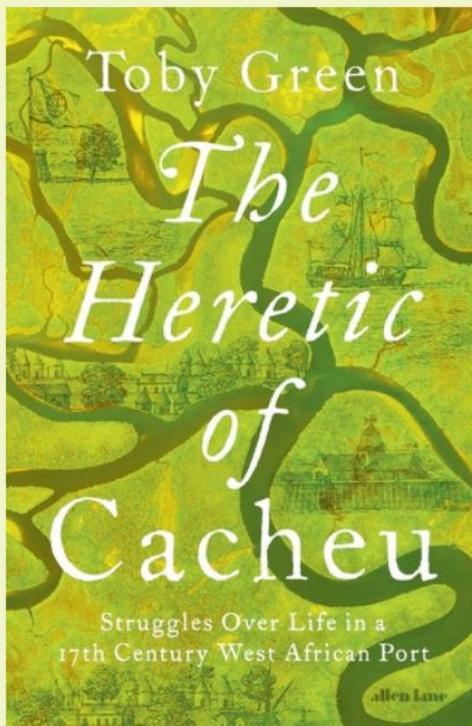


**Guest Lecture "Crispina Peres: An African Woman's Microhistory
and the Study of the African Past"**

Guest Lecture

**"Crispina Peres: An African Woman's
Microhistory and the Study of the African Past"**



28 May 2025



With
Toby Green

May 28, 2025
4:00 PM to 6:30 PM
Festsaal at the University Main Building

Please register by: **May 21, 2025** via: [Crispina Peres: An African Woman's Microhistory and the Study of | Doodle](#)

Convener:

Ana Lucia Araujo, Professor of History, Howard University
Heinz Heinen Fellow (May-June 2025) BCDSS

Co-hosted by the Research group “The Concept of Slavery in African History”

“Crispina Peres: An African Woman's Microhistory and the Study of the African Past” explores the history of Crispina Peres, the most powerful trader in the West African slave trafficking port of Cacheu, who was arrested by the Inquisition in 1665. Her enemies had conspired to denounce her for taking treatments prescribed by Senegambian healers: the djabakós. But who was Peres? And why was the Portuguese Inquisition so concerned with policing the faith of a West African woman in today's Guinea-Bissau? In this lecture Professor Green takes us to the heart of this conundrum, but also into the atmosphere of a very distant time and place. We learn how people in seventeenth-century Cacheu built their houses, what they wore, how they worshipped – and also the work they did, how they had fun, and how they healed themselves from illness. Through this story, the haunting realities of the growing slave trade and the rise of European empires emerge in shocking detail. By the 1650s, the relationship between Europe, West Africa, and the Americas was already an old one, with slaving entrepôts, colonies, and military bases interweaving over many generations. But Cacheu also challenged the dynamic. It was globally connected to places ranging from China and India to Brazil and Colombia, and women like Crispina Peres ran the town and challenged the patriarchy of empire. For the first time, through the surviving documents recording Peres's case, we can see what this world was really like. Cacheu is an extraordinary act of historical recovery. It is the story of a seventeenth-century West African woman, but also of the shifting, sophisticated world in which she lived – its beliefs, values and people.

Book summary: In 1665 Crispina Peres, the most powerful trader in the West African slave trafficking port of Cacheu, was arrested by the Inquisition. Her enemies had conspired to denounce her for taking treatments prescribed by Senegambian healers: the djabakós. But who was Peres? And why was the Portuguese Inquisition so concerned with policing the faith of a West African woman in today's Guinea-Bissau?

In the *Heretic of Cacheu* Toby Green takes us to the heart of this conundrum, but also into the atmosphere of a very distant time and place. We learn how people in seventeenth-century Cacheu built their houses, what they wore, how they worshipped – and also the work they did, how they had fun, and how they healed themselves from illness.

Through this story, the haunting realities of the growing slave trade and the rise of European empires emerge in shocking detail. By the 1650s, the relationship between Europe, West Africa, and the Americas was already an old one, with slaving entrepôts, colonies, and military bases interweaving over many generations. But Cacheu also challenged the dynamic. It was globally connected to places ranging from China and India to Brazil and Colombia, and women like Crispina Peres ran the town and challenged the patriarchy of empire.

For the first time, through the surviving documents recording Peres's case, we can see what this world was really like. Cacheu is an extraordinary act of historical recovery. It is the story of a seventeenth-century West African woman, but also of the shifting, sophisticated world in which she lived – its beliefs, values and people.

Toby Green has worked widely with colleagues across Africa, organising events in collaboration with institutions in Angola, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique Sierra Leone and the Gambia. His books have been translated into 12 languages and include the award-winning *A Fistful of Shells*. He writes extensively for the media, including in recent years *London Review of Books*, *New Statesman*, *Prospect*, and *UnHerd*. He has worked on curriculum change in the teaching of African history both in the UK and in West Africa, and has been a member of the UK government's Model History Curriculum Advisory Group. He is a Fellow of the British Academy, and Professor of Precolonial and Lusophone African History and Culture at King's College, London. His new book, *The Heretic of Cacheu: Struggles over Life in a 17th-Century West African Port* will be published by Allen Lane and University of Chicago Press this year.