

# GLOBAL AFRICA

## Call for Applications

JUNIOR RESEARCHER'S INSTITUTE 27 OCT-2 NOV 2024, GHANA, LEGON

### The CIHA Project and Global Africa

For more than a dozen years, Critical Investigations into Humanitarianism in Africa (CIHA) has produced a blog ([www.cihablog.com](http://www.cihablog.com)), run workshops, and (for the past five years) shared online courses. All these undertakings have been guided by our mission statement, which is: “to transform the phenomenon of aid to Africa into egalitarian and respectful relationships that challenge unequal power relations, paternalism and victimization. Our research and commentaries lean both on critical voices but also religious one so as to explore the connections that exist between issues of faith, governance, gender, and race in colonial and post-colonial contexts. Using critical thinking and open exchanges, we strive for equality, justice and, ultimately, respect for others’ desires, beliefs and practices” (CIHA Mission Statement).

Our understanding of “humanitarianism” –sometimes referred to as the “humanitarian international” (DeWaal, 1997), or “the humanitarian industrial complex” (Dadusc & Mudu, 2020) –incorporates emergency relief in theaters of natural or man-made disasters and development aid, because both share: a) colonial histories; b) a paternalistic ethics, and c) most of the same NGOs/UN infrastructures – see also Barnett, 2017, pp. 1-2). Our research and work with numerous African scholars and NGOs’ representatives, have reinforced our agreement with current calls across the African continent, Europe and beyond, to “decolonize” humanitarianism and aid in general. But what might “decolonization” mean? And how to ensure that decolonization does not reproduce the pitfalls of previous attempts to equalize relations between powerful external aid organizations and African states and societies?

**To explore these questions, we are holding our next workshop from *October 27 to November 2, 2024, in Accra, Ghana*, in partnership with the *Global Africa* program’s Junior Researchers’ Institute. The *Global Africa* Junior Researchers’ Institute integrates emerging African researchers into social scientific communities, enabling them to play an active part in shaping knowledge production about Africa and the world. In addition to the goals of mentoring and inclusion in scholarly communities, selected works derived from the JRI/CIHA Workshop are going to be eligible for publication in a special issue of *Global Africa* to be published in December 2025. We invite junior researchers to submit projects in line with the topic and concept note outlined below.**

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Humanitarian Relationships and the Reinvention of Africa's Futures:  
Genealogies, Current Practices, and the Decolonial Imperative

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## Concept Note:

### I. **Foregrounding African Charitable Discourses, Practices, and Paradigms: A First Step in Decolonizing Humanitarianism**

Humanitarianism is a phenomenon with numerous tentacles and definitions that might be distilled into the global phenomenon of providing succor and assistance to people in need, through both emergency relief and development aid (Barnett, 2017). Humanitarianism has an outsized presence on the African continent, structuring relations between the West and Africa, and also increasingly the East (Middle East and Far East) and the continent, as well as relations within and among African states and societies themselves. Today, due to both conceptual and empirical shortcomings, debates about humanitarianism are returning to the question of “the human” and what is necessary for a basic level of life and of reciprocal relations among peoples. Therefore, it also suggests its negative – what is inhuman, degrading, and unacceptable in human relations (e.g. Siba Grovogui, forthcoming; Adomako Ampofo, 2019). Yet this explicit inclusion also falls short, because the well-being and very survival of humans can no longer be separated from that of other forms of life and materiality, especially given the recognition of increasingly severe environmental threats and intrusive technological developments. Consideration of all life then begs questions about the relationality of all forms of being, intergenerational responsibility, spirituality, and conceptions of the sacred. Because much African spirituality and philosophy takes this kind of relationality as a central point of departure (e.g., Aina & Moyo, 2013; Kalu, 2001; Murove, 2009; Dube, 2001), we begin from the premise that it can contribute greatly to reconfiguring, and hence decolonizing, humanitarian ontologies and epistemologies of compassion towards others.

