

Fall 2024 | Spring-Summer 2025

Newsletter of the Center for African Studies  
University of Illinois at Urbana – Champaign

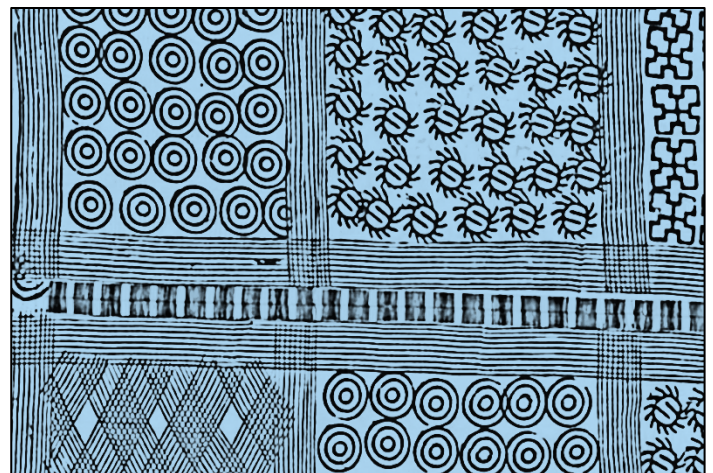
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“Storytellers ought not to be too tame. They ought to be wild creatures who function in society. They are best in disguise. If they lose all their wildness, they cannot give us the truest joys.”

- Ben Okri



## New Director's Note



Dear Center for African Studies Colleagues and Friends:

Greetings! Let me begin by (re)introducing myself. As some of you may recall, I served as the Acting Director of the Center for African Studies from January 2024-August 2024 while Prof. Teresa Barnes, CAS Director, took a much-deserved sabbatical.

I'm a sixth-generation African American Midwesterner from Detroit, my family hails from St. Kitts, Canada, and the United States. I was raised in suburban Cleveland Ohio and spent considerable time as a child in Puerto Rico. Africa and the Black diaspora have been important parts of my life for as long as I can remember. My research reflects my interest in Global Africa. This is most evident in my recently published book *The Second Battle for Africa: Garveyism, the U.S. heartland, and Global Black Freedom* (Duke University, 2024). I have taught at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign since 2003.

As I begin my directorship of CAS, I would like to express my sincerest appreciation for Prof. Barnes for her dedicated eight-year leadership of CAS. Over her tenure as CAS Director, she earned the deep respect of faculty, staff, community members, and people far beyond Champaign-Urbana for championing African studies. Indeed, she has been a pillar of strength for the campus and community in advancing justice and equality.

This fall has presented some unprecedented challenges for CAS. In September 2025, the U.S. Department of Education revoked our Title VI grant. This action resulted in CAS losing more than \$300,000 from our FY 2025-26 budget, impacting our Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) program and our financial support for graduate students.

Despite these unprecedented times, CAS is moving forward. We remain passionate and deeply committed to our mission. This is evident in our fall reception on September 3, 2025, co-hosted by the Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. More than ninety people gathered and enjoyed delicious food, warm company, and fellowship. This event signaled our commitment to working in solidarity with other Illinois Global Institute units and the wider Champaign-Urbana community for advancing African studies and for celebrating the beauty, brilliance, and complexities of Global Africa.

In October, U of I alum ('74 and '81) Ambassador Eric Whitaker visited campus for a five-day trip. CAS scheduled his itinerary while on campus. He met with faculty and students. He shared his leadership and commitment to public service through his thirty years in the US Foreign Service in Africa, including serving as the U.S. ambassador to Niger from 2017 to 2021

CAS continues to make its mark in the classroom and in the community. Through the leadership of CAS Associate Director Maimouna Barro and with the support of Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship Program (U.S. Department of Education), CAS still offers language classes in Wolof and Swahili. In Spring 2025, Prof. Vieux Toure taught two courses: AFST 222: Introduction to Modern Africa, with 39 students, and AFST 210/ENG 211: Introduction to Modern African Literature, with 29 students. During Summer 2025, he taught AFST 222 again, this time in an online format, enrolling 22 students. CAS Outreach Coordinator Adeyinka Alasade continues to ignite excitement with community events that explore Africa—drawing in diverse voices from campus, Champaign-Urbana, and far beyond. Through a recently hosted musical performance by Vitalis “Samaita” Botsa of Zimbabwe and Erica Azim



from California, audiences were captivated by the sonorous, bell-like sounds of the musicians' mbiras—one highlight in a vibrant lineup of experiences that spark creativity, ignite dialogue, and bring people together.

Looking ahead, stay tuned for a series of brown bag presentations, as well as an event celebrating Prof. Barnes's leadership of CAS. Our weekly newsletters will continue to share upcoming events, updates from our faculty affiliates and CAS students. If you have news to share, we would love to hear from you. We are always happy to meet to discuss any questions about our programs or ways to get involved with CAS. Please feel free to contact me or our Associate Director, Maimouna Barro at [barro@illinois.edu](mailto:barro@illinois.edu) or (217) 333-6221.

We also hope you will consider offering financial support for CAS. Please contact me or Meg Edwards, Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations, at [mbedward@illinois.edu](mailto:mbedward@illinois.edu) or (217) 244-3776.

We thank you for your support of CAS. We look forward to seeing you at our events and to working together in advancing the study of Global Africa!

Warm regards,

Erik S. McDuffie

Director, Center for African Studies

Professor, African American Studies/History

## Honoring a Legacy of Leadership

### Professor Teresa A. Barnes steps down as CAS Director



After eight years of dedicated leadership, Professor Teresa Barnes has stepped down as Director of the Center for African Studies (CAS) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Her tenure has been marked by intellectual rigor, a deep commitment to equity, and an unwavering focus on creating an academic community where everyone feels they belong.

A historian of southern Africa with decades of lived experience in Zimbabwe and South Africa, Professor Barnes brought to CAS a distinctive blend of scholarly expertise and personal insight. Her research—spanning political history, gender studies, and institutional culture—has shaped not only her own academic path but also the direction of the Center. Under her guidance, CAS broadened its interdisciplinary reach, strengthened graduate programs, and deepened engagement with African and African diasporic communities.

Professor Barnes's impact extended far beyond programs and policies—it was felt in the way she led. She fostered collaboration across departments, encouraged interdisciplinary scholarship, and mentored junior faculty navigating the complexities of academia. She supported inclusive hiring practices and championed projects that bridged African Studies with African American Studies, Gender & Women's Studies, African Art & Museum Studies, and beyond.

Her leadership was defined by humility—though never by softness of intellect. Those who worked with her soon learned that her modest demeanor should not be confused with timidity. She possesses a capacity for offering incisive critique with extraordinary tact. It is not uncommon to see her, in a conference setting, redirect a misguided argument with what can only be described as feather-light precision and unmistakable authority. In such moments she demonstrates a firm but diplomatic insistence on clarity, accuracy, and ethical reasoning. One can readily imagine this same combination of gentleness and rigor shaping her mentorship of graduate students, whom she guides toward expressing complex ideas with precision and intellectual honesty.

Professor Barnes also modeled a hands-on approach to leadership. She was never above the most practical forms of labor—setting up chairs, troubleshooting technology, or cleaning up after an event. This willingness to share responsibility communicated more than efficiency; it articulated a vision of leadership rooted in community, transparency, and shared purpose. She listened deeply, distributed credit generously, and encouraged colleagues and staff to recognize and cultivate their strengths. In this way, she practiced a form of stewardship that positioned her not above the Center but within it, working alongside those she led.

Her tenure also brought significant institutional achievements, including major grants such as the 2022–2026 U.S. Department of Education Title VI award and the Presidential Initiative on Expanding the Impact of the Arts and Humanities, where she co-led efforts to reimagine Africana World Studies across campuses. She played an integral role in initiatives like New Immigrant Foodways—a collaboration between CAS and the Center for Caribbean and Latin American Studies—alongside partnerships with the New American Welcome Center at the University YMCA and the Illinois Extension Program. The New Immigrant Foodways project explored how Illinois immigrant communities adapt traditional cuisines within U.S. food systems, using research and short cooking videos to highlight their challenges, strategies, and cultural creativity. The work reflects her commitment to scholarship that connects academic study with lived experience and honors the communities partnering with CAS.

Professor Barnes understood that academic spaces must also be spaces of belonging. Whether welcoming new students, supporting colleagues through challenges, or celebrating milestones, she cultivated a culture where people felt recognized and valued. Students consistently praise her engaging lectures, thoughtful mentorship, and ability to make complex topics accessible:

“She’s really sweet and funny. Respectful of how busy students are and takes that into account. She puts a lot of work into her lectures and knows a lot about gender and women’s studies.”<sup>1</sup>

Even as she steps down from her administrative role, Professor Barnes continues her work as a professor in the Departments of History and Gender & Women's Studies. Her recent scholarship includes *Raising Hell: Rebellions of the Black ‘Insane’ in The Black Scholar* (2025) and editorial contributions to *History in Africa*, reflecting her ongoing commitment to uncovering hidden narratives and challenging dominant historical frameworks. Her research on institutional complicity in apartheid-era South Africa and her work on African American family history demonstrate her ability to connect the personal with the political, the historical with the contemporary, and the scholarly with the ethically urgent.

