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*Bodily Practices and Aesthetic Rituals in 20th Century Africa*

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The flagship journal of the African Studies Association, the *African Studies Review*, is publishing a proposed “forum”, “Bodily Practices and Aesthetic Rituals in 20th Century Africa,” of which I am the editor in April 2018. I am requesting Arts and Humanities Faculty Research Program funds to publish six color images in the forum. Given the subject, I believe images are important for the forum, as the authors’ key arguments are tied to visual aesthetics and most readers will not have the knowledge to surmise the colors present in the images if they appear in black and white. *ASR* has only published color images once before. It has also dedicated only two forums to issues of gender since its establishment in 1958. Color images will raise the prominence of this forum, which addresses an understudied area of gender studies. Thus, as the home institution of the forum’s editor, Baylor University will enjoy greater academic visibility if the forum includes color photographs.

The contributing works explore the significant connections between gender, aesthetic rituals, and body constructions in five countries in the 20th century – Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria, Mauritania, and Sudan. Africanist scholarship evidences the importance of body constructions and the aesthetic principles of African rituals, with particular reference to religious practices, theater, traditional masquerade dances, and festival performances. Burgeoning work on aesthetic customs and bodily rituals demonstrates that African women’s bodies have long been a concern of scrutiny, anxiety, and surveillance across time and space. Yet gender analysis of women’s experiences of beauty standards and constructions of the body remains scant. Taking the body surface as an academic focus, the selected works examine aesthetic and bodily rituals associated with women’s bodies as sites of gendered agency that reveal much about the simultaneous creation of individual and social identities. Utilizing interdisciplinary and multi-methodological approaches, the contributing authors in the forum demonstrate the larger importance of gender relations and the construction of gendered identities, illuminating the lived realities of people who endeavor to challenge and renegotiate identities in changing political, social, and religious landscapes.