe, secure and affordable housing is a fundamental human right for humanitarian entrants—as recognised by the UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (1991). Secondly, as pointed out by the UNHCR (2002) in *Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration*, housing “provides a base from which resettled refugees can seek employment, re-establish family relationships and make connections with the wider community” (p. 162). As Ager and Strang (2008) have pointed out, for this specific group of migrants, housing is both a marker to measure integration and a means to achieve it.

### **Research Design: Choices and Challenges**

This study uses the three latest available Census databases compiled by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to profile the identified ethnic community. For each census, the research has interrogated the datasets: “Counting Persons, Place of Enumeration”, “Counting Persons, Places of Usual Residence” and “Counting Employed Persons, Place of Work”. The biggest hurdle was to identify the target group. In the 2006 census, the search was limited to the people who indicated their country of birth as “Sudan”. For the other two censuses (2011 and 2016), the country of birth used was both “Sudan”, and “South Sudan”. This decision was taken for two main reasons, the first being associated with the inaccuracy of the census data—in particular, the 2011 census—and the second, related to comparability of data

across the different census databases (as well as databases from different sources). The 2011 census introduced, for the first time, the preference “South Sudan” in the question relative to “Ancestry” and “Country of Birth”. This change in codes aimed to generate an opportunity to understand the extent of South Sudanese migration into Australia. However, as Robinson (2013, p. 15) warns, “the raw data for country of birth is not plausible since they suggest that over 3,000 people [...] born in South Sudan after 9 July 2011 (Independence Day) were residing in Australia one month later (9 August 2011, Census Night)”. Robinson also explains that more problems surface when cross-referencing different data in the census database such as language and ancestry. Additionally, the 2011 Census presented issues related to errors in transcriptions, respondents’ language barriers, and incomplete and/or incorrectly completed census forms. The data emerging from the 2011 census also presents considerable incongruences in counting the numbers of Sudan- and South Sudan-born population in WA when compared to the successive censuses. While the growth of the total Sudanese born community between the two latest censuses registered only a marginal 5% increment (corresponding to 200 people), the distribution between the two countries has considerably changed. In 2011, there were 438 South Sudanese and over 2,600 Sudanese-born people residing in the Perth metropolitan area; five years later the census counted over 2,100 South Sudanese and just over 1,100 Sudanese. As this growth in the number of the South Sudanese migrants does not correspond to any interstate migration of considerable proportion, it only confirms Robinson’s (2013) hypothesis of the presence of significant errors of estimate of South Sudanese presence in Australia by the 2011 census. Therefore, the study considers the broader category of Perth<sup>6</sup> residents born in Sudan and South Sudan.

### The WA Sudanese Population

As previously stated, in 2006, Perth was home to almost 99% of the Sudanese population present in WA. These figures have not changed over time. In 2016, approximately 98% of the Sudanese population in WA had settled in Perth, with most entering Australia in the decade between 2000 and 2010, during the second wave of Sudanese migration to Australia. The increased Sudanese migration to Australia was prompted by the escalation of Sudan’s longstanding civil war, combined with the UNHCR pressure on the Australian Government to increase the number of refugees accepted into the country, and the “9/11 effect” which shifted the intake of refugees out of the

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<sup>6</sup> From now on, when using the term Perth, the article refers to the Greater Perth Metropolitan Area as identified in the 2011 and 2016 censuses.

Middle Eastern region for security reasons (Robinson 2013; Hugo 2011; Dhanji 2010; Hart and Maiden 2007).

The analysis of data from the three latest censuses, aggregated per year of arrival, suggests that the Sudanese migration to WA started in earnest in the early 2000s, peaked between 2003 and 2007, and then abated in recent years (Figure 1). In 2011, 3,208 Sudan- and South Sudan-born people lived in WA (ABS 2011c), registering a 57% growth compared to 2006. Between 2011 and 2016 data show that (first generation) Sudanese migrants in WA has now settled, with the latest Census (2016) registering only a marginal 5% growth over the previous 5 years. It is important to note that some of this population initially settled elsewhere in Australia. Data on internal migration across Australian States and Territories show that in 2011, 8% of the Sudanese people in WA migrated from within Australia, with the majority of them coming from New South Wales (32%) and Victoria (30%) (Census 2011).

According to the 2006 census, the first WA Sudanese settlers were young (91.5% under the age of 44) and predominantly Christian (81.6%). This profile has only minimally changed during the rapid increase of Sudanese migration registered leading up to 2011. The demographic statistics of the Sudanese population, in 2011, show in fact that the newly arrived migrants were in the same age bracket of their predecessors and we can attribute the increase of average age—as visible in Figure 2—to the natural ageing of the population.

While the fundamental demographic characteristics (sex and age) of this migrant group have not changed significantly in the considered decade, a significant change has occurred in household composition. In 2006, 30% of the Sudanese population was married, and 7% of people lived in a single-parent household. Families encompassed both dependant and non-dependant children as well as immediate family. In 2006, 10% of Sudanese were living with their relatives\*; and a very marginal number of people lived alone (4%) or in shared housing (2%).

In time, the household composition and family living arrangement started changing. The absolute number of lone parents doubled between 2006 and 2011. Analogously, in this period, the number of people living with unrelated families doubled. Demographic changes related to household composition continued to occur in the following five years. Overall, between 2006 and 2016, the number of married Sudanese (opposite-sex couples) doubled, and the number of people living in a single parent household quadrupled. While in 2006 there were two married couples for each lone parent, in 2016 the ratio dropped to 1:1.3. This coincided with an increase in the number of “separated” people. In 2016, the number of separates was, in fact, four times

in value when compared to data collected ten years earlier. In the decade considered, census data also register a decrease of large families (six or more) and an increase in the number of people living in smaller households (two and three family members) (Figure 3). This change in the number of people counted in the household can be partially attributed to changes in family structures due to divorce and separation, and adult progeny still living in the household. Since settlement, the population presented an almost equal distribution between the two sexes (Figure 2). However, disparities within this migrant group between sexes are evident in education, participation in the workforce and proficiency in spoken English. Sudanese-Australian women have a lower level of education compared to their male counterparts, with an average, across the three censuses, of 19% difference between men and women having completed year 12 or equivalent (Table 1).

An even higher difference in percentage between the two sexes is evident concerning school attendance. On average, across the three censuses, 3% of men and 13% of women never attended school. Women remained also less proficient in speaking English. In 2006, 31% of the Sudanese women did not speak English well (and 6% spoke no English at all); while, for men, about 17% did not speak English well. Five years later, 21% of women were still not fluent in spoken English (9% for men), and in 2016 the percentage dropped to 16% (5% for men). Sudanese women are also less active in the workforce. In 2006, 71% of them did not work and in 2011 this percentage diminished by 11%. Data on male employment show that Sudanese men are, on average, four times more engaged in a full-time job than Sudanese women are. However, they still have a higher percentage of unemployment compared to Perth's overall male population (four times). In 2006-2011, half of the Sudanese-Australian population—specifically half the number of Sudanese-born people responding to the workforce section of the census—was not in the labour force (Table 2). The male Sudanese workers were mainly employed in the manufacturing industry (40% in 2006, decreasing to 32% in 2011), while women worked primarily in healthcare and community services (45.8% women in 2011, a figure that had doubled compared to 2006). The relatively high level of unemployment among Sudanese Australians is partly explained by the involvement of Sudanese migrants in some form of study. Almost invariably across the 2006 to 2016 decade, approximately a third of the total Sudanese population aged twenty to sixty-nine attended an educational institution (mainly university and tertiary institutions) and, of these students two-thirds were enrolled full-time\*.

## The Slow Way Home

High levels of unemployment and commitment to study among Australian-Sudanese culminate in low personal and household incomes. The slow growth in economic independence is reflected in limited housing choices and housing stress. At the time of the 2006 census, 76% of the Sudanese population aged fifteen and over was earning a weekly gross income less than the average WA weekly income, which at the time was set at \$861.30 (ABS 2006a).

Five years later, despite a general increase in the percentage of Sudanese above the age of fifteen earning higher salaries, still fully 84% of them relied on a weekly income that was below the state average of \$1,138.90 (ABS 2011a). Similarly, in 2016, despite the Sudanese population continuing to increase their weekly income, the vast majority (86%) remained below the average state weekly income of \$1,205.30 (ABS 2016a)\*. The meaning of the term low-income for this migrant group is, however, better understood when comparing their equivalised gross weekly household income<sup>7</sup> with the mean equivalised disposable household income in Australia.<sup>8</sup>

In 2006, 88.7% of the Sudanese population in WA had a household income below the second lowest quintile value calculated for the 2005–06 financial year, of \$640 (valued at 2006). For the same period, the mean equivalised disposable household income per week for low-income earners was calculated as \$341 (ABS 2007a), and the cost of housing occupancy for WA was estimated at \$179 (ABS 2017b)<sup>9</sup>. According to these figures, over 80% of the Sudanese population was living in poverty. In 2011, the value of the low-income category in the household income distribution rose to \$496 (ABS 2017a). Seventy-six percent of Perth's Sudanese population were living in a household with a gross income lower than the set value defining low-income. This value increases to 89% when including Sudanese

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<sup>7</sup> This is defined by the ABS as: “‘Total income’ at the household level adjusted using an equivalence scale. This variable has been developed to enable comparison of the relative incomes of households of different sizes and composition. When household income is adjusted according to an equivalence scale, the equivalised income can be viewed as an indicator of the income available to a standardised household or as an indicator of the resources available to each individual in a household” (ABS 2015).

<sup>8</sup> This has been done by using the quintile categories estimated by the ABS (2017a) for the period from 1994–95 to 2015–16. The values indicated by the ABS are adjusted to 2015 dollars value using the Consumer Price index (CPI). The values indicated in Table 3 have been re-adjusted using the ABS CPI inflation calculator, <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/d3310114.nsf/home/Consumer+Price+Index+Inflation+Calculator> using the annual index.\*

<sup>9</sup> All household renting.

households with a gross income below the estimated second lowest quintile value. Data has not changed much in 2016, with first generation Sudanese migrants in Perth—at almost ten years since their arrival—still within the low-income category.

Both in 2011 and in 2006, 80% of Sudanese migrants lived in single detached dwellings with the residual 20% residing in semi-detached houses and flats\*. According to the census data, in 2011, 70% of the Sudanese migrants lived in rental properties, while the remaining either were paying a mortgage (20%) or owned their house outright (3%). Analysing the census data, it emerges that the tenure type relates to the year of arrival in Australia and the area of settlement. Analysing relative percentages of tenure type by year of arrival, a correspondence between the length of stay in Australia and tenure is evident (Table 4). Moving backwards on the timeline, the proportion of homebuyers increases on an annual basis.

The proportion of the total number of Sudanese migrants buying a home doubled between 2006 and 2011, while the rate of Sudanese living in a rental property registered only a 10% decrease. Such disparity in percentages can be attributed to the increase of the Sudanese migrant population in Australia between the two censuses. However, a more thorough analysis of the data shows that 60% of these renters were migrants that had been living in Australia for five or more years. Between 2011 and 2016, the WA Sudanese-born population registered only a marginal 5% growth. By this time, migrants had started expressing the desire to remain in Perth, with an increased number of them investing their small income in buying a home.

Given their low-income and precarious job position, renting offers them an opportunity to move between different properties in order to locate more affordable housing. The recording of a significant share of migrants renting after several years of settlement needs contextualising within the problem of inaccessibility to the Perth housing market as well as the characteristics of the migrant group considered. In his study of the first and second generation of migrants in Australia, Hugo (2011) suggests that, in interpreting data relative to migrants' housing tenure, both their average age and the presence (or absence), of an established migration pattern to Australia needs to be considered. He argues that home ownership rates are lower in younger age groups and that more recently arrived migrant groups have lower ownership rates compared to established ones. Perth's Sudanese migrant population ticks both of these boxes. As the age chart above (Figure 2) shows, the Sudanese population settled in Perth is young, with over 90% of the population being forty-four years old or younger. Moreover, the arrival of refugee Sudanese people to Australia is relatively recent with a steady influx

of entries registered only in the early 2000s. Nevertheless, independently from the tenure type, a considerable share of both renters and owners invested a substantial portion of their income to pay for their accommodations, indicating severe housing stress. This is clear in the data summarised in Tables 5 and 6, which respectively compares the housing income of the Sudanese born population with rent and mortgage repayment.<sup>10</sup> It is worth pointing out with regard to home purchase, that the choice of Sudanese migrants to buy a house even if not financially fit for the recurrent and long-term cost, is not an isolated choice. Hugo (2011, p. 157) noticed a similar pattern for Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian migrants, observing that they were “reproducing a pattern of earlier generations of low skilled migrants who placed a high priority on property purchase”. A very high proportion of the Sudanese population lived in a household where the cost of the weekly rent was higher or equivalent to its gross equivalised income\*. The ABS (2007) calculated that, for the financial year 2005–06 in WA, the housing cost for private renters was equivalent to 16% of their gross income. In 2006, low-income Sudanese migrants, however, were spending more than 16% of their income to pay their rent. According to the figure elaborated in the 2006 census data (summarised in Table 7) the percentage value is considerably higher, with a large number of Sudanese households investing 50% or more of their household income to pay the rent. This data assumes more significance when contextualised within the cost of rental property, using a snapshot at the time of the 2006 census. The analysis of the cost of the rental housing stock in the private market at the 2006 census night, in fact, emphasises the extent of the difficulties experienced by migrants in finding economically viable private rental opportunities.

## Conclusions

At their arrival (as charted by the 2006 Census), the Sudanese migrant population that settled in Perth were relatively young individuals with a refugee background and a low-income economic profile. After 5 years, according to the 2011 Census, their demographic profile had not changed significantly nor had their financial position. According to the analysed census data, the vast majority of the Sudanese population in fact in 2011 still relied on an income significantly lower than the average weekly WA salary. In 2016, despite the Sudanese migrants having significantly improved their economic position, still almost 90% of the first-generation population was

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10 To note that to calculate the percentages the highest values of the range has been used. As mortgage is calculated monthly in census data the month length of 4 weeks has been considered and the value has been divided accordingly.

earning a weekly salary lower than the average State weekly income. The data presented shows that since their arrival the first generation of Sudanese migrants have improved their employment status, education level, and increased their income. However, the vast majority of them after ten years living in Australia were still struggling to better their financial position to a level where they could detach themselves from the label of “low-income migrant group”. These findings highlight the necessity for further research regarding the resettlement experience of other migrant groups—also considering different geographical locations and timeframes—in relation to building financial independence. Moreover, this initial exploration of the census data exposes differences in progress (both in relation to education, and therefore to job status) between male and female, with the latter advancing at much slower pace when compared to their male counterparts. The analysis of the data relative to income has not been investigated in relation to gender; however, the type of jobs in which the female Sudanese population is employed (healthcare and community services sectors) suggests roles with a low hourly pay rate.

