

Description Africa-Asia, A New Axis Of Knowledge
Conference-Festival 3 Themes

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3. Economic Globalisation: Prosperity or Pain?
4. The Role of Local Communities: Society against States and Corporations?
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6. Arts, (Digital) Media and Culture: Creativities, Contestations and Collaborations
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1. Human-Nature-Technology: Interactions and Responses

The transformation of the planet -- desertification, melting glaciers, receding coastlines, and much else -- has been accelerated by human exploration, mining, coastal engineering, monoculture farming, infrastructure projects, nuclear testing, space exploration, genetic engineering, artificial intelligence (AI), and more. At the same time catastrophic droughts or floods as well as air and water pollution emergencies have become the global norm.

In this thematic cluster, we invite contributors to address questions associated with human-technology-nature interactions in Asian and African contexts. Topics include ecological vulnerabilities and their impact on human futures – droughts, floods, and other natural degradations – as well as the role of new technologies in transforming societies and the environment. The theme includes geopolitical issues arising from ecological exploitation and governance such as surveillance platforms, militarization, regulation, and international coalitions and competitions, and how these interact with questions of sustainability, human and social needs.

Local context

The African continent as a whole and the Western/North African Sahelian region in particular are experiencing many ecological transformations caused by human activities, including the exhaustion of fish stocks off the coasts of Senegal and Mauritania, the over-exploitation of the Sahelian soils by industrial agriculture, illegal logging and deforestation that contributes to growing desertification. The region has fallen prey to mining and oil and gas extractive industries, many in the hands of multinational conglomerates, including from Asia. Political developments like the “Alliance of Sahelian States” and the election of the new Senegalese President will likely change the balance of power in the region even as new digital infrastructures raise questions of digital sovereignty.

What are the implications of these trends? How do they affect local populations and what are the strategies adopted by various stakeholders? In what ways are citizens responding to ecological and economic vulnerabilities that accompany these transitions?

2. Geo-political-economic Hegemonies: Cartographies and historiographies

In discussions of inter- and intra-continental, hemispheric, and marine connections in global history, of interest is the power dynamics among Asian, African, Middle-Eastern, European and American actors and their interactions across time and space. Historical imperialisms and transnational economic systems continue to affect Asian and African cartographies and their intersections, including European imperialism, Japanese, and now Chinese, political and economic intervention, and the US-promoted neoliberal order. Of interest is the growing multipolarity in these hegemonic systems as well as analysis of hegemony itself and how it relates to African and Asian experiences and interactions. Beyond the unequal effects of mobilities associated with slavery, colonialism, and geo-political hegemonies, we welcome attention to the historically diverse counter-hegemonic efforts, from anti-colonial and non-alignment movements to the emergence of a Global South consciousness, as exemplified also in Pan-Africanism and the Global Social Forum which originated in Latin America.

The many voices, stories, and objects – on land or underwater – that wait to be heard, found and narrated in this context, can help to stimulate new transnational historiographies relevant to the present time.



Local context

Dakar is a metropolis at the western tip of the African continent as well as the terminus of ancient Trans-Saharan and Silk Road trade routes. Ancient links between Asia and Africa have been unearthed, from Western Asian artefacts discovered off the coasts of Ghana to Chinese ceramics found in the heart of the ancient Malian Empire. Dakar faces Brazil's Northeast, and beyond it, Latin, Central and North America and the Caribbean, thus bringing the perspective of Atlantic oceanic history into view.

The transatlantic slave trade, its history exemplified on Gorée, an island off the port of Dakar, and European colonial empires both separated and connected Asia and Africa, not least through racialized creolization in the Caribbean and parts of what is now the United States. Caribbean Islands today combine elements of Asian and African 'heritages' with those of the indigenous populations and the former European 'masters'. French imperial and post-imperial entanglements resulted in the presence of small Southeast Asian communities in Senegal and Morocco, while in parts of Africa the Vietnamese victory at Diên Biên Phu was heralded as "the Bastille Day of European colonialism." Can we revisit the Africa-Asia axis through the prism of Atlantic connections? Are there configurations that might inform our understanding of connections that occurred in the Indian Oceanic space?

An acute contemporary question is the emergence, or resurgence of new hegemonic designs in West Africa. Will economic, political and security initiatives of China, the United States, and also Turkey, Russia and Morocco lead to a new "scramble for (West) Africa", developed perhaps at the expense of the earlier notion of *Françafrique*?

