

Institution: King's College London		
Unit of Assessment: 28 History		
Title of case study: Moving Beyond Slavery in Teaching West African History: Agency and Global Impact		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010–2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Toby Green	Professor in History	From 2010
Dr Vincent Hiribarren	Senior Lecturer in History	From 2013
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

Research by Green and Hiribarren has led them to shape new narratives and educational frameworks that have been widely adopted to recast the teaching of West African history. Their new research has enabled:

- the expansion of secondary school teacher engagement with the significance of West African history in the UK and in West Africa, moving beyond narratives of slavery and victimisation; and
- the creation of adaptable resources for researching and teaching African history in Africa and the UK.

It has done so via:

- building digital archives, open-access pedagogical materials, and accessible writing; and
- creating teaching fora and tailored tools, including a new OCR-accredited A-level module for UK students and a flexible, co-produced and freely available History syllabus for English-speaking West African teachers.

Both in Africa and Britain, their work has reshaped pedagogical approaches to the history of West Africa, moving away from older narratives of slavery and colonialism to create a better understanding of the region, its politics and its peoples.

2. Underpinning research

Redefining narratives of West African history

In a variety of ways, the work of Green and Hiribarren has redefined the historical study of West Africa, moving beyond narratives of slavery and victimisation, which stress the rupture of European colonialism, towards stories of agency, adaptation, survival and longevity.

One key claim has been arguing for the role and brokerage of West Africa in the development of the Atlantic World. Green's monograph on early African–European relations [1] showed the connections between pre-colonial trans-Saharan trade networks and social structures and those that were established in the era of the early trans-Atlantic slave trade, demonstrating for the first time the influence of African societies in early global social formations. It also revealed the importance of early West African commercial and social practices in creating mixed societies in the first generations of the colonial Americas. Green's edited book [2] established the range of trades in pre-colonial Western Africa, while his multiple award-winning book *A Fistful of Shells* [3] took these arguments further still, examining the structure of pre-colonial Africa through the lens of monetary and cultural exchanges instead of slavery.

The other central research strand challenges imperially-defined periodisations from the perspective of modern history. These periodisations reinforce a radical caesura between pre- and post-colonial practices. By contrast, Hiribarren's work on borderlands in West African history was the first to link the historical study of space with that of state administration in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Africa. Because of its *longue durée* approach exploring the heartland of the Kanuri-speaking royal empire, Hiribarren's first book [4] (which was nominated for the RHS

Impact case study (REF3)

Gladstone Prize), depicted Borno as a survivalist state, extremely well-adapted to harsh conditions and powerful rivals, drawing on a rich archival assemblage and including recently released 'migrated archives'. Hiribarren's redefinition of Borno's political and social identities was thus able to stress longevity and the persistence of territorial integrity in contrast to traditional narratives that sharply divide pre- and post-imperial African states, punctuated by slavery, colonial exploitation of resources and the 'scramble for Africa'. Hiribarren's innovative approach, for the first time, provided a truly historical context for, and explanation of, the deep roots of contemporary instability in north-eastern Nigeria. Both Green and Hiribarren's research therefore speaks to the capacity of West African histories to reshape Eurocentric conceptualisations and challenges the historiographical insularity of understandings of globalisation and imperialism.

Digital histories of Africa

Both Green and Hiribarren have also contributed to ongoing scholarly debates about how to reposition North–South dynamics in the academy, particularly focusing on the ways in which African countries are empowered to preserve and write their own histories. Both see digitalisation as a potential tool for such work, though not uncritically so, for they note its potential for further embedding imbalanced power structures.

In a special issue of *History in Africa*, Hiribarren et al offered wider theoretical reflections on the issue of digitalisation and governance in Africa, especially drawing attention to the way in which the digital turn can act as a form of imperialism [5]. They noted that the “*complex of the white saviour*” has morphed into the “*complex of the digital saviour*”, warning against a dismissal of existing non-digital archival work done by Africans, which already suffers from underfunding and an inability to engage with many of the research and technological practices taken for granted by western academics. Their intervention was sceptical about market-driven, private digitalisation projects that rarely take seriously the notion of archives as a public service ensuring accountability and good governance.

