The Challenges of Protecting Our Oceans

President Faure of Seychelles speaks at the ASC African Leaders Lecture Series
The 2019–2020 academic year started on an excellent note at the Centre. We welcomed an outstanding cohort of students in October 2019. Everyone was looking forward to an exciting and smooth academic year. Little did we know that a relentless and vicious global enemy that would transform contemporary understanding of our individual and collective vulnerability was lurking in East Asia and would soon upturn everyone’s plans. But we had had two remarkable terms before the coronavirus pandemic overtook the world and disrupted our activities – while forcing the staff and students to rethink the modes of teaching, studying, researching and staying alive.

Though the Hillary Term was also seriously impacted by the UK university teachers’ 14-day strike in February and March 2020 over pensions, pay and conditions – reflecting a particular form of precarity provoked by the ascendancy of neoliberalism – nothing can compare with the disruption experienced since various governments around the world started taking the threat of the pandemic seriously. As these governments and eventually the UK government announced the shutting down of the borders, we had to scramble to recall our students, some of whom had left for their fieldwork.

I thank my colleagues and the leadership and administrative staff of the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies (OSGA) who ensured a smooth process of communication with our students to ensure that all those who could return to Oxford (or their home countries outside Africa) did so promptly, and that the couple of students who either had no choice or chose to remain in their home countries in Africa – where they were scheduled to conduct their research – stayed out of harm’s way.

In these unprecedented era, every academic discipline is being forced to rethink, not only the conditions of our morbidity and mortality, but also the overarching questions of what it means to be human under exceptional conditions of vulnerability. Yet, even under these conditions, we must reaffirm the value of our collective and individual lives.

This is the last of my three-year tenure at the director of the Centre. I will therefore like to thank all those who have supported and worked with me in the last three years. I thank all my colleagues in the Centre and the Centre’s past and current administrators. I am grateful to the immediate past head of OSGA, Professor Rachel Murphy and the current head, Professor Tim Power. I also thank the Warden of St Antony’s College, Professor Roger Goodman, the Dean of the Said Business School, Professor Peter Tufano, the Director of the Middle East Centre, Professor Eugene Rogan, and the administrative staff of the College and OSGA, particularly Head of OSGA Admin and Finance, Mrs Erin Gordon.

The next Director of the Centre, Professor David Pratten, is a tried and tested hand. He is the longest serving member of the Centre and a former director of the Centre. There is no doubt that the Centre will fare much better under his leadership. I wish him the very best.

Wale Adebanwi,
Director, African Studies Centre.
The Challenges of Protecting Our Oceans – President Faure of Seychelles

Kenza Camara

The Seychelles’ life line is sustained by its vast ocean. A host to 84,000 people, covering over 454 km of land engulfed in a vibrant blue ecosystem, the Seychelles’ story is analogous to other small island nations. Despite continuing to attract 273,000 tourists annually, debris can be seen in the Indian Ocean polluting its waters causing environmental degradation. Coupled with the overshadowing fear of rising sea levels, small islands of this kind are therefore at the forefront of climate issues. In his lecture, the President’s lecture was ‘Protecting Our Oceans: The Seychelles Experience.’

President Faure was received at the St Antony’s College by the Warden of the College, Professor Roger Goodman, the Head of the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies (OSGA), Professor Tim Power, and the Director of the African Studies Centre, Professor Wale Adebanwi.

This is not the first time President Faure posed this pertinent issue. In fact, his commitment to marine conservation led him to take a 4,000 feet dive below the ocean’s surface facilitated by the Oxford-based Nekton mission (https://nektonmission.org/) to present an address to the AOGA, an effort unprecedented amongst world leaders (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CF_F-9ZbMM) President Faure’s position was clear: ‘Oceans cover over two-thirds of the world’s surface but remain, for the most part, uncharted’. Refusing to be hampered by uncertainty, Faure has instilled the need for greater research in the Seychelles surrounding waters. Since the beginning of his term in 2016, Faure has striven to propel the Seychelles as a leading force in marine technology. Over time, the country has expanded to become what Faure calls a ‘blue economy’. Over the period, 300 research deployments have taken place, helping the Seychelles reach its goal to protect almost a third of its national waters by 2020.

But what of its global appeal? All over the world, the issue of climate change continues to gain salience in national discussions, although, with limited results. The question remains whether enough is being done to meet environmental targets. On the African Continent, Faure expresses optimism in strengthened alliances and greater African unity. He asserted that the ‘Oceans are the next frontiers of the world’, adding that the oceans therefore should not be left to ruins by future generations.

Before his lecture, President Faure and his entourage which included Ambassador Barry Faure, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and The Blue Economy, Mrs Aude Labalene, Secretary of State for Presidential Affairs, Ambassador Denick Ally, Seychelles High Commissioner to the UK, Mrs Jacqueline Moussatche-Belle, Chief of Presidential Protocol Affairs, and Mr Terry Romam, Principal Counsellor in the Seychelles High Commission, were hosted to a reception at the Investcorp Building in the College. They were joined by ASC staff, students and members of the Centre’s International Advisory Board, Mr Alex Duncan, Mr Ivo Agiamian-Duali, and Mr Thomas Swaniker – and his wife, Ambassador Johanna Swaniker.

After the president’s lecture, the Q&A session, moderated by Professor Wale Adebanwi, the Director of African Studies Centre, reminded us that the Seychelles isn’t without its obstacles, high rates of tourism and socialills put pressure on the socioeconomic situation of its inhabitants. However, with Seychelles marine territory making up three times its landmass, it has had little choice in making ocean conservation its priority. The onus is now on developed nations and neighbours responsible for ecological damage to engage further in technological exchange, information sharing and, most of all, in action.

Researching African Media History in French Archives

Peter Brooke

France’s archives offer historians an excellent and underused source of documentary material on Africa’s media history. Earlier this year I spent a few weeks exploring what they have to offer. The study is part of a wider project on African broadcasting and press during and after decolonisation that also draws on archives in Zambia, Kenya, South Africa and Britain. The research was kindly supported by the University’s Beit Fund.

Unusually (some might say unhelpfully) the French National Archives are dispersed around the country. My first port of call was the Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer at Aix-en-Provence. This archive is dominated by the records of French rule in North Africa. I already knew that the Francophone colonial media was heavily controlled, even more so than in Anglophone colonies. This was particularly true of the press. But control of the airwaves proved a much greater challenge for the French colonial state thanks to the ready availability of short-wave broadcasts by the mid-1950s, first from Egypt’s Radio Cairo and then from Radio Free Algeria broadcasting from newly-independent Morocco. I was interested to explore the impact of these external broadcasts on the Algerian population and to test Frantz Fanon’s theory that radio held the key to liberation. Writing in Algeria in 1959, Fanon recalled that when RFA started broadcasting Algerians rushed out to buy radios to hear the ‘story of the Liberation on the march’. The archives at Aix confirmed that RFA was hugely popular and played a critical role in the collapse of colonial rule. According to a French military report, ‘radio is to the Algerian War what the machine-gun was to the war of 1914 and the tank to the war of 1939.’

The archives revealed that the French response was to establish one of the most extensive jamming operations ever mounted by a colonial power, second only to the USSR. Despite its huge cost, the results were mixed and RFA continued to attract a large audience throughout the Algerian War of independence.

Leaving Aix, I went north to Paris. At the Centre des Archives Contemporaines (CAC) in St Denis I found that what had started in French North Africa in the 1950s continued in sub-Saharan Africa into the 1960s and beyond. Across Africa the decolonisation period coincided with a boom in radio ownership, helped by the popularisation of battery-operated transistor sets from the late 1950s. Audience research files demonstrated that in French colonies, as elsewhere, decolonisation was hastened by liberation radio’s attack on the colonial empires of knowledge. Radio Cairo offered an ‘open mic’ to liberation groups across the continent and as decolonisation gathered pace it was soon joined by dozens of newly-liberated national stations which emulated its aggressive anti-colonialism. In 1960 the number of independent African stations quadrupled.

