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# OUR LOVE AFFAIR WITH NIGER Professor Emeritus John Hutchison recounts the inception of BU's exceptional relationship with Niger, and his lasting love for the region.

# 30 Years and Counting

by John P Hutchison

**Boston University** Emeritus Associate Professor of African Languages & Linguistics, John P. Hutchison discovered his natural talent for language learning as a young Peace Corps Volunteer. Since his time in the Sahel, he has helped BU develop a deep and fruitful relationship with the region and its people. Dozens of students and alumni have traveled to Niger to experience firsthand this beautiful and complicated West African country. Although BU no longer has a formal program there, the Center



continues to cultivate its relationship with this special place in order to continue its 30 year legacy of cooperation and collaboration.

It was 1965 and I was visiting West Africa for the first time. My destination: Niamey, Niger; my mission: to work on a community construction project through Crossroads Africa, an experience that since has motivated me to continue working and researching in the world's second largest continent.

I graduated from Pomona College in 1966 with degrees in Economics and French, and within two weeks of receiving my diploma I was halfway across the world. Though invited to serve in Niger, I succumbed to an offer to serve as a "pioneer in Chad," where I worked in animal traction farming and well drilling. While in Africa, still working for the Peace Corps, I discovered my gift for learning languages and applied to graduate school at Indiana University. After my service, I became a Peace Corps language trainer, and wrote a number of language manuals for training Peace Corps volunteers in Africa, having begun my graduate work in Linguistics and African Languages in 1969. I defended my doctoral dissertation on the syntax of the Kanuri language in 1976.



Nigerien man outside Baleyara (1990s), John Hutchison



I worked as a civil servant in the Nigerian university system between 1974 and 1979. There, I was responsible for the documentation and development of the Kanuri language, preparing it as one of twelve Nigerian languages to serve as the medium of instruction in Nigeria's Universal Free Primary Education program.

As a civil servant, I was involved with the production of dictionaries, grammar books, anthologies of folktales, oral histories, music, and even riddles while collaborating with Kanuri title-holding royalty in standardizing the writing system of the language. While serving in Chad, and working in Nigeria, I maintained a strong connection with the Republic of Niger, making regular trips there from Nigeria to establish collaborative connections between academics and language specialists in the two countries. I was connected to Niger through Crossroads Africa, through my 100 fellow Peace Corps trainees who served in Niger, and through the Nigeriens who trained us all. I was also connected to Niger through my five years in

Nigeria.

After a one-year post-doctorate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which resulted in the publication of my book *The Kanuri Language: A Reference Grammar (1981)*, I was hired by Boston University (BU) in 1980 as a professor of African Languages and Linguistics, and Director and Coordinator of BU's African Language Program. I came to BU in the company of the Republic of Niger.

I spent leaves and sabbaticals from BU in the Sahel, working in Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, and of course Niger. Following my 1984-85 year as a Fulbright Lecturer in Linguistics at the Université Abdou Moumouni (UAM) in Niamey, with the support of then BUASC Director James McCann, I organized a proposal for a USIS-funded three-year linkage grant between BU and UAM focusing on faculty exchange in linguistics and languages in education. This exchange brought Prof. Karen Boatman of BU's School of Education, among others, to Niamey. Having served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Senegal, she saw

landlocked Niger as a unique opportunity for study abroad where BU students could have firsthand experience in a country with a broad spectrum of eye-opening development challenges. She felt that the Sahel offered a chance to better understand far more critical African issues than those that might preoccupy students in countries with game reserves and beaches. BU students began studying in Niamey in 1987 and the program there lasted nearly a quarter of a century, with BU withdrawing in 2011 due to the insecurity that had become rampant in the Sahel region, subsequent to the withdrawal of the Peace Corps. Boston University shared a quarter of a century in Niger with the Peace Corps, the latter having been there for more than 50 years. The 2011 departure has not stopped either BU or the Peace Corps from continuing their long-term relationships with Niger, even after their physical departures.

