



# NEWSLETTER

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*The State of African Studies, 2000*  
*Memo for Richard Lavers (FCO) from John Lonsdale (ASAUK), 25/1/00*

*NOTE: In January Richard Lavers, head of the FCO Research Department, contacted John Lonsdale, as President of ASAUK, in relation to the FCO's concern of the declining knowledge of Africa among the British newspaper-reading public. The following memo was prepared by John Lonsdale for presentation to the FCO. JML consulted colleagues widely in preparing this memo, but he alone is responsible for its opinions and facts. It does not commit anyone, least of all the FCO, to any plan of action. It is hoped that the memo itself can serve as a background document for general discussion at the ASAUK Biennial meeting in September. The memo suggests there are three areas of concern, outlines possible remedies (not all of them costly) and makes other general remarks.*

## A The African Studies Problem

It is generally agreed that there are deep problems to do with the structures of academic provision, individual opportunity, career structure and replacement.

### *1 Academic provision: what we can no longer do*

- a) High overseas students fees are a widespread concern. We can no longer teach Africans (seedbed of future friendship) to the extent we once did. Africans can least of all afford the fees; arguably they are most in need of access to British universities. The Centre of West African Studies reckons the raised fee has effectively killed off their once-flourishing import of West African MA and PhD students. SOAS, for the same reason, has been unable to implement its postgraduate course for African language-policy-making; and feels particularly keenly the loss of its former role in giving doctoral-level training to African university lecturers in post: their home universities can no longer afford that yet it is scarcely a luxury. Edinburgh would not have a single African on their MA in African studies were it not for an annual half-scholarship from DFID. Statistics of this year's post-graduate awards by the Cambridge Commonwealth Trust suggests that Africans are well-equipped to enter UK courses (in all disciplines). Of 420 Commonwealth students admitted with CCT awards in 1999, no less than 85 were from Africa (23 South Africa, 14 Zimbabwe, 10 Ghana, 9 Kenya, 7 Nigeria etc), as against 110 from Canada and Australasia, 95 from the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka, 86 from Singapore and Malaysia. Oxford, also with sources of external funding, similarly feels that it is not difficult to attract African postgraduates. Lack of talent is clearly not a problem where the money is found. There is a strong case for 'affirmative action' in favour of Africans here.

- b) Libraries have suffered large cuts in ability to buy Africana. Librarians can no longer go on book-buying trips to Africa as some once did; there is a growing dialogue of the deaf, therefore, between British and African scholars with segregated bibliographies. The crucial ephemera and daily newspapers of to-day are being lost to us (and with them the history of today by future historians). In one particular economising exercise the subscription to *African Economic History* was axed, the *Journal of Medieval Yorkshire History* was kept (in a University distant from Yorkshire). The BM Newspaper Library at Colindale is thought to be acquiring less from Africa than CEAN Bordeaux.
- c) Africanist staffing is in decline in older universities with the longest traditions of African studies in established disciplines. Edinburgh had 4 posts for Africanists in the 1960s; now it has one half. Edinburgh is not alone. York has lost its once-significant Centre of African studies; other centres are known to be under threat (and with the loss of centres one loses morale and ability to communicate).
- d) The loss of language-teaching capacity at SOAS is especially serious: they can no longer teach such major languages as Shona, Bemba, Fula and Mende, for instance (all to the detriment of communication with major Commonwealth countries). Moreover, to attract the student numbers that attract funding, even the few remaining SOAS language-courses are adding 'culture' at the expense of language. There are deleterious consequences for (oral) pre-colonial history and post-colonial, contemporary, studies. One can't begin to understand human rights and other contemporary issues without a deep language-attuned appreciation of local culture.
- e) Research funding is noticeably on the decline. African research is more expensive and riskier than research in UK and Europe. Several colleagues have cited their recent inability to visit Africa in consequence.

## 2 *The structure of academic opportunity*

The number of lecturing posts is only part of the problem. While older departments have fewer Africanist posts than before and centres have closed or are under threat – thanks in part to the loss of the Hayter and Parry ring-fenced funding of former days – there are probably more Africa-related posts than before in the aggregate, thanks to appointments in the former Polytechnics, which also best meet the inner-city Black British demand.