Transnational radio—listening not only hastened decolonisation but also created a robust culture of cosmopolitan media consumption after independence, despite the repressive policies of post-colonial states. Over time international influences outstripped intra-African broadcasts. Audience research surveys at CAC revealed that by the 1980s about a quarter of the urban population in Francophone West Africa was regularly listening to the Voice of America. However, the most popular foreign radio station was Radio France Internationale, with a listening audience of nearly half of the population in cities such as Dakar. France’s post-colonial influence on Francophone Africa’s media continues to this day, thanks not only to RFI broadcasts but also Agence France-Presse, mirroring the influence of the BBC and Reuters in Anglophone Africa.
"Comparing the Copperbelt", which started in 2015 and will reach its completion in 2021, is a major research project into the social history of the cross-border mining towns of Zambia and Haut Katanga in the DR Congo. These towns were in the 1950s the subject of research by a largely western scientific community who sought to understand what they considered new/modern urban African societies. While researchers uncovered revealing information about these growing communities, their analysis was distorted by their tendency to counterpose a 'tribal', superstitious, unchanging rural Africa – to this new urban one – capitalist, cosmopolitan, dynamic, Christian – that understood progress and development in entirely Western terms.

Later generations of researchers from many disciplines have returned to the Copperbelt to investigate many issues – labour relations, gender dynamics, political change, cultural expression such as music and painting, economic boom and bust, urban agriculture and environmental pollution, to name a few. The community of Copperbelt researchers has diversified – most are now African and some grew up in the region or work at its universities. Many have criticised the modernist gaze of the first generation of researchers, most notably James Ferguson in his landmark study Expectations of Modernity (1995). It is one of the most studied regions of Africa, particularly given the relative marginalisation of the continent in academic analysis.

The 'Comparing the Copperbelt' project takes as its starting point that the region's social history has shaped, and been shaped by, its interaction with these intellectuals and the knowledge they produced. On the one hand, Copperbelt communities sought to influence academic research for their own ends, understanding its potential to advance their own political and social position. On the other hand, this research, developed in unequal relationships with Copperbelt communities, influenced the policies of colonial and post-colonial governments, businesses, civil society and labour and ethnic associations, among others. The project then analyses the ways in which these societies (and their scholars) have come to understand their distinct sense of self and community, how it has changed over time and how it differs between the Zambian and Katangese copperbelts.

All this means that as historians of these processes, we are acutely aware of the need to avoid the mistakes of our predecessors in distorting the underlying reality of these societies and ensuring we don’t impose our worldview in our own work. While the colonial system that influenced the early study of Copperbelt society may be a thing of the past, the continued inequality of global academia means that intellectual resources for research still concentrate in universities and centres such as ours. Here are three ways in which our research seeks to recognise and begins to address these historical legacies and contemporary inequalities:

1. Listening and learning: our research has involved hundreds of interviews with longstanding Copperbelt residents. Many earlier researchers focused only on narrow sections of the region’s population, most often senior male miners, whose experiences were often presented as representing these diverse communities. We’ve spoken to women entrepreneurs and farmers, musicians and painters, environmental activists and many others. We’ve conducted open-ended life history interviews that allow respondents to tell us what is important to them, rather than imposing our priorities and pre-conceived views on them.

2. Cooperation: the best place to find expertise about the Copperbelt region is in the Copperbelt itself: its residents of course, but also its organisations – churches, non-governmental organisations and of course its universities. We’ve worked closely with colleagues from Zambian Copperbelt University and the University of Lubumbashi in Katanga throughout the project: learning from the expertise and research they have carried out for decades, encouraging their professors and students to write for the project’s publications and websites, and co-organising events in the region where speakers from these universities and from civil society take a leading role. In July 2019 Prof Donatien Dibwe dia Mwembu of UNILU and I organised a conference at UNILU, bringing together Congolese, Zambian and international speakers to discuss Copperbelt history and society (see picture).

3. Dissemination: Copperbelt residents have long complained to western academics that they never see the results of research in which they participate – some liken this to mine companies that extract the region’s mineral resources and leave nothing behind. All our publications – including contributions from academics from the region – are being made available online for free download from our website and these will be added to over the next 18 months as the project reaches completion, enabling them to be read by anyone in the region.

None of these approaches will fundamentally alter the inequality of power and wealth within the global academy or by themselves overcome the legacies of past distortions of Copperbelt society. However, in drawing the line to and explaining how the region has been (mis)understood, and by partnering with and learning from African expertise, we hope to go some way to addressing the historical imbalance.

‘Remembering Rwanda’ wins Oxford’s Vice Chancellor Award for Public Engagement

Julia Viebach

In 2019 Dr Julia Viebach (together with Jozie Kettle, Pitt Rivers Museum) won one of the prestigious Vice Chancellor Awards for Public Engagement for her project ‘Remembering Rwanda’ that demonstrated a long-lasting legacy and passionate engagement. Remembering Rwanda encompasses two engagement activities: Kibuka Rwanda (‘we remember’ in Kinyarwanda), a photographic exhibition (2018) and Traces of the Past (2019) – that features a case display and video installation; both displayed at the Pitt Rivers Museum. The project draws on Julia’s research with survivors of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi to capture the nature, narratives and the materiality of Rwanda’s genocide commemoration.

About the project: Kibuka Rwanda is a photographic (traveling) exhibition that delves into the world of survivors working at memorials who have pledged their lives to care, clean and preserve the dead bodies of their loved ones that are often displayed at such sites. The exhibition features quotes from survivors and photographs and integrates Rwandan fabric into its design to surround the dead with a sense of ‘home’. Kibuka Rwanda was developed in consultation with Rwandan partners and survivors of the Genocide against the Tutsi living in the UK and displayed at the Pitt Rivers Museum in 2018, attracting over 70,000

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I was in Cape Town when things started looking ominous. It was the first days of March, just the start of autumn in South Africa, and it was hard to believe the rumblings of a global pandemic under a warm blue sky, especially as South Africa has only had a handful of cases at that point. In any case, I was too busy tracking people down for interviews — I was just getting going on what was intended to be an extended fieldwork trip. The plan was to first do interviews with civil society leaders, trade union activists and perhaps, if I was lucky, government bureaucrats and MPs, and then follow this on with a month or so of rural fieldwork.

But by the end of the first week of March, it was becoming clear that the coronavirus was coming to Oxford immediately instead of chasing up activists and learning about the views of the long-term unemployed in a rural village. I had been watching Skype footage of the window of my study in east Oxford. And yet, despite missing crucial fieldwork time, it has been a fascinating couple of months for the sorts of questions I ask in my research. Fundamentally, I am interested in the link between money and work — and why it is so hard for us to let go of the belief that the first can only be accessed via the second. The idea that ‘you shouldn’t get money for nothing’ holds even in a place like South Africa, where unemployment is at nearly 40%. To put it even more broadly, I am fascinated by the normative value we give to productivity and hardworkingness, even as work become ever more unstable and precarious, and the world needs less and less human labour to ensure human survival.

The global coronavirus pandemic has turned the existence that only the hardworking deserve money on its head. Now governments insist, often against the wishes of citizens, that people must not go to work. The only way that they can do so is to give cash to people who are not working — precisely the policy that many have long feared would lead to lassiness and moral and economic decay. Many countries — including a list as varied as Brazil, the US, Spain and South Africa — have decided to give cash to anyone below a certain income level, regardless of whether they were employed before the pandemic or not, a step that has long been resisted by governments. It has also become clear that the work that remains essential to keep society running — the work done by bus drivers, postal workers, delivery drivers, supermarkets cashiers, rubbish collectors — is some of the lowest paid, and is often outsourced, short-term and unstable. The link between how essential or socially valuable a job is and how well compensated it is by the labour market clearly does not hold.

This contradiction is even more prescient for care work. With schools and nurseries closed, and vulnerable people unable to leave the house, many more people have had to juggle paid productive labour with the unpaid (and unacknowledged) reproductive labour of caring for others. This has highlighted how ill-equipped our current structure of work is to enable us to also engage in care. After all, the full-time job was designed for someone (a man in most cases) who had another family member (usually a woman) to devote themselves to performing essential but unpaid and unseen full-time reproductive labour. What is surprising is that the structure of full time work remained unchanged when women began to move en masse into paid full-time work. This was a moment when paid labour and care work could have been more equitably shared out between all — but instead paid work is given primacy, and care is outsourced. Now that this outsourcing is no longer possible, we are forced to learn how to truly balance the two, or the impossibility of doing so within our current job structures.

