

African Studies Centre

2024 Newsletter



African Studies Newsletter 2023-24

Director's Report



I was the African Studies Centre's (ASC) Director in the 2023-2024 academic year. It was an incredibly demanding year. Academic life presents its particular set of challenges but this year was made even more challenging by events in our immediate environment, such as: the university's unwarranted calling in of police in a crackdown on student demonstrators in Wellington Square; the university leadership's attempt to erode academic freedom via proposed amendments to Statute XI (Disciplinary Procedures); and the university leadership's refusal to properly acknowledge and address the concerns of, and engage in dialogue with, the Oxford Action for Palestine (OA4P).

Many students on our MSc African Studies degree either actively endorsed or directly participated in OA4P. Our students had to pursue their studies amid other important ongoing conflicts, genocide, repression and complex crises in various parts of Africa like Senegal, Kenya, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, South Sudan and Sudan, amongst others. Some of our students were personally affected by these developments. Still, they pursued and completed their studies in Oxford. I am very proud of our students for that.

The ASC continues to be a vibrant and leading institution for the study of Africa. Our flagship MSc in African Studies degree ran smoothly under the

adept stewardship of course director Peter Brooke and our principal administrator Amy Crane. Scholars affiliated with the ASC had some quite marvellous academic achievements. Peter Brooke published exciting new research on 'Radio in Africa: Past and Present'. Rebekah Lee finalised her important book, called 'Death and Memory in Modern South Africa', during sabbatical leave this year. ASC Honorary Research Associate Wale Adebaniwon an extremely competitive Guggenheim Fellowship and his book 'How to Become a Big Man' will be published in August 2024 by Indiana University Press.

Abigail Branford won a prestigious 3-year Leverhulme Research Fellowship for her fascinating project, 'Teachers versus the Memory Hole: How Teachers Fight Nationalist History Curricula'. Branford will commence the Leverhulme Fellowship in the ASC in the 2024-2025 academic year. In July 2024 I will join the University of Cambridge as a Smuts Research Fellow until May 2025. I will work on a new book, called 'Coups D'état: What They Are And Why They Are Back' (under contract with Cambridge University Press), during the period of the Smuts Fellowship. In addition, my book 'The Overthrow of Robert Mugabe: Gender, Coups and Diplomats' will be published in October 2024 by Oxford University Press.

In the ASC, we tried to create space in which genocide, a key crisis in 2023-2024, could be discussed, unfettered, through this year's esteemed Annual Lecture, 'Transnational Feminism in an Age of Genocide', which was delivered by the accomplished USA-based professor Amina Mama in May 2024. Our weekly African Studies Seminar featured a range of excellent talks about elections, social media and politics, authoritarianism, film studies, developmental states, a biography of Winnie and Nelson Mandela, queer studies, and China's support of anti-colonial struggles in Angola and Congo. The brilliant cast of scholars who gave these talks included Jonny Steinberg, George Karekwaivanane, Jodie Yuzhou Sun, Dan Hodgkinson, Tom Lavers, Rachel Taylor, Biruk Terrefe, Rachel King and Paula Cristina Roque, amongst others.

I am thrilled to have served as the ASC Director in the 2023-2024 academic year. I am grateful for the enormous support of staff and students in the ASC. I doff my hat to students and staff for their various breath-taking activities and achievements this year.

Miles Tendi
Director, African Studies Centre.

With many thanks to all of our contributors for this year's ASC Newsletter, and in particular, to Emma Davis, our Events Assistant, for working so hard on collating the articles. Our special thanks also go to Andrew Harvey for his super design work once again.

Events

Maternal Mental Health in Africa – A hybrid symposium hosted by the Perinatal Mental Health Project (PMHP), UCT and the University of Oxford

Dr Nicole Votruba, Nuffield Department of Women's and Reproductive Health, University of Oxford; and A/Prof Simone Honikman, Perinatal Mental Health Project, University of Cape Town.

On the African continent, women experience high levels of depression, anxiety and traumatic stress, especially during pregnancy and the years that follow. However, researchers and practitioners on the continent are leading the way in developing innovative and effective interventions.

Together with colleagues at the University of Oxford's Nuffield Department of Women's and Reproductive Health, the Africa Oxford Initiative, the African Studies Centre and organisations such as the African Alliance for Maternal Mental Health, the PMHP designed a one-day hybrid symposium at St Antony's College, Oxford on 19 June 2024.

The event centred around three themes: moving to scale in maternal mental health (MMH), working with social determinants in MMH and sustaining capacity in MMH.

The World Health Organization and colleagues gave a keynote address describing the pilot work of the [Guide for the integration of perinatal mental health into maternal and child health services](#) conducted in three African countries. Then, speakers from about 15 countries on the continent presented their work – their challenges, solutions and requests for guidance.

There was active engagement from among the 30 participants in person and the 100 participants online, from all over the world.

Lessons learned included

- Engaging policymakers and implementers at the earliest stage of MMH research and programming greatly improves outcomes. It develops a sense of ownership, motivating influential actors to drive change.
- Co-designing interventions with service users and service providers ensures contextual appropriateness and enhances uptake and sustainability of these interventions.
- We should be cautious about using detection tools developed in the Global North. These tools need to be tested for local and cultural appropriateness. Where possible, local tools should be developed and validated.
- Visual aids may effectively support detection and psychological counselling
- More interventions should be located at community level
- Gender based violence (GBV) impacts research participation and researcher wellbeing. There is strong intersectionality of GBV with postpartum depression and poverty.

During and after the symposium, we had very positive feedback, and conversations and collaborations emerging with colleagues across the continent. An e-booklet containing abstracts, speaker bios and presentations will soon be published by PMHP.



ASC Annual Lecture 2024 – ‘Transnational Feminism in an Age of Genocide’

The African Studies Centre (ASC) Annual Lecture was delivered by Professor Amina Mama (University of California Davis) on 7 May 2024. Mama spoke on ‘Transnational Feminism in an Age of Genocide’. Mama began the lecture by reminding the audience that ‘we do well to recall Nelson Mandela, who captured the sentiment of the anti-colonial world when he said “we know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians”’. Mama’s lecture was an absorbing tour de force, tracing the anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal political genealogy of South feminism. Mama argued global militarism in the 21st Century is the antithesis of South feminism. Additionally, Mama analysed the many actions being taken by women’s movements at multiple locations in the formerly colonised world and its diasporas, to challenge mass killings and genocidal acts in Palestine, Sudan, the Sahel and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), among others. Mama’s lecture was well attended by the African Studies community in Oxford and by other university members with thematic interests such as transnational feminism, genocide and militarism. The ASC extends its profound appreciation to Professor Amina Mama for a highly stimulating and timely lecture, and to all university members who continue to support the ASC’s events.

Amina Mama is a transdisciplinary feminist educator, researcher and organizer and a professor in the Dept of Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies at the University of California, Davis. Amina’s most influential books include *Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender and Subjectivity* (Routledge 1995) and *Engendering African Social Sciences* (co-edited with Fatou Sow and Ayesha Imam, CODESRIA 1997). She has over 30 years of experience on university campuses in Africa, Europe, and the USA. Her most prestigious appointments have included the Prince Claus Chair in Development and Equity at University of Utrecht (2004), the Barbara Lee Distinguished Chair at Mill’s College (2007–2009), the Angela Davis Guest Professor in Social Justice at the Cornelia Goethe Centre, University of Frankfurt (2016), and the Kwame Nkrumah Chair in African Studies (2020–2022). She co-produced two documentaries *The Witches of Gambaga* 2011, and *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo* 2014, both with filmmaker Yaba Badoe. Amina continues to pursue her interests through writing, collaborative action–research, documentation and film projects.



Narratives, storytelling and health in southern Africa

Rebekah Lee



As part of the African Studies Association of the UK biennial conference (in August 2024), I am co-convening (with Elleke Boehmer) a panel on narratives, storytelling and health in southern Africa. The panel of speakers address, in different ways, how the experiences and understandings of health, illness and wellbeing in southern Africa are conveyed and mediated through diverse narrative forms and storytelling practices. We are interested in the conceptual, cultural and political infrastructures that contribute to the creation and circulation of narratives and storytelling as particular ways of speaking, knowing and performing health in the region. We also explore the potentialities and limits in the health policy sphere of taking narratives and storytelling in southern African communities seriously as a form of health intervention. How may a focus on narrative and story meaningfully influence health outcomes? The panelists address health narratives and storytelling across diverse

genres, such as in literature and through popular, oral and media cultures.

Exploring these linkages between narrative and health has been a prominent theme for me this year in my research. As part of a larger and still nascent interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral project on 'everyday' forms and meanings of road safety at work in sub-Saharan Africa, I have begun developing new approaches to, and understandings of, the 'archive' on road safety in South Africa. One of the ways in which I have tried to 'refigure' (following Achille Mbembe) and decentre the historical archive on road safety is through the frame of 'crash narratives'. Crash narratives are, essentially, accounts of road injury or fatality, collected through oral historical research and ethnographic observation of a wide array of road users and road stakeholders in South Africa, including: transport operators and drivers, township funeral entrepreneurs and their employees and clients, traffic enforcement officers, Forensic Pathology officers, Road Accident Fund claimants and medico-legal experts, and of course 'ordinary' drivers, road users and pedestrians.

Listening to these diverse accounts has challenged me to think about how to conceptualise, through their words and embodied experiences, notions of risk, danger, trauma and harm. In the process, alternative moral and political geographies of mobility and hazardous roadscapes have emerged, as well as an intriguing array of *quotidienne* practices of road safety and accident prevention that are far removed from global public health approaches to road carnage in sub-Saharan Africa. I hope to expand this research by examining how the frame of 'crash narratives' can be applied to, and is evoked in, South African literature as well as in social media posts and popular music lyrics.