As a result, we insist in this workshop on *learning from* local African forms of knowledge and practice, rather than continually employing neocolonial forms of “teaching to” presumably less enlightened others. Such humanitarian discourses, practices, and paradigms connote forms of relationality among living and nonliving beings that often cross temporal lines and that, if taught, disseminated and deployed, can upend and enrich (i.e., “decolonize”) humanitarian relationships

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worldwide. Such a decolonial agenda could provide opportunities for disrupting the highly institutionalized and paternalistic logics and practices of the humanitarian industry, and foregrounding forms of relationality grounded in more egalitarian lifting up, healing, and ecological well-being. *Ubuntu* (often translated as “I am because you are”), perhaps one of the best-known African concepts connecting relationships and well-being, represents “a spiritual foundation, an inner state, an orientation, and a disposition toward good” – “a way of life” that is “realized in relationships with others” (Munyaka & Motlhabi, 2009, p. 65, 68). Numerous other principles also provide significant guideposts for equitable and egalitarian forms of giving and receiving and ensuring the well-being of all. In Southern Africa, for example, *Ukuisa* denotes a way to lift up a poorer family by sharing one’s cow; while *Ilima* articulates how people work together to plow each others’ fields or build each others’ houses, thereby allowing everyone to help each other rise together. Shona traditions contain numerous proverbs related to *Ukama*, “an existential reality permeating everything that exists,” going beyond the human to all of the natural world, and articulating a solidarity and “mutual interdependence ... between the ancestors and their progenitors” (Murove, 2009, pp. 317-318). The Akan proverb, “the left hand washes the right ” reflects mutual dependence, and “terenga” in the Sahel connotes obligatory hospitality as part of human relationality. In addition, much African philosophy is also concentrated in proverbs and aphorisms, which can express entire lifestyles. *Emigani Bali Bantu*, for example, a proverb of the Bashi people in Central Africa, connotes a similar orientation: “there is no such thing as a ‘self-made man’; every human being is made by/with others.” The exponential rise of what some are calling “diaspora philanthropy” (Kayode, 2013) to describe remittances sent home by Africans living abroad, can also be understood as a variant of this mutuality. African concepts and practices have even been taken up and repackaged by the aid world, as is the case for practices such as *Thanduk* or *Susu*, terms that represent mutual savings associations respectively in South Sudan and West Africa (Kemedjio & Lynch, 2024). Not only did the microfinance fad of the 1990s and 2000s repackage these terms; it also distorted their associated practices (as well as women’s mutual aid practices in general) and removed decision-making about “worthiness” (who gets loans/financial assistance) and gave it to (mostly) western organizations, who then claimed the credit (pun intended) for “giving” to Africans, especially African women.

We are interested, therefore, in concepts and practices that push people away from the competitive mindsets of liberalism and neoliberalism that have taken root in the world of western humanitarian assistance, including in aid relationships to and within the continent. Today, these mindsets also ignore the multiple and intersecting genealogies of humanitarianism, which are variously found to be rooted in 15<sup>th</sup> through 20<sup>th</sup> century European conquest, colonization, and missionizing, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century abolitionist movements, and 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>

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century international humanitarian law (Appiah, 2015; Dube 2001; Fanon, 2007; Morel, 2018). After the Nigerian civil war, known as the Biafra war (1967-1970), a reconfiguration of a more activist brand of humanitarianism, embodied by Doctors Without Borders and characterized by “witnessing,” came into play. The Ethiopia famine of 1984 became an early terrain for experimentation of this version, also bringing into focus both the “emergency” and the “development” contradictions of the phenomenon (DeWaal, 1997). The latest iteration of humanitarianism, which some commentators associate with the fall of the Berlin wall, saw the emergence of a new phase in this moral/political agenda. The intervention of American troops in Somalia or of NATO forces in Libya marked this latest version, while simultaneously, development aid NGOs have proliferated. Africa and Africans, as we see in this brief historical summary, have played a significant role in all iterations of the humanitarian phenomenon, from the Biafra/Nigerian Civil War through Live Aid to the Ebola crisis to the present.

