

## THE AFRICA INSTITUTE, SHARJAH, ANNOUNCES LAUNCH OF NEW SENIOR & POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

**New Fellowships Named in Honor of Okwui Enwezor, Ali A. Mazrui and Fatema Mernissi Awarded to Surafel Wondimu Abebe, Elizabeth W. Giorgis and Nidhi Mahajan, with Additional Senior Fellowship Awarded to Dagmawi Woubshet**

**Sharjah, UAE** – The Africa Institute, a globally oriented centre for research, documentation, study and teaching of Africa and its diaspora in the humanities and social sciences, announces the inaugural group of fellowships awarded through its new Research Fellowships Programme. Conceived as a research-based think-tank and a postgraduate studies institution, the Institute will offer both masters and PhD programmes dedicated to training a new generation of critical thinkers in African and African diaspora studies and evolving a new model for academic research, teaching and documentation in the field.

In advancement of these goals, The Africa Institute has inaugurated a senior fellowship named in honor of the esteemed late professor of African studies **Ali A. Mazrui** as well as two postdoctoral fellowships named for scholar, curator and art critic **Okwui Enwezor** and for world-renowned Moroccan scholar **Fatema Mernissi**.

The inaugural cohort of fellows consists of:

- **Okwui Enwezor Postdoctoral Fellow in Visual Culture, Performance Studies and Critical Humanities: Surafel Wondimu Abebe**, Assistant Professor, Centre for African Studies and College of Performing and Visual Arts at Addis Ababa University
- **Fatema Mernissi Postdoctoral Fellow in Social and Cultural Studies: Nidhi Mahajan**, Assistant Professor in Anthropology at the University of California, Santa Cruz
- **Ali A. Mazrui Senior Fellow in Global African Studies: Elizabeth W. Giorgis**, Associate Professor of Art History, Criticism and Theory in the College of Performing and Visual Art and the Center for African and Asian Studies at Addis Ababa University
- **Senior Fellow: Dagmawi Woubshet**, Ahuja Family Presidential Associate Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania



The Africa Institute Research Fellowships Programme provides the opportunity for both junior and senior scholars of African and African diaspora studies to focus on a research project and participate in ongoing scholarly and intellectual activities during their term at the Institute. The programme also grants fellows the opportunity to interact with scholars and academics in their area of research with the aim of enriching their scholarly experiences and future projects.

The Africa Institute welcomes interested scholars to apply by 15 July 2021 for fellowships commencing in September 2021. Applications should include a CV and cover letter indicating a proposed research project, in addition to a writing sample or publication, directed to [applications@theafricainstitute.org](mailto:applications@theafricainstitute.org). For more information about The Africa Institute's Research Fellowship Programme, visit [theafricainstitute.org](http://theafricainstitute.org).

## **POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS**

### **The Inaugural Okwui Enwezor Postdoctoral Fellowship in Visual Culture, Performance Studies and Critical Humanities**

Named in honor of the late Okwui Enwezor, the famed scholar, curator and art critic, whose contributions to the disciplines of art history, art criticism and cultural studies have left a groundbreaking and dynamic impact, this fellowship is open to emerging scholars whose work focuses on visual and performance studies and intersections with discourses of art history, performance studies and critical humanities.

Eligible applicants must have earned their doctoral degree (PhD) within the last five years, prior to assuming the fellowship.

## MEET THE FELLOW: SURAFEL WONDIMU ABEBE



Photo courtesy: Surafel Wondimu Abebe

Surafel Wondimu Abebe is the Inaugural Okwui Enwezor Postdoctoral Fellow in Visual Culture, Performance Studies and Critical Humanities. Wondimu is an assistant professor at the Centre for African Studies and College of Performing and Visual Arts, and a researcher at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University. Wondimu completed his PhD in Performance Historiography at The University of Minnesota, minoring in Comparative Literature and Development and Social Change.

He obtained a BA degree in English Literature minoring in Political Science and International Relations, and MA in Cultural Studies, at Addis Ababa University where he later served as a lecturer and Assistant Dean in Humanities.