The migrant group considered in this study has mostly entered Australia with a Humanitarian Visa, and are therefore eligible at arrival for the assistance provided by the Australian Government through the Refugee and Humanitarian Program (HSS). Under the direction of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, the program establishes eligibility criteria and regulates the number of entrants. According to the program, the procurement of a six-month lease is considered a satisfactory outcome and contributes to fulfilling the requirements to exit the HSS. As part of the housing assistance package, the program offers a one-time grant and rental assistance (up to six months); and groups such as religious organisations and migrant welfare bodies provide additional help. Following the initial period, Centrelink<sup>11</sup> offers further assistance. Notwithstanding the structure put in place by the government to provide adequate housing, as well as guarantee control over the quality of the support offered, the reality of the resettlement comprises many hurdles (RCOA 2013, Fozdar and Hartley 2012, 2013, 2013a, Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010). The Department of Social Services (DSS 2016) itself recognises the difficulty for migrants in finding and accessing affordable and adequate housing. In a booklet targeting newly arrived migrants the Western Australia government acknowledges “Housing in Australia can be difficult to find and rent can be expensive. It may be particularly difficult for large families to find long-term

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11 Centrelink is a program within the Australian Department of Human Services that delivers social and welfare payments and services.

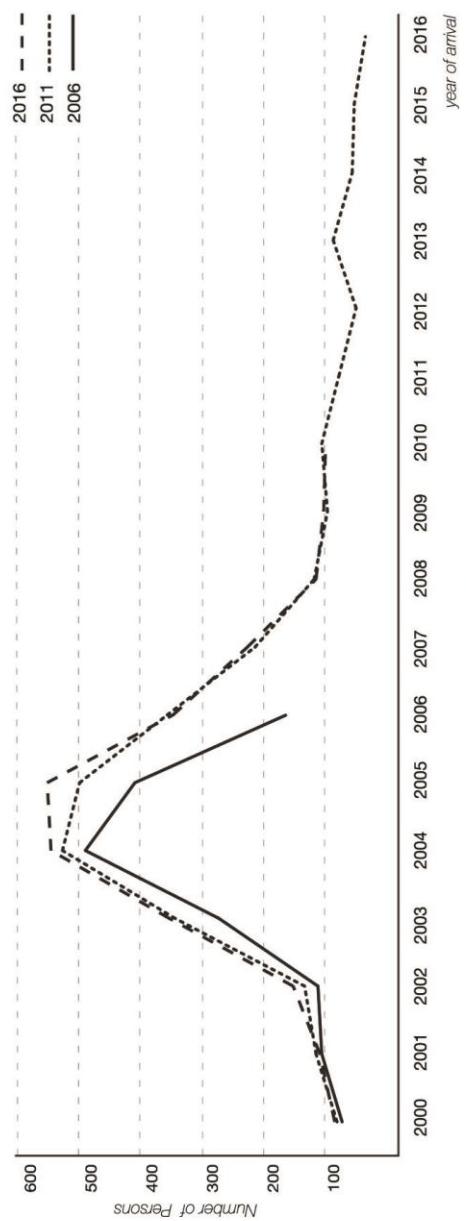
accommodation that suits all their needs” and advising the migrants, “You may need to compromise and take housing that is available” (DSS 2016, p. 64).

Taking what is available is indeed the best way to describe the housing choices of Sudanese refugees settled in Perth. The report of the WA Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI) on the settlement of African humanitarian entrants in WA states that at arrival, migrants “were having difficulty securing government and/or private housing after the six-month lease expired” (OMI 2009, p. 37). Participants in the OMI study also reported “lengthy waiting times for government housing and difficulties securing accommodation for large families” with some of them resorting “to leasing two separate dwellings to house their families” and facing “barriers accessing private housing”, which included “cost, lack of referees and racism” (OMI 2009, p. 37).

A study carried out for the Department of Immigration on first- and second-generation humanitarian entrants (Hugo 2011) stresses that it is approximately within the first five years after their arrival that refugee migrants establish themselves in their new country. In this period, they are seeking rental opportunities rather than home ownership because they have minimal house-buying power: they are most likely to be involved in some form of study and/or they are at the initial stage of building their working career. This profile coincides with the Sudanese refugees settled in WA. However, this timeframe, still primarily used as a reference in Australian migrant literature, is questioned by the findings of this study. These findings call for more research on the resettlement experience of other migrants’ groups and a rethinking of settlement services provided in relation to the length of wait times before services are accessible, and the nature of services offered.

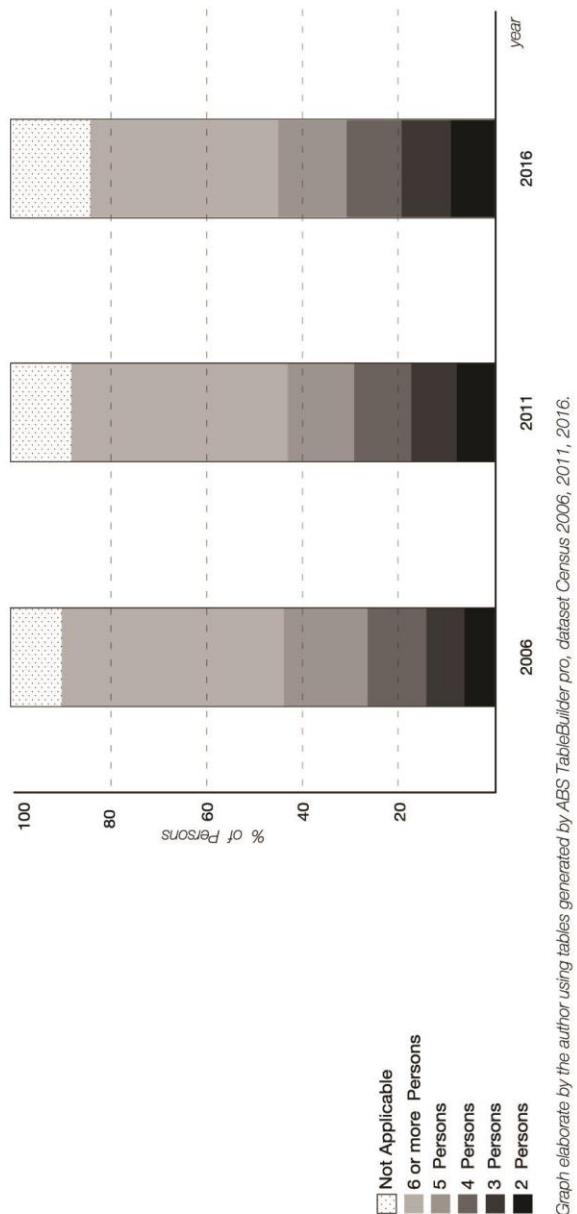
In summary, the findings of the study presented in this article show the relatively slow process of Sudanese-Australian migrants in bettering their economic situation. The data also indicates that the precarious financial status is paired with the experience of a high percentage of Sudanese migrants established in Perth between 2006 and 2016 spending a prolonged period in rental accommodation with only a small percentage of them attempting the financial risk of accessing the house-buying market, even when not supported by an adequate income. These findings open up a debate surrounding issues about how the current resettlement process is managed, and the opportunity for migrants to complete it successfully, which includes the capacity to access and maintain a suitable housing outcome within a shorter timeframe.

**Figure 1**



Graph elaborate by the author using tables generated by ABS TableBuilder pro, dataset Census 2006, 2011, 2016.

**Figure 2**



**Figure 3**

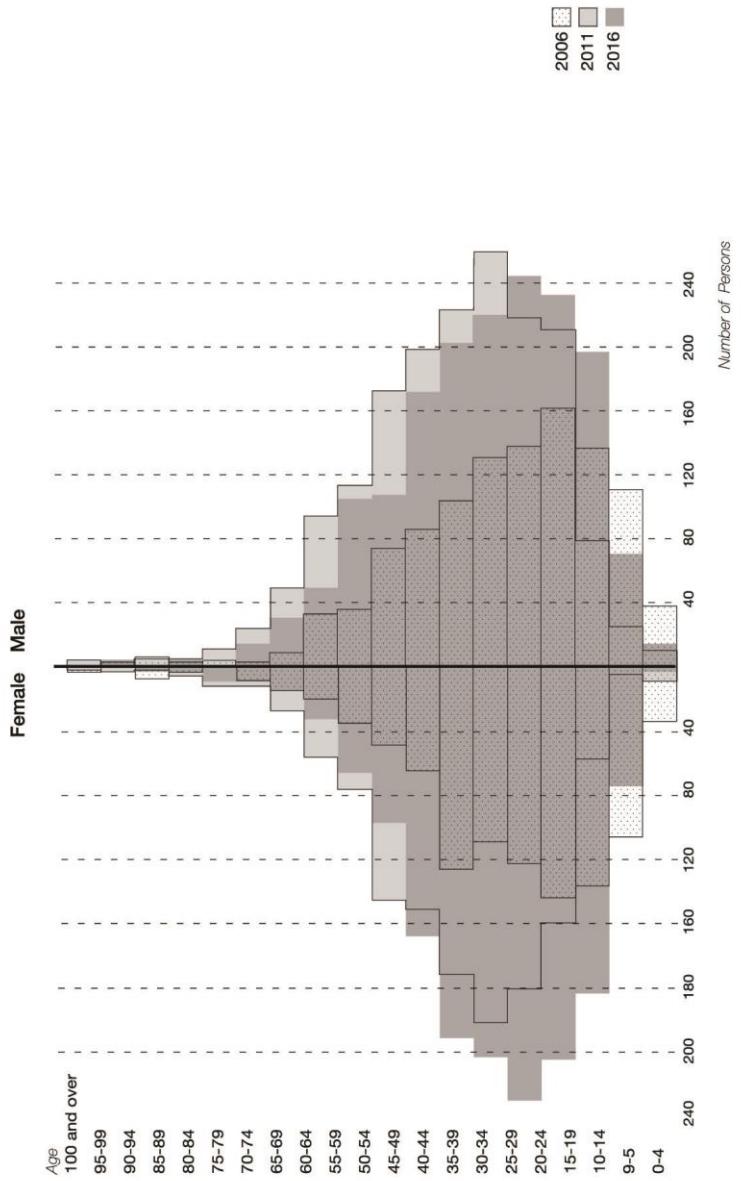


Table 1 Number and Percentage of Sudanese-born Population Highest Year of School Completed

	2006			2011			2016		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Year 12 or equiv.	371	47.3	165	25.2	756	54.7	458	36.5	
Year 11 or equiv.	117	14.9	57	8.7	181	13.1	124	9.9	
Year 10 or equiv.	82	10.5	65	9.9	116	8.4	128	10.2	
Year 9 or equivalent	26	3.3	59	9.0	41	3.0	59	4.7	
Year 8 or below	65	8.3	128	19.5	91	6.6	179	14.3	
Did not go to school	27	3.4	84	12.8	56	4.1	173	13.8	
Not stated	96	12.2	98	14.9	140	10.1	135	10.7	
Total	784	100	656	100	1,381	100	1,256	100	
							1,571	100	
							1,537	100	

Source: Data elaborated by the author using tables generated by ABS TableBuilder pro, dataset Census 2006, 2011, 2016.

Table 2. Percentage of Sudanese-born Population by Labour Force Status

	2006			2011		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Sudanese	All Perth	Sudanese	All Perth	Sudanese	Sudanese	All Perth
Employed, worked full-time	24.90	55.33	7.36	27.60	16.89	41.09
Employed, worked part-time	12.52	12.14	12.00	26.28	12.28	19.40
Employed, away from work	4.04	4.89	2.88	3.92	3.51	4.39
Unemployed, looking for full-time work	4.85	1.78	2.72	0.96	3.87	1.36
Unemployed, looking for part-time work	4.17	0.79	3.84	1.37	4.02	1.09
Not in the labour force	49.53	25.06	71.20	39.87	59.43	32.67
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Sudanese	All Perth	Sudanese	All Perth	Sudanese	Sudanese	All Perth
Employed, worked full-time	31.80	54.83	9.58	28.25	21.34	41.26
Employed, worked part-time	14.69	12.66	17.29	26.65	15.92	19.80%
Employed, away from work	5.50	4.51	3.47	3.89	4.55	4.19
Unemployed, looking for full-time work	7.54	2.42	4.66	1.36	6.18	1.88
Unemployed, looking for part-time work	3.32	1.05	5.25	1.70	4.23	1.38
Not in the labour force	37.15	24.54	59.75	38.15	47.79	31.49
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Source: Data elaborated by the author using tables generated by ABS TableBuilder pro, dataset Census 2006, 2011, 2016.