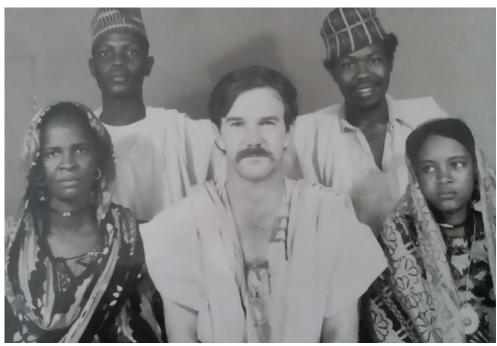
The lives of many of the participants in this program were significantly changed by their experience in Niger, leading them to pursue

education and careers that involve service and work in Africa and in economic development. There are many more examples. By the time of the departure, the alumnae of BU's international program in Niger had already organized themselves into the Boston University Niger Alumnae Network (BUNAN). Alix Saba, the current program administrator of the Center, is an alum of the Niger program and a member BUNAN. She continues to work on Africa though the mission of the center. I coordinate a website known as the African Language Materials Archive,

(www.alma.matrix.msu.edu; ALMA) for the West African Research Association (WARA), a non-profit membership organization dedicated to the promotion of research on West Africa. In addition to this, I manage the publishing company that I founded in 1988, Mother Tongue Editions

(www.mothertongue.us). ALMA, with the support of the Title VI National Resource Centers, is committed to gathering documents in all African languages, including those of Niger and other Sahelian countries. Today one alum of the BU program in Niger, Brian Nowak, is working as the Niger Director of the non-profit based in Portsmouth, New Hampshire known as Rain for the Sahel and Sahara, and is also contributing greatly to the ALMA website through his ethnomusicological research in Ghana, Benin, Togo, and Niger, where he is based.

The Boston area is one of many metropolitae where return Peace Corps volunteers (RPCVs) gather. I became involved as a board member of the Niger RPCVs organization known as the Friends of Niger (FON) and in that capacity I have returned to Niger regularly to work with Nigerien NGOs on



John Huchinson with Wakkil Modu Bulama, Abba Kanembu, and two visitors from Chad in Maiduguri.

projects that are funded by the FON. I recently returned from there after visiting related sites in Niamey, in Liboré, and in the Kornaka rural commune area near Maradi where the FON have funded a number of the extremely nutritional *Moringa oleifera* plantation projects for women and children's organizations.

In an alliance between the FON and BU's Mugar African Studies Library, I began discussing the possibility of establishing an Archive of the Republic of Niger, which is housed in the care of our African Studies librarians, This was facilitated by librarians Beth Restrick and Rachel Dwyer, growing out of their respective long-term relationships with Niger. Word of this spread and students and RPCVs began signing up and contributing photographs, documents, memorabilia, and correspondence, among many other things relevant to the more than half century during which the Peace Corps and BU had been linked to Niger. This led to the official inauguration of AREN (The Archive of the Republic of Niger) on the 3rd of April in 2015, when

the President of Niger Issoufou Mohammed and his entourage, as well as Prof. Hassana Alidou —one of my students in Linguistics at the Université Abdou Moumouni in '84-'85—Ambassador of the Republic of Niger to Washington, D.C., joined the BU Provost and African Studies faculty and staff. In attendance was Habou Boukari, Director of the National Archive (DAN) of the Republic of Niger, and this resulted in a formal relationship between the BU library, AREN, and the DAN. I traveled to Niger after this event to develop a proposal to fund the Cooperative Africana Materials Project (CAMP) to digitize endangered archives via the consortium organization of African Studies librarians. Although CAMP is still under consideration, the relationship Boston University now has with the Republic of Niger lives on through the continued support of the University and BUNAN. Although the program may have closed, the African Studies Center strives to keep the relationship between Niger and BU alive. We continue to search for ways to collaborate so that we are able to pass on the information to new generations of students who one day too may aspire to create change in Africa.



# From the Director's Desk

It gives me a distinct pleasure to address the African Studies Center's community. I am honored by my appointment as Director of our distinguished African Studies Center. I am grateful to Dean Najam, Professor Longman, who led the center skillfully for the past eight years, and the faculty and staff who have sustained the center's tradition of excellence.

The Center is pleased to welcome two new colleagues: Cosmas Ochieng and Mahesh Karra. Professor Ochieng's interests lie in the theory, policy, and practice of development; global climate change and environmental policy; science, technology, and innovation policy; and the political economy of African development. Professor Karra's interests focus on development economics, health economics, quantitative methods, and applied demography. Please join me in welcoming our colleagues who bring new expertise to the center and the Pardee School of Global Studies.

