

Maria Grosz-Ngaté

Biographical Statement

My interest in Africa dates back to my undergraduate years at the University of Washington, Seattle. I pursued those interests as a graduate student in anthropology at Michigan State University, deciding to concentrate on the anthropology and history of West Africa. With the assistance of a Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowship I was able to study the Bamana language for two years before undertaking dissertation research in Mali and archival research in Senegal. The sixteen months I spent in Mali, mostly in a village of the Segou region, was a profound learning experience that has informed my professional and personal life ever since. I completed my Ph.D. in 1986 and have returned to Mali many times since, most recently in 2001. Professional and personal activities have also taken me to Gambia, Togo, the Central African Republic, Tanzania, and back to Senegal.

My research has focused on rural transformation in relation to labor migration, on issues of gender, and on conversion to Islam. I have presented papers at various conferences and published articles in the *American Ethnologist*, the *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, and *Ethnology*, among others. I also co-edited *Gendered Encounters: Challenging Cultural Boundaries and Social Hierarchies in Africa* (Routledge, 1997) with my late colleague Omari Kokole.

I have taught at several institutions, including Western Michigan University, the University of Michigan, and SUNY Binghamton. In 1998 I accepted the position of Assistant Director at the Center for African Studies, University of Florida, and recently moved to my current position as Associate Director of the African Studies Program, Indiana University-Bloomington.

Statement of Candidacy

I am honored to stand for election to the board of directors of the African Studies Association. I have been a member of ASA for many years and always look forward to the annual meetings for the intellectual stimulation and collegiality they provide. Election to the board of directors would allow me to pursue at the national level what I have sought to do locally: promote a greater and more complex understanding of Africa. Efforts to realize this goal must, in my view, be intimately tied to collaboration with colleagues and enhancement of capacity on the continent. Following are a few ideas for ways in which the ASA might do this in the years ahead.

Support Africanist faculty at institutions without well-developed African Studies programs by including such institutions in the itinerary of visitors from the continent. Claude Ake scholars, for example, would make a presentation and interact with colleagues at a research institution and at a nearby university or college that is less well endowed with Africa-related resources.

Expand the range of intellectual engagement at annual meetings by inviting a filmmaker, creative writer, or artist from the continent to discuss her/his recent work. In addition, bring one or more community activists to familiarize scholars with their work and exchange ideas for potential collaboration.

Continue to support higher education on the continent by facilitating access to recent print publications. Most scholars provide copies of books or articles to colleagues

and institutions in the country where they are conducting research, but professors and students in neighboring countries or other regions do not gain access to these publications. ASA might act as a clearinghouse for the dissemination of recent publications.

Strengthen the ability of African scholars to make their own work known outside the continent. The African Studies Review, whose editors have been doing a splendid job, would be able to assist with this. ASA board members could work with the editors in identifying ways to generate publishable submissions from the continent as well as exploring other venues.

Liaise with print and electronic media journalists to improve reporting about Africa. Foreign desk editors and selected correspondents could be invited for fora at the annual meeting.

Develop and maintain a strong and userfriendly database of scholarly expertise that human rights lawyers, news organizations, congressional staffers, and the association itself can draw on.

Senior scholars are an untapped resource. ASA board members might enlist their assistance in liaising with members of congress and in writing grant proposals to generate funding for Association projects.

If elected, I would seek to realize these ideas in collaboration with the Executive Director, Association Officers, and my colleagues on the board. I would also cooperate to the fullest on any existing projects.