

African Studies Centre

2025
Newsletter



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD



Director's Report



As we bring the 2024-25 academic year to a close, I am moved to reflect on what has been an intense period of dialogue, renewal and growth for the African Studies Centre (ASC). This has been a year of significant developments in our teaching programme, research and collaborations, as well as a time of planning for the future. We remain committed to fostering a vibrant intellectual community that draws together scholars, students, and practitioners from across Oxford and beyond, while strengthening our partnerships with African institutions and researchers.

A key achievement this year has been the successful approval of major changes to our flagship MSc in African Studies. The new-look MSc will launch in 2026-27 and promises to position the ASC on the leading edge of the field of African Studies, intellectually and pedagogically, whilst enhancing student choice – key to remaining competitive in the international market for graduate courses. Fieldwork remains central to the MSc, and I am pleased to report that 20 of our 24 MSc students engaged in Africa-based research towards their dissertation, supported by an increased travel subsidy to reflect rising costs. The emphasis on embedded fieldwork in Africa continues to distinguish our programme and is consistently cited by students as one of the most rewarding aspects of their academic experience. We continue to be grateful for the generous funding from the family of Patrick Duncan and the MasterCard Foundation, in association with the Africa Oxford Initiative (AfOx), to support African scholars on the MSc. This year we were very pleased to welcome Kendi Juma, our first student funded by the AfOx-Corpus Christi College partnership, designed to enhance African women's participation on the MSc in African Studies.

Alongside teaching innovations, the ASC has been developing strategic initiatives that foster cross-regional and interdisciplinary dialogue. The Africa-Asia Table brought together departmental colleagues from African Studies with South Asian Studies alongside scholars from other departments and institutions across Oxford representing anthropology, development studies, history, Asian and Middle East Studies, and Islamic Studies. We hosted our first joint event, Rahul Rao's book talk on *The Psychic Lives of Statues*, and are looking forward to building further momentum through growing research networks including regionally based actors and institutions, and jointly convening an Africa-Asia seminar series, planned for 2025-26.

Events have once again been a defining feature of our work, drawing together a wide range of speakers and audiences for lively discussion and debate. Our weekly African Studies Seminar was a regular highlight in the term calendar, including notable talks by Patience Mususa on central Africa's Copperbelt agenda for its minerals, and José Lingna Nafafé on rewriting an Africa-centred history of abolitionism to Atlantic slavery in the 17th century. We were delighted to celebrate in March the publication of Miles Tendi's latest book, *The Overthrow of Robert Mugabe: Gender, Coups and Diplomats*. The Northeast Africa Forum and South Africa Discussion Group, both supported by the ASC, continued to convene dynamic weekly seminars that showcased the breadth and depth of emergent scholarship in these regions. In Trinity Term, we were honoured to host the historian and critical theorist Premesh Lalu, who delivered the African Studies Annual Lecture, entitled 'The Becoming Technical of the Human: Race After Apartheid' [see p.4 of the Newsletter]. As part of OSGA's 20th anniversary celebrations in Trinity Term, the ASC was very pleased to welcome back to the Centre our former colleagues Wale Adebani and Jonny Steinberg for a book talk and conversation on Adebani's recent book, *How to Become a Big Man in Africa: Subalternity, Elites, and Ethnic Politics in Contemporary Nigeria*. The student-run Africa Society provided the platform for several high-profile public events including: a talk convened by Ryan Cauwenberghs (MSc African Studies student) featuring the Ambassador of the Democratic Republic of Congo to the UK Ndolamb Ngokwey, on the 'War in the Congo: Rebels, Rwanda and Resources'; a panel discussion on 'West Africa in Transition', marking the 50th anniversary of ECOWAS and featuring an address by the former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo. Both events drew significant interest and wide engagement, and aptly illustrated how our students have actively sought to respond to, and shape, conversations on the most pressing concerns and challenges facing the continent.

The Centre was particularly pleased to support the Britain Zimbabwe Society's landmark conference held in June, on 'History, Histories and Historians', which brought together what may have been the largest gathering of Zimbabweanists outside of Zimbabwe, to critically reflect on that nation's complex historical landscape and its extraordinary historiographical traditions. The ASC has also continued to support the Oxford University China-Africa Network annual conference, whose theme this year was the 'Belt and Road Initiative in Transition,' with the aim of fostering critical dialogue on Africa-China relations and regional geopolitics.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all the teaching, research and administrative staff of the Centre for their sustained dedication and brilliance throughout the year. We were delighted to welcome this year Michael Odijie, who began his tenure with us as Associate Professor in African History, and Abigail Branford, who is a MSc alumnus now undertaking a three-year Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship project entitled, 'Teachers versus the Memory Hole: How Teachers Fight Nationalist History Curricula'. We are grateful for the intellectual contributions and collegial conversations spurred by the presence of this year's visiting AfOx-African Studies Fellow, Nkululeko Sibanda (Rhodes University, South Africa), who participated in a panel discussion with Lena Reim on public contestations over the memory of the Gukurahundi massacre in Zimbabwe, and gave a talk on the economic and cultural value of the National Arts Festival in South Africa. We bid a sad farewell to Doris Okenwa, our departing Evans Pritchard Fellow in African Anthropology, who has been a source of inspiration and advocacy for both students and staff throughout her four years with the ASC. We look forward to welcoming new colleagues who will shape the Centre's next chapter: Rita Abrahamsen, an internationally renowned scholar of African politics and international relations, has been appointed to the Professorship of African Studies and will take up the Chair in January 2026; and Gabrielle Robbins, a specialist in medical and development anthropology with a focus on Madagascar, will join us in September as the next Evans Pritchard Fellow.

Looking ahead, the 2025-26 academic year will mark the 20th anniversary of the African Studies Centre. We are preparing a rich programme of events, including the launch of a new blog led by Michael Odijie, a series of high-profile public lectures, book talks and seminars, and a reunion celebration in Trinity Term at which we hope to throw open the doors of 13 Bevington to warmly welcome back our alumni, friends and supporters to Oxford. Please stay in touch with us to find out more.

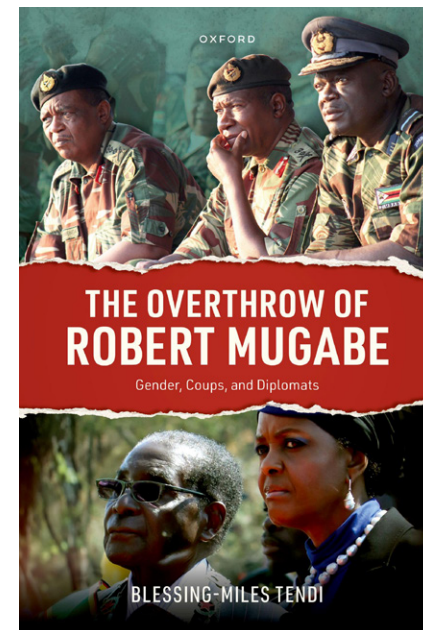
Rebekah Lee
Director, African Studies Centre

ASC Annual Lecture 2025

The African Studies Annual Lecture is evocative of the Centre's wider intellectual and educational mission as well as an opportunity to allow us all to pause in the midst of the demands of our daily lives and an intense term, to gather together as a community of scholars and researchers, to listen deeply, ask questions and to dialogue. We were honoured to host the historian, critical theorist and humanist Premesh Lalu, UK-South Africa Bilateral Research Chair (Digital Humanities Chair in Culture and Technics) and founding Director of the pioneering Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. Entitled 'The Becoming Technical of the Human: Race After Apartheid', the Annual Lecture invited us to consider how a future in South Africa beyond apartheid could be imagined, beyond the conventional politics and analytics of repair and redress. Through a focus on aesthetic education and what he has termed the 'techné' of race, Lalu called for the radical 'undoing' of apartheid via the reshaping of a sensory order rooted in the everyday. That the audience was both inspired and challenged by Lalu's talk was evident in the vigorous question and answer period that followed, and in the conversation that freely flowed at the drinks reception afterward. We are very grateful to Premesh Lalu for his thought provoking Lecture and his generous engagement with the Centre.



Miles Tendi book launch

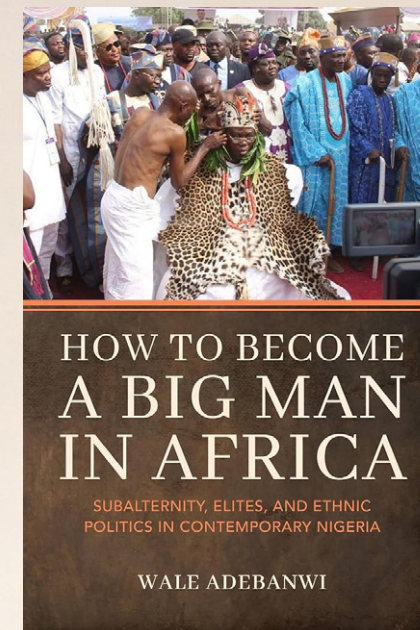


In Hilary Term, one of the African Studies Centre's weekly seminars celebrated the launch of Dr Miles Tendi's newest book, *The Overthrow of Robert Mugabe: Gender, Coups, and Diplomats*. The book was published in February 2025 with Oxford University Press.

