

ISSUE 9 - MAY 2026

GLOBAL HUMANITIES INITIATIVE

Official Newsletter of the Global Humanities Initiative

Director's Welcome

BY CHRIS YOUNG

As this issue amply demonstrates, the **Global Humanities Initiative** has given the **School of Arts and Humanities** a flagship programme of which it can be proud.

China, Haiti, Mexico and Ghana are just some of the countries featured, with themes ranging from the state in times of geopolitical change, Western philosophy under a global approach and the environment. There is something here for everyone. For me, Pulitzer Prize-winner **Cristina Rivera Garza's** third Trinity Lecture on bilingualism and the process of grieving, in which she discussed her treatment of her sister's murder with such profound dignity, will live long in the memory. And a shout-out goes to **Professor Wazi Apoh** from the University of Ghana, who was introduced to us last year by **Classics Beyond Borders** and will return twice in the next six months to participate in the **Francophone Programme** and the **DAAD Research Hub for German Studies**. The Global Humanities Initiative (GHI) is what you make of it, and Wazi is an example to us all.



Chris Young

Professor of Modern and Medieval German Studies
(Master, St Edmund's College)

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BEIJING FORUM GLOBAL 2026

BY HANS VAN DE VEN

We often conceptualize the state in the abstract, treating it as a bedrock structure fixed at the moment of its founding. In reality, the state is a fluid organism, perpetually shedding obsolete functions while improvising new practices. It exists within cycles of making and remaking, evolving through gradual shifts or, in moments of upheaval, through radical and rapid structural mutations. Today, we find ourselves in just such a crucible, as we confront tectonic geopolitical shifts, demographic transitions, deepening socio-economic polarization, and the dual disruptions of the climate crisis and the digital revolution.



In a collaborative effort between the [Beijing Forum Global](#) and the [Global Humanities Initiative](#), historians from China and Cambridge scrutinized these complex processes of institutional evolution. We explored the shifting resource landscapes that constrain or catalyse growth, the volatile role of frontiers and peripheries, the transformative power of traditional, modern, and emerging media, and the seismic shocks of revolution and war. We sought to map how power reconstitutes itself when the old frameworks begin to fracture.



Dr Zhang (Cambridge), Dr Liu (Peking), Prof Hou (Peking) & Dr Hess (Cambridge)

Our discussions ranged across vast historical epochs and global geographies. We concluded our sessions with the profound realization that this dialogue has only just begun. The urgency of understanding how states transform is escalating daily; only through such deep, comparative inquiry can we distil the historical insights required to navigate the radical transformations currently redefining the modern state.



“State Making and Remaking”



Prof Jiang (Provost at Peking University) & Prof Sir Aston (Pro VC for Research - Cambridge)



Prof Song (Tsinghua), Prof Mei (Cambridge) & Dr Hu (Nanjing)



Dr Kung (Academia Sinica) & Prof Hurst (Cambridge)



Prof Song (Tsinghua) & Prof Dubow (Cambridge)

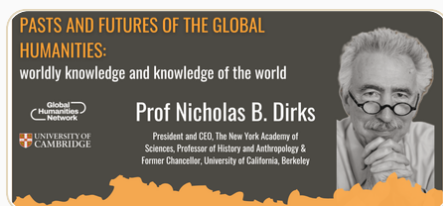
GHI - Elements Series

BY ALEX WRIGHT

I'm pleased to say that the following Elements are either now or shortly will be in production:

- **Western Philosophy: A Critique**, by Lea Cantor and Josh Platzky Miller
- **Daoism and Non-Action in Europe**, by Eric Nelson
- **Postcolonial Reconstruction of History in African Drama**, by Chima Osakwe
- **Small Worlds**, by Virpi Timonen et al
- **Worldly Knowledge: Pasts and Futures of the Global Humanities** by Nicholas B. Dirks, which comprises a significantly expanded and developed version of the ideas explored in his Cambridge plenary lecture delivered in **June 2025** at our **Global Humanities Summer Forum**.

One of the standout features of the Elements platform is its speedy turnaround (around 12 weeks) from manuscript to printed copies and – for a fortnight – full gratis download. We therefore expect to see a further five finished Elements appearing over the summer and autumn, to complement the already-published [Esoteric Orientalism by Mandakini Dubey](#).