Table 3 Number and Percentage of Sudanese-born Population, Weekly  
Equivalised Total Household Income

<i>Equivalised disposable income Australia</i>	<b>Mean income per week*</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Lowest quintile</i>	288	Negative income	21	1.5%
		Nil income	4	0.3%
		\$1-\$149	182	12.8%
		\$150-\$249	384	27.1%
<i>Second quintile</i>	640	\$250-\$399	414	29.2% <b>70.9%</b>
		\$400-\$599	252	17.8%
		\$600-\$799	92	6.5% <b>95.2%</b>
<i>Third quintile</i>	1,084	\$800-\$999	34	2.4%
		\$1,000-\$1,299	17	1.2%
		\$1,300-\$1,599	12	0.8%
<i>Fourth quintile</i>	1,658	\$1,600-\$1,999	0	0.0%
		\$2,000 or more	5	0.4%
<i>Highest quintile</i>	3,156	<b>Total</b>	1,417	
<i>All households</i>	<b>1,366</b>			
		<b>2011</b>		
<i>Lowest quintile</i>	392	Negative income	25	1.0%
		Nil income	71	2.8%
		\$1-\$199 (\$1-\$10,399)	433	17.2%
		\$200-\$299 (\$10,400-\$15,599)	422	16.8% <b>41.7%</b>
<i>Second quintile</i>	855	\$300-\$399 (\$15,600-\$20,799)	380	15.1%
		\$400-\$599 (\$20,800-\$31,199)	596	23.7%
		\$600-\$799 (\$31,200-\$41,599)	307	12.2% <b>89.0%</b>
<i>Third quintile</i>	1,448	\$800-\$999 (\$41,600-\$51,999)	136	5.4%
		\$1,000-\$1,249 (\$52,000-\$64,999)	73	2.9%
		\$1,250-\$1,499 (\$65,000-\$77,999)	37	1.5%
<i>Fourth quintile</i>	2,236	\$1,500-\$1,999 (\$78,000-\$103,999)	17	0.7%
		\$2,000 or more (\$104,000 or more)	14	0.6%
<i>Highest quintile</i>	4,654	<b>Total</b>	2,511	
<i>All households</i>	<b>1,845</b>			

		2016		
<i>Lowest quintile</i>	461	Nil income	135	4.9%
		\$1-\$149 (\$1-\$7,799)	152	5.6%
		\$150-\$299 (\$7,800-\$15,599)	422	15.4%
		\$300-\$399 (\$15,600-\$20,799)	433	15.8% 41.7%
<i>Second quintile</i>	972	\$400-\$499 (\$20,800 - \$25,999)	311	11.4%
		\$500-\$649 (\$26,000-\$33,799)	381	13.9%
		\$650-\$799 (\$33,800-\$41,599)	256	9.4% <b>76.4%</b>
<i>Third quintile</i>	1,636	\$800-\$999 (\$41,600-\$51,999)	263	9.6%
		\$1,000-\$1,249 (\$52,000-\$64,999)	170	6.2%
		\$1,250-\$1,499 (\$65,000-\$77,999)	92	3.4%
<i>Fourth quintile</i>	2,520	\$1,500-\$1,749 (\$78,000-\$90,999)	51	1.9%
		\$1,750-\$1,999 (\$91,000-\$103,999)	24	0.9%
		\$2,000-\$2,499 (\$104,000-\$129,999)	24	0.9%
<i>Highest quintile</i>	5,100	\$2,500-\$2,999 (\$130,000-\$155,999)	17	0.6%
		\$3,000 or more (\$156,000 or more)	6	0.2%
<i>All households</i>	<b>2,135</b>	<b>Total</b>	2,737	

Table 4 Percentage Sudanese-born Population by Tenure Type and Year of Arrival in Australia 2011

	%	Arrived 2011*	Arrived 2010	Arrived 2009	Arrived 2008	Arrived 2007	Arrived 2006	Arrived 2005	Arrived 2004	Arrived 2003	Arrived 2002	Arrived 2001	Arrived 2000	
Owned outright	0	0	0	3	0	1	3	5	2	0	3	4		
Owned with a mortgage	0	3	8	8	5	16	11	16	27	29	35	28		
Being purchased rent/buy	0	7	4	0	2	1	2	3	7	0	0	0		
Rented	94	78	84	87	87	74	73	73	62	61	60	65		
Being occupied rent-free life tenure scheme	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	2	2	0	0	
Other tenure type	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	
Not stated	6	12	5	3	6	5	7	4	1	8	3	4		
Not applicable	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5. Percentage Sudanese-born Population by Rent (weekly) Ranges and Equivalised Total Household Income (weekly) 2011

Rent		Income			
\$1-\$74	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
\$75-\$99	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
\$100-\$124	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
\$125-\$149	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%
\$150-\$174	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%
\$175-\$199	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%
\$200-\$224	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%
\$225-\$249	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%
\$250-\$274	1%	2%	1%	2%	0%
\$275-\$299	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%
\$300-\$324	3%	3%	4%	3%	0%
\$325-\$349	3%	2%	2%	3%	1%
\$350-\$374	3%	3%	4%	4%	0%
\$375-\$399	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
\$400-\$424	1%	2%	1%	0%	0%
\$425-\$449	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
\$450-\$549	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
\$550-\$649	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
\$650 and over		0%	1%	0%	0%
Over 50%		18 %	20%	14%	0%
Below 30%		0%	1%	1%	3%
				3%	3%
					73%
					9%

Table 6. Percentage Sudanese-born Population by Mortgage Repayments (monthly) Ranges and Equivalised Total Household Income (weekly) 2011

	Mortgagee	Income	\$1-\$199	\$200-\$299	\$300-\$399	\$400-\$599	\$600-\$799	\$800-\$999	\$1,000-\$1,249	\$1,250-\$1,499	\$1,500-\$1,999	\$2,000 or more	(\$104,000 or more)
Over 50%	13%	8%	10%	32%	15%	6%	4%						88%
Below 30%													1%

Table 7. Number and Percentage of Sudanese-born Population, Weekly Equivalised Total Household Income

<i>Equivalised disposable income Australia</i>	<b>Mean income per week*</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Lowest quintile</i>	288	Negative income	21	1.5%
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<i>Lowest quintile</i>	392	Negative income	25	1.0%
		Nil income	71	2.8%
		\$1-\$199 (\$1-\$10,399)	433	17.2%
		\$200-\$299 (\$10,400-\$15,599)	422	16.8%
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		\$400-\$599 (\$20,800-\$31,199)	596	23.7%
		\$600-\$799 (\$31,200-\$41,599)	307	12.2%
<i>Second quintile</i>	855	\$800-\$999 (\$41,600-\$51,999)	136	5.4%
		\$1,000-\$1,249 (\$52,000-\$64,999)	73	2.9%
<i>Third quintile</i>	1,448	\$1,250-\$1,499 (\$65,000-\$77,999)	37	1.5%
		\$1,500-\$1,999 (\$78,000-\$103,999)	17	0.7%
<i>Fourth quintile</i>	2,236	\$2,000 or more (\$104,000 or more)	14	0.6%

<i>Highest quintile</i>	4,654	<b>Total</b>		2,511
<i>All households</i>	<b>1,845</b>			
<hr/>				
		<b>2016</b>		
		Nil income	135	4.9%
		\$1-\$149 (\$1-\$7,799)	152	5.6%
		\$150-\$299 (\$7,800-\$15,599)	422	15.4%
		\$300-\$399 (\$15,600-\$20,799)	433	15.8% 41.7%
<i>Lowest quintile</i>	461	\$400-\$499 (\$20,800 - \$25,999)	311	11.4%
		\$500-\$649 (\$26,000-\$33,799)	381	13.9%
		\$650-\$799 (\$33,800-\$41,599)	256	9.4% 76.4%
<i>Second quintile</i>	972	\$800-\$999 (\$41,600-\$51,999)	263	9.6%
		\$1,000-\$1,249 (\$52,000-\$64,999)	170	6.2%
		\$1,250-\$1,499 (\$65,000-\$77,999)	92	3.4%
<i>Third quintile</i>	1,636	\$1,500-\$1,749 (\$78,000-\$90,999)	51	1.9%
		\$1,750-\$1,999 (\$91,000-\$103,999)	24	0.9%
<i>Fourth quintile</i>	2,520	\$2,000-\$2,499 (\$104,000-\$129,999)	24	0.9%
		\$2,500-\$2,999 (\$130,000-\$155,999)	17	0.6%
<i>Highest quintile</i>	5,100	\$3,000 or more (\$156,000 or more)	6	0.2%
<i>All households</i>	<b>2,135</b>	<b>Total</b>		2,737

\* Note - Further data elaborated from the author using ABS census databases 2006, 2011, 2016 are available from the author upon request.

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## **Experiences of vulnerability and sources of resilience among immigrants and refugees**

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### **Abstract**

This article considers the nature of, and factors contributing to, experiences of vulnerability. It also explores some aspects of resilience among immigrants and refugees of black African background in South East Queensland, Australia. The findings indicate that an understanding of what influences immigrants and refugees to engage in activities to mitigate vulnerability can inform the development and implementation of targeted policies, including programs and interventions for successful settlement and integration.

### **Introduction**

Immigrants and refugees<sup>1</sup> are often described as a vulnerable group (Aysa-Lastra and Cachón, 2012; Bustamante, 2007; Dion, 2010) but they are

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<sup>1</sup> Immigrants are people who have long-term residence or live permanently in a country other than their countries of birth, while refugees are people who seek protection in safe countries from persecution, torture or killing in their countries of nationality.

also resilient with agency, strengths and capabilities (Aroian and Norris, 2000; Cardoso and Thompson, 2010; Hutchinson and Dorsett, 2012). In the context of liberal societies, the notion of vulnerability as a shared human condition is not self-evident in terms of liberal ideals of independence and autonomy that often escape critique. As a result, there is a tendency to essentialise and label *some* individuals and groups as *either* vulnerable — that is, dependent, and therefore always a potential drain on society — *or* as resilient — that is, independent and thus presumably productive members of society, rather than seeing *all* people as *both* vulnerable *and* resilient, albeit in a multitude of variations and degrees. In short, questions of vulnerability and resilience are “sites of political contestation” (Robinson 2010, p.132).

As Robinson (2010) explains, *all* people must be regarded as vulnerable, inasmuch as degree and nature of this condition of vulnerability will change along a person’s lifespan, and in accordance with people’s social, political, economic and cultural positioning at different points in their lives. This view rests upon an understanding of social life as a web of relationships and interdependencies. As such, in this article, we accept “the existence of vulnerability without reifying particular individuals [or] groups … as ‘victims’ or ‘guardians’” (Robinson, 2010, p.12). Even though immigrants and refugees may appear to be more vulnerable than native-born people, some immigrants and refugees have strengths and capacities and can do remarkably well over the course of their settlement, and even their lifespan. As resilient individuals, these immigrants and refugees do exhibit coping skills effectively to manage adversity and stressful situations at hand, thereby transforming them into less stressful ones and exhibiting positive outcomes (Aroian and Norris, 2000).

Against this background of a relational and contextual understanding of vulnerability and resilience, this article considers not only the nature of, and factors contributing to experiences of vulnerability but also explores some aspects of resilience among immigrants and refugees of black African background in South East Queensland, Australia. The article is organised as follows: First, it presents a brief historical context of African immigration and settlement in Australia. Second, it examines the concepts of vulnerability and resilience. Third, it discusses the study methodology and presents the findings. Finally, it concludes with a discussion on the study findings. The findings indicate that an understanding of what influences immigrants and refugees to engage in activities to mitigate vulnerability can inform the development and implementation of targeted policies, including programs and interventions for successful settlement and integration.

## African immigration and settlement in Australia

Australia has moved from being the “most British” country in the world to a more diverse, multiethnic and multicultural, society (Jupp, 2002). The 2016 Census results indicate that nearly half (49 per cent) of Australia’s population were born overseas (first generation Australian) or had one or both parents born overseas (second generation Australian). At that time, Australians came from nearly 200 countries, spoke more than 300 languages other than English at home, practiced over 100 religions and represented more than 300 ethnic ancestries (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2016). Prior to mid-1960, black African immigration was restricted. However, some people of black African descent were in Australia before the Immigration Restriction Act 1901 — the White Australia Policy<sup>2</sup> — via the First Fleet (for more details, see Pybus, 2006; Udhā and Singh, 2018). It was only in the mid-1960s and early 1970s, under the Special Commonwealth African Assistance Plan, that a small number of black African students, from Commonwealth African countries, began to arrive in Australia. Immigration from Africa to Australia reached a peak between 1996 and 2005 with the admission of black African refugees and displaced persons on humanitarian grounds.

In Queensland, the black African population has continued to increase in size. There were only 3,522 African people living in Queensland at the 1986 census but by 2016 the number of sub-Saharan Africans increased to 67,274<sup>3</sup> and the number of North Africans to 7,117 (ABS, 2017). Although still a small group, black Africans constitute a highly diverse and rapidly growing population, settling in Queensland as temporary or permanent immigrants. Indeed, the black Africans’ lived experience in Queensland presents a unique opportunity to understand immigrant and refugee vulnerability and resilience. While they are most likely to be vulnerable because of the adaptive challenges related to migration and (re)settlement, including their visible difference and foreigner condition, they are a group with resilience.

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<sup>2</sup> The White Australia policy favoured white immigration, and restricted coloured immigration to Australia. Its implementation was explicitly exclusionary, discriminatory and racist — immigrants were either selected or excluded, and discriminated against based on their ethnicity, skin colour, culture, religion or language (Jones, 2017). The removal of race as a factor for immigration to Australia in 1973, by the Whitlam Labor government, led to the eradication of the White Australia policy.

<sup>3</sup> The problem with these statistics however is that white Africans, especially white South Africans and Zimbabweans, are included in this number. In the 2016 census, there were over 23,436 White South Africans and 5, 295 White Zimbabweans in Queensland (ABS, 2017).

## **Towards a relational, contextual understanding of vulnerability and resilience**

“Vulnerability” is a concept that some have applied to understand the experience of various individuals or groups. While the concept of vulnerability is relative and dynamic, it has a commonplace meaning, often associated with poverty, powerlessness, weakness, dependency, limited capacity or susceptibility to injury. As a social concept, the emphasis is placed on how social and economic status inequalities within a society’s social order (such as the existence of ethnic and racial discrimination, high rates of unemployment and underemployment, and the lack of resources) render some people and communities more vulnerable than others. Vulnerability denotes, thus, the relative position of advantage or disadvantage that particular individuals or groups occupy within a society (Bankoff, 2004, p. 29). Economically disadvantaged people; racial and ethnic immigrant and refugee minorities; women; children; the aged; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ); the homeless; the sick; and persons with disability and other chronic health conditions have all, at times, been labelled vulnerable. Labelling entire groups as vulnerable, while important in pointing to prevailing social injustices, risks essentialising them further, as potentially problematic and dependent populations. Instead, following Robinson’s (2010) contention that vulnerability is a shared human condition, there is need to consider what kinds of social, economic and cultural conditions contribute to heightening or lessening experiences of vulnerability among members of particular social groups.