Wondimu is a co-founder of Crossing Boundaries, a festival-conference that focuses on North-East Africa; a board member of a multi-genre online journal, AGITATE, at the University of Minnesota; and a research associate at the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre (VIAD) at the University of Johannesburg. He has worked with the National Theatre in Addis Ababa and other cultural institutions in Ethiopia as an actor, playwright and director, and recently co-founded a new local television station called Asham TV. Surafel is co-editing a book titled *The Imagined New: Or What Happens When History is a Catastrophe*. Wondimu is a public intellectual who uses academia, performance and media as sites of cultural politics from which to interrogate representational practices. Questioning the inadequacy of Ethiopian exceptionalism, which valorizes the country's 'uncolonized' position, Surafel engages with sedimented and embodied historiographies in order to understand what it means to be human in the here-and-now.

During his fellowship at The Africa Institute, Wondimu is editing and submitting several journal articles, in addition to developing his doctoral dissertation into a book manuscript. The book manuscript examines how performing Ethiopian female bodies engage with spaces, and maneuver within progressive, imperial (local and colonial), socialist and neoliberal temporalities of the 20th and 21st centuries.

## **MORE ABOUT NAMESAKE SCHOLAR OKWUI ENWEZOR**



*Photo credit: EPA/Frank Leonardt*

Okwui Enwezor (1963, Calabar, Nigeria-2019, Munich, Germany) was a curator, critic and art historian. Enwezor's curatorial projects alternated between ambitious international exhibitions that sought to define their moment and historically driven, encyclopaedic museum shows. His major projects include the Venice Biennale (2015), Paris Triennale (2012), Gwangju Biennale (2008), Seville Biennial (2006) and Documenta 11 (1998-2002), and he served as Artistic Director of the Second Johannesburg Biennale (1997). Enwezor's groundbreaking museum exhibitions include *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific*

*and the Atlantic, 1945-1965*, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2016); *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life*, International Center of Photography, New York (2012); *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, International Center of Photography, New York (2008); *Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary African Photography*, International Center of Photography, New York (2006); *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994*, Museum Villa Stuck, Munich (2001); and *In/Sight: African Photographers, 1940-Present*, Guggenheim Museum, New York (1996).

Enwezor served as Director, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2011-2018) and Dean of Academic Affairs and Senior Vice-President, San Francisco Art Institute (2005-2009). He was Global Distinguished Professor in the Department of Art History, New York University (2013) and Kirk Varnedoe Visiting Professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University (2012). Among his publications are *Postwar: Art between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945-1965* (Prestel Publishing, 2017), which he co-edited; *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life* (Prestel Publishing, 2013); *Contemporary African Art Since 1980* (Damiani, 2010); *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (Duke University Press, 2009); and *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Market* (InIVA, 1999). In 1994, he founded *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*.

## The Fatema Mernissi Postdoctoral Fellowship in Social and Cultural Studies

This fellowship is named in honor of the world-renowned Moroccan scholar, the late Professor Fatema Mernissi, whose contributions to gender, feminism, sociopolitical change and Islam, have been critical and transformational. The fellowship is open to emerging scholars in the field of social sciences with specific emphasis on gender, feminism and cultural studies and visual cultures, as long as they intersect with African and African diaspora studies.

### MEET THE FELLOW: NIDHI MAHAJAN



Photo courtesy: Nidhi Mahajan

Nidhi Mahajan is the inaugural Fatema Mernissi Postdoctoral Fellow in Social and Cultural Studies. Nidhi Mahajan is assistant professor in Anthropology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Mahajan obtained her PhD in Anthropology from Cornell University in 2015. Her research examines transregional maritime connections across the Indian Ocean through shipping and trade networks, ports and their entanglements with state sovereignty.