South Africa Discussion Group, 2023–2024 Maxim Bolt, June 2024

The South Africa Discussion Group has had another fantastic year, once again testifying to the breadth of interests and approaches sustaining an enduring community. Presenters have explored Black queer geographies, the Drum photographic archive, and Olive Schreiner's relationship to Cecil Rhodes. They have asked us to rethink Cape historiographies, and also taken us to the moral economy of food and to political activism rooted in underground water. We have ranged from hymns on nineteenth-century missions to current public work programmes, private labour brokers, and post-apartheid inherited wealth. We have learned about rural social reproduction and customary arrangements, and professional consultancies that plan for state institutions. We have been taken into the biographies of a major anthropologist and a major literary figure. South Africa-based Speakers have come the University of the Western Cape, the University of Johannesburg, the University of the Witwatersrand, and Stellenbosch. UK-based scholars have come from SOAS, LSE, the University of York, and King's College London. We heard from a number of exciting doctoral research projects as they develop, and from speakers reflecting on research careers. Visiting AfOx Fellow Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon presented his recent book, *The Blinded City: Ten Years in Inner-City Johannesburg*. Our very own Thomas Cousins, Associate Professor of the Social Anthropology of Africa, introduced his new book, *The Work of Repair: Capacity after Colonialism in the Timber Plantations of South Africa*. And, as always, the seminar sustains an important and supportive scholarly community, producing ongoing conversations and connections that extend beyond our stimulating programme of presentations. We look forward to picking up again in Michaelmas Term!

Miles Larmer



The social, political and environmental impact of extractive industries in Africa, past and present, is the dominant theme in my research. Africa's mining industries have long been the subject of political struggle, amid debates about whether mineral resources enable sustainable development or lead to a 'resource curse' of skewed growth, corruption and conflict. Until recently however, the environmental impact of mining, long recognized as a problem in the global north, was not central to African politics, company policies and even community activism. My 2021 book 'Comparing the Copperbelt' sought to explain this absence, as well as the rise of environmental awareness from the 1990s onwards.

This year I've studied how changing understandings of environmental change play out in both contemporary and historical mining projects. New mines in Africa are subject to Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), which supposedly assess impact on water, air and people's health, both during and after the mine's lifespan. But history shows us how difficult it is to assess and account for mining's long-term environmental legacy. Zambia's Kabwe lead mine closed in 1994, but its continuing devastating effect on the health of local residents has seen Kabwe labelled as one of the world's most polluted towns. The Anglo American Corporation ran the mine from 1925 to 1974, after which it was nationalized and owned by the state mining corporation ZCCM.

A recent class action lawsuit brought by Kabwe residents against Anglo American in South Africa was thrown out in December 2023. Documents presented in court show exceptionally high levels of lead in the early 1990s in children's blood samples. More could have been done to reduce lead pollution at this time, but those measures were not taken, probably because of the parlous nature of ZCCM's finances, as well as Zambia as a whole, during the implementation of neo-liberal economic reforms. At the Johannesburg court, this evidence was successfully used to show that the Zambian state and the company it owned oversaw this particularly high period of lead pollution, with demonstrable effects on the health of local residents. This undermined the case against Anglo, since the health problems of litigants could as likely be the result of Zambian state action, or inaction, as by the company. In rejecting

the lawsuit, the presiding judge declared that during Anglo's period of ownership there was no "evidence of knowledge of harm to an unborn class..." and asked rhetorically, "how could the Mine then ... have been aware of a future generation community?" Anglo was found not to be liable for its failure to foresee the future environmental impact of its operations. All of which shows how difficult it is to account for historical mine pollution, which is, like mine history itself, sedimentary: it accumulates as layers of dust and memories that are not easily distinguishable from each other and whose impact on subsequent phases of history, on the present and future of mine communities, is difficult to ascertain and foresee.

Africa is today experiencing a new mining boom, with production of cobalt, lithium, and other minerals vital to the production of electric vehicles and clean fuels soaring and expected to expand over the next decade. Dozens of African countries are starting production of these minerals, with new lithium mine opening across the continent. How can Africans ensure that globally vital green energies don't result in new dirty industries that replicate past social and environmental injustices? As a historian working in interdisciplinary African Studies, in Oxford and now as Director of the Center for African Studies at the University of Florida (UF), I have the opportunity and responsibility to bring lessons of the past to bear in current debates about Africa's mining industries. In November 2023 I spoke to Ghana's Ministry of National Security on 'The Role of Strategic Minerals in National Security in Africa/Ghana': this gave me the opportunity to highlight past, present, and future challenges arising from extractive industries, including the opportunity and threat posed by 'green' or 'strategic' minerals.

History provides only a limited guide to the future: it is vital to scrutinize the mining industry's claims that it is now much cleaner and greener than in the past, but equally important to avoid an Afro-pessimism that assumes resources must always be a curse for Africans. By drawing relevant lessons from the past, Africa's recent experience of mining can provide some guidance about both the threats and opportunities posed by extraction, green or otherwise, in the future.



Lithium mine in Ghana

Brenda McCollum

In the 2023 – 2024 academic year I worked as a Lecturer in the African Studies Centre. In addition to teaching on the core courses of the MSc in African Studies, I also supervised two MSc students' dissertations. Over the course of this academic year I completed my DPhil in History and began pursuing postdoctoral opportunities. In April 2024, I was awarded the Bringing the Research Home Grant from the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA). This grant allows postdoctoral researchers to disseminate their doctoral research to the communities which they researched as doctoral candidates. I undertook the BIEA funded research dissemination trip to Uganda in June 2024.

In my trip to Uganda I arranged and attended five research dissemination events. The first event was hosted between the Kibuli Mosque and the Islamic University in Uganda. The current leader of the Kibuli Mosque and the Kibuli community, Prince Kassim Nakibinge, graciously organized this event and welcomed myself at the Kibuli Mosque. This

event began with a thirty minute conversation between myself, Prince Kassim, and several educational leaders within the Kibuli community. Next, I presented my research at the Islamic University. This was followed by a lively question and answer session, in which I was grateful to receive a wide variety of questions and comments on my research. Prince Kassim and the Kibuli community were incredibly supportive of my doctoral research when I visited Uganda in 2021 and they helped me organize many of the oral history interviews which I conducted. I was incredibly grateful to be able to bring this project back to Kibuli and to hear the community's comments and questions about the research.

My second event was organized and hosted in a small rural community to the west of Masaka. When I travelled to Uganda in 2021 for my doctoral research, I visited this community to conduct oral history interviews. It was a pleasure to visit this community again and to present my research to them. For this event, I was hosted by and



The final event in my trip was hosted at the Uganda Society in Kampala. The Uganda Society acted as a base for me while I was in Uganda conducting research in 2021 and 2022. I was very grateful to be able to return to the Uganda Society during this trip and to share my doctoral research with other Uganda Society members. This event had over thirty individuals in attendance and I appreciated the feedback and questions that I received. The dynamic discussions and hospitality I experienced at the Uganda Society were a highlight of this trip.

I am grateful to the BIEA for funding this trip and for giving me the opportunity to discuss the findings of my doctoral research with the communities that made this research possible. This research dissemination trip allowed me to reconnect with communities and individuals that I had not seen since 2021 and enabled me to form new connections with other people in my field of study. Moreover, this time spent in Uganda and with these communities allowed me to formulate further ideas for future research projects. Traveling to Uganda for these research dissemination events was a high point of my academic year!

presented my research at the local mosque. Although this is a small community, there were around thirty attendees at the event. Due to the varied range of English language knowledge in this area, I worked with my research assistant to present the work in both English and Luganda. This presentation was followed by a vibrant question and answer session. I was grateful to hear this community's questions and feedback on my doctoral research.

The third event in this trip was hosted by a rural community in Mukono, to the east of Kampala. This event was also held in the local mosque and the presentation was also given in both English and Luganda. Similar to the second event, I had also visited this community in 2021 when I was conducting my doctoral research and I also conducted oral history interviews with elderly members of this community. It was lovely to visit this community again and I was grateful for their hospitality and their comments on my doctoral research.

The penultimate event in my research dissemination trip was hosted by Makerere University in Kampala. In my doctoral research trips to Uganda, I was required to receive ethical approval from a Ugandan institution and the Makerere Institute of Social Research undertook an ethical evaluation of my project. At Makerere I presented my doctoral research, followed by a discussion session. I appreciated the questions and comments I received on my work at Makerere and I was grateful to interact with other academics who also study Uganda. Term time had come to an end at Makerere by the time of my event there, but the university was still able to generate an audience of around twenty people. I am thankful to Makerere for their hospitality and for the opportunity to discuss my work with students and academic faculty at the university.



Hon. Albert Kan-Dapath speaking in Oxford

Broadcasting Colonialism

Peter Brooke



Panel on 'Empire and Metropole': Dulce van Vliet (Utrecht, online), Dr. Vincent Kuitenbrouwer (Amsterdam), Federike Moorman (Weimar) and Steve Hocking (Oxford).

In May 2024 I was pleased to convene a two-day conference on 'Broadcasting Colonialism: Sight, Sound and Media Technologies in the Colonial World' at the African Studies Centre in collaboration with the Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, the Department of Communication and Media Studies, University of Johannesburg and the Oxford Centre for Global History. The conference was held at St Antony's college and online and featured speakers from Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Algeria, India, USA, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands. A packed programme comprised eighteen original research papers and a film discussion session, attracting an audience of 120 over the two days.

The subject of the conference was research on the history of radio, television and film across the colonial world, with a particular focus on African colonies. Historical scholarship on colonial newspapers is a well-established field but historians have traditionally given less attention to broadcast media due, not least, to the methodological challenges of using audio and visual archives. The conference showcased the work of current historians to plug this gap in our understanding of the nature of

colonialism. The papers revealed many common themes that were shared across the colonial world, especially in Africa and South Asia. Colonial officials were fascinated by the power of broadcasting as a tool of political control and its potential to project a high-tech vision of colonial rule as modern and permanent. Paradoxically, this often went hand-in-hand with an ethnographic impetus to record, curate and promote 'traditional' music and stories. But broadcast media proved unreliable servants of colonial rule thanks to the efforts of subversive voices from within the colonial media machine and, from without, the cross-border flow of contraband records, banned film reels and cross-border covert radio stations. In some localities broadcast media served as much to undermine as to prolong empire.

