

TRAVELLING AFRICA

& THE ARCHIVES

a postgraduate conference

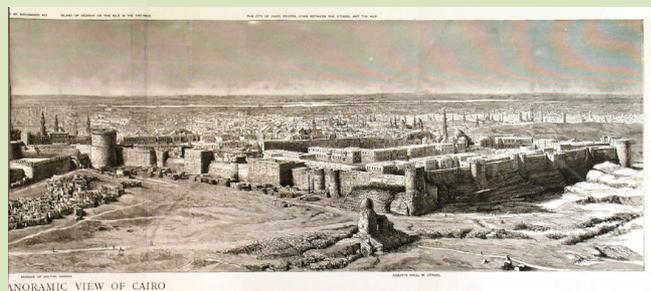
7-8 June 2013

SOAS, University of London

Room 116 [10h30-17h30]

Convenors:

Kai Easton, Rebecca Jones, Danielle Tran & Christine Singer



showcasing the archive projects of MA Travelling Africa together with related presentations by research students from SOAS and further afield



FRIDAY, 7 June 2013

10h30 Welcome and introductions

10h45 - 12h00

1. Jade LEE (MA African Studies, SOAS)

'From the Inside Out: Elizabeth O'Kelly's "Eleven Eventful Years" and Colonial Women in the Archives'

Elizabeth O'Kelly worked extensively in Cameroon and Nigeria from the early 1950s onwards, initially for a large parastatal and then the Colonial Service itself. She wrote two books, one focused on her time in Africa and the other an account of her work in Borneo. However, despite writing and publishing numerous educational and welfare pamphlets throughout her career, her novels were never circulated and were only submitted to the archives towards the end of her life.

A question that seems to form, drive and fragment much of travel writing seems to be: Who is telling this story and by what authority are they permitted to narrate? To attempt to answer this question is to raise other issues whose conclusions prove elusive; nationality, belonging and cultural memory to name a few. Whatever authorial attempts are made at self-deprecation and effacement, narration by its very nature stakes and states an authority of experience which will always turn up these vexing questions.

In the case of Elizabeth O'Kelly, the question itself is complicated by the fact that the 'who' and the 'authority' are borne of two, potentially contradictory discourses; patriarchy and imperialism. The interplay between these discourses and the ways in which their tensions reveal the discursive limits of both is central to this preface. The aim is not to attempt to 'read against the grain' of late imperial thought or, for that matter, patriarchy but rather to understand the construction of these discourses and the ways in which they shape, problematize and drive the work. 'The task is less to distinguish fiction from fact than to track the production and consumption of those facticities themselves.' (Stoler, 2002)

2. Tetsuhiko ENDO (MA Postcolonial Studies, SOAS)

'Masculinity in the Silence: Writing the White Hunter [The archives of Alfred Basil Lubbock 1876-1944]'

11:45 - 12:30

3. Jaya MADHVANI (MA Postcolonial Studies, SOAS)

'The Colonial Archives: Photographs of Uganda and European Imaginative Constructions of Africa'

4. Aneka SINGH (MA Cultural Studies, SOAS)

'Through the Colonial Lens: Articulating European Insertion and Presence into the Nineteenth-Century Gold Coast'

12h15 - 13h30

LUNCH at the October Gallery

13h45 - 14h30

5. Stephen TRAVERS (MA Postcolonial Studies, SOAS)

'Approaching Sierra Leone in Joseph Corry's *Observations upon the Windward Coast of Africa* (1807)'

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, England's increasing role in the slave trade aided the promotion of British interests in Africa, but it was not until the aftermath of the industrial revolution when the 'European economic interest in staple products and new markets exploded' (Claudia Gualtieri, 2002) that Africa became subject to systematic exploration and conquest. From 1788 onwards the African Association was active in charting newly explored areas in Africa and plotting the course of major rivers, with Mungo Park's expeditions between 1795 and 1805 attempting to solve the enigma of the Niger for the Europeans. In political response, the abolitionist cause revived at the turn of the 19th century, encouraged by an administration headed by abolitionist supporters and helped by Napoleon's attempts to reimpose slavery in the French islands. Abolition could take on both moral and strategic dimensions: attacking the slave trade could allow Britain to take the moral high ground while significantly undermining Napoleon's plans for the Caribbean.

