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Introduction

The Duke Africa Initiative (DAI) has had a productive year, building on previous successes while expanding our reach and broadening the scope of our programming. We have continued to support faculty and students in their projects and events, and reaffirmed our commitment to student groups on campus. We also organized two major symposia during the 2023-24 academic year.

We have begun reassessing DAI's programming and governance structure, incorporating five new members into the steering committee, all of whom are recent African/Africanist arrivals to Duke. This year's DAI steering committee includes:

- Charlie Piot (Cultural Anthropology & AAAS)
- Fred Boadu (Pratt Engineering)
- Tsitsi Jaji (English)
- Anne-Maria Makhulu (Cultural Anthropology & AAAS)
- Karin Shapiro (AAAS)
- Stephen Smith (AAAS)
- Erika Weinthal (Nicholas School of the Environment)
- Felwine Sarr (Romance Studies)
- Chris Ouma (English)
- Khwezi Mkhize (AAAS)
- Sarah Balakrishnan (History)
- Eric Mvukiyehe (Political Science)

Rohini Thakkar has continued to serve ably as the program coordinator.

The DAI continues to be a recognized entity on campus, supporting faculty and students in their quest to better understand the continent and share their knowledge with both Duke and Durham. The Initiative offers programming to the community and continues to be a valuable source of timely events, funding opportunities, and conferences.

Faculty-Led Projects

Fall Symposium: The Sahel Region - Coups, Jihadism, Wagner & Anti-French Sentiments
Thursday, November 16, 2023



Leif Brottem presenting on his research in Benin

In the presence of over seventy students, the symposium featured a lively Q&A session and a roundtable discussion moderated by Professor Piot. The discussion focused on local rather than global understandings of jihadism in the Sahel region, challenging the dominant media narrative of 9-11-minded terrorists.

Leif Brottem (Grinnell College) provided a close analysis of “jihadist spill-over effects into the north of Benin,” highlighting longstanding conflicts, particularly between farmers and herders, where local jihadists have inserted themselves, tipping the balance of power. He discussed how indiscriminate international counterterrorism campaigns undermine local support for the postcolonial state.

Stephen Smith (Duke) described the phenomenon of “theocratic populism” in the Sahel, a region historically significant for precolonial statehood in Africa but currently the poorest with the youngest population on the continent (and globally).

Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos (IRD, Paris) dissected the failure of France’s decade-long military intervention in the Sahel (2013-2023) and the subsequent military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger that forced France to retreat. He also discussed the new military alliances with Putin’s Wagner Group (renamed “Africa Corps”) and the surge of anti-French sentiments across francophone West Africa.

Alioune Sow (University of Florida) focused on Mali, using textual analysis to analyze the figure of the soldier while also arguing that militarism and coups are seen as a last-resort form of governance.

Spring Symposium: Towards a Critique of Democracy in West Africa Wednesday, April 17, 2024



Charlie Piot introducing the speakers

Achille Mbembe giving keynote speech

This all-day symposium explored everyday forms of democratic governance in West Africa beyond official narratives. It examined embedded (substantive) practices—those rhizomatic modes of participatory governance that inhabit contemporary cultures of assembly, as well as the pan-Africanisms and militarisms of the early postcolonial period that continue to influence West African political imaginaries today.

The papers critiqued and suggested alternatives to democratic proceduralism, while remaining acutely aware of the times we inhabit: post-FrancAfrique, at a moment when new hegemonies are exploiting the continent, and amidst the global decline of democracy. They also highlighted new modes of digital and diasporic belonging.

Speakers included Achille Mbembe (WITS), Mamadou Diouf (Columbia), Felwine Sarr (Duke), Rose Ndengue (York), Alioune Sow (Florida), and Gary Wilder (CUNY), with discussants Anne-Maria Makhulu (Duke), Sarah Balakrishnan (Duke), Laurent Dubois (UVA), and Michael Hardt (Duke). The symposium engaged students and faculty in scholarly discussion across disciplines, fostering a deeper understanding of democratic governance in West Africa.



