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The State of African Studies in Australia

Tanya Lyons, Flinders University and
Elizabeth Dimock, La Trobe University

The purpose of this chapter is to provide up to date evidence on the importance of African studies in Australia. The relevance of the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific, an overview of Australian government policy towards Africa and the impact that such policy has on teaching African studies in Australian universities are all discussed. This chapter will show how African studies exists in Australian universities because of the dedication of a handful of enthusiastic scholars who have had the opportunity to deliver topics on Africa in their respective university departments.

Unlike the USA where there is “a brutally direct link between the new geo-politics and academic funding”¹, Australia does not appear to have any government sponsored initiative to promote the study of Africa, either in relation to the African Diaspora or indeed specific African countries or languages.² Indeed, the opposite effect was apparent in the 1990s when the Keating Labour Government initiated a closer engagement with Asia to the detriment of links with Africa. When United States President George W. Bush visited Africa in July 2003, he clearly drew links between Africa’s instability and global terrorist threats³. Africa is logically more important to the United States than to Australia not only because of the history of the slave trade and African American demography, but also due to the desire for access to Africa’s vast mineral and oil resources. Instability in Africa, whether caused by poverty, HIV/AIDS, corruption or state collapse has, as we have seen with the bombings of the US Embassies in East Africa in 1998, impacted upon US interests in Africa and in the USA. In the wake of terrorist attacks on New York and Washington and the subsequent war on terror it has become increasingly important to understand ethnic and resource conflicts, collapsed states and unstable regions. Yet, despite Australia’s close ties with the USA and support for its leading role in the war on terror (in Afghanistan and Iraq), Australia persists in its lack of interest in arguably the world’s largest unstable region, where some of the roots of terror can be found⁴.

Australia’s engagement with Africa stems from the Boer War when Australia contributed to the British forces fighting in South Africa. However, popular folklore and reminiscence of Breaker Morant and Baden Powell have little influence on current foreign policy, and Australia’s interests in Africa were, through most of the twentieth century, indirectly through London and British colonial links. Perhaps it is no great surprise that Australia has little diplomatic interest in Africa, outside of Commonwealth responsibilities. Nonetheless, the Australian academy still ought to be in a position to provide insight and analysis and offer comparative examples with other collapsing regions (for example the Solomon Islands) from an African perspective⁵. Yet, there are very few experts to call upon in the university sector that purport to have this detailed knowledge of African politics, economy, society and history and in particular, current affairs in Africa⁶. In 2003 there were only ten academics teaching at least one topic directly related to Africa⁷. If Africa is in crisis, then African studies in Australia is under siege⁸.



Overview of African Studies in Australia in 2003

If there was a heyday of African Studies in Australia universities it was during the anti-apartheid struggles, a time that was also characterized by liberation movements and decolonisation in Africa. As in the US and Britain, African Studies had expanded in the years following World War II, coinciding with the upsurge of African nationalism, the initial phase of decolonization, and the deepening of the Cold War. Area studies, that is, African, Latin American, Asian and Pacific studies gained increased significance as the superpowers became involved in geo-political manoeuvres. Tertiary education was expanding in Australia and new universities were established. Courses on Africa were an integral part of humanities and social science degrees in a number of universities. The move towards African independence generated new areas of research in colonial, pre-colonial and eventually postcolonial studies. The effects of Cold War politics on nationalist and liberation movements in Africa, and the militarization and arms-building that paralleled these movements provided 'grist to the mill' for further research and academic courses in Politics, Development Studies, Economics and History.

During the 1970s and 1980s a further impetus drew Africanists in Australia together. Waves of migrants from South Africa, fleeing *apartheid*, settled in the major cities. The inter-census population increase of South African-born immigrants went from 11,400 between 1976 and 1981, to 10,093 between 1981 and 1986, and to 11,951 between 1986 and 1991, after which the increase dropped significantly.⁹ These migrants included people from all of South Africa's racial categories, but were predominantly white, and had economic means to re-settle in Australia. They did, however, include members of the banned African National Congress, some Indians and Coloureds.¹⁰ The multi-factored issues that crossed racial boundaries and political movements within South Africa were brought to Australia, but the anti-apartheid movement among South Africans in Australia also encompassed existing class/race/political tensions.¹¹ In Melbourne, for example, the one-year old Anti-Apartheid group disbanded in 1985 because of disagreements with representatives in the SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization) and ANC (African National Congress) offices. Intellectual debate concerning *apartheid*, already a feature of African Studies in the universities and of increasing political significance, was thus fuelled by input from South African migrants, both permanent settlers and those who chose Australia for temporary political asylum.

Members of the African Studies Association of Australia were deeply involved, as a survey of papers presented at the annual conference between 1979 and 1985 demonstrates.¹² A key figure in the anti-apartheid movement in Australia, until his death in 1985, was Jim Gale, a founder member of AFSAAP and also of the Campaign Against Racial Exploitation (CARE). One of Jim Gale's achievements was his role in bringing ANC and SWAPO representatives to Australia and assisting them to establish offices here.

One might get the impression that Australian Africanists have focused their interests on South Africa and its turbulent political history. This, however, is only part of the story. Many of the academic staff moving into university posts in the 1960s and 1970s had other interests in Africa. This new generation had completed doctoral degrees in Britain, the USA or Africa, had spent considerable periods of time conducting



fieldwork in Africa, and had frequently taught in African universities. Some were involved in establishing degree courses in African History, Politics, Education and other disciplines in new universities created in Africa around the time of independence. The research interests of these new arrivals were often continued subsequent to appointment in Australian universities, and their often vibrant links with West, East, Central and Southern African countries were maintained and reflected in teaching and in conference papers.

Given this remarkable history of African Studies in Australia, one might ask why the interest in Africa has not increased, or at least maintained the earlier level of activity. It has been suggested that after Nelson Mandela walked out of prison and democratic elections were held in South Africa in 1994, the struggle was over, and we no longer needed to focus on Africa. This naïve interpretation of events was far from reality. The Rwandan genocide to name only one tragedy, amply demonstrated the need to continue to analyse and understand Africa's politics, economics, history and society. Nonetheless, as we will see below, many Africanists either shifted to Asian Studies, now the preferred focus of the Australian government policy and many tertiary institutions, or simply, as in Gavin Kitching's case, abandoned African Studies.