Green has also discussed his own experience of collaborating between Northern and Southern institutions and his attempts to ensure that African partners were the ones directing the work [6]. Drawing upon a European Union funded project linking four African and four European universities, he charted the initial phases in which the European universities had drawn up the main research aims and agendas, fostering a sense of disempowerment. The nature of the partnership was, however, transformed through the development of a digital platform (to be launched in Feb 2021) maintained by KCL but run by institutions in Portuguese-speaking Africa (thereby maintaining the paramount importance stressed by Hiribarren [5] and Green [6] of African countries controlling how their histories are told).

For both Green and Hiribarren, there is a strong link between refashioning the conceptual and analytical frameworks for writing the histories of West Africa and reconfiguring the North–South dynamics in the production of teaching materials, the identification and preservation of archival repositories and the presentation of recast histories in classrooms in both the North and South. This has been invaluable for telling the history of West Africa in a way that moves beyond well-worn narratives of slavery and imperial domination, and which has demonstrated the potential to advance both academic debates and to inform and alter school and university teaching practices in Britain, Africa and both North and South America.

3. References to the research

1. Green, T. (2012). *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, 1300–1589*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Green, T. (Ed.) (2012). *Brokers of Change: Atlantic Commerce and Cultures in Precolonial Western Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
3. Green, T. (2019). *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution*. London: Allen Lane; Chicago: Chicago University Press. Shortlisted for the Wolfson History Prize, Cundill History Prize, Fage and Oliver Prize, the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize and the Pius Adesanmi Memorial Award; Winner of the Historical Writers' Association Non-Fiction Crown 2020; Winner of the American Historical Association's Jerry Bentley Prize in World History 2020; Winner of the Nayef Al-Rodhan Prize for Global Cultural Understanding 2019.
4. Hiribarren, V. (2017). *A History of Borno: Trans-Saharan African Empire to Failing Nigerian State*. London: Hurst/Oxford University Press. Nominated for the RHS Gladstone Prize 2018.

Impact case study (REF3)

5. Chamelot, F., Hiribarren, V. and Rodet, M. (2019). Archives, the Digital Turn and Governance in Africa. *History in Africa*, 47, 101–118. doi:10.1017/hia.2019.26.
6. Green, T. (2019). North–South Dynamics in Academia. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 31(3), 280–283. doi:10.1080/13696815.2019.1630263.

4. Details of the impact

The research and its impact in Africa, the Americas and Europe led Green and Hiribarren to develop pathbreaking curricula resources that transformed the pedagogical environment in both West Africa and the UK for the teaching of African history. Impact came through the development of new resources and pedagogical training in both the UK and West Africa: firstly, through the creation of a suite of new resources in the UK at Key Stage (KS) 3 and 5 (A-level) including a free online ebook by Green, *African Kingdoms*; and, secondly, through the creation of a new, free internet-based history textbook [I] for the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASCE), which has formed the part of a major redevelopment of curriculums in the region.

Teaching material at KS3 and KS5

The teaching of African history in UK schools has almost exclusively focused on slavery and victimisation. It was thus extremely difficult for teachers (in secondary classrooms) to deconstruct imperialist imaginaries that construe Africa exclusively through framings of suffering and poverty, rather than approaching African history on its own terms [C]. Through Green's recruitment to and pivotal contribution in the development of the new A-level option, *African Kingdoms*, for the OCR exam board [A], he has played a crucial part in changing the teaching of African history in the UK. At a time when pedagogical and cultural debates are increasingly couched around the legacy of slavery in Britain, Green's work demonstrated the importance and potential of reframing African history in a way that moves beyond such binary, and even reductive narratives, towards understanding West African histories as part of multiple interlinked global histories in which slavery was merely one (albeit significant) facet.

Green's research [1,2,3], which illuminated the commercial and social patterns of early modern Africa and their global importance, was crucial in the development of this new A-level unit that gave students a novel view of African history privileging agency and world historical influence. Green was approached by OCR, through the recommendation of the Royal Historical Society, precisely because of this expertise, and he became the Lead Consultant for the module. The Head of History at the OCR said that the development of *African Kingdoms* would not have been possible without Green's support and suggested that that the syllabus was "*one of the most significant developments to the A Level History landscape, quite possibly for several decades*" [B].

As mentioned, Green wrote an ebook based on his *Fistful of Shells* [3] for use by teachers and school children and created a supporting website to accompany the teaching of this new A-level option [E]. This too proved crucial to the development of the curriculum and informing teaching practices. One teacher described it as an essential resource for "*a base of knowledge*" that "*forces students to challenge their pre-conceptions of the continent of Africa ... I have lost count of the number of times that students have told me that their study of African Kingdoms has enabled them to have a greater understanding of the current situation in African countries today and how they can use this to challenge the views of those around them*" [C].

