




Afrigi xam-xam

Scholarly Africas: Critical Reflections on a Decade of Knowledge Creation, Scientific Dialogue, and Academic Experimentation

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Ten years ago, at Gaston Berger University, the Laboratory for the Analysis of Societies and Powers / Africa–Diasporas (LASPAD) was established. LASPAD emerged from the UFR CRAC, the UFR SJP, and the UFR of Economic Sciences, already grounded in a broad conception of the humanities and social sciences that form our DNA.

What a long way we have come in a decade! Today, the laboratory comprises 14 research areas, bringing together as many scientific directors and organized into more than 20 programs. Above all, our teams do not hesitate to venture onto uncharted paths, paving the way for a resolutely endogenous research approach, as envisioned by Paulin Hountondji.

These 14 research areas and 20 programs represent initiatives carried forward by researchers and dedicated scholars from Senegal and beyond. All these programs are equal, though some are more equal than others, I must admit. One of these programs fills me with particular pride: the journal *Global Africa*, which this year celebrates its fourth anniversary.

¹ This speech was delivered by Professor Mame-Penda Ba, Director of LASPAD and Editor-in-Chief for the first four years of the journal *Global Africa*, during the celebration held from December 8 to 10, 2025, marking the double anniversary of LASPAD (10 years) and the *Global Africa* program (4 years).

Four years have yielded twelve issues and nearly one hundred articles published, following rigorous double-blind peer review that meets the highest international standards. Each of these twelve issues features a carefully crafted visual thread, helping make each publication a unique event. Each issue is an opportunity for Africa to step onto the global stage of scientific creation. Creation lies at the heart of all reflections at LASPAD and within Global Africa. The translation effort we provide in each issue demonstrates this commitment. It is a unique effort worldwide to publish, issue after issue, articles in Arabic, Swahili, Wolof and Amharic, in addition to English and French.

In the editorial of the first issue of *Global Africa*, we described the imperative need to “understand the possibilities for Africa.” Understanding the possibilities for Africa in an era of technological upheavals, but also when the ecological limits of the planet are being reached, and exceeded, one after another. Since these observations, technological upheavals have intensified. They have been joined by geopolitical upheavals whose effects on our continent are still difficult to conceptualize. Worse still, we dramatically lack the tools needed to guide decision-making and finally guarantee what has become fashionable to call “Africa’s agency”.

Today, slogans abound about “African solutions to African problems”. Let us not be mistaken, what will be discussed are certainly African issues, but they are also global issues. On the other hand, these are African solutions, drawn from African research. I do mean “African” in the sense described by Mudimbé regarding the African university: not just an institution composed of scholars from the continent with programs decided by themselves, but, above all, one that resonates with the contradictions of the modern world and contributes to creating possibilities for societies across the continent.

This is therefore an African reflection on global issues, yet one that is firmly rooted in the continent. LASPAD cannot avoid engaging in critical epistemological reflection. Indeed, the questions raised within LASPAD and Global Africa spare no one. They do not erect altars to nostalgic currents for a resolved golden age, one that is in any case inaccessible and largely invented. We do not shy away from talking about decoloniality and pan-Africanism, provided that we live up to the meaning of these terms. The laboratory and the journal cast restless, uncompromising perspectives on our immediate environment. This African reflection at LASPAD cannot exist without the formulation of a clear social utility. All our programs resolutely meet this requirement. Our students, in particular, learn to engage with society and not to wait for someone else to act on their behalf. One constant since the laboratory’s creation has been that this research must influence thinking and guide decision making in Africa and throughout the world.

The challenges are numerous, especially since the life expectancy of research institutions devoted to studying societies in Africa is generally very short. The ambition of LASPAD and Global Africa is to address the marginalization of African research and to give life to these “scholarly Africas.” By celebrating these two anniversaries and bringing you together with us today, we place Africa at the center of the highest-level scientific concerns, indeed, at the very highest level.

In this spirit, the present issue devoted to humanitarianism fully embodies the intellectual and political commitments of LASPAD and Global Africa. By interrogating the historical, epistemological, and practical foundations of humanitarian action, the contributions gathered here challenge dominant paradigms and foreground African forms of knowledge, care, and solidarity. They invite us to rethink what it means to give, receive, and share, beyond the asymmetries and paternalistic logics that have long structured the humanitarian field. In doing so, this issue contributes to a broader effort to decolonize knowledge production while opening new pathways for more equitable and grounded forms of engagement—anchored in the lived realities, histories, and aspirations of African societies.