

THE GRIOT

BU African Studies Center

The Online Newsletter of the Boston University
African Studies Center Graduate Students

Number 1
Spring 2009

The Job of Finding a Job by Chris Annear

You've just read the thousandth book on your rarified dissertation topic. Seven years of your life sit staring back at you in the rear view mirror. You've taken courses whose titles dissolve in your memory, let alone the syllabi you must claim to have mastered. Unslept hours have been devoted to rewriting the 48th and 31st iterations, respectively, of your research funding applications, which you followed with sixteen glorious months of fieldwork. Host country politicians have treated you as their professorial savior, yet your uncle chuckles that your education will only earn you the right to start directly at the burger-flipping grill, skipping right over the fry station. Your poverty level stipend has kept you below the Starbucks 'Vente' line for so long that a \$45,000 a year starting salary at a school you had not heard of yesterday sounds like a lordly sum. The quip, muttered from time to time in hallways between classrooms has never held such sardonic truth until now: The reason there is so much competition and backstabbing in academia is because the stakes are so low. Now that you have nearly reached your goal to join the hunt for employment, you ask, how do I get a job?

Run Your Academic Life Like You Are Going to Have One

A PhD gets you to the starting line. Without one you have little hope of landing a job, yet with one it seems that all a hiring committee wants to know is what else you have done. The PhD is the pair of shoes you wear to walk into the interview, not the tweed jacket with elbow pads that makes you look like a professor. Although you must interest members of a hiring committee with your dissertation, they really want to know what you will do with it; how you will teach; and what research comes next. When you are invited to an initial hiring interview you must already have a track record showing what you promise to do in the future. So,

well before you sit in that cold, steely, straight-backed chair prepare for this moment. Run your academic life like you are going to have one.

The members of a hiring committee are looking for a colleague. It is remarkably easy to fall into the graduate student mode of looking to professors on a committee as

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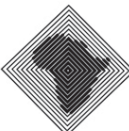
mentors, not associates. The best way to appear like a colleague is to begin to act like a professional, even before you are

one. While you are working to complete your dissertation, find ways to practice, present, and publish your discipline. Take advantage of the research funding available through the African Studies Center and your department. Teach summer courses at BU and elsewhere in Boston. Present your research at meetings. Start with our gem of a graduate conference to hone your skills and confidence; and then add others, such as your professional disciplinary meetings and regionally focused conferences. Publish! Revise a particularly good paper you wrote for a class and submit it to a notable peer reviewed journal. Each of these endeavors adds indelible lines to your CV and builds experience that promises giving you a job isn't a guess at your potential, but a recognition of your proven value.

Corralling the Announcements

Start to locate job announcements now. Familiarize yourself with where, who and how job openings are presented. I recommend starting a file by year with an associated Excel spreadsheet digest documenting the schools, types of jobs and application requirements for each. Figure out where applicable jobs are announced. I

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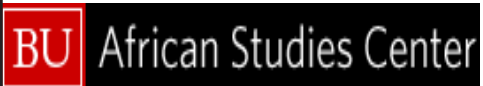
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Material for publication in upcoming newsletters should be submitted to the editor at the African Studies Center at Boston University . Please send an electronic version (preferred) or a hard copy of your submission. The editor reserves the right to edit and/or modify any submissions for content, format or length. Opinions expressed in published articles, however, belong solely to the author(s).



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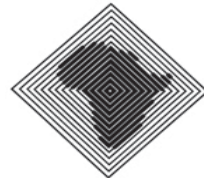
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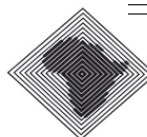
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Call for editor/coordinator and contributors:
If you are interested in participating in future issues of the newsletter, please contact us (nmettler@bu.edu or adamado@bu.edu), as we will be needing your help.



Upcoming issues of "The Griot" will feature introductions to Dr. Timothy Longman, the new director of the African Studies Center, and the incoming graduate students affiliated with the Center in Fall 2009. We would also like to expand the newsletter into a forum for discussion on academic topics and current events, so if you have any interest in contributing an op-ed piece or something similar, please get in touch!