However:

- a) RAE stresses disciplinary rather than area specialisation – and area studies, not least in Africa with less than 2% of world trade, does not attract external funding. So it is difficult to build up the specialised courses/MAs etc from external funds that might strengthen student demand in the 'hard' disciplines that include African material;
- b) disciplinary status is in any case attached to work in core rather than peripheral areas, publication in core journals rather than area studies ones. This bias is built into the ESRC's hierarchy of preferred theoretical and topical fields for its postgraduate studentships: the Council seems not to accept that what happens outside Europe can affect Europe;
- c) There is a worry that the pursuit of student numbers under current funding regimes may result in the creation of rather 'soft' cultural and/or diaspora study courses.

## 3 *Career structures*

This, with the lack of language training, seems to be where the deepest problem lies.

Postgraduate research grants are for three years only, without therefore a 'language year'. Departments are also under funding-body pressure to get doctoral candidates through the production line in three years only: this is virtually impossible where the



research involves language acquisition and extended fieldwork or archival research in unsatisfactory facilities in Africa. (There are procedures for obtaining exceptions to this time-pressure but they involve more hassle). Thereafter, first teaching appointments can no longer be in Africa as thirty years ago they commonly were, with the opportunity for further local immersion. In consequence, in the most demanding British centre of Africanist scholarship, most SOAS lecturers under 35 are non-British. Somehow the possibility of long-term immersion in Africa must be re-created (for which ideas are floated below).

Perhaps the biggest problem is at the bottom of the career ladder: getting funding for British graduate students (and their language training); so that some Africanist careers do not even start.

All this has implications for the replacement of the current (ageing) generation of Africanists. Speaking personally: I have supervised 26 successful African-history PhDs in 30 years. Of these 9 are British; of these 4 teach in UK institutions of higher education; of these only 1 was supervised more recently than 1984. On the other hand 6 of my former students teach in South African universities alone. Most of my colleagues could tell a similar story.

## B Suggested Remedies

*Include existing trends in the logic of Africanist enquiry, and the fostering of genuine exchanges – to ensure that Africa does not become a mere 'poverty problem', without interlocuteurs valables (significantly without an English equivalent) among its élites.*

### 4 Disciplinary trends

#### In general

- (i) it is agreed the onus lies on Africanist academics who need to persuade more non-Africanists that we have interesting things to say to them, worth more of their funding support; and
- (ii) without the broad cultural/historical/social analysis that universities ought to be able to provide then policy-directed, short-termist research will get nowhere, leaving the FCO with nothing but (faulty) short-term advice.

#### Some trends that may be of special interest:

- a) 'African Studies' and 'Diaspora studies' in undergraduate and taught MA courses are thought to be especially valuable in attracting the Black British constituency, whose talents are an under-represented resource. Care will have to be taken to ensure such courses are 'hard' rather than 'soft'.
- b) Religious studies (Christianity & Islam) attract external funding and thus combine both the emerging logic of our enquiries, richness of evidence and (with some caution) relevance to UK policy concerns.
- c) Similarly, bio-diversity, ecology and local knowledges are of growing academic interest – all of which need a local language to be pursued in real depth, and are of clear 'long term' interest for the future stability of Africa.
- d) UK Africanist political science seems weak (by comparison with USA and France), especially on multi-party democracy, not so much on how to get there as how to make it work on arrival. Political science might particularly benefit from the institutes suggested under 6 below. And there are already bright spots: to understand the causes of Africa's present disorders needs a political understanding of Africa's extraversion, quasi-statehood and mafia-capitalism – which a conventional international relations approach cannot fathom but which certain Africanists are pioneering nonetheless.

### 5 Exchanges

The funding of two-way sabbatical exchanges is urgently needed, so that African academics can get into our libraries while young Britons can get a real taste of Africa, in recreation of the early immersions of the current (and outgoing) generation. But this would do little good unless the incentives for the African brain drain to USA were reduced: clearly there is no easy solution.

