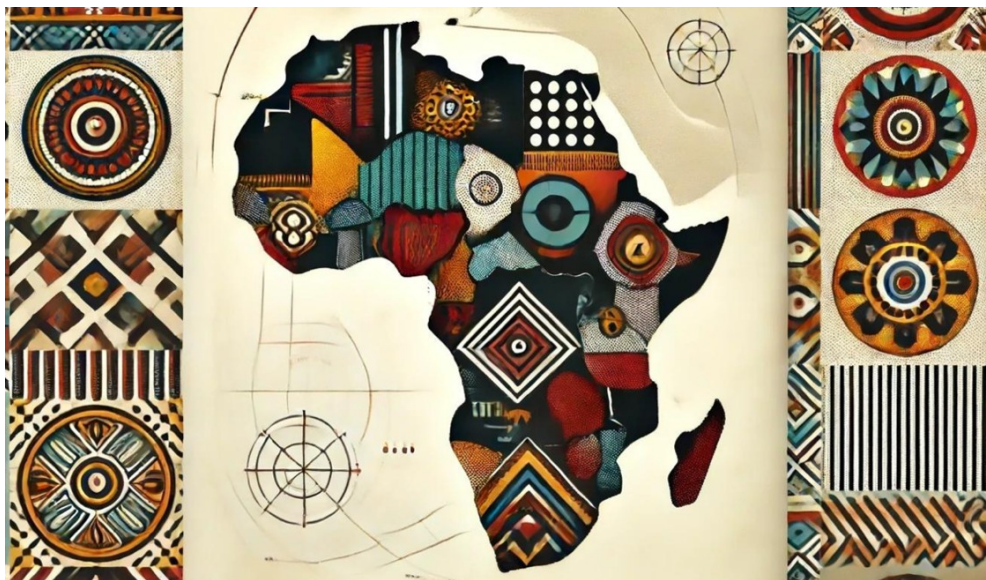




## **Duke Africa Initiative Annual Report 2024-25**



**Prepared by Charlie Piot and Rohini Thakkar**

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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.

This year's DAI steering committee includes:

- ï Charlie Piot (Cultural Anthropology & AAAS)
- ï Fred Boadu (Pratt Engineering)
- ï Tsitsi Jaji (English)
- ï Anne-Maria Makhulu (Cultural Anthropology & AAAS)
- ï Karin Shapiro (AAAS)
- ï Erika Weinthal (Nicholas School of the Environment)
- ï Felwine Sarr (Romance Studies)
- ï Chris Ouma (English)
- ï Khwezi Mkhize (AAAS)
- ï Fidèle Ebia (AI postdoctoral fellow)

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

[Book Manuscript Workshop](#) | August 30, 2024

The DAI supported a manuscript workshop for a forthcoming work by Benjamin Lawrance (University of Arizona) and Vusumuzi Khumalo (Nelson Mandela University, South Africa), which explores the life and literary contributions of Dugmore Boetie, a South African writer who lived under apartheid. The workshop brought together an interdisciplinary group of scholars to offer feedback, including Elizabeth Thornberry (Johns Hopkins), Susan Pennybacker (UNC), Lauren Jarvis (UNC), Laura Cox (UNC), Karin Shapiro (Duke), Anne-Maria Makhulu (Duke), Chris Ouma (Duke), and Khwezi Mkhize (Duke).

African Studies and Black Studies: Intersections, Genealogies, and New Directions | November 1–2, 2024



*Walter C Rucker presenting his work.*



*Engaged audience members during the presentation.*



This two-day interdisciplinary symposium brought together scholars from across the globe to explore the dynamic intersections between African Studies and Black Studies. Through four panels and a keynote by Kamari Clarke, participants examined shared concerns, including racialization, migration, state formation, and the legacies of colonialism, while also addressing emergent topics like climate crisis and racial capitalism. With presenters from institutions including American University, UC Berkeley, University of Cape Town, and Princeton, the symposium fostered intellectual engagement and highlighted the growing relevance of Global Black Studies. The event was hybrid, accessible to a wider audience, and supported robust student and faculty participation. Several meals together and a collaborative setting further encouraged networking and dialogue across disciplines.

