



Spring 2023



Alumni Newsletter

News for Alumni & Friends of the
African Cultural Studies Department



Connect with us!

A Letter from the Chair

Dear alumni and friends of the African Cultural Studies Department,

As the newly elected ACS Chair, it is my distinct pleasure to connect with you again and bring you news of our highly accomplished and hard-working community. To borrow an ancient teacher's famous aphorism, "for everything there is a season." To be sure, the proverbial winds of change have continued to waft across the 14th floor of Van Hise Hall. As you have no doubt noticed, there has been a change at the helm. In the wake of Professor Vlad Dima's departure in January 2023 to take up a position at another institution, I stepped in midstream as Interim Chair, while concurrently directing, until the end of this spring, the Center for African Studies. As the new Chair, it behooves me to express my profound gratitude for all that Vlad has done on behalf of our department. He was a collegial, and action-oriented Chair, supportive, always approachable, and unstintingly attentive to the needs of our faculty, staff and students. And of course, he was the dotting godfather of this Newsletter.

Vlad's absence leaves a void both in our department and in our collective heart. Although he has set the bar quite high for the next chair, I keenly look forward to building on his successful endeavors by striving to steer the department on its current course of pedagogic excellence and award-winning, leading-edge scholarship. Precisely in this vein, we extend a warm welcome to our new colleague, Professor Warrick Moses, who is featured in this issue, a trained

ethnomusicologist whose scholarly expertise centers on Cape Town hip-hop. Two of our talented and prolific colleagues, Professors Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué and Matthew Brown, have deservedly been promoted to the rank of Associate Professor. And we embrace another essential addition to our fold, Alexis ("Lexi") Langendorf, our new multimedia communications specialist.

It is inevitably with a mixture of immense pride and a hint of wistfulness that we bid farewell to our undergraduate and graduate students, as they embark on crucial new stages in their careers. Some go on to pursue graduate studies, as Olivia Ligman, one of our current majors profiled in this letter, plans to do. Others enroll in professional schools, as our alumna Jessica Miller, also highlighted in this letter, has done, or secure employment in diverse sectors. Many of our exceptional graduate students—two of whom, Omotola Okunlola and Vincent Ogoti, are featured in this issue—will join or have joined the faculty ranks at reputable institutions of higher learning across the country, as Vincent is getting ready to do in the coming fall.

We remain committed to promoting diversity, equity and inclusion as well as fostering a collegial and inclusive work environment. We have sustained and enhanced the opportunities available to our graduate students to obtain lectureships and secure research funding. Toward that end, we are delighted to report that the department has created an annual summer research award to be given

to a full-time graduate student in honor of Emeritus Professor Aliko Songolo for his long years of dedicated teaching and service to our department. Professor Songolo's enduring contribution not just to literary and cultural studies but to humanism writ large is justifiably celebrated in this letter.

Last but not least, as evidenced by the courses spotlighted in this issue, we remain steadfast in our efforts to enrich the learning experience of our majors, while nurturing the sense of community that Olivia so values about our department. These endeavors entail not only seeking to draw more majors to ACS by offering an ever-expanding range of engaging topic courses, team-taught and innovative First-Year Interest Group classes, but by strengthening our language program. Under the expert guidance of Adeola Agoke, the new director of our language program interviewed in this issue, we continue to explore new vistas for African language learning, including launching a language certificate and planning to pilot short-term study abroad programs in the continent.

I am profoundly grateful for your friendship and unwavering support!

On,
Wisconsin!

**Luís
Madureira**
*Chair,
African
Cultural
Studies*



Dean's Message

Fall semester is well underway, and there is much to celebrate this year! UW-Madison's freshman class is, once again, the largest in history, and it is also the most diverse. Here in L&S, we have a student body full of talent and we are providing a world-class experience for those students. Engagement at SuccessWorks, our innovative career advising center, is at record levels.

One of my top priorities is to make sure we have a welcoming and inclusive environment in which all of our students can thrive and feel at home. I am thrilled with the work happening in our Center for Academic Excellence. CAE continues to provide a strong community of support, guidance, mentoring and connection for students from underrepresented groups, from the time they set foot on campus until the day they graduate. Our new leader of CAE, Karen Stroud-Felton, is setting ambitious goals including a digital-first strategy to share students' stories in their own words.

