

Institution: SOAS University of London
Unit of Assessment: Communication, Cultural and Media Studies
<p>1. Unit context and structure, research and impact strategy</p> <p>1.1 Context/Overview Our unit brings together unique research expertise in media, film, and cultural studies, grounded in the lived experiences and practices of diverse populations in the Global South and their diasporas. We are engaged in pressing global debates surrounding globalisation, decolonisation and political conflict, and are motivated by the need to support and empower marginalised communities in the Global South and their diasporas. Our research combines critical theory from the social sciences and humanities with empirical engagement; all of our members engage in fieldwork and many are practitioners (for example, journalists, curators, and filmmakers).</p> <p>1.2 Structure The thirteen members of our unit have been located in different departments across SOAS during this REF assessment period (five in the School of Arts; three in the School of Interdisciplinary Studies; three in the School of Languages, Cultures, and Linguistics; and two in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures). Our expertise straddles the SOAS regions: five members work primarily on Africa (Agina, Dovey, Easton, Pohjonen, Thomas); three on South Asia (Batabyal, Dwyer, Yaqin); two on South-East Asia (Harrison, Murtagh); two on East Asia (Kirsch, Lu); and one on the Middle East (Matar). All unit members are knowledgeable about the cultures and histories of the contexts they study, and most are also proficient in the languages of the regions they research, such as Arabic, Hindi, Chinese, Japanese, Urdu, Indonesian and Amharic. All staff have worked full-time during this REF cycle.</p> <p>Our unit came together for the first time after REF2014; most members were submitted to Area Studies. REF feedback noted that the Area Studies submission was too broad. We have thus come together as a small, focused unit to research how mediated, communicative forms (news and journalism, narrative film and screen media, digital platforms, visual and literary texts) operate within and across our regions. While maintaining this focus, we have nurtured cross-regional, comparative, interdisciplinary, intermedial, future-oriented research, which, along with decolonisation, is core to our research and impact strategy (see IES§2).</p> <p>As a small unit located across departments, we have taken advantage of departmental and School-wide structures to support our research. Some of our members have taken on senior management roles during this REF cycle, serving as heads of department (Kirsch, Matar, Murtagh), and on key working groups related to SOAS' institutional commitment to decolonising knowledge (Dovey, Yaqin). We have worked across our departments to develop a strong collegial culture of support and career development in line with SOAS' policies and practices, and to advance our key agenda of building a rich, non-Eurocentric body of knowledge and research.</p> <p>1.3 Research strategy Our research strategy for the current REF period has focused on a commitment to decolonising the study of media, film, literature, and culture. This focus has been productive, particularly through the winning of a major grant to decolonise film and screen studies (§3.1). As such, our unit has played a leading role in contributing to SOAS' commitment to decolonising knowledge and research practices (IES§1.1).</p> <p>1.3.1 Themes Our research is interdisciplinary and intermedial, cutting across various kinds of textual, visual, and audial media including film, television, news media, radio, digital media, and literature, thus</p>

transcending rigid boundaries. While our unit's research output is extremely diverse, there are several clear, cogent themes that have united our work and that have allowed for fruitful and energetic cross-regional and cross-disciplinary conversations and research clusters, as well as grant successes that collectively amount to more than £2 million (§3).

Our research themes are:

- 1) **Political communication in non-Western contexts**, evident in the research by Matar on Hizbullah and Syria; by Pohjonen on extreme/hate speech in India, Ethiopia and Finland; by Lu on the Chinese Communist Party's film production; and by Kirsch on the relationship between memory and media in post-war Japan;
- 2) **Mediated gendered and LGBTQ cultures in Asia, Africa and the Middle East**, evidenced in the work of Murtagh on LGBTQ film cultures in Indonesia; and Harrison on mediated gender relations in contemporary Thailand;
- 3) **Muslim identities and Islamophobia in relation to communication, film, and literature**, evidenced in the work of Yaqin on Muslims, trust and multiculturalism;
- 4) **Non-western popular media cultures**, evident in the work on popular filmmaking and film genres in Nigeria, China and Ethiopia by Agina, Lu and Thomas, respectively; on stardom in China, Japan and Indonesia by Kirsch, Lu and Murtagh respectively; and on film; spectatorship in India, China, Nigeria, and across Africa by Dwyer, Lu, Agina and Dovey;
- 5) **Digital cultures**, evidenced in research by Matar and Pohjonen; by Batabyal and Kirsch on television in India and Japan respectively; and by Dovey on the rise of internet television and smart-phone film consumption in Africa;
- 6) **Decolonising film and media theory and practice**, evidenced in research by Agina on history and spectatorship in Nigerian filmmaking; Dovey on international film festivals and curatorial politics, and through her ERC-funded Screen Worlds project (§3); Dwyer on the global significance of the Hindi film industry; Lu on transnational socialist film connections; and Thomas on Amharic language cinema in Ethiopia.
- 7) **Curatorial theory and practice**, evidenced in Dovey's research and practice on curating film, Murtagh and Lu's film curatorial work, and Easton's curatorial exhibition practices (§4)

1.3.2 Implementation

To support our strategy during the current REF cycle, we have held internal, termly meetings to read and respond to one another's research, share and give feedback on funding applications and impact plans and ensure that our unit's work has coherence. We have particularly emphasised the need for engagement between staff and research students, other research institutions, and the non-academic community.