Professor Barnes leaves behind a strengthened Center—one that is more intellectually vibrant, more inclusive, and more connected to global communities of scholarship than ever before. Her example—hands-on, humble, principled, and deeply attentive to the people around her—will continue to inspire generations of students, colleagues, and educators.

As the CAS community reflects on her tenure, we offer our deepest gratitude for her service, mentorship, and vision. Professor Barnes did not simply lead the Center; she nurtured it, challenged it, and helped it grow. We look forward to her continued contributions and celebrate the profound and lasting impact of her leadership.

Please see the Editorial Note for my interview with Dr. Barnes.

-Adéyinka Aláṣadé

#### Notes

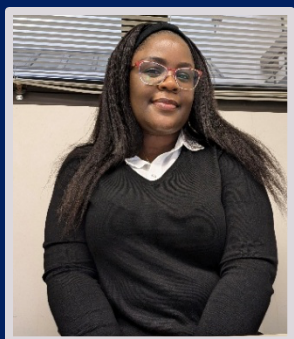
<sup>1</sup> RateMyProfessors, “Teresa Barnes – University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign,” accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.ratemyp Professors.com>.

## Welcoming New and Returning Faces to the CAS Community

This semester, we're excited to welcome both new members and familiar faces to the Center for African Studies. Among them are individuals who have long been part of our community and now join us in new roles as faculty. Their continued presence enriches our collective work and reflects the strength of CAS as a space where growth, mentorship, and community thrive.

**Dr. Daniel Alabi** is an assistant professor in the Electrical and Computer Engineering department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Before joining UIUC, he was a postdoctoral researcher at Columbia University and a junior fellow in the Simons Society of Fellows. He received his Ph.D. in Computer Science from Harvard University.

Also, he is the president and co-founder of NaijaCoder, Inc. NaijaCoder aims to proliferate early algorithms education in Africa with a focus on Nigeria. His research interests include privacy, information theory, and machine learning.



**Dorothy Maweu** joined the Department of Linguistics in the Fall Semester of 2025 as the new Swahili Instructor and Director of the Minor in Sub-Saharan African Languages. She holds a Master's degree in teaching English as a Second Language from the University of Illinois.

Ms. Maweu previously taught in the Swahili Program at the University of Illinois and in the Summer Institute for Languages of the Muslim World (SILMW) for the past three years. She was also a Fulbright Fellow at Tulane University, where she contributed to cross-cultural and language education initiatives. Her research interests focus on language pedagogy, particularly translanguaging and teacher stylization in second language instruction.

**Dr. Tolulope Fadina** is an Assistant Professor of Actuarial Science and Risk Management at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Her research bridges financial mathematics and actuarial science, with a focus on climate risk and model uncertainty in finance, insurance, and risk management.

In 2025, she was honored by Mathematically Gifted and Black, and in 2022, recognized as one of the Black Heroes of Mathematics by the International Centre for Mathematical Sciences. She recently received a CAS Course Development Grant to design an R programming project, enabling students to work with real-world datasets on issues in finance, insurance, and environmental science.

Dr. Fadina is passionate about interdisciplinary collaboration, innovative teaching, and fostering inclusive pathways into mathematical and actuarial sciences.





# Meet the Students of the Center for African Studies

We're proud to introduce the dynamic and diverse students who make up the heart of the CAS community. Each brings unique perspectives, passions, and experiences that enrich our shared learning environment. Get to know the scholars shaping the future of African Studies—on campus and beyond.



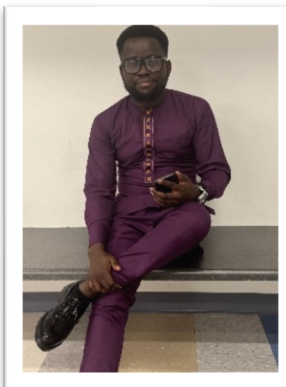
**Olúwatóbilóba ('Tobi) Daniel Adéwùnmí**, of Nigerian and Brazilian heritage, is a second-year African Studies graduate student with a pre-law focus and a minor in African American Studies at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. He brings over five years of teaching and research experience from institutions including the University of Ibadan and NISER, consulting for DFID-Nigeria and ECOWAS. A former Africa Chair of the International Association for Political Science Students, he co-authored a UN@75 report. His research explores global governance, urban political ecology, and environmental law, with a thesis on Nigeria–U.S. climate relations since the Obama era. Passionate about youth capacity building, he founded the Graduate Research Clinic in 2018. 'Tobi is a 2025 grantee of the prestigious Meaning Making Research Initiative (MRI) by CODESRIA.



**Marisol Woods Jones** is a second-year master's student at the Center for African Studies and a FLAS Fellow in Swahili. Her academic focus centers on intersectionality within the Afro Diaspora and humanitarian crises affecting marginalized communities.

Originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, she earned her bachelor's degree from St. Bonaventure University in New York, where she designed an individualized major titled Examples of the Afro Diaspora. Her research examined laws in Egypt, Mexico, and the United States that either responded to or perpetuated racial discrimination against people of African descent—drawing on her studies in Spanish (10+ years) and Arabic (3 years).

Graduate study at CAS has offered her a rich academic and cultural experience, supported by dedicated faculty and staff. Highlights include attending the Model African Union conference at Howard University and participating in immersive programming that deepens understanding of African histories and cultures.



**Simeon Ọnàṣlápò** earned a B.A. in Yorùbá (2018) and an M.A. in Yorùbá Literature (2021) from the University of Ìbàdàn, Nigeria, receiving multiple academic awards during both programs. As a teaching assistant during his M.A., he taught a range of departmental courses.

In 2023–2024, he served as a Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant at Michigan State University, where he taught Yorùbá for the academic year.

His research explores indigenous knowledge systems, decolonization, digital humanities, and the preservation of African cultural heritage. Simeon has consulted on language and culture for organizations including the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), the FACIT Group, and TAUS. He also documents and recreates Yorùbá oral genres, drawing on his expertise as an oral poet.

## Model African Union Program

In Spring 2025, **Mr. Vieux Toure** supervised six students—three graduate and three undergraduates—who received the prestigious Ambassador Whitaker Award, named in honor of the former U.S. Ambassador to Niger. These students represented Niger at the 23rd International Model African Union Conference in Washington, D.C. Prior to the event, the university's delegation met regularly on campus and participated in a briefing with Ambassador Eric Whitaker, who shared insights from his final diplomatic posting in Niger.



**From Top left** (Oluwatobiloba Adewunmi, Vieux A. Toure, Col. Toure (Niger Embassy), Simeon Onaolapo). **Bottom left** (Marisol Woods Jones, Ganiyat Daranijo, Ambassador Idi, Esther Akinyoade and Pharah Green)

As Director of the newly established Model African Union Program at UIUC, Mr. Toure has set a strategic goal to launch an annual experiential learning conference within two years. The University of Pittsburgh's African Studies Center has expressed interest in collaborating, drawing on their experience hosting similar events. This one-day conference will convene high schools from East and Central Illinois on the UIUC campus to explore African diplomacy, foreign affairs, and U.S.-Africa partnerships.

This initiative was made possible through the support of CAS leadership, especially former director Dr. Teresa Barnes, Dr. Maimouna Barro, and Sam Ham.

Additionally, Mr. Toure was selected to attend the National African Language Resource Center's Summer Institute at Indiana University Bloomington. The program emphasized Standards-Based Curriculum Design, Integrated Instruction, and Learner-Centered Approaches. Participants from Africa, Europe, and the U.S. shared rich pedagogical insights and effective strategies for teaching African languages.

## Faculty News

Dr. Siân Butcher, a human geographer, focuses her teaching and research on urban, economic, and development geography. Having spent most of her life in Southern Africa—growing up in Zimbabwe and later studying and working in South Africa—her scholarship reflects deep regional engagement.



Recent publications include:

- Butcher, S. (2024). *Gauteng A–Z and Non-metropolitan Marxisms, in Knowing the City: South African Urban Scholarship from Apartheid to Democracy*, edited by Sophie Oldfield, Anna Selmeczi, and Clive Barnett (UKZN Press), pp. 122–125; 358–362.
- Harrison, K. & Butcher, S. (2025). “Financialization, affordable housing and urban governance: A spatio-temporal analysis of four South African REITs.” *Urban Geography*, 1–26.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2025.2486995>

Dr. Butcher and co-author Kirsten Harrison presented this research at the African Urbanisms Conference in Johannesburg in October 2024, with travel supported by UIUC’s LAS COVID-19 Faculty Research Revitalization Fellowship (2024–25).

## Explore the Latest Work by Thomas J. Bassett

Thomas J. Bassett, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Geography & GIS, examines the intersection of colonial and indigenous cartographic traditions in his new article, “Drawing the Line: The Interplay of European and African Mapping Practices in the Carte du Haut-Niger au Golfe de Guinée (1:1,000,000)”, published in *Imago Mundi*.