Finally, the pandemic has underscored the deep inequities and dangers of precariousness. Most governments around the world have put in place economic support for workers in permanent jobs who are furloughed, or for the self-employed. But what of the precariously employed, who work on-demand, or to zero-hour contracts, or whose employment just end, or will end soon, in the midst of an enormous global recession? While this will especially affect the sort of people I typically do research with — the underemployed, or those employed on short-term or outsourced contracts in service industries — these questions cut across all. For instance, universities themselves are replete with highly qualified workers on cheap part-time and short-term contracts, hired in order to cut costs and grow endowments. The African Studies Centre, like all of the University of Oxford, relies on teaching and research staff who are on one-year, two-year and three-year contracts. Though termed ‘early career’, most of us have been do research with — the underemployed, or those employed on short-term or outsourced contracts in service industries — these questions cut across all. For instance, universities themselves are replete with highly qualified workers on cheap part-time and short-term contracts, hired in order to cut costs and grow endowments. The African Studies Centre, like all of the University of Oxford, relies on teaching and research staff who are on one-year, two-year and three-year contracts. Though termed ‘early career’, most of us have been do research with — the underemployed, or those employed on short-term or outsourced contracts in service industries — these questions cut across all. For instance, universities themselves are replete with highly qualified workers on cheap part-time and short-term contracts, hired in order to cut costs and grow endowments. The African Studies Centre, like all of the University of Oxford, relies on teaching and research staff who are on one-year, two-year and three-year contracts. Though termed ‘early career’, most of us have been do research with — the underemployed, or those employed on short-term or outsourced contracts in service industries — these questions cut across all. For instance, universities themselves are replete with highly qualified workers on cheap part-time and short-term contracts, hired in order to cut costs and grow endowments. The African Studies Centre, like all of the University of Oxford, relies on teaching and research staff who are on one-year, two-year and three-year contracts. Though termed ‘early career’, most of us have been
Adebanwi Presents Harvard AAAS 50th Anniversary Keynote Lecture

The Director of African Studies Centre and Rhodes Professor of Race Relations, Wale Adebanwi presented one of the two keynote lectures at the 50th Anniversary of the Department of African and African American Studies, Harvard University on Saturday, 29th February 2020. The theme of his lecture was “Contexting Africa’s ‘Dissimilarity’: Reflections on Global African Studies.” The other keynote, delivered on Friday, 28th February by Professor Farah J. Griffin, the Chair of African American and African Diaspora Studies at Columbia University, was entitled, “Fixed and Calmly Blooming: Fifty Years of African and African American Studies at Harvard.” Adebanwi, who argued for studying the continent and its diasporas as ‘Global Africa’ rather than focusing on the continent in isolation, stated that, in pointing to some of the challenges in the contemporary study of Africa in Africa, North America and Europe, his “purpose is not a criticism of African Studies, but rather a critique that points to existing tensions and some of the surviving elements of the old attitudes and paradigms and the consequences of the enduring study of Africa as a ‘dissimilar’ system, no less promoted by African scholars as by non-African Africanists.”

This ‘Africa-as-difference’ perspective, he argued, is particularly problematic because the difference has been deployed, on the one hand, as a means of inferiorizing the continent as well as the humanity and experiences of its people, and on the other, as a way of claiming that Africa and things African must be defined as or by anything that is not the West.

Adebanwi was introduced by Professor Emmanuel Akanyepong, the Ellen Gurney Professor of History and of African and African American Studies and Oppenheimer Faculty Director of the Center for African Studies, Harvard University.

Many leading scholars in the field of African and African American Studies attended the two-day celebration. These included Harvard Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Professor Claudine Gay, Dean of Social Science, Professor Lawrence D. Bobo, History Department chair Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Professor Henry Louis “Skip” Gates, Jr., Professor Cornel R. West, Professor Orlando H. L. Patterson, Professor Jacob E. Olupona and Professors Jean and John Comaroff.

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Emeritus Professor William Beinart

William Beinart retired from the African Studies Centre in 2015, but continues to write, convene the South Africa Discussion group and occasionally supervise masters students. With Saul Dubow, he completed an overview book in May 2020 entitled The Scientific Imagination in South Africa, 1700 to the Present to be published by Cambridge University Press in 2021. It begins with scientific travellers in the eighteenth century and ends with an analysis of debates about science and indigenous knowledge – as well as big sciences such as astronomy – in the early twenty-first century. Our aim has been understanding key areas of scientific work and their impact on economy and society over the long term.

He has also written articles and short pieces for the media on land tenure and land reform, largely with Peter Delius, which argue for a pragmatic and production-oriented approach. Since our book on Rights to Land (2017), we have focussed on developing alternatives to the arguments being made for a ‘fast’-track’ approach in South Africa, in which 60 per cent of remaining agricultural land would be redistributed to smallholders.

In another project, with Luviyo Wotchela and Sonwabile Mwana, he has been researching changing relationships on the land in the hills of the KwaZulu-Natal province. In a related project, with Lubabalo Okahle and Sonwabile Mnawuza, he has been researching changing relationships on the land in the hills of the KwaZulu-Natal province.

In Pretoria, Hani Strydom Drive (named after apartheid-era prime minister and Afrikaner nationalist) renamed Solomon Mahlangu Drive (after activist and member of the military wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe, who was hanged by the racist regime in 1979).

© Wale Adebanwi
The 2019–2020 academic year has been a year of not-doing.

Portia Roelof

Oxford has always been a paradox for productivity: it promises both perfect solitude and a wealth of distractions. The ASC, with AfOx, invites Africa-based scholars to the University for a year, so that they can escape everything they have to do back home and hunker down to write. Yet, nowhere do the daily interruptions for lunch, or coffee, or dinner proceed so lazily. Coming from LSE where every conversation is cut short by someone looking at their watch and rushing off, these deviations from constant meeting are a guilty respite. The Centre’s Thursday seminar is a first-rate example: lunch with the speaker in the clattering din of the Hilda Blix can turn into coffee, by which time people are arriving for the seminar, with drinks after, which continue to the Royal Oak and then it’s dark and time to go home to bed.

In October 2019, as students arrived in Oxford from across the world to enjoy this mix of secluded industriousness and slow-motion conviviality, national politics was threatening to break loose from its established rhythms. In order to move forward with his domestic and international agenda, the Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that Parliament would be prorogued. We learnt a new word for not-doing: prorogation. As I was in the middle of reviewing Gwyn Williams’s re-released State and Society in Nigeria, the spectre of a strong man suspending politics to better allow politicians to serve national interest was familiar. Brexit continued to not happen, as it had been not happening for three years already.

In the middle of Michaelmas, Johnson called a General Election. We – British and Commonwealth citizens – had an opportunity to vote out the Conservative government and reverse the changes that had made Universities and British society as a whole a hostile environment for our visitors from Africa and people of colour. Writing was put on hold and for a couple of weeks we were required to punch into the leading lights of Oxford Africa. Politics on the rainy streets of what we optimistically termed ‘swing seats’ in Wycombe, Reading or Swindon than in the corridors of the library.

Late November and early December saw eight days of strike action, where we painstakingly did nothing together. As Cathy Elliot recently wrote in Renewal: “As students and academics, we are accustomed to feeling good about our work. Being busy is our virtue, and academics, we are accustomed to feeling good about our virtue. As Cathy Elliot recently wrote in Renewal: “As students and academics, we are accustomed to feeling good about our virtue.”

As Cathy Elliot recently wrote in Renewal: “As students and academics, we are accustomed to feeling good about our virtue. As Cathy Elliot recently wrote in Renewal: “As students and academics, we are accustomed to feeling good about our virtue.”

Instead of knowledge over a scale that outstrips any one human life. The ASC’s activities: seminars and lectures cancelled in solidarity. I found myself with a collection of unused train tickets to Leicester, Cambridge and Leiden, and wondered if I could include on my CV everything that I meant to do but didn’t.

Amidst the disruptions described, I have nonetheless been lucky enough to get stuff done. During the few months we were together, I went to stimulating talks by Carl Coetzee, Simukai Chigudu, Nargila Yabola and Miles Tendi, and listened to students question documentary makers, elections observers and state governors. I went to the “20 years of Democracy in Nigeria” conference, which crammed two decades’ worth of effervescent discussion into one day. My work on interfaher peacebuilding in Nigeria has been accepted for publication, another article on political thought in Kenya revised and resubmitted, and draft two of ‘What Nigeria can teach us about good governance’ is starting to look like a real book. This carving out of a space to keep doing, in the face of disruption, has been a privilege and a joy. Yet, it is a joy that has to be put to work to sustain the privilege: work is the route to the financial security necessary to secure the ever more precarious conditions of life.

