Life/Writing: A Colloquium on Biography

On the 31st of May WISER hosted a colloquium on biography that sought to explore the nature of life-writing and its impact and possibilities in the South African context. Biography has in recent decades become one of the most popular varieties of non-fiction literature and it has also become an increasingly prominent form of historical writing. Biographical and life history methods of research are attracting growing interest as a form of social science research. The types of presentations and themes discussed included reflections by biographers on their work, with emphasis on the following sub-themes: ‘What counts as biographical evidence?’, ‘Problems of biographical writing’; and ‘How far can the writer legitimately appear in the biographical story he/she tells?’. The colloquium was convened by Jonathan Hyslop.

The event was well-attended and reflected WISER’s interest in the interaction between scholarly and popular forms of writing. A feature of the day was a session in which Elinor Sisulu talked about her new joint biography of Albertina Sisulu and the late Walter Sisulu. Sarah Nuttall held a session on biographical writing in conversation with leading biographer Tim Couzens and the three WISER members working on biographical projects — John Matshikiza, Mark Gevisser and Jon Hyslop. Other sessions dealt with literary biography and with biography in publishing, and included contributions from the distinguished scholar of South African literature Stephen Gray and poet and novelist Chris van Wyk. An interview with WISER’s biographers is published on page 3 of this edition of WISER in BRIEF.
As we approach the third year of our existence, we are consolidating our work at WISER, and finding new directions. As this edition of our newsletter shows, we are continuing to build an intellectual impetus through the hosting of regular symposia and seminars and lectures. Indeed, we understand one of our central contributions to the University to be animating debate across a wide field. Our decision to run symposia on questions of class, biopolitics and biography over the last few months reveals something of the intellectual and disciplinary range we are aiming to encompass. That each of these occasions has drawn unprecedented audiences at Wits, as much from beyond the university as from within, continues to be a great inspiration to us. During the next few months, we will be co-hosting an international conference on Sex and Secrecy, which has excited a huge response from contributors across the globe. Clearly the idea animating this conference is one whose time has come. The principal organizers, Liz Walker and Graeme Reid, have compiled a fascinating programme, as global in its referents as it is South African. I encourage you to consult our website to read the papers, if you aren’t able to attend the event itself.

This edition profiles newly appointed WISER staff members. If the appointment of our Writing Fellows last year produced a concentration of expertise and interest around the question of biography (which issued in the extremely successful symposium on biography, covered in the newsletter), this year we have welcomed Susan van Zyl (on secondment from Psychology here at Wits) and Tina Sideris (a clinical psychologist on a post-doctoral fellowship). Together they have excited discussion and debate on the psychological facets of social life and challenged us to grapple more concertedly with the interface between the psychological and social disciplines. A symposium on psycho-analysis and the social sciences is planned for later in the year. We were also delighted to appoint Tom Odhiambo, a Kenyan scholar of literature and popular culture, to a research position. Tom’s presence at WISER will contribute powerfully to our efforts to link up with like-minded scholars elsewhere in Africa, and boost our research initiatives in the study of popular culture. Jon Hyslop, previously on secondment from sociology at Wits, has now joined us in a more permanent capacity. A leading figure in fields of historical and sociological work, he plays an important role in shaping WISER’s intellectual practice. It’s also a pleasure to work with him as deputy director.

We have made further progress in our doctoral fellowship programme. In March, we ran the first in an ambitious series of theory seminars, planned over the course of four years, to offer doctoral students in the university at large (and any other interested persons) the opportunity to track the key theoretical debates in the humanities and social sciences from the Enlightenment to the present. Peter Hudson, our colleague in Political Studies, who has played a pivotal role in planning the series, kicked off with masterful commentaries on the philosophical foundations of the early modern project. The second set of seminars is scheduled for November. Anyone who wishes to know more about the series, and/or wants to attend, should contact Clair Harrison, our administrator.

We much look forward to our continuing conversations with you across the different facets of what we do, and to your participation and comments on what WISER is attempting to achieve for the University.

Deborah Posel
Director
June 2003
Sarah Nuttall speaks to Jon Hyslop, John Matshikiza and Mark Gevisser — all currently involved in biographical projects — about the endeavour of biography-writing, the politics and practices of writing lives, the biographer’s positionality and the elusiveness of the biographer’s subject.