Corry's text offers us important insights into a lesser known voice around the time of the Slave Trade Act of 1807. An employee of a trading firm on Bance Island, his text embodies the tensions between British imperial commercial interests and the impending reformative legislation, amounting to a vast opportunity to explore the subtleties of the era's colonial discourse. Also found in King's College London's Foreign and Commonwealth Office Historical Collection, naval surgeon Francis B. Spilsbury's *Account of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa, Performed by His Majesty's Sloop Favourite, in the Year 1805* (1807) and abolitionist physician Thomas Winterbottom's *An Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone* (1803) are productively employed throughout as counterpoints to Corry's text, enabling discussion of a plurality of underexposed perspectives from the 1800-1810 period of travel writing in West Africa. Framed within critically contextualised experiences of archival research, examination of Corry's text will take form through four distinct points of concentration: his representation of the natives, the extent to

which commercial interests influenced his text, its intriguing cartographic element and the importance of the illustrational components in the text.

Discussant: Rebecca JONES (PhD Candidate & Research Fellow, CWAS, Birmingham)

14h30-15h15

6. Alexander LOVETT (MA Postcolonial Studies, SOAS)

'The Tales of a Reluctant Traveler'

Retrospective travel writing is a genre that can readily eclipse entire landscapes, as it becomes the task of the discerning author to decide which points of interest are the most memorable; a process which inevitably necessitates the dismissal of less 'interesting' locations. Nautical landscapes often suffer within this tradition as they can easily be written off as places of tedium and boredom, as merely a watery limbo that separates one destination from another. Indeed, seas and oceans provide few objective interests for travelers - and even less for sailors - which places great significance upon ports and coastal landscapes, as positions against which travels on a nautical terrain can be plotted and imagined.

My archive research yielded the journal of Lieutenant Paymaster Donovan C. Roe, an officer who was – much to his horror – posted to Simonstown in 1912 on-board HMS Pegasus, as part of a squadron of three ships. My interest lies in Roe's second journal in which he documents his travels within African waters: from Gibraltar to Zanzibar via The Cape of Good Hope.

Roe's diary is something of a skeletal affair, which affixes importance to often unusual events and chooses to dismiss entire days upon which, "nothing of interest occurred." Roe's omissions provide a fascinating translation of the nautical landscape and grant insight into the process of transcription behind the journal form. Additionally, as a reluctant traveler, Roe affixes great importance to sites of familiarity, especially the colonial club; an institution which embodies a network of colonial power and forms an exclusive space for the Caucasian male. Indeed, Roe's perceptions frequently reflect the colonial sensibilities of his era, and unpicking this mentality is key for understanding why Roe's journal includes rather unexpected content and retains such a unique style.

Discussant: Kai EASTON (SOAS)

15h30 - 15h45 break

15h45 – 17h00

7. Robert LINES (MA Postcolonial Studies, SOAS)

Contemporary Nigerian Travel Writing: Teju Cole

8. Rebecca JONES (Research Fellow & PhD Candidate, CWAS, Birmingham)

'Writing for tomorrow': The travel writer as archivist in twentieth and twenty-first century Nigeria

"I knew I wasn't just going to be writing for today; I wanted to be writing for tomorrow. So that has always been my approach to writing: documenting, documenting, documenting," says Nigerian travel writer Pelu Awofeso, who has been travelling Nigeria documenting "everyday life" for the last ten years. This paper explores some of the different practices of archiving, historical memory and documentation at play in the work of Nigerian travel writers in Yoruba and English across the twentieth and twenty first centuries. While some Nigerian travel writers see their work as cultural documentation, others – such as the educated Christians of the early twentieth century – were more concerned with memorialising themselves in their personal diaries (often written with an eye to wider dissemination), creating their own archive of themselves as 'civilised' travellers. I compare this to other twentieth century 'archiving' practices in Yoruba and English print culture in Nigeria, such as locally published town histories and memoirs. I finish by thinking about the tension between these intense archiving practices and the strange amnesia surrounding Nigerian travel writing, and moreover the role of the researcher in these archives.

Rebecca Jones is a Research Fellow and doctoral student at the Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham, where she researches Nigerian travel writing in Yoruba and English from 1912 to the present day.

