Welcome!

We are delighted to present the first edition of the Five College African Studies newsletter, which we envisioned as playing a key role in enhancing the visibility and effectiveness of African Studies in the Five Colleges. The council and its members have for many years energetically and consistently promoted the study of Africa in the Five Colleges through administering fellowship awards, engaging in curriculum review, supporting language learning programs, and organizing seminars and public lectures. In the 2016–2017 academic year, for example, the council organized a total of five faculty-led seminars, two community dinner events featuring presentations by students and introductory remarks by faculty members about course offerings, two community dinner events featuring presentations by students and introductory remarks by faculty members about course offerings, and organizing seminars and public lectures. In the 2016–2017 academic year, for example, the council organized a total of five faculty-led seminars, two community dinner events featuring presentations by students and introductory remarks by faculty members about course offerings, two public lectures by visiting scholars, and a four-day international symposium and festival of African cinema that attracted participants from within and outside the United States. Other notable council activities have included the management and editing of African Studies Review—the journal of the African Studies Association—for over twenty years, and the stewarding of the African Scholars Program (ASP). Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Smith College, the Five College African Scholars Program offered 4-month fellowships to 37 scholars in different stages of their academic careers to conduct research and collaborate with faculty members in the Five Colleges from 2003-2007. Through these various activities, the council continues to develop local and international networks, fostering a growing global community of Africanist scholars. The newsletter will serve, consolidate and help to expand that community by providing information about the work of council members and their associates within and outside the United States. In addition to creating a forum to exchange ideas across and beyond the Five Colleges, the newsletter will contribute to the process of documenting the various activities of the council. We hope that the newsletter will enrich and inform our community for decades to come. The editors welcome contributions to the newsletter and your thoughts and suggestions for future issues. Happy reading.

From the Editors: Nathalie Arnold Koenings, Joye Bowman, and Bode Omojola

Five College African Studies Council Community Dinner, Thursday, November 9, 2017
Your work has taken you to Uganda. Will you be going back soon?

I am returning to Uganda on April 3rd. My focus will be to conduct a study that explores the experiences of armed conflict and internal displacement on men in northern Uganda. The male participants in this study are Acholi, the predominant ethnic group in the districts in which I work. After having conducted the study that explored the experiences on women, I am interested in men’s subjective understanding of the specific ways that the experience of conflict and displacement affected their relationships with wives and children. I will also engage in discussions with communities regarding strategies to address some of the lingering post conflict consequences that are affecting them.

What project would you love to do if you could, and might do one day?

I would be interested in a longitudinal case study approach to exploring the experiences of families through conflict, displacement, post conflict, and resettlement and beyond. Most studies on conflict-affected populations give the unstated impression that these phases of conflict and displacement are discrete and that there is a beginning, middle, and an end. The experience of conflict begins long before the conflict is defined and the effects of conflict extend beyond the post-conflict defined period. Understanding more of the continuum of the conflict and displacement experience would inform policy development, practice interventions and research goals.

What are a few Africa-related books, movies or albums you would recommend to the five college community and why?

The book that I am looking forward to reading is *Kintu* by Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi. I bought this book last year while in Uganda but have not had a chance to read it. Perhaps I will have a chance to do that soon.

Are there any emerging ideas/topics/theories in African studies that you find particularly interesting today in light of your work?

I think this question links back to the project that I would like most to do. The models of post conflict resettlement are just that – models. Developing models in combination with interventions that target the significant economic, social, and cultural changes at the community and family levels is needed.
You have worked in different parts of Africa—your book, *Doomed Interventions*, draws on your work in Malawi but also speaks to other settings in Sub-Saharan Africa, and your podcast series brings you into conversation with people working across the continent. What are some common themes and concerns that you see emerging in the work of scholars from different parts of Africa?

Perhaps this is the political scientist in me, but a major theme I'm seeing in my work and through the work of others is a crisis of democracy. While many—especially in the West—perceived democratic reforms as the path to prosperity for African countries, African citizens are challenging whether these reforms have actually brought much meaningful change. In principle, of course, I agree with the idea that people should have a say in how they are governed and what policies should be prioritized, but democracy as practiced in many parts of Africa fails to live up to those principles. In my book I show evidence of a serious disconnect between citizens’ priorities and the priorities of the broader global community. In aid-dependent countries there is a great risk that where there is a disconnect, the funders—not citizens—will be driving the agenda.