Sarah Nuttall: Why did you choose the biographical form?

Jon Hyslop: I have found biographical work both the most enjoyable and the most intellectually challenging academic work I have done. On the one hand biography offers the challenge of gradually piecing fragmented material together in a way which makes a coherent account of a life. On the other hand, your material tests the explanations you offer for broad social processes to the limit.

John Matshikiza: I think my biography chose me. Since I was quite young I can remember South African exiles coming up to me with an accusing look in their eye and saying, ‘When are you going to write a biography of your father?’ It hardly mattered to them that I knew very little about my father’s life, since he had died while I was in my early teens. Nor had I grown up with family folklore, recent and ancient, that would have somewhat filled in the gaps. But no one else was offering to do the job. So in the end I was, in a sense, drafted by a variety of interest groups. Having said that, now that I have embarked, I find the project filled with fascinating challenges, and no longer as daunting as it was when I was first forced to start thinking about it a couple of decades ago. And to echo Jon H, I am more and more finding that I am not only writing a life, I am also re-examining and writing a well-known period from a partly unexplored perspective.

Mark Gevisser: The more I write, the more obsessed I become with narrative, and what better vehicle for storytelling than somebody’s life, with its readymade beginning, middle and end and all the rites-of-passage andcomings-of-age and flowerings and deflowerings, the tragic twists and ironic turns, in between? Janet Malcolm says that biography is really fiction in disguise, and she’s not wrong: it works off a central protagonist and tracks his or her progress through life. I came to book-length biography through my profile-writing as a journalist, and I got involved in profile-writing because describing a life, and someone’s subjectivity through the South African transition, seemed to me the richest way — actually, the only way — to make sense of the otherwise-indescribable time we were going through in the ‘90s. I’ve always been a closet historian (I’m not trained as one), and now I feel like I’m using biography the same way, to understand the past.

SN: You are each writing about people of considerable public visibility in South Africa and elsewhere. How does this visibility impact on the writing of these men’s selves?

JH: My protagonist, James Bain, was very famous in 1913 to 1914 when he led the Johannesburg General strike, and was then deported to England, where he became a labour movement hero for a short time. But he is now entirely forgotten. One of the things that strikes me is that celebrity was different in 1914 to what it is now. Today it seems easier to find out what politicians eat for breakfast than to get information on their political ideas. Before the First World War typical reports on pub-
Public meetings gave reports of every word spoken; but it was much harder to glean personal details about prominent figures from the media.

JM: Todd Matshikiza was a very public figure in his times, foremost as a composer and musician, but also importantly as a writer on the famous Drum magazine. However, like many others of his generation, his departure into exile meant that he lost his immediate contact with his audience in both media. Which means that, forty years down the line, he is remembered by his own generation, and even some of the younger generation, as someone famous — although few can remember in detail what he was famous for. That demands certain critical choices in the writing of this biography. Can one assume a readership will know anything about the subject, apart from a few famous snatches from the musical King Kong? Can one even assume that a readership will be intimate with the general context of the times — social, political, artistic, educational? Even small details like how people lived in the townships, and how they travelled from A to B. Nothing can be taken for granted.

MG: The fact that my subject — my protagonist, if you will — is a living, breathing, acting person with significant agency over all of our lives makes my project very difficult indeed. Although I am clear that I am writing a work of historiography — an attempt to explain where Thabo Mbeki comes from and why he is the way he is rather than an assessment of his Presidency — I find myself perpetually distracted by the present. I go through the day with bifurcated vision; part of me focussed on the fifties or sixties or seventies and trying to recreate that world, and another part of me tracking my subject’s every utterance in the present. Just recently he made some extraordinary statements about African identity at a speech to an editors’ conference; this requires me to go back and reassess what I have already written about his shift into ‘Africanist’ ideology. It happens all the time.

SN: The histories and meanings attached to biography differ and change quite rapidly over time. How do you see yourself responding to these traditions?

JH: I suppose I do see my work in the social history tradition of recovering the lives of relatively obscure people. This is no longer a particularly remarkable project, yet it is striking how much of published biography is about the famous or notorious. You really have to work harder to interest people in the unknown figures of history than you do to interest them in Dave Beckham or J.V. Stalin.

