

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Chester		
Unit of Assessment: D25 Area Studies		
Title of case study: <i>Francophone Africa and the Equality Challenge</i> : a digital humanities research and knowledge transfer project		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2001 – 2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Claire Griffiths	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: Sept 2009 – 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: June 2017 – January 2021		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

This project examines the legacy of colonisation on the lives of women in Francophone West Africa and traces reasons for contemporary concerns around rising poverty and falling literacy rates in the region. It conserves and publishes an important series of reports known as the Savineau archive which forms the basis of an interactive online platform www.francophoneafricaarchive.org providing resources on colonial and post-colonial history, social structures, cultural diversity and educational policies. These materials respond to a need to de-centre pedagogical practices and public perceptions of the francophone world. They have broadened the content and design of key stage 3 lessons in preparation for 'A' level.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Professor Griffiths' interdisciplinary research into Francophone Africa spans two decades. Its overarching aim is to analyse what makes such spaces politically and culturally unique within the broader context of the postcolonial French-speaking world. Her research examines rising poverty levels and falling literacy rates in Francophone West Africa and questions the underlying causes and potential opportunities to reverse these trends.

Research for the project has been conducted through a three-stage programme involving a) archival research; b) in-country fieldwork; c) data analysis.

Archival research conducted by Griffiths at the French national archives (Paris), the French colonial archives (Aix-en-Provence), the national archives of Senegal (Dakar), Gabon (Libreville) and Niger (Niamey), generated new knowledge on the policy making infrastructure and culture inherited from the French colonial administration (1895-1960) that continue to influence the development landscape in Francophone Africa today (references a, b, e).

Most notable among her archival results was the discovery of a unique set of colonial reports on the impact of colonisation on African women and families in interwar French West Africa. Published on the eve of World War II and subsequently shelved by the incoming Vichy regime, these ground-breaking reports lay unread for sixty years. Rediscovered by the chief archivist of Senegal's National Archives at the end of the 20th century, they were reviewed by Professor Griffiths who initiated the conservation of the disintegrating archive as a photocopy and then as a digitised version of around 1000 pages of reports and correspondence. The complete archive is now accessible on the project's digital platform www.francophoneafricaarchive.org alongside translations into English. This is the only open access digital version of the complete archive in the world.

Publications highlighting the importance of the archive to our understanding of development challenges in this region have been produced in English and French including a book-length publication of the overview report, *La Famille en AOF: Condition de la Femme par Denise Savineau* (reference b).

Impact case study (REF3)

Fieldwork: In addition to testing the hypotheses generated by archival and desk research that cultural and structural constraints have crossed from colonial to postcolonial policy, the fieldwork addresses gaps in published scholarship from the global North by integrating high quality unpublished research findings from leading Africa scholars (references c and d).

Data analysis. Griffiths' monograph *Globalizing the Postcolony: gender and development in francophone Africa* (output c) examines contemporary thinking around gender and development in Africa, looking specifically at how current approaches are informed by the history of gender politics in the region from pre-colonial to postcolonial times. It concludes that the efficacy of standardised, universal development policies in French West Africa is entirely dependent on the unique historical and cultural contexts in which they are implemented. In another recent article (output f) Griffiths demonstrates the potential impact of gender theory on policy-making for human development and gender justice across the former French African empire.

Reviews of publications from the project described it as a 'triumph of detailed and sound research...impeccably reasoned and convincing...a wonderful resource for anyone interested in issues concerning gender and development (Prof. I. d'Almeida, University of Arizona), 'timely and meticulously researched...Professor Griffiths has provided an invaluable service to policymakers and students of Francophone Africa' (Prof P.-P. Fraiture, University of Warwick).

The research has received two AHRC awards, two Nuffield Foundation awards, two Sir Philip Reckitt travel grants and a Global Challenges Research Fund award.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- a. 2006. *Colonial Subjects: gender and race in French West Africa*, International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, special double issue, 26, (11/12): 449-594.
- b. 2007. *La Famille en AOF: Condition de la Femme par Denise Savineau*. Paris : Editions l'Harmattan.
- c. 2011. *Globalizing the Postcolony : gender and development in francophone Africa*. Lanham, MD.: Lexington.
- d. 2013. *Contesting Historical Divides in Francophone Africa*. Editor. Chester: University of Chester Press.
- e. 2013. 'Engendering Humanism in French West Africa: patriarchy and the paradox of empire', International Journal of African Historical Studies, 46 (3): 353-372
- f. 2018. 'Gender and Generations: exploring gender at the frontier of the colony', *Chronica Mundi*, 13 (1): 155-171

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The objective of the project was to inform and shape public knowledge of the French-speaking countries of West and Central Africa (the former French African colonies) with a view to enhancing understanding of the historic challenges that stand in the way of eliminating poverty and illiteracy in the sub-regions and developing more informed and sustainable responses.