If the geographical breadth of the conference highlighted synergies and departures across the colonial world, its chronological sweep from the early 1900s to the present day also enabled panels to explore change and continuity over *the longue durée*. This was a period of dramatic change in media technology, from the magic lantern shows that Dulce van Vliet (Utrecht) termed the 'TedTalks' of early twentieth-century Netherlands, the telegraph wires of colonial Namibia (Federika Moorman, Weimar) and loudspeakers mounted on early planes in India's princely states (Dr. Priya Mirza, Delhi), to BBC television's twenty-first century coverage of torture in Northern Ireland (Matthew Robinson, Belfast), Russian disinformation in contemporary Mali (Jennifer Dickson, King's College London) and the coloniality of Scorcese's recent film *The Killers of Flower Moon* set in Oklahoma of the 1920s (Ruka Hussain, Oxford). In other ways the conference highlighted continuities across time and space. The racialised 'comedy'



Keynote lecture on 'Hum London se Bol Rahe Hain' ['This is London Calling'], Broadcasting and the British Raj: Prof. Chandrika Kaul (St Andrew's) and Dr. Peter Brooke.



Panel on 'Violence and Propaganda': Matthew Robinson (Belfast).

of Rhodesian silent film in the 1970s analysed by Tichawona Zinhumwe (Johannesburg) shared the same vision of the white settler good-life in Algeria that features in the French military film *Képi Bleu* (1957) discussed by Dr. Natalya Vince and Walid Benkhald (Oxford), and other forms of Algerian propaganda in the 1950s (Prof. Youcef Hamitouche, Algiers). Individual broadcasters played an essential role in shaping colonial broadcasts, sometimes celebrating colonialism and sometimes critiquing it in subtle ways as revealed by the keynote speaker Prof. Chandrika Kaul (St Andrew's) in the context of British India, Dr Vincent Kuitenbrouwer (Amsterdam) on radio in the Netherlands East Indies, and Dr. Siyabonga Njica's (Cambridge) research on Nontando Jabavu's role at the BBC in the 1940s and 1950s.

The practical difficulties of decolonising the broadcast media in the years after independence was also a global phenomenon as demonstrated by Golden Maunganidze (Johannesburg) in his paper on the dominance of the English language in Zimbabwean community broadcasting, the analysis of Ghanaian broadcasting in the era of decolonisation presented by Dr. Jennifer Blaylock (Rowan), Dr. Victoria Ellen Smith's (Bath Spa) research on Dagbani radio in Ghana in the 1960s, and Dr. Linda Austin's work on Christian radio stations in the South Pacific Islands (Malmö). My own paper on Ghana's wired (loudspeaker) radio network argued that the infrastructure inherited from colonial initiatives had a gendered impact in the years after independence as it favoured female listeners, unlike the wireless networks used elsewhere which tended



Radio Van, Gold Coast Broadcasting Service, 1956 (Source: Bodleian Library).



Panel on 'Decolonisation and Indigeneity': Dr. Siyabonga Njica (Cambridge).

to exclude women. Conducting research on the history of media presents many practical challenges but Moses Adjei Adjetey (Ghana) gave us all hope in his survey of archive preservation projects undertaken at the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation.

I was very grateful for the support of our collaborating universities, in particular the heads of department Prof. Admire Mare (Johannesburg) and Dr. Abena Yeboah-Banin (Ghana) who opened the conference. I was also indebted to our Oxford-based partner, the Oxford Centre for Global History and the Sanderson Fund who supported the event, and to Dr. Brenda McCollum, Amy Crane and Emma Davies for their invaluable help.



Film presentation and discussion on 'The Birth of Nations: Colonial and Anti-Colonial Film in Francophone Africa, 1957-61': Dr. Natalya Vince and Walid Benkhald (Oxford), with Dr. Peter Brooke.



Panel on 'Legacies and Traces': Ruka Hussain (Oxford).

Oxford, Black Oxford

Tinashe Mushakavanhu



A portrait of Dambudzo Marechera was unveiled in the New College hall in April 2024.

It is 50 years since Dambudzo Marechera's dramatic arrival in Oxford, where after a year and half in March 1976 he was 'sent down' at New College. He led a peripatetic life, homeless, vagrant but somehow managed to forge a successful career as a writer. He is now a canonical figure in African literary culture. But he is not the only African writer to come to study at Oxford and find the going tough. In a new mapping project, I have been seeking such figures in order to develop a genealogical tree of how Oxford has shaped, influenced, or contributed to the development of African literature.

In the prevailing scholarship of Marechera, he has been isolated from himself, and his community and yet his professional and personal project was to build a literary network and infrastructure to sustain the black imagination. By reading Marechera in community with others, we get to appreciate the import of his contributions. In literature as in life, Marechera's Oxford experiences appear to have taken on a significance that transcends their brief temporal—or textual—duration. Did he try to burn down his college library? Marechera wrote about Oxford immediately following his departure from the university. He depicts Oxford in great, unflattering, detail. There are grains of truth in this. His Oxford years remained forever unfinished. He is often considered Percy Bysshe Shelley's African doppelgänger, a historical figure and famous Oxford misfit who also had a premature stay at University College.

Using Marechera's short story, 'Oxford, Black Oxford' as a catalyst, I have wondered what the darker side of this town looks like when a light is shown on it. The South African poet Arthur Nortje arrived in Oxford in October, 1964, a decade before Marechera as the first recipient of the Junior Common Room scholarship, which was discontinued because of Marechera's behaviour. His reputation as a writer was forged posthumously after the publication of his collected poems in two separate volumes *Dead Roots* (1973) and *Lonely*

Against the Light (1973). He died of a suspected drug overdose aged 27 years old.

And if we rewind the clock back to the early 1950s, we encounter yet another figure in the Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek who was a student at St Peter's College. After travelling to the United Kingdom as a player with his national team, p'Bitek gave up football to pursue his studies in Bristol, Aberystwyth and eventually Oxford where he was famously failed his Dphil in anthropology in 1970 because his version of history informed by his lived experience did not fit into the accepted colonial historiography. Okot p'Bitek returned to his homeland without a degree but went on to play an important role as a university teacher as he joined his contemporaries such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Henry Owuor-Anyumba and Taban Lo Liyong to reform the education system. His interest in history and anthropology was turned into fiction, especially his well-known book, *Song of Lawino*.

To understand the careers of these writers, we need to understand Oxford, the place they inhabited, literally, during their student years and, artistically, for the rest of their lives. Their published careers begin in this city. When these writers arrived in Oxford their minds were aglow with literary and romantic associations and then they spent their time in the city building on formed and unformed preconceptions of the place. Eventually, each of them made contributions to literary Oxford, even if they're not acknowledged, or recognised as Oxford writers. There is a sense in which for these writers Oxford was always a city of imagination.

A visit to Blackwells or Waterstones offers a decidedly narrow view of who, or what an Oxford writer looks like. They are usually male and white. All the writers under focus here are not represented at all. In juxtaposing the stories of African writers in Oxford and the dominant white narrative, it is my interpretive political aim to make concurrent those views and experiences that have been ideologically and culturally closed to each other, and also attempt to shed new light upon the parochial readings of Oxford in a limiting political lexicon.

Perhaps, the major intellectual contribution of this mapping exercise is that it offers an inventory and a genealogy of refusal, because when these writers cannot find their place in Oxford, they graduate and leave, or they get expelled, or they die and retire permanently and continue to exist forever as peripatetic activist-intellectuals because they're not defined by one place or another. Their literary texts collectively share procedures of world making and offer us radically new perspectives. They represent a wide range of aesthetic forms. Histories of failure and disconnection offer a more powerful way to relativise and decentre Oxford. These challenge the dominant representation of the University of Oxford in popular culture.

Dr. Tinashe Mushakavanhu is a Junior Research Fellow in African & Comparative Literature at St Anne's College.

Green Finance, Democratic Accountability and the Slipperiness of Public Private Partnerships in Africa

Dr Portia Roelofs

How can African governments fill the 'infrastructure gap' in an increasingly hostile fiscal environment? And how can the clean energy transition be accelerated in a context where many African countries still have poor levels of electricity supply? For many at the World Bank and development finance institutions like the African Development Bank (AfDB) the answer to both is public private partnerships also known as PPPs.

This governance modality, which has been around since New Labour's experiments with Private Finance Initiatives in the UK in the mid-1990s, has been touted as the solution to meeting developmental objectives amidst strained government budgets, and a way of unlocking private finance – by creating 'bankable' projects, in countries and sectors which would otherwise be too risky to attract investors. The World Bank have celebrated PPPs as part of the 'Making Finance Work for Development' and pledged to escalate PPP financing 'From Billions to Trillions. In this way, PPPs are central to what critical scholars, following Daniela Gabor, have termed the "Wall Street Consensus", as vehicles for channelling blended finance and cementing the shift to the use of government money to "derisk" private investment.

Spurred by accelerating climate change, this embrace of PPPs comes at a time of growing donor and foreign investor interest in energy systems in Africa. USAID's Power Africa, for examples, sees 170 private companies committing \$40bn of investment in African energy markets. Much of this uptick in international financing for energy transition is set to be channelled through PPPs, through initiatives like the Africa-Europe Green Energy Initiative, the Sustainable Markets Initiative and the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP).

Thus public private partnerships can be thought of as a new frontier of how global capitalism engages with states to create new configurations of accumulation around new market opportunities created by energy transition and climate policies. Yet critical scholars and activists have raised questions about whether these new PPP arrangements. Firstly, in many cases, PPPs rely on expensive, highly leveraged private-sector debt financing, with private partnerships putting in scant actual equity. Secondly, large-scale infrastructure PPPs are highly complex, demanding expensive forms of legal and financial expertise to navigate. As a result, PPPs risk putting green finance beyond the scope of democratic accountability. As a May 2024 Christian Aid argue in a report on the AfDB's support for renewable energy, there are concerns "about the lack of transparency and hidden costs to consumer associated with financing arrangements such as public-

private partnerships and associated power purchasing agreements with private sector providers." In this way it's unclear if they are really a solution to the various 'funding gaps' that have been said to characterise the clean energy sector in Africa.