The challenge of writing the life of a little-known person is that you do not have one main organised archive of their papers, as you would be likely to have if you were writing about a celebrated writer or politician. But the hunt for the material in obscure archives and newspapers is thus given an extra edge of excitement and discovery. Tim Couzens’ Tramp Royal is a masterly example of this kind of work, and something of a model for me.

JM: Mine is a bit of a hybrid, since it necessarily involves sections of autobiography as well as ‘straight’ biography. In addition, I am working from my father’s own autobiographical work, Chocolates for my Wife as a key source that is nevertheless itself not ‘formal’ biography, but part of the artistic and intellectual output of my subject. There are other issues of detective work, too: much of his music has survived in fragmented or incomplete manuscript form. It is an important part of the process to reconstruct them, wherever possible (and employing the serv-
ices of those who are expert in the medium) and then deciding what they meant in
the life of the composer, and what they spoke to in his own times.

MG: The funny thing is that I have a really hard time reading biography, I suppose
because most of it is so bad: biographers get away with murder because of their
readers’ prudence. I think my starting point is an attack on the biographer’s omni-
sience. ‘As Thabo Mbeki crossed the border into Botswana, he thought of the little
boy he left behind in the rolling green hills of the Transkei, whom he would never
see again...’ What crap! How on earth does the biographer even begin to know what
Thabo Mbeki was thinking at that moment? I think that biography is about how we
cannot know another’s life; it’s about how we receive information and remember the
past through the filter of our own subjectivities. So what I’m trying to do is render
this logic explicit: I write myself in, as a reporter or an archaeologist trying to exca-
vate meaning from the shards I find as I dig; and I write my informants in too. I let
you see and experience the people who tell me about Thabo Mbeki, so that you, the
reader, know where they’re coming from, and how their subjectivities contribute to
the patchwork that is the recollection of someone’s life.

SN: Biographies are ostensibly about the past but are also ways of ’finding the present’,
aren’t they?

JH: I do see my book as a Joburg book, or at least a Rand book, although some of
it is set elsewhere. I’m hoping to contribute to a greater sense of the importance
and the complexity of Johannesburg’s past, particularly of its early years. I’m inter-
ested in early Joburg as a cosmopolitan city, which can’t only be understood in a
South African perspective, but also needs to be looked at in a global one. Early
Joburg is the city of Gandhi, of the founders of modern Irish nationalism Arthur
Griffith and John MacBride, of people from every continent. The narrative of Joburg
is not only a narrative of the clash of South African forces.

JM: Mine is also largely a ’Johannesburg book’ because that is where the protago-
nist spent the most productive years of his life. But it is also a book about exile,
deeper exile and despair. And it is also, as I have come to discover in my investiga-
tions, a book that has to say a lot about rural origins, and one that goes even
further back to interrogate questions of class, history and migration. The combina-
tion of internal exiles, which have gone on for so many generations, and forced
removals, influx controls, the destruction of family units that went with these, and
the deliberate creation of poverty, prohibition and alcoholism — all these play a part
in the creation of the complex palate of our story. And without knowing our past,
intimately, how can we understand how we are, with all of our divisions, in the present?

MG: Although Mbeki only spent three years in Joburg before going into exile, and
then only came back here 28 years later, mine’s a Joburg book too! That says
something to me about how we write from where we come from, as much as where
our subjects come from. I cannot deny that I use Thabo Mbeki to make sense of the
Johannesburg of the early Sixties, the Johannesburg into which I was born; an era
which remains one of my abiding obsessions (thank you, Todd Mat-
shikiza!). My work is explicitly
about ’using the past to find the
present’: my journey in search of
Thabo Mbeki is a journey through
contemporary South Africa, at-
ttempting to understand it by drop-
ning these deep wells into the past.
colm has described letters as the ‘fossils of feeling which biographers prize about all else’. Has this been true for you?

**JH:** Not really. There was too much emotional reserve in those letters of Bain that I got hold of. However there are other kinds of discoveries one can make from letters than affective ones. Bain’s enemies alleged that he was a spy for the Kruger government in the 1890s. I had assumed this was a slander. Then in the Pretoria archives I found the years’ worth of spy reports he had written to the Transvaal authorities. This was quite thrilling to me. I was able to connect the material in these letters with themes in the novels of the early Johannesburg writer, Douglas Blackburn, who was a friend of Bain’s.