3. Economic Globalisation: Prosperity or Pain?

The pursuit and cost of material prosperity is the suggested theme in international political economy. The perceived disparity between economic development in Asia and Africa often underlies a comparison that sees Asian success as a blueprint for Africa. Asian economies have long inspired many in Africa, despite the prominence of Western models. China's growth has helped to revive this view in forums on "South-South cooperation". Today, Asia and Africa are part of a trend toward multi-centered globalization, one that some associate with a level of material prosperity aligned with social aspirations in the Global South. Meanwhile, some speak of "de-growth" in the West. What is the future of such conflicting views of economic development?

This cluster invites critical explorations in multiple disciplines of the parameters, indices, policies and ideologies undergirding narratives of economic growth, including its human and ecological costs. Processes of modernization and conceptions of modernity figure here, as does the international political system as both opportunity and obstacle. The tensions between material aspirations and social constraints reveal themselves in rural-urban divides, class and communal politics, and in the cultural and philosophical limits of the quest for economic growth itself.

Local context

In West Africa today, the visible economic presence of Chinese, and also Korean, Japanese, Indian, and Turkish actors has brought a re-appraisal of the region's economic options beyond its earlier exclusive, bilateral and largely neocolonial relations with Europe, and by extension, North America. The emergence of Asia in the region is a game changer. In Senegal and its neighbors, the local economy's growth and inclusion in the global supply chain has arguably resulted in increased



inequality. Some see these trends as the result of elite capture and the intersection of private and state interests. The pegging of local West African currencies to the Euro perpetuates neocolonial strangleholds such as those expressed in '*Françafrique'*. Recent domestic political crises in Senegal and other countries are largely the result of structural economic contradictions.

The question remains: Economic growth for whom? and for what kind of collective project? What is the role of Asian economic actors? How have parallel Asian institutions such as the New Development Bank and the AIIB presented alternatives to African economies, and how have Asian and African efforts either contributed to or confronted international roadblocks to more equitable development in West Africa and elsewhere on the continent.

4. The role of local communities: society against states and corporations?

The complicated interaction of community, society and state in Asia, Africa and elsewhere takes place in countries in different phases of nation-building and development, whose cities are often shaped by transnational corporations working in conjunction with the state and local authorities. Topics might include the ways in which local communities address issues of neighbourhood(s), rural–urban–peri-urban migration, urban infrastructure, gentrification, urban publics, or living in close proximity to such natural borders as coastlines and mountains.

Of interest is local communal agency and possible new forms of collective identity 'from below', such as the '*Kampung'* and '*Yan'* (local neighborhoods) in Indonesia and Thailand, and how they might be included in large-scale development projects. Also relevant are communities that have been marginalized or erased and their place in collective memory and alternate narratives (*Lamanat, Kafu, Lamu, Jamono*).

Local context

West African cities communities revolve around communal configurations rarely taken into account by states and corporations engaged in land-grabbing and other phenomena of displacement. Chinese, Turkish and Indian real estate firms speculate in high-rise housing for a new middle class in the cities, while large rural areas are swallowed by corporations like the Indian Senegindia group in the Senegal river basin. Even well-meaning initiatives like the preservation of the '*Langue de Barbarie'* against encroachments of the sea in the Senegalese city of Saint-Louis frequently ignore the needs of local fishermen and others. Are there examples of communal success in protecting local interests or of state and corporate agents successfully including the 'local' in their projects? How to interpret the rise of powerful non-state actors that stand in opposition to the state in the Sahel nations of Mali and Burkina Faso?

5. Knowledge-making: Institutions, Objects, Cultural Ownership

The subject here is the production, transmission and circulation of knowledge in a post-colonial, multi-centered, (possibly post-) neoliberal age. In addition to universities and the current focus on their international ranking rather than their local role as agents of social cohesion, there are alternate channels of knowledge creation and circulation, including innovations in curriculum, pedagogy and experiential knowledge.



The role of museums, libraries, and archives has changed, cellphones and social media have expanded their reach, and new and often informal sites of learning have emerged. The future of digital research and education as well as the civic role of the arts are also relevant. What problems and prospects come with the diversification of the sources of knowledge and how might they be managed?