In the ASC newsletter Muhammad Sanusi II, CON, Emir of Kano wrote about his connection to the African Studies Centre and his plans to re-establish a library in the Emir’s palace: “Centuries from now, when hopefully this library will have millions of volumes, the Kirk-Greene collection will remain at its core.”

Anthony Kirk-Greene, as many readers will know, arrived in the UK has helped to refine the nature and scope of my work. In addition to goals I set myself to achieve – completing a paper on Angola, writing and editing an unpublished manuscript – I have now started working on a book.

Finally, the icing on the cake was the cultural spaces that were available to me to explore. I enjoyed the magnificence of Oxford’s colleges, including Keble where I resided, the remarkable exhibits at the Prits Rivers and Ashmolean museums and plays such as Wuthering Heights, which I saw performed at Wadham College.

The expression that readily comes to mind when I reflect on the eight weeks spent at the University of Oxford as an AfOx-ASC fellow is: What an opportunity!

The fellowship was an intellectually and culturally fulfilling experience. It provided a conducive getaway that enabled me to concentrate on my research project – interrogating Africa’s contributions to World War II through the lens of broadcasting – and to experience the uniqueness of Oxford.

Much of my time was spent at the Charles Wendell David Reading room on the fifth floor of the Weston Library. From this vantage point I accessed Oxford’s vast repository of archival material and academic literature to inform my work. Additionally, Oxford’s easy proximity to Reading enabled me the chance to visit the BBC written archives in Caversham where I was able to obtain a treasure trove of primary material on the subject I was exploring.

Expanding my literature search at Oxford and Caversham confirmed my earlier thesis on the dearth of scholarship regarding the wide range of contributions Africans made during the Second World War. Furthermore, the rich exchange of ideas I had with my professor, Wole Adebanwi, other colleagues at Oxford and elsewhere in the UK has helped to refine the nature and scope of my work. In addition to goals I set myself to achieve – completing a journal article and translating an unpublished manuscript – I have now started working on a book.

Audrey Gadzekpo (AfOx-ASC Fellow, 2019)
The period I live in 2019, I got the opportunity to join the African Studies Center at Oxford University at a peculiar time in my young career. I had just launched myself to develop an Afro-critical perspective on violence from Francophone scholars. I had to carry out a genealogy starting from authors of the 1930s that have written about negritude. The Center offered me a quiet work space which has been a great source of inspiration for me. It was an invaluable innovative space which has offered me many research perspectives and opportunities.

Firstly, I had numerous interesting exchanges with colleagues of diverse disciplines touching my research. I developed the habit to stroll around in the rich libraries of the University, visiting the treasures of philosophy and literature. Everything is at your fingertips in Oxford. In a small library of the Centre, I discovered old books that revealed remarkable links between social criticism from black scholars that took root at the same time in Harlems and Paris during the interbellum. While the Harlem critique strongly influenced by Anglophone African academics, the Paris critique has left permanent marks in social critical debates among Francophone scholars. I have come to understand that we can not understand Africa without taking into consideration its linguistic diversity. This linguistic diversity corresponds with different experiences and therefore with different ways of making sense of the world. This has led me to establish a dialogue with two academic and linguistic African worlds that do not interact a lot: the francophones and the Anglophones. In this way, my stay at Oxford University has been an opportunity to refocus my research and to recalibrate my research agenda.

For me personally, being at the African Studies Center gave me the time to reflect and to write. The environment was perfect for this. Several of my articles published in the period 2019-2020 in renowned reviews are a long-lasting memory of my stay in Oxford. Two of these articles were written based on my talk at Christ Church Oxford in September 2019. These articles will be published in World Development and Journal of Payne studies. While being at Oxford, I also worked on an article titled « The Great Lakes in Africa: Regional Politics and Dynamics » which has been published the same year in « The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Politics ».

Finally, my stay at the African Studies Centre has offered me the opportunity to establish contacts with other universities. I have participated in many workshop meetings that have given me the opportunity to present and discuss my work. At the London School of Economics, I have spoken about the political situation in the DRC and I have had the opportunity to talk about it with the UK department for International Development. Since then, we have worked on several projects together. At Kings College, I have met colleagues with whom I'm working even since on the subject of Ebola and Covid-19 in post-conflict situations in Africa. I also had the opportunity to get in contact with colleagues of the University of Cambridge, with whom I worked very intensively the past year. This collaboration has been so interesting that I wanted to return there in the future. This is why I have returned as a visiting scholar at the University of Cambridge in 2020.

I am very grateful to professor Wole Adebanwi for welcoming me and for agreeing to stay in touch. His passion and determination for this important African Centre are inspiring. With his team, he gives his all for the Center to grow and he continues to welcome young Anglophone and Francophone African researchers that want to participate to unveil the challenges of our continent. Many thanks to his team and in particular many thanks to the Africa Oxford Initiative that makes this adventure possible.

The Oxford University China-Africa Network (OUCAN) is an academic, multi-dimensional organisation that seeks to forge cross-disciplinary and trans-regional links between researchers, practitioners, and officials around the emerging phenomenon of Chinese engagement with Africa.

Throughout the academic year, OUCAN hosts seminar series to share the latest ideas in China-Africa engagement. OUCAN seminar series call for applicants on a rolling basis from early career scholars to share their most updated research in any field relevant to China-Africa engagement. In Michaelmas and Hilary term in 2019-2020, OUCAN held five seminars covering a wide range of topics of China-Africa cooperation in media, health, agriculture, and infrastructure, featuring scholars from SOAS, LSE, Open University, and Oxford.

OUCAN seminar series also welcome established scholars and practitioners to have book launches and share their experience. In 2017, OUCAN invited the former director of Ethiopian Railway Corporation, Getachew Bechlu, to share with us his experience of developing the railway networks in Ethiopia. In May 2020, OUCAN scheduled two book launches: Christopher Alden and Daniel Large on New Directions in China Africa Studies, and Arkebe Oqubay’s China-Africa and an Economic Transformation. Due to the pandemic, these seminars will be rescheduled in the 2020-2021 academic year.

OUCAN will not be able to host these seminar series without the generous support from African Studies Centre, China Centre, St. Antony’s College, and the Department of Politics and International Relations.
All Things Africa in Oxford

Avni Gupta

In 2019 AfOx supported 5 African graduate students to undertake a summer internship at the Nuffield Department of Medicine (file name NDM interns)

The Africa Oxford Initiative (AfOx) is a cross-university network supporting research and academic excellence by facilitating sustainable and equitable research partnerships between researchers based in African institutions and the University of Oxford. AfOx is working with colleagues across Oxford to develop a university-wide strategy to increase the number of African students studying at Oxford and increase the University’s engagement with research institutions and universities based in Africa.

Africa-focused research, working with departments and colleges across the University of Oxford and with universities, research institutions, governments and NGOs across African countries.

To enable effective partnerships that are genuinely co-developed, AfOx offers two researcher mobility schemes—the AfOx Visiting Fellowship Program and the AfOx Travel Grant.

AfOx Travel Grants are open to all disciplines and support the establishment of new collaborations between researchers based in African research institutions and at the University of Oxford. The Travel Grant is a flexible fund which covers research and travel costs in either direction i.e. from University of Oxford to an institution in an African country or vice versa. Since 2016, AfOx has awarded over 200 travel grants that have facilitated new collaborations between 70 departments within the University of Oxford and 114 African institutions across 32 countries.

The AfOx Visiting Fellowships Program enhances academic mobility and network building by supporting leading African scholars and researchers to spend periods of flexible time in Oxford, utilising the University’s facilities and undertaking collaborative research with Oxford based colleagues. AfOx collaborates seek new breakthroughs in the fields of medical sciences, big data engineering and astrophysics, conserving environments and ecosystems, archaeology, preservation of ancient languages amongst other research areas.

Supporting student experiences in Oxford

Postgraduate degrees provide a superb opportunity for making transformative changes to a person’s career and often form the basis for sustained institutional partnerships with the graduate’s home institutions.

In partnerships with the Oxford University Africa Society, AfOx runs academic support programs to enhance the graduate experience at Oxford, promote a sense of belonging and enhance the academic success of emerging African leaders in Oxford. These targeted programs include essay writing workshops and tips on pursuing DPhils in Oxford. AfOx also hosts an annual virtual open day for prospective African graduate applicants. In a live-streamed video, colleagues from Oxford’s graduate recruitment and scholarship teams as well as current students answer admissions related questions from prospective students.

