AFRICAN STUDIES CENTRE

13 Bevington Road, Oxford OX2 6LH
Tel: +44(0)1865 613900
www.africanstudies.ox.ac.uk

UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

14th Annual Researching Africa Day Workshop

Saturday, 23rd February 2013

NISSAN LECTURE THEATRE
St Antony's College, Oxford

TIMETABLE OF EVENTS

9:00-9:25   Registration at the Nissan Lecture Theatre

9:25   Opening address

9:30-11:00   First panel: **Accessing**

11:00-11:30 Tea and coffee

11:30-13:00 Second panel: **Acquiring**

13:00-14:00 Lunch*

14:00-15:30 Third panel: **Interrogating**

15:30-16:00 Tea and coffee

16:00-17:30 Fourth panel: **Presenting**

17:30-17:45 Closing remarks by Ramon Sarro

* We invite all presenters and attendees to buy lunch at the St Antony's dining hall. Please note: only card payments (credit and debit) are accepted.

Ed Teversham, Juliet Gilbert, Khumisho Moguerane,
Organisers, Researching Africa Day 2013
RAD.23Feb.Oxford@gmail.com

PANELS

1: **ACCESSING**

Duncan Scott, University of Aberdeen
Teachers as researchers and gatekeepers: Challenges to accessing and acquiring material in a school-based participatory research project
Hagar Taha, SOAS
Constructing Trust and Identifying the Researcher: Accessing Information in the African Context
Bryn James, University of Manchester
Accessing secret medicinal knowledge: The challenge of engaging with traditional healers in Ghana
Lucy McCann, SCOLMA and Rhodes House Library
African Archives in the UK

2: **ACQUIRING**

Andrea Rüdiger: University of Oxford
Linking Positionality and Methodology: How who we are, drives what we do.
Daniel Ostendorff: University of Oxford
Research Relationships with a Subject and Their Family: Navigating the Present and Personal in Field Research
Caroline Williamson: University of Nottingham
Accessing material from the Genocide Archive of Rwanda: Challenging but worthwhile

3: **INTERROGATING**

Jacob Wiebel: University of Oxford
Stopped Wells and Poisoned Streams: Challenges of Accessing and Evaluating Archival Material on the Ethiopian Terror in Addis Ababa
Rouven Kunstmann: University of Oxford
Newspapers as Sources for African History
Andrea Grant: University of Oxford
Truth, Truth-telling, and the Problem of Trust in Post-genocide Rwanda
Ed Teversham: University of Oxford
Social Construction and the Kruger National Park

4: **PRESENTING**

Anne Heffernan: University of Oxford
Writing as Interpretation: Using the blank page to come to grips with your sources
Melanie Boehi: University of Basel
Telling History in the 'Language of Flowers'? Unconventional Ways of Presenting Academic Work and Increasing the 'Flow of Research'
Enrique Martino: Humboldt University Berlin
Pirating and posting the colonial archive of the bight of Biafra: an open source PhD in history
Juliet Gilbert: University of Oxford
Anthropologist as Apprentice: Learning, embodying and presenting knowledge in a Nigerian sewing shop

ABSTRACTS

Accessing

Duncan Scott: PhD Candidate, University of Aberdeen
Teachers as researchers and gatekeepers: Challenges to accessing and acquiring material in a school-based participatory research project

Over three years, a multi-country (Ghana, Kenya, South Africa) participatory research project tested the viability of involving teachers and Grade 6 pupils in developing an HIV/AIDS education curriculum. The first stage examined children's formal (school) and informal (friends, media) knowledge of HIV/AIDS. During the second phase, educators adopted a teacher-researcher role to gather pupils' views on how HIV/AIDS lessons should be conducted. This material was presented to a small discussion group comprised of the teacher, parents, pupils and an NGO consultant, who used the information to enhance the official HIV/AIDS curriculum. The participatory action project incorporated a non-linear research design that involved an iterative process of acquisition and interrogation of material. However, the study confronted an unforeseen obstacle when, due to their apprehension of 1) deviating from the official curriculum and 2) contravening cultural mores linked to sex, teacher-researchers began to revert to a gatekeeper role. This project highlights the challenges of pursuing a cyclical research design that emphasises the role of participants in accessing, acquiring and interrogating data. Despite setbacks, final evidence of improved teacher-pupil collaboration and increased teacher willingness to adopt a research role indicates the positive potential of this alternative model for conducting research in African schools.