In my ongoing research I interrogate the PPP phenomenon from two angles. First, I've mapped how state-level (i.e. subnational) governments in Nigeria have deployed PPPs over the past two decades, showing that the outcomes have been much more varied in terms of size, structure and modes of public-private interaction than glossy donor reports might lead us to believe. Second I'm interested in how public private partnerships domesticate green finance into domestic political economies of African countries, and the way that these modalities which are promoted by international donors play out on the ground. Between the donor hype and the sometimes overly deterministic narratives of capitalist extraction from critics the research hopes to shine a light on the contingent ways that African governments are engaging with the rise of 'green' capitalism in a climate-changed world.



Dr Portia Roelofs
Lecturer in Politics at King's College London and Associate of the African Studies Centre

Africa Oxford Initiative (AfOx) Visiting Fellowship in the African Studies Centre and Merton College: Pathway to Achieving my Long-term Research Agenda

Prof. Abosede Omowumi Babatunde

2023–24 AfOx Visiting Fellow and Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies, Centre for Peace and Strategic Studies, University of Ilorin, Nigeria



Being awarded the prestigious AfOx Visiting Fellowship in the African Studies Centre and Merton College, University of Oxford, provided a pathway for me to achieve my long-term research agenda. The fellowship offers the opportunity to access special collections of archival materials in the Bodleian Library and objects on African traditional religion and cultural practices in the Pitt Rivers Museum. These are relevant to my book project on indigenous climate adaptation strategies, conflict, and peacebuilding in oil extractive communities in Nigeria's Niger Delta. The AfOx residency offers diverse experiences beyond my expectation. Quite aware of the short duration of my two months residency in Oxford University, I have to carefully organize my schedule in line with my set agenda and stated goals. Numerous interesting events and programs in Trinity term could easily divert me from completing my set goals if I did not make careful selections. I did not foresee the whirlwind of academic events, lectures, seminars, conferences, and lunch meeting invitations that I would encounter during my residency. I had to carefully navigate attending some of these enriching events and meetings, along with my library

search for rare collection of materials for my book project.

Through my library sessions with Lucy McCann, I was able to access archival documents written by some British colonial officers on African traditional religious beliefs, cultural practices and traditions. These materials offered a glimpse into the precolonial African societies and the way of life, customs, and traditions of my forebears. It is exciting having access to these archival materials that depicted raw glimpses into cultural life of precolonial African societies, revealing details beyond those available in historical books. I found some practices that have been sustained over time and similar to those of the oil extractive communities where I locate my research. It was interesting to glean the perception of the British colonial writers about the African way of life. Reading these archival documents also gave me a better understanding of my African identity and heritage. In all, I found it fascinating to read these raw and special collections of archival materials on precolonial African societies at the Charles Wendell David Reading Room on the 5th floor of the Weston library, where I spent a considerable part of my two-month residency.

Through Lucy, I was able to connect directly with a member of staff at the research section of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Bryony Smerdon. My first visit to the Pitt Rivers Museum did not facilitate any direct connection with any research staff. The Museum staff that I met at the time, only directed me to some collections of objects on African cultural practices and indigenous religion. My email interaction with Bryony showed that I would have to wait for a month or more to be able to book an appointment to access rare African objects not on display. Alarmed

because of the limited time left in my residency, I decided to take the bull by the horns by visiting the Museum to directly meet with Bryony and explain my peculiar situation. In the end, she enthusiastically assisted me to locate some of those materials and fixed an appointment to view some of those objects not on display.

My visit to the Pitt Rivers Museum led me to discover similarities between African indigenous culture and those of other parts of the world, including Canada, Columbia, and many Asia countries. This led me to ponder why the entire gamut of our indigenous African traditions, customs, and religion were labelled by the European colonials as heretical. The answer is apparently embedded in the political economy of transatlantic slave trade and colonial incursion into African soils. An interesting aspect of my residency is connecting with Oxford colleagues in other colleges and departments and sharing fascinating conversations about our research. In lunch meetings with Oxford colleagues in Wolfson, St Antony's, Linacre, and Lady Margaret Hall, I discovered the fascinating, unique, and varied congenial college life in Oxford University that depicts a mix of formality and informality. I was able to connect with Oxford colleagues in TORCH and the Departments of Migration Studies, History, Politics and International Relations, Economics, the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, and of course the African Studies Centre.

My Oxford collaborator in the African Studies Centre, Doris Okenwa, provided very useful information on relevant events relating to my work in various departments in Oxford, as well as useful guidance for library search and publishing outlets. I was fortunate to

meet with Miles Larmer, the former ASC Director who also shares my research interest on extractive communities. I also met with David Pratten, another former Director at the ASC. I had some talks with ASC past and current students working on extractive communities in Ghana and Zambia. The current ASC Director, Miles Tendi, also provided useful suggestions for my research engagements in the University. These conversations with Oxford colleagues and students opened up opportunities for collaborative research.

Book talks, lectures, and conferences at the Blavatnik School of Government, the Oxford Martin School and the Evans-Pritchard lecture created possibilities of future collaborative research with Oxford colleagues. Attending the OxPeace conference organized by the Oxford Network of Peace Studies gave me an opportunity to learn about new models of peacemaking and peacebuilding in my field of Peace and Conflict Studies. This conference also connected me with colleagues outside Oxford such as those from the London School of Economics and St Andrews University. The warm, friendly environment, lovely meals, and interaction with other fellows at Merton College created a special space to socialise, relax, laugh, and have fun with Oxford colleagues from diverse departments. Matthew Higgins played a crucial role in connecting me with other fellows at Merton. The AfOx team made my residency worthwhile and also offered exciting events including interactive meetings with the Atlantic fellows, AfOx Insaka, networking lunch, and reception with the AfOx steering committee. The AfOx Visiting Fellowship is quite an impactful and enriching lifetime opportunity for me.

It was the best of times...

Rui Verde



Last January, in response to the kind invitation of Professor Miles Tendi, I had the opportunity to present a lecture to a cohort of his master's students. The subject was "The largest Chinese interaction in Africa: Angola – glimmers of hope and sorrow." The lecture's relevance is that it presents the epitome of what research should be and affirms that the practices at the African Studies Centre articulate that ideal.

Scientific research at a university makes sense when it has consequences for students, offering them contact with the latest results in a given subject and creating a virtuous cycle between students and researchers. There is no benefit to be gained from mass research that does not affect students and only seeks publication in scientific journals, little known and often destined to be covered by the dust of time. The beauty of the researcher's work lies in the possibility of investigating and presenting meaningful progress to colleagues and students.

This is the opportunity and the hallmark of the African Studies Centre at the University of Oxford. Researchers are not isolated in a search for some non-existent Holy Grail but have the ability to share the progress of what they are doing with students and colleagues in real time. This is the most rewarding form of research.

In my case, the main research objective concerns China in Angola seeking a possible Angolan model of China's intervention in Africa from 2002–2024. Although its

principal output will be the publication of a book, perhaps in the next year, its relevance is that it will generate several interventions along the way.

This year, I held seminars on the subject in various places, such as the École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris, the National Library in Lisbon, Macao, China, and the Universidade Agostinho Neto in Luanda, Angola, with the presence of the Chinese ambassador in connection with the 10th anniversary of China's Belt and Road Initiative, Egmont Institute, Belgium, and, of course, in seminars at the University of Oxford.

What is clearly relevant is that Oxford promotes a free flow of people, ideas, and initiatives around the world, constituting a truly universal university where research is an authentic, original product with an impact on students' knowledge and learning.

However, to paraphrase Dickens' saying, while it was the best of times, the worst of times, could be coming in the form of Brexit consequences. Although I obviously do not question the sovereign ability of the British people to determine their future as they wish, decisions have consequences. For this free and universal model of research, Brexit is bringing a sour alternative. Currently, we live in a time of shrinking ambition, fear of freedom, and a deterioration of the research model and scope described above. The news about the decline of British universities in the world are abundant.

Overcoming this challenge is the great task that Oxford faces. To cite the Charles Dickens quote in its entirety: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

We must hope that the former of each dichotomous pair outweighs the latter.

Jonny Steinberg

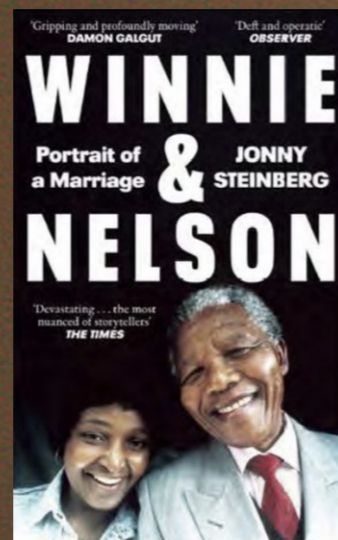
I spent most of the year working on a biography of Cecil Rhodes which I hope to complete by the end of 2025. I first became interested in him nearly a decade ago when I was teaching at the African Studies Centre here at Oxford and some of the students I was supervising were deeply involved in Rhodes Must Fall. I had also recently taught at UCT and so was keenly interested in the movement there and the upheaval at the university following the removal of the statue. So, I guess I started reading about Rhodes because his legacy had entered my life and I became intrigued about who the actual flesh-and-blood man had been.

Before long, I came across what I regarded as a paradox, or at least a tension worth exploring. On the one hand, Rhodes was clearly a Machiavellian figure who exercised power brutally. Yet he also seemed to be – at least according to his most authoritative biographer, Robert Rotberg – a healthy, well-adjusted homosexual who loved a man deeply and was deeply loved in turn. I don't think Rotberg realised it, but he had painted Rhodes as a hero in queer history. For Rhodes lived in late Victorian times when the life Rotberg claims Rhodes led was criminal, punishable by hard labour and certainly ruinous of public careers. Rhodes was at Oxford at the same time as Oscar Wilde, who was, famously, destroyed by Victorian prejudice. He was also a colleague of Lord Rosebery who was almost brought down by rumours that he had an amorous relationship with his private secretary. If Rotberg is right and Rhodes was indeed both a practicing homosexual and among the most famous British imperialists of his time, how did he negotiate the combination? What did these two poles of his identity mean to him? What was the relationship between the two in his own conception of himself?

