

13th Annual Researching Africa Day Workshop:
“Researching Africa: Moving beyond *researcher and the researched*”

St Antony’s College, Oxford, 3 March 2012

What is ethical research in Africa? What is effective, or innovative? How do we navigate the complex relationship between our role as researchers and the expectations of those we work with? What are the ethics of respecting or deconstructing the researcher/researched dichotomy? And how can knowledge be shared, expanded and further developed amongst researchers, communities, stakeholders, and policymakers? These were just some of the questions raised by participants of the 14th annual Researching Africa Day at St Antony’s College, University of Oxford, on 3 March 2012. The workshop brought together over eighty participants from universities throughout the UK and Europe and from a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, business management, economics, history, literature, politics, and sociology .

The overarching theme, ‘Researching Africa: Moving beyond *Researcher and the Researched*’, examined the complexities of knowledge production in a context where researchers must continuously re-evaluate their own role in socially and politically changing environments. The opening keynote address by Dr Noor Nieftagodien, Oppenheimer Visiting Fellow and senior lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand, discussed the role of local communities in the production of knowledge. Dr Nieftagodien made a compelling argument for the greater involvement of non-academic local populations in writing their own histories.

Following the keynote address, seventeen papers were presented in five panels. In the panel *Defining, accessing and interpreting archives*, presenters and the audience discussed the limitations and challenges of conducting archival research. The second panel *Interviews, stories and knowledge production with marginalised populations* examined the ethical questions presented by working with prisoners, refugees, minors, and internally displaced people, and the complexities of access, trust, bearing witness, legitimising narratives, and reifying or challenging dominant tropes of victimhood. After an engaging lunch featuring debates, and knowledge and experience-sharing, the afternoon continued with panels on *Ethics, power and context* and *Post-colonial researchers navigating neo-colonial contexts*. Some of the issues discussed herein included the fraught nature of post- and neo-colonial research, advocacy and activism; accommodating the expectations and needs of research participants and communities; and the challenges of researching in contexts that demand rethinking one’s own ethical standards. The day ended with *Beyond researcher/ researched* – an interactive panel in which presenters discussed various ways of making research findings accessible to local communities. Closing remarks were given by Dr David Pratten, Director of the African Studies Centre.

Funding from the African Studies Centre at the University of Oxford made this workshop possible. For a full overview and programme of the day’s events, visit:
<http://www.africanstudies.ox.ac.uk/events>

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