L-R Mamadou Diouf, Felwine Sarr, Alioune Sow and Gary Wilder

Stories of Resistance—Human Rights in Equatorial Guinea
Monday, April 08, 2024



Tutu Alicante and Alison Posey

Duke’s Department of Romance Studies, the Africa Initiative, and the Duke Human Rights Center cohosted a public talk by Equatoguinean human rights lawyer and activist Tutu Alicante. Alicante addressed the rule of law, press freedoms, and kleptocracy in West Africa’s longest-lasting dictatorship, Equatorial Guinea. During a question-and-answer session with Dr. Alison Posey (Romance Studies), Alicante discussed the role his nonprofit, EG Justice, has played in securing the freedom of Equatoguinean illustrator Ramón Esono Ebalé after his imprisonment on false charges in 2017. Alicante also visited Dr. Posey’s SP 331 class, where he and Esono Ebalé spoke to students about the importance of freedom of expression for democracy and discussed the graphic novel whose satire of the Obiang regime

landed Ebalé in prison.

Spring 2024 Black Archival Imagination Seminar Series



Chris Ouma, Lebohang Kganye and Khwezi Mkhize posing with attendees of the event

Professors Chris Ouma and Khwezi Mkhize launched the “Black Archival Imagination” course in the Spring of 2024. Professor Ouma, who joined the Duke English faculty this academic year,

and Professor Mkhize from African & African American Studies collaborated to co-teach English 590S (AAAS 590S), a course built around two central questions: What do we mean when we invoke the idea of a Black Archive? What are the conditions, genres, and modes of expression through which Black life, imagination, and desire become legible?

Paralleling the class, Professors Ouma and Mkhize also introduced a Black Archival Imagination (BAI) Seminar Series. The series was cosponsored by the Duke Africa Initiative, the Franklin Humanities Institute, Duke's English department, African and African American Studies, and the Concilium on Southern Africa.

“This seminar series examines how Black experiences have posed problems with regards to their representation through enslavement, imperialism, and apartheid. In response, Black engagements have complicated the concept of the archive and its material and generic manifestations. The series brings together scholars from Africa and its diaspora, expanding the notion of Black Archival Imagination and exploring its potential to create alternative futures. Scholars, archivists, writers, filmmakers, and activists work across genres and media, presenting work with multifaceted implications for understanding the Black Archival Imagination.” – Prof Chris Ouma.

Throughout the semester, Ouma and Mkhize hosted interactive events and welcomed esteemed guests to Duke. These events, a component of the BAI Seminar Series, provided a unique platform for engagement and inspiration.



Jewell Humphrey leading a guest seminar

Guest Seminar by Jewell Humphrey Monday, February 26, 2024

Jewell Humphrey, a PhD student at UCLA's Department of Anthropology, led a guest seminar that delved into her work on [UNIA](#) and the [Robert Hill Papers](#) at Duke University's Library Collections. Her visit, a standout moment for the “Black Archival Imagination” class, ignited thought-provoking discussions and fostered a deeper understanding of these significant archival materials.



Jocelyn Luckett in conversation with Ramadan Suleman

"Zulu Love Letter" after 20 Years **Tuesday, March 05, 2024**

Screenwriter and director Ramadan Suleman visited Duke's campus for a screening of his film *Zulu Love Letter*. Following the screening, NYU Professor Jocelyn Luckett moderated a Q&A session during which Suleman and Luckett discussed the film's content and filming techniques, including its interludes, which he used to deal with people's traumas.



Professor Louis Chude-Sokei

Louis Chude-Sokei Reading and Q&A **Tuesday, March 19, 2024**

The seminar series also featured Professor Louis Chude-Sokei of Boston University who read from his memoir *Floating in A Most Peculiar Way* and answered questions from audience members. Professor Chude-Sokei spoke of his mother's influence on his decision to write *Floating in A Most Peculiar Way*. When asked how he determined what content to include and what not to share, he replied: *"As a scholar, you want to tell everything, but as an artist, you can't."*



Lebohang Kganye and Serubiri Moses

In Conversation with Lebohang Kganye **Thursday, March 28, 2024**

The final installment of the Spring '24 Black Archival Imagination Seminar Series consisted of visits by visual artist and photographer Lebohang Kganye and curator Serubiri Moses. The two visited the BAI class, Moses via Zoom, and Kganye in person, to discuss Moses' work. The following day, they joined Professors Ouma and Mkhize, along with a dozen members of the Duke community, at the Nasher Museum of Art, to discuss Kganye's photography and the importance of the Black Archive. They discussed how she got into the field and the role photography can play in helping track one's family

history and telling a family's story. Slides of Kganye's work served as a backdrop throughout the conversation, and the participants were impressed by the method Kganye used in her ["Her-story"](#)

collection to illustrate a connection between herself and her deceased mother.