#### Without such exchanges:

- a) it will be increasingly hard to work on terms of equality with local African academics, either to teach their junior members or (especially) to learn from their seniors;
- b) UK interest in Africa will become increasingly single-stranded: poverty and conflict alleviation without a discursive equality with Africans and therefore fairly futile in foreign policy terms.
- c) there is a special disciplinary problem in the lack of UK-African exchange in African archaeology at a time when Africans are increasingly aware of the need for 'heritage protection': an initiative being lost to USA and the continent. There is nothing elsewhere comparable to the British Institute in Eastern Africa which could in its increasingly multidisciplinary form be a model (provided it is properly funded) for:-

### 6 Africa-based multidisciplinary research institutes

These seem to be essential, if costly, to act as nursemaids for UK-African scholarly exchange and co-operation, to fund post-doctoral work for UK scholars to work in Africa and so on, to build African research capacity generally. The French appreciate the need (with IFRA and ORSTOM). In my own experience it is easier for young Kenyans to get funded research attachments in France than in UK. There scope for Anglo-French co-operation here, nursed by the British Council, in association with the British Academy. Three would be desirable, the existing one (redefined and re-funded) in Nairobi, one in West Africa, the other in southern Africa.

### 7 Ethical worries

Academics don't want to be asked to identify the state's enemies: Islam, fake asylum-seekers, HIV- or other disease-carriers, criminal cultures.

### 8 General

- (i) the state gets the knowledge it pays for. This is especially worrying in the case of the Home office's country assessors for asylum-seekers: their knowledge is too often abysmal.
- (ii) The FCO is congratulated on the success of Chevening scholarships in Khartoum, but is asked to extend their remit to get Africans here.
- (iii) There is a lack of co-ordination and synthesis of knowledge. Aid-NGOs often know much more about contemporary Africa than Universities do. But to universalise their knowledge requires a structure we don't have and would find difficult to organise without institutional funding. A case perhaps for FCO/DFID/British Academy co-operation.

### *Obituary: John Wiseman*

John Wiseman, Senior Lecturer in African Politics at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, died of cancer on 5 March 2000, at the tragically early age of 54. John was always proud to have been a product of the Department of Government at Manchester, where he



took both his undergraduate degree and his Ph.D. with Bill Tordoff and Dennis Austin between 1968 and 1974, completing his Ph.D. under Bill's supervision on 'The Organisation of Political Conflict in Botswana'. He then taught for three years at Ahmadu Bello University, before taking up what proved to be his lifetime post at Newcastle in 1977.

Sceptical of theory, and moved by a deep love of Africa, John always saw African politics as deriving from the needs, aspirations and struggles of individual Africans, rather than from grand global narratives. This was an approach that encouraged the empathetic and fieldwork-based study of individual African states, first in Botswana, but also in his second African home, The Gambia, while at the time of his death he was working on Malawi. It also led to an interest in leadership, expressed in his *Political Leaders in Black Africa* (1991), and to an abiding conviction that Africans were every bit as capable as anyone else in the world, given half a chance, of managing effective multi-party democracies. This conviction was expressed in his two major books, *Democracy in Black Africa: Survival and Revival* (1990), and *The New Struggle for Democracy in Africa* (1996), as well as an edited volume, *Democracy and Political Change in Sub-Saharan Africa* (1995). Fittingly, the last publication before his death was 'The Continuing Case for Demo-Optimism in Africa', *Democratization* (1999).

A lifelong enthusiast, John made an enormous contribution to the study of Africa, as teacher, colleague and friend. His final-year undergraduate course on African politics at Newcastle regularly attracted more than seventy students a year. He was an active member of ASAUK, especially in organising conference panels and serving on its Executive Committee, and was Book Review Editor first of *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, and from 1997 of *The Journal of Modern African Politics*. He will be deeply missed, both amongst the Africanist community in the United Kingdom, and in those parts of the continent that he knew and loved.