“Giving up” African studies

Gavin Kitching, a *former* Africanist, at the centre of a recent debate sparked by his article on why he gave up African Studies¹³, argues that the answers to the questions about Africa's failures are simply too hard. He (unfortunately) joins other scholars such as Manuel Castells who have painted rather bleak pictures of Africa's development woes and have subsequently given up asking the pertinent questions, just as they have given up hope for Africa¹⁴. The questions surrounding the corruption and failure of the new leaders in postcolonial Africa were the hardest to resolve. The old theories, like dependency and underdevelopment, Kitching explains, 'could not account' for the corruption and mismanagement of many African states, or indeed state collapse. The end of the Cold War, the subsequent marginalisation of Africa combined with the forces of globalisation¹⁵ has, according to Bundy, "translated into a declining public support for African Studies in the academy". Is it then any wonder that Kitching dropped his involvement in Africa? Kitching's attempts to reconcile the external and internal constraints on Africa's development might have led him to this juncture. He argues that the new leaders in Africa were long considered by dependency theorists to be the puppets of transnational capital or victims of IMF and World Bank Structural Adjustment Policies. Yet, it appears now that they were also simply inadequate as leaders. Colonisation and imperialism had for so long been the scapegoat for Africa's woes, that it was difficult for Kitching to conclude that it was these leaders who were hindering development.

Kitching wrote that he "gave up African studies because [he] found it depressing"¹⁶, but emphasised it was not because he did not care what happened to Africa and Africans. His rather emotional response to an historical and political crisis on the African continent may indeed reflect a wider crisis in African Studies in Australia.

Without the exposure of Africa in university teaching curricula, there have been obvious repercussions for research output including the number of PhD students in this field of study. In fact, there would appear to be such scant interest in Africa within the Australian academy, that when Kitching's article was first published in 2000, after



being presented at an African Studies Conference in Adelaide, hardly an eyebrow was raised in Australia. It was not unusual for an Africanist to move into Asian studies in order to gain or maintain their academic position. Subsequently, it was not until the British based *Chronicle of Higher Education*, (by chance reprinted in an Australian newspaper almost three years later,) published an account of Kitching's story and the current debate now raging in Britain and North America¹⁷, that the Australian public was made aware of a crisis in African Studies.¹⁸ The online journal *The African Studies Quarterly* has already commissioned a special edition to explore the problems raised by Kitching, yet Australians have remained eerily silent on the issue. The fact that neither *The Chronicle*, *The African Studies Quarterly*, nor *The Australian* sought an opinion or any analysis from the *African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific* (AFSAAP), might demonstrate how insignificant this association has become, or might simply illustrate the media's inability to draw on the group of experts available in Australia who can provide up to date and relevant analysis on current affairs in Africa. Yet, it was through the pages of AFSAAP's *ARAS*, that the controversy was set in motion. Kitching, in fact, argues that we could educate the media about Africa because they are grappling with the same questions, but will continue to do so if African Studies is not promoted substantially. In this 'age of globalisation', Kitching pointed out that we in Australia should know more about Africa than we do. We couldn't agree more with him on this issue. However, it is unfortunate that Kitching felt he had to leave Africa behind.¹⁹

Survey of African studies in Australian Universities in 2003

A recent survey of the 38 public universities in Australia has been made to determine the extent of African Studies today. Our method has been to examine all topics offered in Australian universities in 2003, assessing topic titles and outlines as presented in their respective university calendars and student handbooks.

The survey has shown that only thirteen Australian universities appear to have any African Studies in their teaching programs (see Appendix 1)²⁰. A total of 47 topics that mention Africa are on offer at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in these universities. Of these topics, only fifteen are specific to Africa, while another 32 include Africa within a comparative context.²¹ (See Table 1). Comparative topics include themes such genocide, agriculture and rural poverty, sociology, philosophy, literature, history, geography, and development or world politics. The Africa-specific topics are taught in only nine universities, as indeed are twenty three of the comparative topics, a total of 38 topics (See Appendix 2 and 3.)



Table 1 Universities with the most African Studies topics

University	Specific African Studies Topics	Comparative Topics that mentions Africa
La Trobe	4	3
Macquarie	3	0
Flinders	2	3
Western Australia	1	8
Monash	1	1
Curtin	1	0
Melbourne	1	0
Wollongong	1	0
Sydney	1	8
Total	15	23

Table 2 Universities which offer Comparative Topics that mention Africa

University	Specific African Studies Topics	Comparative Topics that mentions Africa
Newcastle	0	4
New South Wales	0	2
Queensland	0	2
Tasmania	0	1
Total	0	9

The remaining nine comparative topics are taught in four other universities.²² (See Table 2). These four universities do not offer any specific African topics, although it should be noted that there are staff with research interests in Africa in each of these universities. Furthermore, our survey has covered the year 2003 only, and courses with Africa content may have been offered in other years.²³

Of the fifteen Africa-specific topics in nine universities nearly half (seven topics) are located in history departments. These are at Curtin University (one), Latrobe University (three), Melbourne University (one), Sydney University (one), and the University of Western Australia (one). Only four Africa-specific topics are offered in the discipline of politics, two each at Flinders and Macquarie Universities. Of the remaining topics two are in Music Studies, one each at Macquarie and Monash Universities, one is in English at Wollongong University, and one is in Archaeology at La Trobe University (See Appendix 2).

Of the 32 topics that use Africa for comparative case studies and/or brief examples, nine are in history, five in politics, three in archaeology, two in agriculture, two in Semitic studies, and one in each of the following: geography, philosophy, English, art



history, Australian literature, Jewish studies, architecture, fine arts, anthropology, development studies and sociology (See Appendix 3).