Green's efforts to support the teaching of African history in schools raised public awareness of the new ideas to key beneficiaries in the teaching profession. These included:

- delivery of plenary lectures on teaching African history in schools at the Schools History Project (SHP) Conference (Leeds Trinity University, July 2017);
- participation in the Historical Association (HA) Teacher Fellowship programme on the teaching the trans-Atlantic slave trade in schools (April 2019) and a plenary lecture to 516 delegates at the November 2020 Zoom Historical Association conference [F]; and
- participation in a panel on Black Lives Matter and education at the October 2020 Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference for Private Schools.

The availability and accessibility of resources for teachers was also facilitated by the delivery of two webinars (attended by 40 teachers), four podcasts through the Historical Association (covering four West African Kingdoms from 1400–1800 and with over 11,147 track plays) [F] and, between April and June 2020, through a series of five free webinars delivered with Professor Trevor Getz of San Francisco State University to over 150 UK history teachers, targeting the teaching of African history at KS3 [D]. Summarising these initiatives, the CEO of the Historical Association (HA)

reflected: *“All these interventions helped to highlight to teachers across the UK that African history should not be taught simply in terms of victimisation and slavery ... [dismantling] preconceptions about what is often regarded as difficult and challenging subject matter, while providing the resources and confidence to ... transform views of Africa among the next generation, ... and develop out their own content drawing upon the resources on the supporting website”* [F].

Feedback from Green’s talk at the 2020 Historical Association virtual conference was extremely positive: *“Green’s session was so helpful, the invaluable resource sharing he did were a true highlight”* and *“Green’s session was also excellent — huge amount of knowledge [was] very accessibly developed.”* [F] Likewise, responses to his HA webinars demonstrated a significant uptake of his ideas among teachers (with 100% of respondents saying they were ‘Very likely’ to ‘use what [they] have learnt in their teaching’). Indeed, many resolved to refashion the way they taught the subject using Green’s resources and books: *“I now have the confidence to teach a short unit on this topic. Since the last webinar I have bought his book and will be using it to inform the teaching of a series of KS3 lessons”*; *“excellent demonstration of resources and suggestions of how to teach the topic. I will be introducing a topic at KS3 on either Benin or Kongo, currently leaning towards Benin. I will use the recommended resources and am looking forward to the follow up seminar to gain more subject knowledge.”* [F]

Such cumulative work has led to a definite step-change in approaches to teaching African history [C,D,E]. Teachers used the new resources to change their own practice and options for teaching African history at both KS3 as well as at A-level, in one case transforming the delivery of history to over 800 students through working through a new scheme of work on Benin following exposure to the resources by Green [C]. Several teachers developed and delivered entirely new schemes of work centred on the resources and cited Green’s research in their materials, as documented on the African Kingdoms website [E]. The feedback from the Teacher Fellowships [F] and webinars [D] shows that this allowed teachers to provide a much richer African contextualisation to the delivery of content at KS3; as one noted *“it gives great opportunity for students to challenge assumptions/misconceptions about African history”* [C]. Thus, new cohorts of students from up to 150 schools from across England, from Croydon to Newbury, benefited from the development of these new resources. The growing popularity of the African Kingdoms curriculum in schools was covered by the *Independent* newspaper, ‘African Kingdoms: Why a growing number of schools are teaching pre-colonial African history for A-levels’ (11 November 2020).

Digital humanities and education: WASSCE option and its wider impact

Hiribarren and Green have also worked together to facilitate the writing of new histories of Africa for use in West African schools. Like the OCR module, the West African Secondary School History (WASSCE) syllabus stressed empowerment and autonomy but concentrated less directly on writing agency into African history and more on allowing people to have control over their own past, enhancing the writing and understanding of history in Africa. This project was, in essence, a practical manifestation of the attempt to challenge the power dynamics within the 21st century academy between institutions in the global North and South [6]. It also aimed to build a digital resource that genuinely contributed to the public good in West Africa and was led by West African scholars, eschewing patronising paternalism [5].

