

The African Studies Program at Indiana University Bloomington (USA)

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Introduction

Scholars associated with the African Studies Program at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) are leaders in research and teaching about Africa in the United States. No single conceptual or methodological approach defines this research: IUB's more than eighty African Studies scholars are housed in numerous College of Arts and Sciences departments and professional schools at Indiana University. Many IUB African Studies scholars engage issues associated with multiplicity and relationality in Africa and its relations with the world, producing new work that places emphasis on connections, networks, and processes in their analyses. In this essay, I will offer an overview of the African Studies Program and discuss an African Studies Program research project entitled "New Media and Global Africa," which illustrates the theme of multiplicity and relationality.

The African Studies Program at Indiana University Bloomington

The African Studies Program (ASP) was founded in 1961 at Indiana University's main campus in Bloomington (IUB).¹ The ASP grew under the founding director, J. Gus Liebenow (1961-1971), and continued its expansion under his successors: Patrick O'Meara (1971-1993), N. Brian Winchester (1993-1995), York Bradshaw (1995-1999), John H. Hanson (1999-2007), Samuel Obeng (2007-2015), and Hanson again from 2015.

¹ The ASP's website includes information about its faculty and staff, ASP courses and degrees, IUB African Studies resources, and many other aspects of IUB's ASP (African Studies Program 2018).

Currently the ASP covers all regions of the continent (north to south, east to west) and draws on the expertise of over eighty IUB faculty members in the arts, humanities, and social sciences as well as several professional schools (business, education, information science, international and global studies, law, media, public and environmental affairs and public health). IUB's African Studies resources are extensive. They include the print and audio materials at the Herman B. Wells Library, IUB's main library and one of the largest university collections of African Studies materials in the U.S.A. Africana materials extend to archival documents and material objects in various repositories and museums. For example, IUB's Eskenazi Museum of Art has one of the largest university collections of African art, its Lilly Rare Book Library holds the private papers of several African literary figures and other rare materials from Africa, IUB's Archives of Traditional Music has extensive materials recorded in Africa beginning in the early twentieth century, and other repositories hold unrivalled collections of materials from Liberia and Somalia. Some of these audio, visual, and print materials now are available digitally, and efforts are ongoing to add more Africana to IUB's online offerings.

The ASP's staff includes a director, associate director, administrative coordinator, and a student services assistant. IUB's African languages program, offering seven African languages at three levels on a regular basis, is based in the ASP. The instructors include one clinical professor who also serves as the language program's coordinator supervising three senior lecturers and seven associate instructors. For the past twenty years the ASP has been the editorial home of *Africa Today*, a quarterly, peer-reviewed, academic journal publishing original research on the arts, humanities, and social sciences; six ASP faculty serve as its editors, a graduate assistant is its managing editor, and the ASP director is *Africa Today's* editor-in-chief.

The ASP promotes the interdisciplinary study of Africa by coordinating instruction in African languages and cultures at IUB. The ASP offers African language courses and coordinates the African Studies course offerings of affiliated faculty in IUB departments and schools. The ASP awards several undergraduate degrees, including a minor and certificate in African Studies, a minor in African Expressive Culture, and a minor in African Languages; students may receive a major in the International Studies Department with an Africa concentration. Graduate degrees include: an MA in African Studies, a dual MA in African Studies and Master of Library Science, a joint MA in African Studies and Master of Public

Affairs, a dual MA in African Studies and Master of Public Health, and a PhD Minor in African Studies. The program also promotes the exchange of students, faculty, and materials and engages in collaborative activities with other universities and institutions.

In 1965 the ASP became a National Resource Center (NRC) for Africa under Title VI of the U.S. National Defense Education Act, maintained NRC status as the program moved into the U.S. Department of Education, and held it continuously until 2014. Despite the recent loss of NRC status, the ASP continues to offer Title VI Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowships to students studying African languages and is seeking to regain NRC status in the 2018 Title VI competition. Whether serving as NRC or not, the ASP has engaged in outreach activities to extend knowledge of Africa beyond IUB.

Outreach involves activities targeting schools, colleges, universities, communities, businesses, and other organizations to promote cultural, artistic, musical, and other activities related to Africa. These efforts include the development and dissemination of resources for a broad range of non-specialists interested in teaching about Africa, engaging in activities in Africa, and other initiatives linked to Africa. The resources include a website, podcasts, interactive instruction (e.g., video conferencing), film and print media materials, and library online services. It also engages in outreach activities that lead to personal, community, or institutional enrichment.

