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20 YEARS OF THE MPHIL
Welcome to the 2017 issue of *Oxford Development Matters*, the magazine of the Oxford Department of International Development at Queen Elizabeth House. This year is my first as Head of Department and I am delighted to be introducing this update on life at – and after – ODID.

The academic year 2016–17 is a significant one for us as it marks the 20th anniversary of our flagship course, the MPhil in Development Studies. Frances Stewart, who was instrumental in founding and shaping the MPhil in its early days, writes about the motivation behind the degree and we find out where some of the first year’s intake are now on pp10–11, and on p12 one of their number, Anasuya Sengupta, writes about a new venture which seeks to address skewed representations of knowledge in the online world. We are very much looking forward to welcoming some of these pioneering students – as well as many more former MPPhils – to our anniversary celebration on 2 June.

The activities of some more recent alumni also feature in this year’s edition. Jamie Furniss, who completed his DPhil at ODID in 2012 and continues research in the same area as an academic in Edinburgh, revisited his old fieldwork sites in Cairo as part of his contribution to a major new exhibition on waste and recycling in the Mediterranean (pp6–7). And Carlos Domínguez Virgen, another former DPhil, made a similar leap from research into the arts by writing and directing an absurdist play, now showing in Mexico City, which draws on his work on big infrastructure projects (p3).

This year at the department we are hosting two interesting new research projects that focus on social, environmental and educational issues in the Amazon: Nina Isabella Moeller is researching IKIAM, a recently established university in the Ecuadorian rainforest, while Elizabeth Rahman is exploring how the customary sustainable lifestyles of the Brazilian Warekena, particularly around personal growth and mindfulness, can inform educational approaches. You can read more on pp4–5.

We were also delighted to welcome a new statutory Professor of Development Economics in 2016. Christopher Woodruff, who joined us from the University of Warwick, writes on p8 about his research exploring the barriers to women entering management positions in the Bangladesh garment sector. Elsewhere, Tristen Naylor introduces an intriguing new option course he offers on the links between political power and pop cultural power (p13), while MSc student Theophilus Kwek reflects on a seminar series he organised this term that brought refugee writers, and those who work with them, to the department to consider literary responses to home, dislocation and refuge (p9).

We hope you enjoy reading the magazine – and do please continue to send us your stories and keep in touch.

*Christopher Adam*

Head of Department
Building a bridge between art and social science

Carlos Domínguez Virgen describes how his ideas about megaprojects developed over 15 years of research and ultimately provided rich material for an absurdist play, now being performed in Mexico City.

On a fictional island republic in a lost continent at an unspecified time, a group of ministers make an announcement: after many years of delay a huge bridge will finally be built connecting the island with the rest of the world. But not everyone is happy with the project and the announcement unleashes a series of controversies that will threaten the republic’s very existence...

La Leyenda de Mu (The Legend of Mu), a new play I wrote and directed, was inspired by 15 years of research into the way in which social movements interact with different institutional actors in the context of very concrete public policies – in particular, so-called ‘megaprojects’: airports, roads, dams, wind farms, refineries.

These initiatives fascinate me because of their scale, their capacity to take on the status of myths and legends within discourses and narratives of development, but above all, because of myths and legends within discourses and narratives of development, and social science and vice versa – to build a bridge between the two worlds.

So I decided to write and eventually direct La Leyenda de Mu. The play's dramatic tension derives precisely from the situation contained in the anecdote: the governor’s off-the-cuff expansion of the bridge from two lanes to four. The play explores the obstacles the ministers face, the social opposition to the project, different understandings of development, and various ups and downs until something goes wrong and the megaproject causes Mu to sink and disappear forever.

La Leyenda de Mu has been performed at various venues in Mexico City since June 2016.

La Leyenda de Mu is a combination of political satire and theatre of the absurd in the style of Eugene Ionesco, and seeks to offer a critique of rational-administrative thinking and the technocracy characteristic of megaprojects. Like my academic work, the play is not intended to give formulas or offer prescriptive analyses – but simply to describe what is, as it is. The difference is that in the theatre we can embrace ambiguity and contradiction, no matter how absurd. The play is an attempt to enter art from the social sciences and vice versa – to build a bridge between the two worlds.

La Leyenda de Mu has been performed at various venues in Mexico City since June 2016.

Carlos Domínguez Virgen completed the DPhil in Development Studies at ODID in 2008. He is currently a researcher at the Instituto Mora in Mexico City.
Sustainable pedagogies, at home and away

Elizabeth Rahman outlines her research, which investigates how a better understanding of traditional mindfulness practices in the Brazilian Amazon might help inform educational approaches in indigenous communities, and beyond.

If human development involves ‘taking an interest in the lives that people actually lead’, then anthropology is our privileged interlocutor. Perhaps our most distinguishing feature is our methods. Anthropologists typically spend long periods of time living with and observing the group of people they want to get to know and understand better, carrying out the same practices they do, on a day-to-day basis. We’re confident that this approach provides a fuller picture of how one aspect of life – say education – relates to another, like wellbeing or environmental sustainability.