Tendi argues that coups, such as the 2017 Zimbabwean coup which ousted the long-time president Robert Mugabe, cannot be accurately and rigorously understood without examining the crucial role of gender and women's politics in military seizures of power. Contrary to influential representations of Zimbabwe's 2017 coup and other recent coups as markedly different from past coups, Tendi draws on long gendered histories of military coups in Africa to argue that there are significant continuities in coup characteristics across time.

The book launch was well attended by academics and students from the Department of International Relations, African Studies, History, and the Department of International Development, and was followed by a drinks reception.

Tendi is currently writing his next book, *Coups D'état: What They Are and Why They Are Back*, which will be published in 2026 by Cambridge University Press.



Wale Adebani book launch

Former African Studies Chair and Centre Director, Professor Wale Adebani (University of Pennsylvania) returned to Oxford in May, to speak about his latest book 'How to Become a Big Man in Africa: Subalternity, Elites and Ethnic Politics in Contemporary Nigeria'. He was joined in conversation by Professor Jonny Steinberg (Yale University), another former ASC Director.

The event was part of the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies' 20th Anniversary celebrations and hosted a group of returning African Studies alumni.

It was a great pleasure to welcome back Wale, Jonny and former African Studies students!



Recovering African Voices in the Fight Against Slavery

Michael Odijie

I began the academic year working to complete my manuscript, *A History of Anti-Slavery in Southeastern Nigeria: Grassroots Movements and Activism, 1901–2020*. This book explores the history of campaigns led by local people against indigenous slavery, with a case study focusing on southeastern Nigeria, primarily among the Igbo. The book is part of the AFRAB (African Abolitionism: The Rise and Transformations of Anti-Slavery in Africa) research project at University College London, of which I was a member before joining the University of Oxford. The AFRAB project, funded by the European Research Council, involves myself, three other core researchers, and collaborators from eight African universities. AFRAB examines the abolition of domestic slavery from African perspectives, spanning from the mid-nineteenth century to the late colonial period. Conventional scholarship has often assumed that indigenous slavery in Africa was abolished by Europeans, primarily through the actions of missionaries and colonial administrations. However, AFRAB's findings challenge this view, highlighting the significant and underacknowledged role of Africans in the struggle against slavery.

Using several archives and early newspapers, I uncovered a conflict between some African anti-slavery campaigners and the early colonial administration over the issue of slavery. Colonial administrators in what later became Ghana and Nigeria generally wanted slavery—or some modified version of it—to continue, both for administrative convenience and to secure labour for public works. However, some local people began to resist slavery in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Traces of this conflict can still be found in various archives today. Some of the campaigners bypassed the colonial state and wrote letters directly to sympathetic organisations in the late nineteenth century. One such individual was Francis Fearon from Accra, whose letters to the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society in the 1890s accused the British colonial governor of enabling slavery in the Gold Coast. These letters are preserved in the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society archive at the Weston Library. In 1909, several Lagosians—Herbert Macaulay, Samuel Herbert Pearce, Sapara Williams, James Bright Davies, and Mojola Agbebi—joined forces to challenge the colonial governor in Lagos for promoting slavery through



I am leading university students on a guided tour of my exhibition at the National Museum in Lagos.



I am leading secondary school students on a guided tour of my exhibition at the National Museum in Lagos.



After one of the workshops held on the premises of the National Museum of Nigeria in Lagos. Participants included academics from the University of Ibadan and the University of Calabar, archivists from the Nigerian National Archives (Ibadan and Enugu branches), the Director of Education at the National Museum of Nigeria, and students from various universities in Lagos.

a law known as the Native House Rule Ordinance, which applied in the Niger Delta region of modern-day Nigeria. They wrote numerous letters directly to London and successfully lobbied for the repeal of the ordinance. Their efforts led to the passage of an anti-slavery ordinance in 1915. This campaign caused a scandal and even sparked debate in the British Parliament. It marked an important early moment in the emergence of modern-day nationalism in Nigeria.

In August 2024, I collaborated with the National Museum of Nigeria to exhibit some of the findings from my research within the museum premises for six weeks. The exhibition, *Nigerian Voices Against Slavery*, featured direct quotations from local anti-slavery campaigners—ranging from well-known figures such as Olaudah Equiano and Samuel Ajayi Crowther to lesser-known but equally important voices like Esin A. Esin, who authored an abolition law in the 1956 South-Eastern Parliament to end slavery in southeastern Nigeria, despite opposition from the colonial state. The exhibition attracted visits from numerous secondary schools in Lagos, which transported their students to the museum, as well as history students from various universities. I also collaborated with the University of Ibadan to host a series of workshops for graduate students and history lecturers across Nigeria. During the exhibition period, I undertook a lecture tour of several universities in Lagos and neighbouring states, where I introduced the AFRAB research project to academics and students, and engaged in discussions and debates with local scholars on the subject.



A selfie taken after my lecture at Lagos State University, with Aduke Gomez, academics from Lagos State University, and attendees.

Researching Community Radio in Zambia

Peter Brooke



Peter speaking on Simooya FM

Radio has dominated Africa's media landscape since the 1950s and continues to enjoy enormous popularity. However recent audience surveys suggest that since 2020 the numbers of people using the technology may have begun to decline for the first time in its history thanks to the exponential growth of digital connectivity. What is the future of radio? Should governments and NGOs continue to invest in broadcasting as the primary means of communication with populations?

These were some of the questions that I set out to investigate on my latest fieldwork trip to Zambia, as part of my larger research project on the history of African radio. My previous work in the country has been historical in focus but this time I was keen to bring the story up to the present day. Radio plays an enormous role in Zambia thanks to the established presence of the state broadcaster ZNBC since the 1940s and the popularisation of commercial music and talk show stations since the 1990s. More recently the main growth area in the sector has been community stations, typically broadcasting to a range of around 20 miles on a minimal budget and run by a mix of professionals and local volunteers.

My case study was a brand-new community station which launched last year. Simooya FM serves a rural area of Southern Province near the provincial capital, Choma. I enjoyed a warm welcome from the station manager Kelvin Muzelenga who very kindly invited me onto the afternoon music show to discuss my research and the social impact of radio. A sample audience survey in the village revealed that nearly everyone tunes into the station regularly, attracted by the relevance of local issues aired and the excellent signal quality. The launch of the station was particularly popular because Simooya has historically been in a media blackspot with poor reception of national radio and television stations. Silas Mono, chair of the local school PTA (pictured listening to the station on his phone), explained that villagers had previously relied on newspapers for news but low literacy levels were a major barrier. The village has excellent data signal thanks to a large telecoms tower built by the mobile provider MTN and shared by Simooya FM (pictured) but of the few villagers who are literate even fewer can afford smartphones or the cost of regular data usage. I estimated smartphone ownership to be around 5 per cent of the population at most. Although radio sets are too expensive for many, 'basic' phones have FM receivers incorporated as standard and the mobile boom in recent years has, paradoxically, served to reinvigorate the audience for the much older technology.

Community radio can clearly have a profound impact but in Simooya it faces major problems. The station was set up by a local community trust in collaboration with the UK-based NGO Amplifying Voices and it will be funded by them in its initial stage. However, the future of the station is unclear beyond that point and so far it has been unable to raise significant income from commercial advertising. It seems that it will continue to rely on donors but new donor revenue may come with strings attached, as another local station found when it opted for takeover by a church organisation with a mandate to promote religious music. Climate change also poses a serious problem for Simooya FM. Most power in Zambia is generated by the Kariba Dam but over the last two years the country has experienced prolonged drought and the government has imposed load shedding. While I was in Zambia this was typically lasting up to twelve hours a day and the timings were not announced in advance. Transmitters and radio studios are power hungry and the only alternative power source for the station is a small petrol generator with enough fuel to run the station for around an hour. For Simooya FM this situation presents the station manager with a daily headache of having to prioritise the most popular programmes before the power goes off or risk

losing his audience. Time will tell whether it is viable to run a community station in its current form in Simooya – elsewhere stations have tended to become a platform for commercial or church interests – but the scale of its success reveals the limits of the digital revolution and suggests that radio will continue to be the only practical mass medium for rural Zambian audiences for many years to come.