The Wolof poet, Muusaa Ka, once wrote: "challenge is the price of great achievement." His words continue to inspire me. Thus, I see the current transition of the Center as forecasting a bright future. Maintaining the center's status as a premier Africa-focused Title VI National Resource Center in the next competition is one of the first challenges we face. The second is becoming a world leader in the training of a new generation of experts who combine the optimal disciplinary, language, and cultural skills necessary to understand and engage Africa more effectively.

My priorities cannot all be listed here. But they include: (1) expanding our growing strength in research and teaching on *Islam and Ajami in Africa*, (2) developing *long-term multipurpose linkages* with African institutions that serve our faculty and students, (3) engaging more *African diaspora communities and organizations in America*, and (4) enhancing the *center's global stature* by developing joint projects with reputable international organizations that focus on Africa, and supporting innovative research and teaching initiatives that elucidate the interconnections between Africa and other parts of the world (especially the Americas).

As the center goes through the process of preparing for the next Title VI competition, and planning other pioneering initiatives, I invite you to keep me posted on your projects. With a collective *Harambe* (Swahili: pulling together), as Maestro Parker Shipton would say, I look forward to working with you to make the Center reach a new height of excellence in Africa-focused research, teaching, and service within and beyond the United States.

Fallou Ngom November 2017

# A CONVERSATION WITH PROFESSOR AND AUTHOR, TIMOTHY LONGMAN



Join us for an in-depth book talk and author Q&A on Prof Timothy Longman's most recent publication Memory and Justice in Post-Genocide Rwanda on January 31, 2018 at 4pm in the African Studies Center, 232 Bay State Rd. Visit bu.edu/africa for more information.

# ASC: A lot has been written on the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath. Why this book and why now?

Tim Longman: Rwanda is a rare case of an African country that has received a great deal of international attention. When I went to Rwanda for the first time in 1992, most people had never heard of the country. Even in the first few years after the genocide, Rwanda was

not much discussed, at least in the US. But something happened in the late 1990s, with Philip Gourevitch's best-selling book, We Wish to Inform You, and the movie, Hotel Rwanda. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which has run Rwanda since 1994, has articulated a compelling vision for Rwanda's future that emphasizes national unity and development, and they've done a fantastic job of appealing for international support. Rwanda has emerged as a cause celebre, attracting lots of international interest and development money. For many people working in development and healthcare and other fields, Rwanda is seen as a great model, because of the government's efficient management and low level of corruption. The country has received a lot of praise as well for its promotion of national unity and reconciliation. Many school and church groups travel to Rwanda to look at reconciliation.

Having entered the international imagination as a key cause, Rwanda has also received considerable scholarly attention. A remarkable number of students are producing dissertations on Rwanda, and even a number of senior scholars with backgrounds on the Holocaust or other topics have shifted to Rwanda as a research focus. Many of these scholarly books challenge the positive image of the "Rwanda miracle." While my book falls into this category of critical scholarship, I think that my book brings some unique things to the table. While there have been a lot of books looking at different aspects of post-genocide Rwanda, like the grassroots gacaca courts or

national unity programs, mine is the first book to look comprehensively at Rwanda's transitional justice programs. I look at how the government has tried to shape popular narratives using education reform, memorials, commemorations, re-education camps, trials, political reorganization and other tools, and I also look at how the population has reacted.

One important contribution of my book is that I am able to offer an assessment across time. I have worked in Rwanda since 1992, so I have the perspective of knowing the country before the genocide. I then went back as the head of the office for Human Rights Watch and the International Human Rights Federation (FIDH) in 1995-1996 to conduct research on the genocide. I started researching this specific book in 2001, just before gacaca was launched, and the final research was conducted in 2015, a couple of years after gacaca and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda completed their work. As a result, I am able to look at the ways in which programs have changed across time and the impact that programs have had.

# What were your greatest challenges throughout the writing process?

Both academic and personal factors slowed down the writing of this book. So many things kept coming up - leading study abroad programs in Kenya, China, Beijing, and Zanzibar, doing human rights consultancies in Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic



Republic Congo, moving to Boston, having kids. I came to BU as Director of the African Studies Center in 2009, and in the same year, we adopted our first daughter. Administrative and personal duties combined to make the writing painfully slow.

Another major challenge was just the sheer volume of writing about Rwanda being produced. Given the breadth of my focus, looking at politics, memory, justice, trauma, education, and so many other topics, keeping up with all of the literature being published each year and incorporating it into my own work was difficult. The longer the writing took, the more new works there were that required a response.

