

Ato Quayson
Statement of Interest

While I have published widely on African literature, African Studies, Diaspora Studies, and Postcolonialism more generally, my interest in putting myself forward for election to the Board of ASWAD comes primarily from my long and continuing commitment to studies in diaspora and transnationalism. I was the founding director of the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies (CDTS) at the University of Toronto, which I run from 2005-2016. The CDTS had undergraduate and graduate programs, both of which were defined by comparative interdisciplinarity. Thus, students were required to take courses in at least two diasporic cultural groups to graduate. Running the Centre inspired many insights about the nature of dispersals, the different categories of diaspora, modes of nostalgia and how they were expressed, and, most importantly, the ways in which different kinds of diasporas intersected and yet disavowed their commonalities under specific political and historical conditions.

Following these experiences, there are two things that I want to bring to bear in my role on the ASWAD Board if I am fortunate enough to be elected: First is to cultivate rigorous scholarly comparisons of the various black diasporas across spaces and times and second is to establish with the help of others an elaborate mentorship scheme to help to build up the younger generation of graduate students and early-career scholars. My current role as Vice-President of the African Studies Association (President in 2020) means that I am also able to help establish a necessary and long-overdue bridge between the two associations to make for more integrated interdisciplinary scholarship and advocacy for things that matter to both us all.