Social groups are rendered vulnerable by barriers preventing access to adequate resources and just recognition, and a lack of visibility and voice in public debates and political decision-making (see Fraser, 2009). This, in turn, can lead to poorer health, physical, psychological, social and economic outcomes (Derose, Escarce and Lurie, 2007). Research shows that immigrants and refugees are hardworking and driven with a strong desire to be in gainful employment rather than on welfare (Fozdar and Hartley, 2013). However, they are more likely to be discriminated against in the labour market (Aysa-Lastra and Cachón, 2012; Colic-Peisker, 2009). Immigrants and refugees are not only discriminated against, and seen as different because of their often-distinctive culture, but also tend to be lumped together and allocated a particular place within the class structure of their receiving society (Rizvi, 1986, p. 19). Frequently, they are concentrated in the lower occupational segments of the working class and experience downward social mobility in their receiving society (Aysa-Lastra and Cachón, 2012). In the case of Australia, visibility (Colic-Peisker, 2009) in terms of difference has

consequences for racial and ethnic immigrant and refugee minority groups. For example, it can mark them out for differential and sometimes discriminatory treatment in the society and the labour market (Colic-Peisker, 2009; Uduh, 2018; Uduh and Singh, 2018), potentially placing them in positions of disadvantage and at risk of the negative outcomes summarised above.

Robinson (2010) argues that “levels of vulnerability, and the implication of vulnerability are, in part, a reflection of existing power relations in the context of relationships” (p. 142). The works of Dion (2010), Bustamante (2002; 2007), and Aysa-Lastra and Cachón (2012) illustrate some of the ways in which this contention applied in the case of immigrants and refugees. For example, Dion (2010) argues that among the many challenges confronting immigrants, especially newly arrived immigrants including refugees in their countries of settlement, is “the possibility of experiencing discrimination because of where they came from and who they are, as seen by others through the lens of group labels — ethnicity, race, religion, language” (p. 648). Similarly, Bustamante (2002; 2007) uses the notion of vulnerability to describe the social process of labelling immigrants and refugees. He argues that the labelling of immigrants as foreigners significantly contributes to their spatial vulnerability. He defines immigrant vulnerability as “a condition of powerlessness” in which immigrants are socially placed in the society, the economy, and the culture of the country of their settlement (Bustamante, 2007, p. 166).

According to Bustamante (2002, p. 339), there are “structural” and “cultural” dimensions of immigrant vulnerability. The structural dimension derives from the existence of a power structure, which in any given society allocates more power to some than others. The cultural dimension derives from the set of cultural elements (stereotypes, prejudices, racism, xenophobia, ignorance and institutional discrimination) with derogatory meanings, which are used to justify the power differentials between nationals and immigrants. For Bustamante (2002; 2007), therefore, immigrant vulnerability begins when a country of destination, exercising its sovereignty, establishes a definition of who is “one of us” and who is “the other”, who is “a citizen” and who is “a foreigner” (see also Fraser, 2009). This point was taken further by Aysa-Lastra and Cachón (2012), who suggest that a social outcome of this distinction is the emergence of a discriminatory institutional framework that creates barriers and results in the creation of categorically unequal social subjects or citizens. For Aysa-Lastra and Cachón (2012), immigrant vulnerability derives from their condition as immigrants (and refugees) and their class condition as workers. As Aysa-Lastra and

Cachón (2012) explain, immigrant vulnerability begins with the state establishing borders and managing (recognising, guaranteeing, or denying) individual rights as well as distinguishing between the insiders and the outsiders. Thus, if immigrants and refugees appear to be more vulnerable than native-born people, it is because of the ways in which they have been constructed through norms of ethnicity, race, skin colour, religion, and language, including effective lack of resources, institutional barriers, class position and participation in their new countries.

While important, Dion's (2010), Bustamante's (2002; 2007) and Aysa-Lastra and Cachón's (2012) arguments risk defining immigrants and refugees as vulnerable without recognising their resilience in the face of extraordinary life circumstances. Without denying the significance of discriminatory barriers and challenges faced by immigrants and refugees in their recipient countries, the immigrant experience must also be seen as one of resilience. For example, when immigrants and refugees are looked at through a lens of individual strengths, passions and skills, they appear also to be highly resilient people who go on to thrive in their receiving society (see Aroian and Norris, 2000; Cardoso and Thompson, 2010; Hutchinson and Dorsett, 2012).

The term resilience has multiple uses, depending on the field. In relation to individuals and groups (for example, families, immigrant and refugee groups), resilience may be a description of a personality characteristic or coping resource or skill they have when, in the face of barriers and challenges associated with inequality, discrimination and disadvantaged circumstances, they overcome adversity, survive stress, rise above marginalisation, or disadvantage and thrive successfully (Aroian and Norris, 2000; Cardoso and Thompson, 2010; Ungar, 2008). In this sense, resilience "connotes inner strength, competence, optimism, flexibility and the ability to cope effectively when faced with adversity" (Wagnild and Collins, 2009, p. 29). Thus, resilience is less an individual trait than a quality of an individual's personal, social, economic, political and cultural ecology and as such, denotes "a dynamic process that requires both the exposure to risk and the manifestation of positive adjustment despite experiences of adversity and trauma" (Cardoso and Thompson 2010, p. 257). Moreover, Ungar (2011, p. 10) explains that in the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is,

both the capacity of individuals to *navigate* their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their wellbeing and their capacity individually and collectively to *negotiate* for these resources to be provided and experienced in [contextually and] culturally meaningful ways.

Ungar understands navigation to refer to personal agency and motivation to search for what one needs in order to do well, as well as pushing oneself to access any such opportunities and resources that are made available by power holders to those who are disadvantaged. On the other hand, negotiation refers to how persons, individually or in groups, ascribe meaning to any available and accessible resources. Importantly, Ungar (2008, 2011) maintains that, sometimes, people do not accept or utilise available opportunities because of the principle of negotiation: what people are given must match with what they need or with their culturally embedded meaning systems and social reference groups.

In sum then, working within a relational and contextual understanding of vulnerability and resilience, immigrants and refugees are rendered vulnerable by adverse conditions such as discrimination, marginalisation and inequality, and may be at risk of multiple negative outcomes. Yet, care must be taken not to define them in terms of these contextual conditions and the risks that they entail. Equally important are sources of resilience, which they may derive from their “assets” — that is, positive individual adaptive capacities linked to competencies and skills; hopes, interests and motivation; as well as self-esteem, intellect, and the ability to self-regulate — and from their “resources” — that is, positive external influences provided, for example through family and community support; schools, neighbourhood relations, cultural and religious affiliations (Cardoso and Thompson, 2010). Possession of both “assets” and “resources” are necessary for immigrants and refugees to overcome, to recover after experiences of difficulties, and ultimately, to settle in the face of adversities and contextual barriers in the economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of the societies that they have joined. Potential resilience is thus conceptualised, in this article, as the steps, or proactive actions, taken by immigrants and refugees that make them resilient and more likely to succeed and thrive after experiences of difficulties (Hahn, Willis, Christie, and Matthews, 2017). From this perspective, potential resilience is more than mere capacity to survive. It involves identifying potential barriers and risks, forming supportive relationships and taking proactive steps or adjustments in order to navigate and negotiate available or potentially available resources. In the next section, we present our methodology.

## **Method**

This article draws on data from a broader research study that explored the lived experiences of adult immigrants and refugees from African nations residing in South East Queensland. The study focused on how these

immigrants and refugees define their identity, personal and socioeconomic wellbeing and sense of belonging in white majority Australia. Qualitative research methods were utilised to collect and systematically analyse data.

In-depth semi-structured individual interviews were conducted from April to July 2014 by the first author. Interviews were carried out in the English language. The interviews were exploratory and stimulated the narration of experiences that would remain unexpressed within a questionnaire format. The interview questions focused on participants' migration and settlement experiences, personal and socioeconomic conditions, employment, satisfaction, wellbeing and sense of belonging. Most interviews took place in participants' homes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All participants gave written consent. Participants (N=30) consisted of black African (10 females and 20 males) adults, between the ages of 22 and 67 years. Of these participants, 17 (56.7 percent) came as refugees through Australia's humanitarian program and 13 (43.3 percent) came as temporary migrants (six arrived on student visa and seven on skilled migration visa). These participants were selected through our personal, professional and community contacts. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who had lived in Australia for more than 3 years. Further, they were selected because of their level of education — a third of the participants hold a bachelor's degree and two have a doctorate degree— as well as their English proficiency, both factors important in promoting civic participation. While the participants vary in their demographic characteristics, most have tertiary qualifications and professional expertise, which are much sought after in today's knowledge-based economy (Udah, Singh and Chamberlain, 2019). In addition, many of the participants are naturalised Australian citizens. A few are permanent legal residents of Australia. The remarkable feature of the participants was the diversity of their culture, religion, values, languages, heritage and national backgrounds.<sup>4</sup> The participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Thematic analysis was used to identify common thematic elements across the participants' transcribed interview data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). During the coding, we searched for keywords, buzzwords and metaphors to support analysis and interpretation. The coding process helped to identify and produce a concise matrix of key emerging themes. Some of the important themes that emerged involved the vulnerability and potential resilience of

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<sup>4</sup> Participants came from Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone in West Africa; Tanzania and Uganda in East Africa; Congo and Rwanda in Central Africa; Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan in Northeast Africa; and Botswana and Zimbabwe in Southern Africa.

participants. As visible immigrants, many participants perceived themselves to be vulnerable and at disadvantage. This was experienced in differential treatment and challenges faced, particularly, in securing jobs. Regardless of their considerable barriers and challenges, participants also demonstrated potential resilience.

## Results

On the grounds of being visibly different in white dominated Australia, many participants identified themselves as vulnerable and disadvantaged. While the markers of their visible and cultural difference — skin colour, physical and facial features, accent, dress or religion — together with other random characteristics and discriminatory factors contribute to a considerable level of their vulnerability and disadvantage, some participants demonstrated potential resilience and coped effectively in the face of adversity. They maintained hope, showed perseverance, took initiatives to make things happen by going back to school and upskilling themselves, and received support from families and communities.

A telling example in this respect is the experience of Aaron, aged sixty-five, an academic with a PhD. Aaron is one of the older participants in this study. Aaron is very passionate about education, equity and diversity. He was a university lecturer in the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire) before coming to Australia in 1987 as a political refugee. While he had no trouble speaking English, one of Aaron's greatest challenges on arrival to Australia was finding employment. His overseas educational qualifications were not recognised on time. According to Aaron:

*The only precious asset I carried with me on arrival consisted of my educational qualifications, my Bachelor of Arts with Honours and doctorate degree. I submitted them to the Council of Overseas Professional Qualifications (COPQ) for recognition. It was finalised only two years later. Their initial assessment was that my overall qualification was comparable to a three-year bachelor's degree in Australian standard. Their assessment was shocking to me. I fought and told them that their assessment was misleading. After I confronted them with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) assessment of my BA alone undertaken earlier where my BA was aligned with a Belgian or a French BA, they consulted with an independent assessor of*

*their choice who stated finally that my overall qualification was comparable to an Australian PhD.*

While the UNESCO assessment equated Aaron's Bachelor of Arts with Honours with a Belgian or a French Bachelor of Arts with Honours degree, the Australian assessment downgraded all his qualifications to a three-year bachelor's degree in Australian standard. Though the experience was traumatic, frustrating and depressing, Aaron showed perseverance and demonstrated resilience. Not only was he persistent, he took initiative to make things happen for himself.

Aaron was ready to apply for any job, but it was not easy because of the long delay in recognising his overseas qualifications. While waiting for the qualifications to be recognised, he went back to university and undertook a new degree to find employment. As Aaron said,

*After all the hassle, I realised that it will be too hard for me to get a job with my African credentials. I did not wait for my PhD recognition before I decided to enrol at unif[versity] in order to prepare for another degree. Believe me; you have to be very strong not to fall into depression in such situations*

Frese and Fay (2001) define initiative as “behaviour characterised by its self-starting nature, its proactive approach, and by being persistent in overcoming difficulties that arise in pursuit of a goal” (p. 134). Rather than remaining a victim, Aaron took proactive action to overcome barriers and setbacks. One consequence of Aaron's action is that things changed for him (Frese and Fay, 2001). His perseverance and proactive action helped him to take control and improve his situation. As Aroian and Norris (2000, p. 55) explain, resilient individuals view change as “inevitable, challenging, and manageable”. Similarly, Aaron saw change as inevitable. He had a positive outlook on life. Aaron was able to appraise the situation and came to terms with aspects of his life that are uncontrollable (Aroian and Norris, 2000). The delay in recognising his qualifications could have undermined his mental health and overall wellbeing, but his resiliency helped him to seek solutions in an efficient manner.

Aaron is well educated, scholarly and well versed in art, languages and literature but his condition on arrival was such that he could fall into depression. He faced many barriers, hurdles and setbacks. First, Aaron is a black refugee and comes from a French speaking country. Though his English proficiency is high, he has accent and lacks the local qualifications,

work experience, referees and social networks, which are significant barriers to satisfactory employment in Australia. As a former university lecturer, Aaron thought he would have had a range of options in academia. However, as Aaron said:

*Those position vacancies were not available for someone without local experience. Advertising them was just a formality as someone may be working in the position ad interim. Therefore, there is a high chance the position will be given to the incumbent officer; to someone they know. It was useless applying for.*

It could be suggested from the data extract that Aaron's condition had the effect of discouraging him from applying for certain jobs. Though he felt it was useless applying for academic jobs, he never gave up. He maintained a sense of optimism, negotiated (Ungar, 2011) and sought help. For example, he described receiving support from a university professor who gave him the first opportunity to work as a research assistant.

Aaron described himself as one of the multi-disadvantaged people in Australia:

*When you look at my background, I am part of a multi-disadvantaged people in Australia. ... For people like me, we do not have local experience and as such we lack the networks and local referees. This explains why I looked for jobs for long. It was not because of my inability to do research but because I was victimised in the name of those sets of disadvantages and vicious circles that are so hard to break.*

This explanation captures some of the barriers associated with migration and resettlement facing some immigrants and refugees in Australia. The barriers are not just peculiar to Aaron. One participant, Brian from Nigeria, said that at the time of his arrival in the 1990s,

*Most Africans that came during that time had similar issues. Their experiences back home were not recognised here. You have to go back and do some other jobs. Even when you are looking for jobs that you think you are way above; the same issue comes again.*

As past studies have shown, the non-recognition of qualifications obtained overseas is one of the systemic barriers that immigrants and refugees encounter (Colic-Peisker and Fozdar, 2006; Fodzar and Hartley, 2013). For example, Bruno, from Rwanda, explained, “Most Africans do not get the job they want ... because their previous qualifications are not recognisable here. I give an example of myself. I had to retrain myself”.

