

# THE AFRICAN HUMANITIES PROJECT

## FORM, PRACTICE, THEORY

# WORKSHOP

II



DECEMBER 8 - 10, 2025



UM6P BENGUERIR CAMPUS TAROUDANT ROOM / 2017

CONTACT US :



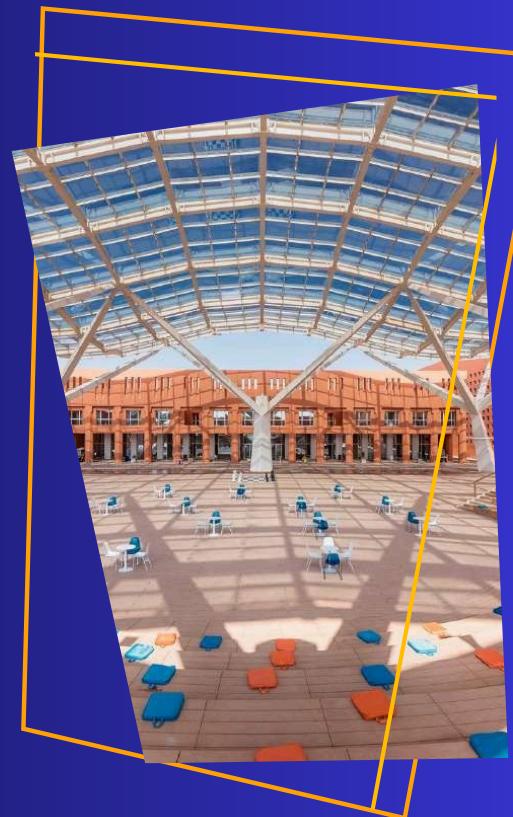
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# The African Humanities Project

Form, Practice,  
Theory



# Workshop Presentation

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# Project Narrative

**The African Humanities Project Workshop II** will continue the collective work of rethinking the human from African perspectives, inspired by Sylvia Wynter's call for a "new science of the word." Building on the first workshop (December 2024), the meeting will focus on how form, practice, and theory shape African humanities in scholarship, pedagogy, and creative practice.

## Objectives:

- Explore how engagement with objects—material, textual, sonic, visual, performative—generates new theoretical insights.
- Examine experimental and interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge, justice, and humanity.
- Advance innovative methods for representing, teaching, and performing African thought.

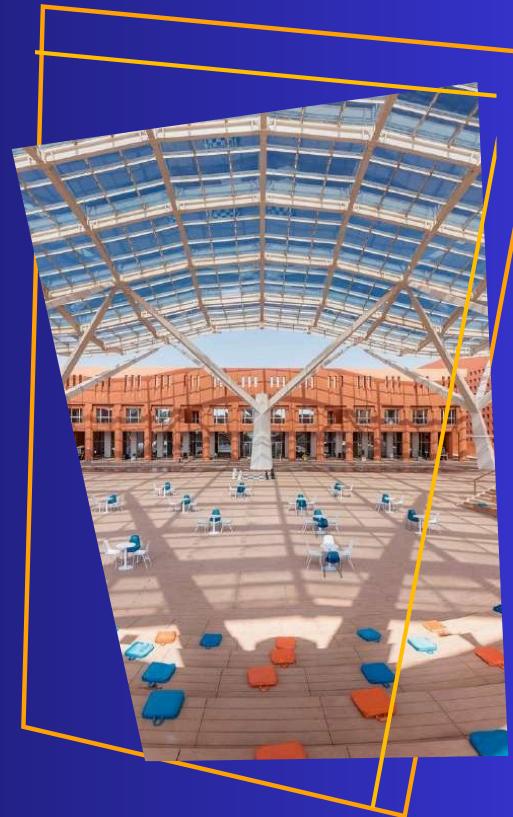
## Program Overview:

- December 8–9: Presentations and discussions on the central themes of form, practice, and theory in African humanities.
- December 10: Collaborative session to co-develop a pilot module for an object-oriented MOOC, supporting pedagogical innovation.
- Preparation of revised papers for a forthcoming edited volume to be published in 2026.

This workshop will advance the African Humanities Project as a living experiment in scholarship and teaching, fostering new intellectual communities and contributing to a reimagining of the human for the 21st century.