These were the initial questions that set the project going. I went in with an open mind, knowing that I'd probably have to revise most of the preliminary assumptions with which I began. I am in the middle of this project now and am just beginning to get a clear sense of what I think. It's been a hard, but really instructive project. Peeling away the layers of anachronism to try to understand what Rhodes' relationship with the men around him actually meant at the time has been the biggest challenge. It is so easy to slip up and allow meanings and understandings that only evolved after Rhodes's death to sneak in. For instance, I found in the archive an interview with a Rhodesian magistrate conducted nearly half a century after Rhodes died, in which he recalls Rhodes and one of his secretaries sharing clothes and, at one point, a bed. How does one read this? Is it evidence that the two men were lovers? I thought it might be at first, but after reading the memoirs, diaries and letters of the men around Rhodes, it turns out that there are much more convincing interpretations of what was going on between them. In the end, grasping how Rhodes understood power and what he needed from

the men around him became a surprisingly seamless, single inquiry. But it took a while to get there.

Also during the course of last year, I spent some time promoting a newly published book, *Winnie and Nelson: Portrait of a Marriage*. It shares with the Rhodes project an interest in the connections between intimate and public life. It was easier in this case as Winnie and Nelson Mandela self-consciously offered up their marriage as a political spectacle and thus thrust private life into the public sphere. I argue in the book that they were on the one hand wildly successful, becoming at one point the most famous couple in the world, but also that they lost control of what their marriage meant as the upheaval their people were experiencing invaded their relationship with each other. Taking this project out into the world was a wonderful experience. Hearing how smart, thoughtful, deeply knowledgeable people respond to one's research is deeply rewarding.



Oxford University Africa Society

Reflecting on the past year, we have shared numerous memorable moments as a society with various engaging events. From the Student Union Freshers Fair, where we welcomed new and returning members, to our vibrant AfroBops at Spirit Bar, creative Sip and Paint sessions, supportive Welfare Teas, the Africa Cup of Nations watch party and fun Game Nights, these activities have provided social and welfare support and strengthened our community. In addition to the social and welfare events, we hosted several educational, thought-provoking, and career-oriented events. Highlights included the African Diplomacy Speaker Event with Honourable Fatou Bensouda, High Commissioner of The Gambia to the United Kingdom, in collaboration with the Oxford Diplomacy Society and African Studies Center; a Career Fair with Genesis Analytics and McKinsey; the Advance Africa Conference with GetIn Ed; Women's Day Reproductive Health Talk with Forward UK; the Swahili classes at the African Studies Centre and the Writing Workshops and Academic Talks with the Africa Oxford Initiative.

In the Michaelmas Term, we implemented the AfriSoc-AfOx mentorship program to boost the number of African students pursuing postgraduate studies at the University of Oxford. Currently, African graduates represent only 3% of Oxford's postgraduate students, even though Africa comprises over 30% of the global student-age population. Our main goal was to change this statistic. This year, we were thrilled to receive 1,400 mentee applications, doubling last year's 700. Our pool of mentors also expanded significantly from 23 to 122. For the first time, we provided a comprehensive application guideline to all applicants, regardless of their selection status. We also developed a guideline for mentors and held an open Q&A session on the AfOx YouTube channel. A heartfelt thank you goes out to the mentorship committee and mentors for their unwavering dedication. The mentorship program was a great success, with mentees giving positive feedback and many securing admissions to Oxford and other universities as a result of the initiative. We also got shortlisted for the [inaugural VC Awards 2024](#) in the category "Commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Awards"

In Trinity Term, we hosted the [Oxford Africa Conference 2024](#) at the Rhodes House, successfully raising over £80,000 in cash and kind for the event. With the theme "Charting Africa's Path Forward: A Journey of Possibilities," we brought together some of the brightest minds in Oxford to share ideas and engage with our members and supporters. Distinguished speakers included Honourable Raila Odinga, Former Prime Minister of Kenya, His Excellency Godwin Obaseki, Executive Governor of

Edo State, Nigeria, Dr. Khetsiwe Dlamini, Former Chief of Staff of UN Women, H.E. Mbelwa Kairuki, Tanzania High Commissioner to the UK, Hon. Edwin Sifuna, Senator of Nairobi City County, Hon. Touma Njie, National Assembly Member of The Gambia, and Honorable Minister Abdihakim Aynte, Minister of Food Security and Climate Change, Somalia, among others.

Over two days, we held multiple panels and workshops on Governance and Democracy, Healthcare, AI and Technology, Entrepreneurship and Economic Development, Gender Equity, and Climate Change. These conversations were a powerful reminder of the importance of our collective efforts in shaping the future of our continent. This year, we also elevated the Innovation Seed Fund competition, our initiative to support grassroots innovations. We opened applications to students across the African continent, inviting finalists to Oxford to attend the conference and pitch their innovative solutions to our pressing challenges for a chance to win £5000. This initiative provided a platform for finalists to experience Oxford, network, and expand the reach of their projects. Furthermore, we hosted an African Fashion runway for the very first time during the Conference Gala Dinner, themed Africa is not a country. These achievements would not have been possible without the tireless efforts and support of the Conference, Alumni, and Magazine Committees. We are forever indebted to them for their dedication and hard work. Look out for the conference report, which will be shared in a few weeks for more details on the outcomes.

We are thrilled to share that we successfully unveiled two key milestones: the society magazine and an alumni network. Since its founding in 1958, the society has thrived and remained committed to the continent, serving as a home away from home for African students at Oxford. Each year, many young Africans graduate from Oxford, most of whom are society members. They continue to contribute significantly to the continent's progress in various ways. We aimed to build a platform that maintains the connections between former and current AfriSoc members. The Oxford Africa Alumni Network, hosted on Raklet, will facilitate this. Additionally, we recognized the need for a medium to share African stories by and for Africans. The AfriSights, the official AfriSoc magazine, features thought-provoking articles, inspiring stories, and insightful interviews that highlight the diverse and dynamic nature of our continent.

This year has been incredibly fulfilling for us all. As we hand over the mantle of leadership, we held a final event with some members to engage with the phenomenal Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General of the World



Advance Africa Conference 2024



Bob Marley Film Screening

Trade Organization, here in Oxford. Our members had the opportunity to learn from her groundbreaking work and invaluable insights. Her inspiring journey and wisdom left a lasting impression on everyone. On June 19, 2024, Dr. Ngozi was one of six distinguished individuals awarded honorary degrees from the University of Oxford. We were incredibly proud and excited to celebrate this remarkable achievement with her, recognizing her outstanding contributions to global trade and development.

None of these successes would have been possible without the brilliant Executive Committee members who have worked tirelessly to bring our society's dreams to life; President Isatou M Bokum, Vice President Ruth Nanjala, General Secretary Macdonald Mutekwa, Treasurer, Olivia Vashti Ayim, Welfare Officer Bomikazi Lupindo, and Social Secretary Tamar Nicholson.



AfriSoc AGM and Welcome Event



Career Fair with Genesis Analytics



Women's Reproductive Health Talk



Oxford Africa Conference Group Photo 2024

Jonathan Jackson

Over the past year the African Studies Centre has once again remained a conduit for social activity, intellectual inspiration, and academic events. During my status as an Academic Visitor to the Centre and the University, my own research has once again taken me to Zambia, Namibia, South Africa, and the USA. This was mostly for fieldwork and also archival work in national archives in Lusaka, Windhoek, and Pretoria; and to the archives of the United Nations in New York.

Two highlights from this past year shine brightly in my mind as I write this. One is the publication of my first Swahili-language article in a peer-reviewed journal. Co-authored with my doctoral fieldwork research assistant, Francis Ching'ota, our article – 'Maono ya Bonde la Kilombero, Tanzania: Historia za Maendeleo Yake' – was published in *UTAFITI: Journal of African Perspectives* in December 2023. It was published Open Access in Utafiti 18(2) and is available online.

The second highlight was the opportunity I had in April this year (2024) to attend the *kuomboka* festival of Western Zambia. This festival has historical origins in social survival, when a whole community would annually leave the flooded Zambesi floodplain for higher ground after the rains rendered the landscape uninhabitable, before eventually returning for the dry season again. Over time this took on a great ceremonial character and cultural significance, locally and nationally. But a major threat to such a practice is, of course, drought and low water levels; and this is precisely what Zambia is currently experiencing. This year's festival was greatly curtailed because of this; the route the flotilla usually takes was significantly shortened. This gave rise to this year's festival theme being "Cultural Heritage Adapting to Climate Change" – and so the impact of the changing natural world on this community and the nation as a key – if not *the* primary – cultural festival in Zambia, is something I am currently researching and writing about.



Northeast Africa Forum 2023–24

Jason Mosley, Research Associate



The Northeast Africa Forum brings together students and scholars interested in examining the region from a multidisciplinary and comparative perspective. Our remit runs from the Great Lakes, through East Africa to the Horn of Africa. By hosting lectures by experienced researchers alongside post-graduates, and by mixing academic and policy research, we hope to come to a shared, factually informed and politically relevant understanding of trends in the region. This year, the Forum continued its seminar series in a hybrid format. It was a pleasure to see members of the Forum's network, including many past presenters around the world, and to discuss a range of interesting themes across the year.

We started the year off with a topical presentation from Willow Berridge (Newcastle), **Western Sudanese marginalization, coups in Khartoum & the structural legacies of colonial military divide & rule: 1924–present**, which has subsequently been published in the *Journal of Eastern African Studies* (JEAS) (DOI: 10.1080/17531055.2023.2280933). The paper discusses the long-term history underpinning the tension between the "national" army and provincial "militias" that led to the outbreak of conflict in Sudan in April 2023.

During Hilary, we also hosted a screening of **Ethiopian Screen Worlds**, with director Michael Thomas (SOAS). Told by those who live off and give life to Ethiopian cinema, this is the previously unseen story of Addis Ababa's astounding recent boom in filmmaking and cinema-going, and all the passions and frustrations that attend these endeavours. (<https://screenworlds.org/films/ethiopian-screen-worlds/>)

Research presented at the seminar included work from two of the Forum's members. Hallelujah Lulie (Oxford) and Juweria Ali (Westminster) presented **Oromo & Somali**

social & political movements in Ethiopia's post-Meles era, which draws on ongoing research by both authors, and will be submitted for a special collection in JEAS. This research investigates why a mass protest movement emerged in Oromia but not in the Somali region by interrogating the conditions that either facilitated or hindered such movements.