My family and I spent over a year living with the Warekena – a small indigenous group who reside along the banks of the Xié River, in the ethnically diverse northwestern Brazilian Amazon – as part of my research exploring how a ‘glocal’ education, grounded in the local community and rich in outdoor experiences, can sustainably promote both well-being and environmental awareness.

The Warekena, like other lowland South American groups, strive for ‘the good life’. Achieving this entails dedicating a substantial amount of time and energy to facilitating and accompanying human growth processes, through hands-on techniques and timely interventions, by family and fellow community residents. I witnessed how health is promoted and passed by family and fellow community residents.

I discovered how the Warekena manage to sustain themselves as a kind, open, equitable, robust and resilient community, ecologically aware and adept at living well in a world of fluctuating uncertainties.

The Warekena engage what we might call an implicit pedagogy, which aims to orientate and accompany human growth processes, through hands-on techniques and timely interventions, by family and fellow community residents. I found this intriguing me.

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For example, FORMABIAP, centred around the teacher-training agro-ecological community of Zungarococha in the Loreto district of Peru. This programme has been working since 1988 to celebrate socio-cultural and ecological diversity, training teachers to work with indigenous specialists in the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Here, agricultural, artisanal (food) processing and productive techniques are post-facto paired up with and corresponded to curricula achievements and scientific knowledge, providing a bespoke education firmly grounded in both the material reality and intangible patrimony of the indigenous population.

Or the Rivers of Meeting (Rios de Encontro) community eco-cultural project pioneered by Oxford alumnus Dan Baron Cohen on the edge of the Amazon in the Afro-indigenous Cabelo Seco community of Marabá. Focusing on urban at-risk and excluded youth, the project aims to resolve visceral legacies of hunger, complicity and isolation through embodied and engaging reflexive performances of storytelling, dance, writing, sculpture and theatre, and promoting self-determination.

The aim of such projects is holistic development and to give people choices, at home and away. But building these dialogues means deeply pondering not only others’ multiple intelligences, but also the special embodied quality of their world. In so doing, we may well revalue outdoor and naturally mindful pedagogic approaches of our own.

Read a longer version of this article at http://bit.ly/Brazil_Warekena

Elizabeth Rahman is an ESRC Global Challenges Research Fund Fellow at ODID.
A new university ‘in the Amazon, for the Amazon’

Nina Isabella Moeller introduces a research project exploring the social and environmental implications of IKIAM, a newly established university in the Ecuadorian Amazon.

I am writing this in a little wooden house on the outskirts of Tena, a small but fast-growing frontier town and capital of the Napo province in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Working here has always been a great source of inspiration, desperation and surprise for me. Here, civilisation’s tensions and contradictions are painfully visible. Plastic and other petrochemical commodities are swept into the forest’s most remote settlements. Abundant co-existence with edible forests and medicinal plants gives way to roads, (un)employment and public health centres. As people get ‘better off’ economically, they often feel ‘worse off’ than ever. Yet it is still possible to catch glimpses of a world in which humans are living in close alliance and intense communication with plants and other beings in a shared habitat.

As part of the ‘Citizen Revolution’ that first got under way when I was doing doctoral research here ten years ago, President Rafael Correa has pushed through a series of drastic reforms, for better and worse. While poverty statistics have starkly improved, the indigenous movement, one of Latin America’s, if not the world’s, strongest and best organised, has been severely weakened.

This time, I am here to investigate the changing socio-ecological relations brought about by IKIAM University, one of four flagship universities established by the government as part of its far-reaching education reform. IKIAM is meant to catalyse a transition towards a green and knowledge-based economy and means ‘forest’ or ‘nature’ in Shuar, one of nine indigenous languages spoken in the Ecuadorian Amazon.

But what version of a ‘green economy’ does this university help build? It is supposed to be a university ‘in the Amazon, for the Amazon’, yet this dictum obscures the diversity of perspectives on what ‘the Amazon’ actually needs.

IKIAM aims to ‘create and transfer knowledge about the resources of the forest’, providing the historically marginalised region with an internationally competitive, natural science-based institution. It boasts a ‘living laboratory’: the biological reserve of Colonco-Chalupas, which comprises over 93,000 hectares that span several ecosystems. Conserving biological and genetic resources for research and development, this now exclusively ‘scientific’ territory prohibits traditional practices of hunting and gathering, casting them as ‘unsustainable’, without an inquiry into the underlying assumptions and values of this enclosure.

One of the architects cried when they realised that the site chosen was in the middle of the forest, ‘where a new pole of development is least needed’. The campus has displaced a small indigenous community, relocating them to a string of identical concrete buildings at the end of a road alongside which real estate prices have soared beyond the reach of anyone but relatively rich settlers, such as foreign academics. Mushuk Kawsay, ‘New Life’, this community is called.

As always, when the road comes, so do new needs. Many centuries of knowledge about how to thrive with what the forest has to offer, while maintaining its diversity, have been replaced by what the Napo Runa, the indigenous Kichwa population of the area, call the ‘needs of the city’. Calibrating your livelihood against this new backdrop is a big challenge, which fuels the self-doubt and loss of faith in customary ways that 500 years of colonialism have instilled in people.