During the REF cycle, we have functioned within two cross-disciplinary centres which helped bring us together as a unit:

The Centre for Global Media and Communications (CGMC), chaired by Matar, evolved out of the Centre for Media (2003), as a space to engage with communication scholarship in globalised contexts and offer research-focused seminars that showcase broad research on the key contemporary debates in global media and communication. CGMC also offers a PhD programme, and two taught MA degrees that **prioritise non-Western approaches to addressing digital transformations, digital cultures and political communication.**

The Centre for Creative Industries, Media, and Screen Studies (CCIMSS) (formerly the Centre for Film Studies (2015-19), co-chaired by Dovey) was founded in September 2019 to support the unit's expanding strengths in broader screen media studies beyond film and **our collective investment in questions surrounding the creative and cultural industries.** The Centre is committed to featuring the work of scholars, creative practitioners and activists who are helping to decolonise media and screen studies, and the global creative industries.

These centres have hosted approximately 100 renowned speakers, including media theorists such as Natalie Fenton (Goldsmiths), Des Fredman (Goldsmiths), Ben O'Loughlin (Royal

Holloway), and Sarah Maltby (Sussex); cultural industries scholars such as Anamik Saha (Goldsmiths) and Kim-Marie Spence (Solent); film scholars such as Clive Nwonka (LSE); filmmaker-scholars such as Samba Gadjigo (Mount Holyoke College) and Jyoti Mistry (Valand Academy, University of Gothenburg); filmmakers such as Meenu Gaur (NYU in London), Perivi Katjavivi, Philippa Ndisi-Herrmann, and Nii Kwate Owoo (presenting his work in relation to discussion about the need to decolonise film archives); and film curators such as Ifeanyi Awachie (Africa Salon). We have also hosted multiple creative/industry events through CGMC and CCIMSS, such as UK premieres of films (for example, the Kenyan film *The Letter* [2019]) and film programmes in collaboration with other organisations (for example, two programmes with Bertha DocHouse in 2016-17).

Unit members are also active participants in other interdisciplinary and regional centres at SOAS. For example, Dovey, Thomas and Agina are members of the Centre of African Studies; Lu is a member of the China Institute; Matar is a board member of the Middle East Institute and chair of the Centre for Palestine Studies; Batabyal, Harrison, and Yaqin are members of the South Asia Institute; and Yaqin is a founding member of the Centre for the Study of Pakistan.

Via these structures, we have developed a collegial and supportive research environment within which we can identify synergies, collaborate and work on current research projects as well as future grant bids. We frequently collaborate on research output and dissemination through co-organising conferences and workshops. For example, Matar and Pohjonen organised the conference 'Hate Speech as Political Communication' in May 2018; Lu invited Dovey and Matar to write chapters for her co-edited *Oxford Handbook of Communist Visual Cultures* [2020]; Matar invited Lu to the UCL/SOAS AHRC-funded workshop 'Socialist World, Third World: Media World' workshop in November 2018; Harrison, Murtagh, and Yaqin have collaborated on the Queer Asia film festival, co-founded by a SOAS research student (J. Daniel Luther) in 2016; and Dovey invited Lu and Thomas to her workshop 'The Asian-African Cinema Connection' in July 2018, which brought together many of the leading scholars of African and Asian cinemas based in the UK. Easton and Yaqin convened the 'Conversations in Bloomsbury' seminar series, which brought together writers, filmmakers and critics; and Yaqin invited Easton onto the organising committee of the Spring Literature Festival in 2014.

1.3.3 Recognition of our research during this REF cycle

Our funding and research strategy has resulted in several large grant successes during this REF cycle, the most important of which is **Dovey's ERC Consolidator grant (€1,985,578), for the project 'African Screen Worlds: Decolonising Film and Screen Studies' (2019-24)**, which has created full-time, post-doctoral fellowships for Agina (two years four months) and Thomas (three years), and for which Kirsch and Lu are advisory board members.

Other large grants include **Harrison's AHRC Wellcome Trust and SOAS-funded ground-breaking interdisciplinary research (2019-) on public health in mainland South East Asia (approx. £220,000)**; and Lu's Leverhulme Research Fellowship (£54,951) for the project 'Transnational Practices: Film Culture and Politics in China (1949-1989)' (2018-20). Matar's research on Hizbullah's communication strategies (2010-14) crossed over into the beginning of this REF period and was funded by the Leverhulme Trust (£129,000) (§3).

1.3.4 Future research strategy

Dovey's ERC project on decolonising Film and Screen Studies provides the basis for our unit's ongoing strategic research focus as it bridges this REF period and the next (running until 2024, with the ERC allowing the possibility of extending it due to the impact of Covid-19). The project allows us to **continue to enhance research on decolonisation and diversification of media and film** through two major international research workshops which will bring together film and screen scholars from around the world (and particularly the Global South), and which will result in two edited volumes; four research films (made by Agina, Dovey, Thomas and a new, full-time postdoctoral researcher, who will take up her post in March 2021 for two years), thereby **enhancing our practice-based research**; multiple audiovisual essays (by many of our unit

members, as well as colleagues from around the world), **enhancing our contribution to creative and artistic research**; decolonising toolkits (see ICS 2); and a series of public-facing events hosted by CCIMSS, in which many of our unit members are participating and sharing their knowledge.

In the next REF cycle, we will also continue to work collegially and collaboratively to:

- Ensure that our focus on decolonisation means we **continue to build meaningful partnerships with media and film scholars and practitioners in Asia, Africa and the Middle East**; and
- **Engage critically with global challenges posed by Covid-19 to the regions we cover.**

1.4 Impact strategy

All our members are involved in **impact-focused research**. From working closely with LGBTQ and HIV activists in South-East Asia (Murtagh), to research on private television channels in India (Batabyal), to addressing complex ongoing conflicts in the Middle East (Matar), our members are committed to **helping change perceptions of the Global South** and to **improving the lives of those in the Global South and non-represented communities in the Global North**.

