



UCL African Studies lunchtime seminar series

Summer term 2019

Seminars will take place some Thursdays this term, **12.30 – 2 pm** in the IAS Forum, ground floor of the Wilkins building, South Wing.

www.ucl.ac.uk/african-studies/events/lunchtime-seminar-series

23rd May

Toby Green (King's College London)

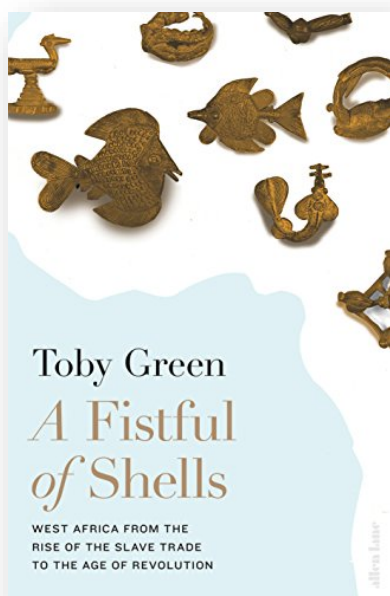
Discussant: Paul Lovejoy (York University, Toronto)

A Fistful of Shells: Economic Histories and Inequality in Africa's longue duree

This paper explores the economic argument of Toby Green's new book, *A Fistful of Shells*, which looks at the history of currencies and Africa's global economic position as a way of understanding wider capital differentials between Africa and other world regions in the early modern era. Green argues that whereas economic historians focus on data since 1800, looking at the earlier period provides a fundamental new reading of the causes and consequences of Africa's relative economic disempowerment on the eve of colonialism.

Bios.: Toby Green is Senior Lecturer in Lusophone African History and Culture at King's College London. He is the author of *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (2019; Allen Lane/Chicago University Press) and *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300-1589* (2012; Cambridge University Press).

Paul Lovejoy is Canada Research Chair in African Diaspora History, Distinguished Research Professor at York University. He is the author of dozens of books, including *Transformations in Slavery* and, most recently, *Jihad in West Africa During the Age of Revolutions*.



30th May

Seraphin Kamdem (SOAS)

Cultural resistance and struggle in colonial and post-colonial Africa:
Writing systems in Cameroon, from King Njoya's *Shumum* writing to
the *General Alphabet of Cameroonian Languages* and beyond

Most of the sociolinguistic research on language standardisation and adult literacy in Cameroon points out the beginnings of local writing systems to the colonial arrivals and the Christian missionary enterprises. Yet it is known that '*Africa is not only the 'Cradle of Mankind', it is the 'Cradle of Writing'. [...] and that '...in modern times Africa has contributed much to the advance of the art and science of writing. A combination of cultural contacts, men of genius, and rich traditions of plastic and graphic symbolism have led to the development of many new and ingenious systems of writing'* (Tuchscherer, 1999: 55-56).

Today there is increasing recognition of the importance of endogenous writing systems in Africa. The existence of local scripts in Cameroon has been documented as early as 1917, as exemplified with the Bagam script, a hieroglyphic system of writing developed in Western Cameroon. Starting with a brief overview of multilingualism in Cameroon, Dr Kamdem's talk will look at endogenous writing systems and at the *General Alphabet of Cameroonian Languages*. While discussing the development of writing systems in Cameroon, he will address the key question of what readings and meanings can be drawn from these systems, in terms of social importance and impact.

Bio: Seraphin Kamdem holds a PhD from SOAS. Before studying at SOAS, he studied at the University of Yaoundé, Cameroon; the University of East Anglia, U.K.; and the University of North Dakota, USA. His doctoral thesis focused on African languages and multilingual education, investigating adult literacy in a rural area of Cameroon. His research interests are in: Sociolinguistics, African languages and cultures, Ghómálá' language (Grassfields-Bantu), Bilingualism and Multilingualism, Adult literacy, Production of didactic materials, Culture in Africa, Education in Africa, Global Englishes, Media and political change in Africa.



6th June*

Kafui Adjaye-Gbewonyo (UCL Institute of Advanced Studies)

Social Capital, Inequality and Risk for Chronic Disease in South Africa

It is believed that high levels of inequality in the community in which one lives may have adverse impacts on a variety of health outcomes. In addition, strong social capital and cohesion in communities have been hypothesised to improve health status. However, much of the empirical research testing these hypotheses has come from the 'Global North'. There is very little evidence on the nature of these relationships within African countries. As a result of its unique history and legacy of apartheid, South Africa is a middle-income nation that is home to some of the highest levels of income inequality recorded worldwide. Similarly, and perhaps consequently, research has also revealed low levels of measures of social capital, such as trust in others. This presentation will report on research taking advantage of longitudinal data from the National Income Dynamics Study to examine whether changes in inequality and social trust at the district-council level are associated with changes in several chronic disease risk factors and depressive symptoms among individuals living in South Africa. Given that the burden of non-communicable diseases is growing in South Africa and elsewhere, understanding whether and how these social factors may contribute to disease risk is important.

**** Exceptionally, this seminar will take place at 25 Gordon Square, Room 107. This session is convened jointly with UCL's Institute for Global Health (IGH).***



20th June

Tiziana Morosetti (University of Oxford and Goldsmiths)

Book launch: *Africa on the Contemporary London Stage*

Africa on the Contemporary London Stage (Palgrave, 2018) investigates the way Africa has been portrayed on the London stage from the 1950s to the present, exploring its representations (and stereotypes) in the theatrical culture of the capital, and in which ways the reception of audiences and critics have contributed to an understanding of Africa and its arts. The collection brings together well-established academics and emerging scholars, as well as playwrights, directors and performers currently active in London. The editor, Tiziana Morosetti, will discuss key points of these contributions, as well the challenges and opportunities of the London stage for theatre makers of African origin.

<https://www.palgrave.com/gb/book/9783319945071>



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