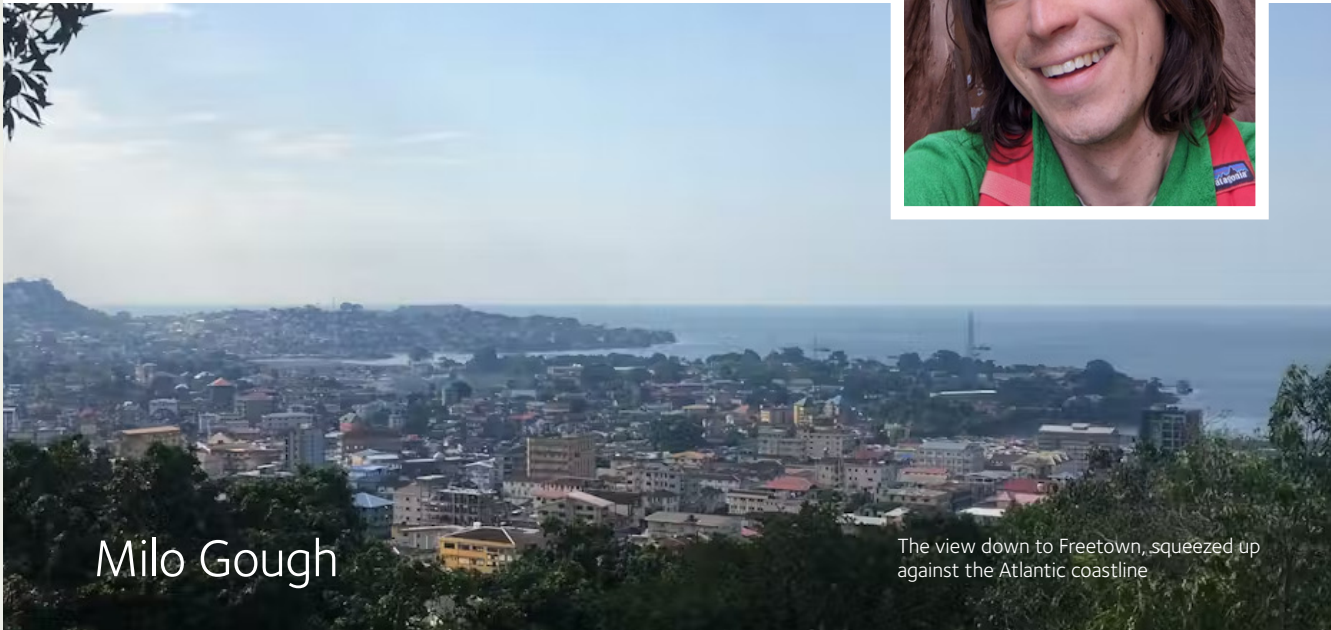
I would like to thank Chibozu Community Trust and Amplifying Voices for their helpful assistance during and after my visit.



Telecoms tower built by MTN



Silas Mono, chair of the local school PTA



Milo Gough



The view down to Freetown, squeezed up against the Atlantic coastline

I started as a Research Associate and lecturer in the African Studies Centre at the beginning of the Hilary Term. Teaching on the 'Debates in African Studies' course has been a fascinating way to discover some of the diverse research going on in African Studies across the University of Oxford and to think in detail about fields outside of my usual interests. I also taught an option course on 'African Environments in the Anthropocene'. This new course considered the environmental history of Africa in the context of the politics of contemporary environmental challenges, from cities running out of water to experimental genetic modifications of malaria carrying mosquitoes.

My academic background is in urban history. During my doctorate I explored the history of Freetown, the largest city in Sierra Leone during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by tracing the relationship between society and the built environment. But over the past couple of years, I have begun to see the city in terms of its environments and to reorientate my research towards unpacking the meanings of precarious urban ecologies.

Informed by my shifting interests my recent research has focused on two ongoing urban development projects in Sierra Leone. The first is [Freetown the Treetown](#), a scheme led by the impressive progressive mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyer, to reforest Freetown. The once forested mountain slopes on which most of the city is draped have been stripped bare and urbanised. This has contributed to numerous wicked problems, including destructive annual floods, air pollution and deadly landslides. Since 2020, Freetown the Treetown has made use of digital tools to empower communities to plant more than 1 million trees. The successes of this project have been widely celebrated, and it has been touted in urban development circles for its repeatability in cities across Africa. Whilst reforestation will certainly improve the much degraded ecology of Freetown, I caution against the assumption that tree planting can be a panacea for urban environments

across Africa. The scheme relies on heavily criticised carbon credit markets and obscures the deeper structural issues that have left Freetown as one of the most vulnerable cities in the world to the effects of climate change.

The second is [Sherbro Island City](#), a master planned 'Afro-dynamic eco-city', that promises economic development to an isolated region in the south of Sierra Leone. You may have read about Sherbro Island City because of its backing by Idris Elba, the famous actor-rapper-DJ-philanthropist-entrepreneur and now master city builder. Sherbro Island City wants to follow in the footsteps of other new cities in Africa like Nigeria's Eko Atlantic City and is explicitly inspired by the luxury urbanism of Dubai. The plans, referencing the most fashionable ideas in urban planning, emphasise the city's green credentials. Sherbro Island City will support both local communities and the local environment of largely untouched mangrove forests. Whilst this idea sounds alluring, I have developed a critique of Sherbro Island City that shows the ways in which its luxury enclave urbanism recycles the logics of the colonial era. During the early twentieth century the British colonial state built Hill Station, a racially segregated settlement in the mountains to the south of Freetown, for white colonial officials to escape what was considered the blighted African city. The class segregations that are being wrought by the proliferation of gated communities, urban enclaves, and luxury new cities across Africa resonate with the racial segregations of the colonial era.

Across both the Freetown the Treetown and Sherbro Island City projects, I have traced the ways in which the inequalities, of climate risk and wealth, are rooted in histories of dispossession and segregation. I argue that future orientated and progressive urban policy makers, planners and investors must make more than a passing gesture to these pasts. My ideas have felt very welcome at the African Studies Centre, and it has felt so generative to problematise 'green' development in dialogue with my colleagues and students.

Research challenges in Lusophone Africa

Rui Verde, PhD



The primary focus of my research efforts is on the countries of Lusophone Africa, with a particular emphasis on Angola. Recently, I had the privilege of completing an extensive research project on the Chinese presence in Angola, provisionally entitled *The Silk Road to Luanda: China's Influence in Angola (2003-2025)*. This project, which I anticipate will be published as a book, is a testament to the intricate and multifaceted nature of the research undertaken in this region.

Firstly, a significant double barrier exists in the form of language and history. The Portuguese language, spoken by more than 260 million people (3.7% of the global population), is the fourth most widely spoken language worldwide. However, the predominant background of researchers from Anglophone or Francophone backgrounds has resulted in a certain bias towards countries where their native tongue is spoken. The historical legacy of the Berlin Conference has also contributed to this dynamic, with British universities tending to focus on Anglophone African countries, while French universities prioritise Francophone regions, perpetuating a perception of other cultures and languages as either suspicious or eccentric. This attitude is further entrenched by stereotypes that originated in Elizabethan England and have persisted over the centuries. The notion of an Iberian Peninsula perceived as 'backward' and 'totalitarian' created an idea that their colonization perpetuated such qualifications, though this perception is a stereotype that does not accurately reflect the reality of the situation. Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, and São Tomé and Príncipe exemplify a dynamic and diverse array of events, studies, and challenges that contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the African continent.

Despite its complex history, including the 'horrors' described by Joseph Conrad, Africa remains a continent of diverse and vibrant cultures, each with its own unique

characteristics. A substantial portion of the future of humanity, along with numerous raw materials necessary for the energy transition, is located in Africa. Prejudice against the African continent may be regarded as a significant impediment to the future of humanity.

In order to surmount the obstacles to research in this domain, it is imperative to address the imposition of excessively stringent regulations on researchers according to Eurocentric standards, which have the potential to engender suspicion in Africa. The human factor, as eloquently explored by Graham Greene, is paramount to the success of any research endeavour. However, the rules, particularly the forms that local sources are required to complete prior to interviews, have the unintended consequence of creating a 'chilling' effect, leading to superficial statements rather than meaningful insights. Eurocentrism is recognised as a significant challenge confronting researchers, with the potential to influence the interpretation of research findings on Lusophone Africa.

Finally, concerns regarding the implications for funding, academic positions and career prospects could be cited as deterrents to research. These challenges were personally experienced during the authors' engagement with research on Angola and China, and this apprehension is shared by the majority of academics and officials, who are often daunted by the prospect of potential repercussions from the Chinese government.

Nevertheless, it is precisely these challenges, coupled with the profound significance of Africa, particularly Lusophone Africa, for the future, that render research into the region an enticing prospect.



Dr Marion Wallace



As a historian of Africa as well as a library and archives practitioner, I'm finding it a great experience to be part of the congenial and supportive community and stimulating academic environment of the ASC. The Thursday seminar programme, with its mix of subjects, disciplines and approaches from experts in their fields, is particularly lively and often eye-opening.