What are you working on right now?

I've started a second book project with my longtime friend and University of Malawi colleague, Boniface Dulani. We have written together before on Malawi politics and public opinion in Africa more broadly and we are taking some of that earlier work to write a book on African voters. We're interested in what drives citizens to vote in elections, particularly when the outcome is a foregone conclusion. The project is in its early stages but we’ve both very excited about it.

What is an idea or topic outside of your immediate work that you find exciting and that you might love to work with/on one day?

This semester I have had the honor of teaching the Five Colleges African Studies Council Capstone Seminar and through it I've been able to invite some of our colleagues to share their work. For example, Bode Omojola shared some research he is doing on music and art about twins in Yoruba culture; in preparation for his visit my students listened to a Cuban-French musical group named Ibeji (which in Yoruba means twins). Mary Hicks shared her work on West African fabric and entrepreneurship in the Black Atlantic. It was through these two seminars that I have a greater interest in studying the diaspora and art and how we can think about their influence on politics in Africa and beyond. This is really far outside of my areas of expertise, of course, so it would take a lot of time reading and thinking before I could get to a point of writing about this. I'll have a lot of beautiful art I can listen to and look at during that time.

What drew you to African studies?

My foray into African studies was mostly by accident. I had focused my coursework and independent studies on Eastern Europe during college, but in the very last term saw a course on African Politics that met my scheduling preferences. (Really! I took the class because it was offered in the afternoon on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It's totally okay for timing to be a reason to pick a class.) That course blew my mind. One component that I really liked was the professor had assigned fiction (Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*) which had never happened in any of the other political science courses I took in college. That class opened up more than just a new part of the world; it also opened up a whole new world of ideas.
Why is it important for more people in the US and elsewhere to learn about Africa?

My rural American upbringing and public school education meant before I took an African Studies class I did not know much about Africa. So I sympathize with the many Americans and others out in the world who are ignorant about the continent. I think it’s important we learn about people all around the world, including in Africa. My learning about Africa in particular has helped me to see similarities in the human condition across cultures and also to recognize the various privileges associated with our differences. While I may have been afforded greater access to high quality education by virtue of my birthplace, my Malawian counterpart may be wealthier in familial ties.

What books would you recommend to readers of the newsletter, and why?

Two books I read this year I highly recommend: Peter Kimani’s *Dance of the Jakaranda* and Nnedi Okorafor’s *Binti*. We are so lucky to have had Peter Kimani in residence this year in the Five Colleges and it was for this reason that I bumped his book to the top of my reading queue (which is longer than I imagine my natural life will take me). I’m not typically one to seek out historical fiction, but *Dance of the Jakaranda* is a beautiful weaving of multiple stories that explores identity, power, and even love. *Binti* is science fiction—another genre I didn’t think I enjoyed, but Nnedi Okorafor has changed my mind. *Binti* is particularly great for anyone about to start college, as the main character is embarking on a journey to get higher education. I loved the novel so much I read (and enjoyed) the other two books in the trilogy.

What is a question that you wish I had asked you, and will you ask and answer it?

The question: Why did you start a podcast?

I really loved my step-grandfather-in-law, who spent his entire life in Missouri. He rarely interacted with people of color and lived in an “international news desert”. Most of his family watched Fox News and bought into stereotypes about Africa. Whenever I visited him, he always had questions about brief news stories he read about African countries in *The Economist*, a magazine he was proud to subscribe to, but felt lacked depth. I loved those conversations with him because while he had no formalized instruction in African studies, he was curious and wanted to know more. I had a crisis a couple of years ago that made me question whether my everyday occupation was of any value to a broader community of people like my “Grandpa Gary” — people of any age, living in international news deserts, who were curious to learn more about the world. I wanted the Ufahamu Africa podcast to be a free, easy way to learn a little something about Africa. While it regularly features scholars of African Studies, Ufahamu Africa is not pitched at people in ivory towers.

