

TRAVELLING AFRICA & THE ARCHIVES

A POSTGRADUATE CONFERENCE

2 MAY 2014

Room 116 (OMB), SOAS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Convenors: Kai EASTON (SOAS) & Rebecca JONES (Birmingham)

WELCOME 10:15

SESSION 1: 10:30-12:15

1. Eleanor SHAW, 'Making Midwives: Sierra Leone's Hindered Journeys'

Sierra Leone's extortionately high infant mortality rate has been encouraging outside involvement in the country for more than a century. An attempt to locate the Sierra Leonean traditional birth attendants, who travelled from their home villages to train in regional centres as part of various schemes throughout the colonial and postcolonial eras, within the British governmental archive fails, forcing a reassessment of understandings of archival expectations and the archiving impetus of colonialism. By acknowledging the possibilities of alternative forms of archives we can expand the archival gaze to trace the multiple journeys of Europeans and Africans in the drive to make midwives, and attempt to locate African women's experiences in self-authored archives.

2. Lucy HARLEY-MCKEOWN 'Letters from Africa: postcolonial reparation of the Second World War narrative'

It is clear that a new kind of context in which to discuss the non-European narratives of the Second World War is needed in order for a modern audience to understand the full contribution of the European colonies to the war effort. Current narratives appear to pay homage only to the movements of European soldiers on African soil, and do not bear reference to the personal experiences and narratives of African soldiers deployed by European powers. This preface offers a reading of two sets of letters, written by African soldiers that narrate aspects of the African Second World War experience. It argues that, although the curated archive is a useful resource, it still potentially cannot present to us a reliable, non-colonised version of events experienced by African soldiers during this time period.

The first set of letters I am examining is a set of internal letters from soldiers serving in the Royal West African Frontier Force to the Matron and officer A. Morgan, often requesting different types of wartime leave from the 37th General Hospital in Ghana. These letters bring to light travel on a small scale, the affect of colonial authority on familial matters, and the greater discomfort felt by the families left behind by soldiers. The second set of letters I am

examining refers to retrospective war narratives from African ex-servicemen, written specifically for Martin Plaut's BBC World Service radio series 'Africa's Forgotten Soldiers'. Comparing these two archives brings into play questions of reliability, colonial responsibility, narrative reality, and manoeuvring the postcolonial archive. Each of these sets of letters attempts to address the non-combat related aspects of military travel: enlistment, 'jaunts' to foreign countries, the prospect of return, and familial hardships, whilst helping us flesh out the non-European war story. They help to ask and answer the question posed by McEwan, 'can complete stories ever be told from partial records?'

LUNCH (12:30-1:45) – OCTOBER GALLERY

SESSION II: 2:00 – 3:30

3. Sarah GHAZALI, 'Intertextuality, Source Studies and the Archive'

Following a two-month long scrutiny of the works of Thomas Winterbottom, a doctor/ writer who had travelled to Sierra Leone in 1792, discrepancies regarding the influences of texts and writing traditions on Winterbottom's *An Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone*, have been found to deter positive reception to the text. Criticism of borrowed knowledge and inauthenticity have constantly been made in response to the aforementioned discrepancies. The objective of this paper is to suggest that the filtering of influences into archive materials were inevitable, and that they were due to the desire of each author to be inducted into various writing traditions. My arguments will be pursued through analysis of the various writing traditions, and archive materials, that might have influenced the formation of the text. As a result, I aim to redeem perspective on Winterbottom's works, through detailed analysis of the form, rather than the content, of his book.

4. Chris BURNS, 'A Preface to Richard Barnard Fisher's *The Importance of the Cape of Good Hope* and the British Empire's Deployment of an Epistemological Vantage Point in the Cape'

This essay focuses on Robert Fisher's 'The Importance of the Cape of Good Hope' (1816); an archival document that was retrieved from the Foyles Special Collections Library at King's College London. It begins by theorising my own personal experiences with this research and the significance of viewing travel metaphorically, whether for better or worse. From this point, the essay moves on to discuss the problems of writing histories, understanding of historical evidence and exercising scepticism about how to treat content with such an exceptional socioeconomic agenda. It also takes in account the rise of empirical observation and the location of knowledge production in the cultivation of political power. Fisher is a British coloniser who is contributing to what J.M. Coetzee would call the 'Discourse of the Cape.' A close-reading of

the preface to Fisher's document is provided and a connection is drawn between this travel narrative and its intertextual links to Jonathan Swift's 'Gulliver's Travels.' By considering questions of representation and genre, this essay intends to provide an insight into the history of travel writing, ethnography and other disciplines that gave rise to colonial fictions/non-fictions of the nineteenth-century.

5. Paul BORHAUG, 'The Alldridge Archives'

My project was about the archives of Thomas Joshua Alldridge. Having travelled extensively through Sierra Leone in various capacities as a colonial official, he witnessed, documented and gained deep knowledge of secret societies. What I found in the process, however, is that Alldridge's archives also reveal him as a pioneering traveler, a terrific writer, an expert photographer, as well as a passionate collector. I thus early suspected his archives might provide a wealth of interesting material, ideal for discussion of such topics as travel, colonialism, representation and culture-exchange, in addition to what I was initially looking for. Through academic dissection of the multitude of material in his archives, especially photographs from his travels and of Secret Societies, I aim to show how his work provides a gateway to exceptional insight to all of the aforementioned fields of interest. In addition, his archives reveal him personally as a man with exceptional views on colonial impact, and his legacy confronts the stereotypical views of colonial official. His unique personal perspective is the crux of the matter in this context.