From the Editor
Inaugural Issue of *The Griot*

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *The Griot*, a newsletter by graduate students for graduate students, and the wider community of the African Studies Center at Boston University. We hope this publication will serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas, practical information, and tips about getting through graduate school and becoming part of the Africanist community of the greater Boston area. As such, we include short announcements about upcoming events and opportunities, both academic and cultural, and longer pieces discussing keystone graduate experiences, such as fieldwork, teaching,

and other aspects of professional development. This month, we also highlight the recent African Studies Center Graduate Student Conference (in its 17th cycle!) and Dr. Zoliswa Mali, of our new and growing Language Program. We hope to include op-ed pieces about African affairs in future issues, which could perhaps be further developed for "real" publication. If you want to get involved, or have announcements you'd like posted in the newsletter, please email Natalie Mettler (nmettler@bu.edu) or Abel Djassi Amado (adamado@bu.edu).

The Job of Finding a Job (*continued from page 1*)

rely on a suite of electronic and paper resources to corral jobs as they are released into the academic wilds. I recommend the H-Net listservs that connect regional and topical communities. Join H-Africa.net and H-net.org/announce/ for a bimonthly job list. But keep in mind that you will most likely earn a job in a department, not in an Africa focused center. So, look for resources that disseminate job announcements through your professional association newsletters and online job guides. To give you an idea of numbers, as an Africanist environmental anthropologist I identified forty applicable jobs (tenure-track, one-year visiting, and post-doctoral positions) and applied to twenty-five this year. Ten announcements were rescinded due to budget constraints.

Getting Fit

Now you sit, ready to apply. Your PhD is imminent, your CV inspires envy among your peers, and you have adequately lowered your expectations. Halfway between the towns of Ambition and Reality, in an area serviced only by Amtrak lies East Eisenhower State University. You squelch feelings of futility and pride to realize that this small school you had not ever heard dropped into haughty cocktail conversation offers you the prospect of a teaching position and smart, dedicated colleagues.

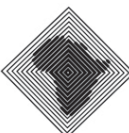
Getting a job is about fitting the needs and interests of a department. So, how do you get fit?

First, you need to cater your CV to the job. If the position is teaching-oriented, lead off with the teaching experience you built up over the past three summers. Accompany this list of self-described accolades, otherwise known as a CV, with a strong and punchy cover letter that, again, emphasizes what the hiring committee states it wants. Follow this information with your teaching philosophy, topical and research strengths, and publications, in no more than two pages.

Keep in mind that when it comes to fit, there is no accounting for taste. No matter how stellar your CV, how acclaimed your dissertation, or how smashingly the interview goes, you can never control or predict what will happen after you close the door behind you. Approach every job like it is your dream position, but after mailing every application and leaving every interview, get back out there and keep looking. Presuming that you do manage to pick the lock of the first interview door, you will find many more ahead of you. But, like your dissertation, with persistence you will get a job. Then, of course, the real work begins.

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Getting a job is about fitting the needs and interests of a department.



**“Creating Consciousness: Emerging Themes in African Studies”
17th Annual African Studies Graduate Conference at Boston University**

Keynote Lecture* – 13 March 2009

Jeanne Marie Penvenne, Associate Professor of History – Tufts University

When I was a graduate student at Boston University’s African Studies Center three decades ago, the Center already had in place its major and enduring strength – an insistence on interdisciplinary training. It had not yet developed its important contemporary strength in African languages. Truly interdisciplinary scholarship is as important as it is rare. Academic disciplines still regulate our approaches

to material, but increasingly more fields are developing that are deeply and necessarily interdisciplinary (environmental, postcolonial, gender studies, etc). The emergence of explicitly interdisciplinary training and the emphasis on learning and using African languages are foundational, as these give scholars a much healthier sense of the complexity and interconnectedness of key factors shaping the challenges facing the continent:

environment, wellness, political stability, resource development, allocation and gender – just for starters! Cultivating our awareness, sharpening and broadening our lenses, increasing our capacity to hear more voices in more languages and from many perspectives have all contributed to the growing appreciation of such complex connections.

Changing technology has brought exponentially more people into scholarly engagement, and allowed for sharing progressively more sources, readings, and images. It has also helped us search, sort, and order that fire hose rush of new materials such that it does not seem a cacophony or tsunami. However, access to these technologies is broadly unequal. African Studies scholars in North

America, Europe, and South Africa have markedly more and better quality access to these enabling technologies. North American and European scholars are also more resourced than their African colleagues. So, while the quality of current debates and number of involved participants have both increased, the gap between what is available to African scholars in relation to foreign scholars is still broad. Despite the greater global awareness of work by some leading African scholars, creative artists and intellectuals the field of African Studies remains dominated by North African and European scholars.