ABOUT KIM YI DIONNE

Kim Yi Dionne teaches courses on African politics, ethnic politics and field research methods. Her research interests include political behavior and public opinion, health, ethnicity and research methods. The substantive focus of her work is on the opinions of ordinary Africans toward interventions aimed at improving their condition and the relative success of such interventions. Her work has been published in African Affairs, Comparative Political Studies and World Development.

From: [www.smith.edu/academics/faculty/kim-dionne](http://www.smith.edu/academics/faculty/kim-dionne)

*Ufahamu Africa* podcast
You are an anthropologist, a fiction writer and a translator. In what ways do these three activities complement or draw on one another in your work as an Africanist scholar?

For me, these things are in absolutely lively relation to each other. Although there are periods in my life when I have focused on one to the exclusion of the others, I always return to each one. Literary translation, of course, is very obviously ‘translation.’ This carrying of one story over a sometimes quite huge gap into another reading world. But ethnography, too, is a form of translation — and it exerts, or should, the same kind of key excitements and ethical pressures on the translator. In ethnography, one ‘translates’ what one has learned from others, often into a language or reading world that hasn’t had much room for the stories, people, and places one is writing about. And, for me, the task is the same—to be at all times working in service of the story, the people who have told them, and to create something that will honor the exchange. And the challenges are similar—in anthropology as well as in translation, I wonder, what size should I be? When am I too proud, too confident, when am I too small, where have I acted in service of myself or in service of the people who have a far greater stake in the material, where have I made mistakes and how do I admit and correct them? And these are ultimately questions about being human, about being in relation to others, which everyone, I think, is asking. Translation and anthropology afford a focused opportunity for posing these questions, every day, all the time. I feel very grateful for that. Fiction writing is something I have always done, from the moment I could write. And I could not live without it. And it, too, is a form of translation—one tries to make clear some of the dimly felt things that live in one’s imagination, or that one has come to know or believe about the world. Like ethnography, fiction writing is also an attempt to imagine others, to engage with and represent some part of the lived world which may not be entirely our own—even as the product always reveals a great deal about the writer. So there is a similar ethical complex there, a fascinating one. But I am also aware, all the time, of the influence of East Africa on my life—having spent my formative years there, and much of my adulthood. We can only work with what we’ve got, so my writing necessarily engages East African things. And I know well that what white people write about Africa has been and can be very, very damaging. I try to know this all the time. So fiction writing is a bit of an indulgence for me. If someone is going to read a novel set in Africa, I would prefer that they read one by an African writer. My stories feed me, but in the greater scheme of things, they are not so important. One thing I do know is that I can’t proceed with writing my own fiction if I am not also actively translating Swahili fiction and poetry, if I am not also working to promote the work of African writers. So, all of these things function together. One last thing I might say, too, is that reading African literature should matter to social scientists of African communities. Many European Africanist anthropologists tend to ignore African literature, or forget that the communities they work with often have remarkable spokespersons and champions who are writing very powerful things that everyone, very much including or perhaps especially, anthropologists, ought to be aware of.

You gave a reading from your current work of translation last semester so we do have an idea about your work in that category. Could you please tell us a little about your work as a fiction writer?

As a fiction writer who grew up white in Africa, I feel bound to think and write about legacies of colonialism, imperialism, the effects of these on human relationships. It was a history of colonialism that permitted me to grow up in East Africa—I feel very aware of that. So I am concerned with
Arnold Koenings is an anthropologist, translator, and fiction writer whose work is focused on East Africa. Her ethnographic research is centered on love and gender, which are at the heart of many Africanist ethnography — specifically focused on global peripheries, where discourses of hardship and wellbeing are figured in the occult and the imaginal, and the historical imagination, dressed by colonialism and Empire. She is also a translator of Swahili literature, poetry and non-fiction.