This focus is evident in the impact of our research on:

- 1) Changing perceptions in the mainstream and alternative media of the regions and communities we research (see ICS 1, and §4 for further examples of engagement on this front);
- 2) Our own immediate working environment and disciplines in Higher Education (ICS 2);
- 3) The communities of the Global South with whom we work;
- 4) The general public, in terms of building cross-cultural awareness, understanding, and tolerance, and changing perceptions (ICS 1).

Our first Impact Case Study ‘Enriching Fiction with Facts: The Representation of African, Asian, and Middle Eastern Cultures through Novels, Film, and Television’ is closely related to Aims 1 and 4 above. It focuses on the impact of interdisciplinary research conducted at SOAS on works of fiction by popular writers and filmmakers, which has led to **more truthful, accurate representations of cultures in the non-Western world**. This includes the depiction of Gambian Muslim youth in 2016 novel *Swing Time* by best-selling author Zadie Smith as well as representation of the two central Muslim female characters in Naomi Foyle’s book series *The Gaia Chronicles*. Research and consultancy significantly informed the Amazon television series *The Man in The High Castle*, and led to a truthful illustration of a 1960s Chinese family in the BBC smash hit series *Call the Midwife*, as well as of Palestinians’ lived realities in the 2018 award-winning animated feature film *The Tower*.

Our second Impact Case Study ‘Decolonising the University across Disciplines’ is central to Aims 2 and 3 above. Closely related to research on decolonisation, it focuses on work by Dovey and others at SOAS—including Agina and Thomas—to support academics worldwide to transform their curricula, syllabi, and pedagogical style to **make Higher Education teaching far more inclusive and globally representative**. Dovey’s particular contribution to the ICS focuses specifically on her and her Screen Worlds team’s work in terms of their impact on decolonising Film and Screen Studies as a discipline, for example, through a major workshop Dovey co-organised at the Valand Academy, University of Gothenburg, and one that Agina, Dovey and Thomas co-organised at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, as well as through the team’s set of eight, Open Access Decolonising Film Studies toolkits. This impact case study has not only grown out of interdisciplinary work across SOAS but has been nurtured and supported through SOAS’ institutional commitment to decolonisation; clear evidence of this is that Dovey was awarded £10,000 from the SOAS impact and knowledge exchange internal funds to support her team’s impact-generating activities on this front.

Beyond our submitted impact case studies, others at SOAS have received impact funding for their work, for example Easton was awarded £7,025 from the impact and knowledge exchange funds for her ongoing international travelling exhibition on the archives of Nobel Prizewinning writer J. M. Coetzee at Amazwi South African Museum of Literature in 2020.

Dovey's ERC project on decolonising Film and Screen Studies will provide the focus for our future impact strategy since this project grew out of our unit's commitment to decolonising media and film studies, and decolonising representations of Global South communities in mainstream and alternative media. Since all members of our unit are either centrally or partially involved with this project, and since it allocates significant resources for impact-generating activities (since the ERC highly values research that produces measurable impact), we can chart a clear path into the next REF cycle, at least until 2024, when the project formally ends, but we hope also beyond that.

As a unit we will continue to promote the development of research that puts impact at the centre of its conceptualisation and that—in keeping with our unit's decolonisation agenda—**prizes above all else the creation of equitable, dialogical research partnerships and collaborations with our colleagues in the Global South**. In this sense, we hope to build on our second impact case study and expand our impact beyond decolonising pedagogy to decolonising research processes, mechanisms and funding structures.

This work has already begun through: Dovey's participation in the groundbreaking conference at SOAS 'Applying a Decolonial Lens to Research Structures, Norms and Practices in Higher Education Institutions' (2019); Agina, Dovey, and Thomas' training for all new PhD students in the School of Arts in how to decolonise their research (2019 and 2020; continuing annually); Yaqin's role as Chair of the SOAS Decolonising working group (from September 2020), which is developing a Decolonising Research toolkit; Easton's organisation (with Dooling and Baschiera in the Centre of African Studies and the University of KwaZulu-Natal) of the 'Contested Spaces' conference in February 2021; and Thomas, Agina and Dovey's organisation of a workshop on Decolonising Film and Screen Studies in Addis Ababa in 2022 for Ethiopian film and media scholars.

We also plan to build on our first ICS, which aligns very closely with our unit's **strong grounding in practice-based research and impact on filmmaking practice**. Again, we already have resources to do so through Dovey's ERC grant, which is funding the making of four research films about film industries in the Global South, as well as audiovisual essays that aim to contribute to the decolonisation of filmmaking and Film Studies.

The Centre for Global Media and Communications and the Centre for Creative Industries, Media and Screen Studies **support practice-based PhD research** and, as noted previously, many of our members are **practitioners in their fields** as well as academics: for example, Matar comes from a journalism background; Batabyal is a writer and journalist; Dovey is a filmmaker; and several members of the UoA are film festival organisers and film and exhibition curators who have worked hard for many years to broaden the canon of global cinema and literature (e.g. Lu, with the Chinese Visual Film Festival; Murtagh, with the Indonesian Film Weeks; Dovey and Thomas, through their work with African film festivals; Yaqin and Easton with literary festivals, conferences and exhibitions, particularly around South Asia and South Africa). We will continue to build on our practical involvement in the media and film industries to contribute in meaningful and measurable ways to them (§4).