In combining both the specific topics and comparative topics that relate to Africa we find again that the majority, sixteen, are located in the field of history. The next most popular discipline that teaches African Studies themes is Political Science (nine topics); archaeology (four topics); music (two topics); agriculture (two topics); English (two topics); and Semitic Studies (two topics). The disciplines of geography, philosophy, art history, fine arts, anthropology, Jewish studies, architecture, Australian literature, development studies and sociology all have just one topic that mentions Africa, none of which are specifically African studies topics.

While Sydney University and the University of Western Australia both appear to offer the most topics related to Africa (nine topics each) only one topic in each case is specific to Africa. La Trobe University, however, has the highest number, four, of Africa-specific topics out of seven topics that mention Africa.²⁴ The other universities with African studies are Macquarie University with three Africa-specific topics, Flinders University, which offers two, and Melbourne, Monash, and Wollongong which each offer one.

The survey indicates other key features. Africa-specific topics are in most cases electives and not core topics to major sequences of study. The teaching of African Studies in Australian universities is dependent on a small number of academic staff; ten Africanists deliver the Africa-specific courses across nine universities. While this is a somewhat gloomy assessment, the number of people researching African themes might be higher. However, there is no reliable database to calculate this figure.²⁵

Listed in the order of the number of topics they teach, these Africanists are as follows. David Dorward teaches three topics (each offered every second year) in History at La Trobe University. The topics are: 1) *Africa in the Modern World*, 2) *Ancient Africa: delving into the mythic past*, and 3) *South African History*. David Dorward also teaches two additional topics, *Pox, Plagues and Pestilence* and *Globalisation*, both of which have a significant African content. Geoffrey Hawker is located in the Politics Department at Macquarie University and teaches two topics related to Africa. These are 1) *Development, Globalisation and State-Building in Africa*, and 2) *Africa, Politics and Globalisation*. Tanya Lyons is in the School of Political and International Studies at Flinders University and teaches two topics; 1) *Africa on a Global Stage* and 2) *Africa Politics: Global Issues*. Taught for the first time in 2003 her topics attracted a total of 22 students.

Anne Collett in the English Department at Wollongong University teaches one topic called *Africa and the New World*. While there are other academics located in English departments around Australia who have demonstrated an interest in Africa literature, Collett's topic was the only Africa-specific course.

Reis Flora, an Ethnomusicologist in the School of Music at Monash University has taught *Music of Sub-Saharan Africa* every third year since his appointment there in 1973. The topic attracts about 45 students, which may in part reflect the wider interest in African music and drumming in Victoria. While Flora's main area of interest and



research is the music of North India, he has “always found music and dance from Sub-Saharan Africa compelling”,²⁶ and perhaps because of this, Monash University’s School of Music - Conservatorium owns a full ensemble of Ewe drums, including the double bells, two atoke, and three gourd rattles. The Matheson Library at Monash has possibly the finest collection of music from Sub-Saharan Africa on LP discs and CDs in Australia.²⁷

Joan Wardrop in the History department at Curtin University teaches one topic on *South Africa the Politics of Memory*. She is also involved with the African Studies Centre of Western Australia. Her colleague Jeremy Martens in the History department of The University of Western Australia teaches one topic called *An Introduction to African History*.²⁸

As an archaeologist and a member of the African Research Institute at La Trobe University, Nicola Stern is well placed to teach African Studies. She teaches one undergraduate topic simply called *African Archaeology*. Nicola Stern has been instrumental in the The 'Blue Tuff' archaeological project in Kenya²⁹.

David Phillips teaches one topic called *South Africa Under Apartheid*, in the History department at the University of Melbourne. In 2003 there were 115 students enrolled, the highest number previously being 135 students. Like many African Studies topics, this one has only limited support from the university and is taught by someone who was “appointed as a British historian, who mainly teaches courses on Modern British history, Australian history, and some comparative colonial history. If [Phillips] disappear[s], so does African history from Melbourne University.”³⁰

Issues relevant to the African Diaspora should be considered equally important in the general field of African studies. Thus, we have included Shane White’s history topic at Sydney University entitled *The Black Experience in the America's*. The importance of the Slave trade and American history in understanding historical events in Africa is obvious. Recent events in Liberia can attest to this.

In sum, we have a small and eclectic list of Africanists currently teaching Africa-specific topics in Australia. How did it get to this minority proportion? And what do the results of the survey mean? In the next section, we will analyse this further.

Other Perspectives on African Studies in Australia

At the start of the 21st century, the first generation of Africanist scholars in the universities is a diminishing group. Natural attrition through retirement, death or promotion (to administrative positions within the university) has taken its toll³¹. But what a list this is. These scholars include Professors Anthony Low and Deryck Scheuder, prominent imperial historians, who moved into university administration, Professors Norman Etherington, Martin Chanock, Peter Alexander, David Goldsworthy, Cherry Gertzel, Gareth Griffiths, David Dorward and others. There is more to be said, however, and this section will further examine the first generation, and the institutions established by them, before looking at later changes and a younger generation of scholars.



Penelope Hetherington, whose enthusiasm and passion for Africa has not gone unnoticed, is worth noting here. Not only has she detailed her experiences in teaching African Studies in her soon to be published autobiography³², she has demonstrated a typical process of how African Studies has developed in Australia. As the author of *British Paternalism in Africa 1920-1940* (Hetherington 1976), she began teaching African history in the early 1980s. Like many Africanists in Australia, she was a university lecturer given an opportunity to develop and deliver her own topic, and she chose Africa. It was that simple. She found support for her endeavours from AFSAAP and as will be detailed below provided one of the few intellectual engagements for scholars of Africa in Australia. Her story demonstrates the vulnerability and provisional nature of African studies in Australia.

Hetherington wrote in her autobiography that she “knew that African studies had begun to take off”³³ particularly after participating in her first AFSAAP Conference. While she was teaching African History at the University of Western Australia however, Hetherington was one of a small group of academics doing so. This situation remains today. While Hetherington was establishing herself as an Africanist at the University of Western Australia, David Dorward and Tom Spear at La Trobe University were busy establishing AFSAAP and later the African Research Institute. Around the same time Cherry Gertzel was appointed to the Flinders University School of Political and International Studies in 1975 and taught African Studies until 1993 when she retired. She was replaced by David Moore who came from Canada in 1994 before taking up a post in South Africa in 2000, whereupon the post of African studies lecturer became redundant. The position was re-established in 2003 when Tanya Lyons began teaching two African Studies topics with the support of the School of Political and International Studies and the Globalisation Program at Flinders University.]

