



## UCL African Studies seminar series

### Spring term 2019

Seminars will take place every other Thursday this term, **1.15-2.45 pm** in seminar room 22, first floor of the Wilkins building, South Wing.

[www.ucl.ac.uk/african-studies/events/lunchtime-seminar-series](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/african-studies/events/lunchtime-seminar-series)

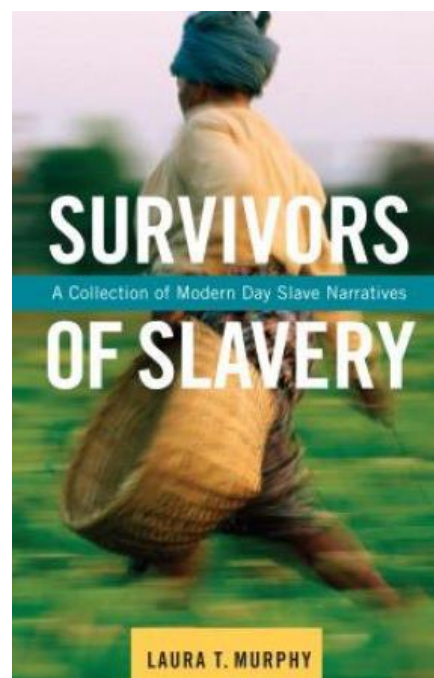
17<sup>th</sup> January

**Laura Murphy (U. of Nottingham and Loyola University New Orleans)**  
The New Slave Narrative and the Transitive Property of African Suffering

In this talk, Dr. Laura Murphy will discuss her new book *The New Slave Narrative*, which takes a cultural studies approach to the recent reemergence of the slave narrative genre. She will present some of the contours of the genre's renaissance, including some of the political, social, and economic reasons why the slave narrative reappears at the turn of the 21st century. She will focus this talk on a post-9/11 strand of antislavery Islamophobia that she has dubbed "blackface abolition," as it plays on a "transitive property of African suffering" through age-old tropes familiar from the slave narrative tradition.

#### Bio:

Laura T. Murphy is Associate Professor of English at Loyola University New Orleans and Director of the Modern Slavery Research Project. She is currently a British Academy Visiting Fellow at the University of Nottingham Rights Lab and School of English. Her latest book, *The New Slave Narrative*, will be published by Columbia University Press this summer.



31<sup>st</sup> January

**Erin Pettigrew (IMAF and NYU Abu Dhabi)**

To Invoke the Invisible: Islam, Spiritual Mediation and Social Change in the Sahara

This talk focuses on invisible forces and entities – secret knowledge and spirits – to bring into view important social and political shifts in West Africa over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Situating this ethnographic history in what is today the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, the talk traces the changing roles of Muslim spiritual mediators and their Islamic “esoteric sciences”, with a focus on the colonial and post-colonial eras. These sciences and their experts have been part of a framework of therapeutic and protective practice attending to physical insecurity, social anxiety, and personal desires. Single women sought out the expertise of these Muslim spiritual mediators to ensure a timely marriage. Once married, they came to these specialists asking for numerological charts that would guarantee fertility and their husbands’ fidelity. Warriors and emirs rewarded these specialists in secret knowledge with herds of animals and promises of exemption from taxes usually paid for protection from raids. Families with a suddenly ill child summoned these spiritual mediators to diagnose and heal illnesses caused by jealous neighbours understood to harm through the evil eye or bloodsucking. These powerful sciences constitute a system of knowledge in response to the needs of its consumers, most often ensuring the health and welfare of local populations. Spiritual mediators invoked these divine forces in retribution for social wrongs, albeit less frequently. This Islamic esoteric knowledge could then be used both productively and destructively according to circumstance.

**Bio:**

Erin Pettigrew is assistant professor of History and Arab Crossroads Studies at New York University Abu Dhabi but currently on leave as a Fulbright Scholar in Paris at the Institut des mondes africains at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales where she is finishing a book manuscript sharing the title of her talk today. As a historian of modern Africa, her research focuses on 19th and 20th century West Africa and histories of Islam, race, and healing in colonial and postcolonial contexts.