Hagar Taha: PhD Candidate, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London
Constructing Trust and Identifying the Researcher: Accessing Information in the African Context

Accessing information is usually a difficult task because not only our interlocutors look upon this attempt with scrutiny, but also because we – as researchers – have to keep questioning what kind of information we want to reach and what reasons we have behind this, practically all the time. Eventually researchers understand that the process of accessing their field of study has been actually part of their research because it demonstrates meanings regarding the field as well as themselves studying that particular field. In that sense, researchers as individuals become part of their own study and who they are, where they come from, what language they speak and what prejudices they have become essential in their ability to access certain information while being unable to access others. Trusting the person who they present to people in the field becomes essential in their ability to do research. To reach this level a researcher will have to be in continuous state of questioning and requisitioning their own research and the point behind it. Issues of trust are also always more complicated where research is being done under authoritarian regimes and brutal security settings where not only the researcher has to gain the trust of the society but also elements within the state order to be able to conduct meaningful research in somehow a 'secure' environment. Based on fieldwork experience in Darfur (Sudan) and Somaliland (Northern Somalia), this paper will attempt to examine the importance of trust, on the level of state and society, as a key component in accessing research field in Africa and the process that researchers go through in order to construct this trust.

Bryn James: PhD Candidate, University of Manchester
Accessing secret medicinal knowledge: The challenge of engaging with traditional healers in Ghana

Gaining access to privileged information concerning traditional healing practices continues to be an obstacle confronting researchers into African medicine across the disciplines. As Edwards (2011:ii-iii) found in northern Ghana, "there are many secrets that healers are not readily prepared to share", out of a desire to protect themselves, their medicines, and their traditions, especially from people who may misuse them. Ethnobotanical studies show around 80% of herbalists keep remedies hidden aside from transmission within the lineage (Giday et al. 2010:81), whilst experienced medical anthropologists such as Murray Last (1992:400), consider the indigenous practitioner as 'gatekeeper' to be characterised by "extreme, institutionalised secrecy surrounding medical matters." Based on two seasons of fieldwork engagements with healers in Accra, Ghana, I shall discuss fresh perspectives on the issue of knowledge restriction, acknowledging the challenges presented, and examining strategies in both the planning and implementation stages which mitigated these. Access to herbal substances and spiritual knowledge was negotiated through on-going dialogues of informed consent with stakeholders in the community's medical culture, and by an incremental process of relationship building. With reference to case studies, this development of trust necessary for admittance into the increasingly closed worlds of may-magane (medicine-men), boka (secrets-men), and underground shrine-keepers is explored.

Lucy McCann: Archivist, Rhodes House Library
African Archives in the UK

Lucy will say a few words from the perspective of the archivist. She is attending this year's Researching Africa Day in the capacity of archivist for Rhodes House Library but also as a representative of SCOLMA, the UK Libraries and Archives Group on Africa.

Acquiring

Andrea Rüdiger: Dphil Candidate, University of Oxford
Linking Positionality and Methodology: How who we are, drives what we do.

Books on research design and courses on research methods suggest that the definition of an appropriate methodology is mainly determined by the research question. Other factors like the availability of certain kinds of data or the feasibility of a particular method are also acknowledged limitations to the choice of methodology. However, we rarely talk about positionality as a relevant determinant in this early stage of the research process. Positionality clearly matters for the choice of research methods in 'the classical sense', i.e. race, gender, nationality and other aspects of the researcher's identity constrain the feasibility of methods. Beyond that, positionality also matters in a more fundamental way. Distinctly personal preferences such as an affinity for numbers or personality traits such as highly developed social skills - have enormous bearing not only on the questions we choose to answer but also the methods we use. Based on experiences in planning and conducting a research project with small-farmers in rural communities in Eastern Ethiopia, this paper challenges the portrayal of methodological choice as an objective process. It encourages graduate students and early-career academics to make positionality not only the object of reflexivity while in the field, but a deliberate and explicit part of methodological choice.

Daniel Ostendorff: DPhil Candidate, University of Oxford
Research Relationships with a Subject and Their Family: Navigating the Present and Personal in Field Research

History is about people. How they live, work, interact and respond to life. The historians task is personal, and often intrusively so. We seek to understand the people and communities we study, endeavouring to portray them as honestly and accurately as we are able. Usually, we are writing about people we cannot know in relationship due to temporal distance . But what happens when our research subjects overflow into the present and source material can only be gathered via personal relationships with those we are studying? And what do we do when our historical understanding and writing might jeopardize those relationships? This paper engages with the dynamics, both practically and ethically, of researching a family that is both historical and contemporary. How do we, as researchers, navigate personal relationship alongside our very real need for source material and the historian's task? Using the experience of a year of fieldwork in Kenya attempting to earn the trust of the Koinange family - a longstanding, wealthy and political dynasty - and the challenges faced, this thesis engages with questions of source material, building relationships, earning and honoring trust, and critically evaluating personal narratives.

