



## In this Issue

16TH SEPT 2024

### In the News

#### New CHRC Bulletin Design

We are excited to launch a new look for the CHRC Bulletin. We welcome a few new sections, including the Member Spotlight, and the CHRC Calendar. The re-design also involves more digital interactivity, with clickable links and soon-to-come cataloging on the magazine website ISSU. We hope you like the new look for the bulletin and find it refreshing and easier to read!

### Cover Story

#### Venezuelan Protests and the 'Power' of Statues after the 2024 Presidential Elections

On 29 July 2024, the day after Venezuela's controversial presidential elections, the country was shaken by a wave of outrage and massive protests which included the toppling of various statues of late president Hugo Chavez.

In this cover story, Oliver Antczak and Fidel Rodríguez Velásquez discuss the spiritual power popularly interpreted to be inside the statues.

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Cover photo: Screenshot from a video shot in Falcon, Venezuela, 29th of July 2024, credit redacted for author safety.



## CHRC Calendar

- **Legacies in/of Place: Exploring sense of place in relation to Heritage reconstruction and community resilience Workshop** - 25th to the 26th of September at the McDonald Institute
- **Michaelmas term begins** - 8th of October to the 6th of December 2024

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## Member Spotlight

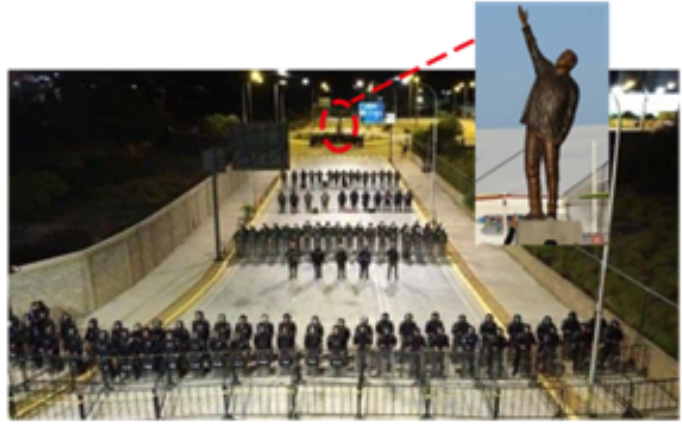
**Stanley Onyemechalu**  
*CHRC Graduate Member*



S. Onyemechalu, 2024

Stanley Onyemechalu, a graduate member of the CHRC, participated in the 2024 UK African Studies Association (ASA-UK) biennial conference at Oxford Brookes University, where he co-convened – alongside Rose Miyonga (University of Warwick) – a panel titled ‘Post-Conflict Heritage in Africa: Debates Challenges and Opportunities’. The panel brought together multidisciplinary contributions on past conflicts in conversation with recent (and ongoing) conflicts from across the African continent, which shed light on a range of theoretical and empirical perspectives on the conflict-heritage research on the continent. Across two sessions of four presentations each, the papers from Kenya, Libya, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe addressed several themes ranging from post-conflict identity (re)formation, transitional justice, post-conflict heritage reconstruction, ‘liberation heritage’, trauma and ‘healing’, to (in)tangible forms of memorialisation and commemoration, dissident memories, and inter-generational memory. Stanley also presented another paper as part of the ‘Revising Biafra’ stream organised by Dr. Louisa Egbunike (Durham University).





Left: Iconic photograph of Chavez's statue in Falcon state being brought down on the morning of the 29th of July, 2024 (credit redacted for author safety). Right: Six rows of military police protect Chavez's statue in Margarita on the 29th of July, 2024 (PNB, 2024) with an inset of the statue on its inauguration day (Bloomberg, 2016).

## Venezuelan Protests and the 'Power' of Statues after the 2024 Presidential Elections

**Oliver Antczak**, *University of Cambridge*

**Fidel Rodríguez Velásquez**, *Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro*

On 29 July 2024, the day after Venezuela's controversial presidential elections, marked by claims of electoral fraud that declared Nicolás Maduro the winner, the country was shaken by a wave of outrage and massive protests. Thousands of Venezuelans, exhausted by repression, economic hardship, and lack of freedoms, took to the streets in demonstrations that captured global attention. The two images above open a window into the connections between power, heritage, and politics in Venezuela. The first image shows the toppling and destruction of the statue of the late President Hugo Chávez, located in the state of Falcón, a fate shared by six other statues of Chávez in the states of Táchira, Aragua, La Guaira, Yaracuy, and Zulia. These acts of statue-toppling could be seen as a form of open resistance and rejection of the ruling regime. In contrast, the second image shows what is likely the only remaining statue of the late president: the statue located on the island of Margarita. After several failed attempts to bring it down, its survival and protection are representative of the repressive military power that keeps the government in place. These statues are being debated on social media, where they are associated with "Brujería" (Witchcraft), a dismissive term broadly used to describe religions of African and Indigenous origin, such as Santería, that engage with aché (energy), and Orishas (spirits) believed to be guarding various sites and monuments.

