AFRICA-FOCUSED RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT DAY

October 22, 2018
SFU Harbour Centre

Organized by
SFU International
SFU African Studies Working Group

With funding from
SFU Office of the Vice-President, Research and International
Introduction

The SFU African Studies Working Group and SFU International, with funding from the SFU Office of the Vice-President, Research and International, and in-kind support from the SFU School for International Studies, hosted an Africa-focused Research and Engagement Day at the SFU Vancouver campus on October 22, 2018. The one-day workshop provided the opportunity for SFU faculty and graduate students to connect with others working on Africa-related research. A total of 17 faculty members and graduate students from seven disciplines delivered short presentations about their research. Following a networking lunch, the attendees were invited to contribute to two panel discussions which demonstrated existing strengths and significant interest in pursuing further interdisciplinary collaboration around Africa-focused research and engagement at and through SFU.

Audience members listen to one of the many presentations of Africa-focused research by SFU scholars.
Overview

Welcome: SFU, Africa, and the future

The workshop opened with an address by Darren Schemmer, Executive Director of SFU International, outlining the research and international engagement strategies at SFU. In his remarks, Darren emphasized how prominently Africa will feature in global relations and interests for many reasons, including the continent’s growing share of the world’s population. (The United Nations predicts that by 2050 one in every four people on earth will be born in Africa.) Elizabeth Cooper, Assistant Professor in the School for International Studies, provided an overview of the African Studies Working Group which is an interdisciplinary group of SFU faculty and staff established in 2018 with a mandate to promote Africa-focused research and engagement activities at and through SFU. The African Studies Working Group is preparing a proposal to establish an African Studies Centre at SFU to ensure the continuity and growth of these initiatives. See Appendix A for more about the SFU African Studies Working Group.

Research: Africa-focused research at SFU

The morning featured presentations of current research by 17 faculty members and graduate students from the disciplines of Anthropology, Archeology, Education, French, Health Sciences, History, and International Studies. The presenters’ research spans 14 countries including Algeria, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania (Zanzibar), and Uganda. Topics of SFU scholars’ current research include colonial politics; identity politics; youth protests; education systems; gender bias in post-secondary institutions; domestic workers and caregivers; intracontinental migration; Africa-China migration; links between ethnicity and poverty; global politics of health crisis responses; post-conflict reconciliation; HIV/AIDS; health care in refugee camps; traditional medicine; human-environmental interactions; and urbanization. See Appendix B for a complete list of research presentations.
Discussion: How to pursue Africa-focused research and engagement

The afternoon involved attendees in panel discussions providing direction for the development of Africa-related research and an African Studies Centre. The first discussion focused on decolonizing the research and practice of African studies and highlighted the need to address the persistent inequalities in academia and how these are reproduced, and to recognize the expertise of people in and from different parts of Africa. Among the topics discussed, panelists and audience members noted that knowledge production on Africa is overwhelmingly driven by Western institutions and follows an extractive mode of practice. They emphasized the need to include – and help to support recognition of – the contributions of Africans, including African scholars. As several participants noted, in studies of Africa, expertise is often assigned to, or assumed by, non-Africans, while Africans are relegated to the role of ‘native informants.’

On the topic of research, it was pointed out that the approach of characterizing conditions in Africa as significantly and consistently problematic (often in order to justify new research funds) can mean that the efforts of those in Africa are not credited. A participant suggested ‘We need to look at how we are teaching about problems [in Africa], how we are talking about who is solving those problems, and who gets credit.’ Another participant noted that incentive structures for academics tend to reward individual leadership and accomplishments, rather than efforts to build capacity, collaborate, and try to ‘lead from behind,’ all of which might lead to wider and more enduring benefits for collaborators in Africa.