1.5 Open research and research integrity

We are not only committed to ensuring openness and integrity in research practice but have also been involved in **actively promoting the benefits of Open Access across the Higher Education environment**. For example, Dovey talked about the importance of OA in relation to decolonising academic partnerships with colleagues in the Global South that was made for SOAS Open Access week in 2017. Furthermore, through the resources provided through her ERC consolidator grant, Dovey and her team (including Agina and Thomas) will be able to make

every single deliverable of their project (2 edited books, 8 journal articles, 4 films, and multiple audiovisual essays) Open Access, and are also turning the Screen Worlds website into an open-access publishing platform.

Our Open Research strategy also includes:

- Moving beyond simply compliance for REF to publishing as much of our research as possible Open Access. This includes making research accessible through our institutional online repository SOAS Research Online, as well as through ResearchGate and other OA platforms (for example, the new EU platform Open Research Europe);
- Prioritising green OA journals when we publish (for example, Dovey has published in the green OA journals *Feminist Africa*, *Jump Cut*, *Media Industries*, *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies*, and *PARSE*; Murtagh has published in the OA journal *Inside Indonesia*, and Gold OA under a CC-BY-NC license; Matar and Pohjonen have published in the internationally-renowned, refereed, OA *International Journal of Communication*).

Like other units at SOAS, we prioritise research ethics and integrity and all staff in our UoA have completed the Epigeum Research Integrity training course. Ethical integrity is of the greatest concern to us because of our commitment to decolonisation and to ensuring that we treat our research partners and participants in non-western contexts with the utmost respect. As noted above, not only do we adhere to these standards ourselves, but we are actively involved in providing **training to research students across SOAS** on these values.

2. People

2.1 Staffing strategy and development

2.1.1 Training, recruitment, and promotion

Our staffing strategy values research excellence within the fields of media, film, and cultural studies in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and a commitment to principles of decolonisation and diversity. Staff members who have been engaged in recruitment during this REF cycle (for example, Dovey, Easton, Kirsch, Matar, Murtagh, Yaqin) have gone through SOAS' full recruitment training, which helps to ensure EDI compliance and to also address unconscious bias in relation to all protected characteristics, including disabilities.

Internal and external funding have also allowed us to recruit three new members to our unit during this REF period (Pohjonen, Thomas, Agina). Internal funding led to the appointment of Dr Matti Pohjonen as Lecturer in Digital Media in September 2018. The external ERC funding for Dovey's project has allowed her to recruit and support two postdoctoral fellows. Michael Thomas was appointed Postdoctoral Fellow in Ethiopian Screen Worlds, School of Arts, in June 2019. His fellowship is fully funded for three years. Añulika Agina was appointed Postdoctoral Fellow in Nigerian Screen Worlds, School of Arts, in November 2019. Her fellowship is fully funded for two years and four months, after which she will return to her permanent job as Senior Lecturer at the Pan Atlantic University in Lagos, Nigeria.

A sign of our growing strength as a unit is evidenced by the fact that three members (all women) were promoted during this cycle (Dovey, Matar, and Yaqin), and with a further three (two of whom are women) promoted just after the end of this REF cycle (Kirsch, Lu, Murtagh).

2.1.2 Leadership during this REF cycle

Since our unit does not map onto one particular SOAS department, the unit coordinators have worked closely with unit members and with their respective heads of department to ensure support for members through different institutional mechanisms. This collaboration has been enhanced by the fact that a large proportion of members also serve or have served as heads of schools as well as ex-officio members of top-level management structures during this REF cycle. For example:

- Murtagh served as Head of the South East Asia Department (2015-17) and the Head of

the School of Languages, Cultures, and Linguistics (2017-19);

- Matar served as Chair of the Centre for Global Media and Communication (2014-18, and 2020-), and Head of the School of Interdisciplinary Studies (2018-20);
- Kirsch served as Head of the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures (2019-) and as Associate Dean for the former Faculty of Languages and Cultures (2013-17);
- Dovey served as Chair of the former Centre for Film Studies (2015-19) and as Co-Chair of the Centre for Creative Industries, Media and Screen Studies (2019-);
- Harrison is Chair of the Centre for South East Asian Studies;
- Murtagh, Matar and Kirsch have served as ex-officio members of SOAS' Executive Board, Academic Board and research committees across the school;
- Dovey and Yaqin have been actively involved in the Decolonising SOAS Working Group, and Yaqin became Chair in 2020;
- Easton and Yaqin served as Chairs of the Centre for English.

2.1.3 Mentoring, research leave, and staff development

As early career researchers, Pohjonen and Thomas have received mentoring from their line managers within their respective Schools, as well as by the unit coordinators. SOAS also has a strong mentoring policy for staff at all levels (including professors), and **a particularly strong investment in female leadership** (we encourage all of our female unit members to consider applying for the Aurora leadership development initiative). SOAS also has an active Staff Development office through which many of us have benefited from additional training (for example, filmmaking training through the National Film and Television School in the UK, and training in how to present our research to journalists). SOAS provides all full-time research-active staff with an annual research budget; and offers two terms of sabbatical after probation, and then one term of sabbatical after every eight terms of service. Staff also benefit from annual Staff Development Reviews (see IES§3.1).

2.1.4 Future staffing

The Covid-19 related 2020 restructure at SOAS will affect the staffing of our unit in the next REF cycle. However, the arrival of Dovey's new post-doctoral fellow in Decolonising Screen Worlds in March 2021 (a female researcher from South Africa) and the fact that Yaqin took up the position of Chair of the Decolonising SOAS Working Group in September 2020 will help to ensure synergies between our unit and colleagues throughout SOAS and beyond working on the same decolonisation agenda.