While the disciplines of History and Politics were dominant in the 1970s and early 1980s there have been interesting disciplinary shifts in the last twenty years. The study of African literatures, important from the 1960s with the earliest publications of Chinua Achebe, Bessie Head, Ngugi wa Thiongo and others, has expanded, and in the 1990s cultural studies, media studies (film in particular) and musicology have become more significant. In theoretical fields, postcolonial and post-structural theory, much debated and disputed, have also become important. Concerning the latter the academy is much divided. Nevertheless the boundary between representation and historic reality (inasmuch as one can even consider this a possibility), is one that must be grappled with in all disciplines. The field of postcolonial scholarship has provided teaching and research especially in English departments throughout Australia, notwithstanding cut-backs to university budgets in the 1990s. Herein lies a contradiction. Our survey shows that few such scholars are teaching Africa-specific course, yet African literature is encompassed within general courses on postcolonial literature at undergraduate and honours degree level. This is an indicator of how African Studies has merged with other regional studies in a new academic order

To look specifically at English departments, at the University of New South Wales Peter Alexander, Sue Kossew and Bill Ashcroft have all published in the field of Africa, African literature or postcolonial writing. Sue Thomas at La Trobe, Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins at the University of Queensland, Andrew Peek at the University of Tasmania, Chandani Lokuge at Monash, Anne Maxwell at the University



of Melbourne, Rosemary Colmer at Macquarie, and Paul Sharrud at Wollongong all have research interests and publications in African literature, although they do not offer teaching topics specific to Africa Studies. Derek Wright, a renowned scholar, and an authority on the work of Sole Woyinka, was unfortunately one who lost his position when the whole of the English department in the University of Darwin was closed in a massive down-sizing exercise.

The Demography department at the Australian National University (the ANU) is a further case in point. Through several decades this department has spear-headed research in population studies in the developing world, with Africa as a special focus. This has been associated in recent years with sponsoring students from Africa to complete higher degrees in demography at the ANU. David Lucas in this department has been a long-term member of AFSAAP and has a specific interest in African demography.

At the same time, a different shift has occurred which has been detrimental to the social sciences and humanities including African Studies. The rise in new technologies has brought computer studies to the fore; this, along with business studies, attracted many good students in the 1990s, a factor which affected the intake of social sciences and humanities subjects. It remains to be seen to what extent this is a permanent swing.

There has also been a shift of government interest and official funding away from Africa which has paralleled the upheaval in the tertiary education sector, associated with economic rationalism (neo-liberalism) and 'user pays' ideology. Changing funding structures, and the rigorous tightening of the universities' budget has been associated with the encouragement of vocational courses in the universities and in particular the expansion of technology courses, computer studies and business studies, with related negative effects on the Humanities and Social Sciences. In the latter, departments have reduced their staff numbers by not renewing contracts and not replacing tenured staff as they retire. Promotions have in some cases been held back. Staffing levels have been halved in many humanities and social science areas, with less capacity for supervision of postgraduates with specific interests. One effect of this misery has been to encourage Africanists to apply for overseas positions, with the loss of some able scholars. Gareth Griffiths, Pal Ahluwalia and Peter Limb have been lost to Australian African Studies in the last two years, the USA and English universities benefiting from our loss.

A further shift in the early 1990s was effected by the Paul Keating Labor Government's policies which favoured a greater political and economic engagement with Asia. Asian Studies received a new lease of life. Asian languages and business-oriented courses encompassing Japan, Indonesia, China and other southern and south-east Asian countries were funded in expanding departments.

Although our survey has suggested that African Studies is in a perilous state, further analysis indicates that teaching programs and the research interests of individual scholars continue to promote African Studies. We would argue that the current state of African Studies in Australia is not completely hopeless. Despite the small numbers of topics on offer in a small group of Australian universities, there remains a committed



group of scholars who conduct research on Africa and African languages and literature and incorporate Africa into more general teaching topics.

Although the Demography department at the ANU is unique in attracting students from Africa, African postgraduate students, in more random manner, have made their way to departments of history, politics and development studies programs around the country, some sponsored by the Australian government through Aid programs. This has sadly been tightened up in recent years.

Australian universities, furthermore, have positioned themselves within Africa, particularly in South Africa, with offshore campuses and the offshore teaching of Australian degrees (such as Bond University, Monash University and the University of South Australia). None of these, sadly, engage in the study of Africa, but deliver, rather, a global education such as in business and communications, to an African elite that can afford an Australian university degree³⁴.

A further factor concerns the increasing African Australian population especially in State capital cities. Some university campuses have considerable numbers of African Australian students. While there may be no particular desire by these students for courses on Africa, their presence is a reminder of the complex demography and social movements of the world in 2003, and of the need for understanding diverse cultures. Although our survey has demonstrated a small, and threatened, nucleus of Africa-specific courses in Australian universities, there is a more complex story which is perhaps less gloomy. The problem is to maintain some cohesion amongst African interests in the universities and to maintain pressure on federal and state governments for funding and other support. In this respect, links established with government, non-government organisations and other interest groups are important. In recognising the small base from which African Studies operates, creating links across these other sectors seems to be important.

African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific³⁵

Bringing together all of the eclectic disciplines, academics, researchers, organizations and interest groups is the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP). The Association was formed when a number of Africanists gathered together during the 1977 Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS) Conference to discuss common problems and concerns, including their physical and intellectual isolation. During the following year Dr David Dorward and Dr Tom Spear organised a conference under the title of 'African Modes of Production' at La Trobe University where they were both teaching African History. At the same meeting a decision was made to form the African Studies Association of Australia and the Pacific (AFSAAP). This coincided with a rising tide for African Studies in Australia.³⁶ Professor Anthony Low, then founding Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University and an eminent Africanist, agreed to be the President of AFSAAP. An Association Newsletter was also inaugurated and the founding members agreed that the Association would endeavour to convene an annual conference.