**JM:** In my own experience, you tear up your embarrassing love letters, even family correspondence, while you are still young enough to understand what they are about. I don’t know if this is true of my father, but there is very little personal stuff about. On the other hand, I have recently come into possession of a series of correspondence he had with Langston Hughes in the early 1960s, which was an amazing find, and came about quite by coincidence. And I recently transcribed many letters that I had never seen before, addressed to my mother, and stored for years in a suitcase in her apartment, from friends and even acquaintances touched by my father’s death in 1968.

**MG:** After spending days riffling through the ANC archives at Fort Hare, I finally came across a letter from Thabo Mbeki to his wife Zanele. I wanted to cry. Suddenly, all those hours of nitpicky cross-eyed work seemed worthwhile. ‘Dear Comrade Zanele,’ it began, and then went something like this: ‘Three young students will be passing through Nairobi next week. I have referred them to you. Please do what you can to assist them with scholarships. Yours in solidarity, Thabo.’ That was it. No ‘PS – How are you doing? How are the cats? Miss you. Don’t miss you. I’ll phone you when I get a moment. How was the party on Saturday night?’ Nothing. I really did weep then. Because it told me something about how deeply sublimated the personal had been to the political for revolutionaries like the Mbekis. But then I thought, hold on. Maybe he knows I’m going to be snooping around the archives some time in the future. Maybe he wants to keep his private life private. Maybe they did write long, chatty letters to each other, and I just don’t have access to them. My point is that letters are incredibly important to biographers, because they give us unique access into our subjects’ interior world (look, for example, at how beautifully Stephen Clingman crafted an inner life for Bram Fischer through his letters to Molly), but they are also very dangerous, because they freeze a moment in time, often a throwaway moment, and we biographers then come along and imbue it with all this timeless significance. So Mbeki wrote a long letter to a girlfriend one arctic Moscow night, praising Coriolanus to the skies as the model for a third world revolutionary. Then I come along, thirty years later, and use it to deconstruct Mbeki’s own approach to power. Maybe he was drunk that night. Maybe he forgot about Coriolanus in the morning. Maybe he was trying something on. Malcolm’s choice of the word ‘fossil’ is spot-on.

**SN:** Correspondingly, what role have photographs played in your conception of your subject? Malcolm again, writing about Sylvia Plath, has said that ‘all photographs of her disappointed me...the fault may be with photography — some people never really appear in their photographs. Or it may be that Plath was only on the verge of showing herself in photos when she died, her “true self” not yet available to the camera’s vacant gaze.’

**JH:** On the contrary, I was thrilled with the photographic record of early Johannesburg, captured in fabulous photos taken through hand-ground lenses. J.T. Bain emerges in his photos as a wilder
and weirder figure than I could ever have imagined. In a 1913 photo, he sports an extravagant waxed moustache and a winged collar, and leans forward through the frame of the photo with unblinking eyes. The picture contains such a strong sense of how he was of a different age, and of his personality.

**JM:** Well, I have access to all those amazing *Drum* photographs taken by Jurgen Schadeburg in the 1950s. They weren’t just news photographs; they were entire stories in themselves. And Todd T. Matshikiza shows his flamboyant side by joining in enthusiastically as a model when circumstances call for it — like cavorting (fully clothed of course) on a mine dump with Thandi Mphambane (now Klaassen) (who was rather more scantily attired) to encourage her to bring out her full sex appeal for the camera lens. In addition, and no doubt fired by Jurgen’s enthusiasm, he took up the camera himself, and has left some very interesting images behind, particularly from the early years of exile in London. An important resource. And unlike Sylvia Plath, he always looked himself in those eloquent black-and-white images.

**MG:** I use photos as talismans to conjure up the past, and many of my chapters begin with a close reading of a photograph I have found — and a description of how I found it. It helps me, in an almost cinematic way, to set the scene — and also, once more, to render explicit the archaeology of my project; to make it clear that I the writer and you the reader are in the present, and that we are looking back at the past, trying to make sense of it. Like John and Jon, I also really like the way photos — particularly old ones, before ‘instamatic’ and then digital technology took away the formality of posing — give us a window into how our subjects wished to be seen. But they can be deceptive too. For example, I was given an extraordinary set of photos of Epainette Mbeki’s family, all done up in stiff Edwardian finery at their ‘country seat’ in the mountains of the Transkei. It became a symbol for me of how ‘proper’ and Anglicized Mbeki’s antecedents were. I played at being Turgenev, or Eliot, for a while, describing the Landed Gentry in a time of tumultuous change. And then Mrs Mbeki told me that they only dressed that way for the camera; indeed, they only wore western clothes for school and church. The rest of the time they ran around in skins. Much more interesting.

