

A PROGRAMME OF
AFRICA-FOCUSED
TALKS AND EVENTS
ORGANISED BY THE
DEPARTMENT OF
AFRICAN STUDIES
AND
ANTHROPOLOGY
(INCORPORATING
THE CENTRE OF
WEST AFRICAN
STUDIES)



Photo courtesy of
Benedetta Rossi.

Class in Africa

The Africa Talks restart this Autumn with a series of lectures on 'Class in Africa'. The idea is to revisit old debates and connect them to new research on questions of class: in what ways, if any, is the concept of class relevant to African societies? Does class matter to the ways in which (some) African individuals understand their lives and relate to others? Is proletarianisation happening - when, where, how, why? Who are the African middle classes?

What happens at the intersection of class, race, and gender? What role (if any) did anti-colonial and liberation struggles, or more recent forms of peaceful or violent political mobilisation, play in shaping class in African societies?

This Autumn's series of invited lectures will bring to DASA and UoB researchers whose current work focuses on class and class-related phenomena in a variety of African countries, including Nigeria, South Africa,

Algeria, Kenya, and Uganda. The Cadbury Workshop in May will also focus on class, and hopefully we can build on this thematic concentration to gain deeper insights in class relations in different regional and historical contexts. Three special events this term focus on separate issues, namely, climate change in Sierra Leone, war in Uganda, and new strategies of international interventionism in Africa. As usual, everyone interested is welcome.

The Price of Death: Understanding the Township Funeral Industry in South Africa

Wednesday 2 October,
5:00-7:00 pm Danford room

Rebekah Lee, Goldsmiths

In a nation marked by continued economic inequality and profound AIDS mortality, moral questions over the profitability of the 'death business' in urban South Africa abound.

Rumours of unscrupulous undertakers and their 'scavenger' practices circulate among township dwellers and accentuate their position as potent symbols of a broader and unseemly commercialization of death. This paper seeks to provide a historical and ethnographic perspective on the rise of the funeral industry in South Africa, and the role of funeral entrepreneurs within this key 'popular economy'. I begin by considering the particular social, economic and political forces at work in the transitional and post-apartheid periods, when an African-run funeral industry first began to emerge. I then turn to the distinctive features of entrepreneurship within this industry, considering both the challenges and opportunities faced by African undertakers in what is regarded as a highly competitive industry. Finally, I examine possible gendered dimensions of funeral entrepreneurship and suggest ways forward for future research. This research is drawn from collected life histories, interviews and participant observation of undertakers and their employees at work, largely in Cape Town's major African townships of Khayelitsha and Gugulethu and secondarily in the rural areas the Eastern Cape. It is part of a larger collaborative project on death in African history, funded by the AHRC: www.gold.ac.uk/deathinafrica



French Perceptions of Algerian Society at the Onset of Colonial Conquest (ca. 1840-1860)

Wednesday 9 October,
5:00-7:00 pm Danford room (jointly organised with the Modern Languages Department)

Jacques Fremeaux, Paris Sorbonne

At the onset of the French occupation of Algeria, French officers were coming from a country that had recently witnessed a major revolution and was becoming an industrial power. These conditions meant that the French military officers who moved to Algeria in the middle of the nineteenth century were lucidly aware of the existence of classes, and they used their understanding of class in Algerian society as an instrument of power. However, they knew that a strong sense of religious solidarity tended to blur class divisions. Concurrently, they tried to divide anti-colonial resistance by supporting the view of a common racial identity of French and Berbers. Moreover, some French colonial officers thought that French action should aim at improving the condition of women, in the hope that this would elicit the gratitude of the better half of the Algerian population and lead to a sincere acceptance of foreign domination. This paper examines how French perceptions and expectations influenced the interactions between French colonialists and Algerian subjects.



Henri (R.), 1848. Dans un Café marocain (Alger). — In a Moroccan café.