Both the statues that were torn down and the one that remained standing sparked a vigorous debate in the Venezuelan public sphere, especially on social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram, which have endured as some of the few avenues for expression after years of repression against traditional media outlets.



In this context, the authors Fidel and Oliver conducted participant observation, gathering impressions and discourse surrounding the toppling of statues. These posts were recorded, translated from Spanish and organised thematically to form an understanding of the prevailing popular opinions and reactions to these events. X is a fitting platform for collecting such data, as it remains one of the main venues for political communication in the country (alongside WhatsApp and Facebook groups), and its influence on politics became so significant in the week following the election, Maduro imposed a nationwide ban on the social media site.

As videos began appearing on social media of rows of soldiers protecting the “last” statue in Margarita (Figure 1 Right), one poster wrote “This is the one with the most witchcraft, that's why they protect it so much. Because if it falls, Maduro falls immediately.” Another poster mentioned that the statue in Margarita was “—the most guarded: so, it is probably one of the cornerstones of his [Maduro's] ‘protection’ (shrug emoji).” Another post in reaction (with hundreds of thousands of views) claimed, “Folks, it's time we had THE conversation. All the statues and monuments of Chavez and their reinterpretation of Simon Bolivar are intentional/have a job on top of it/have witchcraft set on them/are ritualistic/whatever you want to call it.” Referring to Maduro, another poster claimed, “—given the mental state and tiredness seen in him recently I consider that if that statue does not affect him in an energetic/spiritual sense it would in a psychological one.”

Counternarratives coexisted in the same space, notably one post with a clown emoji that followed the message: “Study so that they don't make you believe that protecting a statue is the same as protecting your nation.” Another comment said, “—it is not witchcraft, it is what it represents symbolically.” Even if some denied the spiritual power of the statues, the knowledge that others believed in them made them important to bring down. For example, one poster said “The truth is that I don't believe in these things. However, at this point, everything that can add to the downfall of those bastards is welcome. All those statues have to be taken down, besides, they fervently believe in that, Tareck said they were sacred for a reason...”

The attack on statues is neither a recent phenomenon nor exclusive to Venezuela. In the past decade, we have witnessed at least three major currents that have led to the toppling, vandalism, and removal of statues, often accompanied by intense public debate, as seen in Venezuela. These could be categorised as: 1) those related to political regime changes, for example during the Arab Spring, 2) those driven by social movements seeking racial justice, for example, Edward Colston's statue, and others in the UK as explored in the 2020 CHRC Project “Recording Decisions and Actions connected with Claims for the Removal/Protection of Statues in UK Civic Spaces during the Summer of 2020”, and 3) those condemning symbols associated with European colonisation, including Chavez's supporters toppling Columbus' statue in Caracas in 2004. In Venezuela, reactions to recent statue topplings resonate with these global movements.





# Cover Story

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One user commented, "The statue of Chávez in Margarita is a provocation; it must come down. Remember Saddam Hussein's." Another post drew a parallel between the recent iconic image (Figure 1 Left) and a similar event that coincided in Bangladesh. However, what particularly stands out in Venezuela's case is how the power of these statues is understood within a spiritual realm, especially through engagement with Afro-Indigenous beliefs such as Santería. The power of these statues is understood by many as a real spiritual force, carrying agency and protecting the regime.

This research dialogues with previous and ongoing research at the CHRC, including a central theme of contested monuments and memory that crisscrosses projects including those by [Dr Dacia Viejo Rose](#), [Prof Marie Louise Stig Sørensen](#), [Dr Margaret Comer](#) and [Stanley Jachike Onyemechalu](#), to name a few. We are continuing to research this and will have more findings to share. If you're interested, please reach out to us; otherwise, you will be able to read more in an academic paper we are currently developing on the subject.



## ICRI Biennial Conference - Conservation: Approaches to Sustainability

10th October 2024

ICRI's biennial conference, Conservation: Approaches to Sustainability, will be held on Thursday, 10th October 2024, at ULSTER MUSEUM, BELFAST. The conference is a hybrid event that will gather professionals, stakeholders, and experts from the field to discuss the latest trends, innovations, and challenges in working towards sustainability.

Registration is now open.

[Learn More](#)

## 2nd Culture & Mental Health Conference: Refugees

28-29 November 2024

The second Culture & Mental Health international conference will take place in Ghent, Belgium on 28 and 29 November 2024. This conference seeks to promote learning, discussion and debate around cultural interventions aimed at improving the wellbeing of people recovering from mental health difficulties or people in vulnerable situations. The focus of this edition is on supporting the mental wellbeing of forcibly displaced people through art and culture.

In a report in 2022 the EU and WHO [call for support](#) for the mental wellbeing of forcibly displaced people through art and culture : "People displaced because of natural disasters, persecution, conflict, generalised violence or human rights violations invariably experience significant loss, physical hardships and other stressors that can lead to psychological distress. A large body of evidence shows how forcibly displaced people contribute positively to society. This potential can be further enhanced by ensuring that they are in good physical and mental health. Therefore, according to the report, it is important to support the arts, as investing in the field is an investment in the mental, physical and social health of forcibly displaced people."