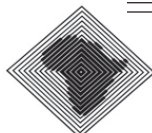
Although we continue to build fastest in areas that are most familiar and accessible to our own experiences, African Studies has contributed to a much more sophisticated understanding of social and political processes, mechanisms, and relationships with ramifications for comparative analysis: work on the complexities of households, gender, healing, rumor and gossip. Some changes developed from frustration with the inadequacy of our projected models and unimaginative lenses, and some came from careful and patient observation. The nature of African economies and cities made nonsense of efforts to impose

analyses that recognized only the formal, legal, licensed and taxed sectors. Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz not only echoed Henri Bergson’s point that “disorder is simply the order you are not looking for,” they argued that what might seem to be simply disorder could be manipulated as a political strategy. Through careful observation, Stephen Feierman teased out ways in which centrally important historical phenomena had been effectively “scripted invisible” by ignorant colonial era observers, who scripted visible only what was accessible to them. Their blind spots perpetuated the blinding of future scholars to the importance of certain processes,



Dr. Jeanne Penvenne delivering her keynote speech

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Highlights of the BU ASC Graduate Research Conference

mechanisms and relationships. Many scholars revealed the extent to which colonial era bureaucrats, ministers, lawyers and magistrates edited out – scripted invisible— the importance of spiritual, sorcery and herbalist teachings and beliefs in daily life, because they viewed it as irrational or wrong headed. Now, not only anthropologists appreciate the implications of sorcery and spirit mediums for social power and politics.

Between 1980 and 1990 the Social Science Research Council / American Council of Learned Societies commissioned fifteen state of the art analytical overview and bibliographic essays. They provide a fine measure of that era’s “emerging themes.” Two decades later, what themes would we identify today as defining, and who would write the essay on that theme? Twelve of the fifteen original authors were North Americans, two were Africans resident in North America, and one was French.

We might all select different emerging themes for a new set of essays, but those that seem most obvious to me are: communications (including film, internet and new media), culture (including style and leisure), the new arts, the environment, gender and sexuality, security (including mercenaries the arms trade, landmines) and regional insurgencies.

Returning to the enduring uneven power landscape, I strongly urge all scholars, but in particular beginning scholars to take seriously their potential and responsibility to address and transform inequities. With a little creativity everyone can be a more equal partner; taking care to read and cite each others work, to share resources in time and revenues and to form genuine partnerships based on knowledge, friendship, and sharing.

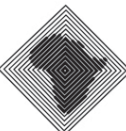
*This is an abridged version of the keynote address, featuring the highlights of the lecture.

Boston University African Studies Center: 17th Annual Graduate Research Conference “Creating Consciousness: Emerging Themes in African Studies” - March 13th & 14th, 2009

Thanks to marvelous and untiring efforts of the six-member planning committee (see picture), the conference was a success. Presentations ranged from a comparison of Africa-centered exhibits in museums in Chicago and Nairobi to a study of identity among Sudanese refugees in Cairo, from a study of fire management practices in Niger’s national park to a presentation on female migration in Ghana.

Top right: The planning committee of the 17th Annual Conference (from left to right): Gareth McFeely, Cedony Allen, Katrina Leach, Sarah Westwood, Katsuki Sakai, and Jillian Jaegar.

Bottom right: Presenters from the Panel “Painting Africa: The Relationship of Image and Media,” with painting by Kehinde Wiley in the background.



Summer in Boston: The African Calendar

Winter is usually the best time to catch African performers in Boston, but there are a couple of high-profile musical acts in town this summer. **On June 6, the Malian couple Amadou and Mariam play the Paradise; tickets are \$25.** They've been active since the 1970s, although they are best-known in the US for their 2004 album "Dimanche à Bamako", a collaboration with Manu Chao. **Fela Kuti's son Femi Kuti is also playing the Paradise this summer, on June 24; again, tickets are \$25.** Femi Kuti played in his father's band for a time, and his music is heavily influenced by Fela's Afrobeat style, although with a dance influence; he's an equally energetic performer. Another second-generation star, Vieux Farka Touré, is touring the US and Canada in July. His tour itinerary is still under construction, but keep an eye out

for a Boston date. His 2008 concert was one of the highlights of the summer, and he reworks some of his father Ali's music in more up-tempo ways.

For those who may be in New York, the second part of the annual **African Film Festival is at the Brooklyn Art Museum in May: the details are at http://www.africanfilmny.org/aff_fest.html.** The festival includes ten features and a short film program; several of the films played at the MFA in Boston in February.