2.2 Research students

Our doctoral researchers are allocated two supervisors, and benefit from formal, cross-disciplinary MPhil training programmes in their home departments. The flexible structure at SOAS allows for co-supervision across Schools so that **we can offer students both disciplinary and area-studies expertise** related to their topic. Doctoral students also benefit from the support provided through our centralised Doctoral School (see IES§3.2). SOAS is also a member of the Screen Studies Group, a consortium of Film and Screen scholars from eight University of London Colleges, which provides specialised methods training for students engaged in film and screen-related research.

One of the things we are most proud of in our unit is **the diversity and quality of our research students**. We have an excellent cohort of media and film studies research students at SOAS coming from countries across the world, for example, Korea, Palestine, Iraq, Egypt, Kuwait, the UK, Germany, and Mexico. Over this REF period, we have collectively supervised **51 PhD students through to completion**, and we sustain a high completion rate for doctorates against the sector benchmark. The CGMC pioneered practice-based PhDs at SOAS, with the first practice-based student completing her PhD in 2019. We thus encourage applications from candidates who wish to submit as part of their thesis a research-focused portfolio (such as photographs, video or other audio-visual material) alongside a textual component. Given our unit's commitment to practice-based research, this is a vital part of our future strategy.

Our students have produced **dissertations on an astonishing range of topics**, including: social networks and activism in the Arab World, artistic practices in Egypt, Palestinian media and film, Iraqi journalism in conflict, Muslim Brotherhood politics and media, the use of religious discourses in the 1971 liberation war in Bangladesh, China's media expansion in Africa, media discourses and anti-liberation in Bangladesh, solidarity movements and social media in the UK, the culturalisation of development in Kenya, youth and screen media in South Africa, genre and melodrama in Amharic-language cinema in Ethiopia, comparative Iranian and Chinese cinema, memory and slavery in West African and African-American literature, religious films and Islamic discourses in post-Soeharto Indonesia, cultural festivals in Senegal, cultural hybridity in Thai television drama, and gender roles in Japanese television drama. Many have benefited from SOAS scholarships, AHRC scholarships, Commonwealth Scholarships, Fulbright Scholarships, CHASE internships, as well as grants from their own countries.

Our PGRs contribute substantially to the energetic, intellectual debates which take place at SOAS and elsewhere. They initiated a **ground-breaking annual PhD film and media studies symposium** in 2015 which ran for several years and attracted scholars from across London and the UK, with keynotes from leading international scholars, such as Julian Stringer (Nottingham University), Samba Gadji (Mt Holyoke) and Katsuyuki Hidaka (Ritsumeikan University). Our media research students also participate in and help organise the annual PhD media studies research symposium co-organised with Westminster University, Goldsmiths, the LSE, and City University, and in our Screen Studies group events (including two annual conferences, one dedicated to PGRs). Easton co-convenes the University of London Southern African Seminar which includes a strong commitment to early career researchers and doctoral students through annual interdisciplinary workshops.

We involve PGRs in our departmental events and research seminars, and many of our research students and early career scholars have also been encouraged to present work at interdisciplinary regional conferences (§4), such as: the African Studies Association of the UK conference in Cambridge in 2016; the International Association of Media and Communication Research 2016-17, 2019; MECCSA 2016-19; and BRISMES 2016-19). We encourage our PGRs to start publishing during their PhD research, and **work by postgraduate students has appeared in journals such as the *Middle East Journal*; *Culture and Communication*; *Media, Culture and Society*; *Black Camera***, in edited collections and as single-authored monographs. While still a PhD student at SOAS, Thomas (now a member of our unit) co-edited the first book to be published on Ethiopian cinema in English (Michigan State University Press, 2018). Two other former PhD students, Khatib and Shanaa, are in the process of publishing their work on Palestinian media and film. In 2018, we also initiated an **inaugural PhD lecture series** by SOAS film students to celebrate and bring greater exposure to the interdisciplinary and region-focused research conducted by our students; three recent doctorates have already presented.

Our successful PGRs are now making significant contributions to our various disciplines through teaching and research, and have gained academic posts around the world. For example, some have won ERC postdoctoral fellowships (Thomas); several have won other postdoctoral fellowships (Kings College London; the Copenhagen Business School; Harvard University); many have been appointed to full-time academic posts (e.g. Melbourne University; Naresuan University; Universiti Gadjah Mada; Universiti Malaya; Manchester University; Sussex University; Dhaka University; the Doha Institute; LUMS, Pakistan); two founded the Queer Asia film festival and conference in 2016 which has had a major, activist impact on our field; and a few have become celebrated filmmakers, such as Meenu Gaur.

2.3 Equality and diversity

EDI principles are of primary importance to our unit, and all four of our unit REF panel members have undertaken REF-specific EDI training. We have a **diverse unit** in terms of **gender** (9 women, 4 men), **national background** (with 8 members originally from outside the UK, namely Nigeria, South Africa, Palestine, Pakistan, India, China, Germany, the US and Finland), and **ethnic background**. The unit's three professors are women (Dwyer, Harrison, and Dovey); our

unit coordinators/leaders are women (Matar and Dovey); and the three unit members promoted during this REF cycle are all women (Matar and Yaqin were promoted to Reader and Dovey to Professor). SOAS' **generous support for parental leave** and additional childcare support while undertaking School-related work has particularly benefitted our four female unit members who are mothers of young children (IES§3.1). Due to our commitment to decolonisation and gender equality, our unit members have provided particularly strong mentorship to help female doctoral and postdoctoral researchers from non-Western backgrounds.

