From the Editors

We conceived of this special issue after much thought about how folklore and the study of folklore contributes to an understanding of social and political issues in contemporary Africa. We were specifically interested in ways that folklore provides resources from which solutions to social problems already are, or could be explored, communicated, and implemented. After much discussion, we decided to focus on the core function that folklore plays in instruction—conveying information, exchanging ideas, and educating—in African cultures. The four articles included in this issue examine how folklore has been or could be used in various types of instruction—in formal schooling, development projects, and theater. In conceptualizing this issue, we wanted to avoid creating one more brush-stroke impression of Africa as a homogenous continent; we wanted to draw contributions that would illustrate the social and cultural diversity of the African continent. Each study is thus grounded within a particular community in Africa. Yet, the issues, problems, and solutions addressed in each article are relevant for most African countries as they share similar histories and experiences of colonialism, independence, and neo-colonialism.

Ladislaus Semali and Amy Stambach explore the value of incorporating traditional ways of knowing and conveying knowledge into school curriculum. They are critical of Western-style schools in Tanzania whose curriculum dramatically differs from students' out-of-school experiences. They suggest that the curriculum in formal schools in Tanzania needs to be re-evaluated and restructured, such that it integrates indigenous knowledge and ways of conveying knowledge into the formal educational setting. They base their argument in a case study of the Chagga of Tanzania, demonstrating how indigenous forms of knowledge and instruction as well as members of the community should be used and integrated into the curriculum and the teaching of agriculture and home economics.

David Samper also explores the inclusion of folklore in school curriculum, but from a different perspective. He analyzes the incorporation of folklore into the curriculum of Western-style schools in post-independence Kenya. Whereas Semali and Stambach consider the benefits of doing this for the enhancement of students' educations, Samper explores its inclusion for political purposes. As in other African countries, just prior to and after independence the leaders of Kenya were faced with the complex task of developing a nation in a country consisting of many diverse ethnic groups,

each with its own history and culture. Samper argues that educators and politicians drew from European romantic nationalism, using folklore as a means for identifying similarities across cultures in an attempt to invent a national cultural identity and a sense of nationhood.

Robert Nicholls and Katwiwa Mule move out of the context of formal education and into that of development. Nicholls critiques development agencies' lack of attention to and consideration of indigenous culture, especially traditional means of conveying information. He argues that development projects might be more effective if they were to integrate indigenous learning systems and instructional methodologies into their strategies to educate. He analyzes the performing arts—music, masquerades, and dance—of the Igede people of Nigeria, demonstrating how these arts provide complex avenues for effectively conveying and exchanging knowledge and ideas. He suggests that if development agencies were to integrate and apply indigenous art forms and pedagocial methodologies and principles in their public education programs, they would be more effective, increasing the potential of meaningful change in African societies.

Katwiwa Mule, on the other hand, explores the issue of development from an individual's perspective. He illustrates how one artist, Penina Muhando, a Tanzanian playwright, uses an oral art form, theater, performed in an indigenous language, Kiswahili, to express her views about social and political issues. Mule argues that Muhando's plays are more accessible to Tanzanians than are written literary works because they are performed locally in a language understood by many Tanzanians. Her use of an oral art form is effective as Tanzanian people are used to receiving information through oral literature. Further, by using familiar folklore genres, such as dilemma tales, the playwright inspires her audiences to question their actions and choices which may be hindering their ability to improve their well-being.

While all the authors discuss the use of folklore in relation to instruction, they also deal with the familiar problem of the juxtaposition of the "traditional" with the "modern" in African societies. Running through the articles is a call for African societies to appreciate the importance and value of local indigenous forms of knowledge and practices, and to recognize the value of integrating these with "modern" forms.

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