Finally, the **Museum of Fine Arts** now has interactive tours of many of its collections online, and they recently launched a brief tour of their Africa collections, at: <http://mfa.org/collections/sub.asp?key=22&subkey=130>

Also of Interest

Malcolm X Day

May 1, 2009 (Friday)

at Charles H. Wright Museum Of African American History, 315 East Warren, Boston, MA
Phone: (313) 494-5800.

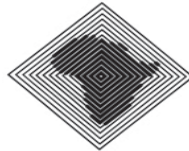
The philosophy, life and legacy of Malcolm X are examined through performances, films, lectures workshops and art related activities based on his speeches, grassroots activism and writings.

African Liberation Day

Sunday, May 24 11:00a to 5:00p

at Boston Common, Boston, MA
Phone: (617) 445-0095

A day to celebrate Africa's historic legacy and tradition dating from the days of Kwame Nkrumah, First President of Ghana, to the Diaspora, with a focus on African art, rhythm, spice, and studies.



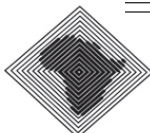
End of an Era: So Long 270 Bay State Road

By the time we return for the next academic year 270 Bay State Road will be added to the long list of the addresses that the Boston University African Studies Center has occupied throughout its fifty six years of existence. Of its official institutional history, is said: "Joanne Hart and the staff have created an ideal space [at 270 Bay State] for



intellectual engagement, social conviviality, and teaching." (ASC webpage - <http://www.bu.edu/africa/about/history/partthree.html>). Joanne would love for people to help with the move over the summer and in creating the new space.

Picture: The current location of the African Studies Center, 270 Bay State Road, Boston University.



An Interview with Dr. Zoliswa Mali

The Griot is above all an endeavor of graduate students to strengthen the sense of scholarly community. We aim to learn more about the environment we are part of. We seek to know more about each other, our professional progress, academic development, and above all, our mentors, the faculty of Boston University in general and of the African Studies Center, in particular. Hence, Cedony Allen spoke with Dr. Zoliswa Mali, Clinical Assistant Professor, Curriculum and Teaching Department, and Coordinator of Southern African Languages, African Studies Center, in order to find out more about her.



Dr. Zoliswa O. Mali

Cedony Allen (CA): Where were you born?

Zoliswa O. Mali (ZOM): I was born in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa in an area called King Williamstown in the village of Zeleni. I did my elementary school there. And then because my mother worked in East London, which is a bigger city, for my high school education, I moved to the East London area in a place called Mdantsane. In South African terms, you call that a township. The township in South African terms would be a residential area demarcated for Black people. You see those houses easily because they all look alike. Some people refer to them as matchbox houses. I then went to do teacher training at a college called St. Matthews Teachers Training College in a small town called Keiskammahoek. From there, I went to teach. I think I was eighteen when I started to teach (laughing). All I further academic training that I did after my teacher training I did that on my own and worked at the same time.

CA: How did you move beyond life in the township considering the state of South Africa at the time?

ZOM: Oh dear!

CA: I know it is a loaded question.

ZOM: No, no, it is a good question and my “oh dear” is not complaining, but there are many things in thinking about the times we had to go through to survive. What shall I say? I think besides my own internal drive and motivation for education and improving myself, my mother also reinforced these ideas. When I went to high school up to tenth grade so that I could go into teaching, she had better

aspirations then. She herself had gone up to that grade in school, and had wanted to be a nurse, but because of state of affairs in our country at the time,, she couldn’t go that far and she ended up working in a factory. So we had to make sure that, I being the first born, get more education. So I had to move in a way that would make me work quicker, and able to help her as she had me and my younger brother and her mom to take care of financially. For us taking care of the extended family is a kind of lifelong duty. Five years after I had been teaching, I went to the University of Fort Hare to get my Bachelors. South Africans call it the University of Leaders because that’s where the likes of Nelson Mandela went to school and other leaders of Africa like Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia. After that, in South Africa, before you

get your Masters, you have to do what they call an honors degree. While I was doing that, they hired me as a lecturer to teach linguistics. So that began to move me from the village and the township because Fort Hare was in a small town called Alice. There I was being a lecturer, doing different things. While there, I decided I wanted to do my

masters and I registered with a university which was supposed to be an Afrikaans speaking university, Stellenbosch University. At that time, it was supposed to be for white Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, but they had

just opened up to all of us, particularly in the African language department and in that department, they had a masters, so that is what I did.