Student-Led Projects Graduate Students

The African Thought and Media Working Group (ATMWG) Speaker Series Tuesday, February 13, 2024



Dr. Adeshina Afolayan

During the 2023/2024 academic year, two students, Damilare Bello (English) and Kasyoka Mwanzia (Cultural Anthropology), initiated the African Media and Thought speaker series, which runs alongside the regular activities of Duke's Office of Global Affairs' *African Thought and Media Working Group* (ATMWG). This series was designed to foster dialogue on African media practices and their significance for issues of race, colonialism, and knowledge production. The events attracted participation from students at Duke and neighboring institutions.

The inaugural event of the series featured a public lecture by Dr. Adeshina Afolayan from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Professor Afolayan presented his ongoing book project, which explores the intersection of philosophy and African music. Following the lecture, there was an engaging Q&A session. The primary objective of this event was to facilitate conversations between working group members, the broader Duke community, and scholars/practitioners of African media from the continent and the diaspora. The lecture successfully sparked new and broadened existing dialogues about contemporary African music, global popular culture, cultural sensibilities, and philosophy. The event also brought together those familiar with Afrobeats music and introduced new listeners from the Duke and Durham communities.

In the evening, ATMWG hosted a dinner for the working group members and the Duke community, providing an informal setting to connect with Professor Afolayan. This dinner event offered a platform for meaningful engagement with a scholar from the African continent,

enhancing the interest of Duke students and faculty in African studies. This event was also supported by the Franklin Humanities Institute and the Africa Initiative.

The African Media and Thought speaker series has significantly contributed to academic and cultural exchange at Duke, providing valuable opportunities for learning, networking, and fostering a deeper understanding of African media practices.

Duke African Graduate and Professional Students Association (DAGPSA) - Spring Colloquium 2024

Thursday, April 4, 2024

The 2024 DAGPSA Colloquium was designed to be both an academic and a career readiness event. The theme of the event was "From Scholar to Solutionist: Equipping the African Scholar for Impact and Success Beyond Duke." The event had three primary goals:

1. To equip African graduate and professional students (as well as any other interested students) with the tools and skills necessary to navigate the workplace, build a personal brand of excellence, and remain true to their original selves.
2. To provide a platform to showcase and reward the work of a African graduate and professional students.
3. To facilitate networking and the formation of professional connections within the DAGPSA community and beyond.

The colloquium included a presentation from the Duke Career Center, a career panel session, and a series of student presentations.

Jared Smith from the Duke Career Center delivered a 30-minute seminar focused on tools and strategies to build career resilience and succeed in the workplace. The seminar was particularly informative for students with minority representation and those unfamiliar with workplace culture in the United States.

DAGPSA invited six panelists to lead a career panel session aimed at helping African graduate scholars understand the work environment in the US, protect themselves from the effects of negative bias, and build a personal brand of excellence in their respective fields. The panelists included:

1. Dr. Charles Muiruri (Duke Faculty member)
2. Dr. Sandra Onwuekwe (Duke MBA, 2022)
3. Chukwuma Ugwu (Duke MBA, 2021)
4. Olajide Olutoke (Duke Public Policy, 2023)
5. Jared Smith (Duke Career Center)
6. Dr. Charlene Chabata (Duke School of Medicine PhD, 2021)

Arinze Okafor, DAGPSA President, gave a 15-minute presentation on the process of applying for permanent residency, emphasizing the importance of obtaining a green card for those intending to work in the US, and providing criteria and strategies for success (with the disclaimer that the presentation was not intended as legal advice). Oseghale Ihayere, a Duke MBA candidate, presented his research on the relationship between foreign aid, governance, and socio-economic inclusivity in Africa.

Approximately 25 people attended the webinar, and about 20 students participated in the in-person social event later that day. DAGPSA received positive feedback from participating students, who found the event highly beneficial. There were also multiple requests for recordings of the event, indicating its impact and value to attendees.

The DAGPSA Spring Colloquium successfully met its goals, providing valuable insights, fostering networking opportunities, and highlighting the outstanding work of African graduate and professional students at Duke.

Undergraduate Students



Duke students at Fake African Wedding event

Duke Africa's Annual Fake Wedding

Saturday, January 13, 2024

Duke Africa's annual Fake Wedding is a vibrant cultural event designed to showcase diverse marriage traditions from across the African continent. The event features music, food, decor, and dance representing various regions of Africa. This year, the event was enhanced by the inclusion of the Burundi Drummers of Atlanta. Their performance was a phenomenal addition, bringing an authentic and dynamic cultural element to the wedding showcase. The Fake Wedding successfully highlighted the richness of African marriage traditions, providing attendees with an immersive experience that celebrated the continent's cultural diversity.

