



Africa's Pasts in Africa's Future: A Conference Honouring John Lonsdale

Centre of African Studies, Cambridge

Room SG1, Alison Richard Building, 7 West Road, Cambridge, CB3 9DP

This conference will draw together leading scholars and students of African history to discuss the major themes pursued by the distinguished Cambridge historian John Lonsdale. The study of political accountability has never been more urgent, for increasingly authoritarian states in Africa (and in the global North) are closing down space for protest. What resources can history furnish to contemporary political activists in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa?

Programme

Thursday 21 May 2026

17:00

The Audrey Richards Annual Lecture in African Studies

Professor John Lonsdale

'Self-Mastery: Jomo Kenyatta and State Free African Political Thought'

At the Winstanley Lecture Theatre, Trinity College, Cambridge, CB2 1TQ

Friday 22 May 2026

08:30

Opening remarks

Devon Curtis

Derek Peterson

09:00

Panel I: Professor Lonsdale's Toolbox

Emma Hunter, 'Political Accountability and the Intellectual History of Democracy in Tanzania'

Parker Shipton, 'Separate Societies, Cultural Continuities? Ordinal Dimensions in Social Relations'

Jon Earle, 'Self-Masteries and Political Violence in Late Colonial Buganda'

Shane Doyle and Yvan Droz, 'Bridewealth, In-laws, and Self-Mastery'

Discussant: Megan Vaughan

10:45 Coffee break

11:30 **Keynote Lecture**

Kenneth Ombongi, Chair, Department of History, University of Nairobi

'Land, Blood, and Belonging: Rethinking the Moral Foundations of Statecraft in Kenya'

12:45 Lunch

2:00 **Panel II: Telling Biographies**

Dan Branch, 'Tom Mboya, Civic Virtue, and Kenya's Politics of Ethnicity, 1957-69'

Nicholas Githuku, 'The Power/Knowledge Nexus and Resistance: discursive consciousness and technologies of the self—the case of Jomo Kenyatta'

Bodil Folke Frederiksen, 'Jomo Kenyatta and Denmark'

Ethan Sanders, 'Africa's Past in Our Future: writing African political biography for global audiences'

Aidan Russell, 'What to do with times of failure: Rwanda's 1960s exile militants and the moral of the story'

Discussant: Saul Dubow

Saturday 23 May 2026

09:00 **Panel III: The Longer History of Mau Mau**

H. Muoki Mbunga, 'In Defence of Komerera: a revisionist account of the scapegoat in Mau Mau histories'

Julie MacArthur, "'In the Forest, There was No Husband or Wife": Remaking Community, Gender, and Moral Economies in the Kenya Land Freedom Army'

Dave Anderson, 'Before and After Hola: the deeper history of a colonial massacre, 1957-1969'

Niels Boender, 'Moral Ethnicity after Mau Mau: Reconciliation and Local Politics in Kenyatta's Kenya'

Discussant: Derek Peterson (and Luise White, in absentia)

10:45 Coffee break

11:15 Panel IV: **Infrastructures**

Paul Ocobock, 'Coffee Root Rot: Debt and Development in Depression-Era Kenya'

Florence Brisset-Foucault, 'Lonsdale and the State: the construction and the formation of the State through the study of village identity papers in Uganda'

George Roberts, 'Financialisation and the making of Kenya's contemporary political economy, 1973–2000'

Discussant: Preben Kaarsholm

1:15 Lunch

2:30 Panel V: **History and Politics in Kenya**

Inge Brinkman, 'Gikuyu Ng'ano and the Making of National Culture: storytelling in Kenya's post-colonial politics and education, 1960s-1990s

Kate Luongo, 'Lawyering Against Injustice: legal mobilization in late twentieth-century Kenya'

Paul Njoroge Muiro, 'Taking God Too Far? Kikuyu religious thought and the June 2024 GenZ protests in Kenya'

Prince Guma, 'Resisting Closure: subaltern politics, logics, and legacies of Kenya's GenZ protests'

Discussant: Fred Cooper