Bassett’s research offers a compelling look at how African spatial knowledge shaped—and challenged—European mapping during the colonial era. A must-read for anyone interested in the history of cartography, African studies, or decolonial scholarship.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03085694.2025.2511054>

## Read the latest research from Prof. Teresa Barnes—an insightful new article in *The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research*

“Raising Hell: Rebellions of the Black Insane” by Teresa Barnes uncovers the hidden history of uprisings led by Black patients in U.S. mental institutions during the 20th century. Focusing on facilities like Crownsville and Searcy, Barnes reframes these acts not as disorder but as deliberate resistance to racialized confinement and abuse. Drawing from Black radical thought and disability studies, the article argues that these rebellions were expressions of agency and protest, challenging both psychiatric and carceral systems. Barnes calls for these stories to be reclaimed as part of the broader struggle for justice and historical recognition. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2025.2466395>

# Faculty News



# 2024 - 2025 Published Books by CAS Affiliates



**Burton, Antoinette M.** *Gender History: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2024.

**Fennell, Christopher C.** (Ed.). *Grappling with Monuments of Oppression: Moving from Analysis to Activism*. Routledge, 2025.

**Harrison, Faye V.**, Yasuko Takezawa, and Akio Tanabe. *Visibilities and Invisibilities of Race and Racism: Toward a New Global Dialogue*. Routledge, 2025.

**Hassan, Wail.** *Arab Brazil: Fictions of Ternary Orientalism*. Oxford University Press, 2024.

**Hassan, Wail.** *O Mundo Árabe e o Brasil*. Edições Makunaíma, 2024.

**Keenan, Patrick J.**, L. N. Sadat, and Milena Sterio. *The International Criminal Court in a Nutshell*. West Academic Publishing, 2024.

**McDuffie, Erik S.** *The Second Battle for Africa: Garveyism, the US Heartland, and Global Black Freedom*. Duke University Press, 2025.

**Nobili, Mauro**, Zachary Wright, and Ali Diakit . *The Chronicles of Two West African Kingdoms: The T r kh Ibn al-Mukht r of the Songhay Empire and the T r kh al-Fatt sh of the Caliphate of H mdall hi*. Liverpool University Press, 2025.

**Ruggles, D. Fairchild.** *Islamicate Environments: Water, Land, Plants, and Society*. Cambridge University Press, 2025.

**Witmer, Ann-Perry, Jess Mingee, and Bernhard D. Scully** (Eds.). *Consilience: Learning About Ourselves by Applying Indigenous Traditions to Western Music and Technology*. Springer Nature, 2024.

## *In Memory of Robert McChesney and Francis Boyle*

### **Two Voices Who Changed How We Think**

Some scholars teach; others transform the way we see the world. This year, our university said goodbye to two such voices: Professors Robert McChesney and Francis Boyle. Their absence is deeply felt across campus, and while words may fall short, their influence continues to shape conversations and inspire action. I wasn't in their classrooms, but I followed their contributions closely—McChesney through his public talks, appearances on Democracy Now! and his books; Boyle through conversations and emails that always pushed me to think harder about structures of justice. They were academics who refused to stay in the ivory tower, and that's what made them unforgettable.

### **Robert McChesney: A Voice for Media Democracy**

Robert McChesney (1952–2025) transformed how we understand media and democracy. His books—*Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, *Digital Disconnect*—pulled back the curtain on how media consolidation and Big Tech shape civic life. Hearing him speak was never just theory; it was a call to action. He made you ask: Who controls information? And why does that matter?

He didn't just write about these issues—he fought for them. McChesney co-founded Free Press, hosted Media Matters on WILL-AM, and championed net neutrality and press freedom. His energy was infectious, and his belief that ideas should lead to action still resonates.

**Side Note:** One book of his that feels strikingly prescient is *People Get Ready*, co-written with John Nichols—Executive Editor and National Affairs Correspondent for *The Nation* and Associate Editor at *Madison's Capital Times*. It warned that automation and AI could wipe out jobs—even for highly skilled professionals—while inequality deepens. They called this a “jobless economy” paired with a “citizenless democracy,” where corporate power blocks reform. Their solution? Democratize the economy and digital infrastructure so technology serves people, not just profits. Reading it now, you realize how far ahead of its time they were.

### **Francis Boyle: Law as a Lifeline**

Francis Boyle (1950–2025) spent nearly five decades using law to defend human rights. He represented Bosnia and Herzegovina before the International Court of Justice, advised the Palestinian delegation, and drafted the Biological Weapons Anti-Terrorism Act of 1989. Talking with him, you quickly understood his mantra: law isn't theory—it's survival for the vulnerable.

His International Human Rights Law class was cross-referenced in African Studies, with roughly 30% of the course focused on Africa and African countries. I was supposed to audit that class, and I regret not taking it—thinking it would somehow always be available.

I'll never forget seeing him at our Word Is Seed poetry readings—first in 2018, then again during COVID in 2020—reading from his book *Poems Against the Empire*. His voice carried the

same conviction as his legal work, showing how artistic expression and social action naturally converge. His 2018 reading was especially memorable for its controversial undertones: Boyle spoke positively about Robert Mugabe, a figure praised as a revolutionary hero for liberating Zimbabwe from colonial rule and white minority dominance yet later criticized and removed from office for allowing his wife to usurp constitutional power. That bold stance sparked debate and ensured his performance would not be forgotten.

McChesney and Boyle didn't just teach—they reshaped the disciplines they served. McChesney exposed how media structures mold public life and gave us the vocabulary to challenge corporate power. Boyle showed how law becomes a lifeline for those targeted by violence, dispossession, or state neglect. Their work bridged scholarship and activism with rare conviction, and they equipped us with tools drawn from the heart of communications and law—tools for seeing clearly, resisting injustice, and understanding the stakes of living in a complex world. Their impact on our campus wasn't abstract; it was catalytic. They changed how we think, what we question, and how boldly we speak.

### **Closing Reflection**

Losing them reminds us that universities are at their best when they nurture voices willing to confront power and expand our moral imagination. McChesney and Boyle modeled what it means to be public intellectuals and engaged scholars—people who believed that ideas must move, must act, must serve humanity. Their legacies now rest with us, not as burdens but as invitations: to keep asking the questions they asked, to defend the freedoms they fought for, and to carry their commitments forward with strength of spirit.

Rest in power, Profs—you came, you conquered, you inspired, and your works live on.

--Adéyínká Aláṣadé



# Alumni Reflections and Updates



Anna Henry  
MA African Studies/  
MSLIS 2011

My time at the Center for African Studies was foundational in expanding my worldview—through learning Zulu and studying abroad in South Africa. After earning my MA/MSLIS in African Studies and Library Science, I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area and built a career in international education. From 2016 to 2019, I advised over 85 Mastercard Foundation Scholars from 20+ African countries at UC Berkeley, deepening my understanding of the diverse cultural, educational, and economic contexts they navigated.

Currently, I serve as Assistant Director of Advising and Student Support at Berkeley Study Abroad, where I support students preparing to study internationally. I aim to help students develop cross-cultural skills and broaden their global perspectives. I recently co-led a team learning circle on decolonizing study abroad and co-presented on climate justice in international education at the Diversity Abroad conference.

While much work remains, I'm committed to advancing ethical, reciprocal, and non-extractive study abroad programs—especially in partnership with African institutions.



Fatou Jobe  
MA African Studies 2021

I entered the PhD program in Sociology at the University of Illinois after completing an MA in African Studies with a minor in Gender Relations in International Development (GRID). My MA thesis, *The Contradiction of South-South Sustainable Development in Chinese-Mauritanian Fishmeal Factories and Environmental Violence in The Gambia*, investigates how these factories contribute to environmental harm along the Gambian coast.

My MA studies were supported by the Center for African Studies (CAS) through a pre-doctoral fellowship and the Eyamba Bokamba Graduate Scholarship. I also received fieldwork funding from the Center for the Study of Global Gender Equity (CSGGE) via the RITA and Arnold Goodman Fellowship (2020–2021). In 2023, a section of my thesis was published in the *Journal of Feminist Africa* (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48737871>).

My PhD research continues to focus on fishmeal production in The Gambia, through the lenses of global and transnational sociology, environmental sociology, and marine studies. This work has been supported by the West African Research Association (WARA) through a pre-doctoral fellowship (2023), the Department of Sociology via the Douglas Barnes Graduate Scholarship, and most recently by CSGGE through the Barbara Yates Fellowship.

I'm grateful for the interdisciplinary foundation provided by CAS and CSGGE. The MA in African Studies and GRID minor have been instrumental in shaping my development as both an Africanist and a sociologist.



Fangyong Kuma  
MA African Studies/ MSLIS 2025

In May 2025, I earned an MA in African Studies and an MS in Library and Information Science. After a two-month break to reconnect with family, I began volunteering with eBASE Africa, an evidence-based research organization and international charity based in Cameroon. eBASE implements projects in health, education, governance, and environmental sustainability, aiming to uplift women, children, and other vulnerable communities.

Following this much-needed pause, I plan to pursue further graduate studies. My time in African Studies at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign was deeply rewarding. I became part of a vibrant, supportive community—my “village”—made up of peers, mentors, and professors whose impact I will always carry with me. As the saying goes, “You can take a child out of the village, but you cannot take the village out of the child.”



Brian Ndumila  
MA African Studies/ MSLIS 2025

My time at the Center for African Studies (CAS) has been deeply transformative—academically, professionally, and personally. As an international student from Kenya, CAS offered more than a place to study; it gave me a sense of belonging. The warm welcome from faculty and staff helped me settle into a new country and academic system with ease.