6. Alice WILLIAMS, "'The Whittlian Age": William Whittle as missionary & traveller on the Gold Coast of Africa'

This paper introduces William Whittle's (1894-1990) archive, my great grandfather, who served as a missionary on the Gold Coast in Africa in the first half of the twentieth century. A memoir written in the 1980s, the recordings of an interview and various photographs from his time in Ghana constitute the main elements of the archival collection I will be looking at. In order to do this, I shall examine the genre of the memoir and its historical meaning, so that an idea of its importance can be established along with some necessary precautions that a historian must be aware of when dealing with such source materials. Furthermore, embedded within the memoir are Whittle's significant perceptions of his contact with Africans, along with an emphasis on travel. By focussing on these two aspects, I will be able to show the extent to which the genre of memoir influences Whittle's observations and yet brings to the forefront not only the important and complete memories but also Whittle's lasting impressions and influence. By combining multiple genres, this paper allows a diverse approach to the topic of missionary narrative. Altogether, this paper intends to familiarise the reader with a relatively unknown missionary and his works on the West Coast of Africa.

SESSION III

3:45 – 5:00

7. Lydia WASSAN, 'Dora Earthy's Anthropological Novel'

Dora Earthy was a moderately successful missionary cum autodidactic anthropologist active in Mozambique and Liberia in the 1930s and 40s. Despite a quick rise to some prominence with the publication of *Valenge Women* in 1933, the book would be her only lengthy publication, despite a fully-funded ethnographic trip to Liberia. Among the unpublished work from her time in Liberia is a novel: *Lighten our Darkness*, a story filled with evocative anthropological vignettes and triumphant conversions to Christianity. By viewing *Lighten our Darkness* as a work of varied genre, content and perspective, it becomes clear that, much like Dora herself, its failure was down to the fact that it *didn't fit anywhere*. Earthy's tone is too sympathetic to *colonized* customs for missionary tastes, yet far too religious for the burgeoning Anthropological Academy. Ultimately, Earthy's quirkiness, talent and uncompromising character are what is to be admired about her. Her qualities may not have positioned her to become a successful professional anthropologist, but they certainly serve to make her memorable.

8. Marta TVEIT, 'Among the Nyakyusa: Anthropologist Godfrey Wilson (1908-1944): Scholar, Traveller and Disciple'

This paper developed for my personal interest in the history and historiography of the Nyakyusa tribe of Southwestern Tanzania, as I come from the Nyakyusa on my father's side of the family. Up to a little past the middle of the twentieth century, in the 'golden age' of the ethnography, the Nyakyusa were a favourite with ethnographers operating in southern Africa.

It was through inquiry into early studies of the Nyakyusa that I found anthropologist Godfrey Wilson (1908-1944). Godfrey Wilson studied under, and was a diehard disciple of, Bronislaw Malinkowski at the London School of Economics. In the 1930s Godfrey and his wife Monica Wilson undertook one of the most intensive husband/wife team field-studies among the Nyakyusa. I decided to delve deeper into the life of Godfrey Wilson for two reasons. First, there is already a store of literature on the life and contributions of his South-African wife, Monica Wilson, yet Godfrey Wilson and his contribution has arguably been neglected. Second, besides being downright sensational, Godfrey Wilson's life-story seems to embody the romantic myth and nostalgia around travels in Africa juxtaposed with the courser realities of colonialism.

This paper is a take on Godfrey Wilson as a traveller and travel-writer. Ethnographies can arguably be seen as a form of travel-writing as they often

bring the reader close to the writer; despite trying for objectivity the interviewees and their environment are always presented to the reader through the eyes of the ethnographer. On the basis of this premise, this paper attempts to frame Godfrey Wilson in the light of travel and travel-writing. It asks, loosely: what kind of traveller was Godfrey Wilson? Does he fit the trope of the colonial African explorer? What motivated his travels in Africa?

The first section covers the biography of Godfrey Wilson and, to an extent, Monica Wilson, especially focusing on their time among the Nyakyusa. The second examines three primary sources found at the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. I am limited by the fact that the majority of primary material concerning the Wilsons is in South Africa, as part of the Wilson collection at the University of Cape town, and is therefore inaccessible to me at present. Therefore, this paper draws heavily on secondary sources, especially a compilation of essays on Monica and Godfrey Wilson, edited by Leslie and Andrew Bank (2013), combined with what can be found at the Royal Anthropological Institute. Third: an analysis of the sources examined, one that endeavors to frame Godfrey Wilson as a traveller and travel-writer. The analysis explores what kind of traveller Godfrey Wilson was by looking at what motivated his departure, his route and the absence of a proper return.

9. Olubumni Olubusola BAKARE, 'Political Travels: Nigeria's First Prime Minister Sir Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa in the 'Land of the Free'

Post-independence Nigeria and the flowering of nationalistic sentiment paved the way for extensive political travels within the African continent and beyond, notably Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's visit to the United States in 1961. Over 20 minutes of footage in the President John F. Kennedy digital archive raises pertinent questions about the expansiveness of the travel genre to include political travels, the role of digital archives in by-passing institutional hegemonies and reconstructing buried histories, and the forging of post-colonial identity in Africa's most populous and increasingly influential country.

10. 'Travelling Archives': Kai Easton and Rebecca Jones

Reception: The Lamb, Lamb's Conduit Street