Local context

Only a small minority of West African youth attend university, although their number has grown with the size of the population. The current educational and academic system was built on Western norms in a colonial context of producing elite knowledge, and with specializations later influenced by the World Bank or the IMF. Now national and regional public programmes are working to define an Africa-specific university model, e.g., the Association of African Universities (AAU), the African Universities Alliance (ARUA), in Accra, and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), in Dakar.

Civil society initiatives are important sources of knowledge beyond the colonial and neo-colonial legacies. The Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana (1961) works to unearth indigenous and vernacular forms of humanistic knowledge-generation; other efforts to 'Africanise' knowledge include CODESRIA (1973), the Global Africa (GA) platform of the University Gaston Berger, General History of Senegal (HGS) as well as such 'grassroot' projects as the Raw Material Company in Dakar, which fosters knowledge through artistic expressions emerging within the social communal fabric. *Biddew bou bess* pioneering a subtle mix of Afro and Asiatic bits.

Then there is the general need to deconstruct the 'Colonial Library' and decolonize knowledge, bearing in mind that these were partly a co-production of African and colonial forces. Epistemic freedom in the Global South would enable African and other peoples to think, theorize, interpret, and write about the world from their own social and cultural locations, developing "new axes of knowledge" from different contexts and experiences.

6. Arts, (Digital) Media and Culture: Creativities, Contestations and Collaborations

The question of cultural ownership and restitution of artifacts and antiquities among nation-states challenges traditional legal perspectives, governance policies and museum practices, particularly in the North. At the same time independent digital media have accelerated exchanges and intensified contestations around identity-based politics, often with highly divisive consequences. Meanwhile an expanded space offers opportunities for media-artists, online whistle-blowers, public educators, and advocates associated with social movements in a number of African and Asian societies.

In addition to proposals that critically assess the role of the arts, media, and culture in Asia and Africa, questions related to 'whose voice', 'whose heritage' are a key focus. We also welcome contributions from artists, designers, filmmakers, writers, dramatists and performers exploring civic and popular forms of expression. We encourage contributions from different disciplines and professions, including publicists, artists, designers and curators engaged in projects in Asia and Africa.

Local context

In West Africa, as in many regions of the world, the debate on restitution of looted arts during the European colonial conquests, originally led by Europeans themselves, is accompanied by discussions

around lost cultural traditions in Africa, the question of political and public accountability, representation, and the expanding gap between official discourses and the views and needs of communities.

For instance, urban youth, adopting a cultural aesthetic at odds with post-colonial logics perpetuate a tradition of political protest through music, dance and graffiti in public spaces used as active sites of contestation.

In recent decades, digital platforms and social media have become vital spaces for creative experimentation and dissenting expression among the Senegalese and West African youth. Approaching social media as an extension of public space, - or as a space between the public and the private - we ask how the arts, culture and social networks (online and offline) are contributing to new forms of collaboration and protest to create a new knowledge-base in (and across) Africa and Asia.

7. Multiple Ontologies: Religions, Religiosities, Philosophies and Languages

The role of religion in everyday life is fundamental to understanding similarities and differences across Asia and Africa. While religion has served to support control by states, national or official languages have also contributed, since though colonial in origin, they marginalize indigenous languages and systems of belief along with their attendant cultural practices and customs. At the same time, movements of decolonization, indigeneity and human rights require careful context-based consideration in terms of citizenship and cultural belonging. For example, politically motivated abuse has been perpetrated in the name of religion and nation while religiosity can also be a source of hope, resilience, and transcendency.

Local context

Religion, Islam in particular, plays a critical role in the regulation and mediation of political and cultural conflicts in Senegalese society. This role has continued to expand amidst differences among the younger generation as to the nature and form it could take. There are a number of connections between members of the Muslim communities of North and West Africa and those in Southeast Asian countries, especially Indonesia and Malaysia. Another thread of connection concerns the concomitant rediscovery in the two continents of 'animist beliefs' and the search for ways to re-enchant and rebalance the relations between humans and their natural environment. Similarly, a number of initiatives in the West African context seek to revitalise marginalised vernacular languages and dialects with the intention of re-introducing local value-systems, world-views, and cosmologies.

8. Negotiating Margins: Power, Agencies, Representations, Resistances

As the anthropologist Anna Tsing suggests, margins force us to think about 'creative living at the edge', helping to grapple with acts of power arousing from the structural inequalities of race, caste, religion, ethnicity and gender that persist on regional, national, and global levels. Sadly, repression and violence abound, often at the hands of the nation-state, which claimed to support citizenship as a universal idea. Forms of marginalization and the dynamic representation, agency and resistance they engender are set against the unbridled exercise of power in 21st-century Asia and Africa.



