



These slides

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AI and the work of the historian

*Researching Islam and Muslims in West Africa.
Curating the sources through which we study them.*

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Abundance has a history

COLLECTION ITEMS

20,000+

WORDS IN THE TEXTUAL CORPUS

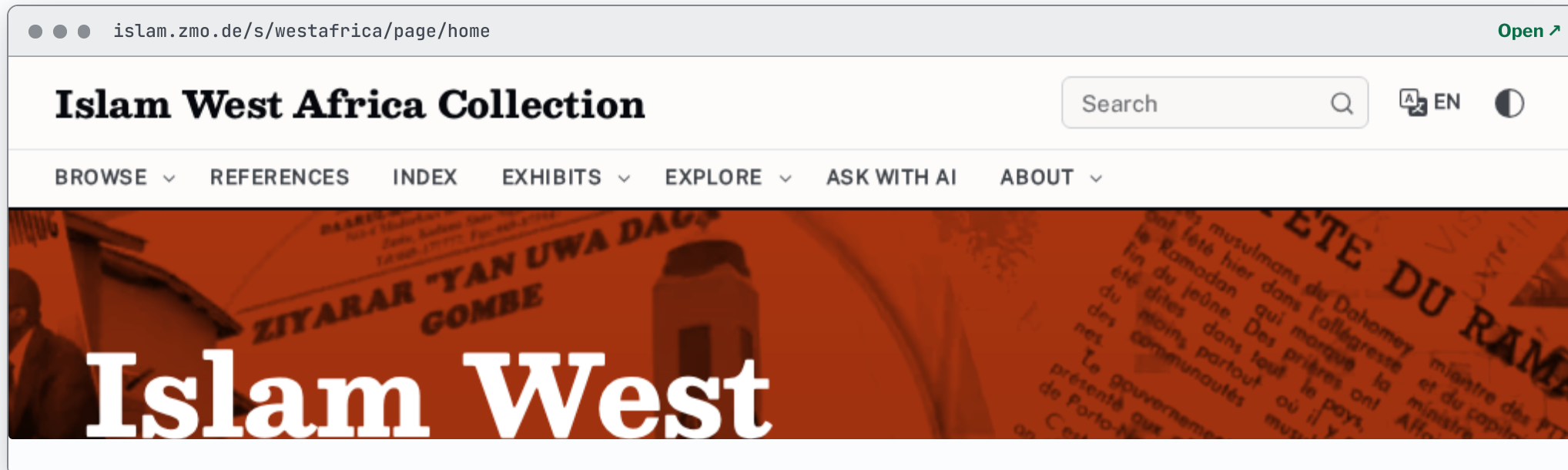
≈31 million

YOUTUBE AUDIOVISUAL MINUTES

34,468

ITEMS IN MY ZOTERO LIBRARY

38,142



A familiar problem for historians: “scanning parties”, thousands of photographs, little time to read them.

Newly readable, still interpreted

TRANSCRIPTION AND INDEXING IN MY WORKFLOW

- Multimodal LLMs extract text from printed and handwritten pages
- Draft transcriptions to check against the original page
- Small LLMs identify names, places and organisations

TRANSCRIPTION

A readable text

Which spellings and uncertainties survive?



INDEXING

A connected record

Do two names identify the same person?



CATALOGUING

A findable collection

Which names and places get recorded?

HISTORICAL SOURCE CRITICISM

A wrong transcription still reads well. Keep each transformation traceable to the document.

Reading printed Ewé

MIAFE NUTIFAFAFIA EYADEMA KPE TA KPLE MOSLEMTOWO FE DEKAWOWO DODZIKPOHA LA



Mia novi Moslem hamea ngonolawo se nya xcasibo tso Togo yeyea fofo nu

«Woayra amesiwo léa avu la, elabena woayowo be Mawuviwo»

Enye Togo yeyea feo awafiawodzifia Gnassingbe Eyadema fe didi vevi be

amesiame nana dzidzo kple nutifafa me lle yefe Denyigba la katã dzi, Dzre, fu-éle kple mamãwo manɔ amewo kple habobowo domo o. Eyaguti dukplala Eyadema anukwareto la lona dɔdɔdowo wowo edziedzi le dukomeviwo dome dɔ.