**SN:** Is biography writing as much a place to explore what did not happen but is — say — most feared or desired — as what did?

**JH:** I do think that there was more blurring of racial boundaries at the turn of a century than looking backward through the lens of the apartheid era would lead one to think. Something I try to bring out in the book is that we tend to read 20th century South African history as a teleological progress to apartheid, whereas there were other, less starkly racialised possibilities which got lost along the way. On the other hand the Marxist ‘problem’ of why black and white workers did not unite in that era, seems to me a false question, one which only arises if you believe that the working class has a historical mission, an idea which I don’t think is sustainable.

**JM:** The most glaring example in South African history of ‘what did not happen’ is the rout of Ma-Kana’s seemingly effortless assault on Grahamstown in 1819, one that should have been assured of victory. It is impossible to imagine what psychological effect such a victory would have had on the Xhosa of the day, and those who were to follow — including my great-great-great grandparents. And, as in today’s world, it is impossible to say that even such a victory against the settler outpost would really have provided a permanent and defendable bulkhead against the inevitable advance of the superpower of the day.

**MG:** Lives are about schisms, ruptures, lacunae, repressions. The challenge of biography is to render this.
Theoretically Speaking

BY IVOR CHIPKIN

What often passes as a critique of 'postmodernism' is often not. That is why it is important to understand the pedigree of the term — precisely to counter a certain glibness associated with its current use. Today 'postmodern' is an accusation. That we all understand. But what is it an accusation of? Frequently it is claimed that 'postmodernists' are only interested in 'discourse' at the expense of the 'real'. Indeed, they dissolve the real itself into discourse. What does this mean? That postmodernism is a reworked Hegelianism (that reduces the real to the Idea). Hegel without teleology. Is that what is at stake? Is postmodernism simply a form of radical skepticism — recalling Hume or Dewey? In its current usage that is to grant to its detractors an intellectual depth that is lacking. Indeed, it is the new name for something much older. The new 'modernists' are not so much not postmodernists as they are the new positivists. What they dislike is theory itself and those who want to ask theoretically-informed questions. They have been caught off guard by the transition in South Africa. Their analytic terms are blind to questions of sexuality, to race, to nationalism — so much so that the virulence of the AIDS pandemic in South Africa remains unaccountable in their terms, nor are they in a position to deal with the government's response. Precisely because they misrepresent its terms, these self-appointed defenders of the faith mistake what is at stake in the postmodern turn.

The term postmodern was first used by American sociologists and critics to describe the effects on culture of developments in 'advanced industrial societies'. At stake was the multi-national corporation and post industrial production, the rise of the 'knowledge economy' and new forms of media. These studies were not unlike, for example, Ernest Gellner's treatment of the shift from an agro-literate society to an industrial one. What was at stake in the term postmodern was a further transformation: the post-industrial society. Despite the heat that these studies generated, the questions they nonetheless asked were conventional and the terms they deployed familiar.

In 1979, the term 'postmodern' broke onto the philosophical scene. Lyotard's *La Condition Postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* appeared and shook things up a little. It was not simply that the measure of science, literature and art was changing, but that the very principle of a measure at all was in crisis. There modern was used to refer to a science that legitimated itself by referring to a metadiscourse, a grand narrative. Postmodern referred to an attitude of incredulity. The grand narrative, metaphysical philosophy, was being dispersed amongst countless language games. The principle of arbitration between them was not truth, but efficiency. In a declaration profoundly reminiscent of the Italian Futurists, what was said to matter was not truth or falsity, but efficiency. Lyotard called the new principle of scientific legitimacy, a technological principle (the criterion of operativity). The purpose of debate was not consensus (based on reasoned argument and the criterion of operativity). Postmodernism is not simply a new name for an old philosophical skepticism. It is not simply a modern reading of Nietzsche or, say, Hume or even Kant. Previous generations of skeptics were interested in precisely the question that postmodernists disavow: the conditions of truth. Nor, despite the apparent literary turn, is the model that of the novel. And therein lies the irony. Postmodernism is the name for a very modern nostalgia: a nostalgia for efficiency. Machines that produce (things, knowledge) without friction, or noise, without strike or revolution. At stake are the silent circuits of cyberspace, of global medias and precision armaments. It is the model of labour without exploitation, of capitalism without the poor, of death without dying. It is academic debate lacking struggle or dissension. What postmodernists renounce is consensus through public argument. What they jettison is the very democratic project itself.