# The African Humanities Project

Form, Practice,  
Theory



# Program

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# WORKSHOP PROGRAM

Monday, December 8, 2025

*Conference room : Taroudant / 2017*

9:00 a.m– 9:15 a.m	Opening Speech : <b>Ali Benmakhlof</b> : Director of CAS -UM6P
9:15 a.m – 1:00 p.m	Moderator : <b>Ali Benmakhlof</b>  <b>Decolonizing Process</b>
9:15 a.m – 9:40 a.m	<b>Oumelbanine Zhiri</b> (University of California, San Diego): <i>Translation and Philology in the Early Modern Maghreb</i>
9:50 a.m – 10:15 a.m	<b>Souleymane Bachir Diagne</b> (Columbia University): <i>African Humanities and the Injonction to Decolonize</i>
10:25 a.m – 11:00 a.m	<b>Coffee Break</b>
11:00 a.m – 11:25 a.m	<b>Ousmane Traore</b> (Pomona College): <i>The African Worlds: Affinities, Cultures, and Ideas of African Societies Across Time and Space</i>
11:35 a.m – 12:00 p.m	<b>Houssine Dehbi</b> (CAS -UM6P): <i>Beyond Resistance: Abdulrazak Gurnah and the Quiet Subversion of Postcolonial Reading Habits</i>
12:10 p.m – 1:00 p.m	<b>General Discussion</b>
1:00 p.m – 2:15 p.m	<b>Lunch Break</b>
2:30 p.m – 6:00 p.m	Moderator: Laurent Jaffro  <b>Knowing and constructing Africa</b>
2:30 p.m– 2:55 p.m	<b>Wendell Marsh</b> (CAS -UM6P): <i>The African Humanities Project between Critique and Construction</i>
3:05 p.m – 3:30 p.m	<b>Mamadou Diouf</b> (Columbia University): <i>In Search of (Building) African Humanities Libraries</i>
3:40 p.m – 4:05 p.m	<b>Coffee Break</b>
4:05 p.m – 4:30 p.m	<b>Mame Mor Ndiaye</b> (Paris1 Pantheon- Sorbonne University): <i>"Afrotopia: a heuristic tool for African Humanities"</i>
4:40 p.m – 5:05 p.m	<b>Aude Tournaye</b> (Columbia University): <i>"Unwriting the Alphabet: Frédéric Bruly Bouabré and the Art of Knowing Otherwise"</i>
5:10 p.m – 6:00 p.m	<b>General Discussion</b>

# WORKSHOP PROGRAM

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

*Conference room : Taroudant / 2017*

9:30 a.m – 1:00 p.m	Moderator : Zhiri Oumelbanine <b>Producing discourses on Africa</b>
9:30 a.m – 9:55 a.m	<b>Asad Ahmed</b> (University of California, Berkeley): <i>Language and Loss: Islam and the Work of the Humanities</i>
10:05 a.m – 10:30 a.m	<b>Madina Thiam</b> (New York University): <i>Writing and Hearing</i>
10:40 a.m – 11:00 a.m	<b>Coffee Break</b>
11:00 a.m – 11:25 a.m	<b>Yuanlong He</b> (Columbia University): <i>Chinese Imaginaries of Africa.</i>
11:35 a.m – 12:00 p.m	<b>Jinny Prais</b> (Columbia University): <i>African Humanities in the classroom</i>
12:10 p.m – 1:00 p.m	<b>General Discussion</b>
1:00 p.m – 2:15 p.m	<b>Lunch Break</b>
2:30 p.m – 6:00 p.m	Moderator: Madina Thiam <b>Building new categories</b>
2:30 p.m – 2:55 p.m	<b>Oyeronke Oyewumi</b> (Stony Brook University): <i>The African Humanities and the Challenge of Gender Categorization and Other Blind Spots</i>
3:05 p.m – 3:30 p.m	<b>Sabrine Hakam</b> (CAS -UM6P): <i>Material Humanisms and the Aesthetic Grammar of Power</i>
3:40 p.m – 4:00 p.m	<b>Coffee Break</b>
4:00 p.m – 4:25 p.m	<b>Aymen Tahin</b> (Paris1 Pantheon- Sorbonne University): <i>Entangled and Grounded Histories, re-opening the case of Morocco's XXth century Aesthetics</i>
4:35 p.m – 5:00 p.m	<b>Modupeola Oyeyemi</b> (CAS -UM6P): <i>Learning Through Cloth: Adiré and the Fabric of African Humanities</i>
5:10 p.m – 6:00 p.m	<b>General Discussion</b>

## Brief for The Curriculum Development Studio

**Goal:** The goal of the Curriculum Development Studio is to provide the space and time together to quickly prototype a lean learning module for a hypothetical Massive Online Open Course in African Humanities.

Africa's youth are making an organic demand for greater access to education that empowers them to live meaningful lives. Shifts in the planet's geopolitical terrain, the emergence of epoch-changing technologies, and new economic horizons have created new possibilities for African articulations of knowledge production and circulation. In other words, the present just might be the time when, as Ghanaian novelist Ayi Kwei Armah described it, the "beautiful ones" are born. They will need an education suited to their beauty.

Curriculum development is thus a pillar of the African Humanities Project. The attention to pedagogy forms a key component in our efforts to both respond to the organic demands of our times as well as to shift from a critique of Africa's marginalization within academic humanism to develop a humanism "to the measure of the world." The scene of teaching also situates the question of how we might perform the work of the African humanities.