The second conference held at the Australian National University in 1979 was a larger event and focused on 'Contemporary Issues', with a decidedly political emphasis. In



1980 the conference returned to La Trobe University with the theme of promoting the teaching of Africa in schools. In 1981 the University of New South Wales hosted the conference with the theme 'Africa and the Media' and in 1982, the conference returned to the Australian National University, when a new President, Dr Cherry Gertzel of the Centre for Development Studies at Flinders University, was elected. A special AFSAAP section on Southern Africa in Transition was also organised by Professor Deryck Schreuder of the University of Sydney as part of the annual conference of the Australian Historical Association. Other conferences followed at Monash, the University of Melbourne, then a bold venture in having a conference in Wellington, New Zealand where it was hosted by the African Information Centre. Although New Zealanders were delighted with this event, it was disappointing in terms of Australian participation.

These early conferences and their range of themes indicate the diversity of focus that existed in African Studies as well as the geographical spread of participants. The annual conference moved between Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney in the first decade, and later included Adelaide and then Perth. Concern about Perth's 'isolation' from the eastern states of Australia delayed the first conference there until held, when with the theme was "Transfers of Power in Southern Africa". The more recent of the two Perth conferences, held in 1999, had a registration of around 500 participants and was the largest AFSAAP conference held so far. Perth is the closest Australian city to Africa, a decided advantage in linking African concerns to Australian academic interests. The 1999 conference attracted a large number of South African colleagues, due largely to the efforts of Peter Limb, who, sadly, has become part of the Africanist brain-drain and has since moved to the United States. The 1999 conference also gave an artificial impression of an expansion of the Association and level of interest in Africa.³⁷ This, however, lasted only as long as the millennium celebrations.

A cursory look at the last few AFSAAP conference programs³⁸ illustrates not only that smaller conferences are being held, but that more non-Australians are interested in African Studies in Australia, than resident Australians. Of note is that in many cases the interest comes from our colleagues in Nigeria who are seldom able to obtain funding. Australian universities are unable to assist in this. There is further negative response from government who frequently denies visas for African participants to AFSAAP conferences³⁹.

Another dilemma for AFSAAP is the declining membership numbers (approximately 85 members in 2003). The annual conference continues to bring African Studies scholars from Australasia, the Pacific and around the world together, but has become increasingly dominated by non-members of the association from outside of the region (Australasia and the Pacific). While this in itself is not the problem, the challenge for the Association in maintaining its membership base is a critical factor if it is to continue.

African Research Institute, La Trobe University, Melbourne

Another institution that has helped to promote African Studies is the African Research Institute in Victoria. Founded in 1985 at La Trobe University in Melbourne, with David Dorward as Director, the African Research Institute is the first and only institute of its kind in Australia. Multi-disciplinary in approach, the aims are: to stimulate and



promote research and postgraduate teaching in the field of African Studies; to promote interaction and cooperation in research and teaching with members of academic or research staff of other institutions in Victoria, elsewhere in Australia and overseas; to initiate postgraduate and post-doctoral interchange between institutions; to give institutional structure to links with organizations and institutions outside La Trobe; and to provide advisory services to government and non-government bodies, such as the corporate sector, trade unions, aid agencies and the media.⁴⁰

The African Research Institute encompasses teaching staff in Legal Studies (now Law), Agriculture, Archaeology, English and History. Renowned scholars have included Professors Martin Chanock and Penny Andrews (now at the City University of New York), Dr Nicola Stern, Associate Professor David Dorward, Professor Tom Spear (now at Wisconsin in the US) and Assoc. Professor Sue Thomas. Within these disciplines there has been a continuous stream of Honours, Masters and PhD candidates. The Institute is supported by an excellent African collection of monographs, serials and microform resources in the Borchardt Library.⁴¹

Visits of notable persons organised through the Institute have included Oliver Tambo and Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 1987, each of whom addressed large crowds in the Union Hall at La Trobe University. In 1991 when the move towards multi-racial democracy in South Africa was well under way, Walter Sisulu, Deputy President of the African National Congress and Albertina Sisulu, Deputy President of the ANC Women's League and Co-President of the United Democratic Front coalition, also visited the university. Later in 1991 Cyril Ramaphosa, then General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers, the largest Black trade union in South Africa gave a luncheon address to a large audience of staff and students. Other visitors included His Holiness, Pope Shenouda III, Patriarch of Alexandria and Spiritual Head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, who delivered an address to the University in 1989.⁴²

Members of the African Research Institute have been involved in various co-operative teaching programmes with other institutions, particularly in distance education programmes offered through Deakin University. There has been effective liaison between the Institute and Africanists at other Victorian universities and colleges on matters relating to teaching, thesis research and library acquisitions. Professor James Polhemus, formerly Dean of Social Sciences at Deakin University, and Professor David Goldsworthy in Politics at Monash University, have both been Associate Members of the Institute.

The African Studies Centre, Perth

On the other side of the continent the University of Western Australia (whose Vice Chancellor, Professor Deryck Schreuder is an Africanist and member of AFSAAP) hosts the African Studies Centre of Western Australia (ASCWA). The centre was established in July 1997 after a successful African Seminar Program inaugurated in 1996.

The Centre is a multi-disciplinary and multi-campus body that organizes an annual program of seminars in all fields of African Studies; encourages the study of African Studies and awareness of Africa in W.A.; maintains a web page and e-mail contact list; [and] hosts international visitors in the field of African Studies. The African Studies Centre Committee has contacts on all



Western Australian university campuses. It also organizes social events. It works closely with the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP).⁴³

Links with government, NGOs and other interest groups.

Africanists in Australia, as individuals or by association with AFSAAP and/or the African Research Institute have taken activist roles concerning government and non-government relations with Africa. Links have been forged with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Australian Council for Overseas Aid and many of its constituent organizations, such as Australian Volunteers International (formerly the Overseas Service Bureau) as well as with Oxfam / Community Aid Abroad. The African Research Institute also has ties with the Africa-Australia Business Council, the South Africa Business Council and a broad spectrum of African community and special interest groups. Members of the Australian diplomatic corps have visited the Institute before departure to postings in Africa and provided briefings upon their return to Australia. Members of the African diplomatic corps in Australia are regularly invited to AFSAAP annual conferences to contribute presentations about their country or their country's perspective on broader issues concerning the continent.