Ete gu dze edzi be miafe tato nutejewa la dɔ go kple mia novi Moslem Hame fe amegãwo nyitsɔ le RPT fea me hena wodome nyawo sese,

Tototo kple dzre dɔ Moslem Hame fe dodzikpoha la me etefe didi. Ale mamã kple fuléle dɔ wo dome.

Le wofe anyinɔna kple numedede-

wo me na To o yeyea fofo vo mege la, miafe nutifafa anukwareto Eyadema dɔ asi Hamea fe dodzikpoha la dzi elabena nutifafa kple lɔlɔ mele wo dome o

Ede nu me na Xasetawo be dekawowo kple nutifafa dim yele le yefe anyigba la dzi...

Mibehe la dukplala la dɔ dɔdɔcasihan dɔ, si me ame 17 le la na mia noviawo bena woadzra Moslemtoowo fe takpekpe gã, si wo ge woala la le Lome le Dasi-mime 4 lia dzi la fe dɔwɔwɔwo dɔ.

Awafiawo Menveyinoyu Dzafalo, dukunɔla Lãmesɔ kple Hadomegbenɔnyã-

woghokpola kple Ayaovi Asila, Togo 'wakawo fe tato kpedeguta hekpe dɔ dukplala fe dɔwɔfe dzikpola afeto Kpotivi Têvi Dzidzagbe Lacle gu woeno tato Eyadema gu le Moslem Hamea fe nya-wododɔ me. Eye afeto Mama Fusenii kple Kasim Mensa, siwo nye Hamea fe bubu 'mewo la hã na Takpekpe me nyitsɔ ma,

EXTRACTED TEXT · EWÉ

MIAFE NUTIFAFAFIA EYADEMA KPE TA KPLE MOSLEMTOWO
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tso Togo yeyea fofo nu

«Woayra amesiwo léa avu la, elabena woayowo be
Mawuviwo»

Enye Togo yeyea fofo awafiawodzifia Gnassingbe
Eyadema fe didi vevi be amesiame nana dzidzo
kple nutifafa me lle yefe Denyigba la katã dzi,
Dzre, fuéle kple mamãwo manɔ amewo kple habobowo

EXCERPT

Togo Presse, 31 July 1976.

