

From the Editorial Team

As I write the world has been in the throes of Covid-19 for over 7 months, and the murder of George Floyd in the US has propelled us into a new era of movements, debates, conversations and soul-searching, in some cases around the lives and wellbeing of Black and Brown people. These are extraordinary times and most of us have not seen anything like it in our lifetimes.

As we watch Covid-19 wreak havoc across the world, readers may be interested to know that the then Gold Coast (modern Ghana) was severely attacked by the influenza pandemic of 1918-19 (Patterson, 1983). Patterson notes that the disease was introduced by shipping along the southern coast and also overland across the northern frontier. As was the case across the continent, the influenza's spread was greatly facilitated by the new colonial transportation network. Quarantines and other preventive measures were futile and therapy, African or European, could do no more than alleviate symptoms. Although the disease struck the majority of the population, mortality rates varied across the country, with deaths especially numerous in the far north. This is not surprising if we consider that the disease death rate is positively correlated with poverty, and northern parts of the country were the poorest. The influenza epidemic killed 100,000 or more people in less than six months during 1918-19, and, Patterson argues, was almost certainly the worst short-term demographic disaster in the history of the Gold Coast and Ghana. Today we have better health facilities, better and faster information flow, but also more fake news and greater inequality and ethical issues to consider about who survives and who does not in times of crisis. In the early days of the pandemic, just before Ghana closed its borders, a group of Italians boarded a flight to Accra, Ghana, but were turned away when they got to Kotoka International Airport,¹ while another group of Italian tourists whose visas had expired refused to leave Ethiopia.² This will not be the first time Italians refused to leave Ethiopia.³ At the time of these two incidents back in March 2020, Italy was at the epicentre of the disease, and for a country that has, in recent history spurned African migrants, to now have some of its citizens view Africa as a safe haven was the ultimate irony.

This leads to the inevitable discussion these days about how Africa is perceived, presented, positioned, and valued. Although the efficacy of a herbal remedy for Covid-19 developed by scientists in Madagascar that initially offered hope remains

¹ <https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/two-italians-blocked-from-entering-ghana-amid-coronavirus-scare/>.

² <https://superohclair.tumblr.com/post/612783297799520256/ethiopia-35-italian-tourists-refuse-to-return>.

³ In May 1936, under Generals Rodolfo Graziani and Pietro Badoglio, invading Italian forces took over the capital, Addis Ababa. Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie went into exile. In Rome, Mussolini proclaimed Italy's King Victor Emmanuel III emperor of Ethiopia (Encyclopedia Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/event/Italo-Ethiopian-War-1935-1936>). The Ethiopians eventually dislodged the Italians in 1936 after several months of fighting. Some 40-odd years earlier Ethiopia had defeated Italian forces at the Battle of Adowa (1896), thereby saving Ethiopia from Italian colonization at the time. It took the so-called Second World War to bring Italy's occupation to an end.

unproven⁴, the global response to African innovations has been lukewarm at best, and highly patronising,⁵ even racist at worst, bringing the discussion about African knowledges centre stage for us again. Despite the challenging social and economic environments in which African knowledge producers and inventors find themselves, many have offered innovative responses to the various challenges Covid-19 has brought about. Young people, who dominate the internet and digital world, are producing products and services, ranging from working as community organisers, to educating about Covid-19 to combat its spread. Others are designing applications to help diagnose, manage and track the disease, or designing testing kits.⁶ As early as April 2020, Senegal was reported to be producing a testing kit that would cost users \$1, and scientists at the University of Ghana have successfully sequenced genomes of SARS-CoV-2. Successes in the areas of agriculture and food production are engendering discussions about opportunities to employ the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) to boost businesses and intra-African trade. This is an opportune moment to intervene to ensure that the usual erasures of African contributions does not happen, and so we at *CJAS* are particularly interested in receiving article submissions that address “African responses” to Covid-19.

