

## **Africa: Moving the Boundaries**

Proceedings of the 39th African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP) Annual Conference, 5-7 December 2016, The University of Western Australia.  
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### **Africa: Moving the Boundaries**

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## **Introduction**

*To you who live in these extraordinary conflictual times, what language have you created to match its demands? What does “boundary” actually mean for a time such as this?*

– *Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor*

The 2016 conference theme, “Africa: Moving the Boundaries”, was designed to inspire participants to explore how physical, social, creative and conceptual boundaries are being stretched, transcended, re-constructed, re-defined and challenged by a range of historical and contemporary dynamics, forces, and ideas of relevance to Africa. The articles in this volume highlight conference participants’ cognisance of and contribution to these processes. They critically engage issues of migration and the evolution of transnational communities; theories, representations and narratives of African agency; grand projects of regional integration; evolving forms of social and political activism; and responses to critical development and environmental challenges. More importantly, they are a genuine attempt to answer the questions posed by Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor above and in the opening contribution to this volume. Kenny and Griffiths offer responses in their explorations and journey into a post-independence Africa narrated by Owuor in her novel, *Dust*.

Bondarenko subsequently explores the fractures and tensions within Africa’s sixth region – the African Diaspora. He highlights how differences in the perception, understanding, and significance attached to the Transatlantic Slave Trade by African Americans and African immigrants have resulted in a strained relationship between the two groups. He argues that differences in historic memory play a significant role in determining the nature of inter-group relationships. Shared skin colour is insufficient for the existence of brotherly and sisterly relations. Moreover, it underlies foreign-born blacks’ experiences of racial discrimination in America, contributing to a shared experience of marginalisation with African Americans, as Usacheva highlights. She reveals the tensions in being both an insider and outsider through an investigation of ‘the complexity and ambiguity of the relations between old African-American communities and emerging African communities.’

Echoing Usacheva and Bondarenko’s emphasis on historic memory, Robinson outlines ‘a Gramscian-Marxist framework for the analysis of modern African history.’ He explores how power relations between core and peripheral states have shifted over time. In *The ANC and Capital: Aspirations to Hegemony*, Hale expands on Robinson’s

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background paper, arguing that the African National Congress ‘is operating an unstable hegemonic project through the vehicle of the South African state.’ Promises of post-independence black empowerment are revealed to have faltered as South Africa embraced a Western neoliberal developmental model.

Jakwa subsequently calls for the reconceptualisation of predominant understandings of state instability. She argues for the inherent instability of the nation-state and international system, emphasising the destabilising impact of global processes of policy transfer, diffusion and convergence. For Jakwa, the jurisdictional competition characterising the contemporary rescaling of governance, the colonial legacy of hybrid political regimes, and African leaders’ failure to disavow state sovereignty, are the principal causes of African state instability. Using Zimbabwe as a case study, she further argues that the world is yet to witness a “weak” state and calls for the reconceptualisation of democratisation in Africa.

In *Nuba Mountains: Current Conflict and Implications*, Deldoum provides an assessment of the conflict facing the people of the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile and Darfur, in the Sudan. He reveals a Sudan that has been at war with itself for 60 years since achieving independence in 1956. Deldoum argues for the need to move beyond an exclusionary ethno-racialist conception of nationhood and to implement a peace agreement that addresses people’s genuine socio-economic and political grievances. In the short-term, he recommends that regional organisations such as the African Union exert greater pressure on the Khartoum Government to allow the provision of humanitarian aid to people in the aforementioned areas.

Woods subsequently examines and critically engages protracted refugee situations (PRS), with a focus on Somali refugees in Kenya. She argues that PRS present both humanitarian concerns and security challenges for the host state and its immediate region. Host states’ securitisation of refugee issues is argued to lead to and interact with other contextual factors, ‘to propel individuals on the pathway to (non)violent radicalisation’. In the final analysis, Woods argues that, ‘the liminal state in a refugee camp context is the overarching sub-structure that hosts and incubates other contextual conditions that interact in a complex web of sub-systems to precipitate radicalisation.’

Mensah subsequently highlights the importance of effective border management strategies to prevent terrorist groups like Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) from crossing African borders with ease. He identifies several factors contributing to border porosity in West Africa including lack of clear sub-regional and national border policies, and lack of cooperation and coordination between states and other stakeholders. Mensah offers recommendations for improved border management.

McDougall then draws our attention to the politicisation of seemingly childish, mundane and banal objects like teddy bears. He explores the political origins of the teddy bear and the arrest of an English primary school teacher in Khartoum, Sudan, after allowing her students to name a teddy bear “Muhammad”. McDougall explores the political ramifications of such an act in a post-9/11 world.