Biruk Terrefe (Oxford) and Harry Verhoeven (Columbia) presented **The road (not) taken: infrastructure & sovereignty in the Horn of Africa**. This paper offers a longitudinal study of the complex entanglements between infrastructure and sovereignty in the Horn of Africa. By analysing Ethiopia's imperial transport corridors, the political economy of Djibouti's Red Sea ports, and the Greater Nile Oil Pipeline between South Sudan, Khartoum, and global markets, Biruk & Harry underline the co-production of infrastructure and sovereignty as a defining feature of regional politics in the last 150 years. (DOI: 10.1016/j.polgeo.2024.103070)

We also had research presentations from MJ Chuhila (University of Dar es Salaam), **Contested waters: negotiating multiple actors on the Rufiji basin – Tanzania, 1960 to the Present**; Luca Puddu (University of Palermo), **Oil, trade & state building in the Ethiopian-Somali borderlands**; Diana Felix da Costa (SOAS), **Youth contestations, age-sets and body art in Pibor, South Sudan**; and Martine Zeuthen (RUSI/UCL), **Borderlands in focus: insights & reflections on the Kenya-Somalia-Ethiopia borderlands through the lens of a peace & stability programme**.

The forum hosted a number of book launch discussions, including for **Precarious Urbanism: Displacement, Belonging and the Reconstruction of Somali Cities** with co-author Peter Chonka (King's College London) and discussant Gayatri Sahgal (Oxford); **Trajectories of Authoritarianism in Rwanda: Elusive Control before the Genocide** with author Marie-Eve Desrosiers (Ottawa) and discussant Andrea Purdekova (Bath); **Ethiopia's 'Developmental State': Political Order and Distributive Crisis** with author Tom Lavers (Manchester) and discussant Biruk Terrefe (Oxford); **Towards Jihad? Muslims and Politics in Postcolonial Mozambique** with author Eric Morier-Genoud (Queen's University Belfast) and discussant James Barnett (Oxford); **Love Songs in Motion: Voicing Intimacy in Somaliland** with author Christina Woolner (Cambridge) and discussant Amina-Bahja Ekman (UCL); and **The Abiy Project: God, Power and War in the New Ethiopia** with author Tom Gardner (Economist) and discussant Terje Østebø (Florida).

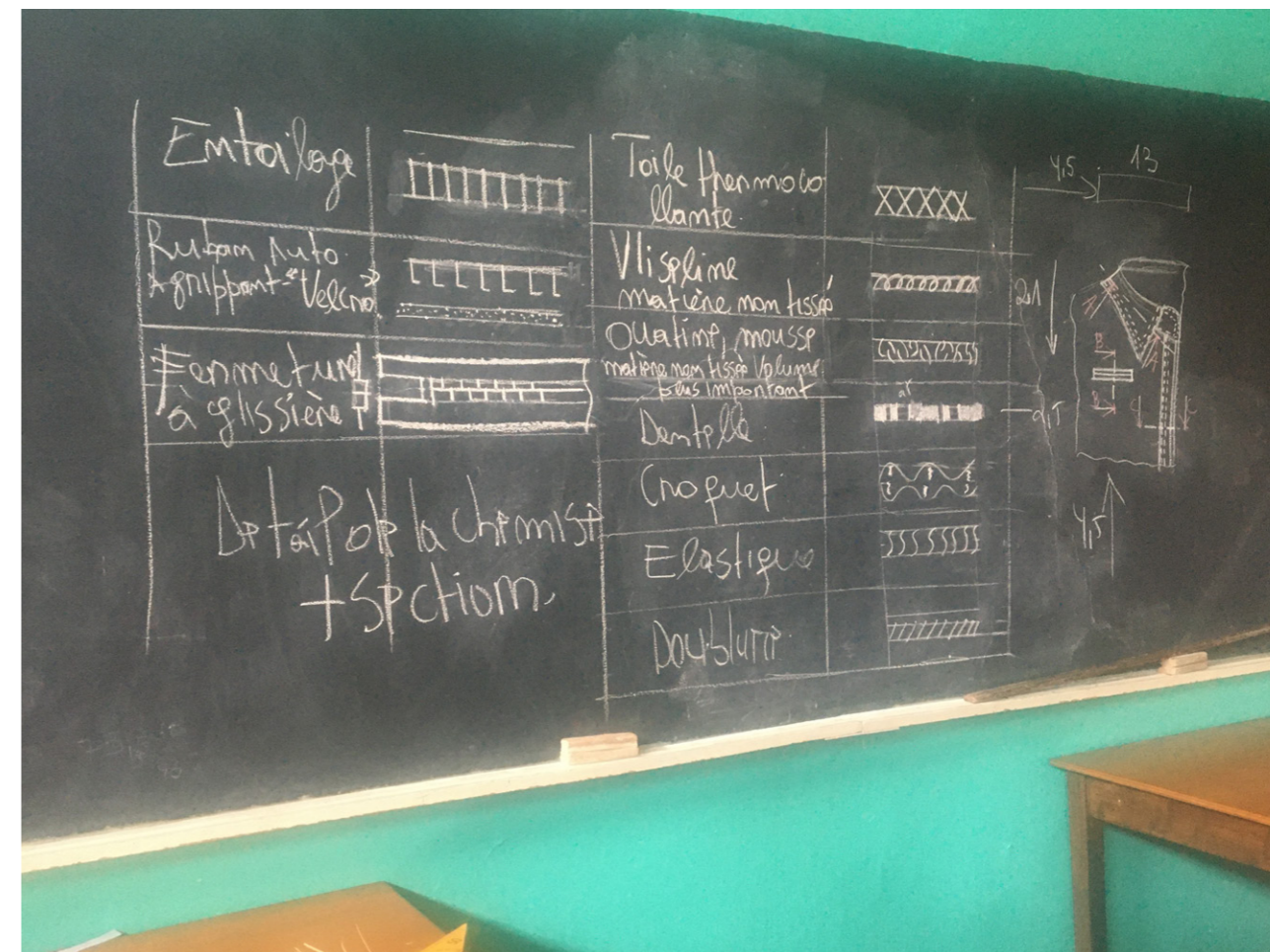
Sewing the City: Interviewing Dressmakers in Lubumbashi, DRC

Rachel Taylor



This year I have had the pleasure of talking to dressmakers and former dressmakers in Lubumbashi, Congo, about their lives and their careers. This is part of my Leverhulme-funded project Sewing the City, which seeks to tell a fresh history of Lubumbashi through centring the labour and creativity of women like dressmakers. I expected that focusing on dressmaking would allow me to foreground the historical and contemporary importance of women's informal labour in a city that is typically thought of – historically if not today – in terms of as a mining city, based around men's formal, salaried labour. I also expected Mobutu's policy of *authenticité* – promoting 'traditional' African styles of dress – to be central to dressmakers' careers, and to the understanding of their work as Zairean or Congolese. As so often with research, none of this panned out quite as expected, but the alternative stories turned out to be even more interesting.

My first interview on my November research trip was with Mama Vini, a resident of Ruashi, a semi-planned neighbourhood of Lubumbashi approximately seven kilometres from the central business district. Mama Vini's house was not one of the houses built to a plan by the *Office des Cités Africaines* when the district was first built. Instead, she had purchased the land much later, originally living in a small one-room house, as she got together the funds to build first the house we were sitting in, and then the house behind, which was rented out to provide an income. As my research assistants and I got instructions sat in her spacious living room, getting contact details for other dressmakers that she knew, I brought out the fabric I'd bought at a fabric shop in the centre of town a few days before. We'd already discussed how although in the past dressmakers and customers picked styles from catalogues nowadays customers often picked styles from tiktok. Following my research assistant's suggestion, I looked through a different website on my phone. I picked out a jacket and skirt, noting I wanted the skirt a bit longer. Mama Vini looked at the design on my phone screen, and quickly sketched out the jacket and skirt – sleeves about so long, collar like so, pleats in the skirt – before taking my measurements. I paid the deposit, thanked her, and went on my way. A week later I came back, paid the rest, and collected the perfectly-fitted jacket and skirt, and the excess material.



In many ways, the interaction appeared to match my expectations in constructing my research project but, as I came to realise, the informality of this transaction – the quick sketch, the domestic setting, the self-built house – can be misleading. Formal education was central to the life histories of Mama Vini and other dressmakers, and their career trajectories combined formal employment, running small businesses, and informal home-based work.

Mama Vini, and other dressmakers in Ruashi, were trained at the vocational high school now called Hodari, formerly Maria Goretti. Although Hodari only opened after independence, its sewing curriculum then and today owed much to mid-century Belgian education. The curriculum provided a basic secondary education in French, literature, and related subjects, as well as an intensive focus on dressmaking. Pupils were educated in the formal theory of dressmaking, including how to read and use sewing patterns, how to measure, how to cut. Each year focused on particular types of clothing manufacture – starting with clothes for babies in the first year, and finishing with Congolese-style women's clothing – a blouse (*ribaya*) and skirt – in the final year. Girls from these classes graduated with school diplomas, and many of them gave up dressmaking, using their high level of French to become secretaries, or other office workers. But those who went into dressmaking became some of the first professional African female dressmakers in Lubumbashi, and helped to establish dressmaking as a female profession.

Authenticité had little direct impact on dressmakers' careers, as they narrated them, but the skills imparted by this education, and the clothes that dressmakers made,

did help to mark them as distinct from their neighbouring countries. As one interviewee, who I'll call Mama Yvonne, noted described, she was visiting relatives in Ndala, in Zambia, and in the market there got asked about her clothing. Where had she bought it? She replied that she'd made it herself. The eager response alerted her to the fact there was a demand for what she could produce. She sold nearly all her clothes while there, and returned subsequently with clothes she had produced for the purpose. Her skill – as developed in a Congolese school and displayed on her own body – marked her as urban and as Congolese, while providing her with economic opportunities and with respect.