Provisionally, we are working with an object-oriented definition of the humanities offered by Laurent Jaffro at last year's workshop. We are treating the humanities as *the cultivation of sensitivity towards the qualities of objects*. While "object" invokes material objects, we understand it to mean any article that is subjected to human sensory perception, such as a text, a painting, an item used for ritual purposes, quotidian ephemera, etc. The object is never given but is made by our attention devoted to it. This definition is useful for highlighting a distinction between a "softer" humanistic sensibility and "hard" dominant approaches to knowledge. In contrast, the cognitive skills of analysis and of "problem-solving" (i.e. the kinds of aptitudes elaborated in the scientific mode and increasingly delegated to artificial intelligence) tends towards insensitivity, and what Aimé Cesaire famously described as "thingification." "The humanities," then, refer less to a group of disciplines or topics that already exist in the world that we might "cover" or represent, than to a set of practices, processes, and ultimately, an attitude.

Accordingly, the Curriculum Development Studio will give participants of the second African Humanities Project Workshop the occasion to *think and do together* in a process-oriented experience of making and playing with forms, practices, and theories for the field. It takes as its inspiration the working space of the artist more than the controlled environment of the scientist's laboratory. Consider this working session to be a collective improvisation in curriculum development as opposed to the setting of an agenda or the planning of an actual course. So, let's jam!

## Background on Massive Online Courses

The following is provided to give participants a shared reference for thinking about massive online courses and their learning modules. It is not necessary for you to review all of these materials. But, it may enhance your understanding of the proposed vision. It might be especially useful to look at the videos about the example courses below.

**Definitions:** Massive Open Online Courses are classes that accommodate thousands of students learning a subject using networked technologies. They are typically organized as clusters of modules. A module is defined as a 2-3 hour period of instruction and up to 4-to-6 hours of student work. "Instruction" includes recorded lectures, reading, and online activities. The hypothetical audience is Africa-based undergraduate students competent in English. Modules consist of:

1. Learning Objectives
2. Object of Reflection
3. Contextual and theoretical material/ Multi-modal content relating to the object
4. Learning Activities
5. Assessments

**Course Examples:** There are two examples of online courses that leverage technology to extend, amplify, and transform what is possible for a college class. Both examples are on topics and subjects that might conventionally be defined as "humanities," and their wild success reveals the assumption that students are no longer interested in this kind of learning to be false. As models, they enliven our imagination in preparation for conducting this collective experiment and motivate us to engage in an open-ended process even though it might take us outside of our comfort and area of expertise.

1. ModPo : Introduction to Modern Poetry (University of Pennsylvania) –
  - a. Description: From their website: "ModPo is a fast-paced introduction to modern and contemporary U.S. poetry, with an emphasis on experimental verse, from Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman to the present. Participants (who need no prior experience with poetry) will learn how to read poems that are supposedly "difficult." We encounter and discuss the poems one at a time. It's much easier than it seems! If you are curious about the ModPo team, watch the 20-minute introductory video below. You will get an overview of the course and will meet the brilliant TAs, who will be encountering the poems with you all the way to the end."
  - b. Videos:
    - i. Three-minute trailer video can be found here:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ho7MSvu5LYo>
    - ii. Twenty-minute introductory video can be found here:  
<https://youtu.be/717BLsQHs5M?si=c62xf4lzBrQog1ts>

c. References

- i. **Proponent** – Al Filreis, *The Classroom and the Crowd: Poetry and the Promise of Digital Community*, Columbia University Press, 2025
- ii. **Critic** – Justin Reich, *Failure to disrupt: Why technology alone can't transform education*. Harvard University Press, 2020. Reich offers a critical take on the failure of MOOCs to deliver on the promises that were made in their name in the early 2010s. It offers a sobering reminder that the technology and the form, by itself, will not achieve transformative goals.
- iii. **Pragmatist** - Jonathan Haber, *MOOCs*. MIT Press, 2014. Jonathan Haber splits the difference between techno-optimism and techno-pessimism, arguing instead that MOOCs address concrete problems and offer real benefits if implemented intentionally. This also serves as a good primer on history, theory and forms of online education more generally. Haber, Jonathan. *MOOCs*. MIT Press, 2014. Haber has also done great work on teaching *critical thinking* in an accessible way with a view to real-life applications.

2. [Anthro101: Anthropology for Everyone](#) (Global network, spearheaded by Mike Wesch at Kansas State University)

- a. Description: (From the website)
  - i. What is ANTH 101? ANTH 101 is many things, including:
    1. a free alternative to expensive Introduction to Cultural Anthropology textbooks
    2. a full textbook, original videos, podcasts, and curated digital materials
    3. a unique anthropology class featuring 10 challenges for transformative learning
    4. a “connected course” of many faculty around the world sharing materials
    5. an open course freely available to anyone online
  - ii. “The free online course ANTH101: Anthropology for Everyone has been highly successful, based on positive student feedback, widespread adoption by instructors, and significant engagement on social media platforms. The course is noted for its transformative learning approach, which encourages students to apply anthropological concepts to their own lives.”
- b. Videos
  - i. Course Trailer 3 min, 10 sec: <https://youtu.be/2WllaxUZnBs?si=5AgdCdoKajcUMb7q>
  - ii. ANTH 101 Welcome Video 16 min, 19 sec: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ho7MSvu5LYo>
  - iii. ANTH 101 Student Testimonials 5 min, 8 sec: [https://youtu.be/A1clegYOlg4?si=OQcz63RPI-W-z\\_m2](https://youtu.be/A1clegYOlg4?si=OQcz63RPI-W-z_m2)