From: www.hampshire.edu/faculty/nathalie-arnold

I am working on an ethnography about visions of community wellbeing in Pemba, Zanzibar, where all of my fieldwork has taken place. I hope to finish the book by next year. I’ve just translated into Swahili a book of English-language interviews with people in Tanzania, Zambia, and China, who were involved in the building of the TAZARA railway in the 1970s. The TAZARA was also known as ‘Freedom Railway’, and for a time it really transformed Southern Africa. Economically of course, but also very much in political terms, principally because it enabled Zambia, a landlocked country, to reach the sea, without having to engage with the racist governments of Southern Rhodesia, South Africa and Mozambique as Zambia exported copper and imported things it needed.

And I am still working on the translation into English of Adam Shafi’s memoir, ‘Mbali na Nyumbani/Far from Home,’ part of which I shared with the seminar last fall.

ABOUT NATHALIE ARNOLD KOENINGS

Nathalie Arnold Koenings is an anthropologist, translator, and fiction writer whose work is focused on East Africa. Her ethnographic research is focused on the historical imagination, the occult and the imaginal, and the discourses of hardship and wellbeing in Pemba, Zanzibar. Publishing fiction under the name N.S. Koenings, she is focused on global peripheries, where her diverse, multilingual characters search for safety and love in contexts shaped by colonialism and Empire. She is also a translator of Swahili literature, poetry and non-fiction.

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2016–2017 Faculty Seminar Presentations

The Five College African Studies Council seminar series has over the years provided an important forum for faculty members and visiting scholars to present their work to council members. Presented below is the list of participants from the 2016-2017 academic year.


II. Grace Musila (Associate Professor, English Department, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa): “A Death Told in Truth and Rumour: Kenya, Britain and the Julie Ward Murder.” (Friday, November 4, 2016).

III. Stephen Clingman (Distinguished Professor of English and Director of the Interdisciplinary Studies Institute, University of Massachusetts, Amherst): “Gordimer’s Pathologies.” (Friday, December 9, 2016).

IV. Mary Hicks (Assistant Professor of Black Studies, Amherst College): “Healers, the Bahian Slave Trade and the Circulation of African-Derived Medicinal Knowledge in the Atlantic World.” (Friday, February 3, 2017).

V. Tanure Ojaide (poet, novelist, and Frank Graham Porter Professor of Africana Studies, University of North Carolina, Charlotte): “Adaptation—The Activist From Novel to Film.” (Friday, March 3, 2017).

Last year’s International Symposium and Festival of African Cinema was the highlight of the African Studies Council’s calendar. The four-day event, which took place at Mount Holyoke College and the University of Massachusetts, featured scholars, filmmakers, producers, programmers and film festival organizers from different parts of Africa. Participants included Djo Tunda Wa Munga (Democratic Republic of Congo), Idrissou Mora Kpai (Benin), Jean-Marie Teno (Cameroon), Rama Thiaw (Senegal and Mauritania), Litheko Modisane (South Africa), Keith Shiri (Zimbabwe/UK), and Mahen Bonetti (Sierra Leone/US). They were joined by a distinguished panel of Five College-based film scholars and filmmakers.

The symposium featured lecture presentations and film screenings, a major highlight of which was the keynote speech titled African Film in Historical Perspectives, delivered by Mahen Bonetti, the Director of New York African Film Festival. The following films were screened at the festival: The Revolution Won’t Be Televised by Rama Thiaw, Colonial Misunderstanding by Jean-Marie Teno, Indochina: Traces of a Mother by Idrissou Mora Kpai, and Viva Ravis by Djo Tunda Wa Munga.

The symposium focused on the role of the cinema as a form of social critique, reflection, and as an agent of political change in Africa. Participants also discussed how film producers have used the medium to counter colonialist narratives and foster nation-building. In examining these key issues, the symposium and festival explored the following interconnected sub-themes:

i. The aesthetics of anti-colonial liberation and film as a tool of nation building.
ii. The decline of the nation-state and related contemporary issues of national and cultural identities, neo-imperialism and the ongoing struggle of decolonization.
iii. African cinema and activism.
iv. African cinema and collective memory.
v. Gender as a thematic of African cinema and as a factor in its production, distribution and consumption.
vi. Programing and showcasing African cinema.
Far from Home: A Reading by Nathalie Arnold Koenings, Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Arts and Swahili Studies at Hampshire College.