### *Digital Divides: Finance, the Biometric State and the Global South | November 18, 2024*



Charlie Piot introducing the speaker.



Janet Roitman presenting her work.

Before a captive audience in the Cultural Anthropology department, anthropologists Janet Roitman (RMIT University, Melbourne) and Peter Geschiere (U of Amsterdam) delivered talks on West African money markets and biometric identity, drawing attention to the ways in which money and biometrics are differently configured by their location in the global South.

### *Hotel Splendid: Movie and Q&A Session with Director Mauro Bucci | November 19, 2024*



Mauro Bucci discussing his film.

As part of a broader campus dialogue on African migration, this event featured the screening of *Hotel Splendid*, a documentary that explores the African refugee and migrant crisis at Europe's borders, particularly focusing on the Italian immigration system and the reception/rejection of African migrants. The screening was followed by a discussion with filmmaker Mauro Bucci, providing attendees with a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding migration, asylum, and state policy in Italy.

The event significantly enhanced awareness of the African migrant experience and fostered collaboration between the Duke Africa Initiative and faculty and graduate students in Romance Studies. It was part of a trio of Fall 2024 events that collectively built momentum for campus-wide engagement with African migration issues, including a subsequent student-led event.

Bucci's visit reinforced ongoing research by DAI faculty affiliates and is expected to contribute to future curricular development. The film is likely to be included in both undergraduate and graduate coursework, with possibilities for continued virtual engagement with the filmmaker. Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and the Africa Initiative's support was well received and appreciated.

### [Powering Progress: Energy, Development and Collaboration in South Sudan](#) | January 13, 2025

This blockbuster event, chaired by Erika Weinthal and Jonathan Phillips (Nicholas Institute), brought together faculty from the Nicholas School of the Environment and the Sanford School of Public Policy who are engaged in development and humanitarian work in South Sudan. They were joined by Duke basketball legend Luol Deng—whose foundation supports community work in Sudan—renowned human rights advocate John Prendergast, and Duke alumnus and social innovator Anteneh Addisu. The event featured presentations by Duke faculty involved in Sudan-related projects and a keynote address by Deng. A key objective was to explore opportunities for future collaboration between Deng's foundation and Duke faculty.

### [Public Lecture by Dr. Yousuf Al-Bulushi](#) | January 14, 2025

Yousuf Al-Bulushi is an undergraduate alumnus of Duke University and doctoral alumnus of UNC. Al-Bulushi delivered a public lecture in FHI January 14, 2025, on the question of Apartheid Divestment.

### [New Directions in China-Africa Studies](#) | January 31, 2025



*From L to R: Mingwei Huang (Dartmouth), Vivian Lu (Rice), Anne-Maria Makhulu (Duke), Elisa Gambino (Manchester), Fidèle Ebia (Manchester & Duke), and Nina Sylvanus (Northeastern)*



Attendees listen to a panel discussion during the symposium.

This all-day workshop explored post-pandemic shifts in China-Africa relations. Five rising-star scholars—Mingwei Huang (Dartmouth), Vivian Lu (Rice), Fidèle Ebia (Manchester & Duke), Elisa Gambino (Manchester), and Nina Sylvanus (Northeastern)—presented stimulating papers, which were commented on by Prof. Anne-Maria Makhulu. The event was capped by the showing of an award-winning documentary film, “Made in Ethiopia,” which filmmaker Xinyuan Yu attended and responded to audience questions.

The workshop gave birth to a semester-long faculty-student reading group in Cultural Anthropology which is curating a special journal issue of the papers presented at the workshop supplemented by those of four Cultural Anthropology PhD students working on China-Africa projects.

### When I Say Africa | February 13, 2025

*When I Say Africa*, produced by Catherine Mathers, Associate Professor of the Practice in the Program in International Comparative Studies, turns a lens on Western stereotypes of Africa, from the first European adventurers’ sketches to pop culture today. Writer Binyavanga Wainaina, educator Zine Magubane, and photojournalist Boniface Mwangi expose the deep-rooted power dynamics that shape images of the continent. Sparked by filmmaker Cassandra Herrman's reckoning, *When I Say Africa* challenges viewers to confront the true cost of these representations. Many elements of the film were made possible by Duke Africa Initiative funding including Boniface Mwangi’s visit and exhibit and the exhibition of photos at the Ruby by young African artists featured in the film. Duke faculty and students got to see an advance screening earlier this year, which was discussed in [The Chronicle](#).