Meetings and events

Throughout the year, AfOx hosts engaging conversations on Africa-related issues. The AfOx insakas and Focus on Research Africa (FORA) Conference bring together researchers, students, alumni, the wider University community and guests from around the world to share ideas and knowledge about Africa-focused research. Keep up to date with news from AfOx through our website here: http://www.afox.ox.ac.uk/

20 Years of Democracy in Nigeria Conference

Brenda McCollum

On December 6th, 2019 the African Studies Centre hosted a one-day conference on the theme of “20 Years of Democracy in Nigeria”. We began our day with a keynote lecture from Professor Larry Diamond from Stanford University. Professor Diamond presented the history of ‘semi-democracy’ in Nigeria over the past twenty years, outlining the issues that have kept the country from obtaining full democracy. He examined the progress that has been made in Nigeria as it works towards becoming more democratic. The presentation finished with an analysis of the future challenges that will face Nigeria as it continues to strive for a more democratic state.

Professor Diamond’s keynote address was followed by three panels. The first panel was titled “The Nigerian State: Structure, Agency and Institutional Processes”. In this panel Eghosa Osaghae, Rotimi Suberu, Ayoji Modibbo Umar, Adolp Abupe, and Matthew Page examined topics relating to the theme of the panel. Their presentations ranged from discussions of political elites, constitutional reform, governance, political parties, and Nigeria’s relationships in the international community. These presentations explored in depth the structural and institutional forces that shape Nigeria’s democracy.

The second panel was titled “The Political Economy of Oil”. Peter Lewis, Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, and Zanab Umar discussed topics regarding the political power and role of oil in Nigeria. The presentations grappled with the complex issues surrounding how Nigeria’s political leaders have regulated Nigeria’s oil industry, the political economy of Nigeria’s oil trade, and the different groups of people in Nigeria who are working to change the way Nigeria’s oil economy is currently run. Oil plays a crucial role in Nigeria’s economy and these presentations sought to discuss and understand the complexities around the current state of the oil industry and how necessary changes can be undertaken. The final panel was titled “Electoral Governance, Civil Society, and (In)Security”. Jubrin Ibrahim, Ebenezer Obadare, Idanit Hassan, Nic Cheeseman, and Adam Higazi discussed topics ranging from Nigeria’s civil society to the political economy of insurgency and counter-insurgency. The importance of elections and voter turnout during elections over the past twenty years in Nigeria was also discussed. These presentations sought to discuss and understand the way that Nigeria’s civil society has evolved over the past twenty years and how the place has worked to shape and reshape Nigeria’s political landscape.

The conference was finished with lectures from Dr. Kayode Fayemi, Governor of Ekiti State, Nigeria and Rt Hon Aminu Tambuwal, Governor of Sokoto State, Nigeria. Both governors gave insightful presentations into how their states are doing and on the topic of the day, Nigeria’s democracy over the past twenty years. It was a thrilling day of discussion, debate, and comradery, with attendees visiting from all over the world. The African Studies Centre once again wishes to thank all those that attended and presented and looks forward to the next time when we can host such an event.
Mary Brooks

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown some unexpected hurdles our way as Master’s students. At the start of the program, my thesis was supposed to focus on teacher training programmes in Tanzania. I have been involved with a non-profit in Arusha over the years and was working well with them to plan my fieldwork. I was to examine teacher attitudes towards the non-profit’s teacher training programme and see how such attitudes were reflective of their wider professional knowledge and capabilities in the classroom. Two days before I was meant to travel to Tanzania for my fieldwork, I made the difficult decision to cancel it seeing how things were progressing so quickly with the pandemic. It ended up being the right call, but it was extremely upsetting and frustrating to have to make. I had to start my thesis over and am now working on an entirely different project. While my initial project used only qualitative methods, my current project is entirely quantitative. I am now studying teachers’ professional knowledge in northern Nigeria looking specifically at how teachers’ educational histories affect their level of professional knowledge and capabilities. I am working on this project alongside a wider project with my supervisor which studies teacher knowledge in Africa, and it has been an amazing opportunity. I am using multivariate logistic regression models on Stata to analyse the data collected by my professor and his colleague a few years back, and have developed my quantitative analysis skills a lot in doing so. While this drastic change has been difficult and very time-consuming, I am grateful for the new opportunity I have been presented with and the skills it has allowed me to develop. As I apply for jobs, it has been extremely helpful to have such advanced quantitative analysis skills, as well as a strong background in qualitative-based research. I also appreciate the applicability and relevance of education, and am realizing how critically important it is to understand many things. While studying during this pandemic has been difficult and a new change of pace as I am back in the US, I am grateful for the opportunity to continue to learn alongside such esteemed professors and like-minded peers.

Tim Moller (MSc Class 2019 – 2020)

I conducted my fieldwork in The Sudan on the cusp of the international lockdown in response to the spreading Coronavirus crisis in March 2020. My subject, elephant hunting in ancient Nubia, was examined through visits to archaeological sites in Butana. While dealing with material from two thousand years ago, the work is keenly relevant to contemporary African study. The trade in elephants, both for their ivory and as a weapon of war, offers an unparalleled window into a variety of issues that are pertinent to our discipline today. I am concerned with agency, working to understand how local actors shaped both their own fortunes and that of their society using the elephant as a catalyst, as well as picking apart the relationship between an organized state infrastructure, centered on the control of water reservoirs, and the nomadic communities which surrounded it. I am perhaps most interested in the symbol of the elephant itself. From depictions in art and architecture as well as literary references from outside observers. I am keen to understand not only its intended significance, which to some extent remains esoteric, but equally conduct an historiographic examination of how the symbol has been interpreted from antiquity to today, drawing on issues of potential exploitation and helping to frame the region in a nexus of historicity.

Working in the field at an extraordinary time, I was given a privileged insight into how the Sudanese transitional government operated in the face of global emergency. While a knee-jerk reaction to close the country’s borders on the very evening I was to take my rearranged flight home caught me off guard, my sub fusc stayed behind in my closet, a vain hope that I would return for exams. Now nearly two months have passed, and my fears that I would accomplish little at home have given way to a routine. Wake up at 8:30, mostly coursework until 4, then practice languages, exercise, and read. Repeat it all again tomorrow. It has all reinforced my belief that our site is life’s most meaningful habitat, even if in this case it results in a Groundhog Day of monotony. But I am happy, healthy, and productive. The dissertation is coming along, too, helped by feedback via email and Skype from my supervisor, Wale. Had coronavirus stricken in the year of my birth, students would have been less lucky. Today, I have access to countless online sources, records I digitized before leaving Oxford, and interviewees who make themselves available with ease. It cannot compare to shaking hands in Equatorial Guinea or browsing the shelves of the Bodleian, but I will get by.

Our African Studies cohort will also miss out on Trinity term, and Trinity is what one thinks of when one thinks of Oxford. Mary Brooks, the current head of the African Studies Centre, has offered them to re-immerses themselves in their traumatic past. While studying in a competitive environment like Oxford is, to say the least, challenging without the added pressures of a worldwide pandemic, the South African lockdown put me in a position where I had to often choose between focusing on my work and helping people in my ancestral community who had an immediate need to access basic services like hospital appointments or visiting food banks, with public transport restricted. My flights back to Oxford, originally scheduled for the 9th of April, got cancelled and postponed to the 9th of May, only to be cancelled again indefinitely and now I am looking at a return date in the UK of July as the best-case scenario. This instability has induced a level of anxiety that I had never experienced before and I am still working through. At the time of writing, in the middle of writing my thesis, I still need to choose on a daily basis which battle I am going to fight on that given day.

While South Africa is home, I live at my grandmother’s house with my cousins when I am here thus I don’t have my own room to retreat into to focus and study and I do not have a reliable internet connection which extended well beyond the reach of the African continent. Instead, I was going home. Nokuzola Songo

I left the British on the last nonstop flight for Phoenix. That morning, I was supposed to be going to Equatorial Guinea for fieldwork. Instead, I was going home.