Like Aaron, Bruno was resilient. To overcome what Colic-Peisker and Fodzar (2006, p. 221) have described as “mechanisms of institutional discrimination” — the failure to recognise overseas’ qualifications and the barriers erected by trade and professional associations — Bruno went back to school and retrained himself. He studied social work, which helped him to enter and stay in employment.

As some scholars have argued, employment is one of the primary indicators of immigrant and refugee successful settlement and integration (Hebbani and Colic-Peisker, 2012). Employment is not only important for immigrants and refugees’ material and social wellbeing, but also is critical to their self-empowerment and interaction with the broader community. Gaining employment can alleviate many of the acculturative stresses associated with settlement (Hebbani and Colic-Peisker, 2012) and influence an immigrant or refugee’s social standing and overall wellbeing (Fozdar and Hartley, 2013). However, the analysis of many participants’ accounts suggests that they faced barriers in the pursuit of employment. While the job hunt journey is a huge task, this task can be harder for many ethnic minority immigrants and refugees: Either their qualifications are not recognised or, when they are, other obstacles such as lack of local work experience make it difficult for them to secure employment (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007). For example, some participants saw the demand for Australian work experience by employers as one of the reasons they had trouble securing employment. As one participant, Tanya, from Somalia, stated, “Most Australian employers will always ask for Australian work experience.” Describing her experiences, Margaret, explained:

*Trying to get a job and they are talking about we want someone with local experience. That to me was a bit frustrating. Some jobs I thought I was qualified, sometimes I found it was different; I do not have the local experience. I found myself competing with people with local experience. So, it is a difficult challenge.*

The quote above shows Margaret's desire to find jobs commensurate to her qualifications. Margaret migrated to Australia in 2005 as a skilled migrant. She was educated in Zimbabwe where she had many years of working experience in the banking sector. However, she was impeded from entering the Australian labour market by her lack of local work experience. Despite the difficulties, Margaret was resilient and developed plans to deal with impending or future difficulties. First, she did not stop looking for other jobs, which suit her and are right for her. Instead of resigning herself to institutional barriers or giving up in the face of difficulties, she was persistent and tried other things to improve her condition. According to Margaret:

*The way I dealt with it is to accept a job lesser than what I thought I would have wanted to be doing and trying to improve myself and going into another area and doing something else. For instance, I have completed a diploma in interior design. It is one of the ways of coping with life and getting more satisfaction out of life.*

Thus it appears that Margaret demonstrated agency and a capacity for resilience. In the face of her challenges, she upskilled and expanded her capabilities by completing a diploma. As Aysa-Lastra and Cachón (2012) explain, immigrants are likely to adjust more quickly than native-born people to labour market conditions because of their resilience to look for and accept any job they can find. Being resilient, Margaret navigated (Ungar, 2011) and tried other things that she needed and might help her for a job. In addition, Margaret took an active approach and received support in contextually and culturally meaningful ways from her Zimbabwean community, especially through religious activities.

Given the difficulty experienced breaking into the labour market, several participants believed that for them to enter and stay in employment, they must take an active and self-starting approach to overcome the barriers and setbacks that arise in securing employment. Lamenting the difficulties experienced by black Africans, Kevin stressed that few people in Australia,

*believe that we, as the African people, have the potential to be higher achievers, the potential to be higher performers in working in an office. It could be because of what is portrayed of us in the media. Nothing good is really said about us in the media. It could be, perhaps, racism. You know, it is very difficult to say. But I know one thing for sure, we are always*

*thought of as under-achievers rather than people who have the potential to achieve and be successful .... I think we need people that can project something different to what society thinks of us.*

Unlike Aaron and Margaret, Kevin completed his degrees, both bachelor's and master's, in Queensland. Kevin was born in South Sudan. He came to Australia in 2005 to seek refuge. He was a teenager when he arrived with his family. At the time of this interview, Kevin's most significant concern was getting a job after graduation. He said that he applied for several job positions and got no response. He believed that his chance of getting a job commensurate with his qualifications is minimal because of his racialised skin colour, and how people think of, and essentialise, black Africans — that is, as inferior, incapable, dependent and thus presumably less productive members of society.

According to Kevin, “not being seen as part of this society is heartbreaking.” He believed that “people are miseducated about African people.” For Kevin, this miseducation sustains many of the misperceptions being circulated and held about black Africans in Australia. As Kevin stated:

*A lot of us are unemployed and people are blaming us so much on relying on welfare. I think the reason for relying on welfare is not because we are lazy people. It is because no one wants to give us a job. It could be because of our skin colour.*

Instead of seeing himself as a victim, an acceptance of the effects of skin colour, a positive outlook on life and encouragement from family members helped Kevin to be resilient. For example, Kevin explained that his mother,

*would always say to me, something, sometimes, requires courage. You will continue to try. ... That I don't get a job because of the colour of my skin cannot be compared to trials I have been through before coming here. I have not given up on trying. What keeps me going is in knowing where I come from and the tough experiences that I have had in life and I think this is what pushes me. This is what keeps driving me and because of that I will keep trying to achieve that dream, that better life that I never had before.*

Kevin demonstrated optimism and hope. As Snyder, Irving and Anderson (1991) have indicated, people with higher hopes about the present and the

future set goals for themselves, tend to be courageous, motivated and determined to attain their goals, and actually attain the goals more often, especially when faced with obstacles. Kevin's positive motivational state, based on his sense of determination, capabilities and hard work ethics, was a driving force behind everything he did to cope with difficulties and thrive. As Kevin stated, "for me as an African to realise my dream here, I believe I should work twice as hard."

Like Kevin, other participants believed that to overcome their difficulties and realise their dreams in Australia, they must adopt diligent work ethics. Damian, a computer professional from Ghana, stated, "You really have to do twice as much to be seen as half as good. ... I have to work twice as hard to be able to get anywhere." As an information technology specialist, he believed that resilience and diligent work ethics could make all the difference for Africans in Australia. However, beyond this, many participants' knowledge of their barriers, including their positive outlook on life, support from families and communities, individual sense of determination and capabilities helped them to take proactive steps that made them resilient in the pursuit of their dreams of better life in Australia.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Although this study explored subjective views, experiences and perspectives of a small sample group of participants, the findings make a useful contribution to the growing body of work that seeks to understand the experiences of black Africans in Australia, and the literature on the strengths, capacities and resilience of immigrants and refugees from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Cardoso and Thompson, 2010; Fodzar and Hartley, 2013; Hutchinson and Dorsett, 2012). While much has been written on the barriers and challenges associated with migration and resettlement confronting African immigrants and refugees (Colic-Peisker, 2009; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007; Hebbani and Colic-Peisker, 2012), there is evidence, in this article, of the existence of resilience and some factors associated with it.

Despite the barriers and challenges, some participants become more resilient. Resilient individuals tend to understand what is happening to them, and are able to distinguish between what is controllable and what is not, choose effective means of coping, and select and modify more supportive environments (Cardoso and Thompson, 2010; Hutchinson and Dorsett, 2012; Wagnild and Collins, 2009). As resilient people, some participants thrived economically and socially. They were optimistic about the future and took proactive steps, summoned up resources, and coped (Saleebey, 1992). Some

features contributing to their resilience include positive individual, family, cultural, religious and community factors (Cardoso and Thompson, 2010; Hutchinson and Dorsett, 2012). Therefore, through increased insight into our participants' perceived experiences, this article inspires individual and institutional action to recognise the strengths, capacities and resilience of immigrants and refugees and promote their inclusion and active civic participation.

Based on the participants' accounts, some immigrants and refugees have capacities and strengths, which they can tap into and build on to ensure that they are able to maintain socially competent behaviours, and thrive in their communities (Pasteur, 2011). This calls for changing community and wider society attitudes towards immigrants and refugees. However, whilst efforts are being made to eliminate discrimination and empower immigrants and refugees, often, negative media coverage and political discourses remain a concern. Constant pathologisation of immigrants and refugees not only denies their inherent resilience but also has the potential to alienate them from full inclusion into the community and society (Hutchinson and Dorsett, 2012). It is, therefore, crucial for everyone: the media, government, professionals and general population to refrain from using deficit models to describe and define immigrants and refugees. The tendency to use a purely deficit-based model devalues them and reinforces the view that they are a liability, and therefore, always a potential burden on society. Indeed, a shift away from the deficit model to one that focuses on empowerment and fostering the building of social networks and strengths would improve this (Fozdar and Hartley, 2013). Focusing more attention on their strengths and resources, rather than on their shortcomings and victim story to the neglect of their potential resilience, would go a long way to improve their wellbeing, sense of belonging, and increase a more satisfying life for them (Fozdar and Hartley, 2013; Hutchinson and Dorsett, 2012).

In addition, a better understanding of resilience in immigrants and refugees and what influences them to engage in activities to mitigate vulnerability can inform, and contribute to the development and implementation of policies and programs to foster their resilience and facilitate successful settlement and integration. For example, the mere presence of services to support settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees in Australia and comparable countries does not mean that they will always step up and use these services. If these services are not provided in ways that are culturally meaningful and relevant to them (perhaps due to experiences of racism and discrimination), then, their resilience remains contingent on their negotiation for a place or service that is more inclusive

and responsive to their context and cultural realities (Ungar, 2008). Thus, essential for fostering resilience in immigrants and refugees is a proactive stance on the part of government and professionals working with them to negotiate and provide them with what they might need in a culturally meaningful and relevant way. This involves understanding *what resources they have* and analysing *how they have survived, what they have done, what they have learned from doing it*, and *how they can be assisted* to access appropriate programs, activities and services relevant to their needs (Cardoso and Thompson, 2010; Hutchinson and Dorsett, 2012; Saleebey, 1992). In this case, it is to give them opportunities both plentiful and meaningful—opportunities to break the cycle of disadvantage, enter the mainstream labour market and surmount their challenging circumstances regardless of their religion, sex, age, gender, sexual orientation, migration pathways or citizenship status, postcodes or where they settle and live.

To determine and understand immigrant and refugee vulnerability, two questions need asking. First, to what challenges are they vulnerable? Second, what makes them vulnerable and disadvantaged? Several factors contribute to our participants' vulnerability. These include, but are not limited to: (a) their immigrant and class condition; (b) failure to recognise their qualifications obtained overseas; (c) assumptions that their educational and work experience cannot be translated to the Australian context; (d) their accent equated with lack of English language proficiency; and (e) their skin colour, especially dark skin, equated with a racialised identity. While factors such as non-recognition of overseas qualifications and lack of Australian work experience continue to marginalise and act as impediments in securing employment for many immigrants and refugees (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007; Udah, 2018), skin colour and accent add additional layers of marginalisation and exclusion for our participants (Udah, Singh and Chamberlain, 2019). This means that they are more likely to be treated differently and disadvantaged by prejudices, or bias or discrimination. While the discrimination against skin colour and accent is non-direct, the discrimination against educational qualifications and overseas work experience seems direct and committed by institutions that make the assessments. Therefore, the findings in this article are important to exploring the structural, interpersonal and cultural conditions that have produced and continue to produce their disadvantage, and the conditions that need to be put in place to readdress their vulnerability, social and economic inequalities.

In diversified and multicultural countries like Australia, counteracting immigrant and refugee disadvantage may require incorporating inclusive practices that include anti-oppressive and anti-racism education in schools,

classrooms, and workplaces. It may also require counteracting negative discourses, promoting diversity and social justice, providing job training and placement and addressing employment discrimination and employers' prejudices or preferences or reluctance to employ new immigrant and refugee arrivals with overseas qualifications or non-Australian Standard accent through ongoing conversation on race relations, and on the barriers and challenges that are ever-present and confront immigrants and refugees (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007; Uduh, Singh and Chamberlain, 2019). Hence, this article is an invitation to promote social inclusion and healthy community environments. Further research with a larger sample size is needed to check whether the findings reported in this article are the same or match well with national trends. Future research is also needed, particularly, to examine and explain why some immigrants and refugees are resilient and some are not.

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## Interviews, Commentaries, and Viewpoints

### Interviews with Notable Australasian Africanists Norman Etherington

This a lightly edited version, reprinted with permissions, of the scholarly podcast streamed as *Africa Past and Present* Episode 116, February 13, 2018 at <http://afripod.aodl.org/2018/02/afripod-116>. The interviewers were Peter Alegi, Professor of African History at Michigan State University and Peter Limb, President of AFSAAP. Norman Etherington is a titan of African history in Australia, having taught from the 1970s at the universities of Tasmania, Adelaide, and Western Australia.

Norman Etherington is Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Western Australia, Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and Royal Geographical Society, past president of AFSAAP and the National Trust of South Australia, and research affiliate, University of South Africa. He has a Ph.D. from Yale and is author or editor of numerous publications on South African history, imperialism, and missions, among them *Preachers, Peasants and Politics in South-Eastern Africa, 1835-1880* (Royal Historical Society, 1978), *The Great Treks: The Transformation of Southern Africa, 1815-1854* (Longman, 2001), *Missions and Empire* (Oxford, 2005) and *Mapping Colonial Conquest* (UWA Press, 2007). The interview focuses on his distinguished academic career and influential works on missions and empire in Southern Africa, as well as his latest books *Indigenous Evangelists & Questions of Authority in the British Empire 1750-1940*, with Peggy Brock, Gareth Griffiths and Jacqueline Van Gent (Brill, 2015) and *Imperium of the Soul* in Manchester's 'Studies in Imperialism' series (2017). Among other important collections, he contributed to *The Cambridge History of South Africa*.

#### PETER ALEGI

Welcome. What inspired you to become a professional historian?