But there are initiatives at IKIAM that try to bridge the gap that the road entrenches. Bringing together gourmet chefs and gardening grandmothers, exciting new recipes have been created with ancestral forest foods. A spontaneously created crochet club works with indigenous community members to create woollen Amazonian animals while sharing scientific as well as folk stories on their importance and dangers. Using local textiles and other materials, a group of Kichwa women has started making dolls representing themselves, their mothers and grandmothers, each with a story. An innovative workshop series is used to support local micro-entrepreneurs through all stages of their projects. Though mainly aimed at business development, these initiatives also enable a much-needed cultural exchange beyond the market.

In the face of the erosion of a culture which has so much to teach a world out of sync with its own bases of survival, my research contributes to the opening of spaces for dialogue between knowledge systems, aiming to strengthen forest-based subsistence as legitimate, dignified and sustainable; indeed, as an instructive and constructive model for a ‘green economy’. We cannot go back to a romantic state of being, but we have much to learn on our way towards a good life with restored connections to one another and the non-human world.
In the context of increasing material and natural resource consumption, disposability, the toxicity of the atmosphere and marine and terrestrial environments, and the unevenness of environmental burdens, waste is a topic of growing interest in academia and beyond, where it generates great fascination and distress.

Films like Wasteland and Plastic Planet, popular books like Garbage Land, Gone Tomorrow, Junkyard Planet, and Garbology, or the brilliant www.storyofstuff.com project have attracted huge interest. This creates some exciting opportunities for a researcher – like me – working on waste.

One of the most interesting projects in which I have been involved is a collaboration on an exhibition at the Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations (MuCEM)). The MuCEM, one of France’s newest and most innovative museums devoted to contemporary social issues, opened in 2013 when Marseille was European Capital of Culture. I have worked with the MuCEM since 2013, preparing an exhibition on waste and recycling around the Mediterranean as the Egypt specialist for the project.

My role has been to document different forms of ‘local knowledge’ with respect to recycling, recovery and repair, through photos, videos, and physical objects that will be displayed in the exhibition.

I came to the topic of waste via my MPhil dissertation: with guidance and encouragement from Nandini Gooptu I carried out research on a Christian-majority neighbourhood in Cairo where people live from waste collection, sorting and selling inorganics and raising pigs on organics.

Fieldwork that summer was an inspiration and marked a turning point, since I decided to continue to the DPhil and ultimately as an academic, rather than return to a career in law in Canada as planned. Today I work in the department of Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh – and continue to do research in Egypt on Cairo’s informal waste collectors.

Returning to my doctoral field sites for the exhibition accompanied by representatives from the museum, a photographer, a videographer, at times a local lawyer, and glossy brochures explaining the project generated many new relations, questions, and expectations.

Reduce, reuse, recycle, revisit

Jamie Furniss describes returning to his old fieldwork sites as research for an exhibition on waste and recycling he helped organise at Marseille’s new Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations.
For one, it gave me a new ‘positionality’ vis-à-vis old acquaintances. Many people congratulated me on having moved up in the world compared to my old student days when I was broke and seemingly spent most of my time hanging around with little to do. But they also took much less pity on me when it came to helping out, and now that I had a budget, their collaboration often came with a price – which, when we could afford it, we were happy to pay.

The symbolism of the objects and the seeming importance of the project also revealed many new dimensions to how people saw themselves and their profession. For example, when we ordered a donkey-drawn cart to be built specially for us, it became a spectacle in the neighbourhood and the source of much amusement but also debate: was it appropriate to display such an ‘old’ and ‘primitive’ technology as a representation of their profession in Europe? Some people agreed that its historic significance and the fact that it was ‘Made in Egypt’ made it an appropriate object. But others thought new, mechanised collection vehicles, even if they were imported, would give a more accurate and ‘modern’ image of their work. As the date of its completion drew near, old Uncle Saad, who was advising us on the project, proclaimed that he would have an Egyptian flag painted on it. But the next day he recounted a dream that had brought counsel in the night: it would be better if the national flag were not associated with an object designed to carry waste.

We traced the transformations of materials by locally built machines like shredders, washers, and extruders (for plastics) as well as through processes of repair, disassembly and smelting (for appliances and the metals that make them up).

We also studied the way different sites devoted to recycling, recovery and repair are distributed throughout the city and dovetail with one another to make up an urban ‘metabolism’ that digests wastes and transforms them back into useful materials and artefacts. I was particularly interested in how the waste collection and recycling profession has evolved, for instance the way collectors have increasingly engaged not just in collection and sorting but also value-added processing. This has transformed the social and physical landscape of their area, creating new categories of wealthy recyclers and generating a workshop-like architecture, in which living quarters are stacked over mini recycling factories and animals are raised on waste on the upper floors of buildings that become like vertical farms.

My hope is that this exhibition can challenge commonplace assumptions, attitudes and behaviours toward waste. Most people, including in Egypt, seem to think that because Cairo’s street are strewn with waste, whereas those in Europe appear to be free of it, there is a much larger waste problem on the south shore of the Mediterranean than the north.