Adapting to Climate Change: Coping with the Effects of Weather Changes in Rural Sierra Leone

Tuesday 22 October,
4:00-6:00 pm, room G13, Nuffield Building

Kabba Santigie Bangura, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone

Global climate change is often manifested in severe weather events which can affect rich and poor alike. However, the capacity for poor countries and communities to cope with these impacts is often weak and represents a significant development concern. The post-conflict West African nation of Sierra Leone is no exception. Rural areas in Sierra Leone are often characterised by vulnerable communities with insecure livelihoods that can be seriously damaged by severe weather events. Following an overview of some key issues relating to climate change in West Africa, the lecture then explores the experiences of rural people and identifies impacts and coping mechanisms used in response to these changes. The field based research on which this lecture is based adopted facilitated group discussion methodologies involving 250 participants drawn from five rural settlements in Kambia and Kono Districts of Sierra Leone. In the context of enhancing the future sustainability of rural livelihoods, the lecture identifies a number of policy recommendations including the provision of external support, enforcing land tenure arrangements, strengthening rural people's resilience, and encouraging collective and adaptive environmental management practices.



East African Railways and Harbours 1945-60: Labour Resistance to a 'Crisis of Accumulation'

Wednesday 23 October, 5:00-7:00 pm Danford room

David Hyde, University of East London

The essence of the severe financial crisis which beset East African Railways and Harbours [E.A.R.H.] lay in its struggle to fulfil its prescribed role as the provider of cheap transportation to underwrite the profitability of Kenya's settler economy. By the 1950s major reinvestment was required though its Renewals Fund was almost depleted. How could E.A.R.H., after years of overwork and underinvestment, renew its infrastructure to facilitate its enabling role to? The state monopoly came under intense pressure to reduce freight charges, to confront fierce competition from the colony's many road haulage companies and to subsidise Kenya's troubled plantation economy mired in a declining world market. E.A.R.H. attempted to pass the costs of meeting these problems onto its African workforce through a region wide programme of rationalisation involving large scale redundancies and intensified working practices. This crisis provoked fierce resistance marked by the inter territorial strike which began with Kenya's railmen on November 14th, 1959. Railwaymen in Tanganyika and Uganda followed them into a strike which continued intermittently until August 1960. The strike seems to have given coherence, form and universality to working class struggles at a crucial moment coincident with the transition to independence.

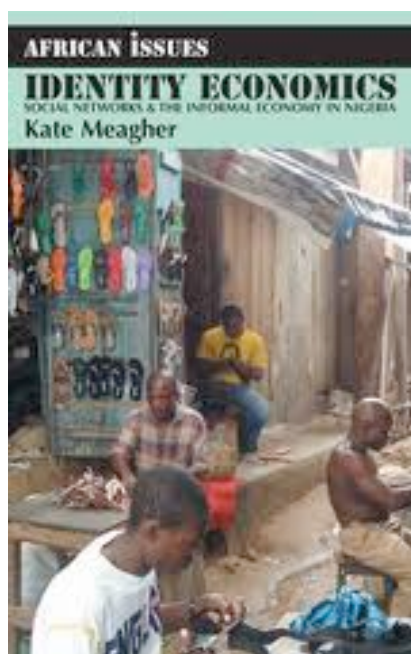


Class and Informal Economic Restructuring

Wednesday 30 October, 5:00 -7:00 pm Danford room

Kate Meagher, London School of Economics

Africa's expanding informal economy now accounts for over 70% of the non-agricultural labour force. However, notions of the informal economy as a lumpen group outside the class system have been challenged by evidence of the recomposition of the informal economy under market reforms, involving internal processes of class formation and penetration by middle class actors from the formal economy. Further changes have been triggered by interventions by labour unions in search of members, and by the corporate sector, who have begun to take an interest in the informal economy, not only as a new market at the 'bottom of the pyramid', but as a source of workers for penetrating that market. Reflections on shifting patterns of class formation within the informal economy will be based on research in southern and northern Nigeria.