A key part of my journey was the unwavering support of my academic advisor, Dr. Maimouna Barro. Her patience and guidance helped me navigate graduate school in a foreign academic system. Alongside Prof. Barnes, she ensured we had access to major conferences and summits that enriched our scholarly growth. When I pursued a joint degree, CAS stood by me—providing financial support and working closely with the School of Information Sciences to resolve challenges. Their mentorship and institutional backing made my academic path not only possible but deeply fulfilling.

Serving as a Graduate Assistant under Adeyinka Alasade was another pivotal experience. This role pushed me beyond the classroom into critical conversations about global Black communities. Through school visits and CAS outreach events, I reflected deeply on education’s role in empowerment and transformation. As a trained educator, these experiences reshaped my perspectives and reaffirmed my commitment to critical pedagogy.

CAS’s care extends beyond academics. When our daughter Bernice was born, Prof. Barnes arrived at our home with gifts from the Center—a gesture that reminded me I was part of a community that sees and supports the whole person.

As I begin my doctoral journey, I carry the confidence and clarity CAS instilled in me. The mentorship, experiences, and community I found here have prepared me for what lies ahead. I look forward to staying engaged and contributing to CAS’s vibrant work.

Academic Year 2024 - 2025

CAS FLAS Fellows and Scholarship Awardees.



## Undergrads FLAS Awardees

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### Graduate FLAS Awardees

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**Sebastien Brown**, Art History (Arabic)

**Fangyong Kuma**, ischool/African Studies Joint Degree (Wolof)

**Etienne Fields**, Education Policy Organization and Leadership (Swahili)

**Daniel Folger**, French & Italian (Arabic)

**Marisol Jones**, Center for African Studies (Arabic)

**Paul De Nijs**, Linguistics (Arabic)

**Domanique Rahman**, Educational Policy, Organization and Leadership (Swahili)

**Jessica Wikle**, French & Italian (Arabic)

**Lila Ann Wong**, Anthropology (Bamana)

**Ammar Aburadi**, Sociology (Arabic)

**Angie Chahine**, Health Sciences (Arabic)

**Anisa Chatman**, Education (Swahili)

**Faramade Cole**, Biology (Swahili)

**Natalie Klunke**, LAS Global Studies (Swahili)

**Shandana Malik**, LAS Global Studies (Arabic)

**Daniel Patton**, Communications (Swahili)

**Rosette Pavkov**, History (Arabic)

## WHITAKER UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIPS

**Taylor McKinney**, Political Science (Swahili)

**Angie Chahine**, Health Sciences (Arabic)

**Grace Denton**, Political Science (Arabic)



## Bronzes and Beyond: Exploring Africa's legacy in the British Museum

In October 2023, the Center for African Studies and the Krannert Art Museum held a two-day event on campus, focused on dialogues and debates on how African-sourced objects in museums should and could be repatriated to their original owners (<https://kam.illinois.edu/event/reckoning-restitution-and-repair-community-conversation>). One collection of looted objects that was repeatedly mentioned were the legendary 16th century “Benin Bronzes,” taken from the kingdom of Benin (now in post-colonial Nigeria) when the British Army invaded in the 1890s. Our campus does not hold any of the Bronzes.

So imagine my excitement at the opportunity to actually see the Bronzes in the British Museum during a research visit to London in June 2025. I arranged to stay in a nearby hotel. I made an online ticket booking – entry to the Museum is free, but the volume of visitors is such that they encourage people to book a time to come in. On the day I rose early, got a nice British breakfast complete with baked beans at a nearby restaurant and made my way to the Museum. It opened at 10am but by 9:45am there were already lines of people waiting patiently to enter. My booking was not until noon but I showed the pass on my phone to a security guard and he kindly waved me in with the 10am crowd.

Thrilled, I rushed down to the Africa galleries. I turned the “wrong” way to begin with but this was a fortuitous mistake as I saw incredible artifacts and artwork from other African territories first. But then – around a separate corner were the Bronzes.

They are breath-taking. The museum displays 48 Bronzes on eight rows of poles, each holding six plaques. They are not in glass vitrines, only standing behind standard museum rope. Each is approximately the size of a standard opened laptop. They are exquisitely detailed, with figures of soldiers, animals, weapons and clothing cast in bronze. The museum's labels acknowledge the looting undertaken by the British Army in 1897, and that the display features only a small percentage of the Museum's holdings of around 900 such objects.

I took photos of some of the plaques; it was hard to decide on favorites. One was clearly of a woman alone, in a dress, so perhaps either a missionary or an African convert. There were head portraits of men with thin eyes and thin noses and thin hats, clearly European soldiers. But most portrayed African men with horses, weapons, tools and adornments.



Bronze plaque, Kingdom of Benin, @1600A.D. Collection of the British Museum, London, UK. Photo by T. Barnes June 2025.

I stayed in the gallery for at least two hours, reveling in the beauty and precision of African history.

Two other parts of the Museum particularly spoke to me – the gorgeous old public reading room and library, where Karl Marx wrote part of “Das Kapital.” He earned a small display along with others who had used the space: Gandhi, Marcus Garvey, Virginia Wolff, Sylvia Pankurst.

And then there was the Rosetta Stone, safely in its glass case, surrounded at all times by a crush of the photo-taking public.

I salute the British Museum for remaining a free resource for the public. But my word, the British certainly have a past to reckon with and a great deal of restitution to do.

**-Teresa Barnes**

# A Year of Impact and Innovation: 2024–2025 Academic Highlights



The 2024–2025 academic year in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences was a vibrant chapter of learning, cultural exchange, and community engagement. From the energetic **Liftoff Celebration**—a dynamic welcome for first year and transfer students at the State Farm Center—to the **Center for African Studies Welcome Reception**, we set the tone for an inclusive and inspiring year. These gatherings, along with the **Fall Faculty Reception and Majors & Minors Fair**, spotlighted African language programs, FLAS fellowships, and essential academic resources, fostering a strong sense of belonging.

Signature programs such as **WORD Is SEED, A Celebration of International Voices through Poetry and Language(s)** exploring the theme Against Tyranny, and the **Of Fish & Yams: Africa/Black World Film Series** sparked dialogue across campus. Meanwhile, **Brown Bag Talks**, the **African Folk Storytelling program**, and **Meet-and-Greet** sessions with visiting scholars strengthened connections between students and faculty.

Programs of scholarly depth and intellectual rigor—like the **Conference Honoring Charles C. Stewart’s Legacy, the 2025 Miller Comm program: Playing the Changes**, a powerful exploration of jazz and education during apartheid-era South Africa, and the **Timbuktu Talks** featuring Professor Djim Drame of Senegal—were truly enriching. Our outreach academic initiatives broke new ground with the **Symposium on Black Iraqi Heritage**, convening scholars and artists from Africa, the Middle East, and the diaspora for rare interdisciplinary dialogue; a transformative **15-day Morocco study tour for educators nationwide** and the **African Socrates Teacher’s Workshop**, piloting our K–12-through-lifelong-learning African Studies curriculum.

Cultural milestones included **Powers of the Feminine**, honoring African women luminaries during Women’s History Month; and **The Transformative Power of Music**, featuring a screening of episode 1 of “The Fuji Documentary” and conversation with filmmaker Dr. Saheed Aderinto, followed by an unforgettable performance by South African musician Sabastian Jamieson.

The year culminated in a vibrant celebration at the Siebel Center for Design, showcasing African fashion, cuisine, and live music by Zimbabwean artist Dan Kusaya—a spectacular tribute to Africa and its diaspora.

This culminating program was made possible through the collaboration of a wide network of international student organizations and key academic and cultural units, including the Center for African Studies, Bruce Nesbitt African American Cultural Center, Engineering International Student Programs, and the Salaam Middle East and North Africa Cultural Center.

Together, these initiatives affirmed our mission: to create spaces where scholarship thrives, cultures converge, and communities grow stronger. Under the thoughtful and visionary leadership of Professor Teresa Barnes—during this concluding year of her directorship—these efforts reflected a deep commitment to intellectual rigor, cultural engagement, and meaningful community-building.

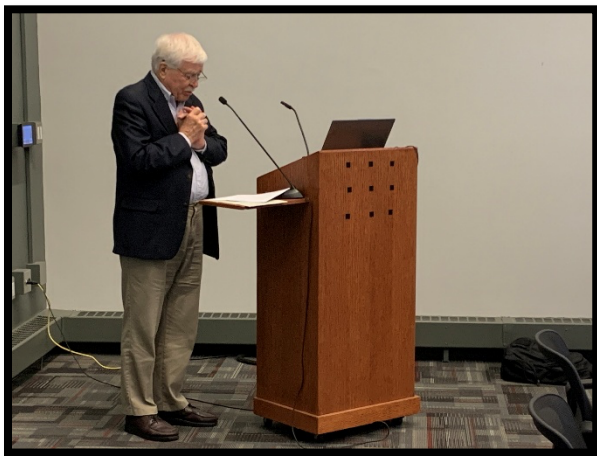
Beyond the bounds of chronology, journey through a curated collection of the year’s key initiatives and signature moments.