On Friday, October 6, Nathalie Arnold Koenings read from her ongoing translation of Shafi Adam Shafi’s autobiography, *Far From Home* (*Mbali na Nyumbani*, Nairobi: Longhorn, 2013). Shafi Adam Shafi, who hails from Zanzibar, is one of Tanzania’s leading Swahili writers. The memoir traces Shafi’s travels as a penniless young man trying to get to Europe, where he hopes to get an education. The account of Shafi’s journey through colonial Africa as independence movements gain ground, his meetings with fellow travelers, reflections on power, culture, and friendship, and his experiences of Europe, provide a much-needed East African perspective on this critical time in history.

“Effects of Armed Conflict and Displacement on Women’s Social, Cultural and Economic Roles and Responsibilities in Northern Uganda.” Joanne Corbin, Professor and Co-director of PhD program, School for Social Work, Smith College.

On Friday, December 1, 2017, Dr. Corbin presented a paper on the impact of armed conflict and internal displacement of women in Northern Uganda. Her study explores the ways women’s social, cultural and economic roles and responsibilities have been affected by the twenty-one-year armed conflict with the Lord’s Resistance Army. Crucial themes are: women’s access to land and the ways that women work together to generate income. While improvements have occurred in women’s lives in northern Uganda since the ending of the LRA armed conflict, the disruption of key family and social networks during the conflict and displacement continues to affect the social and economic recovery of families years after resettlement.

“Towards an African Economic Geography: Challenges and Lessons Learned.” Dr. Mary Njeri Kinyanjui, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi and Visiting Associate at the Five Colleges Women Studies Research Center, Mount Holyoke College.

On Friday, February 2, 2018, Dr. Mary Kinyanjui narrated her experiences of teaching geography in two Kenyan universities, articulating the need for a new African economic geography to decolonize the academy and restore the dignity and honor of African peoples. Topics covered included African positioning in the global economy, the portrayal of Africa on television and in books, academicism, truth and validity, and language. The methods outlined by Dr. Kinyanjui included conversation (*ndereti*), journaling, and content analysis of pop and folk songs. The new African economic geography must account for the significance of economic informality and the diseconomies generated by the informal economy.

Doomed Interventions: A reading by Kim Y. Dionne, Five College Assistant Professor of Government, Smith College.

On April 6, 2018, Kim Dionne, Five College Assistant Professor of Government, Smith College, read from her book, *Doomed Interventions: The Failure of Global Responses to AIDS in Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2018). Professor Dionne’s reading highlighted the failure of AIDS intervention in Africa and the factors responsible; notably, the challenge of coordinating the manifold participants and administrative structures involved in the process of AIDS intervention programs. Dionne’s reading also drew attention to the “misalignment” between the perceptions of the international community and those of ordinary African citizens regarding the social impact of AIDS and how to fight the disease.
The Zimbabwean Coup-Not-Coup

By Chipo Dendere, Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science and Consortium for Faculty Diversity Scholar, Amherst College

On Wednesday, November 15, 2017 around 4:00 a.m. Zimbabwean time, the Zimbabwean defense forces announced on national television that, to restore the national legacy, they had taken custody of President Mugabe. They claimed that the president and his family were safe, and that their only intention was to target the criminals around the president. The army officials claimed that the presidency had been infiltrated by criminals known as the G-40 cabal, a faction of the ruling party aligned with the former First Lady Grace Mugabe. Mr. Mugabe eventually resigned on November 21, 2017, a few hours before he was impeached in parliament, and following massive protests against his rule on November 18 and his failure to resign on November 20.

The demise of Robert Mugabe came after a series of internal fights within his party ZANU-PF. Since the last election in 2013, the party members, including former vice presidents Joice Mujuru and under Grace Mugabe’s leadership, ZANU-PF expelled key party members, including the former First President. The army officials claimed that the presidency was targeted to remove sanctions on state-owned businesses, and to make business engagement easier as a way to support initiatives for the economic empowerment of Zimbabwean youth. The exit of Robert Mugabe has given Zimbabwe an opportunity to heal from its tortured political past and to strengthen democratization.