However Cairo’s informal sector achieves higher recycling rates than in Western Europe, while at the same time per capita waste production in Egypt is lower than in Europe. This presents a compelling critique of how we understand what it means to have a ‘waste problem’, as well as how it should be solved. If we were to think in terms of volumes produced and recycled, rather than in terms of the aesthetics of the city, the conclusion would be the opposite of what most people assume. Thus, neither the notion that complex technologies necessarily provide the best way of mastering waste nor that the visible ‘cleanliness’ of public spaces is the best criterion for evaluating the effective waste management seem to stand up when we juxtapose northern and southern Mediterranean waste management systems, as this exhibition proposes to do.

The exhibition ‘Vies d’ordures’ runs at the MuCEM in Marseille until 14 August 2017.

Jamie Furniss completed the DPhil in Development Studies at ODID in 2012. He is currently Lecturer in International Development at the University of Edinburgh.
The RMG sector has transformed the labour force, too, by drawing women into the wage-labour market in large numbers. Around two-thirds of the sector’s 4.5 million workers are female. On the sewing floor, 80% of production workers are female, but 95% of managers are male.

Over the past five years I have worked with a diverse set of partners to understand why women have not moved into management. Managers typically responded to this issue by explaining that they do not invest in women’s training because women drop out of the labour force when they marry and have children. Our survey data, which now include information from several thousand production workers, indicate that this is not the case. Around 80% of female production workers are married, and half of those who are married have children. These women continue to work in the sector.

Together with colleagues, I evaluated a project to train women to be supervisors, comparing the performance of the female trainees with that of similarly trained men. We worked with the German bilateral aid agency GIZ and a training programme they developed several years ago. Working with more than 80 factories, we trained female and male workers selected by the factories as potential supervisors.

Our research reveals several barriers hindering the advancement of women into management. The first is that workers at all levels of the factory hierarchy believe that men make better supervisors. Workers expect men to outperform women in each of eight key traits we identified as characteristic of effective supervisors. The largest gap concerns technical skills, with men almost universally viewed as having better knowledge of machines and production processes. You may not find it surprising that these beliefs do not always match reality: in an extensive diagnostic, we find no gap in technical knowledge between the female and male trainees.

One area where we do find a gap concerns self-confidence. Male trainees expect themselves to perform at a level equal to a typical supervisor in their factory within three months of promotion, while female trainees expect themselves to perform significantly worse. Perhaps the most important outcome of the training is that it closes this confidence gap. How do workers respond to the trainees once they return to the factory as supervisors-in-training? Surveys of and detailed production data from factory administrative records show the same pattern: in the first two months, operators rate male trainees as equal to other supervisors, and female trainees as significantly worse. Productivity data also show an initial outperformance by the male trainees. But four months later, the female trainees have caught up in terms of both the production data, and the opinion of operators under their direction. A series of exercises we conduct with the trainees indicates that women’s initial underperformance reflects not a gap in skills, but a gap in the beliefs of the production workers they supervise. Female supervisors face resistance, especially from male operators working for them.

Participating factories responded to the trial in various ways. Several factories decided not to promote any of the female trainees. But some made radical changes. One set up an all-female production line out of 60, managers decided to promote more women, and to create more female lines. Now 10% of supervisors are women. Given their performance, we are optimistic the barrier is broken, at least in this factory.

Bangladesh’s RMG sector has generated its share of negative press in recent years. But the sector has also played a fundamental role in nearly three decades of rapid growth. It has transformed both the economy and the role of women in the labour force. This project has given us an insight into the ongoing evolution of the industry. As the economy continues to grow, competition for talent in local labour markets will increase. Our work demonstrates that a key overlooked pool of future talent exists in the factories themselves.

In 2016, we welcomed a new statutory Professor of Development Economics, Christopher Woodruff. Here, he introduces his current research, which asks why women are failing to advance into management positions in Bangladesh’s booming ready-made garment sector.
Writing their own stories

Theophilus Kwek reflects on a seminar series he organised exploring how migrants and refugees in Oxford have turned to writing to help make sense of their experiences and shape their own narratives.

‘Because we were not in our country, we could not use our own languages, and so when we spoke our voices came out bruised’.

Drawn from her debut novel We Need New Names, shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2013, the poignant words above by Zimbabwean author NoViolet Bulawayo strike at the heart of what many migrants and asylum seekers find as they chart new lives and plans in new surroundings. Often under immense pressure to alter their narratives, adopt new identities, or accept painful uncertainties, even those who count English as their first language face an uphill struggle to tell their stories on their own terms.

Some of these challenges, and how migrants living and writing in Oxford have chosen to respond to them, were brought to light in a new seminar series at the Refugee Studies Centre in early 2017. ‘Words of Welcome’ featured readings and discussions led by four successful young poets who are refugees or migrants, alongside two writers who work directly with refugees in Oxford: poet and translator Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, and poet and novelist Kate Clanchy. Across three afternoons, we – faculty, students, and members of Oxford’s writing community – were not only swept along by their stories, but transported in the telling to a different experience of the city that they, like us, knew as their own.