*When I Say Africa* premiered at the prestigious Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) on May 24th as part of FilmAfrica and the New York African Film Festival (NYAFF). Film Africa is part of festivities at BAM to announce its Spring season, and NYAFF is the oldest African-themed film festival in New York City. The link to the screening is [here](#).

Information on Film Africa is [here](#).



[Residency of Advocate Ramogale, South African Advocate on the High Court of South Africa and Legal Scholar](#) | February 14-26, 2025

The Africa Initiative co-sponsored the nine-day residency of Advocate Ramogale, South African Advocate on the High Court of South Africa and legal scholar.

Advocate Ramogale visited graduate seminars in CULANTH, AAAS, ICS, and the Duke Human Rights Center; delivered two public lectures; and participated in FHI faculty reading groups.

[Duke @ 100: A Critical Lens - Symposium on Black studies & Critical University Studies](#) | February 20, 2025

In recognition of Duke's Centennial, the Duke Africa Initiative supported a half-day symposium organized by African & African American Studies. Featuring distinguished speakers Dr. Davarian L. Baldwin, Dr. Kris Manjapra, and Dr. Leigh-Ann Naidoo, the event invited students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the public to engage in critical university studies. The symposium examined the role of antiblackness, coloniality, and capitalist accumulation in the historical and ongoing development of universities.

[New Book Forum](#) | March 26, 2025



*From L to R: Shakira Hadani (UNC-CH), Claire Mercer (LSE), and Claudia Gastrow (NC State) presenting overviews of their books.*



A first-time DAI event, the brainchild of AI steering committee member Chris Ouma, brought together three authors of just published (2024) books, all in African urban studies. Claire Mercer (LSE), Shakira Hadani (UNC—CH), and Claudia Gastrow (NC State), presented brief overviews of their award-nominated books before engaging in lively conversation among themselves and with the audience. Anne-Maria Makhulu offered smart comments not only about the books discussed but also about the field of African urban studies more broadly. Our hope is that this book forum will become an annual event.

#### [Enhancing Traumatic Brain Injury Care and Research in Sub-Saharan Africa | April 12, 2025](#)



*Dr. Robert Turner (Duke) and Dr. Alvan Ukachukwu (Duke)*

The Duke Africa Initiative co-sponsored a hybrid seminar organized by the Duke Global Neurosurgery and Neurology (DGNN) Division to address the pressing challenges of traumatic brain injury (TBI) care and research across sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Moderated by Dr. Alvan Ukachukwu and featuring keynote speaker Dr. Ernest Barthélemy, the event brought together experts from across SSA, including Nigeria, Cameroon, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Niger. With 269 participants from 45 countries, the seminar highlighted regional disparities, shared multidisciplinary solutions, and sparked new collaborations—most notably with Duke's Population Health Sciences on socio-epigenomics in Black athletes. Follow-up initiatives include ongoing TBI research projects in Nigeria and Uganda, focusing on pediatric mental health outcomes, diagnostic biomarkers, and CT scan reduction. A manuscript capturing the seminar's findings is currently in development, underscoring the event's long-term impact on African research engagement at Duke.