Discussant: Robert LINES (MA Postcolonial Studies, SOAS)

17h00 - Reception - Dept of the Languages & Cultures of Africa, Room G51

Saturday, 8 June 2013

10h30 - Welcome

10h45 - 12h15

1. Marie MARKWARDT (MA Comparative Literature, UCL)

'Travels to the Mission Stations: Journals from England to Genadendal, South Africa'

2. Amy FECHTMANN (MA Gender Studies, SOAS, University of London)

'A Family Archive in Black and White: Fragments of Farm Life in Swaziland in the 1980's and 1990's'

Discussants: Christine SINGER (Centre for Media & Film Studies, SOAS, University of London) and Danielle TRAN (L&C Africa, SOAS)

12h15- 12h45

3. Kate HAINES (PhD Candidate, University of Sussex)

'Marketing Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*: Cultural Memory and the Making of Contemporary Writing'

Using Claire Squires (2007) definition of "marketing literature" as not only "the acts of a publisher's marketing and press departments", but "the decisions publishers make in terms of presentation of books to the marketplace" and "the multiplicity of ways in which books are presented and represented in the marketplace" (2-3), this paper explores the marketing of Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and through this the book's transnational intervention in cultural memory. The first section looks at Adichie as a "celebrity novelist" and her appearance at literary festivals in Sydney, Jaipur and Galle. The second section considers the international response to the invitation to "Tell Your Biafra Story" on the book's website.

The paper explores the complex relationship between the production and reception of contemporary African writing and cultural memory, asking questions such as: Where are the spaces in which *Half of a Yellow Sun* has created public dialogue? How has *Half of a Yellow Sun* travelled and been read and received across different locations? What does this reveal about the relationship between individual memory, national memory and global memory?

Drawing on the work of James Young, the paper asks whether his idea of the "fundamentally interactive, dialogical quality of every memorial space" might have a particular resonance for contemporary Nigerian writing in English. It suggests that through the "marketing" of *Half of a Yellow Sun* Adichie promotes and provokes an "active" and "interactive, dialogical" approach to history and memory, which is very much part of the discursive tradition of West African reading cultures (Newell 2000, 2002).

Kate Haines is a DPhil student in the School of English at the University of Sussex. Her research explores the ways in which writing by Kenyan and Nigerian authors published since 2000 has intervened in the creation of cultural memory. In 2011 she presented on 'Marketing Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*: Cultural Memory and the Making of Contemporary Writing' at Spectres of World Literature, University of London and in 2012 on 'Dialogue, Text and Memory: The Production and Reception of Literary Responses to the Post-Election Violence in Kenya' at The Book in Africa, University of London. She was previously Head of Humanities at Palgrave Macmillan. She co-edits www.africanwords.com and is currently Associate Editor for the Kwani? Manuscript Project.

Discussant: Rebecca JONES (PhD Candidate & Research Fellow, CWAS, University of Birmingham)

12h45 - 14h15 LUNCH BREAK - Carluccios

14h30 – 15h00

4. Christine SINGER (Centre for Media & Film Studies, SOAS)

HIV/AIDS, youth, and media activism in South Africa: The Steps for the Future films

This paper explores a series of short films created by, for, and about young people from the Western and Eastern Cape of South Africa, all of whom are coping with the effects of HIV. These films are part of *Steps for the Future*, a media advocacy project commissioned by STEPS (Social Transformation and Empowerment Projects), one of the first South African film production companies seeking to address the country's HIV/AIDS crisis through films that are uplifting, inspiring and emotionally engaging. In 2009, STEPS held a series of filmmaking workshops with disenfranchised youths and assisted individual young people in producing their own short films. These films celebrate the strength of the youths who share their experiences and intend to provoke discussion around HIV/AIDS and related issues such as discrimination, teenage pregnancy, and xenophobia. To do so, STEPS screens the films in local schools, youth centres, and poor and remote areas. The film viewings are typically followed by a facilitated discussion with young audience members in order to answer questions and discuss the issues raised within the films. This paper discusses STEPS' participatory approach to filmmaking, the representations of young people and HIV/AIDS within the films, and these films' exhibition and reception. The paper ultimately interrogates the potential of STEPS' youth films for stimulating public debate about HIV/AIDS and for providing opportunities for historically marginalised youths to create and circulate representations of their own needs, concerns and identities in public spheres.

Discussant: Tammi GILL (MA Comparative Literature, SOAS)

15h00-15h30

5. Danielle TRAN (PhD Candidate, Dept of the Languages & Cultures of Africa, SOAS, University of London)

'The Problematic Museum Archive: District 6 and Robben Island as Sites of Trauma?'

This paper discusses how cultural sites in South Africa, namely District Six and Robben Island, may be charged with being guilty of intentionally maintaining South Africa's past trauma for financial gain, thus commodifying trauma. Furthermore, the conservation of these heritage sites and museums has meant that for some people, their identity remains greatly tied up with and to a certain extent troublingly defined by the history of apartheid. As a result, the construction of these locales may in some way become a site of trauma, which in turn may prevent some people from being able to successfully work through their trauma. By housing such painful memories within the enclosed walls of a museum, do such locales therefore act to sustain the trauma of apartheid?