CA: How many languages do you speak?

ZOM: IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, English, Afrikaans and Sotho...I speak a little bit of this, a little bit of that, but mainly those five languages

CA: How long have you lived in the United States?

ZOM: Since 2000 when I was invited by the University of Iowa to start a Zulu program. I spent seven years in Iowa first doing my second masters and then my PhD in second language acquisition where my focus was on linguistics and technology.

CA: What roles do you have here at Boston University and

I think all languages are valuable for people to learn...but African languages are... important in a sense that they open to you a whole different setting of culture that may be different from yours and at the same time similar to yours. There is very little you will learn about people and their culture without the entry via their language.

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An Interview with Zoliswa Mali (*continued from page 7*)

specifically at the African Studies Center?

ZOM: I was hired by the [African Studies Center] to be the coordinator of Southern African languages. I was also hired as a clinical assistant professor in the School of Education in the Curriculum and Teaching department, where I have taught Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) for the past two semesters.

CA: Do you think it is valuable for Americans to learn African languages? Why?

ZOM: I think all languages are valuable for people to learn...but African languages are, I think, important in a sense that they open to you a whole different setting of culture that may be different from yours and at the same time similar to yours. There is very little you will learn about people and their culture without the entry via their language. If, as you are studying in Senegal, you have been there before you learn any of their language, you can tell for yourself how much people will open up to you when you speak their language against when you don't. Even before you are fluent that will [help] ...of course they will laugh first because you don't sound like them.

CA: What do you tell people who say African languages are not relevant in today's global world?

ZOM: That's an interesting global problem because you can find that within Africa itself there are many who feel there has been some brain-washing that has happened across the universe causing people think they are better off when they speak a language not their own. The language everybody knows that travels all over the world is English for obvious reasons....Even within our own continent, in some countries within Africa itself, people can't read or write their own language. And for them to think they are getting freedom they must be foolish. And I believe in learning another language, you know yourself better because language tells something about your identity. When I went to ASA [African Studies Association] last year, I met some people from China who told me they have Swahili classes in China for people who want to do business in East Africa. If you have any interest in Africa, it is worth it to learn the local language. You will see that when people talk about modern languages, that doesn't include us...I don't know if they are not modern, am I some dinosaur or something? Yeah, [African languages] are relevant. We have APARC here, when these presidents come from Africa and talk about something in their culture, you will perceive something differently about them via their language. When you learn a language, you don't just learn words. You are doing Wolof and I'm sure you know a lot about Senegalese culture via the language which will make you understand the people better than if you didn't learn the language. Sometimes there are stereotypes that are baseless that

could be dispelled by you learning about those people via their language.

CA: We are getting a new director in the fall. What do you think should be the first project he begins work on? What are some other things you would like to see him work on for the Center?

ZOM: They have to pay more attention to the development of African languages, and bring in what they didn't have before, in helping us develop a strong base. Boston University used to be one of the best universities for studying African languages. I think with time, the Center has become stronger in other areas, but the language program has not been as competitive as it once was. So I would like for the new director to help us better develop the language program. Also help with strategies of drawing on other parts of the University and surrounding universities. And he can help maintain the Title VI that we have because that helps us fund and keep students who are here and helps draw other students here. ...Anything to strengthen the development of African languages. (Laughing) There are other things, but I am about African languages and I will thus leave other things for others to address.

CA: If you were not a professor, what would you be doing?

ZOM: (laughing) I would be preaching (laughing)

CA: In South Africa?

ZOM: Anywhere. That's my other vocation that nobody knows about here.

CA: Yeah, I didn't know that.

ZOM: (laughing) That is what I would be doing.

CA: Having spent most of your life in South Africa, what do you think are the most important aspects of African culture that students who go abroad should experience?

ZOM: Some people have some unfounded stereotypes about Africa. I mean, some people in this age and time would be thinking, "where did you get clothes"? They think we don't wear clothes. Or some would ask, "do you just get up in the morning and see elephants outside your house." I think it is important to bring back your cultural knowledge that might help you as a person and help you teach others directly or indirectly, dispelling some of the things that people think about Africa. Some people would not dare set foot in Africa because of their beliefs about Africa. So I think that if you can bring back information that isn't just book knowledge, it will be good.

CA: Is there anything else you want students and staff to know about you?

ZOM: [Laughing] What do I want you guys to know? Maybe some people might think that I seem quiet, but I guess when you begin talk to me, you'll know that I'm not as quiet as I seem to be.