The drawing together of these interest groups has been of particular importance in Australia. The small population concentrated in a handful of urban settlements dispersed around the seaboard of a large continent has made for pockets of awareness of Africa concentrated in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and Canberra, which are relatively isolated from each other. In each centre there has been a history of liaison between NGOs and Africanists in the universities. AFSAAP has been a unifying factor and provided an institution from which Government committees and departments have sought submissions concerning policy development. AFSAAP, along with the African Research Institute and individual Africanists, has maintained a continuing critique of government policies concerning Africa. Discussion of these matters was a formal, and informal feature of AFSAAP conferences throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and will certainly continue if the Association survives. Papers, news and notes in the *AFSAAP Newsletter* for the years 1984 and 1985 demonstrate that this trend was already in place.⁴⁴ Items included 'Australia's Diplomatic Representation in Africa' (March 1984), notes on 'The Jackson Committee Report', 'The Overseas Service Bureau', 'The Australian NGO Preparatory Seminar of ICARA II' attended by an AFSAAP representative (July 1984), 'Training Aid in the Era of Comparative Advantage: African Development Planning at Sydney', 'ACIAR and Farming Systems Research' (November 1984), etc.

The relationship between these sectoral interests was significant in relation to the 1984 *Jackson Report*, which marked a change in Australian policy concerning humanitarian aid and the gradual weakening of official interest in Black Africa. Since that time official emphasis has been on trade rather than aid. This emphasis was entrenched by the *Simons Report on Australian Overseas Assistance* in 1997, which substantially lessened development assistance to Africa. With government focus placed largely on southern Africa and trade, the NGOs were left to take up the humanitarian aid requirements. AFSAAP, along with individual members, made submissions to the 1995 Parliamentary Enquiry into Australia's Political, Security and Trade Interests with Southern Africa, which preceded the *Simons Report*. The AFSAAP submission



firmly recommended the extension of Australia's interest beyond southern Africa, but noted the importance of Australia's development of bilateral relations with South Africa at the time of the first multi-racial elections in that year.⁴⁵ AFSAAP has continued to maintain links with the NGOs.

It is perhaps ironic that as Africanists in the universities have found it increasingly difficult to obtain funding for field-work, particularly postgraduate funding, first-hand Australian knowledge of Africa has come increasingly through Australian NGO workers on the ground. Given the small population of Australia, an integrated emphasis on Africa, in which Africanists in the universities, that is the core of research and higher education, in close liaison with the NGOs and the government sector, would seem to be crucial to assuring a viable field of African Studies in Australia and in attaining and maintaining a body of expertise on Africa.

Conclusion

Measuring the overall interest in African Studies in Australia according to teaching capacity in university curricula might suggest that there is very little interest in African Studies in Australia. A brief survey of Australia's mainstream media furthermore might also conclude that there is hardly any interest in Africa, and little in-depth knowledge of African issues. Shifts in government policies concerning development aid away from Africa during the last decade and the turmoil in the universities caused by cuts in university budgets have caused enormous distress to academics with interests in Africa and reduced the core community of Africanists to small numbers, with additional losses caused by a brain-drain to America, Africa and Britain. Funding for African research has never been high on Australian agendas for grants, and the combined focus of vocational, business, technological courses associated with Australia's rising economic and political interests in South East Asia has made African Studies particularly vulnerable.

Perhaps the most obvious explanation for the lessening prominence of African Studies has much to do with Australian foreign policy and priorities⁴⁶, not to mention Australia's historical past. However, with current foreign affairs concerns about collapsed states in Australia's region (The Solomons, PNG, and Fiji) there might be a need to develop closer links with Africa and Africanists who are engaged in exploring the historical and political reasons for collapsed states in Africa and its prospects for the future.

However, a fuller analysis indicates that the suggested malaise in African Studies may not be wholly true. Community interest, such as participation in cultural events and, in the NGO sector, an interest in development issues, for example through child sponsorship programs and so on, are significant in Australia, and these create additional links with Africa, Africans and African Australians.

Moreover, keen support for African Studies in Australia has continued mainly because of dedicated academics, who continue their research and teaching on African issues. The survey of teaching on Africa in Australian universities, on which this paper has been based, while showing a very small core community of Africanists, also indicates that there are considerable numbers of other academic staff whose teaching and research interests incorporate Africa. These workers, at the fringe of the community



of Africanists are the ones whom we would like to see more centrally placed. These, along with core Africanists, work in isolation in their respective universities, only coming together once a year under the umbrella of the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific. It is these academics who should, as Colin Bundy suggests, “take pride” in their efforts to understand a complex world and to make it a better place.⁴⁷ We would argue that now is not the time to give up on Africa or African Studies in Australia.



Appendix 1: Frequency of African Studies Topics in Australian Universities 2003

Universities	Cutin Uni		Flinders Uni		La Trobe Uni		Macquarie Uni		Melbourne Uni		Monash Uni		University of NSW		Newcastle University		Queensland University		Sydney Uni		University Tasmania		University Western Aust.		Wollongong University		Total
	a	B	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b			
Agriculture																2											2
Anthropology																							1				1
Archaeology					1						1									1			1				4
Architecture																			1								1
Art History																			1								1
Aust Literature																			1								1
Development Studies				1																							1
English																							1	1			2
Fine Arts																							1				1
Geography															1												1
History	1			1	3	3			1						1				1	1			1	3			16
Jewish Studies																				1							1
Music							1				1																2
philosophy															1												1
Politics			2	1			2						2								1		1				9
Semitic Studies																			2								2
Sociology															1												1
Split Total	1		2	3	4	3	3		1		1	1		2		4		2	1	8		1	1	1	8	1	
Merged total	1		5		7		3		1		2		2		4		2		9	8		1		9		1	47

Legend

a = Specific topic related to African Studies (see Table 2)

b= A topic that uses Africa as a case study or theme to explain other political, social, historical issues (such as genocide) (see Table 3)