Great people and strong teamwork are pushing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging efforts forward in every

department in L&S. As our Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion DeVon Wilson put it, "this is mission work." Visit ls.wisc.edu/about/diversity-and-inclusion to learn more about college-level initiatives and check in with your department about how to get involved.

We welcomed our largest cohort ever of new faculty this fall, and we celebrated 18 colleagues in an Investiture Ceremony that recognized both our great faculty and the wonderful donors who made those professorships and chairs possible.

We need world-class spaces in which to learn, teach, and carry out research. We look forward to seeing the new building for Computer, Data & Information Sciences begin to rise in 2023 and we are deep in the design phase for Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall.

As I reflect on our progress, I am constantly reminded that together, we can and will make a difference. Thank you for all you do for the College of Letters & Science!

On, Wisconsin!

Eric Wilcots, Dean

Mary C. Jacoby Professor of Astronomy
UW-Madison College of Letters & Science



Alumni Update: Jessica Miller

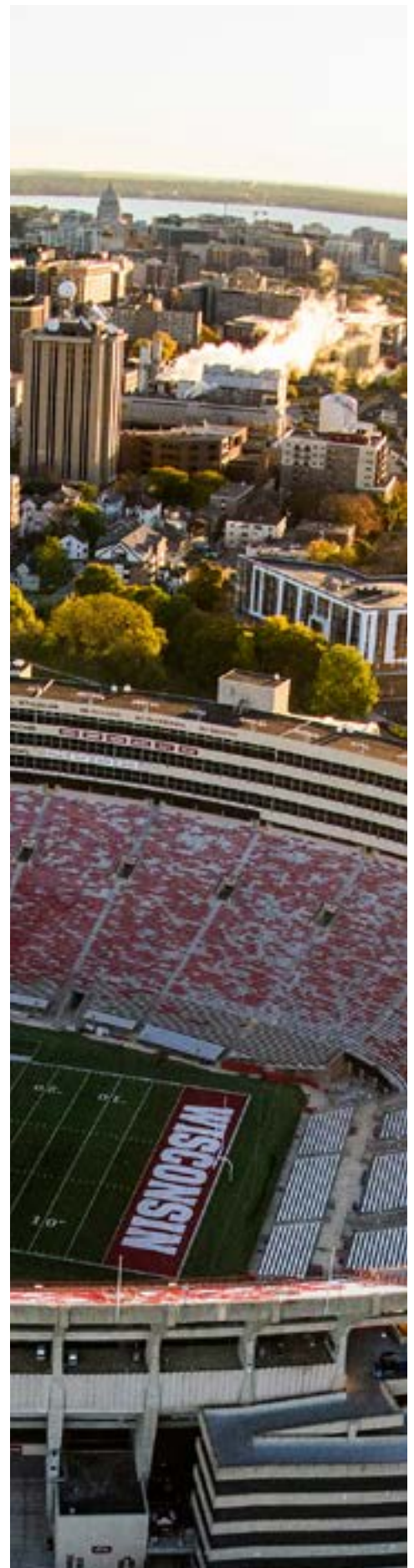
Jessie Miller is a third-year medical student at the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) in Milwaukee. She is very passionate about pursuing a career which focuses on the intersection of human health and migration.

Since 2014, Jessie has been studying Arabic, and she took a keen interest in the MENA region's geopolitics. She graduated from UW Madison in 2018 after completing an Arabic immersion program run by the US Department of State in Amman, Jordan in 2017.

She later returned to Amman in 2018-2019 to work for a local NGO as a MENAR fellow. The NGO Miller worked for as a Community Center

Programs Manager was Collateral Repair Project (CRP), which offers urban Iraqi, Syrian, Sudanese, Somali, and Yemeni refugees psychosocial support, emergency food assistance, and education or job-training opportunities.

For the past year, Miller has been collaborating with Dr. Melek Somai at MCW on an open-source initiative consolidating and displaying data on COVID-19 in the MENA region. She looks forward to graduating from medical school in 2024 and completing her medical residency before focusing her career on improving health equity and accessibility for global refugee patient populations.