Nokuzola Songo

I left Oxford on the 13th of March to carry out my field research in South Africa for my thesis about displacement and homecoming during the political violence of the 1990s. I arrived here before all of the travel bans took effect, I was still hopeful and inspired and felt that I could still find a way to carry out my field interviews for data collection for my thesis. Soon the in-person interviews I had scheduled had to turn to phone interviews as one of the strictest lockdowns in the world came into effect, preventing me to even leave the house for a walk. Inspiration dwindled at this point, as face to face interaction with the interviewees is very important as these are individuals who have suffered tremendous physical and psychological conditions and I am essentially asking them to re-immersse themselves in their traumatic past.

While studying in a competitive environment like Oxford is, to say the least, challenging without the added pressures of a worldwide pandemic, the South African lockdown put me in a position where I had to often choose between focusing on my work and helping people in my ancestral community who had an immediate need to access basic services like hospital appointments or visiting food banks, with public transport restricted. My flights back to Oxford, originally scheduled for the 9th of April, got cancelled and postponed to the 9th of May, only to be cancelled again indefinitely and now I am looking at a return date in the UK of July as the best-case scenario. This instability has induced a level of anxiety that I had never experienced before and I am still working through. At the time of writing, in the middle of writing my thesis, I still need to choose on a daily basis which battle I am going to fight on that given day.

While South Africa is home, I live at my grandmother’s house with my cousins when I am here thus I don’t have my own room to retreat into to focus and study and I do not have reliable internet coverage, often struggling to access online resources. Finding an affordable place to stay where I could study during the lockdown has been a real struggle, with the greatest challenge been financial constraints as I cannot afford to rent a place in both Oxford and in South Africa for an extended period. This has proven to be burdensome, forcing me to choose between compromising my ability to do academic work and living beyond my means.

Worrying about financial issues and at the same time working on essays, preparing for the final exams and, most of all, a thesis without reliable access to the internet has proven to be an all-consuming challenge. In all my enthusiasm for my academic experience at Oxford University, I was most definitely not prepared to find myself in a tug of war between maintaining my mental health and academic success.
The first five months of this year 2020 has not been ordinary. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only challenged and changed our working patterns as humans across the world, but it is also exposing and deepening the levels of inequalities across human society and impacting us on different scales.

As a final year doctoral student with interest in extractive industries in Africa and their relations with societies, I consider myself to be one of the lucky researchers at this period. I returned to the UK from data collection in Asante, Ghana, before the international borders were closed. My current research, which focuses on the social histories of unequal actors in gold mining communities during decolonisation and early post-independence Ghana, would have suffered a significant blow if I had not completed fieldwork before the virus hit the country. The data gathered, among which were the lived experiences of long-term residents and former miners from Obuasi and Konongo mining communities, is essential to my research. My thesis seeks to contribute new ways of exploring the enduring historical legacies and developmental asymmetries in gold mining communities in Sub-Saharan Africa.

One of the experiences of fieldworkers is balancing time with accomplishment where the researcher must consciously, and sometimes painfully, bring the fieldwork to an end. I was anticipating obtaining access to a private archive which contains potentially useful information. I had made a successful application to access it and was planning a short-term return to Ghana to see this particular archive. Sadly, Ghana’s borders now closed, and with the current pandemic remaining unpredictable as it seems, it remains to be seen whether my hopes of accessing this archive will materialise. Appraising data and writing my chapters have also not been without their challenges. The situation prompted the closure of university facilities and essential resources key to my research, which means I have to make do without the comfort of the College and Bodleian’s workspaces, as well as essential reference materials that this situation has somewhat affected my rate of productivity negatively.

Indeed, these are not ordinary times, and all students will need the help they can get to strike a proper balance between accomplishing usual time-bound academic responsibilities—as the clock counts down—and navigating the social and psychological shifts this pandemic has brought.

Matipa Mukondiwa

How I thought my fieldwork and final months of the MSc African Studies would go and what ended up happening were very different. I am grateful that where I was doing research when travel restrictions were put in place was also home however, finishing my degree at home has its own set of challenges. Ultimately, I have learnt that it is good to plan ahead as a student but sometimes we can be very arrogant with the assumed certainty of what tomorrow will bring. Time management is important but so is flexibility.

There have been days where I have been very productive and then there were days where I felt as if all my concerns about my future would swallow me whole. It has been hard experiencing this in another country away from the cohort I had just started getting to know. It is also hard experiencing this at what is meant to be the most intense time of my degree.

Nevertheless, being a student during the pandemic made me appreciate the cohort and all our different personalities in a way that I had not done before as we encouraged each other through numerous WhatsApp group chats and FaceTime calls. I am also very grateful to my research supervisor who has supported me at such an uncertain time. Initially, I thought my thesis would be about the braai solely from the perspective of those who go to the braai for leisure purposes, but due to the Pandemic, most of my interviews ended up being with people who work at the braai and accepting this avenue of research has been so thought provoking. As a student and aspiring researcher, I have seen myself grow through this experience and I am grateful to the Duncan family, the African Studies Centre and my supervisor whose support has facilitated this growth.

A Tale of State Power: The Indian State’s Response to the COVID Crisis

Gayatri Sahgal

Last term in the “Politics of Life in Africa” option course class, we spent considerable time debating the state’s power and capacity to protect and preserve life. Our theoretical debates, however, found empirical application with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the initial weeks of the crisis, I found the Indian government’s response to the crisis to be particularly pertinent and revealing.

On March 24th, 2020, the Government of India hastily implemented a country-wide lockdown by giving the country less than four hours of notice. In doing so, the Indian state demonstrated its particular reading and understanding of the state’s bio-power.

Bio-power rests on the institutions of health and welfare that the states have at their disposal for ensuring the survival and preservation of their populations. However, the exercise of bio-power is a political exercise that requires states to ask the deeper and colder questions of ‘whose lives matter’ and ‘which lives are worth saving’. Bio-power and the resulting measures that are directed in the interest of preserving life, ultimately privilege one life over another. As Butler contends - all lives are not equally valued and the structures of power and the distribution of resources, deferentially dispose lives to precarity.

In imposing the lockdown without either preparing the public, allowing state governments sufficient time and resources to deal with the repercussions or offering a comprehensive aid package, the Modi government demonstrated whose lives the Indian state was trying to secure. The lockdown forced many migrant families to return home to their villages and left states to deal with the burgeoning population of the hungry and the destitute. Social distancing became a distant dream as millions struggled to make their way home on foot, finding refuge in each other and not the cities that they had helped build. In the weeks since the humanitarian disaster continues to unfold with recent surveys indicating that 85 percent of Indian households have experienced a decrease in income and 34 percent won’t be able to survive another week without assistance.

The lives that are considered as worth saving are then not of the people who constitute 70 percent of the country’s workforce and are employed in the informal sector. Without any savings to draw upon or social security protection, these groups were being pushed to the brink of survival. The lives that the government considered in its calculus are (by implication) those of the rich and the middle class. These are groups who have the capacity and the ability to heed the government’s advice and to emerge from the lockdown perturbed but unscathed. The result has been that these lives continue to be lived as ‘bare’ and outside the ambit of the state’s protection and care.

From an outside perspective then, India appears to have taken a proactive stance in imposing strict lockdown measures. However, quite distinct from the experience of European countries, India had a head start and could have, in the early stages, initiating strategies of rigorous testing and containment. Further, a nationwide lockdown of a country of India’s size and limited social protection benefits, should not have been taken without sufficient preparation. The priority should have been to prepare an extensive plan including ensuring food security, providing wage compensation and increasing the scope of existing social safety nets (for full-scope of the measures suggested, see: Citizens Response to COVID Relief).

The Finance Minister’s recent package of measures seems to be a step in the right direction, but for many, it may be too little, too late. Thus, rather than a banal wishing response, a more appropriate strategy would have been to include (from the outset) the many lives that have thus far received scant mention in the state’s cost/benefit calculus.

The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on graduate research: My experience

David Damtar

During this time of lockdown, social distancing and Covid-19, it is not unusual to feel that the world is spinning out of control (perhaps at a faster rate than normal). For those of us privileged to be in stable quarantine locations, each day can feel like a stalemate. The global community is working hard to checkmate Covid-19, and vice versa. In the meantime, thousands of people suffer and fade.

The faster things spin, the more work there is to do. In my safe and somewhat stable world, I feel that my DPhil responsibilities have accelerated. I finished my fieldwork at the end of 2019. This year, I have been analysing and writing. I am fortunate that my work has remained on schedule, unlike so many others for whom fieldwork is not feasible.