All four young poets had spent formative years in Oxford, and spoke candidly about the difficulties of finding a place for themselves in its landscape and fabric. Sharing a portion of her memoir, Asima Qayyum described scenes and landmarks on the Cowley Road – which, even as a child, seemed to her ‘pretty, clean, but undeniably dangerous’. Against the beauty and uncertainty of a ‘world [she] didn’t fully grasp’, school provided a kind of ‘refuge’ where teachers, friends, and the poetry she discovered all helped to ‘make [her] whole life’. Shukria Rezaei, also a student at Oxford Spires Academy and awardee of the inaugural Forward Prize Studenschip for 2016, echoed these sentiments in her poem, ‘Glass of Tea’. Encountering the city’s unfamiliar geography, she found herself at a loss, ‘swirling like a tealeaf in the streets of Oxford: even the sun overhead seemed to ‘move without a future’.

Finding ways to write their own stories proved integral for the four poets to recover a sense of ‘being themselves’. For some, this involved describing a world radically different from the knights and castles they found in storybooks. As dual-nationality poet Tarzina Khatoon put it in a beautiful ghazal, writing allowed her to turn ‘cracking tumbleweed […] into coarse coconut hair’, evoking landscapes and characters familiar to her and thus finding that she could ‘make her mark on the world’.

For others, being able to recount their experiences gave them a sense of ownership and order that was otherwise hard to find. Azfa Awad, who first arrived as a refugee from Somalia, spoke of how telling one’s story in a prescribed way could spell ‘the difference between life and death’ for so many asylum seekers. An opportunity to shape the narrative – to decide its course and contours – was the only thing that would prevent her story from ‘eating her up’. Appointed as Oxford’s first Youth Ambassador for Poetry, Azfa was not only able to tell her story to various audiences (including the Queen) but also to teach other children about the importance of making their voices heard.

These themes resonated across a range of other recent events and initiatives in the University, such as in Syrian writer Samar Yazbek’s talk on ‘Writing in Times of War and Revolution’, part of the RSC’s Public Seminar Series, and in poet and translator Yousif M. Qasmiyeh’s reflections on ‘Poetry in Migration’ at the Oxford Centre for Christianity and Culture. Too often, efforts to address or understand the challenges that refugees and migrants face neglect the role of creativity and artistic expression in their lives, or worse, disregard their voices and narratives altogether. As Qasmiyeh (himself a Palestinian refugee) suggests in a recent interview, writing allows those who have been displaced to ‘retrace [their] unfinished traces’. On our part, listening to their stories is key to ‘seeing [their] faces in their absolute gift’ – and there is something humane and necessary about doing so.

Whether in our personal or professional lives, the seminars point us to ways of deepening our welcome towards refugees and migrants. Empowering others to write their own stories begins with being willing to listen – and then to speak for, and support them, in their own words.

Theophilus Kwek has published four volumes of poetry, most recently The First Five Storms, which won the New Poets’ Prize in 2016. He was President of the Oxford University Poetry Society, and is a student on the MSc in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies.
When I was interviewed as a candidate for the directorship of the International Development Centre at Queen Elizabeth House, as it then was, I said that introducing a multidisciplinary degree would be one of my main priorities. I became Director in July 1993 and three years later, the first students were admitted to the MPhil in Development Studies.

There were several reasons for wanting to introduce such a degree. First and foremost, considerable experience working in and on issues of development had convinced academics at QEH (along with many other development scholars) that a multi or interdisciplinary approach was essential.

Serious mistakes were made, for example, by economists in analysis and policy prescriptions as a result of ignorance about people’s lives and behaviour. On the other hand, many anthropologists were passive observers of local societies and lacked motive as well as ideas on how to tackle the scourge of poverty, or policy processes generally. Political scientists focused on the workings of political systems but were unable to confront the economic realities which could sustain or threaten these institutions. Though we felt that economists frequently made massive and irresponsible mistakes – as in the austerity years of the 1980s debt decade – we also concluded that understanding economics was critical if these mistakes were to be challenged and replaced by improved analysis and policies. Equally, while poverty cannot be understood by economists without drawing on other disciplines, understanding the causes of poverty and analysing policies to reduce it requires economics as well as anthropology. And ultimately, as is becoming more and more apparent, it is politics, influenced by economic and cultural developments, that determines policy change.

These considerations pointed to the need for those studying development and using their knowledge subsequently in practice or in academia to have a multidisciplinary education. This was not just an abstract belief, but deeply felt; each one of the team at QEH developing
‘Each one of the team at QEH developing the degree felt that we ourselves would have been much better development analysts if we had been educated in this way’.

The degree, I think, felt that we ourselves would have been much better development analysts if we had been educated in this way.

This was the main reason for developing the degree, but there were other more institutional reasons. QEH then consisted of a number of academics coming from different disciplines – history, agricultural economics, economics and politics – all working, in one way or another, on development issues. Outside QEH in the University, there were many more scholars working on aspects of change in developing countries, within their own departments. Contacts across disciplines, even within QEH, and to a greater extent in the University as a whole, were very limited – this greatly reduced the potential quality of our work and also to a greater extent in the University as a whole, were very limited – this greatly reduced the potential quality of our work and also meant that development studies as such was almost invisible in the University and in the outside world. Creating and then teaching on the degree helped overcome much of this silo mentality.