Honoring Aliko Songolo

Pedagogies of 'reinventing the universal'

On 7 February 2023, *Senghor et les arts: réinventer l'universel* opened at the Musée du Quai Branly, running through November 2023. The title of the exhibit exemplifies the role that Aliko Songolo has played, yes, in creating and nurturing African, Africana, postcolonial, francophone, and decolonial studies, but most importantly the crucial contribution to humanism that his work has set into motion. When in 1985 Songolo wrote *Aimé Césaire: Une poétique de la découverte*, Césaire's work was read grosso modo in two critical spaces: those who engaged his work within an avant-garde practice of poetry (i.e. conversations and invectives among surrealists whose deliberations on poetry's role in Communist society-building were subject of heated debates); and the emerging understanding of *négritude* as the focus of a "popularizing," which saw in the concept "an unfounded essentialism" (Diagne 2018) that at some level may be understood as an imagining and translation of Negritude into a movement. While both Jason Allen-Paisant (2017) and Souleymane Bachir Diagne (2018) designate "recent revisions of familiar (often dismissive or Manichean) critiques of Negritude and revisits widely held teleological interpretations of Césaire's poetics," they do so honoring Songolo's book, which already almost forty years ago had already deliberated on the subtleties of *négritude* as a reinvention of the universal, not a simplistic contradiction to it.

Moreover, it has been Songolo's deep engagement with *longue durée*

historicism and literary practices transnationally which has allowed him to seamlessly work across disciplines, to usher in postcolonial studies alongside and as integral to UW-Madison's French department's focus on feminist practice. To think of Songolo's work as a professional, as a humanist is to think through the profound possibilities of how gender studies, feminist practice, and thinking the "inheritances of the colonial" (title of an exhibit curated by Wendeline Flores and Wayne Modest 2022) are de facto intersectional. And like Césaire too, for much of his career, he did his work alongside, in honor and reciprocity with another crucial mind, his wife and intellectual partner, Émilie Songolo. It is only now, in a current moment in which a less subtle public sphere misinterprets identity politics as a potential evil twin to discourses of hybridity and creolization, that we are fully conscious of what Songolo bestowed upon us as scholars and pedagogues: namely, that identity—and its politics—and creolization are intertwined, like Condé's "mangrove," a 1989 novel he assigned and read with us as graduate students.

Today, almost twenty-five years since I first met Aliko, we realize how rare it is to be taught by someone who is so expansive in his thinking as to already have been feminist before he joined a department lead by Elaine Marks, and who was in his most deep humanistic being, intersectional *avant la lettre*. The depth with which he engaged the notions of Césairian *négritude* as Glissantian Opacity, rather than posit them as necessarily in contradiction, was for us the common



ground onto which we entered into our own professional lives, informing generations of scholars at the African Literature Association. Aliko's work has been a tour-de-force in creating not just the idea of a "new humanism," but he also constructed a veritable structural context, one that has only burgeoned. Aliko models how structural change takes place. Few are those to *do* and not just theorize. May we continue to draw out the lessons he continues to bestow upon us. As they say in Haitian Kreyòl: *Lonè ak respè*.

By Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken
Former PhD student



Welcoming Assistant Professor **Warrick Moses**



Warrick Moses (Ph.D. in African and African American studies with a secondary field in ethnomusicology from Harvard University) joined our department in 2022 as an Assistant Professor. Read below to learn more about him.

What is your main area of research, and how did you get into that area of focus?

Broadly, I write about the intersections of race and music. Most of my work looks at racial and linguistic identity in hip-hop among the “mixed race” or “Coloured” community (a contentious racialized term specific to South Africa) in Cape Town, South Africa. I grew up in Cape Town and started my graduate career as a performance major in the Western art music tradition. I gradually became interested in more culturally sustaining content and teaching methods, as well as musical advocacy – looking at the socio-political context of South African hip-hop from an anthropological/music theoretical lens seemed like a good fit for that.

What is your favorite thing about the ACS department, UW, and/or Madison so far?

There’s an interactive sculpture in the UW Discovery Center called “Fibonacci Chimes” where a series of light patterns and sounds are triggered by stepping on a granite plaque embedded in the floor. Not too many people seem to know about this triggering mechanism though. I spend a lot of time in the seating area of the Discovery Center meeting with students or doing my own work, and it’s always fun to see people’s reactions for the first time as they experience this sound-and-light show unexpectedly going off.

What are your passions, hobbies, and interests outside of academia?

I like going to gigs; Madison has some pretty good acts coming through. I cycle when it’s not freezing cold, and occasionally make bad art. I wouldn’t exactly call myself a “sneaker head” but I do have an ever-growing collection of high tops.



Warrick gives a talk titled “[Towards an African \(Afro\) Futurism](#)” for the UW-Madison African Studies program’s “Africa at Noon” series.