As for SFU, a participant observed that Africa seems to be at the bottom of the hierarchy of interest when it comes to research and engagement. The lack of professors at SFU of African descent is noticeable to students and limits the kinds of expertise to which SFU students are exposed. Students spoke about how little of what they are assigned to read is written by African authors and how this impoverishes understandings of Africa for all SFU students and makes the education less resonant for African students especially. Furthermore, students noted that professors tend not to recognize the different kinds of knowledge and insights students from Africa have to contribute to studies on Africa. As one
participant expressed it, professors need to ‘be humble enough’ to recognize the value of different experiences and knowledge that African students can bring to their classrooms. In addition, participants stressed the need to consider the challenges faced by African students experiencing the Western education system at SFU. One participant commented, ‘What is colonialism within academia? When we talk about the concept of coloniality it might be too large. Instead, can we talk about one student? … What is colonialism in the context of one student and how we teach that student coming from an African country to a Canadian university? What curriculum are they integrated into? What are the intentions? And what are the outcomes? How does that relate back to life experience as a national of an African country?’ On the point of enriching SFU education with scholars from Africa, including professors, visiting researchers, and students, one participant argued that SFU should think about how to make SFU attractive to them.
The second panel discussion focused on the **proposed establishment of an African Studies Centre at SFU**. The conversation indicated an enthusiasm for research collaboration and the development of international partnerships, while noting the challenge of securing reliable funding for the Centre to undertake projects related to its mandate. The discussion indicated that the organizers will need to draw on their own networks to secure external funding and conduct research into the best practices used by other research centres. Furthermore, panelists and audience members established that creating intellectual space for the interdisciplinary discussion of African topics at the university, perhaps through monthly workshops, was an initial priority. The discussants emphasized the need to partner with student groups that are already organizing similar activities and to foster mentorship connections between professors and students from and with interests in Africa. It was also mentioned that the development of a website could easily make people aware of the various research interests of faculty and graduate students and facilitate cross-disciplinary collaboration.
The next steps for the African Studies Working Group include the establishment of a website furnished with information about SFU-specific initiatives and researchers and practitioners focusing on Africa, an ongoing agenda of events for SFU and non-SFU audiences, and the submission of the formal proposal for an African Studies Centre at SFU.

**Conclusion**

The Africa-focused Research and Engagement Day indicated that there are important existing strengths at SFU in the form of experience and expertise spanning 14 different African countries and seven different disciplines as well as many past and current partnerships and relationships with people and institutions in Africa. It also demonstrated a high level of interest in facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration, promoting more deliberate focus on African content, experiences, and expertise at SFU, and establishing an African Studies Centre at SFU to provide the crucial institutional continuity required to build deep partnerships and sustained knowledge generation. As Africa becomes more important on the global stage, this network of researchers and partnerships present a solid basis on which to build an institutional plan for engagement with Africa.
Appendix A
SFU African Studies Working Group

The SFU African Studies Working Group was established with a mandate to promote research and activities with a focus on issues and perspectives that are of particular relevance to Africa. The objectives of the group are to: (1) facilitate collaborative research and networking among faculty members working on Africa-related projects; (2) develop and deepen connections between SFU and academic institutions in Africa; (3) engage SFU students interested in the study of Africa; (4) advance the dissemination of knowledge about Africa to the public. The 2018-2019 steering committee for the African Studies Working Group includes: Elizabeth Cooper (International Studies); Cathy D’Andrea (Archaeology); Susan Erikson (Health Sciences); Shaheen Nanji (SFU International); Cécile Vigouroux (French); Sarah Walshaw (History); and Aaron Windel (History).
Appendix B
Presenters

Elizabeth Cooper
Assistant Professor, School for International Studies
Country of interest: Kenya
Areas of interest: youth, education, politics

Elizabeth Cooper is an anthropologist interested in child and youth issues in East Africa. Her research has focused on the lives of young people orphaned due to HIV/AIDS in Kenya and the education-related protests – particularly involving the use of arson and other forms of violence in schools – among Kenyan secondary students.

Catherine D’Andrea
Professor, Department of Archaeology
Country of Interest: Ethiopia
Areas of interest: Pre-Aksumite kingdoms, human-environmental interactions

Catherine D’Andrea is an archeologist investigating human-environmental interactions using a historical ecology approach. She is the director of the Eastern Tigrai Archaeological Project (ETAP) and studies Indigenous and Sabaean cultural influences in the pre-Aksumite period in Ethiopia (800-400 BC). The ETAP research group consults with local communities to develop plans to encourage tourism using local archeological and cultural resources. The project involves the partnership of Adigrat University, University of Addis Ababa, Tigrai Agricultural Research Institute, Tigrai Tourism and Cultural Commission, Ethiopian Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the residents of Gulo Makeda.