Building tools for the collection

AI-ASSISTED CODING

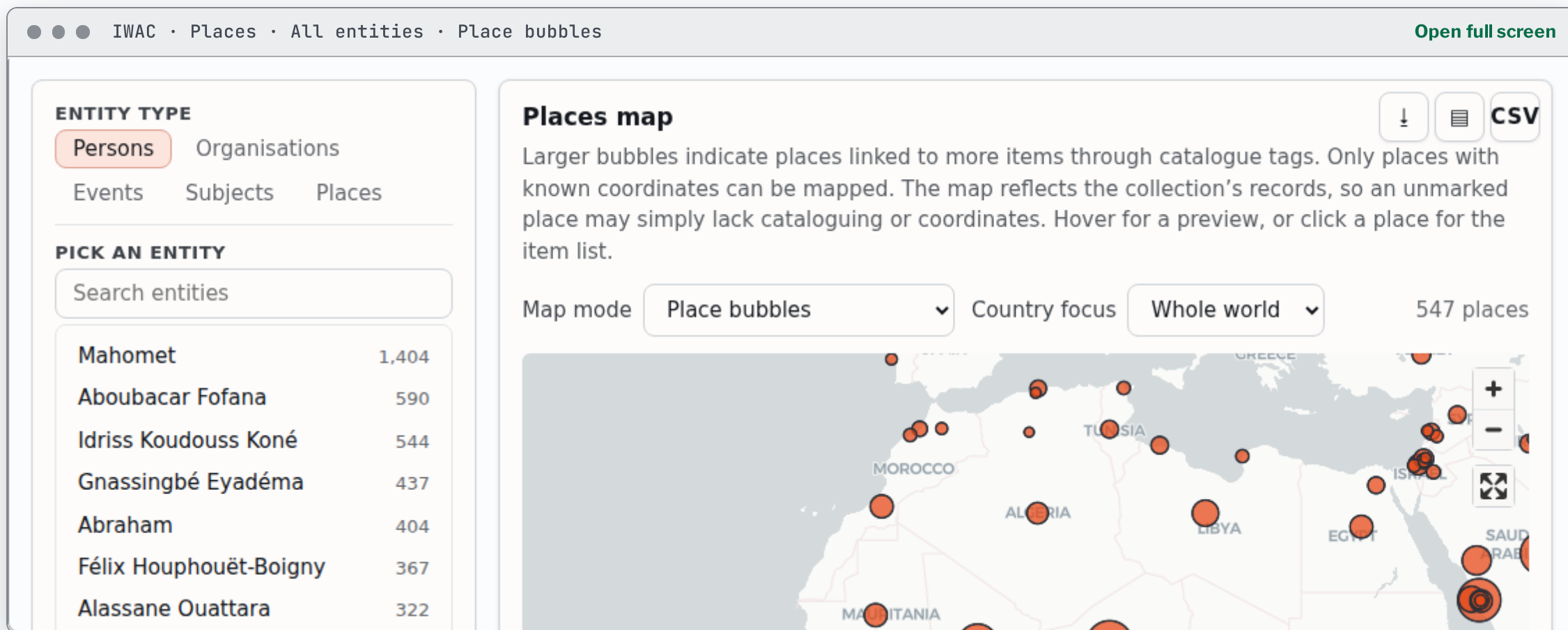
Generating and revising code through conversation.

RESEARCH DECISIONS

Defining the task and checking what the tool counts, links and excludes.

The interface needs to be checked against the underlying records.

Where do the sources direct our attention?



Explore the places most frequently mentioned in the IWAC—and the documents that mention them.

IWAC · 11 Sept 2026

What does a connection mean?

● ● ● IWAC · Entity network · All types · All links

Open full screen

Co-occurrence network

↓ ☰ CSV

Each point represents a person, organisation, place, subject or event in the catalogue. Lines join entries recorded on the same items. The layout helps reveal groups of connections, but distances are approximate. Shared records do not by themselves establish a social relationship. Click a point to inspect its connections.