My research project is an exploration of print cultures in African languages in the mid-twentieth century. It stems from my previous role as Lead Curator for Africa at the British Library, where I researched the African-language print collections and discovered a large cache of pamphlets, produced between the 1950s and 1980s, catalogued in collective entries. So, from the catalogue, the researcher can for example find out that the BL holds a number of 'miscellaneous' pamphlets in 'Asante Twi' published by the Bureau of Ghana Languages, but not how many, or what, they are. Similar entries cover thirteen countries and more than forty-three languages.

I'm now in the process of going through this collection, thinking about its implications, and comparing it to similar material that the Bodleian holds (less, but nevertheless with some significance). My research sits at the intersections of work on print cultures, African languages, African literature, twentieth-century histories of decolonisation, and questions of the coloniality of libraries and archives (on which my next paper will focus).

In my early engagement with the material, two aspects in particular stood out to me. The first was that much of it was published by colonial literature bureaux, bodies set up under the British empire to promote basic education, local language learning and colonial propaganda, but which also, even before independence, published an interesting variety of material, some of it influenced by the interests and agendas of African authors. In the post-independence period, some of the bureaux – the East African Literature Bureau (EALB) being the best known – were established as publishers for newly independent countries, and produced a more copious and wider range of

publications. Aside from the EALB, however, these bureaux have hardly been investigated. The BL's collection of material published by the Bureau of Ghana Languages is particularly strong.

The pamphlets also reveal the role of Christian missionary organisations in translation and linguistic work in the twentieth century. This is something that historians have looked at in some detail for earlier periods, particularly the Western missionary expansion to Africa in the nineteenth century, but there has been little focus on more recent missionary activities in this field. Many of the BL pamphlets, particularly those from Nigeria and Ghana, are published by institutes of linguistics connected with SIL, also known as the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the sister organisation of the Wycliffe Bible Translators, which has the ultimate aim of translating the Bible into every language in the world. Founded in the US in 1934, SIL has worked to codify and create literature in hundreds of 'minority' languages. The pamphlets in the BL and Bodleian collections cover a great number of often lesser known languages, and consist largely of basic wordlists, grammar books, teaching materials and Bible translations.

As I continue to work on these topics, I am also asking how the pamphlets came to be in these UK libraries, how they appear in collections locally and internationally, and what their continuing importance is. This work also intersects with that of [LITAIID: Decolonization, Appropriation and the Materials of Literature in Africa and its Diaspora](#), a project based at King's College London, which is examining literature published in Ghana 1940s-1960s. I will shortly be collaborating on a LITAIID sub-project, Archives in Action, which seeks to explore the reach of these items beyond the academic community.

On another note, 'UK Archives for African Studies' was the title of a session I gave in January together with Lucy McCann, Senior Archivist at the Bodleian, for MSc students and other Oxford postgraduates, at the ASC. This was a practical session, aimed at introducing students to the wealth of archival material in the UK and giving them tips on how to find and access it.

For anyone looking for archival material, probably the most important messages are that there's more out there than you think – but it's not always easy to find what you want, and searching online doesn't always do the job, even to identify what you need. And most archives are not yet online.

A repeat 'UK Archives for African Studies' session is provisionally booked for Friday February 6th 2026. Save the date!

Here are some hints and tips:

- The 'Big Three' are the Bodleian, the British Library and the UK National Archives, but there are many other archives that may help you.
- To find an archive or collection, you can use Discovery, the National Archives catalogue (<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>), which covers many UK archives, and Archives Hub (<https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/>).
- If you are looking for material in the UK National Archives (TNA), be aware that keyword searching in Discovery (the catalogue) is very limited. There's a lot of material you won't find this way. This introduction on the TNA website is a good place to start: 'How to look for records of... Colonies and dependencies from 1782' (<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/colonies-dependencies-further-research/>).
- If in doubt – or even if not in doubt – ASK! Archivists are by and large a friendly bunch and they will be pleased to help. They can often direct you, not only to what you want, but to very useful resources you didn't know existed.

'Shell supports apartheid'. This photograph of an anti-apartheid protest from 1986 comes from the archive of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, held by the Bodleian – just one among many archival holdings at the Weston Building from or related to Africa. Digital version at <https://www.aamarchives.org/archive/history/namibia/pic8625-shell-supports-apartheid.html>.



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Jonathan Jackson

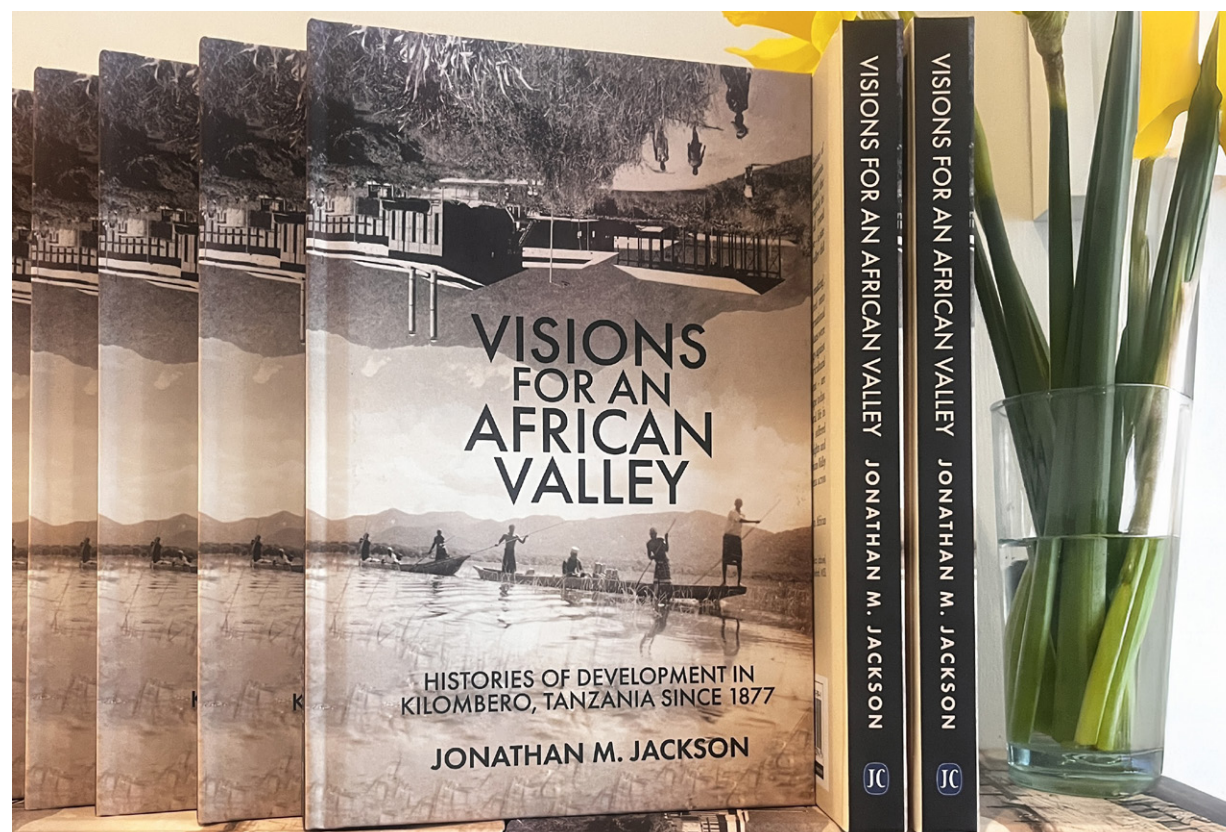
The highlight of the year was certainly the publication of my first book, *Visions for an African Valley: Histories of Development in Kilombero, Tanzania since 1877*. This was a true milestone and some distance from where the book began; ostensibly with the beginning of my PhD and the doctoral research which then bore the book, but I view its origins as also nurtured by my time as a student on the MSc African Studies (2011–12) – not to mention my first forays into academic study at SOAS a few years before that.

Visions for an African Valley is the result of deep archival dives in Tanzania and Europe to unearth the many hopes and plans for development once visioned for this one valley region in south-central Tanzania. It is because these were mostly unrealised, however, that traces of their very existence are not found as ruins on the ground but in shelved surveys, reports, confidential correspondence, and public records. The reasons that various plans did not materialise varied and were often unconnected to local factors. Fieldwork in Kilombero itself revealed the lack of both local consultation and contemporary awareness of this



long history of development from above, and which is addressed by this chronicle of visions for this valley since the late eighteenth century.

The road to publication was long, but the latter writing stages of the book coincided with my tenure as an Academic Visitor at the African Studies Centre. Seminars, lectures, events, coffees and pints, walks and talks: through the centre and a wider Oxford, I have enjoyed the company of many people who have enriched this past year. Through their solidarity, kindnesses, and companionship, they lessened the sense of precarity and frustration that periodically characterises contemporary academia, or at least my experience of it.



