| Section A |
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| **Institution:** Durham University |
| **Unit of Assessment:** 28 - History |
| **Title of case study:** South Sudan: Historical and cultural resources for governance and peacebuilding |
| **Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:** Between 2001 and 2020 |
| **Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:** |

| **Name(s):** Cherry Leonardi | **Role(s) (e.g. job title):** Associate Professor | **Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:** 2007 - present |
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| **Period when the claimed impact occurred:** Between 2014 and 2020 |
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| **Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?** N |
| **Section B** |

**1. Summary of the impact**

Leonardi's research and expertise onR1 South Sudan have led to wide-ranging impacts in the following areas:

- on customary authority and local justice in South Sudan, influencing the design and documentary outputs of an EU-funded project on access to justice, and a Swiss-funded project on customary authorities in the country.

- a research network on South Sudanese museum artefacts, which has contributed to increasing awareness of South Sudanese cultural heritage among European museum curators and a range of heritage, arts and culture professionals and community representatives in the UK and South Sudan.

- research on land governance and boundary disputes, which has informed UK government and other international policy-making on governance, justice, land and boundary issues in South Sudan and neighbouring countries, as evidenced in widespread citation and use of her research in policy-oriented documents.

**2. Underpinning research**

The foundation for the impact is Leonardi's research since 2001 on the historical and contemporary role of chiefs (known as 'traditional' or 'customary' authorities) in governance and justice in South Sudan (R1-R4). This work contested both academic and non-academic understandings of chiefs as either static, primordial forms of indigenous authority or the despotic creations of colonial governments. Instead, it argued for the intermediary role of chiefship in state-society relations and its resilience as a local government and judicial institution. In the context of South Sudan's secession in 2011, Leonardi's research challenged widespread assumptions that the new state represented a clean slate, by highlighting the longstanding local-level state institutions and practices inherited by the independent government.

New research since 2013 has developed in two principal directions. The first extends the focus from customary authority to the broader meaning and value of South Sudanese custom and culture. This research has been pursued collaboratively with Zoe Cormack (Oxford), through an AHRC-funded International Research Network on South Sudanese museum collections in Europe, which brought together curators from museums holding significant collections of objects from South Sudan with international academic researchers, heritage practitioners and community representatives from South Sudan and its diaspora. The network discussions have been disseminated online through workshop reports, blogs and a collection inventory, raising key issues regarding the potential of museum objects and other cultural heritage to generate new understandings of history, inter-community relations and identity. Unlike much research and commentary on South Sudan, this work focuses on the country's cultural assets rather than only on its needs and deficits. Similarly, Leonardi's work has informed and contributed to a major research project coordinated by the Rift Valley Institute (RVI) in South Sudan with Swiss government funding, which has highlighted the value of

history, custom and cultures of dialogue in a context in which conflict and humanitarian crisis tend to obscure the longer-term, local-level resilience that Leonardi's work has consistently revealed. Her 2019 overview report for this project also reiterates the longstanding emphasis of her research on the political, military and economic brokerage role of chiefs (R1), which has implications for engagement with them by international organisations.

Secondly, Leonardi's research on the role of chiefs in governing land and natural resources has led to new work on local forms of territoriality, boundary disputes and land governance, funded firstly by the international foundation Gerda Henkel Stiftung. A 50,000-word original research report in the RVI Contested Borderlands series (R5) was disseminated at public lectures in South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, London and Washington DC. The findings revealed the rapidly changing value of land and the challenges this poses to customary land governance in South Sudan and northern Uganda, ideas which were further developed in the introduction to a special issue of *Critical African Studies* on 'Valuing Land in Eastern Africa' edited by Leonardi with Adrian Browne. Leonardi's own research focused on the long history of a disputed area of the South Sudan-Uganda border (R5, R6), where she also returned for further research in 2017 as Co-I on an AHRC/ESRC PaCCS Inter-disciplinary Research Innovation on Conflict project on '"Witchcraft" and conflict: Exploring alternative discourses of insecurity'. This body of work challenges prevailing understandings of state territoriality and security, by demonstrating the importance of local, often hybrid, government institutions in asserting territorial boundaries and managing land disputes. A particular cause of such disputes and a driver of change in customary land tenure is urbanisation, which Leonardi has also examined in relation to access to fuelwood around South Sudan's rapidly expanding capital, as Co-I on the ESRC/DfID Development Frontiers project 'Energy on the Move' (2017-18).

## 3. References to the research

Evidence of quality: R1-R4 research was funded by an AHRB studentship, a Leverhulme research grant (PI J. Willis), a Leverhulme Research Fellowship, a BA small grant (PI Leonardi) and research consultancies with the UN Development Programme and the US Institute of Peace. R5-R6 were funded by a Gerda Henkel Stiftung grant (PI Leonardi), ESRC Impact Acceleration Award (PI Leonardi) and AHRC/ESRC PaCCS grant (PI J. Fisher). R1, double-weighted in REF2014, has been described as 'masterful' (*Governance in Africa*) and as 'one of the most significant contributions to the study of South Sudan and to the broader scholarship on state-society relations in Africa' (*African Studies Review*).