**The Editor**

## *Moments in Focus*



**Conference participants pause for a group photo**



**A thoughtful moment as Professor Stewart speaks after being honored for his groundbreaking work**

### **Conference Honors Charles C. Stewart's Legacy in West African Islamic Studies**

On September 19–20, 2024, Mauro Nobili (History, UIUC) and Bruce Hall (UC Berkeley, UIUC alumnus), with support from the Center for Advanced Study, hosted a landmark conference celebrating Professor Emeritus Charles C. Stewart. Titled “Muslim West Africa’s ‘Core Curriculum’ Explained, Explored and Redefined,” the event brought together nearly thirty scholars from three continents to examine the foundational texts that shaped Islamic learning across West Africa up to the twentieth century—a body of work Stewart has spent the past fifteen years defining and digitizing.

Panels explored themes such as Arabic grammar in West African scholarship, jurisprudence and logic, Qur’anic exegesis, and devotional practices, while others reflected on Stewart’s pioneering efforts in manuscript preservation and his profound impact on the historiography of West Africa. The conference concluded with personal tributes and Stewart’s own remarks, underscoring his enduring influence on the field.



Professor. Djim Dramé with staff and audience members after delivering his insightful talk, “Between Progress and Regression: The Arabo-Islamic Instructor in the Senegalese Countryside.” This event was part of the Timbuktu Talks series, hosted by Prof. Mauro Nobili and Mr. Vieux Touré. Prof. Dramé, from the Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire (IFAN), Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, Senegal, sparked a rich discussion on the intersections of tradition, education, and social change in rural Senegal.



## TAMASHA:

### A Celebration of Language and Culture

TAMASHA marked the end of the semester with a vibrant showcase by students of African languages. Featuring Wolof and Swahili, the event brought language learning to life through music, literature, dance, and community. Students shared their achievements while honoring the cultural richness and traditions behind these languages. It was an evening of creativity, connection, and celebration.



**Tamasha showcase energy on full display as students and instructors gather for a photo**



## African Textile Archive: Apertures in Decolonizing African Studies Collections

Libraries and archives are more than repositories—they shape how knowledge is accessed and understood. In this program, Emilie Songolo of MIT Libraries invited participants to rethink these systems through the lens of African commemorative textiles.

These textiles, rich with graphics, cultural symbols, and text, serve as social levelers and storytellers, preserving histories and perspectives often excluded from published literature. As institutions acquire these unique materials, Songolo emphasized the need to interrogate conventional cataloging and processing practices that may inadvertently limit access or perpetuate colonial frameworks.

Drawing on principles of decoloniality, critical archiving, and equity, the session highlighted how African textiles expand the knowledge ecosystem and challenge us to imagine more inclusive archival futures. The conversation underscored the importance of honoring the epistemologies embedded in these fabrics and ensuring they remain accessible to the communities they represent.

Organized by the Center for African Studies and the International and Area Studies Library, the program was co-sponsored by the Ricker Library of Architecture & Art, and the University Library.



Emilie Songolo,  
Head of  
Distinctive  
Collections,  
MIT Libraries

## Looking Back: Playing the Changes – Jazz and Education in South Africa

On April 23, 2025, the Center for Advanced Study led a Miller COMM program titled *Playing the Changes: Jazz and Education in South Africa* at the Knight Auditorium. This event examined the transformative role of jazz in South African education and culture, exploring how music became a powerful tool for social change and intellectual engagement.

The program featured Darius Brubeck and Catherine Brubeck telling the story of the pioneering jazz curriculum and performance program at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Also featured was distinguished jazz scholar Colin Miller, whose presentations illuminated the intersections of art, history, and pedagogy in a post-apartheid context.

Organized in conjunction with the Center for African Studies and several academic units, this initiative reflected CAS's commitment to fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and global perspectives.



Jazz scholar  
Colin Miller  
University of Delaware

## Exploring Black Heritage and Resilience Across the Middle East and Indian Ocean

A two-day symposium at the Center for African Studies brought together global voices to examine Afro-Iraqi traditions, the legacy of slavery, and the evolving meaning of identity in Arab-majority societies.

### Black Iraqi Heritage and the African Presence in the Middle East and Indian Ocean

By Adéyínká Aláṣadé, CAS Outreach Coordinator,

On October 29–30, 2024, the Center for African Studies convened a landmark symposium, Black Iraqi Heritage and the African Presence in the Middle East and Indian Ocean. Supported by a U.S. Department of Education Title VI grant, the gathering united scholars and artists from Africa, the Middle East, and the diaspora in a rare transregional dialogue on Black life in Arab-majority societies—its histories, its erasures, and its ongoing creativity.

Guided by the groundbreaking work of Dr. Thawrah Yousif, an Afro-Iraqi theatre artist, dancer, and activist who has spent her career preserving the rituals of her community, and Professor Amir Al-Azraki, a playwright and scholar whose research centers Afro-Arab cultural memory, the symposium placed music, spirituality, and ceremony at the heart of political analysis. Presenters explored how Afro-Iraqi traditions—rituals like Shtanga, Nouba, and Al-Sada, rooted in Zanj ancestry and performed in sacred makeeds—serve not merely as artistic expressions but as strategies for collective survival. Dr. Yousif’s reflections on the emotional architecture of these ceremonies and Al-Azraki’s work with Theatre of the Oppressed in Black Iraqi communities revealed ritual as both memory and resistance, a living archive carried in the body.

Beyond Iraq, the symposium expanded the conversation to Black identity, race, and belonging in North Africa and the Middle East. Tunisian researcher Dr. Maha Abdelmalik—whose work examines marginalized communities, racial formation, and Black womanhood, as well as the survival of traditions like Stambeli, a sub-Saharan-derived musical-healing ritual woven into North African Sufi practice—outlined the pressures and emerging activism shaping Black Tunisian life. Historian Khaled Esseissah offered a parallel view of Mauritania, tracing how the Ḥrāṭīn have mobilized music, religious authority, and political participation to challenge histories of servitude and redefine citizenship.

The symposium also confronted the complexities of Black political agency during moments of revolutionary upheaval, including the Arab Spring. Discussions emphasized that Black participation in these movements was far from monolithic: Black activists, laborers, artists, and migrants often advanced the push for democratic change, yet in some contexts Black communities simultaneously faced exclusion—or were strategically leveraged by state and non-state actors in ways that complicated narratives of solidarity. In certain cases, the uprisings illuminated not just shared aspirations but fractures, where anti-Black racism surfaced within the very movements imagined as emancipatory. Participants wrestled with these tensions, exploring how Black people in the region navigate roles of resistance and vulnerability, empowerment and betrayal, agency and constraint.

This multivocal approach was complemented by reflections from cultural historian Anthony Karakah Browder, whose decades of work recovering African intellectual legacies—particularly Nubian and Nile Valley contributions to world civilization—situated Afro-Arab histories within a much longer continuum of global African knowledge. Across sessions, foundational scholarship by figures such as Salah Trabelsi and M’hamed Oualdi framed conversations about the fourteen-century history of slavery in Muslim societies and its enduring imprint on contemporary racial formations. Scholars challenged narrow racialized conceptions of “the Arab,” insisting instead on the region’s deep pluralism, linguistic continuities, and centuries-long African presence.

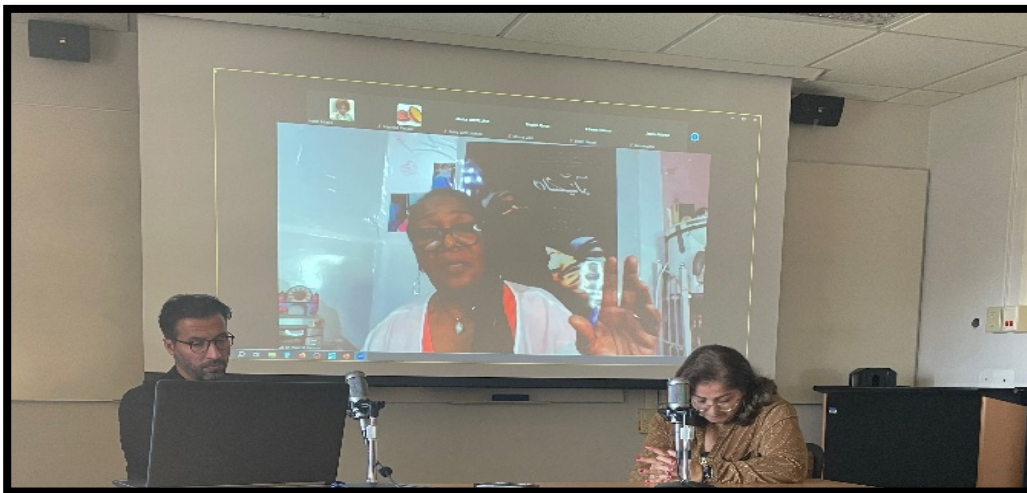
“Black identity in the Arab world is not static—it is dynamic, shaped by centuries of resilience and creativity. These traditions are not just remnants of the past; they are living acts of resistance and cultural affirmation.”

— Dr. Thawrah Yousif

African-descended communities across the Middle East and North Africa have enriched local cultures while asserting dynamic identities—transforming heritage into political presence, and memory into modes of citizenship and activism.

Equally significant, this program brought together Black engaged scholars and artists of the Arab world with those based in the West—an exceedingly rare convergence. In doing so, it generated a set of conversations that are not simply timely but foundational, expanding the field of African Studies and deepening global discourse on African identities, cultural memory, and the meaning of belonging.