Discussant: Marie MARKWARDT (MA Comparative Literature, UCL)

15h30-16h00

6. Katie REID (PhD Candidate, University of Sussex and Lecturer, University of Portsmouth)

'Travelling the Anglophone Literary Marketplace: Ivan Vladislavic's *Portrait with Keys*'

This paper will focus on South African author Ivan Vladislavic's most successfully and internationally commercial text to date, *Portrait with Keys: Joburg & what-what* (2006). Comprised of 138 numbered fragments, the text is itself a series of ambulatory, travelling observations unfolding as the author/narrator moves around the Johannesburg the book portrays. An additional appended section, 'Itineraries', offers a number of conceptual 'maps' in the form of sequences of selected fragments, to help the reader find possible ways through the text. Picking up on these playful evocations of authority, travel writing and the guidebook, and with reference to recent critical work on the strategies involved in transnational marketing of the postcolonial text, I will look at the ways that the very specifically located city that *Portrait with Keys* writes travels 'out' of South Africa into the 'global' anglophone literary market, the effects of that journey on the contexts of the work, and the interventions it makes into *Portrait* as an archival record of post-apartheid Johannesburg.

Discussant: Kate HAINES (PhD Candidate, University of Sussex)

7. Rashi ROHATGI (PhD, SOAS, University of London)

'Going Local in Mauritius'

Who is a traveller, and who counts as a local? This paper recalls the transformation of my fieldwork from a simple trip to the archives to an unlikely integration into the Mauritian literary sphere. In addition, I look at a range of contemporary Mauritian works epitomised by Kalpana Lalji's *Amargeet* and Natasha Soobramanien's *Genie and*

Paul. In an independent Mauritius, Kalpana Lalji's transcreation into Hindi of *Paul et Virginie*, and Natasha Soobramanien's homage novel *Genie and Paul* offer updates on what it means to be Mauritian. Reading these works can offer a local reading of an identity thrust upon the nation by famous visitors Mahatma Gandhi and Bernardin de St. Pierre. However, reading these works also lead to problems equating 'local' with 'authentic': Lalji is an immigrant to Mauritius, and Soobramanien is a second-generation Mauritian Brit. Can we read their interpretations of the story as informing us about the local without entering into a debate about whether these two writers count as authentically Mauritian? Both updates of the *Paul et Virginie* story were successful relative to the challenges of their respective markets, though they depicted Mauritian society in almost diametrically opposing ways. Does this mean that today, in Mauritius, the local, as depicted in these literary updates, is merely a brand that can be manipulated to signify anything at all?

Discussant: Rebecca JONES (CWAS, Birmingham)

8. Peter Johnston (PhD Royal Holloway, University of London)

'The Colony Survives the Night'

Discussant: Kai EASTON (SOAS)

IN Absentia

9. Brian CHIKWAVA (Caine Prize winner 2004, author of *Harare North*)

'An Evening in Mont Noir' (via email from Nice and commissioned for the occasion whilst the author was in Italy)

10. Tammi GILL (MA Comparative Literature, SOAS)

'Jehudi Ashmun's *History of the American Colony in Liberia*'

11. Jackie MUSTOE (MA Comparative Literature, UCL)

'The archive that dances upon history: reality/fiction, Sierra Leone and slavery'

12. Niyati PATEL (MA Postcolonial Studies, SOAS)

'The travel diary of Sir Arthur William Hill, former director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew of his journey to Cape Town, South Africa'

The figure of the explorer-naturalist in colonial travel writing is not new. Both fiction and non-fiction genres have often utilised this trope, this enticing figure of the lone

colonial traveller on his journeys to exotic, wild, uncultivated and often treacherous Edens to popular acclaim. Within the non-fiction genre, the travel writings of William Burchell, Sir Joseph Banks, Mary Hall, Ewart Grogan and Arthur Sharp are among the many that are already familiar to us. The question then arises that what does Sir Arthur William Hill's diaries offer us that hasn't already been discussed at great length using the manuscripts of perhaps more prolific and gifted writers, as well as adventurers who embarked on very early expeditions? In the preface to the diary of Sir Arthur William Hill, I argue that the records he kept of the people he met during his trip to Cape Town, the places he visited, as well as the few stray conversations that he reports, give us insight into how Cape Town's high society was during 1929-1930. Moreover, Hill's position as the Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, makes it possible for us to interrogate the politics of colonial botanical research, as well as explore the ways in which science was complicit in sparking and supporting the colonial mission. Hill's diary also suggests links between the various, often seemingly disconnected colonies in the Empire. His work as the Director of Kew and his notes provide evidence of tangible connections between the colonies based on Kew's insatiable desire for exotic plants from all over the world, and its economic and agricultural ambitions. If Hill's diary helps us imagine the colonial politics of what is usually considered a benign science, it also shows us evidence of the birth of early Western environmentalism. While the short excerpt from his much larger diary is not sufficient for a thorough examination of this, it is nevertheless a very interesting perspective from which to look at Hill's diary.