PROF NICHOLAS DIRKS

Professor of History and Anthropology
President and CEO of the New York
Academy of Sciences



[WATCH THE FULL LECTURE HERE](#)

All five Elements tackle large and important global themes. Linking liberalism to the global humanities, **Nick Dirks** offers a passionate manifesto for the rehabilitation of liberal thinking at a time when illiberalism and populism seem ever more triumphant worldwide. **Lea Cantor** and **Josh Platzky Miller**, meanwhile, critically interrogate the concept of 'Western Philosophy' while exploring what is at stake for globalised approaches both to philosophy and the broader humanities subjects. **Eric Nelson's** Element, by contrast, examines fundamental moments in the Western European history of 'non-action' and classical Daoism (the Daodejing and the Zhuangzi). **Chima Osakwe**, again focused on cross-cultural insights, looks at key dramatic texts through a postcolonial prism to show how each text has reshaped historical accuracy to reinterpret history from the perspective of the colonized. And finally, **Virpi Timonen** and her co-authors examine 'ordinary people' who focus on 'small' aspects of their environment and what that means in a time of ecological crisis.



Alex Wright

Senior Executive Publisher & Head of Humanities
(Cambridge University Press)



Elements Main Editors



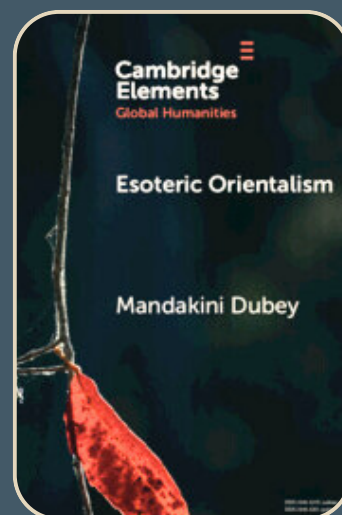
Frisbee Sheffield
Ancient Philosophy



Malvika Maheshwari
Political Science



Saul Dubow
Commonwealth History



'Esoteric Orientalism studies Victorian esotericism and academic Orientalism as the nineteenth century's most significant comparative frameworks for understanding global religions, languages, and cultures'

(Cambridge University Press)

[Click here to access the series](#)



GHI - Trinity Lecture Series 2026

BY DR CARLOS FONSECA

PROF CRISTINA RIVERA GARZA

TACTILE: Archives, Collective Memory and Bodies



Trinity hosted the distinguished Mexican writer [Cristina Rivera Garza](#) — Pulitzer Prize-winning author, MacArthur Fellow, and creative writing chair at the University of Houston — for the 2026 lecture series. Her four-part series, ['Tactile: Archives, Collective Memory and Bodies'](#), explored the relationship between physical and sensory experience, language, and remembrance. The first lecture examined how archives engage the senses, questioning what it means to breathe and feel history. The second reflected on the act of transcription as a form of translation and survival. The third turned to bilingualism and the particular texture of grieving in a second language, asking what is transformed when loss itself must cross linguistic borders. The final lecture confronted the weight of mass violence and its inscription on landscape and memory. Each lecture drew full houses and sparked rich discussion, making for an exceptional series.



Cristina invited attendees to collectively write names in wet earth, transforming reflection into a shared act of remembrance.

'In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer'

~ Albert Camus ~



Cristina with Joel Hernandez & Octavio Perales (Mexican Embassy)



Prof Cristina Rivera Garza - Lecture III



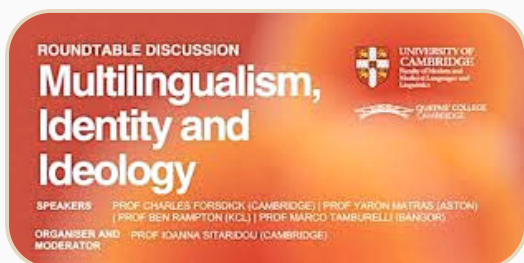
WATCH THE SERIES HERE



GHI - Research & Engagement Programmes

Multilingualism

The Multilingualism Programme hosted a lively roundtable discussion on 'Multilingualism, Identity and Ideology' at Queens' College on 6 March 2026, led by [Prof Ioanna Sitaridou](#). Bringing together leading scholars from King's College London, Aston University, Bangor University, and the University of Cambridge, the event explored multilingualism as a social, political, and ideological phenomenon. Discussions ranged across applied sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, language policy, and regional language studies, offering attendees fresh perspectives on contemporary challenges in the field. The roundtable also provided an engaging forum for interdisciplinary exchange, with audience members contributing to a lively Q&A on the relationship between language, identity, and culture.