South Africa Discussion Group

Maxim Bolt, Robert Freeman and Rebekah Lee
SADG co-convenors for 2024–25

The South Africa Discussion Group has had a particularly lively year, with a rich and engaging set of papers, book launches and film screenings. One of the group's strengths is the range of topics and periods explored, reflecting our regular comers' diverse range of interests and disciplinary traditions, as well as a welcoming and exploratory spirit.

We started the year with a documentary on the life and work of photographer David Goldblatt, followed by thoughtful reflections from the film's director, Daniel Zimble. Many of the film's observations on land and belonging were subsequently picked up by SJ Cooper-Knock's introduction of the concept of 'civic planning' as a tool for understanding planning within informal settlements across Cape Town and Durban. Cooper-Knock's careful critique of overly normative approaches to planning law was similarly echoed by Simon Stevens' talk the following week on the genesis of early twentieth-century sanctions campaigns against South Africa, including through the intervention of Mohandis Gandhi. Stevens showed forcefully that these campaigns often served imperialist interests, despite their emancipatory facades.

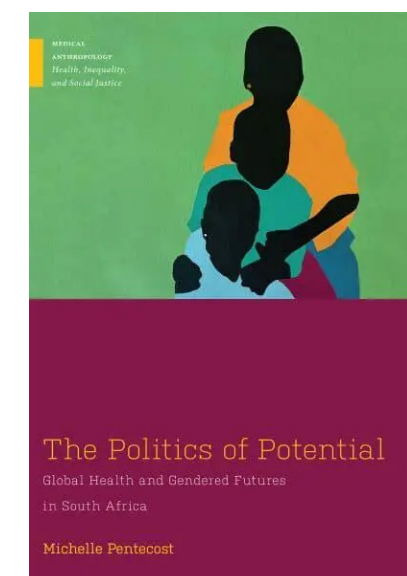
Christopher Warnes' paper on post-Apartheid South African literature channelled some of this deflationary spirit through a charting of a move from 'hopeful optimism' to 'captured state' in South African novelistic writing. Covering several literary genres including detective stories, Warnes illustrated how changes in political conditions resulted in not always predictable shifts in cultural outlook. A co-hosting of Hilary Sapire with the African Studies Seminar showed the close connection between the South African Discussion Group and other seminars at the African Studies Centre. Sapire's work on the pageantry of British royal visits, and the role of African initiatives and re-imaginings in shaping the position of imperial figureheads, chimed neatly with William Beinart's discussion of his recent engagements with the Amadiba Crisis Committee, including though community-initiated education projects on the nineteenth and twentieth century histories of chieftainship and land ownership in the Xolobeni region of the Eastern Cape.

Michelle Pentecost's discussion of her latest book, *The Politics of Potential*, chartered the successes and failings of UNICEF's First One Hundred Days project in South Africa. In particular, Pentecost pointed to the adverse responsibilities the project put on mothers and grandmothers through both its design and execution. This book discussion was followed by two presentations on DPhil work by Oda Eide and Gideon Basson. Eide looked at how people interact with institutions mediating the relationship between unemployed persons and employers, showing the myriad



social and other functions that these centres play. Gideon Basson canvassed the possibility of arguing for poverty as a ground of unfair discrimination in terms of South Africa's constitution. This was followed by a prescient paper by Rita Abrahamsen on the South African far-right, and its connection to international far-right movements. We concluded our discussions for Hilary Term on a lighter note in the form of Colin Bundy's reflection on the history of sports scholarship in South Africa.

Much of the group's success is built on the commitment and enthusiasm of the participants who regularly attend, across a range of ages, careers, and career stages. We very much encourage new members to join our vibrant community!



Green minerals, dirty mining? The politics of new lithium mining in Ghana

Miles Larmer



The production and control of ‘transition’ or ‘green’ minerals – cobalt, rare earths, and lithium, among others – is central to global economics and geopolitics in the mid-twenty-first century. The successful use of such minerals, crucial for new electrical battery and electric vehicle technology, is also vital to alleviating climate-related environmental impacts. Global South production is integral to this new mineral boom, as it has been to the historical mineral booms that contributed to Western industrialization. Investment – from China, the US, and new investors in the Middle East and beyond – is flooding into new mineral sites, as well as the infrastructure to access them. Such mineral booms have historically resulted in little economic benefit from producing countries and communities in Asia, Latin America and Africa, while often creating social conflict and local environmental destruction. Will the ‘green minerals’ boom, with its promise of clean and sustainable energy, lead to better outcomes for mineral producers, or replicate a

historical pattern of dirty and inequitable mining? My new research project asks this question of Ghana’s new lithium mining industry, as well as ‘green mineral’ production in Africa more generally. In Ghana, lithium mining operations commenced in 2023 with the granting of a mining lease to the Australian-based Atlantic Lithium for its Ewoyaa mine. Prospecting and development are under way at other sites in the south of the country. Ghana’s green minerals policy, adopted in July 2023, seeks to ensure that value is added to the mineral before export and aims to regulate production and export in ways that ensure social beneficiation. This is however easier said than done: Ghana’s regulation of the industrial gold mining sector has sought to ensure greater local ownership and control, increase the economic and social benefits of gold mining to both the country and to gold-producing regions, and to limit its environmental effects. However, the disastrous environmental impact of small-scale (so-called ‘artisanal’) gold mining, which became an important issue in Ghana’s December 2024 national elections, indicates the limits of legislation and regulation in ensuring that mining generates positive economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Ghana’s centuries-long history of gold production, associated both with the prestige and power of the Asante kingdom and – more recently – with widespread despoilation resulting from artisanal gold production, informs Ghanaian understandings of any new mineral development, as does its offshore oil industry and its resultant Minerals Income Investment Fund (MIIF), which is a major investor in Atlantic Lithium. Ghanaians know the potential benefits of mineral production and hope it can translate into broader economic and social development, but are also familiar with its historical failure to achieve this.

Building on exchange and research visits to Ghana carried out while I was still at Oxford in 2022, and in my new position at the University of Florida since 2023, I have initiated a new research project investigating Ghana’s new lithium mining. This research, undertaken in collaboration with Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), uses an interdisciplinary (encompassing politics, sociology, history, but also geology and environmental sciences) and multi-scalar approach, aiming to analyze both the global and national

policy context in which lithium mining is and will take place in Ghana, and the understanding and expectations of adjacent and affected communities in the vicinity of lithium mining operations.

This research project is at an early stage, with scoping research underway to establish a baseline of data about new lithium production in Ghana. An initial workshop will take place at KNUST in July 2025 to review initial data and chart the way forward. I am delighted to be working with my former DPhil supervisee Dr. David Damtar (now Turpin Junior Research Fellow in History at Oriel College) and Dr. Sebastian Paolo (MSc in African Studies, 2016–17 and now Lecturer at the Department of History and Political Studies at KNUST). This is a project being carried out in Florida and Ghana, but born in Oxford’s African Studies Centre!



Zimbabwean Stone Sculptures at Chitungwiza and, prospectively, in Oxford

William Beinart



I have been involved in a project to bring four stone sculptures from Zimbabwe for a small exhibition in Oxford, starting in October 2025 at St Mary's Church, High Street. Its origins lie in the protests at Oxford in 2015–16 against the statue of Cecil Rhodes at Oriel College.

The sculptures are all from artists working at Chitungwiza Arts Centre, on the southern side of capital city Harare. They are a response to a competition, held between January and March 2025, organised by the Centre committee, in association with the Oxford Zimbabwe Arts Project (OZAP) and Oriel College.

The brief for the competition was: 'A figurative or semi-abstract reflection on the impact of Cecil Rhodes' colonial wars on the indigenous people of Zimbabwe. A piece that illustrates both the historic suffering of Zimbabweans and their survival through to the independence of Zimbabwe, conveying a sense of peace and resilience'.

Artists were limited to small-scale works and requested to provide a written narrative that explained their sculptures.

110 pieces were submitted with enormous variety: some represented aspects of political

repression, some were more abstract, some allegorical, some focussed on the prophetess Nehanda or women's suffering. The judges, including two leading Zimbabwean stone sculptors, chose explicitly political sculptures as the top four.

The aims of exhibition are to provide an African artistic perspective on debates about the Rhodes statue and legacy, to educate and develop discussion, and to connect Chitungwiza and Oxford.

Students at the University of Oxford were engaged in two major protests about the Rhodes legacy. The first was triggered by the Rhodes Must Fall movement at the University of Cape Town in 2015, which was successful in removing a statue of Rhodes on that campus. Led by students from the region, but with wide support, Oxford students took up the campaign for 'decolonisation' in protest meetings and workshops. They debated the imperial legacy and

iconography at Oxford, the content of courses, and broader issues of racism and diversity.

Public statues of controversial historical figures were already a cultural battleground globally and students found the Rhodes statue at Oriel a fruitful route for attracting attention to the issues they were raising. Most of the conservative national media defended Rhodes, the statue and condemned the students. The College decided to keep the statue in place. They were influenced by strong pressure from their alumni against moving it.