Q&A with Adeola Agoke

New director of the language program

What is your main area of research, and how did you get into that area of focus?

My research interest is in sociocultural and applied and linguistics. I am particularly interested in exploring language use and how issues of power and nuanced social cultural experiences intersect interactional practices in and out of educational contexts. The nature of power and social issues that occur at the intersection of formal and informal language practice is focal to my

research. I examine the classroom as a fraction of the macro social structures where policies and sociocultural norms inform practices of language use and pedagogy. It is from this critical lens that I bring research to African language programming and instructions.

My interest in research of language, society, and cultural practices began from my experience growing up in a linguistically diverse nation, Nigeria. Growing up in Nigeria automatically ushered me into multilingualism, an experience that later guided my curiosity about language acquisition, language use, and learning. My interest in practices of language use inform my academic training in sociolinguistics, cultural studies, and foreign language pedagogy.

As the new director, what are your early goals or hopes for our language program?

My immediate mission is to sustain and further strengthen our language program. First, I will enhance capacities for effective language instruction by creating platforms to effectively communicate the rationale for all pedagogical goals, instructional strategies, and expectations to the language instructors. If these rationales are understood, instructors are likely to embrace it, give their best

to teaching and learning of the languages, and be willing to explore the skills they acquire for their personal development. Second, I am enthusiastic about providing the ACS language instructors team with pedagogical opportunities that will enhance collaboration among them and other language instructors on campus and from other universities. I am in conversation with the Language Institute at UW Madison to work on this.

Also, it is my goal to develop the languages we currently offer through the African Language Program such that students in UW and in the Madison Metropolitan School District see the value in taking these languages and can enroll in the various language classes that we offer. Chief of all, is my goal to expand the capacity for research in African language learning and teaching, an aspect that has not gained a lot of attention in the US collegiate environment and amongst African language pedagogues.

What are your passions, hobbies, and interests outside of academia?

I am passionate about giving back to my community in ways that allow me to use my expertise and other gifting that I am endowed with. I love to travel and I enjoy spending quality time with my family and friends.



Grad Student Spotlights

Omotola Okunlola

Ph.D. Candidate & Teaching Assistant

My dissertation research explores contemporary feminist politics in African literature and film. For this project, I draw on my educational and teaching background in literary studies, linguistics, and film studies to think through the social and material conditions that shape women's literary and cinematic representations in Africa. The financial assistance provided by the Ebrahim Hussein Fellowship, Institute for Regional and International Studies (IRIS), and a supplemental BLAC Foundation award have been tremendously helpful in collecting original research materials for this project, many of which involve archival materials as well as personal interviews with the female filmmakers themselves.



Vincent R. Ogoti

Mellon Public Humanities Fellow & Ph.D. Candidate

I am a Storytelling and Community Access Fellow at MYArts (Madison Youth Arts Center), an organization that provides young people in Madison opportunities to express themselves, discover the arts and create connections. MYArts serves as home to the Children's Theater of Madison and Madison Youth Choirs and provides desperately needed space for many youth arts organizations in Madison. As a Fellow, I use my humanities training to craft and share compelling stories that educate and inspire MYArts' stakeholders about the organization's mission and the impact of its work. My goal is to help people understand and connect with MyArts' cause and to motivate them to take action in support of the organization's work. As a theater practitioner and scholar, I recognize that art plays a vital role in creating sustainable communities by fostering young people's creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. These skills are essential for developing innovative and practical solutions to the complex challenges facing communities. I hope my storytelling will foster a sense of connection and belonging among the many organizations that call MYArts home.



Undergraduate Student Spotlight

Olivia Ligman

Majors: African Cultural Studies, International Studies

Certificates: Middle East Studies, Slavic Studies, Social Justice & Education, Global Languages, Cultures and Education

I chose the African Cultural Studies major because I am interested in the study of culture, languages and history. The ACS major allowed me to specialize in an area of the world that I had previously received little education on and provided courses that really piqued my interest. The interdisciplinary nature of the major meant I had the ability to explore all of the different aspects of cultural and area studies, many of which overlapped with my other academic areas of interest. Some of the first classes I took in this major completely changed my worldview and critical understanding, and I am so glad I chose this major.