Appendix 2 African Studies Topics

University	Topic	Discipline
Curtin University	“South Africa: the Politics of memory”	History
Flinders University	Africa on a Global Stage	Politics
	African Politics: Global Issues	Politics
La Trobe	Africa in the Modern world	History
	Ancient Africa: delving into the Mythic Past	History
	South African History	History
	African Archaeology	Archaeology
Macquarie	African Drumming	Music
	Development, Globalisation and State Building in Africa	Politics
	African Politics and Globalisation	Politics
Melbourne	South Africa Under Apartheid	History
Monash	Music of Sub-Saharan Africa	Music
Sydney	The Black Experience in the Americas	History
Western Australia	An Introduction to African History	History
Woollongong	Africa and the New World	English



Appendix 3 Comparative African Studies Topics

University	Comparative Topic	Discipline
Flinders University	History's Killing fields	History
	Introduction to development studies	Development Studies
	Politics of New States	Politics
La Trobe	Genocides and Holocaust: Nazi Europe, Central America, Africa	History
	Pox, Plagues and Pestilence	History
	Globalisation	History
Monash	Archaeology of Complex Societies in Asia, Africa, Oceania and the Americas	Archaeology
UNSW	Resource Politics	Politics
	States, nations and Ethnic Identities	Politics
Newcastle	Geographies of Development	Geography
	America History to the Civil War	History
	Non-European Philosophies	Philosophy
	Islam in Modern Society	Sociology
Queensland	Rural development	Agriculture
	Rural development Economies	Rural Management
Sydney	Islam in world History	Semitic Studies
	Islam in the modern world	Semitic Studies
	Archaeology of modern times	archaeology
	Orientalism and Visual Culture	Art History and Theory
	Postcolonial Literatures and theory	Australian Literature
	Race, Empire and Bondage 2	History
	Jewish Settlement outside Palestine	Jewish Civilisation, thought and Culture
	Globalisation and Architecture	Architecture
Western Australia	History 151	History
	The modern world: An introduction to historical Archaeology	archaeology
	Expanding the Raj: British Imperialism from Waterloo to Churchill	History
	White Supremacy	History
	Strategy, Diplomacy and Conflict	Politics
	Postcolonial Literatures	English
	Race and Place: European Modernism from Global Perspectives	Fine Arts
	Migration, Culture and Identity	Anthropology
Tasmania	Race and Ethnic Politics	Government



Notes

¹ Colin Bundy, "Continuing a Conversation: Prospects for African Studies in the 21st Century", *African Affairs*, Vol.101, 2002, p.67

² Michael O. West and William G. Martin, "A Future with a Past: Resurrecting the Study of Africa in the Post-Africanist Era," *Africa Today*, 44, 3 (Summer 1997), pp. 309-326; and Christopher Lowe, "Resurrection How? A Response to Michael O. West and William G. Martin's Article, "A Future with a Past: Resurrecting the Study of Africa in the Post-Africanist Era", *Africa Today*, 44, 4 (October-December 1997), pp. 385-423.

³ US Pledge on Africa Terror, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3060379.stm>

⁴ *Africa's Ground Zero (The Bin Laden Effect)* BBC Focus on Africa Jan-March 2002.

⁵ See Ben Reilly, "The Africanisation of the South Pacific", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 54 no.3 November 2000, pp.261-68.

⁶ While the African Research Institute often puts out media releases and other information, the general lack of experts has only recently become noticeable to the authors due to the increasingly large number of phone calls received from national and local radio stations wanting interviews and information on African issues.

⁷ Gertzel foreshadowed this contraction of African Studies as early as 1998, then "at least 30 scholars in different disciplines engaged in teaching and research". Cherry Gertzel "African Studies in Australia", *Australasian Review of African Studies*, Vol. 20, no.1, June 1998, pp.4-11. and for a comparison read John Lonsdale "African Studies in the United Kingdom", *Australasian Review of African Studies*, Vol.22, no.2, December 2000

⁸ Here the Australians join a host of American and British counterparts who have been "frustrated" in their Africanist pursuits, not only due to an "epistemological angst" regarding 'who can speak for whom?', but due also to a gloomy sense of Africa's marginality in both the world and the academy. See Colin Bundy, "Continuing a Conversation: Prospects for African Studies in the 21st Century", *African Affairs*, Vol.101, 2002, pp.65-67.

⁹ David Lucas, *Community Profiles: 1996 Census*, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Statistics Section, 2000, p.1.

¹⁰ White settlers from Kenya and Rhodesia were also among Australian immigrants of this period. Some, including white south Africans, were supporters of *apartheid* policies.

¹¹ African Research Institute archives.

¹² 'Papers presented at AFSAAP conferences 1979-1985' *AFSAAP Newsletter*, pp. 10-16. Wider problems in Southern Africa, including papers on Namibia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique were central in a symposium on Southern Africa at La Trobe in March 1985.

¹³ Gavin Kitching "Why I gave up African Studies", in *African Studies Review and Newsletter*, Vol.22 No.1 June 2000, pp.21-26

¹⁴ See Manuel Castells, *End of Millenium, Vol.III of The Information Age, Economy, Society and Culture* 92nd Edition, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000), pp. 112-17, cited in Colin Bundy, "Continuing a Conversation: Prospects for African Studies in the 21st Century", *African Affairs*, Vol.101, 2002pp.63-64.

¹⁵ See Tanya Lyons "Africa at the Edge of Globalisation", *Australasian Review of African Studies*, Vol. 24 No. 2 December 2002, pp.38-48

¹⁶ Gavin Kitching "Why I gave up African Studies", in *African Studies Review and Newsletter*, Vol.22 No.1 June 2000, p.21

¹⁷ See Colin Bundy, "Continuing a Conversation: Prospects for African Studies in the 21st Century", *African Affairs*, Vol.101, 2002, pp.61-73. He picks up on Kitching's theme. Also see the special edition of the forthcoming online journal *The African Studies Quarterly*, to be edited by Marc Epprecht.

¹⁸ Within AFSAAP, however, there has been concern about the state of the field for ten years or more.. Africanists in Australia, and AFSAAP, have attempted to influence Government through submissions to the Jackson and Simons Reports, etc.