#### NORMAN ETHERINGTON

I was a Yale undergraduate and at the end of my B.A. I was offered a teaching fellowship in the hopes that that might attract me to an academic career. That was a very enjoyable year, but notwithstanding, I went to Law

School, also at Yale, and after the first year, I realised that History was really my calling. I couldn't see myself as a lawyer while I enjoyed the study, so I went over to the History Department and said, will you have me back, and they said yes, so I was enrolled. In my first year of coursework, I attended the very first seminar on African history ever to be offered at Yale, which was run by Prosser Gifford and Bill Swanson (Maynard Swanson as he would be known to South Africans). As my major essay, I followed Bill Swanson's advice to write something on the Aborigines Parliamentary enquiry in Britain in 1836-37. I was quite struck by how influential the testimony of missionaries was. Later, when looking for a Ph.D. topic, even though my major field was British Empire and Commonwealth history, I went back to those missionaries and devised a thesis topic that was intended mainly to assess the influence nationality and theology had on missionaries in South Africa. I wrote a lot on that, and by the time I put the final thesis together I had three times the number of words to meet the limit. But I had discovered that my most interesting findings were not about missionaries at all, but about Africans who joined mission stations, who became Christians and changed their lives, patterns of economic behaviour and family affiliations, as the result of that. So a thesis that started out being fairly Eurocentric ended up being African-centric and that is how my first book came about.

#### PETER ALEGI

You have focused quite a bit on the area that today we call KwaZulu Natal and you talked about all the different motivations that the African Christians, or *kholwa*, had to 'take the cloth', but what would you say is the correlation between spiritual, economic, and other forces in the lives of African clergy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in this region?

#### NORMAN ETHERINGTON

I think a major factor is that while in the first instance mission stations, even when they had plentiful land, found it difficult to attract people to the message of Christianity, the people who *did* join mission stations found that literacy and numeracy were very powerful tools in the developing colonial regime. Whereas non-Christian traditionalists were having difficulty coping with the new economy, they were making headway. So for them success in life was accompanied by the new religion and they associated the two, even if other people tended not to.

## PETER LIMB

Another angle here is the role of the African convert in politics. In some of your early writings, you explained why the indigenous ruler of the amaHlubi people, Langalibalele, ‘ran away’ from settler authorities in the 1870s. You continued looking at these issues recently in *Indigenous Evangelists*, where you tackle a quite different tussle of Africans with white authority, Reverend John Langalibalele Dube vs. the Natal Governor at the time of the Bhambathana Revolt. Indeed, questions of authority lie at the heart of this book where you dwell on persecution of black missionaries. To what extent can we talk of *African* missionaries increasingly being in charge of various spheres in their own lives?

## NORMAN ETHERINGTON

By the 1890s two important things had happened in Natal; KwaZulu Natal as it is today. First, what had looked like British authority advantaging black literate Christians who were economically aspirational, now a change in colonial policy had given decisive control of politics, the political sphere, back to local white farmers and settlers in the town. Yet at the very moment the colonial regime was clamping down, the second and third generations of African Christians were finding themselves capable of effective political argument and this was a force that once started never went away. The clampdown by colonial authority came too late to suppress literacy and political knowledge. The other thing is that, in ways we do not still totally understand, Africans took control of Christian evangelisation. This was outside the mission station setting; it was on farms and in towns, at the diamond fields and at the goldfields, and a new, very powerful evangelical force was under way. Mass conversions began to take place at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which had never happened before in southern Africa. At the same time it has to be said that traditional authority had taken a blow due to the suppression in wars of independent African kingdoms, especially the Zulu Kingdom, so there were a number of factors that came together to make African Christian politics very, very interesting at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## PETER ALEGI

One of the interesting things about this book, which you have co-authored with Peggy Brock, Gareth Griffiths and Jacqueline Van Gent, is how you bring Africa into dialogue with processes of change elsewhere in the world, particularly the British Empire—Jamaica, Australia, New Zealand. What do

you think we gain by working with this comparative method, through this comparative lens, about Southern Africa in particular?

### NORMAN ETHERINGTON

The comparative point that emerges most strongly in any comparison of religious change is the decisive role played by the local, non-colonial agents. That is crucial in every instance and it does not vary. What does vary are the political circumstances. In New Zealand where the Maori people were, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, decisively outnumbered by white settlers a process that had been occurring over quite a short time, 30 years, the colonial authorities were much less worried about the subversive content of Christianity than they were in Natal or Jamaica, where white authority was represented by a numerical tiny minority of people. White, colonial, authority in those circumstances is characterised by frequent panics, constant fear, and frequent bouts of vigorous repression. It is fun to talk to people about the comparative aspect of things as the traditional mission history with its focus on European and North American missionaries can after a while get pretty dull because everybody talks the same language.

### PETER ALEGI

It also helps South Africanists, who sometimes inhabit an exceptional space in the literature?

### NORMAN ETHERINGTON

Yes, that's right. And let it be said that it's 50 years ago this year [2018] that I made first landfall as a researcher in South Africa doing my Ph.D. The way we think about doing African history has really broadened and changed in a number of ways. When I began taking a postgraduate course in African history the predominant school was, I think, the Wisconsin-based idea of Africanists who should be anthropologically fully conversant through fieldwork with an African society, know an African language, and the Imperial history was confided to an entirely separate group of historians in most countries. So even when I first began teaching African history I was careful not to describe myself as an Africanist or an African historian, but a British Empire historian, who happened to be very interested in the way Africa had developed and very enthusiastic about teaching that to Australian university students. In the course of the 1980s and the 1990s, everybody caught up to the importance of the Imperial connotation. So much so that in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century it is routine when talking about any African country to talk about colonialism, post-colonialism and it is

much easier to work across disciplines than it used to be. I never learned to speak Zulu. I suppose I continued to work across fields rather than burying myself in one. And I might say, both in respect to Natal and missions, I never intended to go on focusing my life on either Natal or religious change but it was other people who kept dragging me back, never letting me go, inviting me to colloquia and conferences and so forth. One of my thesis supervisors, Robin Winks, had taught me to take care of my notes, always keep them properly indexed and abstracted. He gave me a tool which enabled me to write things now—I wrote an article last year which drew on some notes taken in the 1960s, some in the 1980s, some in the 1990s, and some as recently as three years ago. So I will express in this little talk my debt to Robin Winks for talking me into this and my stubbornness in persevering with it.

### PETER LIMB

Well, we are glad that you kept those notes, Norman. Turning to another of your great interests, the study of empire and imperialism, your latest book is *Imperium of the Soul*. I think it is a *tour de force* of empire and culture, with plenty of connections to South Africa. One angle you have is architectural history, on Herbert Baker, architect of empire, his work crafting monuments of empire in South Africa and India. Another angle is personality, through the prism of interaction across the generation that included Baker and Sigmund Freud, and novelists such as Rider Haggard, John Buchan, even the arch-composer of empire, Elgar: you talk about his Gordon of Khartoum Symphony. Not to mention layered personalities such as the poet Kipling who was another to have a South African experience during the Boer/South African War, when he took a turn as journalist on *The Friend* newspaper when the British occupied Bloemfontein—I have been reading that journalism lately. You move through the sphere of that work to Joseph Conrad and finally, even majestically, Lawrence of Arabia. So, there are a lot of characters in this complex, nuanced book. Can you just sketch the broad contours of this work and explain the significance of what you call the political and aesthetic imaginations of Edwardian imperialists?

### NORMAN ETHERINGTON

The best way to approach this is by telling you how it came to be and to do that I need to stretch right back to my undergraduate days at Yale, my final two years, when I was in an Honours Program called History, The Arts and Letters. It demanded of the students that they have a pretty high degree of ability to deal with art and architecture, music, and literature, as well as

history though history was very central to it. Those interests have stayed with me my whole life. When I went to Natal, the second research trip, I met the late Jeff Guy, who became a great friend of mine. We were both doing research in the Pietermaritzburg Archives at the same time and he called my attention to Rider Haggard. He was interested in Rider Haggard as an imperialist whom he didn't like. But I hadn't read a great deal of Rider Haggard as a boy and I started reading him while I was doing research on my second research trip to Natal and to London in 1974. This led me to a day in the archives where I was reading this report from the Secretary for Native Affairs in Natal to the Colonial Office and I realised that he was describing the plot of *King Solomon's Mines*. That led me to uncover the links between Haggard and Shepstone and to write something about it. But at the very same time I was there I was in touch with a literary scholar who had been an undergraduate friend, then also in London, Walt Reed, who has just recently retired as a Professor of English from Emory University, Atlanta. He was very interested in psychoanalysis at the time and my conversations with him led me to write first a conference paper then an article on Rider Haggard, imperialism, and the late 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectual environment from which Freud as well as Haggard emerged. That was published in *Victorian Studies*, a good outlet, and I began to toy with the idea then that the approach might apply to other people. In 1980, I applied it to John Buchan and became so convinced of the value of it that I decided not to publish any of my work on this. Every five years or so I would tackle a different character but I put the results of my researches aside, wrote extensive essays, and didn't give conference papers about them. Meantime I always had this dream of a book in my mind that would do this. You mentioned three books coming out in the last three years; they came out in different circumstances. The *Indigenous Evangelists* emerged from a research grant leading to collaborative research from 2008 to 2010. The *Big Game Hunter* on Frederick Selous arose out of a publisher's commission; I researched it in six months, wrote it in six months, and you can read it in a day. But *Imperium of the Soul*, that was a work really of a lifetime.

#### PETER LIMB

Let me ask you here perhaps a Janus-faced question to bring this back to African history and ask whose empire was it in these cultural spheres. On one level, this book is certainly about these Masters of Empire. But what might all this paraphernalia of empire—such as for example the imposing Union Buildings in Pretoria that Baker constructed, or Haggard's novels—what did they all mean to black people and how might the empire and its

African subjects have influenced all these monumental works. I was just wondering how Elgar's 'Pomp and Circumstance' might fit, or not fit here; to paraphrase an historian quite insensitive to African history, namely Hugh Trevor Roper, who spoke derisively of the 'gyrations' of Africans across history. In other words, what do all these Masters of Empire, the Soul of Empire, mean for the subjects of empire?

#### NORMAN ETHERINGTON

There are two questions here. On one level, to these creative conservative imperialists Africa represented savagery in the Hugh Trevor Roper sense, and the twist on that which Freud seized on among other people of that era, was that these people realised that within themselves was a savage who could not be suppressed and whose subversive messages were omnipresent albeit in the subconscious. In the end, the apparatus of suppression became somewhat analogous to the Imperial apparatus of subjection. Now nobody much thought about what the impact of this literature was on African intellectuals and, in fact, I think it is a subject worth investigating. It certainly is worth somebody to do a Ph.D. because you will see there is a little Epilogue after the Lawrence of Arabia chapter in the *Imperium of the Soul*, in which I talk about some of the African intellectuals who emerged in the 1950s and 60s and the way they responded to that literature. It is quite remarkable that in some circumstances, important writers in certain situations, the first time they read Rider Haggard was with enthusiasm. They were identifying with the white explorers and not with the imaginary African people encountered. That is a question whose answer really awaits further research.

#### PETER ALEGI

Speaking of African subjects, I was teaching the other day about the state-building and migration taking place in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in Southern Africa which you cover so nicely in your book *The Great Treks*. I remember years ago the book stirred up quite a bit of controversy among South African historians. Could you share something about how a history of mobility in Southern Africa stirred up a hornet's nest, what the criticisms were, and how you came back to those criticisms and even made it into the pages of academic journals? Graduate students are now taught by people like us to really acquaint themselves with these debates and incorporate those insights into their own research.

## NORMAN ETHERINGTON

I was commissioned by a publisher, Longman, to write a book for a series they called ‘Turning Points in History’, specifically on the Great Trek. That came about because I had become a participant in the debate started by Julian Cobbing on the so-called *mfecane*. My approach to the Great Trek, on which I had never read the Afrikaner version, was drastically reshaped as the result of rethinking the *mfecane*. Having got this commission I thought: when am I ever going to get a commission as good as this. I made a number of important methodological decisions. The first was that it was not going to be a book that rode along with the colonialists and advancing white frontiersmen as they encountered African people. It would be focused on African people encountering those forces, and embedded not necessarily in their point of view—difficult for any historian to recapture at this distance—but from the perspective of that side. This meant not focusing on anybody of authority or influence in the Western Cape or Britain, but focusing on the great interior of Southern Africa when the Bantu language speakers congregated, by far the most populous section of the entire subcontinent. That was one important methodological consideration. That I would situate my perspective not on the frontier but on the interior and watch as these encounters took place.

Secondly, I wanted it to be a history of all Southern Africa. The starting point was, that one of the results of the expansion of the Zulu Kingdom and other upsets, slave trading et cetera, was that some established political groupings moved quite far away from their original homelands. I realised that this movement was not a new feature in Southern African history but a long established one, analogous in some ways to what we see in the Western Sudan. Control of persons and control over labour was always more important than territory. For that reason, it had to be not a history of South, but Southern Africa.

Then I made what I thought was an independent logical decision that I would not use any racial terms in the book. I would never refer to Blacks all Whites and those terms would only crop up when people who were subjects of the book used them themselves. I had no idea at the time that I was doing this that the novelist John Coetzee had made exactly the same decision when writing *Waiting for the Barbarians* and his book on Michael K. I think many people still have difficulty in coming to terms with history that departs so much from established narrative structures—the frontier, the advance from the Cape—my focus on the interior, the focus on mobility and the refusal to accept what became for a time under apartheid a colonialised racial order, the refusal to acknowledge that as some eternal fact about southern Africa. I think many established historians looking at this were perplexed. Paul

Maylam had written a book called *A History of the African People of South Africa*; that was like a piece of segregated history. I did not want to do segregated history. I had some qualms about people accepting me with my background and experience as someone speaking on behalf of African people but I did not imagine that I was speaking on behalf of African people, but myself. Rather like Edward Gibbon when he sat down to study the Roman Empire. Occupying some Olympian mountain-top and watching with great interest what was going on down below and trying to catch, through documents, the voices of people caught up in these big processes of change.

Incidentally, I would like to do the next chapter of that sometime. I finished that book at 1854. I would really like to go on and may within the next year or two take up the story 1854 to 1912.

#### PETER LIMB

We would certainly love to read a sequel to that. Maybe we can move towards bringing this very interesting discussion to a conclusion by thinking about the way you use this book to develop the historical landscape, craft a narrative, and invite the reader to imagine these movements of people. At the beginning of the book, I remember, you use the metaphor of an eagle flying high, not over the Mother City, Cape Town, but over this heartland. This focus on the landscape was something very evident in the work of John Coetzee. I heard him recently in Adelaide give a reading where he compared the South, from Argentina and Chile to South Africa and Oceania speaking in this way to the landscape. This leads me to a final question about maps and cartography. Some years ago, you edited a beautifully illustrated work comparing maps in Southern Africa and Australia. The question that comes to my mind is: What can cartography tell us, or not tell us, about history? And here I am reminded of another recent splendid book on South African surveying and cartography by Lindsay Braum.