Then there was the critical issue that QEH at the time had very few students of its own – just the 8–10 students taking the MSc in Agricultural Economics each year; mostly, academics attached to QEH each taught for their own department. This meant that QEH as an institution was highly vulnerable. Well-endowed All Souls might be able to afford to have no students but with the economic pressures increasingly facing the University, it seemed unwise to assume that it would continue to underwrite QEH indefinitely.

Creating the MPhil, taking over responsibility for the MSc in Economics for Development (which is run jointly with the Department of Economics), instituting a DPhil programme in Development Studies, and later developing masters in Migration; Forced Migration; and Global Governance and Diplomacy has transformed a quite small body with very few students into a flourishing (and viable) institution. The most important consequence of the entrenchment of a body of brilliant students studying development at QEH is not the financial viability of the institution, but rather the academic buzz created by the students on a daily basis, which makes the institution come alive, hugely enriching the academic life of all those associated with QEH. Of these degrees, the MPhil in Development Studies is pivotal: it was the first; at QEH, it is the only two-year master’s degree and has the largest number of students; and it embodies a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary spirit.

The design of the MPhil was the outcome of a close-knit team then working at QEH in collaboration with others elsewhere in the University. Barbara Harriss-White played a lead role; other important contributors were Nandini Gooptra, George Peters, Gavin Williams, Ceri Peach, Megan Vaughan, Wendy James, Rosemary Thorp, Valpy Fitzgerald and Lawrence Whitehead.

The MPhil was conceived to reflect what we saw as the mission of the institution as a whole – to be multi and interdisciplinary, to have the highest academic standards, to be catholic in topics covered, and in ideology and methodology, and to be appropriately critical. To achieve these ambitions we soon decided the degree had to be two years, not one; and that in the first year, the courses would be both disciplinary and multidisciplinary. We were keen that students should have a serious grounding in the separate disciplines. Hence History and Politics, Anthropology and Economics were taught separately in the first year. To make this manageable, each student had to choose two of the disciplines, but economics was compulsory for those who had not previously studied it, on the grounds that the dominance of economics, in policy-making especially, made some knowledge of economics essential.

But we wanted the interdisciplinary content to be there too: hence the core Development Studies course which all students have to take, which is intended to be essentially interdisciplinary. We did not want to prescribe the topics students should learn, but aimed to leave them to choose, in their second year, from the many courses available in QEH and elsewhere in the University – hence the combination of a set menu in the first year, and à la carte in the second. The result has been a fantastic array of choices made by a pool of highly talented and creative students.

Over the past 20 years, there have been a few changes to the degree. But it remains very much as first designed. In my view it has been outstandingly successful in meeting all our original objectives.
It was the summer of 1996. I was 22 years old, and in a village in north Karnataka, a semi-arid region of the Deccan Plateau. I was leading a participatory research mapping to support the creation of ‘development funds’ for 60 villages, led by councils of women across every village. I was also meant to be in Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar in a few months’ time.

Oxford was very far from my mind that dusty afternoon as I navigated, awkwardly and painfully, the boulders of caste, gender, class and language, bringing together – for the first time in the history of the village – women from every community to a common gathering. In that Indian village, as elsewhere in India, people from the Dalit (historically oppressed as the ‘untouchables’) or Muslim areas, did not traverse other, more ‘upper’ caste Hindu localities. The village school was one of the few places meant to be accessible to everyone.

A jeep from the NGO I worked for roared in and stopped outside the school. When I came out of the meeting, I found the driver had a message from my mother in Bangalore. Sir Anthony Kenny (then-Warden of Rhodes House) needed to speak with me urgently. The village barely had electricity, let alone long-distance international call facilities. I had to travel two-and-a-half hours to the nearest town, to make the call. I did that trip, in the sturdy jeep, and was lucky both to find a working phone, and Sir Anthony at the other end of it. It was a call that changed the trajectory of my life for some time after, and possibly beyond.

...Last year, 20 years after I first came to Oxford, I launched – with my co-conspirator Siko Bouterse – a global, multi-language campaign called Whose Knowledge?, to make the internet a little less white, straight, male, and global North in origin.

Debates about access to the internet – beyond basic infrastructure – mostly centre on an individualist and instrumentalist frame of ‘user experience’, on the consumption of information and knowledge (and cat videos). Yet the critical issue of access, to our minds, is the architecture and epistemics of the internet: who produces what forms of knowledge, and what is amplified or invisibilised as a result.

Google estimated in 2010 that there are about 130 million books in about 480 languages. Of these, only about 20% are freely accessible in the public domain and 10–15% are in print. In a world of 7 billion people speaking nearly 7,000 languages and dialects, only about 7% of those languages are captured in published material; a smaller fraction of the world’s knowledge is converted into digital knowledge; and a still smaller fraction of that is available on the internet – the world’s current default option for information.

Unsurprisingly, issues of access mean that online knowledge tends to be even less diverse than knowledge-at-large. Using Wikipedia as a proxy indicator of freely available online knowledge, we know that only 20% of the world edits 80% of Wikipedia currently, and estimate that a little over one in ten of the editors is self-identified female. Mark Graham and his colleagues at the Oxford Internet Institute have found that 84% of Wikipedia articles focus on Europe and North America, and most articles written about the global South are still written by those in the global North.