Local context

West African and Senegalese youth mobilization and radicalization, aided by technology-mediated sociality, are resulting in creative social, political and cultural devices aiming to claim agency in societies characterised by patriarchal values and colonial and neo-colonial hierarchies. Presenting themselves as a forgotten, marginalised category, these youth seek to play the role of protagonists of transformation and social change.

In this section contributions might interrogate to what extent a critical, comparative approach along the Africa and Asia axis of inquiry can help to highlight the specific inclusive capacities as well as the exclusive inflexibilities of Western African societies.

9. Foodscapes: Cultivation, Livelihood, Gastronomy, Agrico-Cultural Exchanges, Appropriations

The focus here spans the discussions around organic food production, food resilience, security and sustainability, natural versus industrial farming, subsistence versus commercial agriculture, genetically modified versus indigenous seeds and crops, expansion of staples (especially rice and wheat), including the recent valorisation of millet by the UN, food processing, packaging, retailing industries, traditions and beliefs associated with food, food and tourism, food vendors, street food and the food fairs thriving in many parts of Asia and Africa. Participants might address shifting food habits in urban contexts facilitated by the emergence of the food-delivery applications that emerged during the pandemic and are part of the spread of fast-food chains, juxtaposed by counter movements like slow-food, vegetarianism, ethnic restaurants, reality food TV shows and the like. Other areas for exploration are global agricultural trade and value systems that have become integral to food production and consumption. Food exchange and practices are often shared across Africa and Asia, in an inter-continental entanglement that has existed since pre-historic times. One can consider Madagascar, for example, as an ecological-cultural meeting site and part of the Indian Oceanic crossroad, whose exchanges were later affected by the imports of staples from the Americas.

Local context

The culinary culture of Senegal has been influenced by nations in North Africa, Europe, and also Asia, as well as by many ethnic groups, the Wolof being the largest. The recent heritagization of West African food culture has highlighted three dishes widely known and beloved in Senegal and led to a consciousness of recipes, ingredients, practices and spaces of cooking and transnational exchange. The fish-and-rice specialty *Thiéboudienne*, which has been labeled the Senegalese national dish, has links with the broken-rice cuisine of the Southeast countries of former French Indochina. Other dishes like *Yassa*, with its onion-based sauce served over rice, and *Mafé,* a meat stew with tomato and peanut sauce, have counterparts elsewhere as well.

The history of this cuisine is connected with changes in Senegalese agricultural practices, notably as a result of the colonial experience. *Nem,* a relatively new 'national' dish, came from the spring rolls Senegalese Riflemen and their wives brought from Vietnam. Pastels stuffed with minced meat and vermicelli, are known as 'Chinese bread'. This theme explores the ways in which an integrated knowledge of African (and Asian) food and livelihood cultures serve as a vector of inclusion and emancipation among different constituencies in the region.



10. Well-being, Sport (football!), Medicine: Living and Dying in Cross-cultural Perspective

This cluster focuses on infection, disease, nutrition, hygiene, sanitation, confinement, cultures of care, reproduction, healing, birth, death, euthanasia, pain, trauma emotions as well as notions of the mind and body, not only within diverse systems of health but also in public health governance at the local as well as national and global levels. Topics include how the state and communities negotiate preventive healthcare through digital platforms of bio-surveillance, for instance, or through participatory platforms involving non-governmental organisations and community-based public health centres and practitioners. Related topics are the coexistence of formal and informal health practices, the role of local practitioners in times of health epidemics, culturally sensitive tensions around burial practices and beliefs regarding the afterlife.

We also invite contributions on professional sport regimes in the global neo-liberal context, including women and the sports industry as well as the history and sociology of popular sports like football, basketball, hockey, and cricket among Asian and African populations. The culture of football in particular constitutes a focal point of comparison and connection between the two.

Another area of interest is the relationship between well-being and the global growth of wellness technologies and industries. Discussions on the development of adequate health-care and geriatric-care systems are welcome. How can African and some Asian societies, still experiencing strong demographic growth, address future needs, not only in educational and professional opportunities, but also in health care and provisions for aging populations, youth populations, as well as in bio-surveillance during epidemics? There are associated concerns over the role of sport, health care and gastronomy as engines of economic growth.