# WORKSHOP PROGRAM

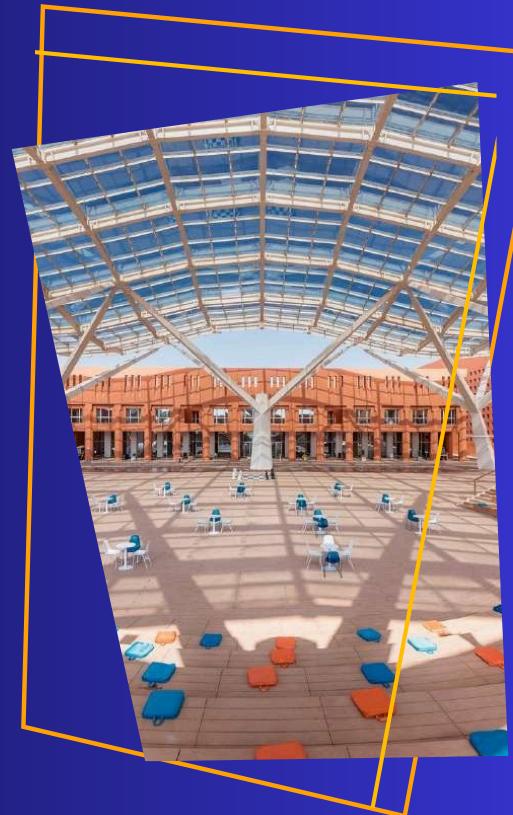
**Wednesday, December 10, 2025**

*Conference rooms: Laayoune & Benguerir / SHBM*

<b>9:00 a.m – 1:00 p.m</b>	
<b>9:00 a.m – 9:30 a.m</b>	Opening & Encountering an Object: Close Looking & Inquiry
<b>9:30 a.m – 10:00 a.m</b>	Introduction to Object-Based Learning
<b>10:10 a.m – 11:00 a.m</b>	Group Activity: Designing the Learning Module (Part I)
<b>11:00 a.m – 11:15 a.m</b>	<b>Coffee Break</b>
<b>11:20 a.m – 12:00 p.m</b>	Group Activity: Designing the Learning Module (Part 2)
<b>12:00 p.m – 12:30 p.m</b>	Group Presentations and Peer Review
<b>12:30 p.m – 1:00 p.m</b>	Synthesis and Next Steps
<b>1:00 p.m</b>	<b>Lunch Break</b>

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# Keynote Speakers

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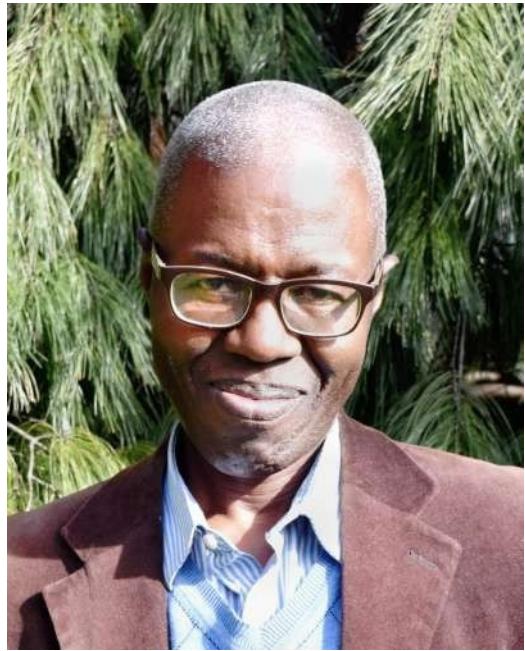


**Oumelbanine Zhiri** is a professor at UCSD (University of California, San Diego), where she teaches French, Arabic and comparative literature, and world history. Her research focuses on the literatures and cultures of Europe, North Africa, and Europe during early modernity (16th, 17th, and 18th centuries). She is particularly interested in the cultural

connections between these regions, including geographical representations and travel narratives, diplomatic, political and legal relations, intellectual and artistic exchanges. She has worked extensively on early modern brokers who contributed to the development of cultural links between Europe and North Africa, including Hasan al-Wazzân / Jean Léon l'Africain, and Ahmad ibn Qâsim al-Hajarî.

## **TITLE : Translation and Philology in the Early Modern Maghreb**

**ABSTRACT :** A remarkable movement of translation in the early modern Maghreb involved the exiles from Spain. These include the population that the Spaniards called the Moriscos, meaning the people who were forcibly converted to Christianity and their descendants. Their intellectual elite produced several important texts in the first half of the seventeenth century. An important hallmark of this body of literature is that it is closely connected to translation, between Spanish and Arabic, in both directions. Some of these authors adapted Arabic texts into Spanish for a readership of compatriots whose knowledge of Arabic was lacking. This presentation analyzes how some of these works connected between the philological practices of Europe and the Maghreb.