Nidhi Mahajan is also an artist and has developed multi-media exhibitions for the Fort Jesus Museum in Mombasa, Khoj International Artists' Association in New Delhi and the 2019 Sharjah Architecture Triennial. Mahajan's publications include "Seasons of sail" in Smriti Srinivas, Bettina Ng'weno and Neelima Jeychandran [eds.] *Reimagining Indian Ocean Worlds* (New York and London: Routledge, 2019); "Dhow Itineraries: The Making of a Shadow Economy in the Western Indian Ocean" in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* (Duke University Press, 2019); "At home, at sea: onboard a dhow in the Western Indian Ocean" in Prita Meier and Allyson Purpura [eds.], *World on the Horizon* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018); and "Lamu, a battleground of memory and aspiration" in Tau Tavengwa and Leonie Newhouse [eds.] *The Corridor: How the East African Corridor Spanning the Indian Ocean from Somalia to South Africa is being Radically Reshaped* (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Association with *Cityscapes Magazine*, 2017). During her residency at The Africa Institute, Mahajan will be working on her book manuscript titled "Mooring: The Dhow

Trade, States and Capital Across the Indian Ocean". Based on over ten years of archival and ethnographic research, the book is an historical ethnography that focuses on encounters between dhows or wooden sailing vessels and multiple regulatory regimes across the Indian Ocean.

The book explores the mutually constituted relationship between mobility, capitalism, and sovereignty in the Indian Ocean, examining how mobile dhow networks have been pushed into the underbelly of the global economy. Based on archival and ethnographic research across India, Kenya, the UK, Tanzania, the UAE and Qatar the book examines how the dhow trade has articulated with different state forms to become a crucial intermediary between local, regional and global circuits of exchange.

During her fellowship at the Africa Institute, Mahajan plans to continue research on a new project that examines multiple contestations over belonging and notions of sovereignty in contemporary coastal Kenya. Against the backdrop of the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor Project—a new infrastructure project—she will work with civil society organisations, politicians and government officials examining how new forms of legitimacy and sovereignty based on Indian Ocean imaginaries are currently being revived in Lamu even as the region is being re-shaped by this mega port project.

## MORE ABOUT NAMESAKE SCHOLAR FATEMA MERNISSI



Photo courtesy: Estate of Fatema Mernissi

Fatema Mernissi, (1940 Fes, Morocco–2015 Rabat), is a Moroccan sociologist and writer. She pursued her graduate education in the United States and in 1973 obtained a PhD in sociology from Brandeis University, and her thesis, which later became a book under the title *Beyond the Veil, Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (1975), won worldwide acclaim as the first book that deconstructed the patriarchal imaginary in the Muslim world. In parallel to her teaching at Mohammed V University since the 1980s, Mernissi developed a remarkable career as a sociologist, writer, novelist, artist and civil society-promoter.

Many of her books were translated into 28 languages. Fatema Mernissi quickly became an icon and a role model for women and men across the globe. Mernissi's work explores the relationship between sexual ideology, gender identity, sociopolitical organisation and the status of women in Islam; her special focus, however, is Moroccan society and culture. As a feminist, her work represents an attempt to undermine the ideological and political systems that silence and oppress Muslim women. A remarkable weaver of ideas and a powerful and yet elegant and exuberant voice, Fatema Mernissi leaves books that will continue to enchant us. For example, *The Veil and the Male Elite - A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (1987) is widely hailed as a pioneer masterpiece in the deconstruction of the misogyny in males' interpretations of Islam's sacred sources: Qur'an and hadith (Prophet's sayings and deeds), a theme that is still vibrant today. She was widely honored and acknowledged as an exceptional writer, scholar and woman.

Fatema Mernissi won many awards, prominent among which is the Prince Asturias Award for Literature in 2003, which was shared with Susan Sontag. In 2011, *The Guardian* categorized her as one of the 100 women that influenced the world. Seen as a "revolutionary princess", a "towering intellect", "a calm agitator" and a "great listener", Mernissi never failed to attract attention. She left a legacy that will continue to inspire generations of men and women the world over. Her thoughts, visionary ideas and extraordinary power of expression and communication could reach the minds and hearts of scholars, as well as those of ordinary people. [Sources: Middle East Studies Association, Oxford, Encyclopaedia Britannica, and Oxford Islamic Studies Online.]

