

Introduction to the 2020 December Issue

*Nanna Schneidermann
Department of Anthropology
Aarhus University
Denmark
nanna.s@cas.au.dk*

As subject editor of the NJAS social sciences section¹, I am excited to welcome you to the end-of-year issue of 2020. The social sciences section of the Nordic Journal of African Studies came into being in 2018, and since then we have, together with authors, reviewers and co-editors, been learning what a social sciences section of a Nordic African Studies journal might be, and what it might become. This process of wonderful discovery will hopefully never end, but I reflect here on two things I have learned so far.

The Nordic Journal of African Studies is owned by the researcher-run Nordic African Research Network (NARN), a not-for-profit organisation² run by volunteers. This means that we are accountable to our community of researchers rather than to commercial interests and temporalities.

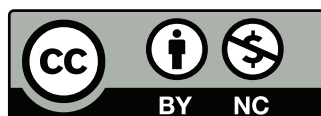
Lack of equity and access to academic publishing is one of the greatest hurdles for emerging scholars and scholars in and from

Africa, and in my first two years as editor I have developed a productive rage against the global publishing machines – both the ones that hide in ivory towers behind paywalls and the predatory journals that take advantage of the increasing publishing demands placed on scholars across the world. Being researcher-owned and open access cannot circumvent the historically entrenched inequalities in global knowledge production. However, it does allow us to dream of publishing entities not as machines, but as sentient and connected beings, and to work with heart and with patience. In the many different kinds of engagements between Nordic and African research communities that NJAS fosters, we aim to nurture publications and scholars that bring out the unexpected, the emergent, and the fragile: scholarship and ideas that might otherwise not reach wider audiences.

The second, related, thing that I have learned is that a journal is a community. Being a subject editor is a humbling experience, as the work of receiving, assessing, reviewing, and publishing articles means becoming intimately acquainted with hundreds of everyday lives of academics across the globe

¹ Which I co-edit with Rogers Orock.

² Supported by the joint committee for Nordic Research Councils in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NOSHS) and the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology of Uppsala University



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

through emails, messaging, Skype and Zoom calls. In 2020 I have had the uninvited privilege of following how authors and reviewers have been affected by and seek to deal with the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, and with the multiple crises taking place on the African continent and beyond. As editors we are often in touch with authors and reviewers over extended periods of time, especially when things don't go exactly as planned. In 2020, not going exactly as planned would be the understatement of the year. Authors have revised articles though "hard lockdowns", and have needed extended deadlines not due to procrastination, but because they had their visas revoked and had to relocate within a few days. Others went on a weekend trip and got stuck abroad for half a year, away from family and homes. Reviewers have been reading and commenting through the illness and death of loved ones, between online classes and crisis departmental meetings.

Again, the globally unequal distribution of security and wealth has placed emerging scholars with precarious job situations and scholars in and from Africa at a disadvantage. The point here is not to show how we have overcome crises – we have not always succeeded in this as many deadlines have been missed, including by me, and frustration and loss have been our unwelcome companions throughout the year. The point is the resilience and commitment of the community that makes the Nordic Journal of African Studies. Our constantly growing numbers in readership, submissions, and even our increasing social media visibility³ are living proof that we are growing and, we hope, supporting our community.

It is therefore on the behalf of a community that I welcome you to open the presents under this year's NJAS Christmas tree: four articles about hopes for better futures, awkward feelings in colonial encounters, and the

³ Almost exactly a year ago we opened a Twitter account, @NJAStweets, and you can always find us on Facebook.

engagement of youth in politics and popular culture.

The first present is a uniquely beautiful article which reflects the experimental streak in the new NJAS, and our commitment to new forms of expression. **Alexander Öbom** explores novel methodological approaches to youth and development in Africa with vantage point in *Boda Bodas (motorcycle taxis) and painted exclusion in Western Uganda*. Combining conventional ethnographic material, classic work on youths and expectations of modernity with his paintings from the field, Öbom makes apparent aspects of exclusion that cannot be captured only in fieldnotes or photographs.

The second present in the collection is an exciting historical essay by **João Figueiredo** about the *uncanniness of religious encounters* in colonial Angola. The article brings a novel perspective to the history of emotions, colonialism, and religious encounters by developing a cultural history of awkward emotions, sensations of the 'uncanny' or the 'abject', as they are described in Portuguese colonial records in the 18th and 19th centuries.

In our third Christmas present, **Guðrún Sif Friðriksdóttir** engages with the important question of how ex-combatants participate in political life in post-conflict societies during times of political tension and upheaval. Friðriksdóttir examines what she terms *performing neutrality* as she follows the successful reintegration strategies of former combatants in Burundi, which entail both disconnecting from formal politics and building alternative forms of political participation.

There's a particular kind of present that no Christmas should be without: that weirdly shaped, slightly used, indeterminate object that is proudly given with the comment "I made it myself!" In this case it is neither an ashtray carved in wood nor a badly knitted sweater, but a story about how popular music changed politics in Uganda. *Ugandan music stars between political agency, patronage, and market relations* highlights the relational

hustling of musicians participating in the past elections as a novel form of power or “bigness” and follows the path of the singer Bobi Wine towards becoming a presidential candidate. I made it myself, all for you. So read along get ready for the 2021 presidential election that will take place on January 14th.

On behalf of the Nordic Journal of African Studies, I wish you a happy festive season.

Nanna Schneidermann
Assistant Professor
Department of Anthropology
Aarhus University