#### NORMAN ETHERINGTON

Yes, it is a great book. I will tell you how I got into the cartography. I had always loved maps. When I was 10 years old, I plastered my bedroom with National Geographic Society maps of the whole world, every one that I had. So the interest in maps goes back a long way. When I was preparing to write *The Great Treks*, I realised that there were many parts of the landscape that I needed to familiarise myself with by seeing them, those parts of southern Africa that I had not visited. To prepare myself I set out to collect all the old maps I could, because the modern map is useless in telling you where Mzilikazi might have been, or what the group names were that were used in

the Eastern Cape, for instance. But on the early 19<sup>th</sup> century maps of different parts of southern Africa people really emerge, you can see them on the map. When I set out to use these old maps to find places, I discovered that they were often wildly inaccurate because they had been compiled by cartographers, usually in England or Germany, drawing on information that they got out of books or reports of travellers.

I also realised that not only were these maps useful in my attempts to chart the movements of people and to understand what so-called ‘tribal’ names might have meant in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but they also enabled me to see Southern Africa from the point of view of people who lived in the era that I was writing about. A lot, maybe most historical cartography, is focused on the matter of getting the map right, correcting errors; there is a narrative of progress that goes along with it. But there is another aspect of historical cartography that I seized upon, which is seeing the world from a different point of view, from the point of view of people in different eras, using the maps that they drew on to understand their mind-set and how they saw the landscape. So that is how that came about.

#### PETER LIMB

I am sure this interview will be very useful for many people trekking across Southern African history and culture. Thank you, Norman Etherington for talking to *Africa Past and Present*.

#### NORMAN ETHERINGTON

And thank you for having me on.



## **Commentary: China and Africa**

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China has a long historical connection to the African continent. In recent years, that relationship has been changed with economic transactions and transfers of wealth on an unprecedented scale. Consider for example the \$4 billion invested in the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway and various hydro-power projects with a combined value of more than \$220 billion (See also Shinn 2012).<sup>1</sup> China has a vast supply of funding, and Africa has a deep need of development funds. However, possession of resources and need is not one sided. Africa has an abundance of undeveloped resources including fuels such as oil, uranium, minerals and metals such as copper, gold or lithium, and foods. China needs access to these resources to continue its economic reinvention and development. Each side can benefit, but there are concerns in such relationships, particularly for the less developed side.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) into Africa has been easing in recent years as an uncertain international economy leads investors to prefer reduced risk (Ernst & Young 2017). Investment, unlike trade, locks the parties together over a period of time and the thing that locks them together is debt. The majority of FDI funds move from and to developed economies with established legal systems and economic governance. Africa is a continent with many economies, a few of which attract most of the FDI that comes to Africa. Egypt, South Africa, Morocco and Nigeria take the bulk of the FDI funds. Though there are large sums of FDI going to Africa, mostly from developed and established partners such as the United States and Europe, strongest growth is in FDI funds coming from China (Ernst & Young 2017),

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<sup>1</sup> Shinn is a former U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia (1996-99) and Burkina Faso (1987-90).

20; UNCTAD 2017, 44). Data on FDI from China into Africa can be difficult to interpret (Data: Chinese Investment in Africa (2018).

While, ideally, the funding for infrastructure spending should come from within the economy in which the infrastructure will be built, borrowing to speed the process is common. However, such borrowing raises questions of local economic governance, and the influence entailed on the act of loaning funds. If the economy is unstable, or weak, or corrupt, then repayments may not be made, and the lender's influence grows. The growth in debt owed to China is a concern to be added to China's relatively low concern with local standards, or the environment.

Many African countries, at least in the modern period, do not have a history of strong economic governance, and therefore any lender is likely to attain a greater influence than might be the case in some other parts of the world. This has been the case when former colonial powers, either individually or in combination, lend to African countries. The arrival of China as a large-scale investor presents African borrowers with a choice, between lenders, and the lender's agendas. While the colonial history in Africa was long and much of it was ugly, at least in recent years there has been some genuine attempt to embrace and embody humanitarian values, and human rights in these relationships (See Albert, 2017).

However, China's position is that it does not interfere in the internal governance of other states, nor does it support such efforts from others. When funds become available to governments who are not respecters of human rights generally, or of the rights of particular groups within their country, the result can be damaging government action, or at least neglect of the needs of underdeveloped communities. There are many accounts of Chinese investments leading to severe environment damage in mining and infrastructure developments. Deming Liu has summarised accounts of mining operations in Zimbabwe, Gabon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and dam building in Ethiopia and Ghana as examples of the bad outcomes that can follow poor regulation linked to large scale investment and government corporations with little connection with the local community or local environment (Liu 2015, pp. 51, 54-55. See also Beyongo).

While some of the investments China has made in Africa are based on business cases, much of its investment turns on broader political objectives. China generally prefers to deal in influence, though on occasion it has engaged in more direct political action; examples include China's direct engagement in Sierra Leone's presidential election of 2014, and China's relationship with ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe. China has preferred to invest in partners who favour Chinese interests directly. This has led to connections in

Africa with parties whose bad conduct within their home country provides an insight into the policy priorities of the Chinese government. The negative reputational implications are not all external to Africa. Chinese support for ZANU-PF has led to a divided view of Chinese involvement in Zimbabwe. While the development of infrastructure is viewed positively, support for a corrupt and oppressive government is a substantial problem. This pattern has been repeated in many African countries. Further, as these governments come toward the end of their lives, China will face the difficult problem of connecting with another party able to provide stable government.

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*Editor's Note: For other, recent articles on China-Africa, see the special issue of ARAS volume 38 number 2, 2017, online at <http://afsaap.org.au/ARAS/2017-volume-38/>*



## **African Studies in Australasia: Comparative Trends in the U.S. and Europe**

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The following talk, here slightly revised and updated, was presented to the Plenary Discussion on ‘African Studies in Australasia and New Zealand: The Future?’ at AFSAAP Annual Conference, Adelaide, 2017, chaired by Alec Thornton. Other contributions were ‘Trends in African Studies in Australia/New Zealand’ by Tanya Lyons and Wanda Warlik; discussants were Tony Binns, University of Otago, and Geoffrey Hawker, Macquarie University. *Further short contributions around this broad theme are welcome to editor@afsaap.org.au*

### **Introduction**

In giving some recent comparative examples of ‘doing’ African Studies from the U.S. and Europe, I am mindful of the quite different academic and demographic landscapes in Australia and New Zealand, let alone across African countries, particularly in terms of funding opportunities and the relative ranking of the continent in university and government priorities. However, some trends do suggest possibilities and potentials, as well as the hazard of pitfalls for us here in the Southern hemisphere to be alert to, particularly in areas such as teaching and research, conference organising, and means of outreach such as publishing and podcasts. My viewpoint is, of necessity, rather impressionistic and subjective, but given my deep involvement in the distinctively wider field of African Studies as such, as opposed to just departmental or university structures, I hope it can offer the proverbial food for thought and further reflection on what we may achieve here. After spending nearly twenty years working on Africa in Australia, I relocated to the U.S. in 2001 where I spent the next sixteen years even more intensively embedded in the theory and practice of doing African Studies.

I will be all ears to hear from you about recent trends in Australian/New Zealand African Studies, your experiences at AFSAAP conferences (the programs of which I have often studied from afar), as well as activities at your own universities or other institutions. Scholarly gatherings are a good

place to start, and can be quite representative of African Studies in their respective locations. I attended each of the last 17 African Studies Association (ASA) annual conferences in the United States, several Canadian Association of African Studies (CAAS) conferences, and several in Europe (the biennial European Conference on African Studies (ECAS)), and gatherings in England, Scotland, France, Sweden, Germany, Holland and Switzerland), as well as meetings in various African countries. The ASA (UK) is also often substantial, if somewhat smaller in numbers than ASA and ECAS, both of which can attract ca. 1,500 speakers. Hence, there are lots to compare.

Conferences of ASA, CAAS, and ECAS each have their own distinguishing features, ranging from the very extensive parallel panels at ASA and ECAS, both of them mega-affairs, accompanied by publishers' booths teaming with new books, non-stop African films, and major keynote speakers from Africa, to the more modest, intimate meetings in Canada and European nations more akin to the scale we have here. The very diversity of these large conferences can offer ideas. We might think, for example, how we could incorporate African films in future conferences. Or African books. It was always a great joy to visit the varied publishers' booths at ASA, sometimes bedecked by book launches. The sprawling wares of the stall of the African Books Collective (ABC), which unites over 100 African publishers, invariably was hosted by manager Justin Cox (now based more conveniently for us in Auckland), accompanied by Walter Bgoya, the Tanzanian Swahili language publisher and chairperson of the ABC board. Walter and his then Oxford-based manager Mary Jay had attended in force at the 1999 AFSAAP conference that I co-organised with Cherry Gertzel, and our paths would cross again in the early 2000s when I facilitated their opening of a North American book distribution centre in Michigan. ABC is keen to re-engage with AFSAAP and present the wares of African publishers and scholars at our meetings. Although there can be a clash between his attendance at AFSAAP and ASA conferences, both usually held in November, last year Justin Cox sent a sizeable box of new books published across Africa, many of which were quickly snapped up by our delegates at UNSW. This year in Dunedin, he plans to be at AFSAAP in force.

Therefore, let us not forget this particular material basis of our work, whether in print or online. Just recently (in 2019), David Mickler, founding director of the Africa Research and Engagement Centre (AfREC) at the University of Western Australia (UWA) and AFSAAP have agreed to re-establish an African Studies Reading Group in Perth, an innovation introduced by AFSAAP some years ago, but now slated to 'go digital' as a

jointly AfREC-AFSAAP supported series. With many Australian and New Zealand universities having access to extensive digital libraries of classic and new books about Africa, it will be very interesting to measure the success of this new venture, with readers attached to universities not having to pay for books as in the past. Although our libraries are chronically weak in their coverage of imprints from Africa, a representative sample of these could later be added to the mix from, for example, ABC, as the reading groups develop.

The last year few years have seen some remarkable innovations at African studies conferences. Recently, both ASA and ECAS have experimented with live video panels beamed in to African universities. The first occasion involving UCAD, Dakar, was memorable. Some university-based African Studies centres have also experimented with this, such as at Carleton University. In a different vein, the combined German-Swiss Africanist gathering held in both Freiburg and Basel was notable not just for a beautifully illustrated evening keynote (in French) delivered by a professor coming from Benin, but also by the migration, on a train, of delegates from one city to the other for the second group of sessions. It was also distinguished for the collaboration of two different national associations, something also apparent, from time to time, in joint gatherings between ASA and CAAS, and now wonderfully coordinated right across Europe by ECAS. In this regard, AFSAAP already brings together Africanists from Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand and the Pacific, so our founders back in 1978 thoughtfully put in place a very nice basis for cooperation across borders.

I am sure we all have vivid memories of conferences on Africa we have attended, such as this one today in the striking setting of Monarto Lion Park. I think back, for instance, to an ASA conference in San Francisco that saw some delegates move their hotel bookings to alternative, nearby accommodations in response to industrial action by the largely African American hotel workers. And mention of the Benin professor's talk brings another to mind, at Deakin University in 1990, when Norman Etherington gave a ravishing evening address on the theme of Freudian analyses of Rider Haggard's novels, complete with images of the mountains of Zululand.

Thematic and not just general conferences on Africa also take place, on a range of subjects, some focused on the work of significant scholars, trends, or anniversaries. A meeting I attended at Stirling University in Scotland in honour of Robin Law was well attended by historians, archaeologists and other specialists in West African studies. Then there are the many meetings in the U.S., Europe and across Africa within the domains of individual disciplines, such as African Languages, Literature, or Economic History, to name just a few. Australia's resources in African Studies are of course

limited, but in the past AFSAAP too has hosted thematic conferences, and with a little imagination, funds, and coordination, can do it again if we so wish. I will return to the question of cooperation.

## USA

In some ways, such as demography and traditions, Canada is a closer fit for us but I will focus more on the U.S. where, for 16 years, I was thoroughly embedded in the African Studies scene at Michigan State University (MSU), home of one of the largest, and oldest, of the roughly dozen federally funded African studies centres. I regularly attended multiple, weekly seminars on Africa, was involved in a wide range of digital, archival, and organisational matters, as well as the teaching and supervision of postgraduate students on Africa, and I helped build the vast Africana collection, one of the largest in the U.S. As I mentioned in my keynote address, the building of a large collection of African comic art at MSU attracted scholars from around the world, and facilitated my own research.

With a good number of African and Africanist postgraduates at MSU, the idea arose of a separate postgraduate conference at the university organised by, and for, students with finance from the African Studies Center (ASC), including support for students in Africa to attend and this has continued. AFSAAP too, has in the past, hosted our own postgraduate workshop the day before our conference. Since returning home, I have seen evidence of a healthy number of postgraduates across the country and so this is something to which AFSAAP might return.

Another interesting experience was helping to start and augment the ‘African Activist Archive’, in both print and digital manifestations, a project funded by a large U.S. Department of Education grant, which has seen many archives of the involvement of American academics and civil society with Africa over the last 50 years brought together and partially digitised. In addition, I served three cycles on the ASA’s Herskovits Book Award judging committee, which decides annually the best book in African studies. (The naming of the award is currently under review following trenchant critiques of anthropologist Melville Herskovits and a decision by ASA directors to ensure that past policies of marginalization of the older tradition of African Studies based at Historically Black Colleges as well as the work of African scholars located on the continent. are not reproduced). Again, AFSAAP has its own Cherry Gertzel award for the best paper delivered by a postgraduate to the AFSAAP conference, augmented recently by the new Cherry Gertzel Bursary Award to assist female postgraduates to do research in Africa.