When the new positivists glibly denounce postmodernism what they often mean is theory itself. In conflating theoretical work *per se* with postmodernism what they abandon is democratic politics in theory's name.
WISER, the Graduate School for the Humanities and Social Sciences and the Gay and Lesbian Archives will be hosting the 4th conference of the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society (IASSCS) from 22–25 June 2003. The theme of the conference, *Sex and Secrecy*, engages with pressing concerns emanating from the South African situation, whilst simultaneously resonating with and encouraging international scholarship in the field of sexuality. Some of South Africa’s most urgent social concerns relate to sexuality and secrecy. The rapid spread of HIV/AIDS and the scale of gender-based violence are two obvious examples. There is a limited amount of work done in the field of sexuality research in an African context. The conference will give new impetus to this avenue of enquiry.

The conference committee has received well over 200 abstracts from many parts of the world. *Sex and Secrecy* will also host participants from research NGO’s who are working in the spheres of sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights. As part of the *Sex and Secrecy* programme, the Gay and Lesbian Archives have initiated a research project on women’s same-sex experience in Africa. Individual researchers from a range of African countries will present their findings at the conference. The Postgraduate Forum of the University will be holding a one-day seminar (21st June) on current social science research on HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa as part of the *Sex and Secrecy* programme.

Leading scholars in the study of sexuality will be participating in the conference. Plenary speakers include Elizabeth Povinelli, Jeffrey Weeks, Achille Mbembe, Gilbert Herdt, Sanjay Srivastava, Zachie Achmat, Eleanor Preston-Whyte and Carlos Caceres. The opening addresses will be delivered by Lenore Manderson and Pregs Govender at a cocktail reception on the evening of 22nd June after the Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand, Professor Loyiso Nongxa, has formally opened the proceedings.

Seven themes form the intellectual parameters of the conference. These are: (1) The Power of the Secret; (2) Confession and Taboo; (3) Sexuality, Sexual Meanings and HIV/AIDS; (4) Unsettling Sexual and Gender Identities; (5) Hidden Codes, Local Rules; (6) Public Discourse, Private Realms; and (7) Politics of Sexuality: Global Sex, Local Practice.

The conference will boast a strong representation from research-based NGOs in the South that focus on gay and lesbian issues, gender-based violence, and, in the African context, HIV/AIDS. Funding from the Ford Foundation and HIVOS has ensured that there will be broad participation by NGOs from South East Asia, South America and Africa to facilitate debate between the academy and the NGO research sector.

There is also an exciting social programme for delegates, which includes a performance of Robert Colman’s new play, *Your Loving Simon*, documentary films and a range of social history tours. Tours offered will explore the conference themes in the context of the city of Johannesburg. Delegates will be offered the opportunity to visit the Constitution Hill heritage site, the Apartheid Museum, and to go on a Queer History tour of Johannesburg.

*Sex and Secrecy* is generously supported by Atlantic Philanthropies, HIVOS, the Ford Foundation, the University of the Witwatersrand Research Office and Taylor and Francis.

For more information visit: http://wiserweb.wits.ac.za/conf2003 or contact conference convenors:
Liz Walker: walkere@wiser.wits.ac.za and Graeme Reid: reidg@wiser.wits.ac.za
 Trafficking

WISER EXCHANGES

WISER is involved in different modes of exchange aimed at fostering links between researchers, research entities and research programmes germane to our project. Through such exchanges, we gain opportunities for sharing our research findings, infusing our projects with a comparative perspective, and engaging in and opening up a variety of contemporary debates and discussions. Besides maintaining a strong presence in scholarly activities at the University of the Witwatersrand — through initiating and coordinating a diverse menu of events, participating in and presenting seminars, undertaking teaching and postgraduate supervision, and hosting international visitors — WISER staff also attended and participated in a broad spectrum of intellectual events locally and abroad since our last report in October. Irma du Plessis reports.