## SENIOR FELLOWSHIPS

### MEET THE FELLOW: DAGMAWI WOUBSHET



Photo courtesy: Dagmawi Woubshet

Dagmawi Woubshet is the Ahuja Family Presidential Associate Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania. A scholar of African American literature and art, Dagmawi Woubshet works at the intersections of African American, LGBTQ, and African studies. These overlapping areas of inquiry inform his scholarship and research, including his book *The Calendar of Loss: Race, Sexuality, and Mourning in the Early Era of AIDS* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), and the co-edited volume *Ethiopia: Literature, Art, and Culture*, a special issue of *Callaloo* (2010). His writings have appeared in various publications including *Transition*, *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, *Aperture*, *The Atlantic* and *African Lives: An Anthology*. Woubshet is an associate editor of *Callaloo* and has served on the Board of Directors of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (CLAGS) at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. He has been a fellow at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University, and, as a Scholar-in-Residence at the Modern Art Museum in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, he curated *Julie Mehretu: The Addis Show* (2016).

He was named a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum in 2010. Before joining the University of Pennsylvania in 2017, Woubshet taught at Cornell University where he was named one of "The 10 Best Professors at Cornell". He received his PhD in the History of American Civilization from Harvard University and his BA in Political Science and History from Duke University.

During his residency at The Africa Institute, Dagmawi Woubshet is focusing on completing his second book, *Here Be Saints: James Baldwin's Late-Style*, and the first English translation of Sebat Gebre Egziabher's 1966 Amharic novel ሰባተኛው መላክ *Säbatägnaw Mälak [The Seventh Angel]*, in addition to several articles for periodical and as book chapters.



## The Ali A. Mazrui Senior Fellowship in Global African Studies

Named in honor of the esteemed late Professor Ali A. Mazrui—whose contributions to the field of African Studies have left a remarkable and transformative impact on the world—this fellowship is open to senior scholars whose work shows emphasis on African and African diaspora studies and their intersections with social sciences and the humanities.

Eligible applicants include well recognized scholars at the level of associate or full professors in their home institutions, or independent authors and public intellectuals who earned critical recognition for their writings in all related fields to African and African diaspora studies.

### MEET THE FELLOW: ELIZABETH W. GIORGIS



Photo courtesy: Elizabeth W. Giorgis

Elizabeth W. Giorgis has been awarded the inaugural Ali A. Mazrui Senior Fellowship in Global African Studies. Giorgis is an Associate Professor of Art History, Criticism and Theory in the College of Performing and Visual Art and the Center for African and Asian Studies at University of Addis Ababa. She received her PhD in the History of Art and Visual Studies from Cornell University and her MA in Museum Studies from New York University. She previously served as Director of the Modern Art Museum: Gebre Kristos Desta Center, Dean of the College of Performing and Visual Art and Director of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University.

She is a member of the editorial board for *North East African Studies* (NEAS) and for the *Ethiopian Journal of Social Sciences* (EJSS), and is an advisory editorial board member for *Callaloo Art* and contributing editor for *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* (CSSAAME). Giorgis has authored several publications including *Unheard Voices: Contestations Over Representation* for a collaborative project between SOAS and University of Addis Ababa called “Parliament for People”; “Skunder Boghossian: A Brief Introduction to the Man and the Artist” published in *Callaloo Art*; *The Art of Skunder Boghossian* for Sotheby’s London; *World of Malls*:

*Architecture of Consumption*, published by the Art Academy of Vienna; and *Time Sensitive Activity: The Works of Olafur Eliasson*, the companion catalogue for the exhibition of Olafur Eliasson at the Modern Art Museum: Gebre Kristos Desta. She also edited *Zemenawinet on Zemenawinet: Ethiopian Modernity and Modernism*, guest-edited a special Issue on *Engaging the Image of Art, Culture and Philosophy: Particular Perspectives on Ethiopian Modernity and Modernism* published by NEAS and co-edited a special issue on “Ethiopian Literature, Art and Culture” for *Callaloo Journal of the African Diaspora*. Giorgis has curated several exhibitions at the Modern Art Museum: Gebre Kristos Desta Center.