I sat on the ASA Publications and Communications committee at a time of change, when the association was deciding how to diversify their journals' content (such as adding reviews of African films), how to better use the media and experiment with scholarly podcasts recorded at its conferences. MSU, with a long history of online projects on Africa from the 1990s, helped mentor ASA staff on podcasts and co-produced several episodes with leading scholars recorded at their conferences. At MSU, over the last ten years, I co-hosted the 'Africa Past and Present' ([afripod.aodl.org](http://afripod.aodl.org)) podcast series with prominent African studies scholars, now with 125 interviews, drawing a million hits one year. I actively participated in the MSU ASC Faculty Advisory Committee on a range of matters from African language teaching, fellowships, and appointment of new directors.

In the field of publishing, I chaired the selection committee behind the African Newspapers component of the World Newspaper Archive, a collaborative if expensive venture between universities and commercial groups, which has digitized close to one million pages of African newspapers from 1800, in three phases. Simultaneously, the challenge arose of making American interests more ethically sensitive to equitable partnerships with Africans, and I was involved in the African E-Journals Project in the early 2000s that assisted several struggling African journals to first digitize, make them more viable, and get their journals into mainstream Northern baskets (Project Muse). The project was infused with ethical concern for equity and the return of Africans' cultural and intellectual heritage into their own hands. It provided useful material and technical assistance to a dozen journals in Africa, some of which were able to make the full transition to digital publishing. This interesting pilot project was the brainchild of MSU sociologist and ASC director Professor David Wiley, a progressive scholar-activist, deported from the old Rhodesia just after Terence Ranger in the 1960s. A previous ASA president, he was prominent in establishing the Association of Concerned African Scholars (whose archive I curated, and whose leadership I briefly assumed in the 2010s).

Much has thus been happening in the digital sphere of African Studies in America, unlocking enormous resources for scholars. AFSAAP too has been interested to kick-start some digital projects. Whilst Africana primary sources are limited in Australasia, we could further explore partnerships with African institutions in this regard, and in such a way as to avoid the 'missionary' or self-interested undertone of many Northern-based projects that can verge on 'digital imperialism'. One lesson I learnt was that it greatly helps to have an experienced in-house technical team as well as academics with a track record of getting grants. Even lacking grants, if such a team is in

place and administrators on board, mainstreaming Africana as part of regular digitisation becomes easier. This is much harder in Australia, where African Studies is not high on administrative or government priorities, but where we do achieve a ‘beachhead’, it makes sense to build on it in ways to enhance future research and give something back to Africa.

### **The Need for Cooperation**

In considering possible digitisation of African studies resources in Australia or analogous projects, we should not be daunted by comparison with the vast amounts of cash and technology floating around America. This wealth is not surprising given the population of that country, available capital, and technological expertise. In fact AFSAAP, under the forward-looking leadership of Tanya Lyons and her executives, has already splendidly achieved the digitisation of our own journal, and various other resources, as well as providing financial resources to seed another project, though that has yet to deliver. Even in the U.S., surprising is the very limited number of universities and African studies centres able to successfully coordinate resources and produce successful digital projects. In part, this has been due to the sharp competition that lies at the heart of the American system, and which makes it relatively difficult to bring about genuine cooperation. On the other hand, MSU certainly brokered some fine inter-university partnerships. For example, between MSU, Harvard, historically black colleges, UCAD in Senegal, and universities in Malawi, Mali, Ghana South Africa, and so on. Many of these digital projects are represented on the website of the African Online Digital Library (<https://www.aodl.org>) that has developed over the last two decades. Some of the most interesting and useful in terms of research and education include Tolerance in Islam in West Africa, Overcoming Apartheid, Community Video Education Trust, and Slave Biographies. These and a related project, the Archive of Malian Photography (<http://amp.matrix.msu.edu>), have built in local capacitisation and avoided removing any materials from Africa. This is not to say that things always go smoothly. The competition between Africanists from different American universities was evident at a conference held on digital slave trade studies at MSU a few years ago, when scholars at MSU and Emory University each hoped to corral future digital projects inside their own centres. Yet positive and negative electrodes produce light.

One useful lesson that Africanists in Australasia can take away is a need for cooperation, trust and coordination in research and projects. Easier said than done, and I am mindful that in the Australian situation of cramped research funding, university rivalry is just as apparent. This is where

organisations such as AFSAAP come into play. AFSAAP has a vital role to play in coordinating, not only its own members (which include students, academics, NGOs, diplomats etc.), but also other groups now emerging, inspiring and keeping us in touch with each other and offering a forum both in terms of the annual conference and *The Australasian Review of African Studies* to exchange ideas, to consummate projects, and work up new ones.

### **Foundations: Demography, New African Communities, and Funding**

We have a very fine demographer of Africa in our midst, David Lucas, which reminds me of the material foundations for a flourishing African studies superstructure. The United States has a huge population of 329 million people, together with a substantial, if relatively declining African American component that tends to provide an element of community and intellectual engagement with Africa. There can be rival academic empires and sometimes tensions between African Americans and ‘American Africans’, as Ali Mazrui used to say. But it is clear to me that Australian African Studies now has a substantial human base for growth, in the first place from our growing African Australian community.

It is becoming very evident that immigrant communities in Australia from African countries, most notably South Sudan but in fact from many nations, are now well established and we can expect a modest increase of interest from them in the study of their homelands as time goes by. How deep this will be is uncertain, but the examples from the twentieth century of, say, Greeks in Melbourne, Vietnamese in Sydney, or Italians in Western Australia (which led to what is probably the largest constellation of Italian studies in Australia at UWA) is something to ponder. I would like to draw attention to the rather inevitable transition from American Africans to African Americans; it is likely a similar thing will happen here and I wonder whether we shouldn’t be doing more to try and garner ‘the African’ component in the African Australian experience. It is wonderful to see, for instance, South Sudanese excelling in Australian Rules football, but how might we also encourage immigrants and their children to study Africa? This is not always done very successfully in either Europe or America and it is not easy.

The American ASA has a range of different categories of affiliates including country-focused affiliates such as the Ghana Studies and Nigeria Studies associations, others such as the ASA Women’s Caucus, the ASA Outreach Council, Islam in African Studies Group, Lusophone African Studies Organization. Over the years, some bodies have fallen away whilst new ones arise and affiliate (such as, more recently, the North American Association of Scholars on Cameroon), but the model is interesting not least

in the way ASA allows a degree of affiliate flexibility. Some African communities in Australia are quite small, but those that have grown substantially in the last two decades, such as from the Horn of Africa, appear to offer greater potential for a range of African Studies connections. I know AFSAAP already has been doing a lot in this regard. Perhaps there is scope for AFSAAP to broaden and deepen its affiliates.

### **Foundations: Libraries and digital resources**

This is an area where Australia really needs more investment. Latrobe, UWA and Melbourne invested heavily in library research materials in the eighties and nineties, laying the ground work for more postgraduate theses. I have not seen much evidence of similar investment in the last two decades, but perhaps some of you have positive stories to share? Administrators like to imagine in their administrative fantasies that all you need is a digital library, and there is a certain logic to this, but such cramped policy just does not work when researching Africa where in most countries the largest percentage of academic publications are still in print. The result can be studying a very diverse continent chiefly from publications not from Africa, but from the North.

This is changing with more digital publishing in many African countries, but a balance and depth is needed to support higher quality research. Australia made the decision to collect heavily on Southeast Asia at the National library and ANU, and before that on South Asia and East Asia, so there is a capacity but it needs active pushing by academics to get librarians back in the groove. In the meantime, budget cuts and lack of lateral thinking will probably mean minimalist research collections. The situation in the U.S. is just so far ahead, even of Europe, and yet even there, only a small number of research universities with very large African studies budgets, notably Northwestern, MSU, UCLA, Harvard and a few others are building high-level collections. Some previously leading universities have pulled back their involvement in African studies, notably Yale, although there are rumours of a return to the fray.

In Europe, it is more patchy. Oxford and Cambridge, together with the British Library and Birmingham, continue to muster impressive collections in some regions of Africa, and there have been important new developments such as the Sudan Archive at Durham. On the other hand, in some countries with a colonial past in Africa, there has been a degree of slippage, such as in Belgium, and to an extent Britain. Germany retains some substantial pockets of interest but even at major centres such as Hamburg and Frankfurt, library collections on Africa can be quite limited, locked as they are in a strange sort

of federal arrangement. Individual research institutes such as the Nordic African Studies Centre in Uppsala, Sweden, and the BAB in Basel, Switzerland have fine collections, if specialised, the former focusing more on contemporary Africa, the latter chiefly on Namibia. There might be a lesson here for Australian and New Zealand institutions of higher education to deploy limited budgets in cooperative, coordinated ways to develop specialised collections on particular African countries at different universities.

### **Foundations: Publishing and new technology**

This is a strong point of both American and European African studies and a weakness for us here. And yet, Africanists in Australia have been able to leverage some Australian university presses quite well. I am thinking of publications by Norman Etherington, Derek Schreuder, and others in previous decades. I have noticed happily from afar that some of you, such as Tanya Lyons, Tony Binns, David Mickler and Gareth Griffiths have continued to publish books in mainstream publishers from the North. Most of these works are published in the social sciences and humanities. Perhaps there are ways of leveraging commercial or independent publishers here in other fields such as comparative fine arts and applied sciences such as agriculture. Another suggestion would be to try and collectively work on books series.

New technology offers possibilities of extending our knowledge more widely into society. Digital open access publishing is always an option but is not always a panacea in academia. Streaming joint conference sessions with African universities have been a success lately, as have conference podcasts. ASFSAAP's YouTube production with interviews from the 2016 conference in Perth was a step in the right direction. Underpinning successful digital outreach, such as the Africa Past and Present podcast with which I have been associated for the last decade, is technical knowhow; at MSU this takes the form of a dedicated, specialised digital humanities unit, Matrix. Not many U.S. universities have bothered to develop this kind of capacity, but it has repaid itself many times over with substantial grants and an extensive digital publication record. Outlays need not be massive and provided there are skilled technicians and academics who pick up some skills, then quite a lot can be done on a shoestring budget.

### **Foundations: Centres, institutes, associated organisations**

It is worth considering the organisational aspects of African Studies. In Europe, there is considerable diversity, country by country. ECAS has been

a wonderful success story, not just in large attendances, but also in rotating conference venues among different European cities, from Lisbon, London and Leipzig to Paris, Uppsala and Edinburgh, as well as developing a rich and varied program. Making the conference biennial has allowed more time to organise, something appreciated in 1999 when Cherry Gertzel and I spent an entire year building the AFSAAP conference. Advance conference scheduling will help us better plan. Europe has the advantage of being close to some African countries. Australian Africanists sometimes have been able to exploit relative geographic proximity with regard to Southern and Eastern Africa. One suggestion here would be to invest more in the Africa-Asia connection, particularly with regard to China and India. There are all kinds of China-Africa institutes and networks. In this regard, a spinoff might be book series or journal special issues focused on Asia and Africa together.

The most effective avenue of developing African Studies is, however, probably dedicated centres. The recent establishment of AfREC at UWA is the first such centre in our region since the highly successful African Research Institute formed at La Trobe University in the 1970s under the able leadership of David Dorward, which later fell victim to bureaucratic short sightedness. AfREC is an example of the successful application of the cooperative spirit. David Mickler and his team has already, in the first year of the new Centre, built impressive contacts with African universities. Long term funding and the distractions of the corporate world may still be obstacles, but surely there is cause here for guarded optimism—and a ‘model’ that might be replicated in other universities.

### **Future directions**

Which way should we turn in the future? I would always caution, in the long-run, against downplaying “the African” in favour simply of “ethnic studies”, of lurching too far towards a singular focus on “African Australian” studies, if I can put it that way, delicately. For that dimension of Australian life will be picked up, as it already is being, by the social sciences. A judicious balance between the two would be in the interests of both approaches and guard against some of the weaknesses I have seen in the U.S. I would like to see always the warmest welcoming of African Australian themes and African Australians, as well as Australian Africans, within AFSAAP, at the same time that we strengthen our understanding of the continent and our direct contacts there. They are complementary. And I anticipate the second (and third) generations of African Australians will return with gusto to embrace the study of Africa.

Let me finish by encouraging more Africans to join AFSAAP Executive!



## BOOK REVIEW

**James De Lorenzi.** *Guardians of the Tradition: Historians and Historical Writing in Ethiopia and Eritrea*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2015; Rochester Studies in African history and the Diaspora series; xii + 219 pp. ISBN 9781580465199.

James De Lorenzi opens this insightful book by speculating on the contemporary historical discipline as a European-brokered synthesis of the world's many ways of representing the past. He goes on to give a masterful account of the origins and growth of historical writing in the Horn of Africa in recent times and centuries past, including interesting institutional developments, with a focus on a small but prolific cohort of relatively obscure Ethiopian and Eritrean intellectuals in the past 100 years.

The principal claim of the book is that both Ethiopia and Eritrea possess a developed vernacular historical tradition that flourished in the early twentieth century through its complex interaction with Western scholarship. This interaction did not entail the export or hegemony of abstract ideas related to intellectual 'modernity' or a culturally alien prose of history, but rather a process of selective appropriation by intellectuals from the Horn of Africa. Vernacular history was not westernised but instead it was Ethiopian historiography that was indigenised.

De Lorenzi contends that early authors of vernacular histories are best understood as public intellectuals who wove together multiple traditions of knowledge. The *Kebra Negast* is the best-known text compiling histories of the Solomonic dynasty; other ancient compilations, often linked to the Ethiopian Church or the royal family and nobles, are also discussed. But as the nineteenth century progressed the hybrid compositions of historians reveal the pervasive influence of ideas, politics and historical forces originating in the wider world, as African intellectuals grappled with the intrusions of the modern world. Into the twentieth century these new Ethiopian historians presented an alternative view of modern historiography, one 'that occasionally spoke a Rankean language with a thick local accent' (p. 9).

De Lorenzi argues that Ethiopian historical tradition is a fact-based field of learning with deep local roots, a stable canon of texts, a coherent set of

genres and methods, and a tremendous capacity for assimilation of external thought. He also makes a broader point, that history is a pluralist undertaking and can emerge anywhere and can be written in many genres and modes. De Lorenzi has done a fine job in bringing us a nuanced understanding of a grand yet evolving historiographical tradition and its ‘guardians.’ He concludes that while Ethiopian and Eritrean historical writing is Africa’s oldest form of historiography, it is largely unknown outside the societies that produced it, a ‘situation that has impoverished our general historical understanding’ (p. 137). This book goes a considerable way toward expanding our historiographical vistas.

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