Parin Dossa
Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Country of Interest: Kenya
Areas of interest: women, domestic work, caregivers
Parin Dossa, an anthropologist by training, has conducted intermittent ethnographic fieldwork in Kenya since 1994. Her current research focuses on the experiences of female African domestic workers who are increasingly expected to become caregivers for elderly Asian parents as their children move abroad to pursue economic opportunities.

**Susan Erikson**  
Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences  
Country of Interest: Sierra Leone  
Areas of interest: global health, health data, pandemic bonds, Ebola

Susan Erikson is an anthropologist interested in the financialization of global health. Her current research investigates the effects of investment in pandemic bonds on health data, and particularly the designation of Ebola epidemics, in Sierra Leone.

**Amal Ghazal**  
Associate Professor, Department of History | Director, Centre for Comparative Muslim Studies  
Countries of Interest: Algeria, Tanzania (Zanzibar)  
Areas of interest: identity formation, politics

Amal Ghazal is a historian of Middle Eastern and African history who has studied Omani rule in Zanzibar. Her current project investigates identity formation and national politics among the M’Zabis in M’Zab Valley, Algeria.

**Geetanjali Gill**  
Instructor, School for International Studies  
Country of Interest: Mauritius  
Areas of interest: development, poverty, ethnicity

Geetanjali Gill is a scholar of development studies and completed her dissertation on how the causes and manifestations of poverty are affected by ethnicity in
Mauritius. She has worked as a development consultant with the United Nations Development Program, European Union, Africa Development Bank, and the Government of Mauritius.

Huamei Han
Associate Professor, Faculty of Education
Country of Interest: Namibia
Areas of interest: race, class, multilingualism, trade, China-Africa relations

Huamei Han is a linguist interested in the intersections between race, class, and language. Her current project focuses on multilingualism in private trade migration between China and African countries. She has conducted field research in China Town in Oshikango, Namibia and Africa Town in Guangzhou, China.

Lorato Maje
MSc student, Faculty of Health Sciences
Country of Interest: South Africa
Areas of interest: women, HIV/AIDS, intra-vaginal practices

Lorato Maje is a graduate student researching how intra-vaginal practices among adolescent girls and young women may be risk factors for HIV/AIDS. Her research is located in Durban and Soweto, South Africa and forms part of an AYAZAZI study based at the University of the Witwatersrand. The project involves the partnership of the MatCH Research Unit and Perinatal HIV Research Unit at the University of the Witwatersrand, Ragon Institute, South African Medical Research Council, South African National Institute for Communicable, HIV Pathogenesis Programme, Sub-Saharan African Network for TB/HIV Research Excellence, and Queen Elizabeth Scholars.

Masahiro Minami
Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education
Country of Interest: Rwanda
Areas of interest: post-conflict reconciliation
Masahiro Minami is a psychologist interested in interpersonal reconciliation following the genocide in Rwanda. He is a co-founder of the Globe in Peace Project which offers an action-based approach to reconciliation, encouraging perpetrators of genocide to provide free labour to victims as an alternative to forgiveness-based methods. His project involves the partnership of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission of Rwanda, Prison Fellowship Rwanda, Mental Health Okamoto, International Committee for Morita Therapy, Japanese Society for Morita Therapy, University of Rwanda, University of Oxford, University of Exeter, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Naima Osman
MSc student, Faculty of Health Sciences

Countries of Interest: Kenya
Areas of interest: refugees, health

Naima Osman is a graduate student studying the ways that health outcomes are influenced by protracted refugee status. Her current project focuses on the experiences of refugees living with hypertension in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya.

Khumoeke Richard
PhD student, Faculty of Health Sciences

Country of Interest: Botswana
Areas of interest: HIV/AIDS, traditional medicine

Khumoeke Richard is a graduate student working in the SFU Tietjen Laboratory. His research focuses on traditional African plants with latency reversal properties that can be used to treat HIV. The project involves the partnership of the University of Botswana, Martin Luther University, The African Academy of Sciences, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Canadian Foundation for AIDS Research, Sub-Saharan African Network for TB/HIV Research Excellence, and Queen Elizabeth Scholars.

Joseph Ssendikaddiwa
MSc student, Faculty of Health Sciences
Country of Interest: Uganda
Area of interest: education

Joseph Ssendikaddiwa is a graduate student and founder of EDUSet, a non-profit organization which aims to reinstate meaning, understanding, and purpose of education through a critical and reflective pedagogy in Uganda.