3. Income, infrastructure and facilities

A key part of our REF2021 strategy centred on increasing income from external funding bodies. With a **fifty percent increase** in successful funding bids (with eight new funded projects in the current REF period, to a value of £2,156,004) in comparison to the REF2014 assessment period, we have seen considerable gains in this area, alongside **exceptional research with global reach and research impact driven by funding achievements**. The REF2021 strategy centred on supporting colleagues to gain increased confidence in applying for grants. After introducing an income stream highlights and case studies (§3.1), as well as how the strategy was realised (§3.2), we provide a summary of the intellectual (§3.3.1) and physical infrastructure that are central to that success (§3.3.2).

3.1 Income

Our unit members are active in submitting applications to diverse funders, including the ERC, the British Academy, Leverhulme and AHRC. We have taken advantage of internal Seedcorn Funding and increasingly robust procedures for grant project development and internal review through the Library, Learning, and Research Directorate (IES§4.1).

Our applications for research funding are dictated by an overall strategy to develop our unit into a leading hub of research excellence focused on **cutting-edge media, film and cultural studies in Asia, Africa and the Middle East**.

Since we formed as a unit, our research funding has been growing steadily to a total of £2,156,004 over the REF period, and has been boosted significantly by Dovey's successful European Research Council consolidator grant (value €1,985,578), for the 'African Screen Worlds' project (2019-24). The project goes beyond conventional theorising by exploring how the use of creative practice (the making of films and audiovisual essays) and activism (the production of toolkits) can contribute to the decolonising of Film and Screen Studies. Inspired by a collaborative ethos, Dovey works closely with post-docs Agina and Thomas, as well as other unit members (e.g., Lu), who are contributing to the project's many workshops and collaborative outputs (e.g., edited volumes and audiovisual essays), thus **deepening the focus and reach of our research on decolonisation, and our commitment to creative research**.

Other awards include Yaqin's collaborative RCUK-funded project 'Muslims, Trust and Cultural Dialogue' (£391,000 total) (2012-15); Harrison's Seedcorn funding from the Wellcome Trust and from SOAS, £175,000 from the AHRC, and follow-on funding of £37,000 from the AHRC for collaborative work on the Cultural Contexts of Disease project, led by SOAS; Lu's Leverhulme Research Fellowship (£54,951) to carry out research on 'Transnational Practices: Film Culture and Politics in China (1949-1989)'; Murtagh's £10,000 grant from the Philippines at SOAS fund, funded by the Philippines Embassy, to run a workshop on constructions of HIV/AIDS in Southeast Asian popular culture in Manila in 2018; Matar's British Academy research grant (£8,500 in 2015) to research the Palestine Liberation Organisation's liberation media; Easton's award (in collaboration with Goldsmiths) from CHASE (£8200) and the John Coffin Memorial Trust (£2,000) for the conference "Coetzee & the Archive" in 2017; and Pohjonen's seed corn funding (£4,750) for the collaborative project, with the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, on 'Decolonising Artificial Intelligence: Emerging Philosophies, Cultures and Politics of Global Digital Media Research' (2018-19).

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

3.2 Infrastructure and facilities

Recent investments by SOAS in media and film resources have had a significant impact on our work. **A Media Studio was created within the Brunei Gallery at SOAS in 2019** (costing approx. £200,000) and is supported by a Studio Manager (0.8 FTE). Dovey and her Screen Worlds team have already made use of the studio for voice-over audio recording and have also collaborated with SOAS Radio to make podcasts with filmmakers. Another major resource for our media and film work is the fact that the **award-winning film company Chouette Films is based within the School of Arts**, and one of its members (Anna Sowa) works on Dovey's Screen Worlds project as a creative producer for all the films that are being made. This company strongly promotes **ethical and environmentally conscious filmmaking**, and has won multiple awards for their documentary films, made in collaboration with academics at SOAS and elsewhere (for example, *Living Zoroastrianism* and *Nobody's Metaphor*). Part of our future strategy involves enhancing our practice-based research agenda through working even more closely with the SOAS Media Studio, SOAS Radio, and Chouette Films. This will be aided by the fact that Dovey's ERC grant covers film equipment, owned by SOAS that will become available to all unit members in due course.

The expansion of SOAS into Senate House and the upgrading of the Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre (BGLT) has also brought **state-of-the-art screening facilities**, which has contributed hugely to the quality of the free, public-facing events that we run. For example, our launch of CCIMSS in October 2019 involved a screening of the UK premiere of the provocative *Film Festival Film* followed by a Q&A with the filmmakers in the BGLT to a packed audience of academics and the general public. Covid-19 has of course halted our ability to stage such in-person events but we have maintained an excellent online programme thanks to the use of SOAS' Zoom and MS Teams accounts, as well as extensive support from our Alumni and Communications teams. For example, Yaqin successfully directed the first SOAS Festival of Ideas (October 2020) as a fully virtual event.

The SOAS Library is designated as one of only five National Research Libraries in the UK, and as such receives direct funding to support UK higher education research in Asian, African and Middle Eastern Studies. The Library houses over 1.3 million volumes together with a major collection of archives, manuscripts, rare books, special collections, an expanding Digital Library, and a growing network of electronic resources. **We have worked closely with the Library to build a unique and expansive collection of rare films from Africa, Asia and the Middle East**, and we also benefit from SOAS' subscription to important video-on-demand platforms, such as Kanopy, Alexander Street, and Documentary Educational Resources (IES\$4.2).