[ INBOUND ]

In line with one of WISER’s key objectives, to create a hub of intellectual exchange and collaboration at the University of the Witwatersrand, researchers at the Institute over the last few months contributed to a varied intellectual programme at Wits. These interventions were designed for different audiences and encompassed a broad thematic. In October, John Matshikiza, a WISER Writing Fellow, presented a paper entitled ‘Jim Comes to Joburg — and Dar es Salaam and Accra and Salisbury and Lagos’ at the Wits School of Journalism. The paper focused on the influence and impact of Drum magazine in South Africa and in other African countries. Later that month, Irma du Plessis read a paper on ‘The body in the discourse of fiction: Afrikaner nationalism and popular children’s literature in the 1940s’ in WISER and the GSHSS’s On the Subject of Sex and the Body seminar series. Detlev Krige, a WISER Doctoral Fellow, presented a paper on ‘Indigenous Knowledge System or Practical Everyday Performances: Anthropological Concerns in the Study of Local Knowledge’ at the First PhD Forum Seminar hosted at WISER in November. Sue van Zyl presented a paper entitled ‘Psychoanalysis and the history of punishment’, at the WISER International Workshop on Biopolitics, Sovereignty and States of Exception that took place early in February 2003, whilst Deborah Posel presented a paper on ‘Death and Modernity’ and Achille Mbembe on ‘Necropolitics’ at the same seminar. Also in February, Deborah Posel read a paper entitled “‘Getting the nation talking about sex’: Reflections on the politics of sexuality and nation-building in post apartheid South Africa’ in the On the Subject of Sex seminar series and another entitled ‘Is class still useful? A Transcendental Realist Case’ at Class Acts, a colloquium on the relevance of the notion of class in the social sciences hosted by WISER. In March, Ivor Chipkin, Deborah Posel, and Achille Mbembe presented lectures in the first component of the PhD Theory Seminar, which was designed to form part of WISER’s Doctoral Fellowship Programme. Attendance of the seminars was open to all doctoral students and faculty, many of whom took up the offer and participated enthusiastically. Tom Odhiambo, who joined WISER in April, presented a paper on ‘Troubled love and marriage as work in Kenyan popular fiction’ at the Wits Interdisciplinary Research Seminar on April 14th. In the same month, John Matshikiza gave a talk to students on the postgraduate writing course in the Wits School of Journalism, focusing on style and integrity in column writing. In May, Ivor Chipkin presented a paper entitled ‘The New Futurists. The Political Meaning of Transformation’ in the Wits Interdisciplinary Research Seminar, which is co-hosted by WISER and The History Workshop, whilst Tina Sideris, currently a postdoctoral fellow at WISER, read a paper on ‘Non-violent men in violent communities: Negotiating the head and the neck’ in the On the Subject of Sex seminar series. On May 31, Jonathan Hyslop, Mark Gevisser, John Matshikiza, Robert Muponde, Sarah Nuttall and Irma du Plessis participated in a WISER Colloquium on Biography.

The first part of the year has seen a number of international visitors docking at WISER. Elleke Boehmer, professor of Colonial and Postcolonial Studies at the University of Nottingham-Trent presented a paper entitled ‘Global Nets, Textual Webs, or, What isn’t new about Empire’ on 4 February in the International Visitors Seminar. Thomas Blom Hansen from the University of Edinburgh participated in the International Workshop on Biopolitics, Sovereignty and States of Exception in February, where he presented a paper on ‘Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Immigrants and States in the Postcolonial World’. The Constitution Hill Series, an occasional series of lectures, debates and discussions leading up to the opening of the new Constitutional Court and the Constitution Hill heritage precinct in Johannesburg, on the site of the Old Fort, in early 2004, brought Ralph Appelbaum and Gail Lord to Wits in March, where they spoke about ‘Making Sense Of The Past, Designing The Future: International Lessons For Constitution Hill’. In March, Barry Munslow from the University of Liverpool presented a paper entitled ‘Complex emergencies and developments: When the state breaks down’ in The State We Are In, a seminar series hosted jointly by WISER and the
Graduate School of Public and Development Management (P&D&M). Professor Lorraine Sherr from the Royal Free and University Medical School in London, participated in WISER’s seminar series On the Subject of Sex and presented a paper entitled ‘HIV and Parenthood — Mothers overwhelmed, Fathers overlooked’ in April. And in May, Rita Barnard from the University of Pennsylvania visited WISER and presented a paper in the International Visitors Series on ‘After Urgency: Ramphele, Tlali and the Politics of Space’.