Caroline Williamson: PhD Candidate, University of Nottingham
Accessing material from the Genocide Archive of Rwanda: Challenging but worthwhile

As part of the collaborative agreement between the University of Nottingham and genocide education charity, Aegis Trust, the research project on which this paper is based involved spending a year working as an archivist at the Genocide Archive of Rwanda. The project itself examines the impact of trauma on identity by analyzing audiovisual testimonies of female Rwandan genocide survivors. These testimonies were recorded by the Genocide Archive and are currently being digitized, transcribed and translated. During the year spent in Rwanda, in addition to working on my thesis, my role was to assist with the translation and proofreading of testimonies. Despite working directly with materials in the archive as a member of staff for the Aegis Trust, there were a number of challenges both in obtaining and understanding the material, particularly when researching such a sensitive topic as identity. This paper describes the challenges I faced, including cultural differences, trauma, political sensitivities as well as issues relating to language and translation. Rwanda is often depicted as an unresearchable area of study because of its cultural and political sensitivities. While acknowledging that there are difficulties, this paper will dispute this misconception because by understanding the nature of the challenges, valuable and rewarding work may be carried out in Rwanda. As one scholar from the National University of Rwanda put it, it is necessary to find the right key to the Rwandan cultural code.

Interrogating

Jacob Wiebel: Dphil Candidate, University of Oxford
Stopped Wells and Poisoned Streams: Challenges of Accessing and Evaluating Archival Material on the Ethiopian Terror in Addis Ababa

Difficulties in translating the comprehensibility of research designs into the complexities of actual archival research are common, especially in archives rarely visited by researchers. At heart, they concern a loss of autonomy: where research design is autonomously constructed within the bounds of research questions, available sources and appropriate methodological choices, much actual archival research is constrained by unforeseen heteronomous factors and constraints. Two such heteronomous restrictions complicated my research into the history of revolutionary terror campaigns in Addis Ababa during the late 1970s and raised important methodological questions. The first of these concerned access to the vast archive of official documents from the period which had been used by the Special Prosecutor's Office to indict members of the military regime for cases of execution and torture. When I started my research project, the archive was in the process of being handed over to an independent organisation charged with making the documents available to researchers. But a government about-turn in 2011 interrupted the process and left me with a limited and heteronomously determined selection of documents. The second incident occurred when I found an image of a torture scene at an official archive, only to later identify the alleged source as a cinematographic reconstruction from the 1990s. Both incidents raise difficult questions about the use of archival sources when the charted flow of research is interrupted or contaminated. How can a research design negotiate and accommodate the constraints of archival fieldwork?

Rouven Kunstmann: Dphil Candidate, University of Oxford
Newspapers as Sources for African History

The study of newspapers finds multiple research interests. Newspapers have often served as additional sources to private correspondences, government documents or biographies to write political history. However, in recent years, newspapers themselves have become the main focus of literary, anthropological and historical research. Therefore, it is oversimplifying to reduce studies of context, practice and meaning to one category of scholarship. My contribution highlights different strategies of historical analyses to help graduate students facilitate a research project, which is largely based on newspapers. Hence, different methods on how to 'read' newspapers will be introduced. Since often different authors, known or hidden, contribute to and edit a newspaper, the classical historical approach to sources, which presupposes distinct authorship, is blurred. Moreover, different authors use different forms of writing. How these differences can be included in research designs, will be explored for selected Nigerian newspapers in the mid twentieth century.

Andrea Grant: Dphil Candidate, University of Oxford
Truth, Truth-telling, and the Problem of Trust in Post-genocide Rwanda

One of the most difficult aspects of fieldwork is assessing the "truth" of the information our informants provide. Can or should we trust what we are told, and how do we distinguish between facts, half-truths, rumours, and outright falsehoods? What exactly is the status or value of truth in the field, and does discovering "the truth" really matter? Drawing on 15 months of research into popular culture in Rwanda, I argue that we must place truth and truth-telling within its proper cultural, historical, and political context. Instead of asking, "are my informants telling the truth?", we should instead consider the motivation(s) behind their utterances and actions. Why are they manipulating the truth, and what can that tell us about the moral climate of our field site? In my paper, I discuss how various forms of "truth-divergence" are strategies people employ to negotiate the difficult social and political environment of post-genocide Rwanda. While the elasticity of the truth can allow for a modicum of agency in an authoritarian system, it also creates suspicion and uncertainty, and calls the very notion and experience of trust – between people and between people and institutions such as the church and the state – into question.

Ed Teversham: DPhil Candidate, University of Oxford
Social Construction and the Kruger National Park

This paper explores the representational system surrounding the Kruger National Park from a social constructionist standpoint. While the national park itself is clearly a constructed space, created by legislation, the ideas and ideology behind it, and contained within it, are perhaps less evidently so. While much recent work has explored the constructed complexion of nature more generally, little work has been done to examine the role that national parks, as important vessels of meaning, play in the generation of public understandings of nature. This paper argues that through its representational material, the Kruger Park created a series of relationships with various audiences. This produced a range of ideas tailored to particular interest groups, at different social and geographic levels, that in turn led to multiple discourses on wildlife, nature, and the park itself. The result was neither a concrete representational legacy, nor a coherent, singular idea of the park and its contents. This paper discusses the theoretical framework behind this approach, as well as the possibilities that such an interpretation opens up regarding culture, nature and national parks.