A memorial fund has been established, and will be donated to projects in those parts of Africa with which John was most closely associated. Cheques should be made payable to the 'University of Newcastle', and sent to Mrs Joan Davison, Department of Politics, University of Newcastle, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE1 7RU. (*Christopher Clapham*)

*[Note: Following John's death, Christopher Clapham shall for the moment be taking over responsibility for book reviews in JMAS, and would be grateful if any books, correspondence and reviews could be sent to him at: Department of Politics, University of Lancaster, LA1 4YL (email: jmas@lancaster.ac.uk)].*

#### *Audrey Richards Prize 2000*

This ASAUK Prize is awarded biennially to the best doctoral thesis in African studies in the human sciences (i.e., anthropology, arts, economics, history, law, literature, politics, sociology, social history of medicine etc) which has been successfully examined in a UK institution of higher education in the two calendar years preceding each ASAUK biennial conference. Eligibility for the 2000 prize is limited to those whose dissertations have been approved in the period 1st January 1998 to 31st December 1999. Nominations must be made by supervisors (and through supervisors if by examiners), with the permission of the candidate. Each supervisor may nominate ONE candidate only. The letter of nomination must be accompanied by a copy of the thesis and, where possible, copies of the examiners' reports. Nominations must be received by Lindsay Allen, Hon. Secretary of the ASAUK, School of

Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, by 30 June 2000. No late entries will be accepted.

The successful thesis will be that which, in the committee's judgement, makes the greatest contribution to the understanding of Africa in the human sciences. After intellectual distinction, originality and contribution to the field, an essential criterion is intelligibility to scholars in disciplines other than that for which it was submitted.

The prize will consist of books of a value to be determined, to be selected from the lists of publishers who have kindly agreed to contribute, and an invitation to participate free of charge at the next biennial conference. A formal award of the prize will where possible be made at the conference.

### *Meetings, Lectures & Events*

22 May: The next meeting of the council of ASAUk will be held on this date at 4pm at SOAS.

1-22 May: The research seminar of the African Studies Centre at the University of Cambridge will be meeting on the first four Mondays of May at 5pm, Committee Room, Faculty of Social & Political Sciences New Museums Site, Free School Lane, Cambridge. All are welcome.

### *Conferences Future...*

*Conference listings may appear twice: one short and one long, the second notice appearing in the nearest quarterly number prior to the conference date. Organizers are invited to keep the Newsletter up-to-date with any changes or additions to earlier notices.*

#### UNITED KINGDOM

28-30 April: *The Review of African Political Economy* holds its millennium conference 'Africa: Capturing the Future' at the University of Leeds. This is a CORRECTION to the notice in Newsletter No. 18, where the date was incorrectly given as November. Contact: University of Leeds Centre for African Studies, Rm. 11.13, Institute for Politics & International Studies, University of Leeds LS2 9JT; email: African-Studies@leeds.ac.uk; or <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/polis>; or [www.roape.org](http://www.roape.org).

24-25 May: 'Africa's indigenous peoples: "first peoples" or "marginalized minorities"?', Annual International Conference of the Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh. Contact: Alan Barnard, Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, A.Barnard@ed.ac.uk.

3 June: Britain Zimbabwe Society Research Day, 'Rethinking Zimbabwean nationalism: urban social history, labour & politics', at St Antony's College, Oxford, 10am to 5.30pm. Contact: David Maxwell, Dept of History, Keele University, Keele, Staffs ST5 5BG; tel +44-(0)1782-711758; email: [hia00@keele.ac.uk](mailto:hia00@keele.ac.uk).

18-21 August: 'Africa 2000', University of Liverpool, will consider art, culture, cinema, media, architecture, music and topics related to politics, economics and the cultural geographies of African cultural production. Visit <http://www.liv.ac.uk/abe/africa2000/main.html>.

**30 Aug-1 Sept:** 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Sudan Studies: '*Sudan: past, present & future*', University of Durham. The conference will include a display of art by Sudanese artists resident in the UK. Fees: £60, or £20 for daily attendance; student rate £35 or £12 for daily attendance. Contact: Sudan Conference, Department of History, 43, North Bailey, Durham DH1 3EX; tel: +44-(0)191-374-2437; fax: +44-(0)191-374-4754; email: Justin.Willis@durham.ac.uk; conference website: [www.durham.ac.uk/History](http://www.durham.ac.uk/History).

### *The CHANGE Project*

The CHANGE Project is developing a list of African social scientists engaged in research (including economists, demographers, human geographers, psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and all related disciplines). Social scientists who provide contact information will have the opportunity, if they wish, to be included in a web-based directory of African social scientists, a mailing list for information on research opportunities and meetings, and/or in a database of consultants that will be available to funding and academic institutions. To obtain a registration form, please contact the CHANGE Project by email at [changeinfo@aed.org](mailto:changeinfo@aed.org), by fax at 1-202-884-8454, or download it after April 2nd 2000 from the CHANGE website at [www.changeproject.org](http://www.changeproject.org).