My favorite thing about the ACS department is the people. From my instructors, to my advisor, to the FLAS coordinators, everyone has been more than willing to help and support my educational and personal success. As for wider UW-Madison, I really love the sense of community this university has, as well as the opportunities for involvement. My experience at UW and in the ACS department has allowed me to grow as a person, be a part of close-knit communities, and enhance my education in a niche, dedicated field.



My plans for the future are to graduate and pursue graduate school. As of right now, I'm not sure where I'll go, but I know I want to continue studying culture, policy, and intersectional approaches to justice. After college, I hope to work in international labor rights, language studies, and interdisciplinary socio-cultural research. I am so excited to see what opportunities arise!





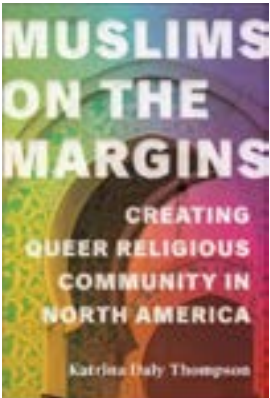
New Fall 2023 FIG Topic

This fall, African Cultural Studies will offer a newly created FIG topic. A FIG, or First-Year Interest Group, is a kind of academic learning community designed specifically for first-year students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Each FIG is a unique cluster of UW classes, linked together to explore a common theme or topic. The purpose of the FIGs Program is to provide an interesting, intimate, and interdisciplinary experience that helps students make a successful academic and social transition to the university.

In fall 2023, Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué will teach a new ACS FIG topic titled "African 202: Stylin' and Profilin' - From Lagos to Los Angeles." The course will use fashion as a useful tool to examine issues of culture, politics, economics, and gendered power across Africa from the late 1800s to the present. Students will examine how clothing and accessories reflect issues of ethnicity, nationality, race, class, sexuality, and gender, and will learn about the critical roles that fashion has played in larger movements including revolutions, nation building campaigns, identity politics, and globalization. Course materials will draw from diverse disciplines and sources including comic strips, graphic novels, animated cartoons, newspapers, films, podcasts, documentaries, Instagram, digital art, and street art as well as scholarly texts.



Faculty Updates



Katrina Daly Thompson’s *Muslims on the Margins: Creating Queer Religious Community in North America* offers vivid stories of nonconformist Muslim communities.

The turn of the twenty-first century ushered in a wave of progressive Muslims, whose modern interpretations and practices transformed the public’s perception of who could follow the teachings of Islam. *Muslims on the Margins* tells the story of their even more radical descendants: nonconformists who have reinterpreted their religion and created space for queer, trans, and nonbinary identities within Islam. Though not to be released until April, *Muslims on the Margins* is now available to [preorder on the NYU Press website](#).

Ainehi Edoro has been awarded a prestigious Mellon-Morgridge Professorship and selected for a Vilas Early Career Professorship for 2022-2025.

As a Mellon-Morgridge Professor, Ainehi will be supported in redirecting a portion of her time and energy toward building better and more innovative humanities classes. The Vilas Early Career Professorship will provide Ainehi with flexible funding between \$25,000 and \$100,000 over three years. The award is meant to recognize research and teaching excellence in faculty who are relatively early in their careers.



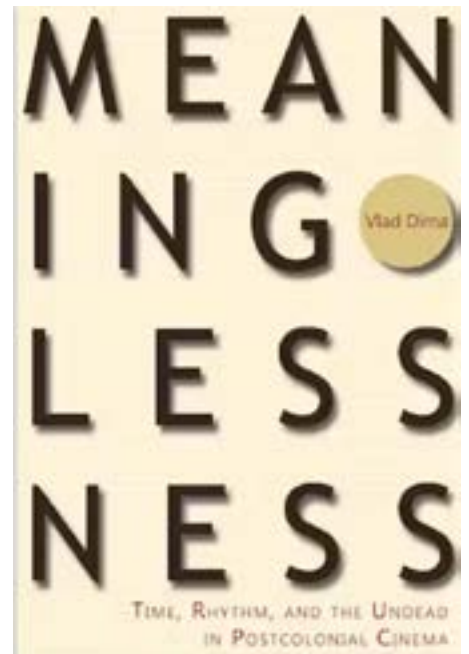
Samuel England awarded IRH Resident Fellowship for the 2023-2024 term.



Matthew Brown and Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué celebrated tenure in November 2022.



Previous department chair Vlad Dima’s new book *Meaninglessness* was released September 1, 2022.





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