Elizabeth Giorgis has also participated in several international conferences and public lectures. In January 2019, she served as convener for the first African Humanities Initiative called “Africa as Concept: Decolonization, Emancipation and Freedom” that was sponsored by the Mellon Foundation and the Consortium of the Humanities, Centers and Institutes. She is a recipient of several fellowships including a distinguished visiting scholar at Brown University, a visiting professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, a fellow at the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center Academic Writing Resident Fellows Programme and a scholar-in-residency at The Institute for Comparative Modernities (ICM) at Cornell University.

Her book, *Modernist Art in Ethiopia* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2019) has been shortlisted for several book awards including the African Studies Association Book Prize (formerly known as the Melville J. Herskovits Prize), and for the African Studies Association’s 2020 Bethwell A. Ogot Book Prize as the best book on East African Studies, in addition to the African Studies Association UK’s Fage and Oliver Prize. *Modernist Art in Ethiopia* represents the first comprehensive study of Ethiopian visual modernism within a broader social and intellectual history.

Giorgis’s current research—to be conducted during her residency at The Africa Institute—focuses on developing a book manuscript on gender, inequality and visual culture which takes Ethiopian women’s aesthetic in the context of the wider politics of exclusion as a case study.

## MORE ABOUT NAMESAKE SCHOLAR ALI A. MAZRUI



Photo courtesy: Estate of Ali A. Mezrui

Ali A. Mazrui, world-renowned Kenyan-born scholar, passed away at the age of 81 on October 12, 2014, in Binghamton (New York) where he was the Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities and Founding Director of the Institute of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton University. For over two decades Professor Mazrui was affiliated to Cornell University, first as Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large, later Andrew D. White Professor-at-Large Emeritus and also as Senior Scholar in the Africana Studies and Research Center.

Professor Mazrui earned his BA from Manchester University in England, his MA from Columbia University and his doctorate from Oxford University. His early specialization in political science was later expanded to include various fields in the social sciences and the humanities.

Dr. Mazrui's professional career was launched in the early 1960s at Makerere University (Kampala, Uganda) where he served as head of the Department of Political Science and Dean of the Faculty of the Social Sciences. He has also served as Chancellor of the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology in Kenya and as Ibn Khaldun Professor-at-Large, Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences, Leesburg, Virginia. He was also Walter Rodney Professor at the University of Guyana and Albert Luthuli Professor-at-Large at the University of Jos in Nigeria. Dr. Mazrui also served as Visiting Scholar at Stanford, Chicago, Colgate, Singapore, Australia, Malaysia, Oxford, Harvard, Bridgewater, Cairo, Leeds, Nairobi, Tehran, Denver, London, Ohio State, Baghdad, McGill, Sussex, Pennsylvania, amongst others, and was a recipient of honorary doctorates from several universities worldwide.

In 2005 the American journal, *Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C.), and the British journal, *Prospect* (London), nominated him as one of the top 100 public intellectuals alive in the world.

Dr. Mazrui authored over thirty books and hundreds of articles published across five continents. He served on the editorial boards of more than twenty international



scholarly journals, and his television work includes the widely discussed nine-part 1986 documentary *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (BBC and PBS). A book by the same title jointly published by BBC Publications and Little, Brown and Company was a best seller in Britain in 1986.

He served in the leadership positions of several academic organisations including Vice President of the International Political Science Association, Vice President of the International Congress of African Studies, Vice President of the Royal Africa Society in London, President of the African Studies Association (USA), and President of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists of North America.

Dr. Mazrui's services to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the African Union include membership of the Group of Eminent Persons appointed in 1992 by the OAU Presidential Summit to explore the issues of African Reparations for Enslavement and Colonization. He was also among the Eminent Personalities who advised on the transition from the OAU to the African Union in 2002.

Dr. Mazrui was involved in a number of United Nations projects on matters ranging from human rights to nuclear proliferation. He also served as expert advisor to the United Nations Commission on Transnational Corporations and as Special Advisor to the World Bank. Dr. Mazrui was also engaged in many discussions with Heads of State in Africa, Asia and elsewhere.