INTRODUCTION

Animated discussions, vibrant debates and strategic policies around diaspora and migrations are as wide-ranging as they are historical and contested. This reflects heterogeneity in concept and practice in relation to past migrations and underlined by the current surge in the global circulation of people. No less evocative are issues around people of African descent dispersed around the world concerning their direct and indirect connections with the mother continent. Estimates are that the African diaspora stands at 140 million people with the countries having the largest numbers being; Brazil, US, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Colombia, France, Venezuela, Jamaica, United Kingdom, and Mexico. These figures however are taken to represent “old” diaspora. Statistics on recent emigrations (roughly the period after the Second World War) are difficult to nail. These include voluntary migrations from post-independent Africa to the rest of the world, as well as the much more recent mobility from the continent arising from a complexity of factors including wars, climate challenges and economic hardships. More significantly, these numbers have significant political, socio-cultural and economic implications on the dual phenomenon of “Africans in the diaspora” and “the diaspora and Africa”.

Academic literature, policy discussions/action and press coverage on the African diaspora are as expansive as the pragmatic leverage of the phenomenon by a multiplicity of stakeholders. Among the research gaps, policy debates and intellectual extrapolations is the distinction between past and present African migrations. The questions that those interested in the African diaspora pose include the connection to the continent between older and newer diaspora and the practices, experiences and worldviews of these two categories with their lands of migration (travel destinations). It is with these and related questions in mind that the “old and new African diaspora” conference is being planned for 20th – 21st May 2020 at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits University), Johannesburg, South Africa.

The conference builds on the May 2019 symposium entitled “the African Year of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons: Africa-UN-US Intersections” held at Wits University in partnership with the African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS) and the African Renaissance and Diaspora Network (ARDN). The 2019 symposium was broad in nature, covering a wide range of migrations issues, topics and themes. Narrowing focus onto the past and present African diaspora, the May 2020 conference is being organised with a multiple partnership bringing together the following organisations:

- The African Centre for the Study of the United States, Wits University, Johannesburg, South Africa
- The African Renaissance and Diaspora Network, New York, USA
- The African Studies Centre and the Alliance for African Partnerships both based at Michigan State University (MSU), East Lansing, USA
- The Africa Institute at the American Jewish Council (AJC), New York, USA
- The Institute for African Studies at the George Washington University, Washington DC, USA
- The African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA), Wits University, Johannesburg, South Africa/
- The Kenya Diaspora Association (KDA), Nairobi, Kenya
OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The conference will bring together scholars and intellectuals from the African diaspora, or those engaged in African diaspora research and engagement, to offer perspectives on old and new diaspora. This will be done from various theoretical, conceptual and disciplinary perspectives as a means of generating new knowledge that can inform not only scholarship but also work in the policy/government, civil society and business spheres. The conference has been calibrated as an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary congregation with a view to present multiple viewpoints from which old and new diaspora can be explained and comprehended. Abstracts will be invited from the fields of history and geography, anthropology and sociology, politics and international relations, media and performing arts, economics and literature, and, linguistics and psychology, religion and philosophy, and their sub-fields as well as iterations.

We expect that our understanding of old and new diaspora will be broadened and deepened by bringing together scholars from the English, French, Spanish and Portuguese speaking regions of the African diaspora. The conference is being organised to draw on similar projects in the past, as well as exploring prospects for future work. Towards this end, the African Centre for the Study of the US and Michigan State University-affiliated centres are working on leveraging an existing reading group on “trans-regionalism and diaspora studies”, the findings of which will be shared at the conference. The conference proceedings will be disseminated via an edited volume drawing on some of the conference presentations. Moreover, the organisers plan to convene a panel at the 2020 African Studies Association (ASA) conference in Washington DC.

A side event driven by the key partners (with the African Renaissance and Diaspora Network in the lead role) will be convened for a strategically-focused conversation on the collaboration of universities, think tanks and supra-national organisations. The focus will be the pursuit of African diaspora research and public engagement, especially with regards to the implementation of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. Discussions towards this end are at an advanced stage with the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) based at Wits.

CONTEXT

In focusing on old and new African diaspora, a potential starting point is that the heightened movement of people globally has complicated the definition of the term “diaspora”. The conventional definition of diaspora as “the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland” is neither encompassing enough nor fit for purpose. As such, no clear consensus exists on what constitutes diaspora much less African diaspora. Thus, the contestations on the conceptualisation of “diaspora” are fundamental to the understanding of “African diaspora”. More importantly, the notions of “old” and “new” African diaspora, equally contested, constitute a novel approach to making sense of the African diaspora in the twenty first century.

The notion of “Africans in diaspora” and “the diaspora and Africa” is a collective, tied together with tangible and aspirational Pan-African interests. This Pan-Africanism is forged in the unity in diversity concept on the basis of geographical, cultural, political and economic diversities. Old and new diaspora is a mostly time-bound category that constitutes one but certainly not the only form of diversity.

A key distinction is one of ancestry. Old diaspora are direct descendants of enslaved African people forced into the diaspora, while, the new diaspora are African immigrants born in Africa who have migrated voluntarily. From this point of view, old diaspora can be considered those permanently settled in their countries of immigration while the new diaspora are either temporarily or recently settled in “host” countries. Some refer to this category as historical diaspora. Permanency suggests that old diaspora are nearly-irreversibly rooted in the countries of immigration, excepting returnees. New diaspora – sometimes referred to as contemporary diaspora – on the other hand have strong ties in their countries of emigration to which they may ultimately return if they don’t already travel there from time to time.