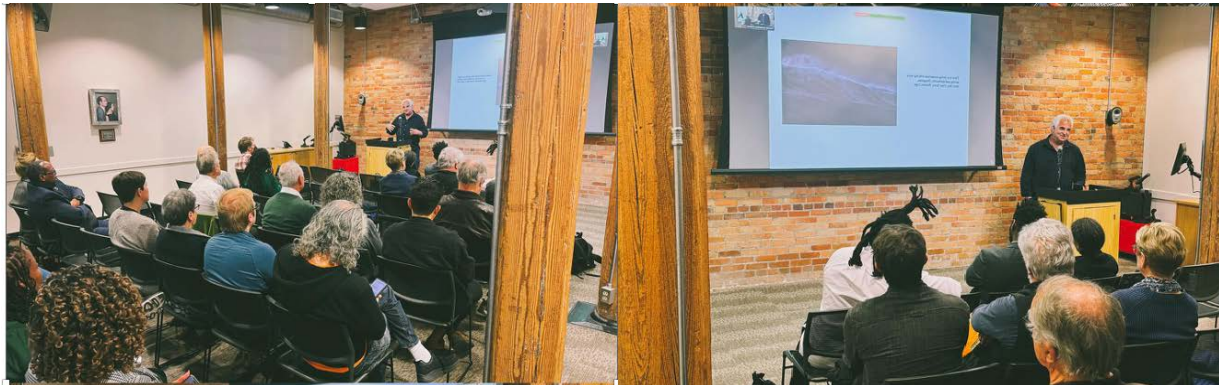
#### [Public Screening of Mati Diop's \*Dahomey\* and Post-screening Discussion with Mati Diop | April 22, 2025](#)

Following the screening of *Dahomey*—Mati Diop's award-winning documentary tracing the return of looted royal artifacts from France to Benin—a discussion was held with the director in conversation with Professors Felwine Sarr and Anne-Gaëlle Saliot from Duke's Department of

Romance Studies. The conversation offered a powerful reflection on postcolonial memory, cultural restitution, and the layered meanings of heritage and ownership. Diop, whose work bridges Paris and Dakar, brought a unique cinematic lens to the topic, blending poetic imagery with political inquiry and sparking deep engagement among students and faculty alike.

### 2024-25 Black Archival Imagination Seminar Series

- a) [Unruly Landscape\(s\) of Death: Symposium](#) | September 27, 2024
- b) [Book Launch for Daniel Magaziner's Available Light](#) | October 22, 2024
- c) [African Studies and Black Studies: Intersections, Genealogies and New Directions](#) | November 1, 2024 - November 2, 2024
- d) [Between the Cracks: Retrospective - Paul Weinberg](#) | January 30, 2025
- e) [Performance in the Aftermath: Mourning and Memorialising District Six - Nadia Davids](#) | March 25, 2025
- f) [Pan-African Music: A Black Atlantic Dialogue](#) | April 2, 2025
- g) [Jazz and Gender Justice](#) | April 10, 2025



Paul Weinberg discusses his latest work with attendees.

Paul Weinberg

The *Black Archival Imagination Series*, supported by the Duke Africa Initiative, brought together artists, scholars, and activists for a yearlong exploration of memory, resistance, and the politics of preservation across the African continent and diaspora. DAI co-sponsored several key events, including the *Unruly Landscape(s) of Death* symposium, a forum on Urban Studies in Africa featuring scholars from UNC, NC State, and the London School of Economics, and a symposium on African and Black Studies held in November 2024. Additional programming—often linked to the Black Archival Imagination Lab’s graduate course—featured visits and public lectures by acclaimed South African figures such as author and playwright Nadia Davids, photographer Paul Weinberg, and jazz broadcaster Brenda Sisane. Across these events, the series fostered expansive and interdisciplinary conversations on Black life, migration, displacement, resistance, artistic expression, and archival practice—engaging both historical reckonings and future possibilities across global Black geographies.

### [Research Africa Reviews](#) – Website Development Initiative

With support from the Duke Africa Initiative, the Research Africa Reviews project launched a new website to expand access, collaboration, and visibility for African scholarship. Participants engaged in training sessions focused on site development and collaborative publishing workflows, which enhanced their digital capacity and streamlined editorial coordination. The

new platform has already broadened the network's reach and is expected to foster long-term impact by increasing readership, improving member engagement, and reinforcing Duke's leadership in African research. The DAI's contribution covered 30% of the development and maintenance costs, making this transformation possible.