This conference wants to bring together individuals from the public, academic, third sector and voluntary sectors, to share experiences, practices and knowledge about the importance and impact of the arts, reading, heritage and creativity on improving mental health, wellbeing and resilience of refugees.

[Learn More](#)





## The World in Florence International Festival of Diversity of Cultural Expression: Community and Heritage

11-13th November 2024

What is heritage without the community that produced it, cares for it and keeps it alive and unique? What dynamics arise between communities and their heritage or between foreign communities and local heritage? What effect and economic impact does heritage have on a community? The fourth annual The World in Florence – International Festival of Diversity of Cultural Expression (#TWIF2024) will take place both in person at the Auditorium al Duomo in Florence and online from 11 to 13 November 2024 and will offer a range of opportunities for meetings and reflections on the complexity of heritage relationships, which have sometimes become – or been made – difficult, been unacknowledged or even been destroyed by conflict or climate change. Whatever their history, these are identity issues that shape people's relationships with their respective communities, with foreign communities, with migrants or travellers, with the natural environment and with the cultural products of the past.

[Learn More](#)

## Museums Association Conference 2024: The Joy of Museums

12-14 November 2024

This year's conference is celebrating the innovation, inventiveness and creativity that make our museums such incredible places. We face many challenges as a sector and society, yet museums continue to deliver transformative experiences that have a deep and lasting impact on people's lives. Our work with our communities is more important than ever – and it is worth celebrating and advocating for.

Whether it is our engaging learning programmes, inspiring exhibitions or innovative community engagement projects, we are committed to offering inclusive, welcoming and engaging spaces. Conference looks at how the sector continues to innovate, working closely with communities to use our collections to tell new stories, developing productive partnerships and embracing the opportunities created by new technology. We explore how museums of all types and sizes are having a real impact on society, improving health and wellbeing, creating better places to live and work and offering spaces for debate and reflection. We discuss the importance of ethics – and how values such as inclusivity, equity and social justice bring communities together at a time of increasing intolerance and division, and we'll explore how museums at the heart of their communities can help people to better understand themselves and others.

[Learn More](#)





# Opportunities

## 2025-2026 Getty Graduate Internship program

4th November 2024

**Getty Conservation Institute**, Stipend: \$47,500 (Full Time, 12 months)

Graduate internships at Getty are open to applicants of all nationalities who are either currently enrolled in a graduate program (Master's or Ph.D.) or graduate conservation certificate.

Includes \$1,500 towards relocation expenses (if coming from outside the Los Angeles area), and up to \$2,500 to support research travel. Individuals from groups underrepresented across the fields of art history, conservation, and museums are encouraged to apply.

[Learn More](#)

## Assistant Heritage Consultant

October 2024

**Purcell** - Cambridge (Full Time, Fixed-Term/Contract)

We are looking for a dedicated Assistant Heritage Consultant to join our Cambridge studio team. We are seeking candidates who can work as part of a regional team and support project work by carrying out research, site visits and report writing. Work will be mostly within the region although some longer distance travel and overnight stays may be occasionally necessary.

[Learn More](#)

## Christmas Experience Volunteer (House) – Wimpole Estate

22nd November 2024 - 1st January 2025

**Wimpole Estate**. Voluntary role, travel expenses paid

We are looking for volunteers to help us offer our visitors a wonderful Christmas experience in the House from 22nd November 2024 to 1st January 2025. Would suit friendly people looking to gain experience of working in an historic environment and learn to new skills to enhance their CV. You would also be joining Europe's largest conservation charity and becoming part of a varied and enthusiastic team. Your role is to

- create a warm welcome for everyone who visits and give them reasons to return
- help create a festive atmosphere
- respond to the different needs of different visitors, including people with additional access needs
- help us keep an eye on the rooms and objects we look after
- support with health and safety and evacuation procedures if required

Hours: 10.30am to 3.30pm – we strongly recommend committing to at least three shifts during the time period specified below. If interested email: [wimpolehall@nationaltrust.org](mailto:wimpolehall@nationaltrust.org).

[Learn More](#)







O Antczak, 2024

## Contribute

We would be especially interested in hearing from you about events and opportunities. Contributions in the form of short reviews of conferences, exhibitions, publications or other events/material that you have attended/read are also welcome. Please note that advertisements for any non-CHRC events, jobs, or programs do not imply endorsement of them.

## Subscribe

If you would like to be added to our mailing list to receive our bulletin, or if you have a notice to post, please contact the editor ([heritage-bulletin@arch.cam.ac.uk](mailto:heritage-bulletin@arch.cam.ac.uk)).

For more information about the Heritage Research Group, visit the CHRC website: [www.heritage.arch.cam.ac.uk](http://www.heritage.arch.cam.ac.uk)

# Cambridge Heritage Research Centre Bulletin

**Editor:**  
Kieran Gleave  
(PhD Researcher)

**Address:**  
Downing Street, Cambridge  
CB23DZ, United Kingdom

**Email**  
[heritage@arch.cam.ac.uk](mailto:heritage@arch.cam.ac.uk)

**Phone:**  
[01223-339291](tel:01223-339291)

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