**Souleymane Bachir Diagne** is a Senegalese philosopher and a professor at Columbia University, where he directs the Institute of African Studies. After studying at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris and earning a doctorate from the Sorbonne, he taught for many years in Senegal and at Northwestern University before joining Columbia. His work focuses on the history of logic, Islamic philosophy, African philosophy, and literature, advocating for a universalism that embraces diverse cultural perspectives.

## **TITLE :** African Humanities and the Injunction to Decolonize

### **ABSTRACT :**

“Decolonize the mind” to create the domain that will truly be the field of African Humanities: this is the injunction that Ngugi Wa Thiong'o addresses to “us.” And this injunction is at the same time that of realizing that African languages alone are capable of authentically conveying these African Humanities. My argument questions this injunction and aims to show, using the example of philosophy, that African humanities will develop in heteroglossia, according to a translational model of the decolonization of knowledge.



**Ousmane Traoré** is an Associate Professor of African History at Pomona College (Southern California). His research focuses on the history of imperialism and colonialism in Africa. His research interests also include the place of trans-Saharan Africa in world history, slavery in Africa, and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Using a global perspective, his work analyzes diplomatic relations and negotiations at the heart of the early and modern cross-cultural encounters between West Africa, North Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas. He is the

author of *Slavery, resistance, and Identity in Early Modern West Africa. The Ethnic State of Gajaaga*. Cambridge University Press, 2023.

**TITLE :** *The African Worlds : Affinities, Cultures, and Ideas of African Societies Across Time and Space.*

**ABSTRACT :** *The African Worlds* explores the ancient history of Africa up to the early Christian era. Anchored in the longue durée, the book investigates diverse historical and geographical contexts across the continent, mapping the African world through its racial diversity, cultural pluralism, technological innovations, and the dissemination of scientific and religious logics. It traces the geographic and temporal development of humanism in Africa's past by examining belief systems, proto-historic funeral necropoleis, spiritual traditions, fauna and flora, societies created and maintained by women, as well as indigenous modes of knowledge production and transmission. Because *The African Worlds* endeavors to historicize African multiplicity and globality against colonial classification systems, it recognizes that racial categories are colonial constructions and challenges the limitations of using Blackness as the primary means of understanding Africanness. Ultimately, any emphasis on phenotype fails to capture the diversity of Africa and its communities.



**Hioussine Dehbi** is a second-year PhD student at UM6P's Center for African Studies, specializes in Anglophone African literatures. His research centers on the work of 2021 Nobel laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah, exploring the formal narrative strategies and recurring thematic concerns of migration, belonging, and home within Gurnah's literary oeuvre.

## **TITLE :** Beyond Resistance: Abdulrazak Gurnah and the Quiet Subversion of Postcolonial Reading Habits.

**ABSTRACT :** Literary categorization is an act of power. Labels such as "African Postcolonial Literature" are not neutral descriptors but critical frameworks that establish expectations, dictate value, and shape reception. This paper interrogates the tyranny of these labels by deconstructing the dominant critical paradigms—Commonwealth Literature, Postcolonial Studies, and the World Literature market—that have historically defined the reading of African writing. It argues that these frameworks privilege a narrow set of narratives, primarily centred on explicit resistance, colonial trauma, and notions of cultural authenticity, while simultaneously favouring literary forms like social realism and national allegory. This creates a prescriptive loop where authors who fulfil these expectations are celebrated, while those who deviate are often marginalized or misunderstood. In response, this presentation positions the work of Nobel laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah as a potent counterpoint to these hegemonic systems. Gurnah's fiction deliberately sits uneasily within established categories. Rather than offering grand narratives of anti-colonial triumph or pristine pre-colonial cultures, his novels delve into the ambivalences, complicities, and quiet betrayals of the colonial and postcolonial experience. He explores the intimate, often ugly, human dynamics within systems of power, refusing the clean binaries of colonizer/colonized or resistance/collaboration. By analyzing Gurnah's nuanced characterizations and his focus on migration, memory, and unresolved pasts, this paper demonstrates how his work actively resists the critical desire for easily consumable "postcolonial" products.



**Wendell Marsh** is Assistant Professor of Africana Studies at Rutgers University- Newark. He received a PhD from the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies and from the Institute of Comparative Literature and Society at Columbia University in 2018. His scholarship focuses on African-Arabic textuality, the intellectual history of Islam in Africa and the African Diaspora, and religious studies. His first research project focuses on texts by and about the Muslim polymath from colonial Senegal Shaykh Musa Kamara.

He has been awarded the Fulbright fellowship, a Ford dissertation fellowship, and a postdoc at the Buffett Institute for Global Studies at Northwestern University.