The RMF protests were among the largest at Oxford for some years and touched on fundamental questions for the university. But public demonstrations petered out until the murder of George Floyd by a white policeman in the United States and the global outpouring of anger associated with Black Lives Matter. Protests in Oxford, in June and July

2020, mobilised even larger support and were again directed in part at the Rhodes statue. Despite Covid, over a thousand assembled in High Street and metaphorically beat on Oriel's back door. Alarmed by the strength of feeling the College governing body publicly indicated an intention to move the statue. They appointed a commission of nine to advise on processes and arguments.

The lengthy report, released in May 2021, addressed diversity and transformation in the College and University, as well as recommending wider academic coverage of African Studies across the disciplines. The majority of commissioners supported the College's decision to move the statue. With assistance, I researched a few of the key points that made Rhodes so controversial to a new generation of students, more than a century after his death. In my mind, evidence about the extreme violence in the conquest of Zimbabwe in the 1890s reinforced the argument against keeping a celebratory statue of Rhodes in a prominent position facing High Street.

Oriel's governing body nevertheless changed its mind again and announced that it would be too expensive to apply for planning permission to move the statue. Supported by the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, it was mindful of the national controversy that this would generate, as well as donor discomfort. With regard to historical statues the Conservative government and press was strongly committed to a policy of 'retain and explain'.

The College decided to keep the statue and to provide contextualisation both on the web and with a plaque at street level.



Full circle with Picasso (not in competition, by Ishmael Chitiyo)

Academic initiatives were taken to diversify scholarship provision. The protests again faded away, but one of the most interesting of the c. 1,500 submissions to the commission was a proposal from OZAP for an alternative statue, as a symbolic riposte to the figure of Rhodes. They also suggested a wider cultural exchange with Zimbabwean artists. The idea lay dormant for a few years but Richard Pantlin, who wrote the OZAP proposal, has brought it to life and we aim also to resurrect debate and education about the issues. They remain important because Oxford, the Rhodes Trust, Oriel (and the students) have largely failed to research the questions of history that underpinned the protests. Oxford institutions claim to be, and should be, led by evidence. They have failed dismally in this respect and been led, instead, by opinion or assessments of the political risks in retaining or removing the statue.

Student interest in Rhodes has probably faded away, replaced by other urgent priorities such as the fate of Palestinians in Gaza. The university probably does not want to know more. But Uncomfortable Oxford still provides alternative tours of the University's history, which

should remain open for investigation. The exhibition from Chitungwiza may provide one route back. CAC is an extraordinary place to visit.

Most of the sculptors work in the open air, sometimes with thatched shelters to protect them from sun and rain. About 50 have substantial stands of their work displayed on the grass or on wooden planks; some said over 5,000 objects were on display and over 250 were associated with the site. There are small items designed for those travelling by air, with well-established themes such as an abstract mother and children holding hands in a circle – a symbol of connected humanity. And there are huge blocks of stone, with an astonishing variety of human figures, as well as animals, as well as an increasing number of abstract sculptures. It is a visual feast and many of the artists are prepared to talk about their work. Visiting Chitungwiza, with its diverse and innovative sculptures, is inspiring. This should be a prime tourist site in Harare, and it is free to visit, but few venture down there.

Explicitly political sculpture of the kind to be displayed in Oxford is rare at Chitungwiza. Some of the artists



Removal of Rhodes statue at the University of Cape Town in 2015

thought that it was unlikely to sell. Each of the 110 sculptures entered into the competition was accompanied by a brief written narrative and most were powerfully critical of colonial rule – even when the sculpture was less explicitly so. The competition winner, *Blindfolded Justice*, by Wallace Mkankha, is an appropriate riposte to the Rhodes statue. His description records: ‘The stone sculpture represents the cruel legacy of Cecil John Rhodes in Zimbabwe. The face, shrouded in anguish, symbolizes the suffering of the Zimbabwean people. The two hands covering the eyes signify the forced blindness to the truth as Rhodes’ regime imposed its oppressive rule. The two hands struggling to remove the blindfold represent the resilience and determination of Zimbabwean people to break free from oppression’.



Most, including all the short listed, were men but about 10 per cent were women, and they were attracted to figures of women. A few used the story of Nehanda as their entry point. She was a spirit medium, credited with drawing together diverse Zimbabweans during the devastating war of the first Chimurenga in 1896–7. She was captured and a photo taken at the time shows her gaunt, dressed in a skin, close to starvation.

Along with about 25 others, she was hung by the British South Africa Company. Yet her name became a symbol for resilience and resistance. Perhaps the images of her can be displayed in a supplementary exhibition.



Shona spirit mediums believed to be unifying resistance among the last captured.



New sculptures of suffering and resilience associated with Nehanda, Chitungwiza Arts Centre

From Oxford to Stanford: Research, Language, Literacy, and Community Engagement

Mia Harris MSc 2023

After completing my MSc at the University of Oxford's African Studies Centre and the School of Global and Area Studies, I was eager to bridge my academic research with public impact, especially in the areas of language, literacy, and educational equity. I now serve as a Social Science Research Professional in the Faculty Lab & Research at Stanford University's Graduate School of Education. In this role, I also work as the Education Research Coordinator for the Stanford Black Academic Development Lab and as the Editorial Associate for the *Journal of Black Language and Culture*, a new academic journal dedicated to advancing research on Black linguistic, creative, and cultural life across the diaspora.

In the lab, as I prepare for doctoral study, I contribute to a range of editorial, publication, and research initiatives that align with our shared commitments to linguistic justice, diversity in literacy and literature, expanding educational access, and overall equity in higher education. I work closely with my PI, Associate Dean Dr. Anne Charity Hudley, whose research addresses educational disparities linked to Black language practices and who has authored several foundational works in the field of liberatory and decolonial linguistics. Together, we are preparing a co-authored article titled *Research in Black Language and Culture: The Next Ten Years*, which explores the future of the field and envisions more expansive, community-engaged scholarship. I also contribute to the lab's book project, *Talking Faculty*, supporting faculty authors as they document Black faculty experiences, language practices, and institutional challenges in higher education. This work aims to serve both as a piece of pedagogical value and a significant contribution to the academic-historical record, amplifying the insights and struggles of historically marginalized scholars in academia.

As I look back at my time at Oxford, I recognize how profoundly it shaped my thinking. The program equipped me with the ability to work across disciplines and communicate complex ideas with clarity—skills that are essential to my research and scholarship today. Outside of Stanford, I also collaborate with the non-profit The Conscious Kid as their Digital Strategy Fellow, where I help produce educational and digital infrastructure content on amplifying their mission and commitment to cultural awareness, socially conscious research, belonging, and identity. I hope this work fosters a meaningful intersection between academic research and public engagement—one that contributes not only to scholarly conversations but also to the well-being and empowerment of the communities I belong to.

To students just beginning, already underway, or just finishing their MSc, my advice is this: treat your time at Oxford not only as a period of study, but as a launchpad for impact. Be open to working at the intersections of your field, seek out others who both challenge and support you, and don't be afraid to follow the questions that matter most to you—even if they take you beyond the boundaries of your course. This is a powerful time to begin cultivating what a sustainable academic practice means for you—whether that's through writing, research, rest, or community. The habits of curiosity, collaboration, and courage you nurture now will continue to ground and guide your work well beyond your time at Oxford.



Mpiti Mosothoane

Since completing my MSc in 2023, I have been privileged to build a career at the intersection of humanitarian response, programme management, international justice, and geopolitical analysis. I have worked with international NGOs and multilateral bodies including the International Criminal Court (ICC) to design, implement, and oversee programmes supporting communities affected by conflict, displacement, and human rights violations across Sub-Saharan Africa.

My roles have ranged from coordinating emergency food distributions and shelter interventions to leading longer-term initiatives focused on education, livelihoods, and social cohesion. At the ICC, I contributed to efforts aimed at ensuring victims' voices are meaningfully included in judicial processes, deepening my understanding of accountability, transitional justice, and the complexities of post-conflict recovery.

As an ASC alumnus, I remain a scholar at heart, and I have cultivated a parallel path as a writer on geopolitical issues. I contribute analysis and commentary on conflict dynamics, humanitarian policy, and international humanitarian law. Writing has allowed me to reflect critically on many of the issues I encounter in my daily work, including the global systems shaping humanitarian and justice responses. It has also allowed me to engage broader audiences in discussions on themes centred on African history, political agency, and resilience in the face of an ever-changing world.

Most recently, I have returned to Oxford to contribute to an exciting new initiative: the Africa Pandemic Sciences Initiative, funded by the Mastercard Foundation. This groundbreaking project seeks to equip African scientists and institutions with the tools they need to respond effectively to future pandemics and epidemics. Drawing lessons from the devastation wrought by COVID-19 globally—and particularly across Africa—the initiative is committed to putting resources directly into the hands of African experts, empowering them to strengthen the continent's preparedness. Leveraging my experience in programme management, I serve as co-lead of one of the key workstreams focused on supporting and mentoring early-career scientists.