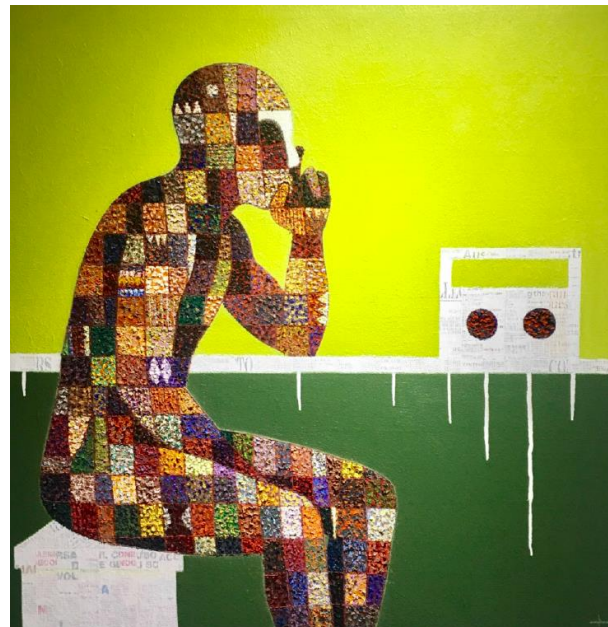


21<sup>st</sup> February

**David Pratten (U. of Oxford)**

The arts of oil: dis/enchantment and popular culture in Port Harcourt

This research engages with the emerging field of ‘oil culture’ or ‘petro-culture’ studies. It aims to make visible the conspicuously invisible role of oil in everyday life and culture, and to do so by examining the cultural history of Port Harcourt - a symbol and a catalyst of Nigeria’s incorporation into the global economy of energy capitalism. It examines how the popular arts reflect a dialectic of enchantment and disenchantment with the Nigerian petro-state. In what ways do the popular arts celebrate its profits and politics, and critique its inequalities and injustices? Is the popular culture of oil a protest culture? Can we demonstrate the role of political ecology on cultural creativity in local arts and in the diaspora?



Johnson Uwadinma  
Breaking News  
2017

7<sup>th</sup> March

**Christine Cheng (LSE)**

*Book launch: Extralegal Groups in Post-Conflict Liberia* (OUP, 2018)

In the aftermath of the Liberian civil war, groups of ex-combatants seized control of key natural resource enclaves in the country. With some of them threatening a return to war, these groups were widely viewed as the most significant threats to Liberia's hard-won peace. Building on fieldwork and socio-historical analysis, this book shows how extralegal groups were incentivized to provide basic governance goods in their bid to create a stable commercial environment during the country's war-to-peace transition. By analysing the trajectory of extralegal groups in three sectors of the Liberian economy— rubber, diamonds, and timber— this book traces how livelihood strategies merged with the opportunities of Liberia's post-war political economy. At the same time, this is also a context-specific story that is rooted in the country's geography, its history of state-making, and its social and political practices. Extralegal groups did not emerge in a vacuum.

Where the state is weak and political authority is contested, where rule of law is corrupted and government distrust runs deep, extralegal groups can provide order and dispute resolution, forming the basic kernel of the state. Further, they can establish public norms of compliance and cooperation with local populations. This logic counters the prevailing "spoiler" narrative, forcing us to reimagine violent non-state actors as accidental statebuilders in an evolutionary state-making process, and not simply as national security threats. These are not groups who seek to rule; they provide governance because they need to trade— not as an end in itself. This leads to the book's broader argument: it is trade, rather than war, that drives contemporary statebuilding. Along the way, this book poses some uncomfortable questions about what it means to be legitimately governed, whether our trust in states is misplaced, whether entrenched corruption is the most likely post-conflict outcome, and whether our expectations of international peacebuilding and statebuilding are unrealistic and self-defeating.

**Bio:**

Christine Cheng is Lecturer in War Studies at King's College London. Dr Cheng is the author of [\*Extralegal Groups in Post-Conflict Liberia- How Trade Makes the State\*](#) (OUP) and the co-editor of [\*Corruption and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Selling the Peace?\*](#) (Routledge) She is also co-author of [\*Securing and Sustaining Elite Bargains that Reduce Violent Conflict\*](#), the final report of the UK Stabilisation Unit's two-year project on political deal-making in conflict-affected countries. She is currently working with Chatham House on a study of [\*Countering War Economies in MENA\*](#). At King's, Dr Cheng teaches on the MA in [\*Conflict, Security, and Development\*](#). Previously, she was the Boskey Fellow in Politics at Exeter College, Oxford, and the Cadieux-Léger Fellow at Global Affairs Canada. She has worked for the UN, the World Bank. Dr Cheng holds a DPhil from the University of Oxford (Nuffield) and an MPA from Princeton University (Woodrow Wilson School). She comments on international affairs for the BBC, the [\*Wall Street Journal\*](#), and [\*al Jazeera\*](#). She is an advocate on gender equality issues, and is committed to increasing the number of women candidates in politics (TEDx talk). Dr Cheng sits on the [\*Conflict Research Society's\*](#) Governing Council and the Advisory Board of [\*Women in Foreign Policy\*](#). She has recently become active in British politics. She tweets @cheng\_christine.



21<sup>st</sup> March

**Simone Datzberger (UCL Institute of Education)**

Schools as Change Agents? Education and Individual Political Agency in Uganda

By drawing on the case study of Uganda, we challenge common assumptions about education, gender, regional differences and political agency. Comparing findings from four different regions, we scrutinize whether and how educational institutions empower Ugandan youth to participate in society as active, informed, critical and responsible citizens. Theoretically, we focus on four different aspects of individual political agency that education can foster, namely: understanding of political structures; independent critical thinking; levels of political interest; and political participation. Throughout our analysis, we make use of a survey (n=497), conducted in 2017 with respondents from secondary schools and universities; and data obtained from 37 qualitative interviews across four regions in Uganda. The aim behind the survey was to move beyond a priori models on how education affects the political agency of individuals. Instead, we offer insights on how Ugandans themselves perceive the politically empowering elements of the education they receive, connecting this to the wider cultural political economy context of Uganda. We find that Ugandan schools make only a very modest contribution towards nurturing an individual's political agency. While the majority of respondents felt they critically reflect on societal issues in school, their knowledge of national political institutions, and on how they would claim and advocate for their rights as citizens was remarkably low.





This seminar series is convened by the African Studies Research Centre/IAS:  
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ALL WELCOME

