AASR
African Association for the Study of Religions
Utambuzi Journal for the Study of the Religions of Africa and its Diaspora

Preface

Celebrating the Relaunch of the AASR Journal *Utambuzi*

Damaris S. Parsitau
President of the African Association for the Study of Religions

It is with profound honour and excitement that the African Association for the Study of Religions (AASR) announces the launch of our newly revamped journal, *Utambuzi: Journal for the Study of the Religions of Africa and its Diaspora*. The journal's new name, *Utambuzi*, is derived from Swahili and embodies the ideals of 'recognition', 'perception', 'discernment', and 'understanding'. These meanings reflect the journal's mission to decentralize, decolonize, and deepen discourse on religion, spirituality and cultural expressions within African contexts and beyond. *Utambuzi* serves as a vital platform for exploring the intersections of religion, culture, gender, politics, and society through rigorous academic inquiry and multidisciplinary perspectives. Dedicated to advancing the scientific study of African religions and the African diaspora, the journal fosters a global dialogue on these critical themes. Its Open Access format facilitates unlimited access for readers from all over the world, in line with the mission of our Association to promote, advance and widely disseminate the knowledge and understanding of African religious traditions and cultures. The *Journal for the Study of the Religions of Africa and its Diaspora* was initially launched in 2015, under the visionary leadership of Professor Afe Adogame and with support of his team of editors, in order to provide members of our Association, and other scholars in the field, with an avenue to publish and disseminate their research. Over the past ten years, six issues of the journal were published on the AASR website. We gratefully acknowledge the editorial labour of Professor Adogame (as Editor in Chief) and Dr. Corey Williams (as Deputy Editor) and the entire editorial board, over this period.

The journal is currently going through a transition period as the editorial responsibility is handed over to a new team and as the journal will now be officially published by University of Johannesburg Press on their digital platform. UJ Press has an expanding portfolio of Africa-centred and Africa-based journals. Partnering with them is an exciting development as it will significantly increase the accessibility and visibility of the journal and its content. We make use of this transition as an opportunity to adopt a new name signalling the journal's commitment to Africa-centred knowledge, and to adopt a new house style that will further professionalize the journal.

The relaunch of *Utambuzi* is the culmination of efforts by the AASR Executive Committee, led by the newly appointed Chief Editor Dr. Abel Ugba. This initiative emerges at a time when the complexities of African religious landscapes call for scholarship that critically engages with evolving narratives. As part of our commitment to scholarly

Utambuzi: Journal for the Study of the Religions of Africa and its Diaspora 8, no. 1 (2025): 1–2
Published on behalf of the African Association for the Study of Religions.
This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

DOI: 10.36615/ce307q18

excellence and community building, *Utambuzi* also provides a space for training and mentoring emerging scholars, helping them grow into future leaders in the field.

On behalf of the AASR, I extend heartfelt gratitude to a generous and long-standing member whose generous contribution has made this relaunch possible, Professor Gerrie ter Haar. Her unwavering support and commitment to advancing scholarship on African religions and the diaspora are truly inspiring. By enabling the revitalization of *Utambuzi*, she has not only preserved an essential academic platform but also paved the way for new and critical conversations that will shape the future of religious studies in Africa and beyond. This contribution underscores the importance of sustaining spaces for scholarly dialogue, particularly those that amplify African voices, perspectives and innovations. *Utambuzi* will continue to serve as a hub for groundbreaking research, fostering collaboration and amplifying narratives that are often underrepresented in global academia. I also wish to acknowledge the generous contributions of many other long-standing members, whose support has been instrumental in bringing *Utambuzi* to this new chapter. This is also an opportunity to remind readers that the sustainability of *Utambuzi* and the AASR's broader efforts rely on annual membership fees and donations. As an Executive, we decided to publish *Utambuzi* as an Open Access journal, meaning that readers can access content for free, but also that authors can publish in the journal for free. However, publishing an Open Access journal does cost money, such as the annual fees for being hosted on and supported by the UJ Press platform. As an Association, we will only be able to afford this on the longer term if we have a strong, robust and committed membership body. For our Association to flourish, we depend on the collective contributions that our membership is able and willing to make in terms of time, energy and indeed financially.

Yet, *Utambuzi* is also more than an academic journal; it is a space for dignity, inclusion and generative conversations. It aims to amplify diverse voices, ensuring that African perspectives, philosophies and methodologies are integral to global religious studies. The relaunch also holds particular significance for women and young African scholars, including members of the AASR Women's Caucus. *Utambuzi* is envisioned as a dynamic space where underrepresented voices can also explore, express and thrive in their scholarly pursuits in an inclusive and safe space for voicing academic and social activism. We warmly invite women and emerging scholars across Africa and the diaspora to seize this opportunity, submit their work and engage with a community dedicated to amplifying their insights and ideas.

As President of the AASR, alongside my executive team and the dedicated editorial board, I am committed to ensuring that *Utambuzi* upholds the highest academic standards while fostering transformative research. Its success depends on the collaboration of authors, reviewers and readers who share our vision of advancing knowledge and understanding of African and diasporic religious experiences.