The ASP outreach activities build on collaboration with the State of Indiana's Department of Education (IDOE), IUB's School of Education, other IUB Area Studies centres, and an emerging partnership with African Studies scholars at Indiana University's urban campus at Indianapolis (IUPUI – Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis). The ASP's outreach initiatives focus on teacher training to rural and urban schools in Indiana, including a new initiative to reach out to teachers of children from Central African refugee families – who now comprise one of the largest refugee populations in Indiana. The ASP also has connections to minority-serving institutions throughout the U.S.A. providing enhancements to their curriculum and professional training. Collaborating with IDOE and other IUB Area Studies centres, ASP provides expertise for the state-wide Global Employability Initiative to prepare a workforce that engages with the world. The ASP also partners with other Title VI centres, such as IUB's Center on International Business Education and Research.

The ASP is one of many IUB Area Studies centres within the recently established Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies (HLS). It is a school within the College of Arts and Sciences. HLS's founding dean, recruited after a national search, heads a unit that incorporates IU's Area Studies centres and several departments: three Area Studies departments (Central Eurasian Studies, East Asian Languages and Cultures, and Near Eastern Languages and Cultures) and the new Department of International Studies, formed from the International Studies Program which had a B.A. major within the College. HLS moved into a newly built Global and International Studies Building in 2015. Although HLS operates within the College of Arts and Sciences, it has partial autonomy, as do two other schools within the College, the Media School and the School of Art, Architecture + Design. Languages are critical to international and global studies, and the opening of HLS encouraged a major change for the African Studies Program: IUB's African languages program, which had been administered in the IUB's Department of Linguistics, moved to the ASP. IUB is one of only a few U.S. universities that offer African languages within an African Studies Center: the University of Wisconsin-Madison has its own department, but most schools place African languages in departments serving other primary functions, such as Linguistics or African-American and African Diaspora Studies. The current arrangement allows the ASP to serve as an advocate for African languages that might otherwise be neglected within the university.²

The constitution of HLS, with its new International Studies department, allows for new degrees. The MA in International Studies was launched this year, and the next task is to facilitate the integration of Area Studies possibilities into the new MA program. One new development may well be the creation of new area certificates associated with the various Area Studies centres. Some units, such as African Studies, already have an MA degree and many dual degree options with professional schools in business, library and information science, public health, public and environmental affairs, etc. These stand-alone and dual degree options will continue, but the Area Studies centres will have new opportunities to fashion a new certificate to accompany the new International Studies MA degree.

² The ASP organized a symposium to discuss the integration of African Studies centers in new schools of global and international studies. Revised papers appear in a special issue of *Africa Today* (Africa Today 2017).

In addition to these roles, the ASP encourages IUB faculty research on Africa. IUB supports faculty projects through various university seed-funding initiatives; IUB African Studies scholars develop Africa projects and receive competitive national and international research grants and prestigious fellowships. The ASP also helps coordinate research on Africa. I now turn to one of these initiatives.

New Media and Global Africa

This research initiative analyses how new media transforms African cultural expressions and how these expressions shape the contemporary world in Africa and beyond. “New media” includes recent developments in digital formats and earlier innovations in cinema, music, photography, and radio. “Global Africa” refers to local, regional and global networks on the continent and beyond to capture interconnections and cultural influences as Africans circulate between cities and rural areas and as they form communities abroad associated with historical and contemporary population flows.³

The transformations associated with new media in Africa require a fresh approach to understanding the historical, socio-political, and creative forces at work. Informed by recent work on modernity and ‘hybridity’, this project engages the specific transformations associated with technological change. It builds on the notion that Africans do not reside in impenetrable cultural spheres, but engage other Africans as well as newcomers to the continent, including recent arrivals of entrepreneurs from Brazil, India, and China. Three themes are foci of this research project.

One theme is mobility. Recent African expressive forms do not emerge exclusively in cities, but urban spaces are vibrant sites of creativity where the absence or breakdown of infrastructure often gives rise to groundbreaking innovations. African cultural production reflects not only the complexity and diversity of urban experiences but is also stimulated and enriched by the movement of people, ideas, and commodities across boundaries. Some are local, rural-urban circuits within national boundaries, while others are regional and international networks connecting

³ This initiative draws on the conceptual and methodological approaches in Adesokan 2011; Bouchard 2012; Buggenhagen 2011; Goodman (forthcoming); Hanson 2017; Moormann 2008; Moyd 2014; Reed 2016.