Oxford's rigorous academic environment instilled in me a critical lens for evaluating complex systems, as well as the confidence to ask difficult questions—skills that have proven invaluable across sectors. I continue to draw on lessons from my MSc coursework and the diverse perspectives of my peers. The strength of the Oxford alumni network, particularly that of my college—St Antony's—has been equally vital, providing mentorship, collaboration opportunities, and an enduring sense of community across countries and sectors.

Looking ahead, I am increasingly committed to orienting my career towards the advancement of marginalised communities, particularly through the application of research, policy, and practical interventions that challenge systemic inequities. Whether through humanitarian programme management, international justice, or geopolitical analysis, I aim to centre the voices and agency of those often excluded from decision-making processes. This ongoing process of critical reflection and intellectual engagement continues to inform my professional trajectory, as I seek to contribute to the development of more inclusive, just, and equitable global systems.



Jeremiah Enoch



I was part of the 2023 MSc cohort in African Studies. Immediately following my programme, I joined the Strategy & Risk Advisory team at the consulting firm J.S. Held. In this role, I support investors and companies operating across Africa, providing services that encompass geopolitical risk advisory, government relations, and strategic intelligence. My geographic focus includes West African countries—particularly Ghana and Nigeria—as well as regional institutions such as ECOWAS and the AfCFTA Secretariat.

The MSc in African Studies equipped me with the analytical, research, and writing skills essential for success in my current role. While my work is primarily commercial, the research methodologies I learnt at Oxford remain invaluable, particularly when conducting pre-investment integrity due diligence investigations.

Beyond the academic rigour of the MSc programme, the relationships I built during my time at Oxford have played a pivotal role in my career. The intellectual exchanges I continue to have with my peers inform my analyses of key African and global issues, while their introductions and connections have been instrumental in business development and international engagements. The African Studies Centre at Oxford has had a lasting impact on both my professional and personal growth, and I remain deeply grateful for the experience.

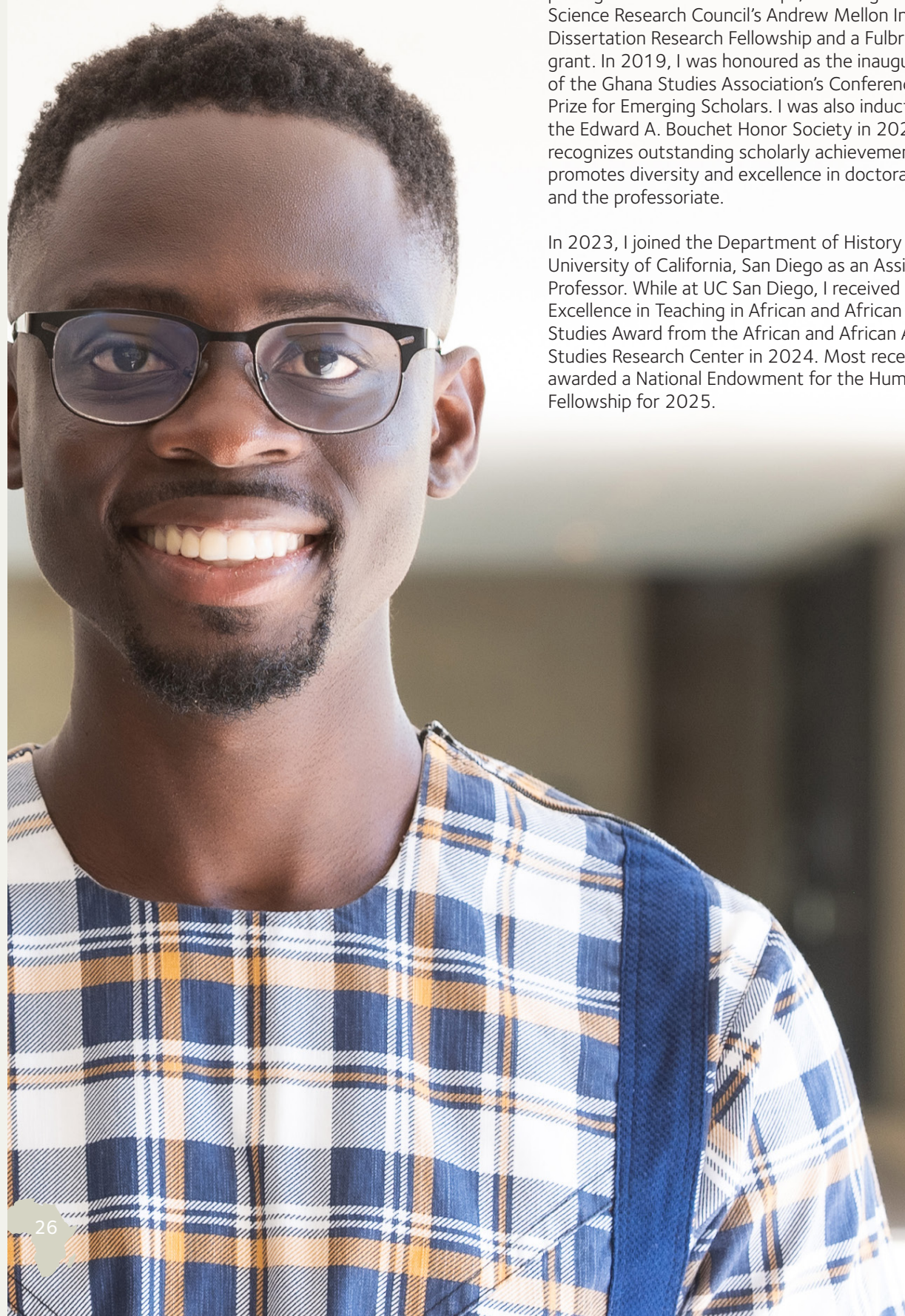


Bright Gyamfi

Since graduating from Oxford in 2016, I have earned a Ph.D. in History from Northwestern University in 2023, where I was named a Presidential Fellow—the highest honour awarded to graduate students at the university.

During my time at Northwestern, I received several prestigious national fellowships, including the Social Science Research Council's Andrew Mellon International Dissertation Research Fellowship and a Fulbright-IIE grant. In 2019, I was honoured as the inaugural winner of the Ghana Studies Association's Conference Paper Prize for Emerging Scholars. I was also inducted into the Edward A. Bouchet Honor Society in 2022, which recognizes outstanding scholarly achievement and promotes diversity and excellence in doctoral education and the professoriate.

In 2023, I joined the Department of History at the University of California, San Diego as an Assistant Professor. While at UC San Diego, I received the Excellence in Teaching in African and African Diaspora Studies Award from the African and African American Studies Research Center in 2024. Most recently, I was awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship for 2025.



Zoditu Schwind

It was the beginning of December and the end of Michaelmas, and I was in the middle of my last advisor meeting for the term when I told my supervisor that I was changing the focus of my dissertation. Yes, a term's worth of research was now obsolete. She informed me that I was stepping, rather naïvely [my words not hers], into a research field already saturated with literature. It wasn't exactly the small topic change I'd envisioned. Because of the niche focus of my earlier topic, I hadn't needed to wade through an exhaustive onslaught of debates and theories to find the "gap in literature." Now, I was facing the giant of "Female Genital Mutilation," and I couldn't even see it because my eyes were burning. The tears never fell but, to be melodramatic, it was "the winter of despair."

That was five months ago. It's spring now, and the pale British sun shines. Wading through the literature was fruitful in helping to narrow the scope of my dissertation. My topic is now centered on the practitioners of female genital cutting (FGC) initiation rites within Sierra Leone's secret women's society called the Bondo. I spent three weeks in the northern Temne region conducting formal interviews as well as having many informal conversations with Sierra Leoneans about evolving views on FGCs and other cultural practices in the region. During my time there, I most enjoyed working with my research assistant and translator. He laughed a lot (often at my expense). To illustrate, on one of my last days there, he pointed to a thatched construction and told me that it was a shrine where women were taught how to be FGC practitioners. He asked, "Do you want to take a photo of it?" As I was reaching to pull out my phone, one of my interviewees said something to my research assistant. Laughing, he translated: "She said, 'if you take a photo of it, you'll have to be initiated'." The hand reaching for my phone froze. I think she was joking, but I was not about to push my luck. With a nervous laugh, I put my hands up and offered a jumble of apologies. Abdul, of course, was still laughing.

My field study in Sierra Leone made my research come alive. In this last term, with the continued support of my supervisor, the encouragement of friends in the course, and the vitamin D enriching weather, I look forward to seeing how participant stories will develop and guide the narrative of my dissertation.



Lisa Kwaleyela

Towards the Finish Line!