The launch of the OCR A-level resource, including the free *African Kingdoms* ebook, led colleagues in West Africa to ask if something similar could be developed for the West African secondary schools. Hiribarren and Green’s AHRC-project, *From Monograph to Classroom*, drew on their research [3,6] to develop a free internet-based textbook, *History Textbook: West African Senior School Certificate Examination* (2018), thereby providing the first ever widely available, innovative history syllabus across West Africa and replacing obsolete teaching materials dating from the 1960s [I]. The WASSCE textbook team mobilised seven contributing authors (two from Ghana, one each from Gambia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, as well as Green and Hiribarren). The outline for the textbook was co-created by a workshop at the University of Sierra Leone in Freetown (May 2017); curriculum development was shaped in West Africa, as the team of West African authors suggested two new chapters that had not been on the original syllabus, one on Gender history and another on Environmental history. This entirely new and free resource is available for all schoolchildren studying History for the WASSCE exam in English-speaking countries across West Africa and has been used by 208,306 new users between 1 June 2019 and 6 December 2020 [H]. The beneficiaries included history teachers across West Africa (Ghana,

Impact case study (REF3)

Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and The Gambia) and secondary school students in these countries, who used the materials to support their studies on the core General History paper.

The transformations on educational pedagogy and teaching practice were marked. By November 2019, five schools in the Ashanti region in Ghana that had not taught History before commenced as a direct result of the resource's creation [G]. In January 2020, the Secretary of the Ghana History Teachers' Association estimated that 1,223 teachers were using the resource and that *"almost all the popular schools offering history as a subject are using it"* [G]. In The Gambia, the book was being used as a key text in seven senior secondary schools, while in at least 10 others, certain topics like those on empires and the slave trade used it as a key text for teaching [G]. There were also rave reviews of a linked quiz designed for the website (*"superb, it's very emotional and addictive for students"*), which Hiribarren developed in July 2018 as an app available on Android and Apple smartphones [H]. In Nigeria, where History had disappeared entirely from the school curriculum between 2009 and 2018, one teacher described how the resource was leading directly to more students studying History at school and university [J].

This educational impact followed as a direct result of the research and associated activities funded by Green's AHRC Leadership Fellowship and collaborative follow-on funding for Green and Hiribarren, deploying Hiribarren's world-leading expertise in the digital history in Africa.

High-level educational policy development was a priority to ensure that the textbook was adopted by the largest number of teachers and students. The new resource was presented at the West African Education Council (WAEC) at Banjul in March 2018. Green and Hiribarren immersed secondary school teachers in the latest scholarship of and on the continent (Green in Kumasi in March 2018; Green and Hiribarren in Banjul during the WAEC meeting). These meetings were an opportunity to ensure that the production of knowledge on Africa was not one-sided or led by European and North American institutions and academics, but could instead pave the way for a new generation of scholars in Africa.

Further educational impact across West Africa followed. Green and Hiribarren used digital (apps), pedagogical (teaching workshops) and academic (conferences) tools to increase the uptake of the resource and recalibrate agendas in History teaching in West Africa [J]. Their multi-pronged strategy was conceived to be as diverse and inclusive as possible and (supported by Hiribarren's securement of a British Academy grant) resulted in pedagogically-orientated workshops drawing on the textbook in Ghana, Mozambique and Senegal with 65 academics on the continent across three different languages (English, Portuguese and French). Presentation of the textbook findings at academic conferences has also led to well-developed, in-progress conversations for extension of coverage to Mali.

The educational impact of these pedagogical and digital initiatives on curriculums in British and West African schools has been transformational. The educational materials have been used by educators to recast historical narratives about West Africa as presented in national curricula and secondary school classrooms. These initiatives, especially the digital resources, also lay the foundations for further extension and expansion and actively redress already some aspects of the North-South disparity in academia.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

-
- A. Letter from OCR nominating Dr Green to be external consultant.
 - B. Letter from Mike Goddard (OCR History subject lead) on impact of the option.
 - C. Evidence from teachers on Dr Green's influence.
 - D. Feedback from the four webinars building on the OCR option and the materials on the africankingdoms.co.uk website delivered by Dr Green with Professor Trevor Getz of San Francisco State University, April–June 2020.
 - E. *African Kingdoms* website: <https://africankingdoms.co.uk/>.
 - F. Correspondence with the Historical Association.
 - G. Letters from WASSCE collaborators in Ghana and Gambia.
 - H. Statistics, WASSCE website between 23 May 2019 and 6 December 2020 and Quiz app.
 - K. WASSCE History Textbook (2018).
 - J. Letter from secondary history teacher in Nigeria describing the impact in the classroom.