During the week of the coup, I engaged in more than 20 media interviews, and wrote extensively on the Zimbabwean situation. I was particularly glad to see that the sources of news were principally Zimbabweans in the diaspora and abroad. This is not always the case when it comes to news coverage of the global south. This focus on Zimbabwean voices allowed for a more accurate representation of the Zimbabwean situation.

On February 28, 2017, I was invited to testify before congress at Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley. My testimony, I urged the United States to continue supporting efforts of locally based pro-democracy groups. I also encouraged the United States to remove sanctions on state-owned businesses, and to make business engagement easier as a way to support initiatives for the economic empowerment of Zimbabwean youth.

April 12 and 13 marked the debut of Bode Omojola’s Irin Ajọ: Odyssey of a Dream at Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley. Written and composed by Omojola, the opera was put on collaboration with music director and conductor, Ng Tian Hui, choreographer Amir Hall, Mount Holyoke College and Five College Consortium African Opera students, and Mount Holyoke Symphony Orchestra.

Irin Ajọ tells the story of Kayode (played by Uriah Rodriguez, a graduate student in vocal performance at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and Adedoji Adetayo, a Greece-based Nigerian musician), a Nigerian immigrant who seeks a better life and future in the United States. Omojola sought to highlight the complicated experiences, and more specifically, the introspection immigrants engage in as they struggle to cope with difficult situations in their new temporary abode whilst simultaneously exploring contemporary political developments at home.

The opera explores Kayode’s move to the United States, leaving his fiancé, Iyabo (played by Agatha Holland, a graduate student in vocal performance at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and Adedoji Adetayo, a Greece-based Nigerian musician), a Nigerian immigrant who seeks a better life and future in the United States. Omojola sought to highlight the complicated experiences, and more specifically, the introspection immigrants engage in as they struggle to cope with difficult situations in their new temporary abode whilst simultaneously exploring contemporary political developments at home.

Irin Ajọ is an engaging production. It is at once, both provocative and entertaining; at times, serious and at others, mischievously amusing. For many in the audience, this is an engaging production. It is at once, both provocative and entertaining; at times, serious and at others, mischievously amusing.
was their first experience of Nigerian opera as an art form. Rodriguez and Holland’s performances are top-notch. The music is exceptional. Both the orchestra and the chorus were outstanding. The dancing and acting was brilliant, and rendered most effective through the use of simple backdrops. It was a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

The opera was performed with support from: The Office of the President, Dean of Faculty, Dean of Students, Music Department, McCulloch Center for Global Initiatives, Inclusiveness Initiative Fund, French Department, Communications Department (Mount Holyoke); Music Department, History Department (Amherst College); Music Department (Hampshire College); Government Department, Music Department (Smith College); Music Department (University of Massachusetts, Amherst); Five College Lecture Fund, Jackie Pritzen Fund, Five College Incorporated, Five College Ethnomusicology Committee, Five College African Studies Council (Five College Consortium).
Meet Our Incoming Chair: Lynda Pickbourn, Assistant Professor of Economics, Hampshire College

Lynda Pickbourn will be taking over from Bode Omojola as Chair, Five College African Studies Council on July 1, 2018. Lynda received her M.A. and Ph.D in economics from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she also completed a graduate certificate in Advanced Feminist Studies. She holds a B.A. in economics and history from the University of Ghana. Pickbourn teaches courses on African economic development, gender and economic development, feminist political economy, labor economics and the history of economic thought. Prior to coming to Hampshire College, she was an assistant professor of economics at Keene State College in New Hampshire.

Her research lies at the intersection of political economy, economic development and feminist economics, with a focus in three areas: rural-urban migration, informal employment and aid effectiveness in Africa. Since carrying out field research in Ghana for her PhD dissertation, she has also been interested in economic methodology, and combines both qualitative and quantitative methods in her work. Pickbourn has been the recipient of a number of awards and fellowships, including a research fellowship from the American Association of University Women and a Women’s Studies dissertation fellowship from the Woodrow Wilson Foundation.

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