The unanticipated advantage of the slow writing process was the view

slow writing process was the view across time that the book is able to offer.

# How has the book been received thus far by the academic and international community?

This is a very personal book for me. It's an academic text, but I worked to write it in a way that would be accessible. I tell a number of personal stories and try to give voice to many of the people that I've met in Rwanda over the years. So I've

been concerned about how it would be received, but so far, the reviews have been strong. I was expecting more of a negative response from within Rwanda, because of my criticisms of the government, but so far other than a few angry tweets, I haven't faced too many attacks.

Although the book is focused on Rwanda and will probably be of greatest interest to people who study Africa, I'm hoping that it can have an impact in the area of transitional justice more broadly. The international community has increasingly focused on the contributions that trials and truth commissions and other programs can have on societies after conflict. Billions of dollars are being spent on transitional justice with the idea that this will help to rebuild society. But my analysis of Rwanda offers a pretty sobering assessment of the limitations of transitional justice in authoritarian societies. In Rwanda, trials have contributed more to building the authoritarian power of the state than to promoting justice, and the international community has been complicit in this. I hope that this cautionary message will be heard by policy-makers working in other post-conflict countries.

## Now that this project is finished, what's next?

I think I'm experiencing a little postpartum depression. After working on a project for 16 years, it's hard to move on! Seriously though, the two projects that I'm working on now both are more broadly comparative. One is to look at Christianity throughout Africa to seek to explain why churches in some times and places become close allies of their states while in others they provide a prophetic voice criticizing the state. The other is a study of African civil society activists. Civil society was a hot topic in the 1990s, but social scientists have soured on the concept and accuse civil society of being too urban, too elite, too driven by foreign interests. But in a number of African countries, I've encountered civil society activists who literally risked their lives working in civil society, and African states have been cracking down heavily on civil society, so there is definitely something there that needs to be explored further. Both of these projects will draw on research I've done not only in Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo but also in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, and Senegal, and I'll probably try to travel to a few other places as well. These projects should take me another 16 years to complete.



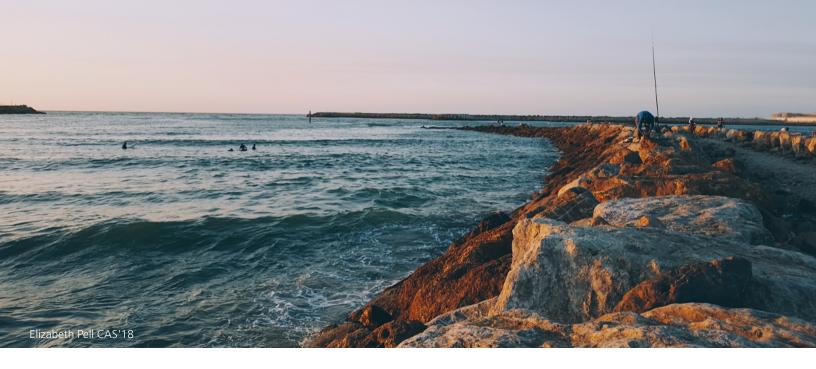
# Hakuna Matata

by Sabrina Hassan

This summer, I spent three months in Iringa, Tanzania interning with One Acre Fund. One Acre Fund (OAF) is a non-profit organization that works with more than 500,000 small-scale farmers throughout Sub-Saharan Africa and Myanmar to eradicate hunger and poverty by providing seeds, fertilizer, and training through asset-based financing. As a former CLS KiSwahili scholar and current FLAS recipient, I was ecstatic about the prospect of returning to Tanzania where I would continue to speak KiSwahili in a professional setting. Moreover, as an International Relations student, I was elated about the practical hands-on knowledge I would gain in the field that would complement the theoretical knowledge I gain in the classroom.

When people ask me what I did as one of OAF's three interns, I pause, unsure of how to summarize three months of working, living, and traveling throughout Tanzania. On paper, it was my job to "support Field Operations' execution and expansion during some of the organization's busiest months." Field Operations, the team which I directly interned with, is the division that acts as the link between the office and the field. Because the timing of my internship coincided with the repayment and re-enrollment season of OAF, Field Operations spent its days monitoring, analyzing, and responding to repayment trends of farmers -- all while signing farmers up for the upcoming year's season! As an intern, I provided extra hands-on support in both the office and the field, where I was given tasks ranging from interviewing farmers to learning why they didn't re-enroll, sitting in on office meetings to learn about the organization's weekly repayment strategy, and creating tracking systems of incentives given to farmers who successfully repaid their loans.