## Student-Led Projects

### Graduate Students

#### Ancestral Cadence: Building a Vibe in Music | October 10, 2024



*Damilare Bello (Duke) in conversation with Alexandria Eregho*

Students and professors across the Triangle and music-loving members of the Durham community were able to attend this dual event. Apart from Duke Africa Initiative that co-sponsored this event, we were able to work with the Franklin Humanities Initiative and the Duke Forum for Publics and Scholars. The event allowed attendees to engage in cross-sectional and interdisciplinary interaction between members of the Duke Community and the larger Durham community. The event created a space for the kind of public-facing intellectual work that the working group's members are invested in.

#### Lessons from a Nigerian Businessman, Actor and Musician: The Challenges and Opportunities Running for Office in Nigeria as a Millennial Businessman | April 4, 2025



*Banky W taking selfie with Duke students.*



*Banky W reflecting on his journey.*

The event offered a powerful blend of personal storytelling, professional insight, and pan-African inspiration. Banky W's candid reflections on his journey—from acclaimed artist and entrepreneur to public policy advocate—resonated deeply with attendees across undergraduate and graduate programs. Participants gained valuable perspective on navigating multiple careers while staying rooted in values and identity, and many expressed renewed motivations to contribute meaningfully to their home countries. The event fostered rich cross-campus connections, sparking future collaborations—including a planned Ghana/Nigeria trek—and



encouraging dialogue on civic engagement beyond presidential elections. With enthusiastic feedback and strong turnout, this event not only bridged business and policy communities at Duke but also reinforced the importance of African-led advocacy and innovation.

*The Duke African Student Innovation Summit: Transforming Challenges into Solutions: Innovating Africa's Future | April 12, 2025*



*Dr. Anthony G. Charles in conversation with a student.*



*The Duke African Student Innovation Summit speakers with Duke students.*

The event brought together students, alumni, and professionals from Duke and neighboring universities for a day of candid conversation and meaningful connection. Through a powerful keynote, thought-provoking panels, and an engaging networking session, participants gained deeper insight into life beyond graduate school, navigating cultural identity, and launching

entrepreneurial ventures in Africa. The event inspired actionable dialogue, sparked cross-campus collaborations, and laid the foundation for long-term mentorship and Africa-focused initiatives. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with attendees praising the relatability of the sessions and the rare opportunity to connect with peers and professionals passionate about Africa's future.

### DAGPSA: Conversation Group

In 2024–2025, DAGPSA continued to serve as a vital platform for African graduate and professional students at Duke, fostering cultural exchange, academic support, and community engagement. Guided by a dedicated executive team, including DAI postdoctoral fellow Fidèle Ebia, the organization prioritized visibility, inclusion, and long-term collaboration. With support from the Duke Africa Initiative, DAGPSA organized impactful events such as *The African Experience* and the *Fireside Chat*, which together engaged over 120 students from 11 African countries. These gatherings provided safe, affirming spaces for dialogue, mentorship, and cross-disciplinary connections, while reinforcing DAGPSA's mission to empower African students and amplify their presence across campus and beyond.

### Undergraduate Students

S.O.S x Duke Meeting in the Middle: The Migrant Crisis in the Mediterranean | November 21, 2024



*Audience watching Mothership, a short film on S.O.S.*

This event shed light on the global migrant crisis, with a particular focus on the perilous Mediterranean routes taken by African migrants and the humanitarian efforts aimed at addressing this issue. Participants gained insight into the socio-political factors driving migration, the dangers faced en route, and how they can support relevant NGOs and legislation. The program fostered collaboration with a France-based NGO actively working across Africa and facilitated connections among African students and professionals at Duke. Follow-up events organized by the Romance Studies Department have deepened campus engagement with migration-related issues. With future collaborations and internships already in motion, the event is poised to have

lasting curricular and co-curricular impact. Participants expressed strong appreciation for the opportunity to learn and engage with real-world solutions.

### [Duke Africa's Annual Fake Wedding](#) | April 19, 2025



*Duke students dancing in traditional African attire.*

Duke Africa's annual Fake African Wedding celebrated the richness of African cultures by spotlighting Kenyan traditions through a symbolic Maasai and Kikuyu wedding ceremony. This year's event featured traditional attire, a dowry presentation, Kenyan acrobats, and cuisine from across the continent, offering students a vibrant, immersive learning experience. The event promoted cultural understanding through collaboration with Kenyan students and supported philanthropic initiatives by fundraising for SOS Mediterranean and Restore the Motherland.