We assert, therefore, that decolonization requires conceptual as well as historical tracing of linkages and ruptures among these movements. While we are interested, following African feminist as well as decolonial scholars, in privileging African perspectives, we also note that assumed epistemological superiority emanates from *both* “western” and “eastern” humanitarian donors and organizations. In other words, “donor proselytism” (Lynch & Schwarz, 2016) characterizes both American/European promotion of the ideal aid recipient as neoliberal subject, and the Middle Eastern/Saudi promotion of aid via ties to particular notions of charity and Islamic “reformism” over time (Kane, 2016; Petersen, 2016). Today, we see yet another wave of Islamic missionizing, of which aid is a constitutive component, emanating from the Middle East to North Africa as well as the Sahel especially.

We do not suggest that all “external” humanitarian rationales and/or aid providers think in one way while all Africans think in another –our own research as well as the relationships we have with the humanitarian aid world gives us a far more complex picture. Disagreements on mutual aid in Africa are not necessarily confined to African relationships with western actors, but also exist with African organizations themselves. All are imbricated into broader geographies and epistemologies of aid and relief. Our own CIHA Blog logo acknowledges the interdependent yet sometimes difficult relationships that do exist:



*”Ese ne tekrema, an Adinkra symbol, means ‘teeth and tongue’ with the associated proverb *Ese ka tekrema nso wote bo mu (or bom)*. It can be translated as ‘The teeth bite the tongue, also/but they live together.’ The idea for us is that they play interdependent and*

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complementary roles in the mouth. While they may come into conflict with each other, they need to work together to achieve the greatest good which is ultimately beneficial to both ([CIHA Blog: About our Logo](#)).” Similarly, aid relationships can *both* embody violence and “do good” (whence the Shona proverb, “charity can save, but charity can also kill”). Such relationships, therefore, can also be both resisted and embraced by African aid workers and aid recipients; and they can be both promoted and challenged by external actors in the west and east.

## **II. A Junior Researchers’ Institute grounded in African paradigms**

By grounding our Junior Researchers’ Institute in African conceptualizations and practices, we signal an intention to move away from colonial humanitarian paradigms. Along with Junior Researchers, we intend to lay the basis for a kind of humanitarian “decolonization” that is grounded in egalitarian conceptualizations of relationality. Even while Africans themselves have been decolonizing for generations (Adomako Ampofo, 2019), there is little doubt that humanitarian aid discourses, practices, and relationships need to be decolonized (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, 2022; Falola, 2023; Boateng, 2021; Kum’a N’Doumbe, 2007; Diagne, 2018; Biekart, Camfield & all, 2023; Ziai 2020; Machikou, 2018, 2021; Sieg, 2021; Kemedjio & Lynch, 2024). If “decolonization” is to be more than a buzzword that allows aid relationships to remain inequitable (following the path of other buzzwords such as “capacity-building,” “partnerships,” “localization,” and “resilience”), we need to begin with African ontological and epistemological frameworks (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Otherwise, we reproduce the neocolonialism and paternalism of external interventions from the exploratory/extractive, missionary and colonial periods to the present. However, if we begin by understanding what humanitarianism/charity frequently looks like in African discourses and practices, we can then engage productively with how, specifically, foreign humanitarian interventions reproduce, ignore, and/or challenge African paradigms. Thus, our workshop has the goal of decolonizing humanitarianism/ aid/ development, but it does so by first naming and lifting up African thought and practices of giving/receiving and articulating the human/humanitarian. We do not intend to reify or romanticize any specific concept. Instead of that, our purpose is to uncover meaningful connections with practices of mutual aid on the continent, ask what tensions exist within or among African concepts and practices themselves, detail what obstacles to their realization exist in current humanitarian relationships with external actors and institutions, and ask to what degree African aid workers and scholars have contributed to ignoring or sidelining African knowledge and practices.