### **TITLE : The African Humanities Project between Critique and Construction**

**ABSTRACT :** Dramatic change in the global order, rapid technological transformation, and paradigm shifts in knowledge production have undermined the traditional warrants of the humanities. At the same time, leaders in higher education and industry alike have signaled the limits of an exclusively techno-scientific training, highlighting the unique benefits of a liberal arts formation. The near future offers a unique opportunity to design and implement programs that respond to emergent needs while preserving the best of humanistic learning. This paper seeks to frame the African Humanities Project as a timely intervention in knowledge production, university teaching and learning, and institutional innovation. It does so by making two key moves. First, it situates the project between current developments in the history and philosophy of the humanities and debates in the decolonization of knowledge in African Studies, while also drawing insights from science and technology studies. Second, it orients the project toward addressing concrete pedagogical needs within specific institutional contexts to ground reflection in real material constraints. Ultimately, it argues that the move from critique to construction will consist of making the African Humanities work.



**Mamadou Diouf** is the Leitner Family Professor of African Studies and the Director of Columbia University's Institute for African Studies. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Paris-Sorbonne. Before joining the faculty at Columbia University, he was the Charles D. Moody Jr. Collegiate Professor of History and African American Studies at the University of Michigan, from 2000 to 2007. Before that, he was Head of the Research, Information, and Documentation Department of the Council

for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and faculty member of the History Department of Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal. His research interests include urban, political, social and intellectual history in colonial and postcolonial Africa.

## **TITLE : Reclaiming In Search (Building) African Humanities Librairies**

**ABSTRACT :** The most significant intellectual adventures in humanities research, particularly in countries now commonly referred to as the Global South, have explored, in greater detail, the inventions and/or imaginations of the other of Europe, which, with the great discoveries of the 15th century, became the center, the reference point, and the yardstick for measuring humanity and its linear historical trajectory. “The Scent of the Father,” its fragrance—the English translation, *The Scent of the Father: Essay on the Limits of Life and Science in Sub-Saharan Africa* maintains the ambiguity of a good or bad smell—imposed or appropriate—has established a body of knowledge and an ethos that are part of the representation of which Europe is the architect and dispenser of resources (methods, theories, images, and imaginaries).



**Mame Mor Ndiaye** is a first-year PhD Candidate in the Department of Philosophy at Paris 1 Pantheon- Sorbonne University (ISJPS). He is writing a dissertation on “Western universalism and African philosophy: From the universal as principle to the achievement of its effectivity through the common prism of human rights”, under the supervision of the professor Magali Bessone.

## **TITLE : Afrotopia : A Heuristic Tool For African Humanities.**

**ABSTRACT :** In his seminal work, *Afrotopia*, published in French in 2016, Senegalese theorist Felwine Sarr explores what he calls Afrotopia, which captures a “site of another Africa, one whose arrival we should expedite in order to realize its brilliant potentials.” In doing so, he emphasizes the need to break free from European-centric categories, especially those derived from economic logic (such as capitalist notions of growth rates and progress) that have often been used to measure the advancement of African societies. Sarr's reflection on Afrotopia is frequently noted for its rejection of epistemic mimicry, articulated through powerful statements like, “Africa no longer needs to try to catch up with the rest of the world. It no longer needs to run on the same paths the world indicates for it”, However, it is important to recognize the broader dimension of Afrotopia as it examines “the fate of the African continent not only by scrutinizing the political, economic, social, and creative spheres, but also by identifying the sites where new practices and discourses have already begun to express themselves, where this future Africa can come into view.” In this context, *Afrotopia* places significant emphasis on the importance of African epistemic categories, symbolic creations, and aesthetic objects — essentially, African Humanities — and their role in education, training, and research across the continent. Inspired by this perspective, my contribution aims to underscore the often-overlooked role of African Humanities in Sarr's Afropopian project, and to demonstrate how his programmatic thinking can contribute to a new frontier of African Humanities in terms of conceptual renewal, discursive practices, and the formation of a new relational anthropology.



**Aude Tournaye** is a PhD student at Columbia's Department of Middle East, South Asia, and African Studies (MESAAS), she explores Senegalese art collectives' artistic and political contributions, particularly the Laboratoire Agit'Art, from the late 20th century.

## **TITLE : Unwriting the Alphabet: Frédéric Bruly Bouabré and the Art of Knowing Otherwise**

**ABSTRACT :** This paper takes Frédéric Bruly Bouabré's pictographic script as a starting point to rethink the place of knowledge within African humanities. Conceived not as art but as a system for storing and transmitting thought, Bouabré's Alphabet bétéwas later subsumed into the field of art, its epistemic ambition eclipsed by aesthetic interpretation. This passage from script to image, from writing to drawing, reveals the endurance of a hierarchy of forms inherited from colonial epistemologies—one that locates meaning and authority in alphabetic literacy while excluding other modes of inscription from the realm of reason.

By revisiting Bouabré's work as an experiment in building an alternative library—one that gathers and preserves knowledge through visual, oral, and spiritual means—the paper explores how African humanities might expand beyond the alphabetic order that has long defined their boundaries. Bouabré's practice interrogates what a library can be and what a script can do: it reclaims drawing as an act of thinking, inscription as relation, and art as a legitimate site of knowledge-making. In doing so, it gestures toward new architectures for African humanities, where archives of image, gesture, and vision coexist with those of text.