Dr. Thawrah Yousif and Prof. Amir Al-Azraki share insights on Afro-Iraqi ritual traditions as Maha Cahine translates from Arabic to English



Dr. Thawrah Yousif embodies Afro-Iraqi ritual on stage, animating memory, movement, and ancestral lineage through performance.



مسرحية ( جعبان ) الفائزة بجائزة أفضل عمل مسرحي متكامل في مهرجان المسرح العراقي ضد الإرهاب عام

لأول سنوات كنت منشغلة في العمل على التواصل مع أقراني من المنحدرين من أصول إفريقية وخلال الفترة الماضية حيث كانت لنا مشاركات مع ( قصتها ) للعزيزة إيمي ميلر في أمريكا تواصلت مع الأنسة ليتا توي وهي من أصول إفريقية فنانة مسرحية وكاتبة أمريكية وكتبنا حكايات مشتركة كانت من بينها ( أنا وكونتا كونتي- طفولة -أي وأبي ) كانت تجربة رائعة جدا نجسست كل منا خطوط التشابه للسود في مكانين مختلفين ، كانت المشاكل ذاتها ، المعاناة لم تتغير وإن كانت أقل بروزا لدينا .

لماذا هي أقل بروزا ؟ لأن مجتمعي ما زال خائفا أن يخرج من صندوق السيد والعبد ، ما زال يحكي الماضي بصيغة عدم القدرة على التجاوز والتغلب ، ما زالت تتحكم في 95% منهم الأمية والجهل القاتل ، فנסبة الذين يحملون شهادات عليا نسبة المتعلمين لمرحلة الإعدادية 30% . نحتاج اليوم لدعم من ناس سيقفونا في التغلب على هذه المشاكل ، نحتاج ، 1% ، إلى تطبيق طرق للتنوعية المجتمعية الخاصة بنا لكي نزرع الثقة وتقوي الإرادة ومن ثم نطرح ذلك وسط المجتمع الكبير نحتاج الدعم لكي نحكي تراثنا الإفريقي من الابدان والزوال لأنه تراث شفاهي

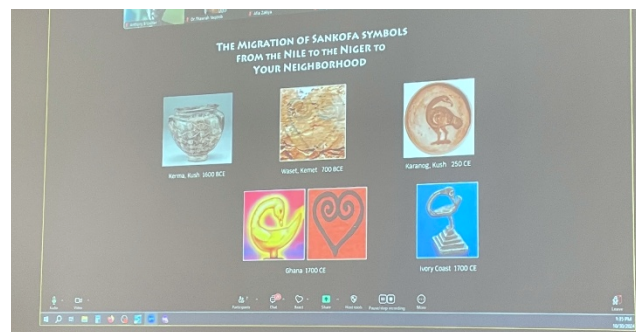
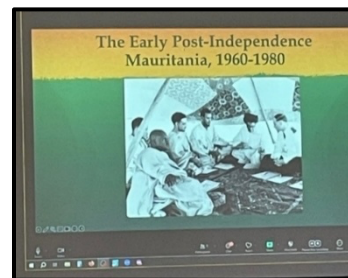
Arabic text highlighting the linguistic and cultural context surrounding Afro-Iraqi ritual and performance



Dr. Maha Abdelmalik discusses Black Tunisian experience and the Stambeli ritual tradition, accompanied by French translation from Patricia Phillips.



Khaled Esseissah presents research on early post-independence Mauritania, highlighting Ḥrāṭīn social and political movements



Mr. Anthony Browder concluded the program with a powerful charge: to continue studying, preserving, and embodying the enduring contributions of African civilizations across the world. His presentation stirred the room to deep, grateful tears—an emotional reminder of the transformative power of cultural memory and reclamation.

We offer our sincere thanks to our colleagues in CSAMES for collaborating with us on this project, supporting logistics and providing essential Arabic translation. We also thank Patricia Phillips from the Program in Translation & Interpreting Studies for her invaluable assistance with French translation. Your contributions were truly indispensable.



## Word is Seed 2024 was electric!

Under the compelling theme Against Tyranny, this year's gathering brought together voices from around the world for an unforgettable evening of poetry. Readers performed in Yorùbá, Kiswahili, Wolof, Tamil, Kikuyu, French, Italian, Arabic, English, and more. The musicality of each language—its tones, textures, and rhythms—wove a vibrant tapestry of defiance and hope. But this was no Tower of Babel born of hubris—no arrogance, no grasping for unreachable heights.

Hubris is excess pride, a blindness that invites collapse. Word is Seed was its opposite: an intentional gathering of poets, polyglots, language lovers, and carriers of memory—coming together to give voice to the brave, the beautiful, and the necessary. Their performances moved the audience late into the evening, reminding us of poetry's power to connect, challenge, and uplift.

For many, it was a rare chance to experience African language poetry in all its rhythmic, tonal, imagistic brilliance. For others, it was a dazzling celebration of global poetics—a reminder that the world's literary traditions speak to one another across continents and centuries.

Word is Seed continues to be a space where poetry transcends borders, where languages honor their ancestors, and where the beauty of the spoken word becomes a shared human experience.

🌱 #WordIsSeed #PoetryMatters



A full house of listeners. Terri Barnes writes a poem on the spot



Vaishnavi Sridharan (Health & Kinesiology) reads classical Tamil poetry from The Purananuru

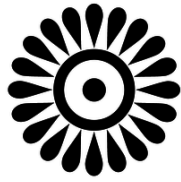


Tobi Adéwùnmí's first-ever reading in Yorùbá — a Word Is Seed moment.



Across the room, the audience sits absorbed in the poetry





## Celebrating Women's History Month: Powers of the Feminine

On March 25, we gathered at The SPOT in the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts to honor the brilliance and influence of African women luminaries. Powers of the Feminine commemorated trailblazers such as Sophie Oluwole, Wangari Maathai, bell hooks, and the Queens of Afrobeat, sparking conversations about feminine power and its transformative impact.

The evening featured thought-provoking dialogue, delicious food, and enchanting music, creating a vibrant space for reflection and celebration. Our distinguished speakers included:

- Mariam Kilimo, Professor of Africana Studies, The College of Wooster
- Dotun Ayobade, Professor of Performance Studies & Black Studies, Northwestern University, Author of Queens of Afrobeat
- Imani Bazzell, Community Educator, Founding Director of Sister Net
- Simeon Onaolapo, Performance Poet and M.A. Student in African Studies, UIUC

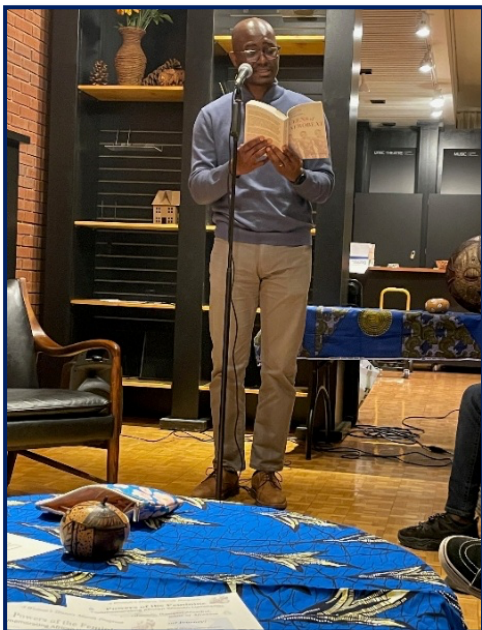
Thank you to everyone who joined us in honoring these voices and redefining the powers of the feminine during Women's History Month!



A meaningful moment shared by Imani Bazzell and Prof. Mariam Kilimo.



Simeon Onaolapo sharing his reflections on the work of Sofie Oluwole



Prof. Dotun Ayobade sharing selected excerpts from his work *The Queens of Afrobeat*.



Attendees enjoying an evening of culture, community, and connection



## The Transformative Power of Music: A Night of Rhythm, History, and Renewal

On April 29, the Salaam MENA Cultural Center came alive with an evening that reminded us of music's profound ability to shape identity, inspire resilience, and connect communities across continents. The program, "The Transformative Power of Music," brought together two remarkable voices: Dr. Saheed Aderinto, historian and filmmaker, and Sebastian Jamieson, South African-born musician and cultural advocate.

Dr. Aderinto, Professor of History and African and African Diaspora Studies at Florida International University, shared insights from his groundbreaking documentary, *The Fuji Documentary*. This film, hailed as "a landmark in popular music documentation," explores the origins and cultural significance of Fuji music—a genre born from Yoruba traditions and transformed into a global sound of resistance and celebration.

Complementing this historical lens, Sebastian Jamieson delivered a stirring live performance that blended Afro-soul rhythms with lyrical storytelling. His music carried themes of struggle, hope, and renewal, reminding the audience that even in silence, there is rhythm; even in hardship, there is song.

The evening was more than a conversation—it was a cultural experience. Attendees engaged in dialogue about music's role in shaping social movements and personal narratives, while the live performance created a shared space of joy and reflection.

This event was a testament to music's enduring power—not just as entertainment, but as a force for transformation.