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## III. For the workshop, we particularly welcome contributions within the following rubrics:

### A. In-depth Empirical Studies:

1. that index African concepts of giving and receiving, including oral traditions that connect humans, animals and nature into practices of mutual support, situated in different parts of the continent, and that address both beneficial and potentially problematic aspects of these practices (arising from tensions within their own logics or between their logics and those of the “humanitarian industry”)
2. that reveal how humanitarian/ development interventions (external or African-led) reproduce epistemological and material imbalances; and/or attempt to disrupt them;
3. that demonstrate the workings of donor logics for specific aid projects, or that analyze specific attempts to reconfigure the mechanisms of philanthropy in new ways
4. that trace given contemporary conflicts from their roots in colonial genealogies (e.g. extractive processes, legal code developments, gendered social norms, missionary religious and linguistic impositions, evident in conflicts including but not limited to DRC, Sudan/South Sudan, South Africa, etc.)
5. that examine “decolonization” discussions, working groups, and debates within specific aid organizations, churches, mosques, etc. –what is the meaning of decolonization in these debates, and what specific practices (if any) are being challenged and changed?
6. that probe attempts at egalitarian “partnerships” and processes of “localization” – how are goals defined in these efforts, what is considered success and what is not? Do such attempts provide templates or cautions for current debates about “decolonization”?
7. that examine Muslim or Christian logics of charity that are, or are not, in accordance with the codes and standards of the humanitarian industry –

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how they may be seen as harbingers or obstacles to “decolonization” given their situatedness in different African contexts

8. that foreground and analyze the huge amount of support (for refugees, internally displaced persons, others) given by ordinary citizens and communities within Africa to others on the continent (or beyond) – how and why is such support given? How do ordinary people express the reasons why they provide such support?
9. that analyze whether and how aid workers – African and non-African – struggle with their own organizations to fulfill or challenge aid mandates (In other words, that investigate aid workers’ (African and non-African) understanding of decolonizing/ decolonial humanitarianism, in ways that might
  - a) identify what they perceive as remnants of colonial ideas/practices in their organization and how they try to contest or overcome them;
  - b) index practices they are planning to try or have tried to implement to mitigate and/or usher in a decolonial paradigm, and to embed ongoing reflexivity in such processes/practices; i.e., that investigate what it means to translate decolonial methodologies and concepts into more egalitarian relationships on the ground

## **B. Review Essays:**

1. of African systems of thought and practices of “humanitarianism,” including forms of relationality between humans, and among the human and non-human, from different regions of the continent
2. of specific aspects of the state of scholarship by African scholars on humanitarian studies on Africa
3. of African scholarship on what decolonizing humanitarian aid relationships might mean (e.g. donor relationships, hierarchies within humanitarian nongovernmental organizations), etc. Does decolonizing humanitarianism/ development differ from previous buzzwords (e.g. partnership, sustainability, localization, etc.)?

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## IV. Practical information:

The October 2024 Session of the Doctoral School will take place in Accra (Ghana) from October 27 - November 2, 2024.

All costs associated with the School will be fully covered by the JRI of GA.

The working languages are French and English.

The October 2024 workshop will bring together participants from Africa and its diasporas. Priority will be given to advanced degree students, post-doctoral scholars, and artists/practitioners whose research involve in-depth empirical or conceptual work, and who have shown a capacity to engage critically with their research topics and the concepts highlighted in this Concept Note. The selection of **applications** will be based on the candidates' ability to identify and justify their research theme in relation to the theme of this session of the Doctoral School, to explain their problematic and their questions, and to detail the methods they intend to use. In addition to the suggested Review Essays, a **particular attention will be given to themes that require fieldwork [that is almost-finished or completed], and to dossiers describing how this fieldwork was or will be] carried out.**

### The dossier must include:

- A note (5-7 pages maximum) clearly indicating (1) the research's theme; (2) the existing body of knowledge/literature on the theme; (3) the problematic or main questions the research seeks to give an answer to; (4) the methods chosen.
- A letter of recommendation from your supervisor, if you have not yet completed your PhD thesis or research/creation thesis.
- Proof of registration into a PhD thesis or research/creation thesis program.

### Schedule:

#### – Call goes out – June 03, 2024

- Receipt of submissions: until **July 15, 2024; 12.00 am (UTC)** at [redaction@globalafricasciences.org](mailto:redaction@globalafricasciences.org)
- Responses to applicants: **August 15, 2024**
- Mentoring : **August 20-October 20 2024**
- Doctoral School : October 27 – November 2, 2024 (arrival in Accra on October 26)



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