Duke Africa – Africa Week

April 15 – April 20, 2024

The AI also supported Duke Africa, the African undergraduate Student Association at Duke, in organizing a weeklong series of events titled “Africa Week.” The primary goal of this series was to celebrate African culture and spread awareness about Africa’s history to the broader Duke population.

Duke Africa x Congo Friends Event

Monday, April 15, 2024

The first event of this series, a teach-in, was organized in collaboration with Congo Action Raleigh and Congo Friends. Guest speakers guided students through the history of exploitation in Congo, from Belgian King Leopold's exploitation of rubber to contemporary mineral exploitation involving Rwanda and Uganda. The session included numerous questions from students and concluded by sharing resources for further learning about Congolese history and opportunities to advocate for Congo in the Triangle area.

Study Break

Tuesday, April 16, 2024

This mid-week event provided students with a chance to decompress and connect with the community in Hollows A. Attendees shared a meal, played games, and engaged in meaningful conversations, offering a relaxing break before the semester's end.

Igbo Language Night

Thursday, April 18, 2024

Continuing DukeAFRICA's monthly language nights, this event featured international Nigerian students Chika Dueke-Eze and Umahi Agwu. They gave a session on basic phrases, greetings, and proverbs in Igbo. The event concluded with a Kahoot game to review what had been learned, making the session both educational and entertaining.

Duke Africa Jubilee

Friday, April 19, 2024

Styled after the middle ground Jubilee videos, this event brought together a diverse group of student participants, including the CEO of Voice of Africa and his colleagues. The discussions covered three provocative topics: the value of returning to the continent, the notion that success at Duke is defined by securing a high-paying job or pursuing graduate studies, and the ethics of corporal punishment in parenting. The event fostered a dynamic exchange of ideas and provided an enriching experience for all attendees, presenting a broad spectrum of perspectives on each issue.

Voice of Africa Speaker Event

Saturday, April 20, 2024

Over the weekend, Kadmiel and Kemuel Van Der Puije from The Voice of Africa organization conducted a masterclass at Duke. Collaborating closely with DukeAFRICA members, the class, titled "The Ambassador of Africa Masterclass," offered aspiring young leaders a platform to express and refine their visions for the development of the African continent. The broader Ambassador of Africa program, focusing on African youth, aims to ensure young Africans have a voice and role in shaping Africa's future through collaborative efforts.

Lock-in Event

Saturday, April 20, 2024

This event provided an opportunity for students to gather around food (specifically West African dishes from Tasty Vibes) and participate in board games and group activities. The event continued the conversations from Friday's Jubilee event and provided a casual, welcoming atmosphere for students to spend time together before the last week of classes.

All events were highly successful, not only in terms of student turnout but also in fostering community building, sustainable cultural and social awareness, educational exchange, and professional networking.

AI Communication and Outreach

To enhance our communication with the campus and wider community, we have expanded our mailing list significantly. The program coordinator staffed the Africa Initiative table during Academic Resources Week to promote awareness of the AI, its events, and activities. This effort was highly successful, resulting in over 45 new students signing up for the Africa Initiative newsletter. This year, we saw a 43% increase in the AI mailing list. The DAI newsletter now reaches over 500 subscribers from across Duke and the wider Triangle area. We also maintain an active social media presence and have begun the process of updating our website.

Postdoctoral Fellow Appointment

We successfully secured funding for a postdoctoral fellow for the upcoming academic year, with the intention of making this position a permanent feature. We offered the position to Beletchei (Fidèle) Ebia, who recently earned her PhD in Global Development Studies from the University of Manchester and holds an MA from Duke. Her dissertation focused on the African Print Textile trade in Togo.

Fidèle will assist Rohini in organizing workshop events, teaching an undergraduate class, liaising with African student groups, and helping to raise the profile of the Africa Initiative across the Duke campus.

Plans for Future

We will continue to fund events organized by faculty and students and will issue a Call for Proposals (CFP) in July. Our goal is to cover a diverse range of topics and remain flexible in supporting unforeseen events. We aim to connect schools and disciplines across Duke's campus, offering opportunities not only for students and faculty but also for community members. With input from new steering committee members, we will continue to reassess the AI's programming and governance structure.