The Brunei Gallery is an exciting venue owned by SOAS that hosts a rotating programme of contemporary and historical exhibitions from Asia, Africa and the Middle East. It exhibits work of academic significance as well as artistic merit and interest; an example of a recent exhibition related to our unit was 'AFRICAN GAZE: Hollywood; Bollywood and Nollywood film posters from Ghana' (January-March 2019).

4. Collaboration and contribution to the research base, economy and society**4.1 Overview**

All unit members are engaged in diverse collaborative, outreach, and knowledge exchange activities relating to our areas of expertise, both within and outside academia. Many of the principles of our wider academic and public engagement closely adhere to the values embedded within our research and impact strategy, with a focus on **making media and film cultures more globally representative, accurate, diverse, and inclusive**.

4.2 Collaborations, networks and partnerships**4.2.1 Hosting international scholars**

We have attracted, hosted, and collaborated with approximately 20 international research

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

fellows, visiting scholars and filmmakers during this REF cycle, from, for example, Brazil, China, Algeria, Denmark, Turkey, Nigeria, the United Arab Emirates, Palestine, Lebanon, Pakistan, Japan and the Netherlands.

4.2.2 Academic partnerships

Dwyer was an external co-investigator working with PI Stephanie Dennison (University of Leeds) on the AHRC-funded network 'Soft Power, Cinema and the BRICS' (2015-18), which brought together scholars from around the world for a symposium and international conference. Harrison's AHRC, Wellcome Trust and SOAS-funded research project (2019-) with Thai medical researchers is the first to bring together humanities and science approaches to address public health in mainland South-East Asia through the medium of grassroots filmmaking and creative writing and arts workshops. Pohjonen has also been deeply engaged in interdisciplinary research collaborations, working on questions of extremism and decolonising Artificial Intelligence with computer scientists, political scientists, health specialists and anthropologists (Dublin City University, Helsinki University, LMU Munich and the University of Witwatersrand). He also has ongoing collaborations with the VOX-Pol Network in their research on big data methods for Extremism research.

Dovey's research and activist work on decolonisation has led to international collaborations with colleagues focused on the teaching of filmmaking across Europe and the rest of the world (for example, her collaboration with the Valand Filmmaking Academy at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden—see ICS 2). The 'African Screen Worlds' project also allocates resources for collaborative work with academic partners around the world—for example, through informal partnerships with the University of Lagos in Nigeria (with whom Agina, Dovey and Thomas co-organised a workshop in March 2020, which brought together many of Nigeria's leading Film and Screen Studies academics—see ICS 2), and with Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia (with whom Thomas, Dovey, and Agina will co-organise a workshop in 2022 to contribute to building the discipline within Ethiopia).

4.2.3 Engagement and collaboration beyond academia

4.2.3.1 Curatorial and Creative Work

Many of our unit members regularly curate film festivals and seasons, literary and/or cultural events. Lu's work on Chinese cinema is widely recognised outside academia and in film circles, which was evidenced in her invitation in 2018 to speak at the Raindance Film Festival's Industry event China Day about her work on Chinese cinema and aesthetics. Since 2016, Lu has collaborated with the Shanghai Art Film Federation to introduce the latest Chinese art films into the UK, and she has curated three Chinese art film festivals at SOAS, which provides a platform for aspiring young filmmakers. Murtagh has helped to develop international networks of scholars working on Indonesian cinema and media through running the workshop on Indonesian cinema (2013, 2015) and in organising regular Indonesian film screenings with discussions at SOAS and elsewhere in London.

Under the aegis of the former Centre for Film Studies (2015-19), our unit also collectively organised two co-curated, public-facing film seasons with Bertha DocHouse, the UK's leading documentary-only cinema: 'Gender Agenda! New Visions from Around the Globe' (2016) and 'Mixed Roots: Stories of Cross-Cultural Relationships Around the World' (2017), which brought academics, filmmakers, and the public together to engage in urgent contemporary debates about gender, race, sexuality, and family relationships in countries as varied as China, Tunisia, Senegal, Indonesia, South Africa, Japan and Benin. Pohjonen co-curated the first workshop on Race and Artificial Intelligence at the London Barbican in 2019. Yaqin curated the 2014 Spring Literature Festival at SOAS, the photography exhibition 'The Art of Integration: Islam in England's Green and Pleasant Land', and co-curated the international literature festival 'Cultural confluences'. She also contributed to the BFI partition archive, has been a special advisor to Akbar Ahmed's important documentary film *Journey into Europe* (2018), and regularly contributes to knowledge exchange activities for BAME UK theatre groups, sharing her expertise on Muslim representation. Easton has led curatorial exhibition

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

practices, first in collaboration with Georgetown University Library ('Navigating the War', on the archives of legendary navigator Michael Richey in 2017), and currently in the ongoing travelling exhibition on Nobel Prizewinning writer J. M. Coetzee, 'Scenes from the South', in collaboration with Amazwi South African Museum of Literature, the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, and the University of York, launched in February 2020 at Amazwi. Batabyal's research and knowledge of the political economy and journalism practices in India has led to a best-selling novel based on his research.

Our future strategy includes continuing to curate public events that stimulate debate about decolonisation; Yaqin's direction of the first SOAS Festival of Ideas on the theme of Decolonising Knowledge (2020) brought together SOAS researchers with our Global South collaborators through enriching panel discussions, masterclasses, creative presentations, and book talks. Easton co-convoked the 'Contested Spaces' symposium (February 2021), in partnership with the Centre of African Studies at SOAS and the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

4.2.3.2 Engagement with the Media

Yaqin's work on the RCUK-funded project "Muslims, Trust and Cultural Dialogue" (2012-15) has led to many media engagements and public discussions about the representation of Muslims (e.g., BBC Radio 3 and 4, Muslim TV, Islam Channel News). Matar regularly contributes to media debates about Palestine, the Arab uprisings of 2011, the Syrian conflict and women and activism in the Middle East. Dovey wrote a key article for *The Conversation* on diversity issues in the global film industries in the wake of the #OscarsSoWhite controversy (2015) which was picked up by news outlets around the world. For the past five years Batabyal has worked several times each month with Monocle Radio, a radio station that broadcasts from London, Hong Kong, New York and Tokyo.