¹⁹ See Gavin Kitching "Why I gave up African Studies", in *African Studies Review and Newsletter*, Vol.22 No.1 June 2000, pp.21-26; and see Danny Postel "Out of Africa and into



Contention", from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, reprinted in *The Australian*, Wednesday April 9th, 2003.

²⁰ Many thanks to Julie Tonkin for help in collating this information. This list might include some topics that were not on offer in 2003, and might not include topics that were not available from university websites.

²¹ For an example of African Studies themes see Robert Bates, V.Y. Mudimbe and Jean O'Barr, *Africa and the Disciplines: The Contribution of Research in Africa to the Social Sciences and Humanities*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993.

²² It is noteworthy that the ANU does not appear to offer any African Studies topics according to our research methods, but has a reputation for hosting many African postgraduates, and postgraduates researching on African issues, especially in demography and anthropology. For a brief time Christine Sylvester, a self-proclaimed Zimbabweanist was based at ANU, but is now in the Hague. David Lucas also remains at ANU and is an Africanist.

²³ In the University of New South Wales, for example, there are three teaching staff in the English department with African interests, along with ex-Africanist Gavin Kitching in Political Science.

²⁴ Two additional topics were offered as summer and winter courses by Liz Dimock on a one off basis (Gender and Imperialism in Africa and Women, Race and Gender in Africa; notably the only topics related to women or gender).

²⁵ We can use the annual AFSAAP Conference program to demonstrate the level of interest in African research – about 50% of the 55 papers listed at the 2002 conference at Macquarie University were by locals, while the remaining papers were given by members and non-members from outside Australia. Of the 62 papers listed for the 2003 Conference at Flinders University, 60% are being offered by participants from overseas while only 40% are being presented by locals. Of the total presenters only 22% (or 14) are actual members of AFSAAP.

²⁶ In 2003 Flora was assisted by Chris Lesser who completed his Masters Thesis at LaTrobe University in 1996 on "Note Placement and Placement Flexibility in Asante Speech-Mode Drumming". Lesser is well known in the African music performance circles in Melbourne, Australia, and he has been on a number of field trips to West Africa. I am grateful to Reis Flora for his personal correspondence detailing this information. July 2003.

²⁷ Part of this collection includes a copy of Hugh Tracey's "Catalogue: the Sounds of Africa Series", which includes 210 long playing records of music and songs from Central, Eastern and Southern Africa. The library subscribes to the journal *African Music* and has been systematically purchasing monographs on music in Africa.

²⁸ Martens has recently replaced Norman Etherington who was teaching African history at the University of Adelaide between 1972 and the mid-1980s and then began teaching history at the University of Western Australia in 1993; Penelope Hetherington, from her unpublished autobiography, 2003.

²⁹ 'Blue tuff' is the informal name given to a sedimentary horizon in the Koobi Fora Formation in northern Kenya that contains traces of activities of early African *Homo erectus*.

³⁰ Personal Correspondence from David Phillips

³¹ Colin Bundy confirms that even in the United Kingdom the "subject is dying because its practitioners are fading away". See Colin Bundy "Continuing a Conversation: Prospects for African Studies in the 21st Century", *African Affairs*, Vol.101, 2002, p.61.

³² Penelope Hetherington, from her unpublished autobiography, 2003

³³ Penelope Hetherington, from her unpublished autobiography, 2003

³⁴ While this area of global education would provide an interesting insight into the expansion of Australian education overseas and Australia's relationship with Africa in relation to education, such a task will not be undertaken here.

³⁵ It was during the 1979 meeting in Canberra that AFSAAP changed its name from the 'African Studies Association of Australia' to the "African Studies Association of Australia and the Pacific" in recognition of the participation of Africanists from such diverse regional states



as New Zealand, Fiji and Papua New Guinea. In 1995 the name was again changed to the more inclusive 'African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific.'

³⁶ Cherry Gertzel, 'African Studies in Australia' *African Studies Review and Newsletter*, VolXX, No 1, 1998, pp. 4-11. Gertzel has pointed out that the foundation of AFSAAP came about because of the expansion of university courses about Africa during the 1970s.

³⁷ See the AFSAAP 1999 conference website

<http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/ASCWA/conference99/>

³⁸ See AFSAAP 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 Conference websites:

www.ssn.flinders.edu.au/global/afsaap/conferences/

³⁹ This Nigerian dilemma needs further investigation but cannot be dealt with adequately here.

⁴⁰ African Research Institute Report, 1985-1990,

www.hist.latrobe.edu.au/africanresearchinstitute

⁴¹ See Eva Fisch, 'African Collections at the La Trobe University Library', *The Australasian Review of African Studies*, Vol XXV, No 1, June 2003, pp 87-96.

⁴² Many of these visitors visited other universities as well as government departments in Canberra. The African Research Institute Annual Reports conveniently list visitors, but only for La Trobe.

⁴³ The African Studies Centre of Western Australia. See their website at

<http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/ASCWA/>

⁴⁴ The *AFSAAP Newsletter*, then published three times a year with 20-40 pages per issue, included short articles or papers, news and notes.

⁴⁵ In the period following these elections a number of representatives of the new South African government made visits to Australia, addressing meetings and institutions. It is noteworthy that seven Kenyan parliamentarians spent a month in Australia in 1997 as guests of the government as part of a study tour.

⁴⁶ See Jolyon Ford "Australia's Aid to Africa", *The Drawing Board*, 16 October 2002,

<http://www.econ.usyd.edu.au/drawingboard/digest/0210/ford.html> and Jolyon Ford

"Australian-Africa Relations 2002: another look" in *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 57, (1), pp.17-33, 2003

⁴⁷ Colin Bundy commenting upon Nicholas Maxwell's thoughts in "Wisdom and Curiosity? I Remember Them Well", in *Times Higher Education Supplement*, No.1488, May 25, 2001, p. 14, cited in Colin Bundy, "Continuing a Conversation: Prospects for African Studies in the 21st Century", *African Affairs*, Vol.101, 2002, p.73.