Invited speakers included [Prof Charles Forsdick](#) (University of Cambridge), [Prof Yaron Matras](#) (Aston University), [Prof Ben Rampton](#) (King's College London) and [Prof Marco Tamburelli](#) (Bangor University); Prof Ioanna Sitaridou was assisted by her PhD student, [Rhoel Tupaz](#).

Francophone

Led by [Prof Charles Forsdick](#) and [Dr Doyle Calhoun](#), the Francophone Programme has continued to foster vibrant international and interdisciplinary engagement across MMLL. In Lent Term, the Faculty welcomed acclaimed Haitian writer [Jean d'Amérique](#) as writer-in-residence, continuing its focus on Haiti in 2025–26. An award-winning poet, playwright, novelist and performer, Jean d'Amérique participated in a series of events with staff and students, including a translation workshop and a reading of his play 'Opéra poussière'.



Thursday 5 February
(5:00–7:30 pm)
Venue: The Parlour, First Court, Magdalene College

TRANSLATION & CREATIVE WORKSHOP

- Poetry, prose, and theatre translation & creative writing
- Multilingual focus: English / Kreyòl / French
- Facilitators: Jean d'Amérique, Leyla Chéry, Charles Forsdick, Hugo Azérad
- Closing reflections on translation and linguistic hybridity

The programme has also hosted visiting speakers including [Dr Sheela Mahadevan](#) (Liverpool) and [Dr Jean-Baptiste Bernard](#) (Queen's University, Belfast), with further conversations in Easter term featuring [Prof Jeanne-Marie Jackson](#) (Johns Hopkins), [Dr Gus Casely-Hayford](#) (V&A East) and [Prof Dominic Thomas](#) (UCLA). The programme will additionally contribute to events for colleagues visiting from the University of Blida, Algeria, in June 2026. Visiting Leverhulme [Professor HERNS Marcelin](#) (Miami) returned to Cambridge in April 2026 and will continue his programme of events, including a workshop in June on the anthropologies of violence in Haiti, with a contribution from GHI member [Prof Wazi Apoh](#) (University of Ghana).



[Prof Jeanne - Marie Jackson](#)
Professor of English at
Johns Hopkins University



[Prof Dominic Thomas](#)
Madeleine L. Letessier
Professor And Chair of
Digital Humanities



[Dr Gus Casely-Hayford](#),
OBE, Director of V&A East

MEET THE TEAM: University of Ghana

The School of Arts is one of the flagship Schools in the College of Humanities. It comprises four leading-edge and vibrant Departments, namely: Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies, Department of History, Department of Philosophy & Classics, and the Department for the Study of Religions. The School of Arts is repositioning itself as the foundation of university scholarship, the cradle of the core disciplines we call the humanities, from which all other disciplines emanate. Through our commitment to inquiry, knowledge production and dissemination, our vision is to inspire our students and stakeholders (Ghanaian society and the international community) to explore and expand African perspectives in developmental initiatives and with environmental humanities in mind. Our Five-Year Action Plan is inspired by the University of Ghana 2024-2029 Strategic Plan. In this regard, the School of Arts' core mission is to work in a multicultural context to produce graduates that are equipped with ideas and knowhow, that would enable them to research, critically reflect and find creative solutions to our common societal problems.



In the Spotlight . . .



Prof Wazi Apoh

Dean of the School of Arts, College of Humanities
(University of Ghana)



Kpando (Ghana)



Farming & Gardening



"Any fast action thrillers"

- What is your Alma Matter?

BA, MPhil in Archaeology, University of Ghana; PhD in Archaeological Anthropology, Binghamton University, NY. USA

- What is your main area of research?

The fields of African archaeology, museology and heritage development, forensic archaeology, the archaeology of slavery and interrogation of issues on reparative justice, restitution and repatriation of looted and illegally acquired African objects and ancestors in Euro-American museums.

- What do you enjoy most about being part of the Global Humanities Network?

It brings a rich set of ideas and knowledge to stimulate intellectual conversations and thoughtful actions. More importantly, the links it provides junior scholars and graduate students from my university to network, nurture and crossbreed ideas among fellow young scholars across the globe.



Dr Richmond Kwesi

Head of the Department of Philosophy and Classics
(University of Ghana)



Maastricht (Netherlands)



Puzzles & Sudoku



The Pilgrim's Progress
(by John Bunyan)

- What is your Alma Matter?

BA & MPhil Degrees - University of Ghana; PhD Degree - University of Cape Town, South Africa

- What is your main area of research?

Analytic Philosophy, and African philosophical thought and practice

- What do you enjoy most about being part of the Global Humanities Network?

The opportunities for staff and student mobility among partner institutions