4.2.3.3 Engagement with governmental bodies

Matar's research on Hizbullah has led to many speaking engagements, such as at Chatham House, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Royal Institute of Strategic Studies, as well as in different venues in the Arab world. She was invited by the UN undersecretary for Global Communication to talk about Palestine and peace efforts at their annual conference in Ankara in September 2019. Pohjonen's research on online extreme speech has informed reports commissioned by public bodies, including the DG Justice at the European Commission and the Ministry of the Interior in Finland. He is also collaborating with the Ethiopian government to develop independently-funded research on online extreme speech during the 2020 elections and has been a consultant with Article 19, an organisation that works on freedom of speech globally. Yaqin has collaborated with the journalist and broadcaster Yasmin Alibhai-Brown for a preliminary enquiry into the aims, effects and consequences of the British government's Prevent programme; the report was launched at the House of Lords (2017). Dovey addressed the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport about LGBTQ rights in 2019 as part of a screening of the Kenyan film *Rafiki*.

4.2.3.4 Consultancy

Many of us take on consultancy work, particularly to aid in **ensuring that the mediated representation of the communities we work with in the Global South is fair and accurate**. For example, Kirsch has used her experience on Japanese war memory to offer knowledge-based consultancy for the Amazon Prime television series *Man in the High Castle* (ICS 1). Based on those connections, she has been asked to join the board for a BBC/Netflix production executed by Sister Pictures. At the same time, she has been involved with training for Heresy Consultancy on media and censorship in Japan (2015-18).

4.3 Contribution to the sustainability of our disciplines

4.3.1 Peer review

All unit members are actively involved in peer review of journal articles and manuscripts with leading journals and publishers in the field (e.g., Harvard University Press, Edinburgh University Press, Palgrave Macmillan, Routledge, Oxford University Press). Several members also have

Unit-level environment template (REF5b)

key editorial positions and/or serve on multiple editorial boards. Matar is co-founder and co-editor of the *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, series editor for the 'SOAS Centre for Palestine Studies' book series (IB Tauris/Bloomsbury), and co-founding editor of the new series 'Political Communication and Media practices in the Middle East' (IB Tauris/Bloomsbury). Yaqin is founding co-editor of the 'Multicultural Textualities' book series (Manchester University Press). Harrison is Editor in Chief of the journal *South East Asia Research*. Kirsch was Editor for *Japan Forum* (2014-18), and is currently Book Reviews Editor. Murtagh served as co-managing editor of *Indonesia and the Malay World* (2004-15), during which time he introduced film and screen studies into the remit of the journal, resuming this role in 2019; in this role he also launched the IMW Young Scholars' Prize in 2015; he is also Book Reviews Editor, *South East Asia Research* (2014-). Unit members also serve on the editorial boards for: the *Vienna Journal in Japanese Studies*; *Journal of African Cinemas*; *Journal of African Cultural Studies*; *Media, War and Conflict Journal*; *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*; *Journal of Pakistan Women's Studies*; *English Academy Review*; *Decolonial Subversions* (a green OA journal launched in 2020); and the book series 'Anthem Studies in South Asian Literature, Aesthetics, and Culture'.

Members have also served on national and international councils, and as peer reviewers for grant funding bodies (e.g., the AHRC peer review college; Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique-FNRS [Belgium]; the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; the South African National Research Council; the Economic and Social Research Council [ESRC]; and DFID). We have also served as assessors for promotions exercises (e.g., for University of Witwatersrand; Emerson College; University of California, Davis; Westminster University; the LSE; Northwestern University; Manchester University; North Chapel University; University of York).

4.3.2 Supporting subject associations and conferences

Staff are members of many of the key national and international subject associations in our fields (for example, NECS, SCMS, BAFTSS, MECSSA, IAMCR), and participate in their conferences. We also contribute to our regional subject associations: Dovey is a council member of the African Studies Association of the UK; Lu is a council member of the British Association for Chinese Studies. We frequently participate in conference organisation: Harrison's current AHRC-funded research has allowed her to organise a panel at the International Thai Studies Conference held in Chiangmai in July 2017 and at the 19th Euroseas Conference in Sep 2019; Dovey co-organised the annual Screen Studies Group conference with Rachel Moore (Goldsmiths) and Chris Berry (KCL) in 2018 and has co-organised major international workshops with colleagues in Sweden in 2019, and with Agina and Thomas in Nigeria in 2020 (see ICS 2).

4.4 Prestigious Lectures/Keynotes/Apearances

During this REF cycle, our members have delivered approximately 10 keynotes at prestigious conferences, for example: Dovey at the 2019 South African Media and Communication conference, and Murtagh at the 2019 ASEAS conference at Naresuan University. We also regularly give talks and industry keynotes at film and literary festivals and events. For example, Matar was the keynote at the Abu Dhabi arts festival in 2016; Dovey was in conversation with the filmmakers of the documentary *Sembene!* and leading film curator Richard Pena at Harvard University in 2016; and Batabyal discussed Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore and the Bengal Renaissance at the 2018 Jaipur Literature Festival.