Presenting

Anne Heffernan: Dphil Candidate, University of Oxford
Writing as Interpretation: Using the blank page to come to grips with your sources

This paper will seek to address the question of how we, as researchers, can interrogate and interpret our source material through the practice of writing. Often researchers perceive the stages of research as distinct and discreet, to be followed one after the next. But in fact the flow between the stages – whether you are accessing your material for the first time, framing research questions, or writing up your findings – is not linear. These stages intertwine with one another, and it is precisely those areas of overlap that sometimes produce the richest material and interpretations. To this end, considering writing-as-interpretation allows us to probe the intersection of how we interrogate our material and how we present it. The paper will draw on the pedagogical literature that surrounds the concept of 'writing as process' (most notably the work of B. Mills), as well as on concrete examples from my own research experience studying student politics in South Africa.

Melanie Boehi: PhD Candidate, University of Basel
Telling History in the 'Language of Flowers'? Unconventional Ways of Presenting Academic Work and Increasing the 'Flow of Research'

While writing an MA thesis about the history of flower selling in Cape Town, I briefly considered presenting my results as a flower arrangement. Deploying the 'Language of Flowers' would have allowed conveying meanings that words could not. As a student at the University of the Western Cape I learned to take all forms of historical narratives, including works of art, into consideration. I handed in my thesis in conventional form, but ever since I have been contemplating how to make most out of my research. People do not read academic publications for numerous reasons, among them lack of access, time, foreign language skills and literacy. In my presentation, I would like to discuss some forms in which I present my research findings in addition to conventional academic publications. Among them are the produc- tion of an easy-to-read booklet, newspaper and non-academic journal articles, blogging, Wikipedia-editing, a planned exhibition and the participation in archive talks. I suggest that these translations allow us complying with high ethical standards. They make our material accessible to institutions and people about whom we write and whom we work with (e.g. who grant access to archives, research sites, give interviews). In addition, they increase the 'flow of research' as our collaborators are more interested in contributing to our work when the results are meaningful to them. Unconventional ways of presenta- tion also make us more visible outside academia and stimulate new collaborations.

Enrique Martino: PhD Research Fellow, Humboldt University Berlin
Pirating and posting the colonial archive of the bight of Biafra: an open source PhD in history

Since late last year I decided to test the methodological and institutional boundaries of African History, with an "open-source" PhD. I started a website where I am uploading transcribed photocopies of all the sources that I have collected and am citing in my dissertation. My research deals with migration, trade and labour in the Bight of Biafra in the colonial and early independence period, and has drawn from archives in the UK, Spain, US, Germany, Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon. I would hope for an exchange of techniques and a discussion of the ethics of "pirating" the archive by copying and posting documents online. I would want to argue that by sharing our materials and inventories and by making public archives open access we can create shared spaces in our academic fields, of verification and debate, and advance global collaboration by making this "flow" of research transparent. This could be a more important research practice than the actual "output" of published work. Technology could help break down the privilege of funding, mobility and being able to navigate access. This is especially relevant for the case of Equatorial Guinea, which has no accessible archive and the bulk of its documented colonial history are vaulted up near Madrid, blocking the potential investigations of journalists, students and authors from Equatorial Guinea.

Juliet Gilbert: DPhil Candidate, University of Oxford
Anthropologist as Apprentice: Learning, embodying and presenting knowledge in a Nigerian sewing shop

This paper draws on my time spent as an apprentice in a Nigerian sewing shop to question the notion that presentation of anthropological knowledge is the ultimate stage of research. It was only some six months into my doctoral fieldwork researching young women's livelihoods in Calabar, a city in southeastern Nigeria, when I became interested in sewing shops as means for young women to fashion themselves, keep busy, learn skills and make business. Whilst I had already built up a solid group of informants, with whom I could spend time and interview, being a part of a sewing shop allowed me greater insight into young women's lives. Three months spent in the sewing shop prior to the apprenticeship had allowed me to watch, ask questions and get to know the girls there – my written field notes were extensive – but I really only began to fully *understand* my field notes during the months as apprentice. It was not just how undertaking an apprenticeship broke down the ever-present 'insider':'outsider' dichotomy of anthropological research but how, by *doing*, I was learning, internalising and embodying knowledge. Furthermore, as I embodied knowledge, I was presenting the anthropological data that had previously only been in my field notes. This paper argues that it is this presentation of embodied knowledge in the field that gives the anthropologist access to further data – to ask more questions, to talk about shared experiences with informants – and is also both beneficial and problematic to the writing-up process.