The new diaspora may be seen as a phenomenon that started emerging after the independence of African countries with many Africans seeking education and livelihoods abroad, particularly in the Americas and Europe, but increasingly in Asian nations such as China. Intra-Africa diaspora – for instance from relatively poor and unstable countries to the relatively prosperous and stable countries – should also not be glossed over. Indeed, barring exceptions, old diaspora have only their countries of immigration as their legal citizenship states while new diaspora may be living on visas, be out of legal status or have dual citizenship. In terms of age, old diaspora may be taken as those more than 35 years of age and the new diaspora as those less than 35 years old. This last distinction may be controversial in that it would, in fact, flatten the old and new categories in such a way that only age rather than ancestry, count as the pertinent conceptual consideration. Between and within the above trajectories of confluence and divergence, there are many issues that speak to the past, current and future status of “global Africa”. The question is: what are the missing links? To address this question with old and new diaspora as the overarching theme, the conference will be structured into sub-thematic inquisitions.
Below are synopses of the possible topics

**Brain drain versus brain gain:** What are the trends in intellectual flows or “brain circulation” in the African diaspora and the African continent?

**Comparative analyses:** How does the African diaspora compare with other diaspora such as Chinese, Israeli/Jews, Indian, etc.?

**Conceptual approaches:** Which new and established theoretical approaches stand the best chance for understanding new and old diaspora? Does trans-regionalism portend a new way of studying global Africa?

**Country case studies:** Which knowledge – policy, academic, practice – is emerging from African diasporic countries and from the continent? For instance, what are the links and inter-linkages between: the African American diaspora and Africa? How does African American diaspora connect with diasporic communities in the rest of the Americas, the homeland, Europe and other parts of the world?

**Digital diaspora:** What does the presence of diasporic communities in social media tell us about their identities, issues of interest, and, community networks?

**Economics:** What is the corporate, trade and investments dimension of African diasporic issues?

**History:** How can we understand the history of the African diaspora in the world of the 21st century?

**Organisational issues:** Which are the African diaspora organisations and associations and what are their objectives and approaches?

**Pan-Africanism:** Are the political and cultural ties between old and new diaspora including matters of identity waning or strengthening?

**Perceptions:** What are the attitudes of old and new African diaspora towards each other and towards Africa and African countries? For instance, how do African Americans perceive continental Africa and Africans? What role does memory and nostalgia play?

**Policy and strategy:** What roles do the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union’s Agenda 2063 have in African diaspora matters? How are global, regional, national and local diaspora policies being formulated and executed?

**Allegiances:** Are African diaspora communities loyal to their home countries or their countries of settlement or both?

**Clashes in the diaspora:** how do ethnic politics by new diaspora spill over into the countries of settlement?

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www.wits.ac.za/acsus

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See https://www.yukonyouth.com/the-african-diaspora-what-is-it/

See https://pesd.princeton.edu/?q=node/232


CALL FOR ABSTRACTS: African Diaspora Conference

Theme: Old and new African Diaspora Networks: Intersections, Distinctions and Strategies
Venue: The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa | Dates: 20 – 21 May, 2020

INTRODUCTION
This multi-partner conference seeks to push the boundaries of knowledge productions on “global Africa”. Paper proposals of no more than 300 words covering the sub-themes listed below are invited.

Registration fees:
- Senior and established scholars: $200
- Non-academic participants: diplomats, civil society, techies: $200
- Early career scholars (postdocs, recent doctoral graduates): $100
- Students (honours, masters, doctoral): $50

OBJECTIVE
The conference will bring together scholars and intellectuals from the African diaspora, and/or those engaged in African diaspora research and engagement. It will offer perspectives on old and new diaspora from various theoretical, conceptual and disciplinary perspectives. The aim is to generate new knowledge that can inform not only scholarship but also work in the policy/government, civil society and business spheres.

The conference is calibrated as an interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity and multidisciplinarity congregation. Multiple viewpoints from which old and new diaspora can be explained and comprehended will be presented (see full concept note at http://www.wits.ac.za/acsus/).

IMPORTANT DATES
1 April 2020: Abstracts submission deadline
10 April 2020: Notice of acceptance
5th May 2020: Registration deadline

Submissions to: ACSUS.research@wits.ac.za and copy adam.levin2@wits.ac.za

Sub-themes:
• The notions of “Africans in diaspora” and “the diaspora and Africa”
• Geographical, cultural, political and economic dimensions
• Identity and allegiances
• Spatial and temporal considerations
• Distinctions between old and new diaspora
• Convergences between old and new diaspora
• Digital diaspora
• Diaspora, soft power and public diplomacy
• Intra-Africa migrations and diaspora
• Brain drain versus brain gain
• Comparative analyses (with European, Asian, Semitic, etc.) diasporas
• Conceptual, theoretical and methodological approaches
• The place for inter-disciplinary studies
• Country and regional case studies
• Diaspora networks and interests
• Pan-Africanism
• Perceptions and image
• Diaspora and global, regional, national and local policies and strategies
• Links between universities
• Country and regional case studies
• Diaspora networks and interests
• Pan-Africanism
• Perceptions and image
• Diaspora and global, regional, national and local policies and strategies

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