Like many other students, I feel that the outbreak has forced me work in a context of pressure, worry, and anxiety. These tensions plague my write-up and analysis processes, even though I endeavor to overcome them in earnest. The already tricky write-up task seems even more difficult to navigate. It is more challenging to find any semblance of a ‘writing routine’ when flights, incidence, and restrictions are in constant flux. These tensions are also taxing for my mental and emotional health. If you are an ‘empath’ like me, you are probably working hard to guard your peace and maintain healthy boundaries. Perhaps it is better to be compassionate towards yourself and others rather than assuming certainty of what tomorrow will bring.

The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on graduate research: My experience

Sasheenie Moodley

The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on graduate research: My experience

And the band played on …

Sasheenie Moodley

The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on graduate research: My experience

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Gayatri Sahgal
**Gambari is New Chair of IAB – and new CoS to Nigerian President!**

The Centre’s International Advisory Board elected Professor Ibrahim Gambari, a scholar, diplomat, and former Under Secretary-General of the United Nations for Political Affairs, as new chair during its annual meeting on October 2019. He succeeded the inaugural chair, Mr Tito Mboweni. Mr Mbomweni, currently the Finance Minister of South Africa, resigned from the Board because of his commitments in South Africa. He was appointed his country’s Finance Minister by President Cyril Ramaphosa just a few weeks before the formal inauguration of the Board in October 2018. We thank Mr Mboweni for his valuable service to the Centre.

At the Board’s meeting in October 2019, Professor Gambari thanked his colleagues for the confidence reposed in him and promised to lead the Board in providing massive support for the Centre’s mission. Three members of the Board announced new two scholarships (the IAB–Kaduna State Government of Nigeria Scholarships), one renewed scholarship scheme (the Patrick Duncan Scholarship which was extended for another three years – after the initial five years) and a hardship fund (African Graduate Thrive Fund, AGTF). The Board also decided to organise three fundraising events for scholarships in three locations in the continent, Lagos, Accra and Johannesburg in 2020. However, the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic has put this plan on hold.

The news of my IAB-Kaduna State Government Scholarship award to study for postgraduate study was of utmost priority to me, and I have always dreamt of pursuing it at Oxford – a dream that this scholarship award will make possible.

**IAB–Kaduna State Government of Nigeria Scholarship**

The Kaduna State Government through the Centre’s International Advisory Board (IAB) has instituted an IAB–Kaduna State Government of Nigeria Scholarships for two students from Nigeria who applied to the Centre as ‘foreign students’. The scholarship was announced by the Governor of Kaduna State on behalf of the Centre for its commitment to providing opportunities for young people from Nigeria to be able to study at Oxford.

The Scholarship, which is based at St Antony’s College, pays for full tuition, living allowance and other fees up to £46,000 for each of the two students that will benefit from the Scholarship. The winner for the 2020–2021 academic year is Mr Temilorun Olanipekun.

**Congratulations to Temilorun**

**Thomas Svanikier joins IAB**

Ghanaian entrepreneur, Mr Svanikier, the Founder and Executive Chairman of Svan Group, an automotive conglomerate based in Accra, Ghana and the Founder and Chairman of the Advisory Board of Fidelity Bank, a growing international financial institution, has joined the Centre’s International Advisory Board (IAB). Mr Svanikier attended his first meeting of the IAB in October 2019. He is married to Ambassador Johanna Odonkor Svanikier, Ghana’s former Ambassador to France and Portugal, and an Oxford alumna.

**Gambadi is New Chair of IAB – and new CoS to Nigerian President!**

The Kaduna State Government of Nigeria Scholarship for Foreign Students is established by the Kaduna State Government. The scholarship is for postgraduate study in any African country before their return to Kaduna State. The scholarship is for 2020–2021 academic year.

**News**

**African Graduate Thrive Fund (AGTF)**

Through the beneficence of a member of the Centre’s International Advisory Board, Mr Thomas Svanikier, the African Studies Centre (ASC) in partnership with the Africa Oxford Initiative (AfOx) has established the African Graduate Thrive Fund (AGTF) for African students at the University of Oxford. Mr Svanikier is the Founder and Executive Chairman of Svan Group, an automotive conglomerate based in Accra, Ghana as well as a founder of the Centre’s International Advisory Board (IAB), a growing international financial institution.

The board also decided to organise three fundraising events for scholarships in three locations in the continent, Lagos, Accra and Johannesburg in 2020. However, the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic has put this plan on hold.

The news of the award came to me at a time I had lost hope of studying at Oxford. Yet, my postgraduate study was of utmost priority to me, and I have always dreamt of pursuing it at Oxford – a dream that this scholarship award will make possible.

I feel very fortunate to be an awardee of this scholarship as it makes an invaluable contribution to my education – a privilege that I do not take for granted. The IAB scholarship award has reinforced my commitment to academic excellence. And thanks to the award, I can peacefully anticipate the commencement of my study later this year with great enthusiasm. As a grateful awardee, I have resolved to enliven, and be an exemplar of, the values expected of an IAB-Kaduna State Government Scholar during my time at Oxford and beyond.

I hold a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology from Bowen University, Nigeria. Upon resumption at the Oxford African Studies Centre, I hope to write my dissertation on the forced displacement crisis in Northern Nigeria. I will be exploring the link between Boko Haram insurgency and internal displacement as it affects the livelihood of the displaced persons, inhibit their mobility to preferred destinations, and affect their integration into host communities.

– OLANIKEUN, Temilorun A. (Nigeria)

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**Congratulations to Temilorun**
European Area Studies Networking Workshop

On Friday, 31st January 2020, the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies convened a workshop with several key European partners to discuss inter-institutional collaboration in the post-Brexit world. The meeting was held in St Luke’s Chapel (Radcliffe Observatory Quarter) and was joined by colleagues from INALCO (Paris), the Free University of Berlin, the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), the University of Leiden, the Higher School of Economics (Moscow and St Petersburg), the University of Warsaw, and Charles University (Prague). The partners discussed collaboration in the areas of doctoral training and institutional best practices in Area Studies.

Photo Gallery

ASC Faculty and Members of the IAB after the IAB meeting at the Centre in October 2019. (L-R) Mr Thomas Svankier, Dr Julia Vieback, Prof Wale Adedowo, Governor Nasir El-Rufai, Chair of IAB, Prof Ibrahim Gambari, Ms Linda Mabhena-Olagunju, Mr Ivor Agyeman-Duah, Mr Alex Duncan, Dr Liz Foukansi, Dr Peter Brooke, and Prof Miles Tendi.

IAB members, Mr Thomas Svankier (L) and Mr Alex Duncan discussing during the reception for IAB members.

Dr Julia Vieback and Ms Linda Mabhena-Olagunju discussing during the reception for the IAB members in October 2019.

Prof Gambari and ASC MSc student and former UK High Envoy to Zambia, Fergus Cochrane-Dyet.

IAB member, Mr Thomas Svankier (L) and Dr Peter Brooke.

Head of OSGA, Professor Tim Power speaking at the meeting of the representatives of European Area Studies Centres.

Group photograph at the end of the European Area Studies Networking Workshop.
Photo Gallery

ASC students and fellow with President Danny Faure of Seychelles

ASC students, Kenza Camara (extreme left), Amidu Mutaru (extreme right) and Visiting Fellow, Akin Osuntokun (second left) with President Faure

Ambassador Johanas Odonkor Swankie, Ghana's former Ambassador to France and Portugal and Ambassador Barry Faure, Seychelles' Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

Chair of IAB, Prof Gambari with Governor El-Rufai and Deputy Governor Hadiza Balarabe (right) at a fund-raising meeting in Kaduna, Nigeria

Caroline Moore (left) and Jacob Moss of St Antony’s College Servrey section at the reception for President Faure

Dr Zoe Cormack of ASC presenting a gift to President Faure at the end of his lecture

ASC former administrator, Martha Mas hugging Dr Julia Viebach after receiving a farewell flower from the latter.

Dr Zoe Cormack of ASC presenting a gift to President Faure at the end of his lecture.
**Update from Shaeera Kalla**


Shaeera is exploring the use of film making and data visualisation to enhance her activism. She is extending her Masters research on digital work, specifically on platform capitalism and domestic work in South Africa with the aim of conceptualizing alternatives to platform capitalism which are centered around new forms of worker organisation through cooperatives. This research sits at the nexus of historical labour struggles, debates around formal and informal labour, apartheid geospatial planning and its continuation through persisting racialized accessibility to labour markets, migration and attitudes of xenophobia, evolving understandings of work in the digital age, and the gendered performativity of labour. She also the co-founder of an organisation called The Mbegu Platform which is an ideation generator and incubator for socially impactful ideas which are community-driven. Their current focus sectors are in sustainable agriculture, renewables, service cooperatives and waste management.