R1. **Leonardi, C.** (2013) *Dealing with Government in South Sudan: histories of chiefship, community and state* (Woodbridge, James Currey).

R2. **Leonardi, C.** (2013) 'South Sudanese Arabic and the negotiation of the local state, c.1840-2011', *Journal of African History* 54:3, pp. 351-372. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853713000741. Submitted in REF2014.

R3. **Leonardi, C.** (2015) 'Points of order? Local government meetings as negotiation tables in South Sudan', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9, pp. 650-668. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2015.1105440.

R4. **Leonardi, C.**, Moro, L. N., Santschi, M. & Isser, D. (2010). *Local Justice in Southern Sudan*. Washington D.C., US Institute of Peace and the Rift Valley Institute. Commissioned and funded by USIP with Leonardi as lead researcher and report writer.

R5. **Leonardi, C.** & Santschi, Martina (2016). *Dividing Communities in South Sudan and Northern Uganda: boundary disputes and land governance*. Rift Valley Institute.

R6. **Leonardi, C.** (2020) 'Patchwork states: the localisation of state territoriality on the South Sudan-Uganda border, 1914-2014', *Past & Present* 248, pp. 209-258. https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtz052

## 4. Details of the impact
## 1. Influence on internationally-funded projects in South Sudan:
a) EU-funded Access to Justice in South Sudan project implemented by the British Council, supporting capacity-building work with chiefs' courts, which are the primary local judicial

institutions in South Sudan. Leonardi has acted as expert advisor to the project since 2013, playing a key role in shaping its focus, approach and research methods. Her research findings on chiefs' courts are cited in project presentations to donors and were summarised in planning documents which ██████████████████████████████████████████████████ (E1) By mid-2020, the project had engaged with 45 customary courts, involving approximately 700 chiefs, 100 court clerks, and 1,600 community representatives. Approximately 2,800 customary court cases had been observed in the courts (E1). Leonardi was approached again in 2020 to advise on 'legacy' strategies for archiving, analysing and publishing the wealth of court data gathered, and she will review written outputs in 2021.

b) Swiss-funded South Sudan Customary Authorities project (2015-present) implemented by the Rift Valley Institute (RVI). The project cited Leonardi's research in a Phase III project proposal in 2016 and employed her as a consultant between 2018 and 2019. She gave a public lecture at the Catholic University in Juba during a forum bringing together chiefs and youth in June 2018, and provided input to a project review in early 2019. She produced an overview report, *Making Order out of Disorder: Customary Authority in South Sudan*, which drew on her own research and synthesised a series of research outputs from the project, most of which also cited her work on the nature of chiefly authority. ████████████████████████████████████████████████████████████████████████████████████████████ (E2).

## 2. Increasing awareness of South Sudanese cultural heritage:

Leonardi's research on the violent and extractive nature of early commercial and imperial encounters, combined with Zoe Cormack's research on South Sudanese material culture and museum collections, generated the AHRC-funded South Sudan Museum Network to explore the history and value of objects taken from the region to Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This network brought together museum curators from across Europe for the first time to consider the connections and significance of their holdings from South Sudan, resulting in a new inventory of these collections and a forthcoming open-access, illustrated publication highlighting key objects. The network workshops enabled South Sudanese participants to explain and debate the contentious histories of museum objects and displays.

According to the network partner, the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM), the meetings enabled its curatorial staff 'to engage closely with colleagues from all over Europe on collections and their stake holder communities, and facilitated many follow up communications and research directions. The network was vital in establishing a further network of South Sudanese Diaspora members living in the UK, who were invited to come to the PRM in November 2018 to view collections and take part in a film training course. As part of this course, the

community group made a film which summarized their feelings about museum collections for the diaspora community, 'Exploring our South Sudanese Identity at the Pitt Rivers Museum'. Dr Zoe Cormack, the network's Co-I, took a lead role in this work as a current Research Affiliate of the Museum. The diaspora group's visit was timed to coincide with another initiative that arose directly from the AHRC network's activity, being a Mellon Foundation funded Global South Visiting Professorship at the University of Oxford in 2018 for Jok Madut Jok, one of the network's participants. This successful set of initiatives led to a further Diaspora group visit to the PRM in Feb 2020, with an expanded number of community participants from different parts of the UK. The network and its ongoing impact have therefore been instrumental in fostering and developing a range of museum-community relations both in South Sudan and in the UK (E3).

Another network member also initiated the relabeling of objects in the British Museum catalogue from 'Sudanese' to 'South Sudanese'. The final workshop held in collaboration with UNESCO in Juba, South Sudan, raised awareness of the European collections among South Sudanese government, heritage and arts and culture personnel, as well as providing a forum to debate the future of museums in the new country. It led to further work by Cormack and a key network participant advising UNESCO over a potential World Heritage Site in South Sudan. The network website disseminates information and resources, with a total of 7,156 views between 2017 and 2020, and 1,412 Twitter followers.