Youth and insecurity in the Niger Delta

Wednesday 20 November, 5:00-7:00 pm Danford room

David Pratten, University of Oxford

This paper concerns the mechanisms by which young people in southern Nigeria deal with and are engaged in a context of radical insecurity. It focuses on agaba, a group that has expanded its membership across the multi-ethnic coastal plain of south-eastern Nigeria since the late 1990s. Agaba members are regularly linked with electoral violence and urban gang conflict, and have been variously framed as 'masqueraders', as 'area boys', and as 'local militia'. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in Annang communities and Calabar, this paper examines the performative aspects of the agaba society. While these young men set trends in fashion and slang, and sing of African-American gangster-rappers, their concern is less with bodily surfaces and the languages of violence than with inner strength and protection. Agaba therefore engages with long-standing localized discourses on power derived from spiritual intercession. More broadly this case study enables us to examine the relationship between personhood, possession and power, and to address the subjective and intersubjective constructions of the category of youth, masculinity and violence in the west African post colony.



War in Northern Uganda: Background and Effects

Wednesday 27

November, 5:00-7:00 pm

Danford room (jointly organised with the History Department)

Vincent Oling, FAPAD Uganda

This paper aims to discuss the background and consequences of the war in Northern Uganda. I will look at what have been seen as the main national and local-level causes for the war; the course the war took as it developed differently in different regions, and the war's effects on national and regional services and community life. Moreover, I will consider the economic, ethnic, and class dimensions of the war for Uganda's society, and the perceptions of the international community.

Bio: Vincent Oling is a Ugandan peace activist, and the founder of Uganda's Concerned Parents Association in the aftermath of the Aboke Girls' Abduction in 1996, as well as of several other development and post-war reconstruction-focused NGOs. Since 2004 he has been the acting Chairman of Facilitation for Peace and Development (FAPAD) Uganda.



Re-thinking Race and Class in Twentieth Century South Africa

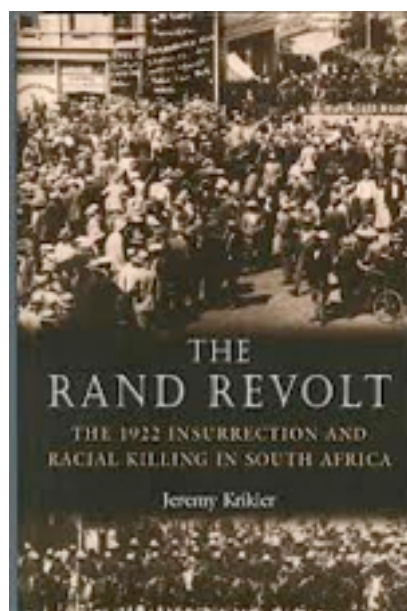
Wednesday 4

December, 5:00-7:00 pm

Danford room

Jeremy Krikler, University of Essex

The relationship between race and class, and how this helped to shape the South African past, dominated the debates and the writing of South African history for much of the 1970s and 1980s. Despite its considerable achievements, the limitations of this paradigm became evident, most notably in its tendency to reduce questions of race to the status of epiphenomena of class. Not surprisingly, then, from the 1990s, there was a steady movement away from class-based analysis on the part of most historians of South Africa. This paper offers thoughts on how we might re-think the relationship of race to class in South African history, particularly through a focus on master-servant relations and through an integration into our conception of the South African past of a crucial insight of the late Tim Mason with regard to class interests and the Nazi state.



Hiding in Plain Site: Drone Culture or Sensing Africa Remotely

Wednesday 11

December, 5:00-7:00 pm

Danford room (jointly organised with the International Development Department)

Mark Duffield, Bristol and UoB

Within the last decade, especially, the last few years, what could be called humanitarian remote sensing has entered a period of rapid innovation. Combining satellite imagery, open-access mapping tools and, increasingly, the mining of real-time BigData, or social media, remote sensing promises to revolutionise liberal interventionism in Africa's challenging environments. However, as a risk reduction strategy, this is occurring at the same time as the bunkerisation of the international aid industry and the increasing remoteness of aid managers from the societies in which they work. The talk takes a critical look at how African populations are understood, retrieved and modelled digitally for purposes of remote management. It also explores the growing overlap – spatially, culturally, and in terms of the digital technologies used – between what could be called 'remote aid' and the rise of 'remote war'. It seeks to question what is at stake as we collectively embrace drone culture.