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**Panzi Foundation DRC**

Nicole Batumike (2018 – 2019)

After Oxford, I moved to Bukavu, DRC, where I am working at the Panzi Foundation DRC. The Foundation was co-founded by Nobel Peace Prize Winner Dr. Denis Mukwege in 2008 to support the Panzi Hospital he founded in 1999. The Foundation ensures the provision of services completing the medical pillar, such as legal assistance, psycho-social support and socio-economic programmes. Together, Panzi Hospital and Foundation offer a holistic model of care for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. At the Foundation, I am the project manager for the National Survivors Network, which organises advocacy and community outreach activities on a national level. The Movement is also active on a global level as part of the global Network, SEMA. Besides that, I am also managing a socio-economic reintegration program which consists in the establishment of ethical, women-led, gold and semi-precious stones value chains.

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**Danielle Del Vicario**

After completing the MSc in African Studies in 2018, Danielle Del Vicario started a DPhil in History, researching the life, death and memorialization of John Garang, the founder of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/ Army (SPLM/A) which fought a twenty-two-year war against the government of Sudan. Over the past year and a half, she has conducted research in Kenya, South Sudan, South Africa and the UK, seeking out different histories and interpretations of Garang. In October 2019, she also started working as a teaching assistant for the MPhil in International Development course, History and Politics of the Global South.

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**Kofi Bediako**

I have had lots of amazing experiences since leaving the African Studies Centre of Oxford University. I won a PhD Scholarship at the University of Melbourne some few months after. But the start of the program was still seven months away, so I took the opportunity to engage other activities. One of them was my participation in an International Conference on Peace and Education at the Archbishop Desmond Tutu Centre for War and Peace, Liverpool, where I presented a paper on the legacies of Ghana’s Transitional Justice process based on my MSc thesis. I also worked with McDonalds for six months as a means of gaining some valuable experiences outside academics and meeting new people. This was lots of fun as I was able to gain deeper insights about life in Oxford. I then visited my family back in Ghana before moving to Melbourne. I am currently working on my PhD and it is very exciting. I am building on my Masters thesis on Ghana’s Transitional Justice process by comparing it the Liberian experience. The aim is to examine the Characteristics, processes, and outcomes of the complex interactions between the International and the Local in Transitional Justice in Africa. My supervisors are supportive, the city is welcoming, and the university is great. But I always look back at the wonderful training I had at the African Studies Centre as the energy that keeps me going. Greetings from Melbourne with love.
I am a French and an Ivorian citizen who just graduated from the Master of Science in African Studies, St Antony’s College. I’m currently seeking a career in international development, ideally with a focus on the Sub-Saharan African region. Most recently, I joined the Education Sector of the UNESCO’s Headquarters (Paris) as a Project and Research Assistant (intern) in order to support quantitative and qualitative analysis on the possible futures of technological, market, and environmental disruptions and how education might be affected by these futures. Just as important, I’ve joined the UNESCO’s ‘Covid-19 Educational Disruption and Response’ task force where I’m monitoring the immediate impact of school closures in sub-Saharan Africa until the end of May. Without a doubt the MSc in African Studies has reinforced my ability to address these issues across the continent. Moving forward, I truly hope to apply my strong expertise of African Affairs and educational policies in the international development sector.

ASC 2019 Annual Lecture was delivered on Friday, 7th June 2019 by Professor Manthia Diawara, cultural theorist, art historian, writer, filmmaker, producer, and Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature and Film at New York University, USA. The title of Professor Diawara’s lecture was ‘Edward Gissiant and the Right to Opacity: some Trembling Thoughts on the State of Critical Theory in Francophone Africa.’

ASC 2019 Annual Lecture by
Prof Manthia Diawara

Mr Ebenezer Asante, the VP of MTN Group Southern and East Africa and Ghana Region, began this book launch by introducing himself and telling us about his background in academia and industry. Although a graduate of Cambridge, with aspirations to become an academic, he went into industry and never quite made it back to academia. Mr Asante described to the listeners how his academic studies are tied to one another, whether we realize it or not, and how this influenced his interest in Area Studies.

The VP went on to discuss development questions on the African continent and the influence that they have in all spheres of life. Technological advances in last few decades have critically changed how development will and needs to happen. His role in MTN has shown him the role that telecommunication technology can play in developmental strategies.

While appreciating the good that technology can do on the African continent, Mr Asante discussed how it can also have negative side effects. This is especially significant when we look at the ways leaders have misused communication technologies. As we move further into the 21st century and begin relying more and more on technology, the VP warns us to be careful about how much we use and trust different technological advances.

Mr Asante stated that MTN serves 240 million people, with Ghana being one of its biggest operations. He recognizes that there have been criticisms of MTN, but that is to be expected with a company this large. Providing this number of people with telecommunications technology comes with both opportunistic and problematic sides. The VP discussed the role that MTN has played in Ghana’s development, but states that everyone must work together to move Ghana forward. Collaborations such as that between MTN and China are both opportunistic and problematic sides. The VP discussed the role that MTN has played in Ghana’s development, but states that everyone must work together to move Ghana forward. Collaborations such as that between MTN and China are both opportunistic and problematic.

The book launch was finished by a Q and A where the Mr Asante and Ivor were questioned about MTN’s future coverage goals in Ghana, problems with how MTN is viewed, and discussions between MTN and Chinese companies.
On 7 June, the Amersi Foundation Room was packed for the visit of the President of Sierra Leone, Julius Maada Bio, which we co-hosted with the Africa Studies Centre. He brought with him the Attorney General and the Ministers of Finance, Agriculture and Tourism. They were in the UK for an Economic meeting on the previous day in London and the Trooping of the Colour on the following day. He has been President of Sierra Leone since 4 April 2018. He is a retired Brigadier General in the Sierra Leone Army and he was the military Head of State of Sierra Leone from January 16, 1996 to March 29, 1996 under a military Junta government. The President is part way through a PhD in International Relations in Bradford University but probably has little time for that now!

He first addressed a lunch for Fellows where he answered questions. At 2pm he spoke to about 130 about the challenges faced by his country which is one of the world’s poorest but is keen to develop. A consistent strand of the speech was that the West (in particular its media) did not understand Africa. The President also emphasised his desire to stamp out corruption (which he said had been rampant under the predecessor regime) and to extend free education to all. He has set up an independent commission of inquiry focused on corrupt officials from past administrations, with the aim of recovering money that was pilfered from public funds, and organise members as well as coordinate a global media engagement illustrates how much of a powerful voice it has become for African students in Oxford.

Furthermore, the 2019/2020 Scholarships and Access Programme was also launched in Michaelmas term. This is one of the core programmes of the society which supports prospective African applicants to Oxford by pairing them with current Oxford students who can guide them through the application process. The Africa Oxford Initiative (AfOx) was very generous in the provision of application fee waivers reduce the financial burden on applicants who those fees.

The Africa Society was also a beneficiary of the Oxford Foundry Booster grant. This grant was used to support entrepreneurship initiatives by inviting leading entrepreneurs on the continent to Oxford to share their experiences of navigating the business landscape in Africa. In addition to these, we organised research and debates events under the Graduate Research and Innovation (GRAIN) Townhall platform through which members could discuss topical issues on the continent.

In terms of social activities, our AfroBops, one the highly anticipated events on the society’s social calendar, organised to celebrate African dance and music were completely sold out in both Michaelmas and Hilary terms. We held a Telegram event at the end of Michaelmas term where we celebrated food, music and games from across the continent. We also launched our T-shirt merchandise which was positively received and purchased by members.

Unfortunately, the Coronavirus pandemic led to the cancellation of the annual Oxford Africa Conference which is a highlight of Trinity term. To support members affected by the pandemic, we launched a welfare fund to help with minor living expenses and received a generous contribution from a supporter of the society to support this welfare intervention. In Trinity term 2020, we are also focused on consolidating and completing outstanding projects. This includes concluding our constitutional review, building the new website and constituting our Advisory Board. We believe these are important projects that’s strengthen the institutional fabric of the society.

We are proud of the progress the society has made in the past year and highly confident that the future is very bright for the society.