African scholars and activists have addressed racism and the destruction of Black lives, and called for what today is referred to as a decolonization of knowledge creation and governance systems since the times of slavery, through the US Civil rights movement and anti-colonial struggles, to today’s Must Fall and Black Lives Matter movements (Adomako Ampofo 2016). In the years following the independence of African nations white scholars like Herskovits managed to actively disenfranchise the work on Africa by Black scholars in the US (Allman 2019) and to influence the separation of African and Diaspora efforts at what today would be called a joint Black Lives Matter agenda. The Pan-African agenda is finding a resurgence, driven in part, interestingly, by global conglomerates like Netflix who are actively promoting Black history documentaries and African feature films, and also popular culture icons like Beyoncé.⁷ What is significant about the current moment is thus the spaces where these struggles are occurring, led prominently by social media activism—often leaderless but also highly influential, and with global diffusion at breakneck speed. At the same time the space has sometimes been coopted, or worse, infiltrated with fake news. As the landscape unfolds, we look forward to receiving submissions on these and related issues as well.

⁴ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/nigeria-madagascars-herbal-drink-cannot-cure-covid-19/1915948>.

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/21/africa-coronavirus-successes-innovation-europe-us>.

⁶ <https://techpoint.africa/2020/04/23/african-innovations-covid-19/>.

⁷ Since her production of *Lemonade*, and most recently *Black is King*, Beyoncé’s work has produced discourse that brings Africans in the Diaspora together in joint conversations, albeit not always in agreement. Take for example the August 14, 2020 webinar Beyoncé’s Africa: African Perspectives on ‘Black Is King’ – AfricaProactiveTalk https://www.africaproactive.com/blog/on-beyoncs-africa-african-perspectives-on-black-is-king?fbclid=IwAR1iDFMUfg0486r4YH2qEp_ZVIDTGnKEl4wMqwKvKatr6hUE1Y-sSNh-BU.

The year 2020 came upon us with stealth and little warning, so this issue of *CJAS* was well in the works to bring you a collection of papers from a conference on “Issues of Restitution and Repatriation of Looted and Illegally Acquired African Objects in European Museums” co-edited by Wazi Apoh (University of Ghana) and Andreas Mehler (Universität Freiburg). This is of course part of a long and on-going discussion that even has unlikely protagonists such as the French President⁸ and China⁹; but it is also extremely topical and our readers will find an abundance of empirical evidence and epistemological guidance for teaching, research and advocacy.

CJAS continues to be committed to bringing conversations with celebrated Pan-Africanists to our readers. In this issue we engage with Professor Esi Sutherland-Addy, a literary scholar at the Institute of African Studies, and a cultural activist. The conversation provides important and interesting insights into her life, the *Panafest* festival, Ghana’s highly celebrated but somewhat controversial Year-of-Return (2019), the murder of George Floyd in the U.S, and African-African Diaspora relationships. Without seeking to be prescriptive, the conversation also offers suggestions for how we might think of, and act for, Global Africa and the relationships among Black people on the continent and in the Diaspora more realistically but also more hopefully.

Finally, this issue brings us Mjiba Frehiwot’s review of Marika Sherwood’s book *Kwame Nkurmah and the dawn of the Cold War*, that was launched at the Institute of African Studies on February 6, 2020.¹⁰ The review speaks for itself, of course, so all I will say is that both the review, and the book itself, provide further empirical information on Pan-African projects and their fortunes.

We thank our readers, contributors, reviewers, editors, board and all the staff in the Publications office at the Institute of African Studies for their continuing support and engagement with us.

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Editor-in-Chief, *CJAS*.

⁸ See, for example, <https://www.france24.com/en/20181123-france-return-african-art-benin-macron-quai-branly-colonial-british-museum> and <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/french-report-recommends-full-restitution-looted-african-artworks-180970872/> Although France is dragging its feet: <https://www.theafricareport.com/23025/why-france-is-dragging-its-feet-to-repatriate-looted-african-artworks/>.

⁹ <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/africa/African-art-and-artefacts-return-home-thanks-to-Chinese-investment-1032340>.

¹⁰ We are grateful to Akos Ofori-Mensah of Sub-Saharan Publishers for making the book launch possible.