Although my tasks varied greatly day by day, my days all began the same way: clutching a hot cup of chai and too-sweet maandazi (sweet bread). Whether my work took me to the field to conduct focus group discussions, or to the office where I sat in on strategy meetings, I quickly learned to live for the songs that Tanzanians use to start off any meeting. No matter how big or small the meeting was, I watched in awe as one person was able to conduct and lead a group through a beautiful and harmonious song. At the end of the work day, I would spend my time-off getting to know my co-workers, and was surprised to learn of the deep bond that was shared among international staff members, as they continuously devised clever ways to entertain themselves while living far away from their families. In truth, it was my interactions with my co-workers outside of the office that surprised me the most, as it opened my eyes to the unique and creative bonds that are often formed in the expat community.



One of the greatest strengths of the internship program was the autonomy and freedom it gave me, allowing me to manage my own projects while also providing me with support and guidance when needed. OAF-Tanzania taught me that I, too, had something to bring to the table, even as an intern. The organization was always open to feedback from all of their employees. Yet my internship experience also introduced me to something I didn't expect: identity politics. As an Intern, I observed the differences between native born and international staff members and began to consider the role that I, a Tanzanian-American, played in working at an American NGO in Tanzania. I began to wonder why working expats in Tanzania continued to live a life more comfortable than most of my Tanzanian counterparts. I began to question how nationality influences the power-dynamics of international NGOs and not simply how, but if NGOs can effectively work in a country without perpetuating Western-centric ideals.

Till this day, I continue to grapple with such questions; however, what I can attest to is living, breathing, and thriving in East Africa for three months does not leave one untouched. During my three months, I fully embraced the belief that everything will be alright, or what I like to call the "hakuna matata" ideology (it truly does mean "no worries" -- thanks, Lion King). Anyone who's been to Tanzania knows that life in Tanzania has a way of slowing down. Suddenly, I found that errands like grocery shopping became fun and personal, as I quickly learned that one does not dare purchase 25 cent avocados before asking about the vendor's day, as well as the health of their mother! From my Tanzanian co-workers, my view of community deepened as I watched them plan each other's weddings, collect money the moment a co-worker fell ill, and celebrate each other's success. And even as mischievous children would occasionally lock me in their

village's outhouses, I learned to laugh and not take myself too seriously.

As a current senior at Boston University, I allow my experience to continue to inform my last year of undergraduate studies. While my internship taught me a lot about what I was capable of, it also showed me what I did not know. Completing the internship the summer of my junior year has allowed me to come back and use my University's resources to take specific courses that help fill in the identified gaps. Furthermore, I have also allowed my experience in Tanzania to shape the topic of my Honors Thesis; I will now spend my last year at BU analyzing minority-ethnic groups' success in African economies -- a question that first came to me in conversation with one of my co-workers. Lastly, my internship experience taught me about the importance of networking and keeping in touch with old colleagues, classmates, and professors, for my dream internship was not found through an online job search, but through conversations! My biggest lesson (and piece of advice) to all who are navigating the uncertainty of graduation is to talk through those stresses. You never know where your next lead on your dream internship (or job) may come from.





#### LIBRARY

#### An Update from the African Studies Library

The original purpose of the ASL was to serve as a repository for information about Africa. While holding true to our goal, we are exploring new ways to reach and engage users. As collections expand to include a wider variety of materials (film, images and textiles), so do the opportunities to creatively introduce these materials to users.

In some cases, the university provides the context; BU's Global Education Week is an ideal time for the ASL to exhibit its circulating and special collections to a broader audience.

This year's theme, *African Cuisine and Culture,* included an exhibit showcasing the diverse cookbooks and food-related materials available in the collections. The library also partnered with the African Language Program's Amharic instructor and students to host an Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony.

Library materials themselves can lead to new activities; the CineAfriq film series began this semester as a means to showcase some of the films available through the library. Film selections were made in collaboration with African language instructors in order to provide a venue for language learning that is outside of the classroom. Relevant library materials on display during the film allow viewers to delve a little deeper in their understanding of places or topics raised by the films.

