

# Guest Editor's Introduction

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I was honored to be asked to serve as the guest editor for *The Journal of African Studies and Research Forum* (The JASRF), volume 33, the first stand-alone volume of the journal under this title. There was an Africa section of the then *Journal of Third World Studies* (JTWS) which was published by the Association of Third World Studies (ATWS) that has since changed its name to Association for Global South Studies (AGSS). The Africa-centric portion of the JTWS was edited (under the title of Associate Editor) by the venerable and incomparable John Mukum Mbaku, whose thorough, competent, efficient, and uncompromising standards are without question. In many ways, the emergence of *The JASRF* as an autonomous journal is a fortuitous but welcome transition since it makes it much easier to identify the reliable source from where one can obtain the broad and multidisciplinary discussions of a plethora of issues based on the perspectives and lived experiences of people of Africa and its Diaspora.

All human affairs are influenced by the sociocultural context in which they occur, and scholarship is no exception. Scholarly exploration, including those purportedly scientific and thus seemingly more objective, are equally influenced by ecology and culture. These contexts influence what the scholars in question choose to study, the extent to which resources are made available to investigate those issues, and the likelihood that the society in question might be receptive to the findings from such studies. It is unlikely that scholars in tropical climates would be preoccupied with the impact of snow or freezing temperatures on people's recreational activities. Even within the same cultural or ecological milieu, people's lived experiences can yield very different perceptions and outcomes. As an example, segregation of schools was, even if grudgingly, acknowledged the negative impact it had on the experiences of children, especially racial minorities. The dominant prevailing view was that these negative experiences were due to the unevenness in the resources available; thus, the proposed solution of separate but equal was deemed sufficient to address the problem. The prevailing argument was that the negative consequences of segregation could be alleviated by providing similar resources and experiences but keeping the races apart.

It took the landmark and influential experiments by the husband-and-wife team of Kenneth and Mamie Clark in what is now referred to simply as the "doll studies" (Clark & Clark, 1947) in which they asked Black school children to choose between a White or a Black doll. They found that even though 90% of the children accurately identified the dolls as White or Colored, 33-50% of the Black children identified with the White doll. To the Clarks, these results demonstrated the psychological consequences of racial segregation: i.e. the internalization of anti-blackness, resulting in a negative sense of self and diminished self-esteem. This, and related types of studies, would not likely have been conceived and conducted by people with a different lived experience. It was on the strength of this study that Thurgood Marshall (who would himself later become an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court) and the other lawyers arguing on behalf of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to persuade the Supreme Court in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* that separate could not be equal, and ruling that segregation was unconstitutional.

Sociocultural and ecological influences cover even such universally experienced phenomena such as death and dying. There is a wide variation across cultures in both the conceptualization of

death and what happens when a person dies. Some conceive death to involve different conditions, including sleep, illness, and reaching a certain age. For others, death is said to occur only when there is a total cessation of life. In certain cultural traditions, death is viewed as a transition to other forms of existence; others propose a continuous interaction between the dead and the living; still other cultural orientations conceive a circular pattern of multiple deaths and rebirths; and yet, others view death as the final end with nothing occurring after death. These different conceptions have conspicuous influences on their lifestyles, their readiness to die for a cause, the extent to which they fear death, their expressions of grief and mourning, and the nature of funeral rites (Gire, 2014). Thus, to provide ecological validity and relevance, studies of any phenomenon of interest must incorporate multiple perspectives.

If we acknowledge that scholarly explorations are affected by sociocultural and ecological influences, a major question that arises is the following: Whose cultural perspective is being used or ought to be used as the standard for such discussions? The major problem that arises is when people tend to understand the behavior or examine issues of people from different cultures from the prisms of their own culture. This tendency, referred to as ethnocentric bias, occurs when scholars fail to detect the injection of the experiences and values of their own culture in their interpretation of phenomena in other cultures (Shaughnessy et al., 2015). Oftentimes, the dominant perspective from which most of these issues are discussed is the Western perspective, which, while relevant in many spheres, presents a less encompassing examination of important issues. It is the desire and necessity to broaden that perspective that is the impetus and exigency for the publication of *The JASRF*. The articles in Volume 33 cover an array of important issues of the current global crises as they pertain to Africa, including the water crisis, food production, insecurity and human rights, and peacebuilding. It is a necessary reading even for those who profess expertise on these topics because each article addresses the phenomenon from a unique, largely Africa-centered perspective that might not be found in other discussions on these topics.

## References

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