With QR codes linking guests to donation platforms, the event successfully combined cultural celebration with meaningful advocacy. Participants responded enthusiastically—especially first-year students—and the event inspired several students to apply for leadership roles in DukeAfrica, reinforcing its lasting impact on student engagement and cultural education at Duke.

### **DAI Communication and Outreach**



*From L to R: Julie Maxwell, Rohini Thakkar, Patrick Semmler, and Renate Kwon at the NAFSA Regional Conference presentation.*



To strengthen engagement with both the campus and the broader community, the Duke Africa Initiative (DAI) significantly expanded its outreach efforts this year. The program coordinator, Rohini Thakkar, actively promoted the initiative at the Global Block Party during Academic Resources Week, where the DAI table attracted strong interest and helped increase awareness of DAI's events and opportunities. Additionally, the coordinator presented at the NAFSA Region VII Conference, showcasing the initiative as part of a broader session titled "Enhancing Global Learning & Engagement through Duke's Regional Initiatives."

Efforts to build connections with new Africanist faculty across departments further boosted visibility and engagement. As a result of these strategic outreach efforts, the DAI mailing list grew by 13%, now reaching over 500 subscribers from Duke and the greater Triangle area. The

initiative also maintains a regularly updated website and a growing social media presence to ensure timely communication and continued visibility.

### Postdoctoral Fellow Update



Fidèle Ebia

Fidèle Ebia completed a busy and successful year as the Africa Initiative's inaugural postdoctoral fellow. She attended all AI events throughout the year and presented at one of them, liaised with graduate and undergraduate student groups and helped these groups organize large spring events, and taught her own well-enrolled class, "Development and Africa." She also submitted two articles for publication, one of which was accepted at *Geoforum*, the other receiving an R&R at *Development and Change*, both top-tier peer-reviewed development studies journals. She is presenting papers at three conferences this summer.

### Plans for Future

We will continue to fund events organized by faculty and students. 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 steering committee members, we will continue to reassess the AI's programming and governance structure.

#### Fall events in the works:

1. AI steering committee members Felwine Sarr (Romance Studies), Khwezi Mkhize (AAAS) and Chris Ouma (English) are putting together a half-day memorial event to honor the passing of distinguished Duke Lit professor Valentin Mudimbe—whose 1988 book, *The Invention of Africa*, transformed the academic study of the continent. They will invite two external keynoters to speak, as well as faculty from Duke who knew him. The

FHI will co-sponsor the event, as will Romance Studies, English, Lit, AAAS and CulAnth. Ranji Khanna (FHI), who will also serve as an organizer, would like to broaden the audience to remotely include faculty and students from African studies centers at Stanford (where Mudimbe also taught) and NYU/Yale/Princeton (homes to well-known African lit professors who knew Mudimbe).

2. Chris Ouma is organizing the annual New Book Forum event, which will feature 2024 books by Benedito Machava (Yale), Samar Al-Bulushi (Irvine), and Sam Daly (U Chicago). AAAS, English and CulAnth will co-sponsor.
3. Charlie Piot is organizing a workshop on African informal economies, with four external and three Duke presenters: Kathryn Takabvirwa (Chicago), Sam Shearer (Wash U), , Motoko Takahashi (Kyoto U), Misa Hirano (Kyoto U); and Anne-Maria Makhulu, Fidèle Ebia, & Charlie Piot from Duke. Co-sponsors: AAAS, CulAnth, Sanford, Nicholas.
4. AI Steering committee member Sarah Balakrishnan (History) is organizing a year-long workshop connected to a grad seminar in the History department on the Black Atlantic. Guest speakers for the fall: Jennifer Morgan, NYU (September 15), Mary Hicks, U Chicago (September 29), Ebony Jones, NC State (October 20), Lisa Lindsay, UNC (November 3), Adom Getachew, U Chicago (November 17). Co-sponsors include the FHI, History, AAAS and GSF.
5. Other fall events: a documentary film series, a grad student conference, continuing support for “The Black Archival Imagination” project