The African Studies Library staff welcome suggestions and ideas as they continue to create spaces and opportunities for the BU community to engage with library collections in new and interactive ways.

### **PUBLICATIONS**

The International Journal of African Historical Studies celebrates it's 50th anniversary with discounted prices on all hardcopy issues of the journal published from 2004 (IJAHS vol. 37) to 2015 (IJAHS vol. 48). Copies can be purchased for \$5.00 each, plus shipping. This includes the following special issues:

Colonial States and Civic Virtues in Africa (Luise White, guest editor), IJAHS 37:1 (2004)

Continuities in Governance in Late Colonial and Early Postcolonial East Africa (Andrew Burton and Michael Jennings, guest editors), IJAHS 40:1 (2007)

The Political Ecology of Trade, Food Production, and Landscape Transformations in Northeast Tanzania: 1850-2000 (Mats Widgren, N. Thomas Hå kansson, and Lowe Bö rjeson, guest editors), IJAHS 41:3 (2008)

Current Trends in the Archaeology of African History (Ann B. Stahl and Adria LaViolette, guest editors), IJAHS 42:3 (2009)

Toward a History of Violence in Colonial Kenya (Matthew Carotenuto and Brett Shadle, guest editors), IJAHS 45:1 (2012)

Incorporating Medical Research into the History of Medicine in East Africa (Melissa Graboyes, guest editor), IJAHS 47:3 (2014)

Violence in the Contemporary Political History of Eastern Africa (Øystein H. Rolandsen and David M. Andersom, guest editors), IJAHS 48:1 (2015)

Exploring Post-Slavery in Contemporary Africa (Baz Lecocq and Éric Komlavi Hahonou, guest editors), IJAHS 48:2 (2015)

Wealth in Pluralities. Intersections of Money, Gender, and Multiple Values across African Societies (Charlotte Walker-Said and Andrea Felber Seligman, guest editors), IJAHS 48:3 (2015)

Supplies are limited. Contact us at ascpub@bu.edu to order and arrange for shipping.



### OUTREACH

This fall, in an effort to encourage more overseas teacher travel, the Outreach Program announced a Curriculum Development Grant opportunity for educators at MSIs interested in attending our co-sponsored educational trip to Madagascar in summer 2018. The trip, which will be run in conjunction with Global Exploration for Educators Organization (GEEO), sold out almost immediately and now nearly 30 educators will be participating in two scheduled trips! In addition to our annual fall presence at the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) and the African Studies Association (ASA) conferences, we also attended the Community College Humanities Association (CCHA) in order to support teaching about Africa in the community college classroom. In line with this initiative, we are excited to announce the recent launch of the Curriculum Internationalization Resources for Community College Educators website, a searchable database of lesson plans, resources, recommended readings, and professional development opportunities across world regions.

### CONGRATULATIONS

Fallou Ngom, Director of the African Studies Center and Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Boston University, was recently awarded the prestigious Melville J. Herskovits Prize for the most important scholarly work in African Studies for his book *Muslims beyond the Arab World: The Odyssey of Ajami and the Muridiyya* (Oxford University Press, 2016). Please join us in congratulating him!

## AJAMI PROJECTS

Building on the Wolof Ajami textbook, this year, the African Language Program released its next entry in African Ajami education: the Hausa Ajami Textbook. Prof. Fallou Ngom conceived the textbook design, which is founded on the core objective of creating language education resources by native language speakers. Featuring more than 20 chapters, the textbook starts with easy-to-write and commonly-used letters in the Hausa Ajami alphabet and builds chapter by chapter to introduce more complexity. The learning activities encourage students to dive into Hausa culture by providing key vocabulary and practice texts on a range of topics, including home life, health, education, cuisine, and religion. This resource is the first of its kind for Hausa. With this textbook in hand, students can learn Hausa Ajami to access a previously missing body of work in the African Studies discourse: hundreds of years' worth of native Hausa writing from across northern Nigeria and Niger. Mr. Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, a doctoral candidate in Sociology at Boston University, spearheaded the textbook's development and devised the lessons and learning activities. Zachary Gersten supported this endeavor by formatting the pages and editing content; Alix Saba contributed graphic design and project coordination.

#### THANK YOU

The African Studies Center would like thank our editorial board, Alix Saba, Michael DiBlasi, Breeanna Elliott, Zachary Gersten, and Hafzat Akanni. We would also like to thank all of our contributing editors and authors.