**Asad Q. Ahmed** is the Magistretti Distinguished Professor of Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures and Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Department of Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures and Affiliate Faculty in the Department of Philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley. He specializes in

early Islamic social history and pre-modern Islamic intellectual history, with a special focus on the rationalist disciplines, such as philosophy, logic, legal theories, and astronomy.

## **TITLE : Language and Loss: Islam and the Work of the Humanities**

**ABSTRACT :** The lecture is a reflection on the work of the humanities in academia and its impact on and instrumentalization for the production of communities of discourse. The paper presents some aspects related to reading, canon, translation, and educational policy. It also discusses how certain indigenous discursive elements were subverted in the service of modernity in a manner that produced an ongoing intellectual dissonance in post-colonial societies. It concludes by offering some thoughts on how an Islamic humanities may be a source of cultural, political, and social empowerment for peoples of the Global South.



**Madina Thiam** is a historian of modern West Africa. Her work explores the circulations of people and ideas connecting West Africa to the Atlantic and Saharan worlds; social histories of Islam in Mali and the Sahel; and Malian women's histories; and pan-Africanism. Her writing has appeared in several outlets, including the *Journal of African History*, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, and *CODESRIA Bulletin*. She is the James

Weldon Johnson Assistant Professor of History at New York University, currently at work on her first monograph, an intimate history of the Sahel's Inland Delta told through individual and family trajectories.

### **TITLE : Writing and Hearing Absence.**

How might we write the history of slavery, not from the perspective of the enslaved or enslavers, but from a third, crucial vantage point: those whose loved ones were taken away? In this paper, I examine the life of Hafsa, a woman who lived in the Delta region of today's Mali, in the cities of Jenne and Timbuktu. Around 1804, Hafsa's teenage son was kidnapped, and likely enslaved. She never heard from him again. I consider what Hafsa, as a historical actor and the parent of a missing child, can teach us about Africa's place in the history of the Black Atlantic. Indeed, scholarship devoted to Black life within the world Atlantic slavery created, has largely focused on those taken across the ocean. How might we reckon with the anguish and grief of those who stayed? Accounting for Hafsa's perspective in the world of Atlantic slavery necessitates foregrounding ruptured kinships on the continent: bereaved mothers and fathers, former teachers, traumatized siblings of missing children. In the paper and workshop discussion, I consider two forms this project will take: a chapter in an academic monograph, as well as a narrative podcast project.



**Yuanlong He** is a doctoral student in the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies at Columbia University. He obtained his B.A. in Philosophy from the University College London. His research interests include Africa-China Interactions, Intercultural Philosophy, and Intellectual History. His current project examines the Chinese reception and conceptualization of Africa through Africa-China interactions.

**TITLE : Chinese Imaginaries of Africa. and Aude Tournaye ("Unwriting the Alphabet: Frédéric Bruly Bouabré and the Art of Knowing Otherwise")**

**ABSTRACT :** Pan-Africanism has been central to shaping China's intellectual, diplomatic, and ideological engagement with Africa, yet its Chinese reception remains understudied. This paper offers a historiographical account of Pan-Africanism in China, tracing how Chinese scholars and policymakers have interpreted, developed, and utilized the idea from the 1960s to the present. Through a review of academic writings and diplomatic publications, I examine how Pan-Africanism entered China as part of a broader effort to understand Africa on its own terms, and how it subsequently became embedded in China's evolving knowledge of the continent. I show that Chinese thinkers have variously framed Pan-Africanism as a source of anti-imperialist solidarity and a model of postcolonial unity. Rather than serving merely as descriptive analyses of African political thought, Chinese receptions of Pan-Africanism reflect its visions of international order. Reading Pan-Africanism through a Chinese intellectual lens reveals how its core ideas have been selectively translated, purposed, and theorized, illuminating the transnational circulation and political uses of the Pan-African ideal.



**Jinny Prais** is the Associate Director of the IAS and Adjunct Assistant Professor of International and Public Affairs at the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA). She received her doctorate in History and Women's Studies from the University of Michigan. Her areas of teaching and research include citizenship and social movements; African cities and urban cultures; African diaspora and imperial networks; and colonial and gender identity formation in twentieth- century West Africa.

## **TITLE : African Humanities in the classroom**

**ABSTRACT :** This talk explores how African materials—texts, artworks, and philosophical ideas—serve as resources for thinking the human. Drawing on classroom work in African Civilization and Locating Africa in the Twentieth-Century World, I consider how objects and concepts originating from the continent generate questions central to humanistic study. Rather than positioning Africa as an addition to existing canons, the paper examines African sources as engines of ethical, aesthetic, and political reflection—sites where the humanities are continually renewed and redefined.



**Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí** is a Nigerian gender scholar and full professor of sociology at Stony Brook University. She acquired her bachelor's degree in political science at the University of Ibadan in Ibadan, Nigeria and went on to pursue her graduate degree in sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. Oyěwùmí is the winner of the African Studies Association's 2021 Distinguished Africanist Award, which recognizes and honours individuals who have contributed a lifetime of outstanding scholarship in African studies combined with service to the Africanist community.

## **TITLE : The African Humanities and the Challenge of Gender Categorization and Other Blind Spots**

**ABSTRACT :** The disciplines are the base upon which the Humanities are delineated. Yet when many of these branches of knowledge were conceived, Africans were hardly the subject. How have African Humanities navigated these conundrums? What does Africa bring to the disciplines, and how do Africans overcome the impact of the male-dominant orientation of the intellectual terrain.



**Sabrine S. Hakam** is a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for African Studies at UM6P. She holds a PhD in Geography (Arts) from King's College London, an MSc in Urbanisation and Development from the London School of Economics, an MPhil in Development Studies from the University of Oxford, and a BSc from New York University. Her research focuses on African interdisciplinary methods.

In addition to her academic work, Dr. Hakam is an artist whose projects reflect her commitment to addressing timely and challenging social issues. Her artistic practice incorporates photography, screen printing, and participatory art to explore identity, representation, and environmental sustainability.

## **TITLE : Material Humanisms and the Aesthetic Grammar of Power.**

### **ABSTRACT :**

This talk explores how the aesthetic grammar of power embedded in public architecture reveals competing, place-based visions of the human. Focusing on Neo-Sudanese and Arabisance architectures in West Africa, it examines these forms as embodiments of the aesthetics of power, heritage, and identity in the urban landscape. By situating these built forms alongside civic practices in the postcolonial moment, the talk argues that architecture and visual interventions participate in 'rewriting the human,' operating as sites that both challenge colonial aesthetic legacies and assert relational, community-based understandings of humanism.



**Aymen Tahin** is PhD Candidate from Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne affiliated with the Ecole doctorale de philosophie de la Sorbonne, and to the laboratory HiPhiMo (Centre d'histoire des philosophies modernes de la Sorbonne). His thesis, Decolonial Aesthetics and Art History in Morocco, aims to rethink the epistemological frames from which modern and contemporaneous art history has been written. It aims to elaborate new concepts, categories and hermeneutic tools so as to access the works of art outside the remains of the colonial frame.

## **TITLE :** Entangled and Grounded Histories, re-opening the case of Morocco's XXth century Aesthetics.

**ABSTRACT :** The writing of Moroccan cultural history remains divided between works on “modern” art and those on “traditional” crafts — a separation produced by what Aisha Azoulay calls history’s “shutters,” the operations of imperial history writing that sustain colonial narratives. This presentation unfolds these shutters in order to consider an emancipation of art and cultural history in Morocco. Three main shutters sustain this imperial organisation of cultural history. The first is the idea of a cultural separation between tradition and modernity, grounded in racial distinction and shaping artistic axiologies and legitimacies. This division frames Moroccan culture as one without “producers,” dead and decadent, asserting that art was born in Morocco only with the supposed importation of technological modernity through the canvas during the 1940s–1950s. This framework produces a teleological history aligned with the West rather than one grounded in Moroccan temporalities, defining which artefacts are recognised as “art” and determining the very axiologies, corpora, and methodologies of art-historical research. To undo these shutters, we retrace the timelines, taking the “moderns” as our starting point. Through Mohamed Melehi’s painting, Allah (1970), and its explicit reference to the 19th-century calligrapher Al Qandusi, we restore genealogical links and overlaps between artistic practices before and after the 1950s. Moroccan modernity thus appears as an attempt to inscribe itself within its own artistic history while making the artwork a tool for rewriting it.



**Modupeola Oyeyemi** is a PhD researcher at the Center for African Studies CAS - UM6P. Her research focuses on West African Literature and African Women Studies

## **TITLE : Learning Through Cloth: Adiré and the Fabric of African Humanities.**

**ABSTRACT :** This paper contributes directly to the aims of the African Humanities Project Workshop II—Form, Practice, Theory—by showing that the African humanities can be understood not only in contrast to Western thought but through the study of African materials and methods themselves. I examine the "Adiré" fabric - the Yoruba indigo-dyed textile tradition, as a case study. The "Adiré" textile is more than just cloth; it is the product of a deeply collaborative process involving design, dyeing, and trade. I argue that the material and historical practice of Adiré holds key ideas about creativity, ethics, collaboration, and continuity that extend beyond the Yoruba culture and could give insights to our understanding of The African Humanities. My analysis is guided by Tim Ingold's idea of "thinking through making" (2013), which emphasizes that knowledge is also generated through material processes. The "Adiré" shows us that in the African humanities, theory and practice are not dichotomous but truly parts of a whole. The history of "Adiré", its cultural significance, production, and global journey, demonstrates clearly that African forms of knowledge connect everyday life to theory and vice versa. The paper concludes that at their core, the African humanities, like Adiré, tell stories that are both local and universal, offering a form of knowledge that contributes to global conversations about what it means to be human.

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