### *Theses Recently Accepted at UK Universities*

*The Newsletter depends on supervisors and successful candidates to supply us with details of new theses.*

Fergus Lyon, 'Trust and power in farmer-trader relations: a study of small scale vegetable production and marketing systems in Ghana', Ph.D Department of Geography, University of Durham. (2000).

### *Recent and Forthcoming Publications*

*Listings of recently published or forthcoming books by ASAU/RA5 members. Members are invited to send in details, including number of pages, ISBN numbers, price and publication date (where known).*

Richard Fardon & Graham Furniss (eds), *Africa's Broadcast Cultures: Radio in Transition* (Oxford: James Currey) 256pp. ISBN 0-85255-829-5, £40.00 (cloth); 0-85255-828-7, £14.95 (paper) (April 2000)

Christopher Fyfe (ed.), *Anna Maria Falconbridge, Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone, with Alexander Falconbridge, An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press) 236pp. ISBN 0-85323-643-7 £14.95 (paper) (March 2000).

David Killingray & S R Ashton (eds), *British Documents on the End of Empire. The West Indies* (London: The Stationery Office) civ + 750pp. ISBN 0-11-290577-3, £160 (cloth) (1999).

David Killingray & David Omissi (eds), *Guardians of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press) (1999).



### *Appointments, Academic Links and Exchanges*

*Centre of African Studies, University of London:* Professor Janice Harris (Professor of English, University of Wyoming) is currently in the UK working on an analysis of southern African narratives of the land as those narratives help to shape current debates throughout southern Africa on land reform and reallocation. Dr Paivu Hasu (Cultural Anthropology, University of Helsinki), will be at the Centre until February 2001, carrying out research on the work of the Leipzig Mission in Kilimanjaro 1893-1940.

*University of Cambridge:* Elizabeth Watson began in October a three year assistant lectureship held jointly at the Department of Geography and at Newnham College, Cambridge

### *Awards, Prizes and Fellowships*

*University of Durham:* The History Department is pleased to announce that it will be offering up to five studentships for postgraduate research leading to the Ph.D degree. Tenable from October 2000, and for a period of three years, each studentship will cover the cost of tuition fees to UK nationals, and a maintenance allowance of approximately £5,000 p.a. EU and overseas students are also eligible, although the awards will not cover the full cost of overseas fees. Contact: Mrs Susan Duncan, History Department, 43 North Bailey, Durham, DH1 3EX, UK. e-mail: Postgraduate.History@durham.ac.uk.

*St Antony's College, Oxford University:* Ingrid Yngstrom is the Kirk-Greene Junior Research Fellow in Tropical African Studies.

*Wolfson College, Oxford University:* The University of Oxford is offering the *Godfrey Lienhardt Studentship in African Anthropology* from October 2000. The Studentship will be for D.Phil. research only.

#### **Note to Contributors**

The *Newsletter* solicits short reports (of around 2-300 words) on recent conferences, announcements of forthcoming conferences, symposia and workshops (giving topic, date, venue, and contact address), announcements of the awarding of grants, fellowships and prizes, news of appointments and visiting fellowships, publication announcements of books by members, and brief articles or notices on matters of importance to Africanists in the UK. All items for inclusion in the *Newsletter* should be sent to Douglas H. Johnson, Editor, ASAUK Newsletter, James Currey Publishers, 73 Botley Road, Oxford OX2 0BS (fax: (+44) (0)1865-246454), or e-mail: 106155.3441@compuserve.com (please send as text, not as attachments). *Deadlines are 31 December (for the January Newsletter), 25 March (for April), 25 June (for July), and 30 September (for October).* Any opinions expressed are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the ASAUK.

For all matters relating to membership of either the ASAUK or RAS contact Lindsay Allan, RAS/ASAUK, SOAS, Thornhaugh St., Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG (tel: +44-(0)171-323-6253; fax: +44-(0)171-436-3844; email: ras@soas.ac.uk).