So what can we do about it? As I learnt, in my early 20s, it takes every one of us to question our assumptions about the worlds we live in and experience. With Whose Knowledge?, we have begun our efforts by working with Wikipedians, free knowledge advocates, technologists, librarians, archivists, and social justice activists. But most importantly, we work with marginalised communities, whose knowledge and experience we centre in our effort: whether it is the Dalit community in India and the diaspora, or Native American communities in the United States. Through their leadership, we hope to change what public knowledge on the internet looks like, and how it is accessed and experienced by the majority of the world.

...in 1996, Sir Anthony was calling to tell me that he felt I was better suited to the new MPhil in Development Studies that was being launched at QEH, rather than the MSc in Economics that I had originally applied for. I had no clearly drawn vision for the rest of my life; I had never imagined leaving India, let alone for Oxford; and my real preoccupation with the Rhodes Scholarship at the time was about its colonial history, not its post-colonial possibility. I agreed to join the new MPhil in Development Studies, if QEH would have me. It was the best uninformed decision I have ever made in my life.

The MPhil helped me to make sense of the distances I was traversing and connecting. It challenged me to question the distances that others could not travel, and why. It pushed me to question power and privilege, and to amplify the voices of those not in the rooms I was lucky enough to be in. The multifaceted notions of access and infrastructure – whether to a school, a jeep, a phone or... the internet – have been part of my feminist journey ever since.

Re-imagining the internet is my way of re-imagining our world.

Details of all the data shared in this article can be found on the Whose Knowledge? website, where you can also find out more and get involved: http://whoseknowledge.org

Anasuya Sengupta casts her mind back to the start of the MPhil and detects the genesis of her new campaign, which seeks to diversify the sources and content of online knowledge.

Anasuya Sengupta is Co-founder and Coordinator of Whose Knowledge?
Where House of Windsor and House of Baratheon meet

Tristen Naylor explains the thinking behind a new option course he offers on Pop Culture and Global Politics.

The idea for this new course first came two years ago when I saw a photo of the Queen visiting the Game of Thrones set, gazing upon its iconic Iron Throne. This royal visit of the House of Windsor to the House of Baratheon prompted a lot of questions: for whom was this the bigger publicity win, the monarchy or the hit TV show? What's the significance of a head of state visiting the set of a fantasy drama? What's more un-real, the divine right of kings or stories involving dragons and wizards? Who has more power in our world, the real Queen or the fake Throne?

When we think about global politics we tend to think of heads of state, diplomats, and transnational elites, not film stars, musicians, and superheroes. Multilateral treaties, financial governance, and environmental policies are said to be the proper ‘stuff’ of ‘the global’, not blockbuster movies, viral memes, and videogames. This is the traditional image of global politics – something ‘out there’, undertaken by elites in distant institutions, well removed from our ordinary lives. But this image is problematic – it causes us too easily to miss the multiplicity of ways in which the apparently apolitical things of everyday life are, in fact, anything but apolitical. This new course corrects for this bias in how we think about politics, placing things that don’t typically find their way into scholarly analysis front and centre: from Star Wars, to selfies, to Tinder.

After all, if we want to understand how power works in the contemporary world, we can’t ignore pop cultural figures. A reality TV star now sits in the Oval Office with the authority to launch the largest nuclear arsenal in the world; Katy Perry and Justin Bieber command a Twitter following of 45,000,000 while a mere 187 million people watch the House of Baratheon meet the House of Windsor.

In this course we explore an incredibly wide array of topics. To highlight but a few: we examine the relationships between visual art and power. We look at propaganda in the service of the powerful, examining everything from the use of Superman to sell war bonds in the Second World War to the doctoring of photographs to produce ‘fake news’ today. Conversely, we examine street art as a challenge to power, particularly looking at the movement’s opposition to corporate globalisation. We also study the intersection between technology and war, exploring how drone warfare and videogames alike desensitise us to the exercise of violence, rendering what was hitherto held as an exceptional state of affairs as normal and routine.

We also explore the allegorical dimensions of pop cultural fiction. Fiction not only helps us make sense of a complex world by rendering it accessible and intelligible, it also serves to help us explore the implications of contemporary political developments and the moral questions at the heart of politics. The liberal interventionism of Game of Thrones’ Daenerys Targaryen is as worthy of our attention as that of Tony Blair and George Bush. Likewise, if we want to understand the moral dynamics of rebellious insurgencies supported by fundamentalist religious sects, we might have no better guide than Star Wars.

In all, this new course forces us to confront traditional ideas. It confronts conservatism and orthodoxy in academia – challenging conventional wisdom about what counts as legitimate topics within our discipline. At the same time, it confronts prevailing wisdom about how power works in today’s world, taking the ascendency of Donald Trump or the popularity of Justin Trudeau’s selfies not as aberrations from the norm, but as a sign that political power and pop cultural power are now inextricable from each other.

Tristen Naylor is Departmental Lecturer in Diplomacy Studies teaching on the MSc in Global Governance and Diplomacy.
Julia Knight retires

We were very sorry to say goodbye to Julia Knight, who was departmental administrator at ODID for more than 30 years and was a central figure in ensuring the success and smooth running of the institution. She retired at the end of the 2015–16 academic year.