Oxford alumna Florence Ifeoluwa ‘Cuppy’ Otedola announced as the Prince’s Trust’s Ambassador

Cuppy completed an MSc in African Studies at Lady Margaret Hall in 2022

On March 8 2024, Cuppy was announced as the Prince’s Trust’s Ambassador, bringing her passion for empowering young people to the forefront. Founded by King Charles III in 1976, the Prince’s Trust’s mission is to assist young people who are at risk of falling off course in life. It assists those aged 11 to 30 who are unemployed, having difficulty in school, or who run the risk of being excluded. Cuppy’s dedication to supporting the aspirations and dreams of young people aligns perfectly with the Princess Trust’s efforts to provide opportunities and guidance for those facing adversity. Her role as an ambassador involves amplifying the work of the trust as well as connecting with the young people who have been enrolled in programmes by offering them advice and guidance.

After an exciting and inspiring Prince’s Trust Award show on May 21, 2024, where Cuppy hosted the international segment in her capacity as an international ambassador alongside duo Ant and Dec, Cuppy was invited by his majesty the King to a reception at Buckingham Palace held in honour of the young winners and ambassadors of the Prince’s Trust. Cuppy had the opportunity to meet and talk to his majesty about her role as an ambassador and interact with fellow ambassadors and Prince’s Trust winners.



Kayla Fraser

Upon completing the MSc in African Studies, my friends and I wondered what that one thing we would remember about the course would be. Without hesitating, I responded: ‘CUREC’. This committee, and the extensive paperwork that comes with it, ensures that research projects are conducted in an ethical and integral manner. My area of interest, Sub-Saharan migration in Tunisia, required me to conduct interviews with vulnerable individuals in a high-risk environment. I remember mapping out every detail of my recruitment methods, planned interview questions, and travel itinerary – it was not just a matter of convincing CUREC, but of honouring my participants’ safety, well-being, and dignity. Four months, hundreds of pages, dozens of emails, and several naps later, I was ready to make my way into the promised field. I knew where I was going, how, with whom, and what answers I was looking for, down to the minutest detail.

Except I didn’t.

The field could and would not be reduced to a static environment. It was not to be a real-life laboratory whereby a researcher could march in, collect their data, and compile it into a dissertation within the confines of Oxford’s walls. Instead, the field was a plurality of encounters, experiences, and emotions.

I undertook my fieldwork in Tunis, Tunisia, from late March to mid-April 2024. The dates chosen for my trip coincided with the holy month of Ramadan. Shifted working hours, erratic traffic patterns, and altered nightlife all had to be taken into consideration when coordinating interviews. It also meant that hunger and fatigue altered practicing individuals’ state of mind, be it myself, some of my participants, or the vast majority of Tunisian people. Being more vulnerable to irritability, impatience, and mood swings sometimes led to petty fights and uncomfortable conversations. At the same time, Ramadan is associated with heightened spiritual awareness, resulting in increased displays of empathy and belonging through communal practices. Breaking my fast with newfound friends – some Tunisian, some Sub-Saharan, some from other places altogether – around a table overflowing with mlewi, harissa, and chorba became a daily affair. As did going to Zitouna mosque for taraweeh – special nightly prayers – where all bodies fell into prostration and worship without any regard to the differences in skin colour or nationality.

In Tunis, I rarely did things alone. Interviews are the best example of this, as my participants and I ‘co-constructed’ (Freire, 1970) them. Due to participants’ initial mistrust, confined living conditions, and restricted availabilities, several joint interviews were conducted. This favoured an atmosphere of confidence as participants completed each-other’s sentences, experienced both shared and dissimilar understandings, and expressed feelings through nonverbal communication. In particular, a joint interview with two migrants who were from the same country but did not speak the same language, resulted in almost identical responses. The questions themselves were consistently re-interpreted, as participants emphasised and recounted certain subjects I



initially desired to spend less time on. At one point, I stopped reading from my linear, bullet pointed set of questions altogether.

I also stopped aiming to categorise time, spaces, and encounters as being part of pre-defined research aims and expectations. Within mere hours of arriving in Tunis, my supervisor told me that ‘it sounds like “the field” is finding you even more than you’re finding the field’. And it did – in taxis, at the Central Market, from the balcony of my Airbnb, on a barstool in a shisha café, during a Stambali performance, and in so many other places beyond what I could imagine. Conversations and observations thrust me into undertaking constant research, which did not start with consent forms nor end with the turning off of the recording. The field was all around me, it inhabited me and I inhabited it, defying clear-cut ‘insider/outsider’ binaries and knowledge disconnected from human actors.

The field also found me in more, hostile, intangible ways, as I faced racialised, gendered, and psychological harassment in temporalities and manifestations I could not have predicted. In particular, discomfort was experienced when participants perceived the intimate, co-constructed interview environment with a woman researcher as one embedded in transaction, in all the ambiguity that term encompasses. In Tunis, I’d lay awake at night, questioning if I had failed to uphold ethical standards and establish boundaries. When those thoughts eventually quietened, they were replaced with traumatic images of the stories I had heard throughout the day. When I arrived back in Oxford, I didn’t feel okay for weeks. My supervisor, college advisor, and the university counselling services all helped me to build a support system where I could process my research, and heal from the confusion and pain it made me feel. It made me realise something that four months of preparation never could – the field is not detached from the body you inhabit, the emotions you experience, and the contradictions of the world we all observe, describe, and aim to change through our research.

I started this piece by saying how, upon completing the MSc in African Studies, my friends and I wondered what that one thing we would remember about the course would be. In retrospect, my answer is no longer saying something as simple and tangible as ‘CUREC’. Instead, I remember sitting – alone, for once – on my friend’s balcony, and staring at the building across. An uncle had his back to me, no doubt looking at his phone as the city stood still awaiting the call to prayer which would signal that the fast was complete. The moon, itself completing a cycle, shone full. For just a moment, I was able to stop and breathe. This is the field, and this is how I will remember it.



Shani Akilah

I was a student on the African Studies MSc in 2015-2016. Post-graduation, I have worked on a number of passion projects including setting up a Bankra; a diaspora storytelling contributor-based platform with my friend and fellow MSc graduate Esther Diala (2018-2019). I also co-founded Nyah Network - a community for Black women in their 20s which hosted regular socials, brunches and a monthly book club. Additionally, I started working full-time at what was the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) across project and programme management and progressed to getting my Grade 7 (the sixth most senior grade) in under two years.

In 2019 however, I was looking for something new. A lack of fulfilment in my 9-5 coincided with me attending a Q&A with author Bernardine Evaristo to discuss her recently published 'Girl, Women, Other' which would go on to win the prestigious Booker Prize just months later. I was inspired by what Bernardine shared about her writing journey and was reminded of how much I loved creative writing. We spoke after the talk about the importance of honing one's craft as a writer, and she recommended that I come along to a four-week masterclass that she was running for young people in my local area of Woolwich. In the very first session, I had an overwhelming feeling that writing was the one thing that made sense and committed myself to the goal of becoming a published author.



Fast forward five years, through the discipline of 5am writing and reading sessions before work and remaining steadfast in the midst of endless rejections from the publishing industry, my debut short story collection 'For Such a Time as This' has recently been published by Oneworld as a superlead title. Described as 'the book of the summer' by Amazon, Marie Claire and The Observer, the collection explores themes of Black love, community and friendship with stories set in South London, Jamaica and Ghana. The book also delves into topics such as being Black in the workplace, male mental health, sickle cell and endometriosis, and one of the stories draws on my MSc dissertation research on home and belonging amongst second-generation Ghanaians. In a full-circle moment, I've been described by Bernardine Evaristo as 'a glittering new voice in the literary firmament' and was so grateful to have Bernardine interview me as part of my book launch party in June. Having my first book published is a dream come true, and I am so grateful too at the start of my journey of writing stories that centre on African diaspora experiences and connections with the motherland.

To keep up with my journey and to catch me on my book tour, follow me on Instagram. 'For Such a Time as This' is available to purchase from Waterstones and Amazon.



Gayatri Sahgal



Since completing my PhD, I have been working as a postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Transitioning from the quaint and charming streets of Oxford to the bustling and high-rise lined thoroughfares of Philadelphia has been a surreal experience. The journey would have been that much harder

had it not been for the support of Professor Wale Adebawwi, the current director of the Centre for Africana Studies (also the former director of African Studies at Oxford) and my thesis supervisor at Oxford.

Under Professor Adebawwi's sage tutelage, I have been focusing on publishing and presenting my thesis research. My research primarily focuses on how state capacity emerges in contexts where the idea of a centralised authority, such as a state, is either suspect or contested. In my thesis, I used the case study of Somalia to interrogate tax relationships between the state and large private sector actors and discussed their implications for long-term institutional development and growth. Some of this research, including a co-authored piece on the role of digital transformations and mobile money on state-building dynamics in contexts of fragility, is under review with the journal of International Affairs. Two other papers have also been selected for the African Studies Association Conference, USA (2024) and the European Association for Social Anthropologists Conference (2024).

Concurrently, I am collaborating with the International Centre for Tax and Development and working on two research projects exploring informal revenue and state-building in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Alongside, I am continuing some of my practical and policy-related work. In particular, I am supporting the UK government's programme to strengthen domestic resource mobilisation, public financial management (PFM), and institutional capacity within Somalia as part of an international team led by Adam Smith International.

Apart from these responsibilities, I have sought to contribute to the academic community at Penn. Last semester, together with another doctoral student, I organised a series of sessions for graduate and post-graduate students to share and discuss their works in progress. We hope to continue these sessions in the fall and to expand the focus to include a wider community of students.

