

Diversifying the Curriculum blog 2024-2025

*Africa and Global Politics (POLI30862)*

Dr Carl Death [carl.death@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:carl.death@manchester.ac.uk)

This UG3 optional Politics course aims to critically contest myths and stereotypes about African politics. Informed by postcolonial theory, the course explores the ways in which “Africa” has been represented within unequal global power relations, and the ways in which coloniality and capitalism reproduce intersectional inequalities of class, race, gender and sexuality.

I have taught the course since 2014, and as a white, male, English speaking, middle-class academic I devote considerable attention to discussing issues of positionality, authority, and alternative epistemologies with students during the semester. We also reflect on how ‘African Studies’ is taught in the UK context, the opportunities and challenges of decolonising curricula, and the continuing inequalities in UK academia, particularly in terms of Black professors and lecturers. The course draws upon a diverse and African-centred reading list, and we make frequent use of videos, podcasts and other online materials that centre African perspectives on global politics. However, it is important not to miss out on opportunities to allow students to engage in person with African experts. In the context of our discussions about the ways in which African perspectives are often marginalised in International Relations, it is important for all students – and is often especially welcomed by the many students of African heritage who take this course – to see and hear African academics as authoritative knowledge-producers.

Including visiting speakers is one way of foregrounding African voices in the course. In 2024-2025 I used the Diversify the Curriculum fund to bring Dr Mitterand Okorie and Dr Akinyemi Oyawale to Manchester to give guest lectures, and Dr Matipa Mukondiwa was also able to join us online for a shorter talk. This built on previous guest speakers, such as Dr Patrick Tom and Dr Robtel Neajai Pailey, who have also been funded by the Diversify the Curriculum fund in previous years for similar purposes.

In Feb 2025 Dr Mitterand Okorie (Nelson Mandela University, South Africa) gave a guest lecture on his research on elections and security policing in Nigeria. His published work on Nigerian democracy, security and counter-terrorism, and Nigeria’s Coronavirus Response was included on the course reading list, and the students particularly appreciated his insights into the role of political parties in Nigeria, his perspectives on the 2024 South African election, and his experiences as an early career African academic.

In March 2025 Dr Akinyemi Oyawale (Warwick, UK) gave a guest lecture on vernacular security discourses in North Eastern Nigeria. Akin has won teaching prizes for his pedagogy, and the combination of ‘big-picture’ theoretical framing with in-depth detail on security politics in Nigeria was really appreciated by the students. Akin’s enthusiastic and accessible style really helped the students get to grips with this important and complex topic, and several of them decided to write their final coursework essays on Boko Haram as a result. Student feedback was that they “loved the lecture” and “really appreciated the emphasis on first-hand, vernacular accounts of counter-terrorism”. Akin also gave a research seminar during his visit and so additional funds from the Politics Dept budget supplemented the Diversify the Curriculum funding.

In April 2025 Dr Matipa Mukondiwa (Cambridge, UK), gave a short online talk about her PhD research on decolonising secondary school education in Zimbabwe. All these visiting speakers significantly expanded the diversity of perspectives available to the students, and their first-hand experiences of research, fieldwork and the challenges of being an early career African academic really enriched the course. As with previous visitors – such as Patrick Tom (St Andrews) who talked about his research on conflict and peacebuilding in Sierra Leone, and Robtel Neajai Pailey (LSE) who gave a book talk on development and citizenship in Liberia – the speakers also provided resources that can be used in subsequent years.

Student feedback this year, and in previous years (including when visiting speakers have fallen through due to strike action or other circumstances), confirms how valuable they find the opportunity to hear directly from African experts. The visiting speakers have also expressed how much they welcomed the opportunity to visit, especially in the case of early career academics building their networks and experience. There are challenges – administrative and financial – in making these opportunities available afresh to each new cohort of students, but from my perspective the benefits outweigh the costs and I hope to be able to continue to bring in more guest lecturers in future years.