**Prof. Saheed Aderinto and Sebastian Jamieson**



**The speaker's super-fan club**



**A quiet moment as Sabastian Jamieson lets the music speak.**

# Visit to Morocco –

## Dr. Maimouna Barro, Associate Director, Center for African Studies

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The Center for African Studies (CAS) and the Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (CSAMES) launched a Title VI-funded Trans-Sahara project with a fall 2023 Educators Workshop titled "Teaching the Trans-Saharan Space: Critical Observations." The event was possible thanks to generous support from a US Department of Education Title VI grant and was one among several activities organized jointly by our two centers in 2023-2025.

Educators gained an understanding of Africa that is transnational in scope whereby the Sahara is approached not as a boundary, but as a geographical space that brings together, and in complex ways a multitude of shared linguistic, literary, creative, and cultural phenomenon that are interconnected but that do not always overlap neatly. Former Director of the Institute of African Studies at Columbia University and Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and renowned Africanist, Souleymane Bachir Diagne helped lay the groundwork with a keynote speech on "Disrupting Area Studies." As a follow up to this successful K-16 teachers, CAS and CSAMES organized a 15-day educational and professional development trip to Morocco in June 2025 that included 11 teachers from across the United States.

The first-hand experience they gained in Morocco included visiting a variety of sites from major coastal cities, the middle and high Atlas Mountains, to the middle of the Sahara Desert, and through interacting with local communities about their indigenous knowledge systems in agriculture, engineering, water and food conservation, math and science, arts and architecture, among other fields. These meaningful interactions offered new insights on how to approach teaching about Africa, its peoples, their creativity, adaptability and resilience. Their proposed curriculum plans include topics such as the interface between oral history method and museum artifact collections to enrich middle school Social Studies curriculum; the historical significance of medinas (historical cities) and souks (open-air marketplaces) and ways in which students could learn about the different types of goods sold and cultural practices associated with them, and critically think about how these markets reflect community identity and relate that to their own lives; the Todra Gorge Valley limestone in the High Atlas mountains and the interest it sparked among science teachers, especially in how it compares with other geologic formations; the geometric patterns in Moroccan and Islamic art and the fascinating discussions among math teachers during our visit to the old city of Fez at the world oldest university, Al-Qarawiyyin, founded in 859 CE by renowned female scholar Fatima al-Fihri.

As one of the lead organizers of this study tour, I enjoyed interacting with West African market women in some of the sites we visited such as Casablanca, Fez, and Essaouira and made a lot of connections with research I conducted on the topic in the last few years regarding women as important actors in informal trans-Saharan trade networks through which people, languages, religious and cultural practices, knowledge systems and goods have, for centuries, traveled and interacted and continue to do so.

Another striking example of Morocco's place within the Trans-Saharan space that attracted our attention is the centuries-old architectural of its buildings. Les Dune d'Or, a Kasbah hotel we stayed in the middle of the Sahara Desert surrounded by orange sand dunes located in the outskirts of the town of Merzouga, just a few miles away from the Algerian border. The building features many appealing design qualities, including magnificent arches, a variety of geometric shapes that serve as pillars or facade ornaments, and the use of color and painted motifs.

Through my discussions with a student of architecture, she observed that earth was used as the primary building material, along with thatch or straw as a binding agent. This not only adds to the building's unique character but also highlights Moroccan architecture in relation to that of the Sahel regions that have also historically prioritized earth and thatch as defining elements of their structures. We looked at images of the renowned Great Mosque of Djenné in Mali and compared it with the impressive structures of our Kasbah and saw stunning similarities in their sandy-like color, earthen walls, varying degrees of height, and geometric shapes and symbols.

These architectural similarities reinforce our understanding of the Trans-Saharan network through a design framework. They also draw attention to how ideas, cultural characteristics, and people can move throughout and take root within a given region.

As some of us went on camel rides, others enjoyed Amazigh hospitality as our generous hosts served atay bin na'na (green tea and mint) and sand-roasted salted peanuts with skin on, which brought back memories of teatime from my native Senegal and other parts of the Sahel.

Educators gather to take photos of the beautiful scenery.

Tangier, June 17



Auberge Les Dune d'Or, Merzouga, June 2025



# Celebration of Africa: A Vibrant Showcase of Culture and Collaboration

On April 25, 2025, the Siebel Center for Design came alive with color, rhythm, and flavor during Celebration of Africa, an event envisioned and inspired by Nashma Carrera, Coordinator for International Student Programs in Engineering Administration. This dynamic program honored Africa's rich cultural heritage through music, fashion, and food, creating an immersive experience for students, faculty, and community members.

The evening featured a fashion show of African-inspired designs, authentic African coffee and cuisine, and electrifying live music by Dan Kusaya & The Chimurenga Inspiration Band, blending traditional Zimbabwean sounds with Afro-ethnic rhythms, reggae, jazz, and other genres.

The celebration was made possible through the collaborative efforts of a wide network of international student organizations and key academic and cultural units, including the Center for African Studies, Bruce Nesbitt African American Cultural Center, Engineering International Student Programs, and the Salaam Middle East and North Africa Cultural Center. Together, these partners created a space for cultural exchange, creativity, and global community building.



When the food is this good, the line becomes part of the celebration



Kente tells its own story—Paapa Nkrumah Ababio beautifully representing Ghanaian heritage



Dan Kusaya & The Chimurenga Inspiration Band delivered an unforgettable performance—energizing the crowd until everyone was on their feet



East African elegance met Nigerian tradition—everyone showed up in style.



All eyes were on the runway—every design capturing the audience's full attention

# African Socrates Teachers' Workshop: Lifelong Learning and Innovative African Studies Curriculum

**“One who does not know can know through learning.” – Adinkra Saying**

**By Adéyínká Aláṣadé**

This past July, I had the privilege of leading the African Socrates Teachers' Workshop, a transformative two-day professional development experience under the theme: Teaching, Reading, and Writing the African Presence in the World. Supported by a U.S. Department of Education Title VI grant, this workshop marked the launch of something I've dreamed about for years—the African Socrates Curriculum, an ambitious initiative to integrate African Studies into K–12 education and beyond.

## The Vision Behind African Socrates

When I first conceptualized the African Socrates Project as Outreach Coordinator for the Center for African Studies, my goal was clear: to create a curriculum that roots African Studies in academic disciplines from the earliest stages of learning. I wanted to foster global awareness and critical thinking in classrooms everywhere.

The name African Socrates reflects my commitment to intellectual depth and dialogue. I drew inspiration from Henry Odera Oruka's sage philosophy and Sophie Oluwolé's pioneering work—both champions of African Indigenous thought as a foundation for education. To this foundation, I also add the powerful pedagogical visions of Paulo Freire, whose call for liberatory, dialogic education shaped my approach; bell hooks, whose writings on engaged pedagogy emphasize love, presence, and the democratization of knowledge; and John Dewey, whose belief that learning emerges through experience continues to guide my thinking about inquiry-based, human-centered instruction.

Just as Socratic inquiry shaped Western traditions, African sage philosophy emphasizes reflective conversation, communal wisdom, and lived experience. Together with Freire, hooks, and Dewey, these principles ground our curriculum for learners of all ages—inviting them to think critically, question deeply, and engage the world with curiosity and care.

The curriculum consists of nine modules, including:

- Teaching African Foreign Relations
- Teaching African Health and Medicine
- Teaching African Food Systems
- Teaching African Legal Systems

Each module promotes reading, creative activities, and critical reflection, equipping educators to bring Africa's rich histories, cultures, and contributions into classrooms worldwide.

## Partnering with Dr. Emmanuel Nuesiri: Driving Pedagogical Excellence

While I provided the vision and oversight, I was fortunate to work with Dr. Emmanuel Nuesiri, our Senior Curriculum Development Specialist. His expertise shaped the academic rigor and practical relevance of the workshop. From the start, he designed and delivered the curriculum framework, introducing educators to strategies that make Africa come alive in the classroom.

His sessions went beyond theory. He showed teachers how to:

- Begin with simple, engaging activities like map labeling and cultural storytelling.
- Progress to deeper projects such as debates on climate impacts and creative presentations.
- Use flexible, inclusive approaches—videos, maps, tactile materials like egusi seeds—to reach diverse learners.
- Design lessons with clear goals and meaningful outcomes, ensuring every activity connects to big-picture understandings.

The feedback was incredible—Day 1 earned a perfect 4.9/5 rating! Educators praised his clarity and creativity, noting how he made complex frameworks accessible and actionable. His work gave teachers confidence to create lessons that are both rigorous and culturally relevant.



**Engaged teachers, active learning—professional development in action**

## **A Hybrid Gathering of Global Educators**

We hosted the workshop at Coble Hall, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and it was amazing to see a full house of educators from the Champaign area, while participants from Cameroon, Spain, Nigeria, and other countries joined virtually. Over two days, we explored:

- Foundations of the African Socrates Curriculum
- Strategies for Teaching Africa in K–12 Schools
- Collaborative Lesson Design
- Teacher Resilience and Professional Growth

The sessions were highly interactive, featuring group activities, peer assessments, and project-based learning exercises that empowered teachers to design lessons adaptable to diverse classrooms.

## **Creative Engagement: Music, Dance, and Storytelling**

We ended the workshop with an unforgettable Creative Engagement session at the Salaam Middle East & North Africa Cultural Center. Participants enjoyed hands-on music-making with traditional African instruments such as the mbira and drums, guided by world music artists Dan Kusaya from Zimbabwe and Stella Sabina from Uganda. The evening culminated in a vibrant performance by these two artists, whose artistry brought the rhythms and stories of Eastern and Southern Africa to life, offering participants a rare opportunity to engage with Africa's musical heritage.