Entities

Places

● Persons

● Organisations

● Events

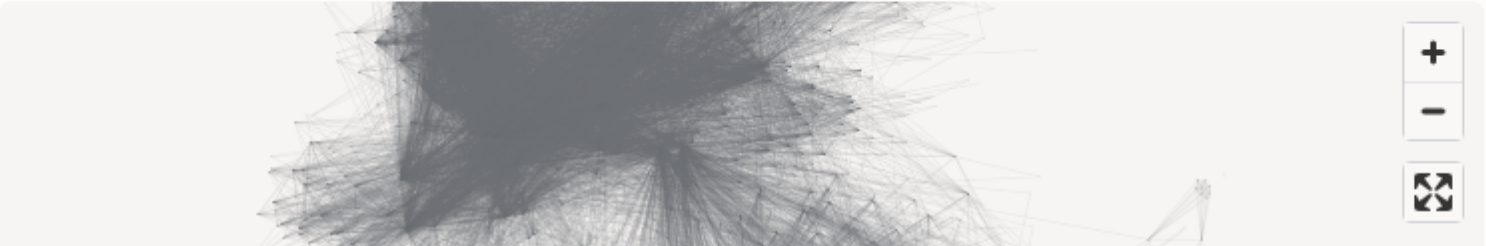
● Subjects

● Places

Min. link strength

All links ▾

Find in network



ABOUT THIS NETWORK

1,997 entities · 27,638 links

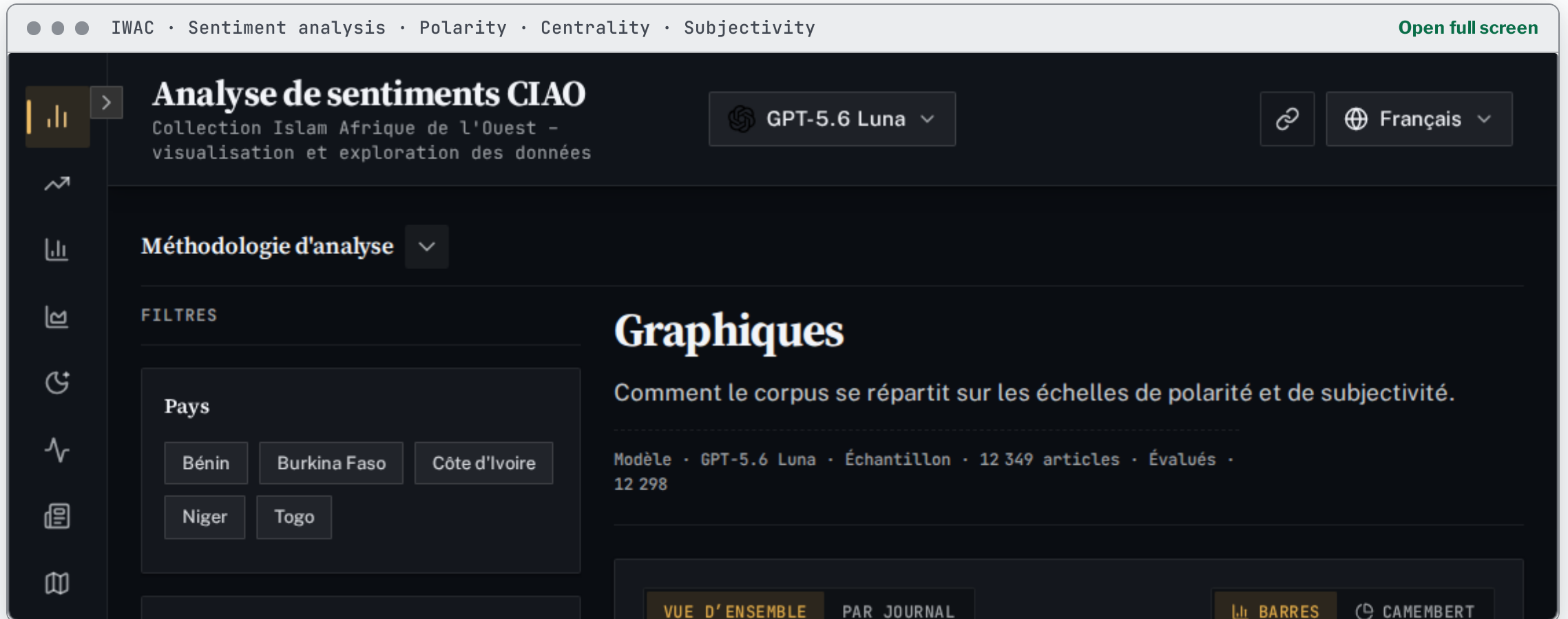
A line joins two entries recorded together on at least 2 items.

Click a point to see the entries sharing the most items with it; click the background to clear the selection.

A co-mention is a starting point for investigating a relationship.

IWAC · 11 Sept 2026

What should I read next?



AI-assisted sentiment analysis · 12,349 newspaper articles

iwac.frederickmadore.com

Affordable access, unequal control

COMMERCIAL SERVICES

Gemini · ChatGPT · Claude

Low entry costs, little local hardware.
Dependence on external providers.

Small models can run on personal computers; larger ones need
substantial infrastructure.

Open weights do not mean equal access to computing resources.

OPEN-WEIGHT MODELS

Increasingly capable alternatives.
Greater control when run locally.

Whose sources become usable?

01 Digitisation

Faster processing still depends on preservation and scanning.

02 Language

French-language gains are only a starting point.

03 Expertise

The people who know the sources remain essential.

Expanding what historians can do

More accessible sources. New tools.
New starting points for reading.

Historical judgement throughout.

The goal isn't simply to process more sources,
but to help more people work with them.

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Islam West Africa Collection

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