Sarah Vanderveer
MA student, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Country of Interest: Ghana
Areas of interest: women, university, work

Sarah Vanderveer is a graduate student interested in the role of female academics in reshaping gendered norms and practices at universities in Ghana. Her research has found that the efforts of women university-based academics challenge the hyper-individualistic tendencies of academia through collaborative initiatives.

Cécile Vigouroux
Associate Professor, Department of French

Countries of Interest: South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo
Areas of interest: language, intra-continental migration, French and Belgian colonialism

Cécile Vigouroux is a social linguist interested in language systems and ideology. She has conducted research on language in intra-continental African migrations, including ethnographic fieldwork with Francophone migrants in South Africa. She has also studied the role of the French and Belgian colonial armies in spreading ideologies regarding African languages.

Sarah Walshaw
Senior Instructor, Department of History

Countries of Interest: Tanzania, Madagascar
Areas of interest: agriculture, urbanization, politics, capacity building
Sarah Walshaw is an archeologist interested in agriculture, people, and politics on the Swahili Coast. Her dissertation focused on urbanization, food production, and Islam on Pemba Island, Tanzania. She has also been involved with research examining connections between Madagascar and the Indian Ocean through food.

**Brock Wiederick**

MA student, Department of Archaeology

Country of Interest: Ethiopia
Areas of interest: Pre-Aksumite kingdoms, community engagement, capacity building

Brock Wiederick is a graduate student taking part in the Eastern Tigrai Archaeological Project (ETAP) near Adigrat, Ethiopia. His contributions include surveying archeological sites for evidence of the first civilizations on the Horn of Africa and building an inventory of archeological and heritage sites to be used for the development of heritage management plans. ETAP also engages the local community in decision-making on future archeological projects and builds the capacity of researchers at Adigrat University. The project involves the partnership of Adigrat University, University of Addis Ababa, Tigrai Agricultural Research Institute, Tigrai Tourism and Cultural Commission, Ethiopian Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the residents of Gulo Makeda and Ghanta Afeshum.

**Aaron Windel**

Assistant Professor, Department of History

Country of Interest: Uganda
Areas of interest: British colonialism, politics, cooperatives

Aaron Windel is an historian interested in colonial and decolonial politics in Uganda in the 1940s and 1950s. His current project investigates the role of British cooperatives in development initiatives in Africa.
Appendix C
Program

Africa-focused Research and Engagement Day
October 22, 2018
SFU Vancouver | HC 7000

Organized by SFU International and School for International Studies

PROGRAM

9:00–9:15  Welcome & Overview of SFU’s Research Strategies and International Priorities
Darren Schemmer, Executive Director, SFU International

9:15–9:30  Overview of SFU African Studies Working Group and proposed Centre
Elizabeth Cooper, Assistant Professor, School for International Studies

9:30–12:00 Research Presentations

Group 1
9:30–10:20
Amal Ghazal, Associate Professor, Department of History | Director, Centre for Comparative Muslim Studies
Catherine D’Andrea, Professor, Department of Archaeology
Brock Wiederick, MA student, Department of Archaeology
Sarah Walshaw, Senior Instructor, Department of History
Khumoekae Richard, PhD student, Faculty of Health Sciences
Lorato Maje, MSc student, Faculty of Health Sciences

10:20–10:30 Coffee/Tea Break

Group 2
10:30–11:15
Cécile Vigouroux, Associate Professor, Department of French
Aaron Windel, Assistant Professor, Department of History
Huamei Han, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education
Sarah Vanderveer, MA student, Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Geetanjali Gill, Instructor, School for International Studies
Masahiro Minami, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education
Group 3 11:15-12:00
Parin Dossa, Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Elizabeth Cooper, Assistant Professor, School for International Studies
Naima Osman, MSc student, Faculty of Health Sciences
Susan Erikson, Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences
Joseph Ssendikaddiwa, MSc student, Faculty of Health Sciences

12:00–1:30
Networking Lunch

1:30–2:30
**Discussion: How to Pursue African Studies — Decolonizing the Academy**
Chair: Cécile Vigouroux, Associate Professor, Department of French

2:30–3:30
**Discussion: Future Direction**
Chairs: Elizabeth Cooper, Assistant Professor, School for International Studies
Shaheen Nanji, Director, International Community Engagement, SFU International