## **Why It Matters**

Embedding African Studies in K–12 education is a significant milestone. It not only broadens students' global perspectives but also fosters critical thinking and cultural appreciation from an early age. The African Socrates project exemplifies the power of lifelong learning, equipping educators with tools to create inclusive, globally informed classrooms.

This workshop also served as the pilot of the African Socrates Curriculum—and it worked. Teachers told us the modules met urgent needs in their classrooms, offering concrete pathways to serve diverse student populations while teaching Africa with depth, accuracy, and relevance. We are proud to say the workshop met core school standards with excellence, aligning instruction, assessment, and inquiry-based learning in ways that educators can adopt immediately.



While initial funding has been withdrawn, our commitment has not. We will find a way to complete the curriculum and formally launch it to schools. We recognize this will be challenging—especially amid broader debates about how history and multicultural knowledge are taught—but the pilot proved the demand is real and the approach is effective. Teachers are seeking resources that honor students’ identities, expand their worldviews, and cultivate rigorous thinking; African Socrates helps them do exactly that.



With Dan Kusaya and Stella Sabina, teachers explore hands-on music-making as a powerful tool for creative engagement and emotional learning.



Dr. Emmanuel Nuesiri and  
Adéyínká Aláṣadé

## The Humanities: Nurturing the Full Human Experience

At its heart, this work is a humanities project. The humanities call us to educate the whole person: to cultivate discernment, empathy, and imagination; to teach learners not only how to analyze evidence and ideas, but how to listen, wonder, and write themselves into the shared human story. Through teaching, reading, and writing the African presence in the world, we invite students to practice ethical inquiry, encounter diverse voices, and see themselves as thinkers who can act with wisdom in community.

## Bringing a bit of Africa's Cultural Stories to Local Schools



We are honored to be invited into area schools to share the richness and diversity of African cultures as part of their World Cultures programming. During our visit, students have the opportunity to explore interesting musical instruments, cultural artifacts, and stories that reflect the heritage and artistic traditions found across the African continent. Through demonstrations of instruments such as drums, rattles, and mbira instruments—as well as textiles, symbols, and everyday objects—we aim to give students a meaningful, hands-on understanding of how music, art, and history shape African communities.

As part of a broader World Cultures experience, we share Africa's vibrant cultural expressions alongside presenters representing other regions of the world. Through this collaborative program, students are encouraged to appreciate the distinct traditions each culture brings to the global community. We are grateful for the chance to broaden perspectives, celebrate cultural heritage, and contribute to a larger conversation about the beauty and interconnectedness of world cultures.



Through crafts, artifacts, and narrative displays, Brian Ndimilla introduces students to the rich blend of traditional and contemporary African cultures



# Habari Special Issue — Honoring Professor Teresa Barnes

## Editor's Note

This special issue of Habari unfolds in three movements. We begin with a tribute that recognizes Professor Teresa Barnes's eight years of leadership—years defined by intellectual rigor, feminist insight, and a deep ethic of care. From there, her interview offers readers the opportunity to hear directly from her: her reflections on the field, her experiences as director, and her hopes for emerging scholars. The closing reflection then steps back to consider the broader significance of honoring her work—not only for what she has accomplished, but for what her example reveals about leadership, equity, and representation within African Studies. Together, these pieces form a narrative arc that celebrates Dr. Barnes's contributions while inviting us to reflect critically on how we choose to recognize the women who shape our field.

## Intro

Although this was not a formal sit-down conversation, I reached out to Dr. Barnes with a series of questions about African Studies, leadership, and the future of the field. Her generous reflections struck me as both timely and deeply resonant, especially for students, educators, and colleagues navigating today's academic landscape. In sharing her words here, I hope they offer both guidance and affirmation to those committed to the study of Africa and its many intellectual traditions.

## Interview with Professor Teresa Barnes

**Looking ahead, what do you think are the biggest challenges African Studies will face—and how can scholars and institutions rise to meet them?**

One of the biggest challenges for African Studies in the U.S. is keeping the study of African languages alive. We cannot sustain the hard-won progress of the last sixty years—in respecting, valuing, and learning about African cultures, histories, and societies—if everything continues to be filtered through translations into colonial languages like English, French, and Portuguese. I do not believe one can fully comprehend indigenous knowledges without fluency in their mother tongues. Those who are not fluent in an African language can appreciate the contours of indigenous cosmologies from afar, but cannot really inhabit them through English or French. So, sustaining African languages within U.S. institutions is essential. Long live the study of Wolof, Zulu, Shona, Swahili, Yoruba, Lingala, Bamana, and Arabic.

**In your view, how should African languages and indigenous knowledge shape the future of African Studies?**

African languages and indigenous knowledge must remain central to the field. Indigenous knowledges are embedded in African languages themselves, and without those languages, we risk only partial understandings. African languages allow scholars to move beyond translated or

mediated versions of African thought. Without them, we can observe these cosmologies, but we cannot fully experience or understand them from within. The future of African Studies therefore depends on keeping these languages vibrant and present in our institutions.

**During your time as director, what were the toughest leadership challenges you encountered—and how did you navigate them?**

As director, I learned almost everything from CAS colleagues, other directors and associate directors, and our wonderful office staff. Together, we worked extremely hard to establish IGI and later to secure Title VI funding in 2018 and 2022. The greatest challenge was balancing all the responsibilities: administrative and management tasks, IGI participation, teaching, departmental obligations, research, writing, grant applications and reports, university and community commitments, and professional networks—along with personal health and home life. I did learn that it is best to answer emails as soon as possible. But even with that, it was not possible to do everything at full strength all at the same time.

**Balancing administration with scholarship is no small feat. How did you manage that while keeping your vision for the center alive?**

Balancing these demands required constant adjustment and the recognition that not everything could receive equal attention at every moment. Administrative work, IGI involvement, teaching, research, writing, and community responsibilities all competed for time. What made it possible was accepting those limits while staying committed to the center's work—and relying on strong colleagues who shared in the effort. Answering emails quickly helped keep things moving, but, it was impossible to maintain every part of the job at full capacity simultaneously.

**Finally, what advice would you share with emerging scholars and graduate students as they navigate the evolving world of Area Studies?**

I would advise scholars and graduate students to pursue the topics they are truly passionate about, for as long as they possibly can. They should demand the support they need from their institutions in order to flourish and continue their education. I also encourage them to participate in student groups and associations, to build friendships and networks that will last throughout their careers. And they should make use of the UIUC library—it is one of the best resources on campus. We are living through contentious and dangerous times, but I remain hopeful that intercontinental and intercultural studies and exchanges, carried out in the spirit of equity, peace, and solidarity, can help mitigate the challenges we face.

**Closing Reflection**

As this special issue honors Professor Teresa Barnes, it is worth stating plainly why centering her voice matters. Dr. Barnes is a historian of southern Africa with decades of lived experience in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Her scholarship—spanning political history, gender studies, and institutional culture—has shaped this Center's direction, and her teaching in Gender & Women's Studies continues to ground our understanding of how power operates in and through institutions. Under her leadership, CAS strengthened graduate programs, expanded interdisciplinary work, and built collaborations linking African Studies to African American



Studies, Gender & Women's Studies, African Art & Museum Studies, and community-engaged initiatives such as New Immigrant Foodways. She accomplished this with humility and practical care—mentoring, building bridges, setting up rooms, solving problems—quiet labors that sustain academic life.

With this history in mind, the question of how we choose to honor Dr. Barnes becomes more than a routine editorial decision. It creates an opportunity to reflect on how our choices—large and small—signal what we value and how we acknowledge the people who have shaped our programs. When suggestions about centering a particular voice generate little discussion, the silence can reveal the quiet momentum of inherited habits rather than intentional direction. These habits are not the responsibility of any one person or group; they can surface in many settings and be reproduced by any of us, especially within environments shaped by long histories of masculinist norms. They show how institutions evolve when we do not pause to consider other possibilities. Feminist leadership urges us to notice these moments, to slow down, and to ask how our decisions might better reflect our shared values and commitments.

That pause is part of what shaped this reflection. The tribute in these pages grows out of Dr. Barnes's scholarship, service, and example of thoughtful, relational leadership. It also grows out of a commitment to attentiveness—to noticing the work that sustains us and ensuring our practices align with the principles we seek to uphold. Even when decisions are not straightforward, we still have the opportunity to lift up the people whose labor and vision have helped to advance our mission.

Our hope is that this issue invites readers into that spirit of appreciation and reflection. As we celebrate Dr. Barnes, we also reaffirm our ongoing commitment to recognizing the stories, labor, and leadership that have carried our community forward.

- Adéyínká Aláṣadé

Habari Newsletter Editor

### About the Cover

Images from top right to bottom right:

**Calabash Bowl** Modern West Africa Museum of Anthropology, Wayne State. University.

**Adinkra Symbol: Wawa Aba.** Symbol meaning hardiness, perseverance.

**Prestige Cloth: Asante Peoples.** New York Metropolitan Museum of Art.

**I ILLINOIS**  
Center for African Studies  
ILLINOIS GLOBAL INSTITUTE

# HABARI

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