Li subsequently explores the role of ethnic favouritism in primary education and overall educational attainment. She reveals that in Kenya, differences ‘in the socio-economic achievements across diverse ethnic groups’ have persisted. Li finds that these disparities ‘are largely due to early exposure to education during the colonial era’. Co-ethnic favouritism is found to principally operate at the district level. Broadly, Li warns against overestimating the role of ethnic favouritism on educational attainment.

Israel then focuses our attention on the impact of global capital on research ethics

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governance in South Africa. He argues that the search for new pharmaceutical markets has led companies to look to developing countries. The latter's 'lower risks of litigation, low labour costs, pharmacologically naïve participants, weak ethics review and the absence of other regulatory processes', is attractive. Consequently, he argues, researchers in developing countries are encouraged to implement external regulatory measures. Israel emphasises the need to pursue and implement locally-informed approaches to ethical research.

With this in mind, Higgins immerses us 'in the stories, experiences and perspectives of African families from refugee backgrounds' residing in Australia. She challenges universalist conceptions of human rights by prioritising the voices of African families. Broadly, she explores 'key methodological elements that impact engagement, cultural safety and power in research'.

Lyons' *Reflections on the Dilemmas of Feminist Fieldwork in Africa* subsequently reflects on the author's experiences of 'conducting research in Zimbabwe in the mid-1990s'. Her research concerned 'the role of women in Zimbabwe's anti-colonial liberation struggle.' As such, Lyons interrogates the question of 'who can speak for whom?'

Building on these interrogations of the locus of enunciation, and focusing on the experiences of African immigrants living in Queensland, Australia, Udah explores and discusses the impact of the representation of Africans in Australia on settlement outcomes. He argues for a 'postcolonial outlook that challenges racist assumptions and constructions of Africans.' Deng then 'explores the impact of South Sudanese youth experiences of the settlement challenges resulting from acculturation and intergenerational conflicts.' Jagtenberg follows with an exploration of Afrikaner immigrants' motivations for emigrating from South Africa to Australia. Despite the continuation of white privilege in post-apartheid South Africa, Jagtenberg highlights that 'fear of the threat that affirmative action poses to their children's future' and 'reverse discrimination', informed Afrikaner emigration.

Lucas *et al* subsequently traces Europeans' migratory patterns from Zimbabwe. They are interested in understanding both the movements and motivations behind migration as well as the possibility for returning to Zimbabwe in the post-independence period. In contrast to Lucas, Molefe critically engages cultural heritage management practices in post-independence Botswana. She highlights issues and opportunities for heritage management in that country. Ongalo *et al* then reveal the varied meanings of the word "home". They highlight the lack of a universal understanding of *home* through a discussion of Marjorie Oludhe MacGoye's identity as a British-born Kenyan and Luo wife. Their critical engagement with her novel, *Chira*, and 'her engagement with the different appropriations of the Luo *dala* [home]', leave us with an appreciation of home's multi-layered nature.

Access to opportunities often shapes one's sense of belonging; thus, Adusei-Asante & Awidi explore the educational experiences of African high school students in Perth, Western Australia. They highlight that although there exist 'a broad range of equity programs and strategies' targeting students from low socio-economic backgrounds, the number of students from Sub-Saharan Africa undertaking higher education remains low.

The volume closes with four articles engaging health in Africa. Holmes discusses the significance of 'African indigenous herbal medicine for treatment of "new" diseases, including HIV/AIDS'. She discusses the implications of this for HIV/AIDS treatment. Doh and Adusei-Asante examine 'the contextual meaning of active ageing based on the

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lived experiences of older African people.’ They argue for the need to ‘optimise social interaction by strengthening family systems’. In old age, active, happy and fulfilling lives can only be realised where there exists strong ‘community structures’. Adusei-Asante also explores the continuing popularity of faith healing in Ghana. The practice, he argues, exists alongside Ghana’s National Health and Insurance Scheme. Adusei-Asante recommends ‘public education and a national regulatory framework for controlling dangerous forms of the practice.’ Finally, Adusei-Asante, Doh & Klutsey discuss Ghana’s experience with National Health Insurance, revealing that ‘implementation of universal health coverage is challenging, but possible, if associated blind spots are managed’.

The articles featured in this volume of conference proceedings demonstrate the richness of African Studies in Australasia and the Pacific. Each article has significant policy implications for both Africa and Australia and is an important contribution to increasing dialogue between the two continents in all areas of development and human security.

We thank all those who attended and participated in the 39<sup>th</sup> annual AFSAAP conference, “Africa: Moving the Boundaries”, for making this volume possible and contributing to the growth of African Studies in our region. We thank our keynote speakers, Wafula Okumu and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor for challenging us to create an African lexicon for the difficult times we find ourselves in.