**3. Informing UK government and other international policy-making on governance and boundary issues in South Sudan:**

Leonardi's research and expertise has been cited and consulted by UK and other international agencies, policy-makers and practitioners, through a range of dissemination and advisory channels. While it is difficult to demonstrate specific policy change as a result, there is considerable evidence of key contributions to the information base used by policy-makers. Leonardi's publications are cited in many policy reports and briefs. For example, a special feature on South Sudan in the ODI publication *Humanitarian Exchange* included a call for international actors to 'fundamentally rethink our timeframes' and spend more time understanding South Sudanese institutions: 'on the subject of chieftainship and customary authority, Cherry Leonardi's book… is particularly helpful.' In 2019 Leonardi was invited to discuss her research findings on local governance and conflict with the UN South Sudan Joint Mission Analysis Centre (E4).

The Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility for South Sudan, funded jointly by the UK, Switzerland, Canada and the Netherlands and implemented by Saferworld and swisspeace, also includes Leonardi's publications in its repository and monthly briefings, and cites them in several of its own policy briefs on governance, housing, land and property and conflict sensitivity guidance. The swisspeace focal point working on the CSRF regularly refers to Leonardi's work in briefings and presentations to donors and policy-makers (E5).

Leonardi's research is cited in a draft report on South Sudan's contested internal state boundaries for the United States Institute of Peace and Rift Valley Institute. ███████████
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Leonardi's work was also used in an internal FCO brief on South Sudan's internal boundaries, and she contributed to a workshop and the writing of a publication on decentralisation and internal boundaries by the Overseas Development Institute (2016), which has been heavily used by the FCO and DfID. ████████████████████████
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Work on security in the South Sudan-Uganda borderlands with J. Fisher resulted in a workshop in Uganda, organised jointly with the International Refugee Rights Initiative in 2018, to discuss the South Sudanese refugee influx into Uganda. This informed a joint submission to the UK parliamentary inquiry into forced displacement in Africa: the final report cited the submission in relation to gender issues in refugee settlements and the need to engage local community organisations and traditional leaders in refugee response (E8).

Work on borderlands also led to contributions to a report by the Governance and Social Development Research Centre, University of Birmingham, to help DfID prepare for an Ebola outbreak in South Sudan and an advisory group and workshop at the Wellcome Trust in 2019 for the Social Science in Humanitarian Action Platform (SSHAP) work on the Ebola outbreak in DRC. She subsequently provided feedback on an SSHAP brief on cross-border dynamics between South Sudan and DRC, in which her work on borders was also cited (E9).

Leonardi and Browne's 'Introduction: Valuing Land in Eastern Africa' (*Critical African Studies*), drawing on Leonardi & Santschi's research (R5, R6), was used by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors Land and Resources Global Group, whose director attests it was 'a good counterbalance to the more overt market orientated worldview of the valuation and surveying profession and has helped raise important issues of communal value and social cohesion'. It will inform the preparation of a Manual for the "Valuation of Unregistered Lands and Informal Property" by the UN-Habitat Global Land Tool Network, for which Leonardi was invited to join the expert review group, and which 'could have enormous repercussions in the acquiring of communal land and property for public and investment use' (E10).

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

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E2. ███████████████████████████████████████████
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E3. Statement from Pitt Rivers Museum Head of Curatorial, Research & Teaching; network workshop reports, object inventory, screenshots showing website traffic and Twitter followers.

E4. 'A 'call to peacebuilding'' F. Carver, *Humanitarian Exchange* 68, 2017; *Policy Brief South Sudan: Working with local institutions to improve the provision of justice*, Van Vollenhoven Institute (2016); B Braak, *Exploring Primary Justice in South Sudan*, Cordaid (2016); C Copeland, *Dancing in the Dark: Divergent approaches to improving security and justice in South Sudan* (Clingendael 2015).

E5. CSRF, *Governance in South Sudan* (2018); *Housing, Land and Property, Aid and Conflict in South Sudan* (2018); *Contextualised conflict sensitivity guidance for South Sudan* (2017); *Findings around conflict sensitivity and food aid in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal* (2017); Peter Justin, *Blog: Treading a fine line: Aid agencies and local government in South Sudan* (2019).

E6. ████████████████████████████████████

E7. *Considering the state: perspectives on South Sudan's subdivision and federalism debate* edited by M. Schomerus and L. Aalen (ODI &CMI 2016); ███████████████████████
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E8. UK House of Commons International Development Committee, *Forced Displacement in Africa: 'Anchors not Walls'* (2019)

E9. ████████████████████████████████████████████ SSHAP Brief on cross-border dynamics between South Sudan and DRC in the context of Ebola (2019).

E10. Statement from the Director of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors Land and Resources Global Group.