Iyone Agboraw

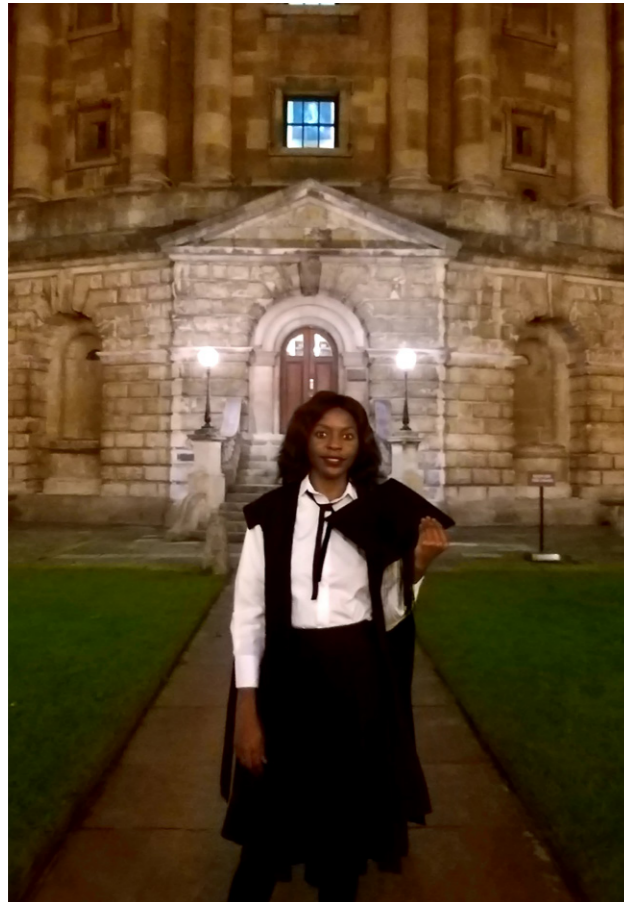
MSc and DPhil Alumni

I moved to Oxford in October 2016 to start the MSc in African Studies. As I excitedly walked down Bevington Road to orientation at the department, I tried to soak it all in, believing I would only be in Oxford for nine months. However, the contents of the course and the people I befriended during it inspired a budding interest in academia. After a presentation I gave one week, Professor Larmer commented: "I could see you in front of a class giving a lecture on this". His comment was the confirmation I needed to try and stay on at Oxford and become an academic. I subsequently completed an additional MSc in another department and returned to OSGA in 2018 for my DPhil. During my DPhil, I had the privilege of being supervised by Professor Wale Adebawwi. He has profoundly shaped how I understand both the African and global landscape. I successfully defended my thesis in 2023. My interdisciplinary research foregrounds the emotional response to uncertainty and challenges the current academic emphasis on the productive value of uncertainty rather than its emotional dimensions. I interrogate how Nigerian higher education students both respond to and understand uncertainty. I am currently a Postdoctoral fellow in Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania.



Lisa Kwaleyela

Personal Experience of Studying Africa at Oxford



When I first arrived at the University of Oxford in Michaelmas Term 2021, Covid was still a harsh reality. It seemed almost impossible that I would get this far ahead in my DPhil journey. Here I am at the near end of third year 2023/24 and almost into my fourth and final year. How time flies when you are having fun!

I have had a productive third year academically. Being able to meet all the academic requirements to progress to this level has been more than fulfilling though challenging at times. I can't overemphasise the importance of efficient and sufficient support during a DPhil, but I have to state that being a student at the African Studies Centre (ASC) has been central to my progress. The quality of supervision has been brilliant and professional. I have never been more passionate about a research project than I am now. With the guidance of my supervisor, being able to complete all my data collection was one of the most exciting and productive tasks I have ever completed academically. It has become abundantly clear to me that this will

become more than just a degree research but something that has outlined what I need to do for my community back in Zambia.

I am sincerely grateful for the diverse research seminars that I attended in the ASC as these have been influential in shaping my own research. Leading up to the third year, I was able to participate at a conference in Ghana which was the first time that I presented my DPhil research. From that conference, I was able to learn more about what to focus on for my research and successfully complete my data collection in study sites on the Zambian Copperbelt.

Access to credible and sufficient academic resources in both the ASC and University Libraries continues to grant me the confidence to be open to so many possibilities in my near future. Presenting part of my research expertise for a Korea youth conference (September 2023) and also being able to publish a few articles attests to the confidence that has been influenced by my time at the ASC. I am also excited for an upcoming summer school later this year in France where I will yet again have an opportunity to present my research. And of course, the African Studies Association of the UK (ASAUK) conference at Oxford Brookes in August 2024 promises to be another highlight for research presentations – super exciting!

At this point, I just want to make it known that I am grateful for all the support that has accompanied my DPhil journey. The ASC is a dream space for any prospective student wishing to pursue an MSc in African Studies or DPhil in Area Studies (Africa). While I agree that studying for any degree requires great commitment and discipline, I also believe that the quality of where you can do this is equally important. My very best wishes to all students that will be joining us at the beginning of 2024/25 academic year both in Oxford and at the ASC. Be rest assured that you have come to right place

Emma Davis

I graduated from the MSc African Studies in 2023, and am now nearing the end of my first year as a DPhil student in the Global and Area Studies programme. I already have so many people to thank for their help towards my DPhil – my 'acknowledgements' document is steadily growing! In particular my thanks must go to my supervisor Professor Rebekah Lee, and to the Nigerians who have been involved in this project so far, both online and in person. My project is generously supported by the Economic and Social Research Council [grant number ES/P000649/1].

I am currently working between the intersections of history, (digital) ethnography, and archival theory, to explore how Nigerians use different mediums in online and offline spaces to discuss, interrupt, and construct historical narratives. As part of preliminary fieldwork, I spent a week in Enugu, Southeast Nigeria, in April, visiting the National Archives branch there and the Centre for Memories (an Igbo cultural centre). I will return in 2025 for a longer period of fieldwork.

The ASC seminar series has continued to be one of my favourite weekly events in Oxford. In Michaelmas term I enjoyed George Karekwaivanane's talk on the Zimbabwean Twitterverse, and in Hilary, Gibson Ncube gave a great talk on circumnavigating the challenges of doing research in queer African studies.

In the last year I have been involved in St Antony's College *Global South Film Society*. Acting as secretary, along with the rest of the team, we have organised weekly screenings of films and documentaries over the last three terms. A small selection of the films we screened include *Concerning Violence* (2014); *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980); *200 Meters* (2020); *Lionheart* (2018); *Sambizanga* (1972); *The Act of Killing* (2013).

In June this year, I was given the opportunity to present my research at the ESRC Grand Union Doctoral Training Partnership Annual Conference, and received some useful feedback. I have had a paper accepted for the African Studies Association of the UK Conference in August this year, and will present my research on AI art and how it is being used online to construct and explore Afrofuturist histories.

I would like to end my update as an MSc alumni and current DPhil student with an acknowledgement and a condemnation of the ongoing genocide and scholasticide in Gaza. Every university in Gaza has been destroyed or damaged; libraries, archives, and cultural heritage have been destroyed. Most significantly, at least 37,300 people

have been killed and at least 85,197 injured at the time of writing. Below I quote from the '*Open letter by Gaza academics and university administrators to the world*', published in Al-Jazeera on 29 May 2024:

"We have come together as Palestinian academics and staff of Gaza universities to affirm our existence, the existence of our colleagues and our students, and the insistence on our future, in the face of all current attempts to erase us.

...

We call upon our colleagues in the homeland and internationally to support our steadfast attempts to defend and preserve our universities for the sake of the future of our people, and our ability to remain on our Palestinian land in Gaza. We built these universities from tents. And from tents, with the support of our friends, we will rebuild them once again."

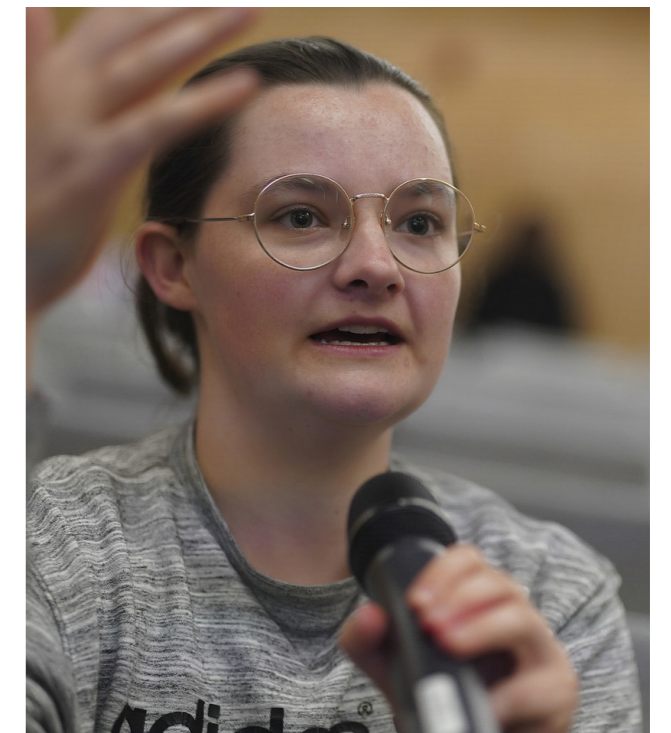


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African Studies

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Christopher Agbo

"Champions or Charlatans"? Examining the 'Watershed' Negotiations between Organised Labour Unions and the Nigerian Federal Government during the 2012 Occupy Nigeria Protests.



Ahmed Yusuf Ahmed

'Beyond the Law: Narratives of Queer Activism in Nairobi'



Amal Allouch

Amazigh Identity, Indigeneity and Coloniality in Morocco c. 1980s to 2000s



Christian Bosselmann

Human Development and religion in Kenya: Seminarian's imaginaries of agency and empowerment



Samson Oolio

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Rhys Pearson-Shaul

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Micaella Rogers

REIPPPP what you sow? Social and economic development in South Africa's renewable energy pathway



Bengi Rwabuhemba

Africanisation in African Universities: Interrogating the Positionings of Indigenous Knowledge Production



Paul Siniga

Mirambo, Urambo and "Indigenous diplomacy": Politics, Practices and Power



Antoine Campinos

Quest for post-coup legitimacy: the case of Guinea's National Transition, 2021-.



Moritz Döbele

Rethinking Gangsterism in Cape Town: The Incompleteness of Identity



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The Edge of Africa: Externalised Borders, Race and Liminality in Sub-Saharan African migration to Tunisia



Sam Holmes

Effective partnerships? Civil Society Organisations, Donors, and Democracy Promotion in Zambia



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Citizenship and Official Identification in Kenya: A case study of Transgender and Intersex people in Kenya



Elie Tokpa

The Causes of Burkina Faso's Coups in 2022



Ozi Uduma

Remaking the nation: Nigerian women as artists and muse, 1960-2020



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Giustino Luberti

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Gendered Discourses and the 2023 Presidential Candidacy of Elizabeth Valerio in Zimbabwe



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Tumbocracy as a popular sentiment of corruption in Kenya



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