Local context

Health systems in Sub-Saharan and West Africa have long been burden with a double plague of communicable and non-communicable diseases and most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the advances in health-care across the world, the region continues to lag behind. COVID-19 revealed the malfunctioning of the health system globally and particularly in Africa. China was deeply involved during the pandemic, conducting an active "vaccine diplomacy" at the heart of a new "Health Silk Roads" strategy. Media images circulated of masks and other protective equipment in boxes bearing a prominent Chinese flag, and today Chinese medical missions continue to reinforce the image of Chinese medical expertise in Africa. Meanwhile, Asian doctors and medical centres, massage and acupuncture services, have opened in Dakar. In a demographically ‘young’ environment like that of West Africa, questions associated with ageing and well-dying may seem to figure as of less urgent concern. In this respect, too, a dialogue with such issues in Asian societies could prove useful.

11. ‘Pan-Africanism’, ‘Bandung Spirit’, ‘Global South’ Futures and the New World Order

This cluster seeks to harness contributions that engage directly with the ideas and promises first articulated at the Afro-Asian Conference of Bandung, in Indonesia, in 1955, followed by the call for unity among African nations through the aspirational notion of Pan-Africanism.

The concept of an African-Asian solidarity does not always come naturally. There have been questions around the invocation of these solidarities for political gain and self-serving interests. The inclusion of Africa into China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' gave the initiative a clearer 'Southern' character, one epitomized by the expanding BRICS alliance. There is an emerging realization of shared interests and views across different 'Southern' regions of Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, linked to the notion of a living 'Global South'. Yet the incorporation of such interests on the international stage by countries like China, India and Russia have left many confused or skeptical, particularly in its counterpart, the Global North. There is thus a growing interest among both academic and political experts in the question of the Global South – both as a concept and a trans-regional political practice across Asia and Africa.

Local context

The current political mood in West African countries, especially in Senegal, revolves around the possibility for the countries in the region to emancipate themselves from the remnants of neocolonial-neoliberal exploitation. There is a strong desire to re-imagine a democratic and developmental project built on local and culturally-sensitive foundations. The global presence of Asia -- concomitant with the relative decline, at least in local perceptions, of the West and its institutions -- the digital revolution, and the general improvement in basic infrastructure -- often thanks to Chinese and Asian investments -- have created an enhanced collective awareness and a politicization of societal development in its broadest sense.

In Senegal, the political crisis of the last three years, prior to the election of President Diomaye Faye in March 2024, was born from the emergence of a powerful popular opposition movement whose message reflects these emancipatory aspirations, especially among youth. This cluster addresses the often-competing challenges faced by countries of the Global South, the burdens of their past political structures and institutions, and the emancipating imaginaries of the future, especially in the light of comparisons and exchange.

12. 'Africa-Asia' in an Entangled World: Migrations, Diasporas, Creolities

In this era of global human entanglement, hyphenised Africans, Asians and 'AfricAsians'/'Afrasians' constitute a global human reality that embodies expressions of close connections, if not hybridization, between the two entities. This phenomenon is not new, long the experience of maritime and island societies of the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean, and the southern tip and eastern regions of the African continent. The renewal of Afro-Asian interconnections is already strong in the cultural and artistic realm as well as in the fields of fashion, music, sports. This cluster welcomes explorations of such themes, both past and present, particularly as they relate to communities' self-awareness, self-expression, and identities, with their potential effects on broader society.

Local context

Senegal, but also Morocco, Mali, Guinea and other West African countries, have a special connection with the peoples of former colonial Indochina (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam). Many Senegalese *Tirailleurs* (riflemen) were sent by the French occupiers to fight against the Vietnamese independence movement in the 1950s. A number of them returned home with their Vietnamese wives, leading to the growth of a small but vibrant Senegalese-Vietnamese community. Today these 'Senegalese-

Asians', are joined by first-generation Chinese and Indians who have come to work and do business in the West African country. Meanwhile, Senegalese traders are found in the Asian metropolises of Dubai, Bangkok and Guangzhou. No doubt they, too, will contribute to the expansion of the Senegalese-Asian community, one increasingly more diverse in its origins. How does one think about this growing Asian-African social group and subjectivity in West Africa and beyond?