‘Julia is one of those rare and exceptional individuals who was considered a friend and ally by all, because she did her best to “make the system work for people, rather than the opposite”, as one of my colleagues aptly put it,’ said then-Head of Department Nandini Goopu. ‘She was universally trusted for her impeccable professionalism, integrity and incisive understanding of administration and finance.’

Our new Head of Administration is Lindsay Rudge, who comes to us from the Classics Department where she was Head of Administration and Finance.

Christopher Woodruff joins as new Professor

Professor Christopher Woodruff joined ODID as the new statutory Professor of Development Economics in 2016. Professor Woodruff’s research focuses on enterprises in low-income countries, with noted work on returns to capital investments in microenterprises and the effect of formal registration on enterprise performance. He is a pioneer in the use of field experiments in firms.

He currently holds an Advanced Grant from the European Research Council for work measuring productivity in the ready-made garment sector, with a particular focus on the challenges women face in moving into supervisory positions in the Bangladesh garment sector.

Professor Woodruff joined us from the University of Warwick, where he was Professor of Economics.

‘We are delighted to welcome Professor Woodruff as a colleague,’ said Head of Department Professor Christopher Adam. ‘Chris’ work on the economics of the firm not only sits right on the research frontier but is also concerned with a range of hugely important questions in public policy on how to create and sustain high-quality jobs in low-income countries. This work fits perfectly with the research tradition of the department and the University.’

New World Bank poverty measure

The World Bank has announced it will broaden the way it measures poverty by introducing a new ‘multidimensional’ measure that captures non-monetary aspects of poverty, using a methodology developed by Sabina Alkire and James Foster of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) at ODID.

The introduction of the new metric, to be used in conjunction with the Bank’s $1.90 measure of extreme poverty, was one of the recommendations made by a commission led by the late Sir Tony Atkinson and contained in the Monitoring Global Poverty report, released by the World Bank in late 2016.

OPHI has pioneered an approach to poverty measurement that goes beyond income by incorporating non-monetary deprivations, for example, poor sanitation, malnutrition or lack of education. Individuals are defined as ‘multidimensionally’ poor if they experience a given number of such deprivations at the same time.

The Bank said it would track non-monetary deprivations in three specific domains: educational outcomes; access to healthcare; and access to basic services, such as water, sanitation and electricity. It said the dimensions would be aggregated ‘using a member of the class of multidimensional poverty indices’ proposed by Alkire and Foster.

Find out more: http://bit.ly/OPHImeasure

Cathryn Costello wins ERC Starting Grant

Associate Professor Cathryn Costello has been awarded a European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant of just under 1.5 million euros for a project titled Refugees are Migrants: Refugee Mobility, Recognition and Rights.

The project aims to re-examine refugee protection through a lens of mobility and migration, and to bring scholarship on refugee law into conversation with the practices of the refugee regime, in particular to subject the latter to legal scrutiny.

It will re-examine three key aspects of refugee law – access to protection, refugee status determination, and refugee rights – and explore them in the context of the refugee regime’s norms and practices on responsibility-sharing and solutions.

Crucially, the project takes a long and broad view of the refugee regime, in order to open up new possibilities and trajectories. It also brings critical new insights into the regime, by undertaking a legal assessment of the role of non-state actors. In particular, it will provide an important and timely legal assessment of the role of the International Organization for Migration.

It examines EU law and practice, as an actor in the global refugee regime, engaging not only with asylum seekers and refugees on its territory, but via cooperation with transit and host states. It will examine law and practice in the EU, and in Turkey, Lebanon, Kenya and South Africa.

Find out more: http://bit.ly/CostelloERC
ODID hosts DSA

ODID was delighted to host the 2016 annual conference of the Development Studies Association (DSA) in September, an event that saw some 600 development academics and practitioners from all over the world gather in Oxford for three days of scholarly exchange around the theme of ‘Politics in Development’.

The conference offered 118 sessions, 65 panels and 440 papers on a huge variety of topics, growing considerably in scale from initial plans thanks to an overwhelming response.

We were particularly delighted that of the 604 delegates who came to the conference, over 200 were from overseas, creating a truly international gathering. In all, the conference attracted delegates from 47 countries.

We were also pleased that large numbers of early career researchers, including students, were able to come; ODID, in line with our mission to help doctoral students and post-doctoral scholars to engage with their peers and present and publish their work, helped facilitate their attendance through 25 bursaries co-funded with the journal Oxford Development Studies.

The conference was opened by Charlotte Watts, Chief Scientific Adviser at the Department for International Development, and featured keynotes by Professor Tania Li of the University of Toronto and Professor James A Robinson of the University of Chicago.
STAY IN TOUCH

The department uses the University database, DARS, for information on alumni. If you think your details may be missing or out-of-date on the database, please update them through the University's alumni website: www.alumni.ox.ac.uk.

There are lots of ways to keep in touch with what's happening at the department:

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We also have course-specific LinkedIn groups for all our masters’ courses:

MPhil in Development Studies: www.linkedin.com/groups/MPhil-in-Development-Studies-Alumni-7466036/about
MSc in Economics Development: www.linkedin.com/groups/MSc-in-Economics-Development-Alumni-7467960/about
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