Discussant: Imogen MATHERS, [MA African Studies – retrospective written response as follows]

On Thursday evening I returned home late from an event at the Royal Society in London that I'd been sent to cover by my editor at work.

On arriving home, I read the opening pages of Niyati Patel's essay on the diaries of Arthur William Hill, director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew between 1922 and his death in 1941, a period corresponding with the expansion of Kew's imperial links and the growing politicisation of botany and science.

The parallels between the Royal Society debate, and the life and beliefs of the man now appearing on the pages before me, were striking – if not, on reflection, entirely surprising.

Thursday's event strove to galvanise discussions on the role of science in shaping – or how it was failing to shape – the post-2015 development agenda, as policymakers from Geneva to Jakarta attempt to thrash out a robust framework for poverty alleviation and development after the Millennium Development Goals' official 'expiry' in 2015.

Like many of the scientists whom I interviewed on Thursday, Hill was a member of the Royal Society. It's even possible his portrait could have been found among the august, moustached gentleman scientists – and they were, rather dispiritingly, almost entirely male – gazing down in swirls of oil pigment from the Royal Society's opulent walls, as I posed questions to twenty-first-century men and women of science.

And, like today's scientists, Hill was keenly attuned – albeit at a very different juncture in history – to the politics and politicisation of science.

Patel's essay explores the role of scientists and science as extensions of colonial power in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – and 'the politics of plant collecting as a colonial, botanical activity, and the networks of circulation of plants and people within the Empire'.

Hill's diary becomes, she writes, 'an important document which exposes the complex colonial politics of science and natural history'. As an archive, it reveals how, as Richard Drayton describes, 'the sciences shaped the pattern of imperial expansion. ... the sciences, with their promise of insight into, and control over, nature, lent potent ideological help'.

Patel quotes the nineteenth-century botanist John Lindley, who wrote, in 1838, that he believed Kew should be: "the nexus of a global network. It would be the sun around which the satellite imperial gardens revolved, bestowing their beneficial rays on British commerce, agriculture, medicine, horticulture, and manufactures".

'This "wonderfully rich criss-cross patterning" (Hulme and McDougall 2007, 7) of imperial botanists and officials,' Patel describes, 'further emphasises the intricate web of circulation of scientific research, flora and human beings that had the Royal Botanic Gardens placed at the centre with the colonies at the peripheries'.

Today, we live in a very different world, but one where the long shadow cast by these ways of thinking can be found in scientific and development debates spanning myriad sectors, from health and climate change to governance and gender.

As Patel's archival examination of Hill's diaries shows, the intermeshing of science, politics, colonialism and 'development' has a long and controversial history. And while the archetypal colonial adventurer or scientist is, in many ways, a figure of the past, it could still be argued that his vestiges can be found in contemporary policy frameworks that favour northern interests over those of communities in the global 'South'.

Many hope that the communication potentialities of the age we live in now – the new "criss-cross patterning" enabled by the internet and mobile communications, and the wider complexities of accelerating globalisation – will, today, help marginalised communities amplify their voices in science and development debates and hold northern policymakers to account. Patel's essay reveals, I feel, that these debates can – and should – learn important lessons from the historical but contemporarily illuminating diaries of scientists of the past.

Questions:

- What can Hill's diaries teach us about the role of science in imperial and post-imperial politics?
- In light of Antoinette Burton's observation (as quoted by Patel) that archives are not just a historical storage space but "an institution with a history of

institutionalization: a history that is deeply implicated in the politics of the nation-state as well as the production of scholarship and promotion of national memory and identity" (Burton, 160), what do the nexus of archive, location and history revealed by Hill's diary tell us about the production of colonial memory and identity?

- How can the Internet – in enabling the democratisation of access to archives and their removal from specific politically-inflected spaces (eg Kew) – affect our response to historical diaries and texts?