The Marett Memorial Lecture of 2024

Professor Francis B. Nyamnjoh
(University of Cape Town)

“Optimism as a Crossroads of Composites and Conviviality”

In this Marett Memorial Lecture, we seek to understand the meaning we bring to the notion and sense of optimism as an attribute universally shared by individuals and societies in an interconnected, interdependent, and dynamic world. We argue that optimism is strengthened through community and a focus on relationality and negotiated inclusivity. This is achieved through encounters, empathy, and indebtedness, which promote mobility and allow for growth. We posit that it is impossible in an interconnected world to be optimistic without endangering or cannibalising the optimism of others. Consequently, to be optimistic in a negotiated and inclusive manner necessitates an ethic of being, becoming, relating, and sociality inspired by incompleteness and conviviality as a framework to mitigate the violence, violation, opportunism, impunities and the mass production of pessimism that we risk from unequal encounters engineered and sustained by zero-sum games of desire, hope, and fulfilment.

Friday 26 April 2024 at 5.00pm

Fitzhugh Auditorium, Cohen Quadrangle, Exeter College, Walton Street, Oxford