Three and a half years later, the finish line is in sight! I am humbled and extremely happy to be nearing the end of a journey that I can only describe as challenging and fulfilling at the same time. I feel incredibly lucky to have experienced the ups and downs of this process as this has been an incredibly rewarding experience filled with so many highlights that will last a lifetime. Being in Oxford is certainly a scholar's dream; having access to the African Studies Centre has been incredibly rewarding and I am so grateful for the support and encouragement that is core to the centre's care for its students.

From this journey, it is clear that access to quality supervision and resources for research have an impact on how well students cope with their studies. As I head close to completing this chapter of my life, I can affirm that the skills and knowledge I have gained will always be with me as I continue to grow and contribute knowledge where it is needed the most.

One particular strength that emerged from all my interactions at the ASC is the flexibility and interdisciplinary nature of Area Studies (Africa). At this point, my thesis is already at an advanced stage, and I reached a conclusion that my DPhil

in Area Studies (Africa) is an interdisciplinary research project that engages in sociological methodology whilst addressing a complex peacebuilding–development relationship in the context of Zambia. From this perspective, I can now justify the parameters of my research questions, what problem they address and how the study relates to overall debates about Africa as a region of study in Area Studies. Thanks to the ASC, my research can contribute to the study of a region (in my case Zambia) in a context-sensitive and issue-oriented approach to research. As various scholars interacted about their epistemic influence and methods of inquiry, it was clear that Area Studies (Africa) as a discipline was a meeting point for a diverse set of disciplines encompassing politics, sociology, anthropology, history, and international relations.

For new and prospective scholars at the ASC, I can assure you that the African Studies Centre will provide adequate resources for you to delve deeper into the complex and interrelated topics and research themes that are holistic in furthering your knowledge of the African continent. I implore you to take advantage of all the benefits that come with being a scholar in this field at Oxford; you will build networks that will expand your professional and social facets, granting you life-long resources that will continue to open new opportunities and possibilities in the future.

Biraanu Gammachu

Stepping on the grounds of the University of Oxford has been a dream come true!

Dessifitu Mekonnen, my mother, was the unrelenting foundation of our family. She decided to leave school early and supported my father in his academic endeavours. This is where I began my journey; with a resilience that I have been carrying with me into each lecture hall and library, and every other life!

On 13th of May 2024, I received a full scholarship within a month of getting my offer to Oxford. Telephone connectivity is undependable due to an ongoing violent conflict in Wollega, western Ethiopia, my home region. Luckily in late July 2024 I heard the news, and the first person I told was my mother. “Esho Kormako!” an Oromo saying meaning “I’m so proud of you,” was her immediate and heartfelt response. ‘So, you are going to the land your grandpa calls



the home of the wise,’ she then added. “Adjust wisely to your new environment, my son, but don’t be wicked against who you are, and behold unto Christian values. ‘May God bless you in all your endeavours.’ Those were her final words before I left for the UK.

We landed at Gatwick, and it was 3°C, a decidedly chilly Sunday morning. The immigration process went quite smoothly, and I took the Airline Bus to Oxford, arriving at St Antony’s College just before noon. The door swung open and a kind gentleman at the Lodge welcomes me in, “How may I help you?” he cheerfully quipped. He walked me to the apartment – a Victorian building. “Brilliant!” I was humbled, and once settled in, I was filled with gratitude and excitement.

The following day’s induction was a whirlwind of information and introductions. Since then, I’ve been out exploring Oxford — the museums, historic colleges and quiet corners. I am in awe of the Ashmolean, the Natural History Museum and the old stone buildings.

Oxford is not just a place of learning; it is also a living tribute to possibility, sacrifice and hope.

Ziyi Yan

It is difficult to single out one defining moment when I truly felt part of the MSc African Studies programme at Oxford—perhaps because the experience has been so immersive and transformative from the very beginning.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my dissertation supervisor, Professor Rebekah Lee. I have been continually inspired by her dedication to African Studies and her thoughtful approach to mentoring. From engaging with cutting-edge debates to identifying gaps in the literature, and from crafting sharp research questions to developing well-structured interview schedules, she has modelled how to navigate the research process with rigour and clarity.

Throughout the year, this programme’s interdisciplinary nature exposed me to a wide range of topics. I grappled with questions of reflexivity and positionality in ethnographic research and explored how archival documents and oral histories can intersect across disciplines. Courses covering subjects such as news media, slavery and labour, gender and reproduction, transitional justice, and urban ecologies helped broaden my understanding of African Studies as a deeply interconnected and evolving field.

My dissertation focused on traditional medicine and knowledge authority in Rwanda. Conducting independent fieldwork beyond my familiar Swahili-speaking context was a challenge, but one I fully embraced. It pushed me to grow, adapt, and reflect more deeply on a long-standing question: what contributions might a Chinese scholar make to African Studies after being educated in China, East Africa, and the UK?

What also made this year special were the people. From student-led events

and AfriSoc to college activities, these moments helped build friendships and created space for meaningful exchange, thoughtful reflection, and shared laughter. I was also honoured to co-teach Swahili with my cohort in partnership with AfriSoc at the African Studies Centre—an experience I’ll always cherish.

Lastly, special thanks to Peter, Amy and Emma for creating such a warm and welcoming environment throughout the year. Their kindness made this journey all the more memorable.



Photo Gallery





African Studies
Class of 2024–25



Annie Gishen
St Antony's

Bright Futures? The Role of Solar Energy in Youth Employment Opportunities in Post-Genocide Rwanda



Beracah Agwang
St Antony's

Beyond the Quota: Exploring Power, Identity, and Legislative Influence Among Women MPs in Uganda's Parliament



Biraanu Gammachu Feyissa
St Antony's

Regionalization of Regime Insecurity: Ethiopia-Somalia Dynamics through MoU and ATMIS Transition



Brittany Pembroke
St Anne's

Women in Mining: CSR policies and the cultural politics of employment in Ghana



Chiyedza Zunzanyika
St Antony's

Trials, Solidarity and Power: Gendered resistance and the (re)construction of womanhood in Zimbabwean Politics



Oli Bourton
St Antony's

Continuity and adaptation of the politics of security legislation in Moi's Kenya



Phoebe McMahon Oriel

African Photographers, Colonialism, Race, and Knowledge Production in the Gold Coast



Rainier Pilotte
Corpus Christi

Beyond Neocolonialism and Great-Power Geopolitics: Visual Cultures of Cooperation and Resistance in the Urban Landscape of Burkina Faso



Ryan Cauwenberghs
Regent's Park

Dynastic Capitalism and the Politics of Sectoral Competition in Post-Conflict Côte d'Ivoire (2011–2024)



Saskia Fredericks Reuben

Transgenerational Memories, Cultural Preservation and Activism of the Nama diaspora to South Africa



Ellie Price
St Cross

Between Intervention and Interpretation: Vaccines, Memory, and Medical pluralism among Maasai communities in Northern Tanzania



Fatuma Ahmed
St Cross

Dead or Alive? Digital Recruitment, Resistance and Remittance of Kenyan Domestic Migrant Workers



Floris Gast
St Antony's

Mining Share: Exclusive Prospecting Licenses, the Assetisation of the Subsoil, and the Offshore Architecture of the Namibian Mining Industry



Ivan Mahoney Kellogg

Navigating Illness Without Cure: Diabetes and Therapeutic Pluralism in Ghana



Jasper Gentry
St Cross

News narratives, journalism and Russian influence in South Africa's legacy media



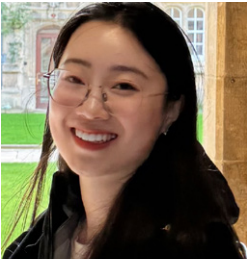
Tobi Moronfolu
St Antony's

The Role of Coordination in Nigerian Debt Management



Tom Chaloner Kellogg

Violence, Death, and Memory in Kenyan political culture, c.1963–1978: The Assassinations of Pinto, Mboya, and Kariuki



Ziyi Van Oriel

Becoming 'Umuganga': Healing Knowledge and Ritual Authority in Rwandan Traditional Medicine



Zoditu Schwind
Corpus Christi

The 'Bloodless Bondo': Contestations over Female Genital Mutilation and Ritual Knowledge in Sierra Leone



Kendi Juma
Corpus Christi

Getting by Together with Chamas: Savings, Safety Nets and Social Mobility for Women in Kenya



Kuln'Zu Zucule Oriel

A Space of Our Own: The Poetics of Arrival in Queer/ing Nairobi



Meret Weber
St Antony's

Where is the revolution? Women, diaspora and the 2018/19 Sudan Revolution



Mohamed Muse
St Antony's

The Guardians of the Giant: Historical Institutional Account of Nigeria's Anti-Economic and Financial Crimes Regime



Nana-Saa Kessie
St Anne's

The Role of Authenticity in Recent Ghanaian Film Creation



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