The traceable impact of the research is channelled through face-to-face events backed up by digital resources to encourage further engagement, comment and reflection on the project's platform www.francophoneafricaarchive.org

This multi-page interactive open access site incorporates archives, data, research project summaries and findings, UK national curriculum teaching resources for presenting the French speaking world (language, history, geography), activities for younger learners and materials of interest to individuals, community groups and academic and professional associations.

Key targets for impact are:

- 1) Schools
- 2) Scholars and researchers
- 3) Civil society
- 4) Policy-makers and development professionals

1) Schools

To date the project has focused on providing teaching materials that meet the new curriculum requirements for AS and A level French introduced in English schools in September 2017. These require teachers to introduce students to French-speaking cultures beyond France. Teacher education events delivered in the University's Faculty of Education and Children's Services enabled 58 teachers and trainee teachers to explore materials on the project platform. This led to the resources being trialled and taught in French classes. Events were held in June 2017, December 2017, December 2018, July 2019 and December 2019. Participants shared lesson plans and comments on materials on designated sections of the website which was praised as 'very accessible', 'excellent' and another noted *'the information will be very useful in explaining the cultural impact of France abroad and how post-imperial Africa has retained such strong ties with France'*, another concluded *'I will definitely use the context in language classes and some of the audio-visual material as a base for language teaching'*.

2) Scholarship and Research

The unique collection of archives on the impact of colonisation on women and families, known as the Savineau Report, is now being used around the world for teaching and research. As the archival resources on the digital platform are open access and presented in user-friendly and annotated forms, it is rare for users to contact the project director directly. However, the platform has recorded over 5000 visits to the conserved material between July 2018 and July 2019. Comments appear in the ThinkSpace from global users and researchers who do make contact include postgraduate students from Lyon 11, Harvard, Chicago and Portsmouth using the materials for their PhDs, and scholars including Marie-Paule Ha in Hong Kong University and Tony Chafer at Portsmouth integrating resources into their research and/or teaching.

Three scholarly training events about the project and the site have been delivered by the project director to the University of London PhD training series (8/12/18), the University of London Senate House Library (16/11/18) and the national institute of Modern Languages Research (7/6/17).

Participants provided feedback on the site regarding its usefulness as *'a wonderful resource'* highlighting the *'usefulness of cross curricular links in teaching MFL'*. The platform was also presented to Africa scholars at Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, Senegal in November 2019.

3) Civil society

Impact on civil society is delivered through interactions with:

- African opinion makers (academics, writers, artists, journalists, community activists);
- Audiences in the global North (UK, Europe and USA) – Civil society organisations.

Insights gained from meetings with critics, analysts and activists in four countries of Francophone West Africa over a period of 15 years have been integrated into a series of public lectures including:

2017-19 – Annual lecture delivered for the University Centre Shrewsbury public lecture series

2018 – *Migration: a story of two artists* Round table chair and presenter, Gallery of African Art, London

2018 – *Gendered Pasts and Gendered Futures: a French African Experience* public lecture University of Arizona, USA.

Impact case study (REF3)

Regarding civil society organisations, we aim at establishing an agreement with *African Voices Forum* to provide online visual and textual resources for their educational activities.

4) Policy makers and Development professionals

The project's findings and the challenges facing gender and development in Francophone Africa were foregrounded to Ministers of State, presidential advisers, heads of government services and UN agencies and diplomatic missions in West and central French-speaking Africa over the space of forty meetings.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Feedback from teacher training events (30 survey responses)
2. The website platform has been visited 5,080 times by 1,804 visitors (highest number from USA followed by France) as of 1/07/19 <https://www.francophoneafricaarchive.org/>
3. Feedback from University Centre Shrewsbury public lectures (12 responses)
4. Public impact comments from 2018 Gallery of African Art event (20 responses)
5. Government of Mali website (screenshots)
6. Twitter @FArchive
7. Blog comments on website ThinkSpace (5 comments)