Africans in diasporas emerging across the continent and beyond. External diasporas connect new immigrants with those associated with previous movements in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds: cultural processes, therefore, emerge not in an on-or-off the continent binary, but out of connections, historical and contemporary, between Africans on the continent and elsewhere. Such processes also manifest themselves in more transformative senses than those typically associated with cultural identity, making it necessary for scholars to go beyond research on 'global flows' and their appropriations on the continent or the emigrants living in various diasporas. Africa is not the only continent to experience these processes, and our focus on global Africa will be relevant beyond those interested in Africa and its diasporas, highlighting productions that emerge from various connections and intersections while taking account of historical experiences and specificities.

A second theme is the de-centred productions made possible by recent technologies. Beginning in the early 1990s, an explosion of FM radio stations began broadcasting in different national languages and produced commentary and debate, bringing often neglected rural voices into national debates. Political and religious leaders also turned to new media, initially cassette tapes, then DVDs, and now social media, to communicate with various publics and disseminate ideas. There has been a similar growth in initiatives such as innovative publishing ventures dedicated to publishing new writings in different genres as well as arts, film, and hip-hop festivals which provide forums of exchange for diverse publics. This flourishing of expressive forms and initiatives has taken place in a context of widespread economic volatility where the state has been decapitated by structural adjustment and neoliberal reforms. They engage with, and often grow out of, the economic and political challenges that women and men across the social spectrum face in their everyday lives. The changes in media provide access to voices that are not "new" but no longer suppressed. This democratization, made possible by the media but made relevant by African participants, is a source of vitality and creativity at the heart of this project, but it also provides opportunities for undemocratic movements to convey messages and recruit.

Performance is a third theme. This research theme emerged in the 1970s as a new approach in several disciplines interested in artistic production, from music and spoken word through ritual to visual arts and dance. This research project builds on this approach, and it extends the inquiry by conceptualizing performance as a space that is transportable,

from rural to urban contexts and back as well as to communities in diaspora. Performance in this project is a creative space of heightened reflexivity. It is an arena where identity is formed, contested, and changed. It is a space that is fluid, where performers and audiences interact. The space also is adaptable, from a rural site illuminated by headlights or gas lamps to urban nightclubs and international venues producing streaming videos. The aesthetics of this performance space is one aspect of this theme, but another is the practical issues of copyright and piracy, legal domains that define and open creative spaces to the globalized economy of the current era.

The researchers are Indiana University scholars working on African topics in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. The initiative began with NEMLIA, “New Media and Literary Initiatives in Africa,” as a cross-disciplinary group formed in 2011 to explore relationships between different modes of literary and media production in literature, film, photography, art, and music and issues of intellectual property, copyright, piracy, and access.⁴ The “New Media and Global Africa” involves Akin Adesokan, Media School and Comparative Literature; Vincent Bouchard, French and Italian; Beth Buggenhagen, Anthropology; Jane Goodman, Anthropology; Marissa Moorman, Media School and History; Michelle Moyd, History; Daniel Reed, Folklore and Ethnomusicology; with ASP Director John H. Hanson, History, as its head. Its activities include workshops and symposia on this topic: one example is the recent conference, “African Practices and New Media,” held at the Indiana University Global Gateway in Berlin, a collaborative event with scholars at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Bayreuth and scholars at the University of Humboldt. The next major conference will occur in Cape Town, South Africa after the Indiana University Global Gateway is opened in 2020. Other activities include special issues on this topic in *Africa Today*, books published with Indiana University Press, and the development of digitized materials, blogs, and podcasts focused on new media in Africa.

⁴ For more information on the project, see Nemlia n.d.

Conclusion

The ASP serves many roles at IUB. It coordinates a broad range of African Studies and African language courses and provides students with an opportunity to specialize in African Studies by obtaining undergraduate and graduate degrees, minors, and certificates, participating in study abroad, research, and internship opportunities in Africa, and attending events such as lectures, conferences, films, and other academic initiatives. The ASP also conducts outreach activities to serve wider communities in Indiana and the U.S.A. Encouraging research on Africa also is another ASP activity, and the recent initiative on New Media and Global Africa expresses one of several research initiatives undertaken at IUB under ASP leadership. These initiatives draw on African Studies expertise, but they also stress connections across regions and continents, recognizing the wide range of networks that link Africa to the world. The ASP's integration into IUB's new Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies reinforces activities that stress multiplicity and relationality in Africa and beyond. HLS seeks to actively promote activities and conferences that transcend regional and disciplinary boundaries and that challenge conventional binaries between area and global studies and between the social sciences and the humanities. HLS and the ASP at IUB integrate diverse perspectives into discussions relating to Africa and its role in the world.

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