[ OUTBOUND ]

Last year ended at a strong pace, evident from the number of exchanges between WISER researchers and other research places from late September to December. Since the report on WISER exchanges in the previous edition of WISER in BRIEF, Sarah Nuttall travelled to the Netherlands where she spoke on ‘Girl Bodies’ at the Trust in Post-Colonial Africa conference, hosted at the University of Leiden in September 2002. In the same month, Detlev Krige presented a paper at the First Annual Anthropology Southern Africa Conference, which took place in Grahamstown, South Africa from 9-11 September 2003. And Graeme Reid presented a paper on ‘Beauty and familiarly: the hair salon as a site of trust’ at a PhD and Post-doc seminar on Terms of Trust: The Dynamics of Old and New Moralities in Africa, held from 18-20 September 2002 at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. In October, John Matshikiza read a paper on ‘Where are our black historians?’ at a Department of Education Conference in Cape Town, and in November, Nsizwa Diamini, a WISER doctoral fellow, presented a paper in the History/African Studies Seminar Programme at the University of Natal (Durban). His paper was entitled ‘Re-questioning Through Investigating “Heritage” Production Patterns: The Case of the Significance of King Shaka in KwaZulu, 1977-92’.

Ivor Chipkin spent most of January in Mumbai, at the invitation of Partners for Urban Knowledge, Action and Research (PUKAR), to give a series of guest lectures on the legacy of the Apartheid City. The visit was arranged in part to help deepen links between WISER and research institutes in the geographically imprecise ‘South’. In particular, PUKAR and WISER share a growing interest in questions of the city. Achille Mbembe attended a conference organized by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Entretiens internationaux de l’aménagement des territoires in Paris where he delivered a keynote address on ‘Regional Identities in a Globalizing World’. During the same month, he attended the Einstein Forum & Alfred Herrhausen Society for International Dialogue conference on Europe as Necessity: Alternative Responses to Globalization in Potsdam, Germany. On 14 February, Kgamadi Kometsi, presented a paper ‘The main causes of psychological trauma and distress for South African children — Informing more sensitive film classification’ at the Film and Publications Board’s Specialist Research Seminar convened by the HSRC (Child, Youth and Family Development unit) to help formulate guidelines for film age classification and parent accompaniment. Later that month, Achille Mbembe went to Barcelona for a series of public lectures on ‘Violence and the Politics of Sovereignty in Contemporary Africa’. In March, Deborah Posel presented a paper on “Getting the Nation Talking about Sex”: Reflections on the Politics of Sexuality and Nationalism in post-apartheid South Africa’ to the Amsterdam School, University of Amsterdam. She gave another paper, entitled ‘What’s in a Name? Racial Categorisation in Apartheid South Africa and Beyond’, at the African Studies Centre, University of Leiden. In the same month, Achille Mbembe gave a seminar at the University of Natal (Durban) on his book On the Postcolony. He was also a guest speaker for the Fiftieth issue of the well-renowned South African journal Transformation and attended the 2003 Writers Festival and moderated a roundtable featuring the Somali-born Nurrudin Farah and the South African Lewis Nkosi. Also in March, Irma du Plessis presented a paper at the University of South Africa (UNISA), entitled ‘Afrikaner nationalism, the publishing industry and popular fiction: Stella Blakemore and J.L. van Schaik publishers’. In April, Sarah Nuttall delivered a keynote address, entitled ‘What’s New? Theorizing the now in South Africa’, at the New South Africa: Reading, Writing, Resistance conference at the University of Nottingham Trent. Achille Mbembe travelled to California where he gave a keynote address at the University of California at Irvine (USA) conference on Race in Deconstruction and Critical Theory. He also held a series of workshops with the Redress in Social Thought, Law, and Literature Group. At the University of California (Los-Angeles, USA), he gave a lecture on ‘Time and Event in recent Francophone African Narratives’ for the French department and another on his most recently published piece ‘Necropolitics’ for the European History Colloquium. Before leaving Los-Angeles, he gave a public lecture at the Japanese American National Museum (Los-Angeles, USA) titled ‘On the Idea of Mass Destruction’. Still in April, the Centre for the Book in Cape Town and the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) in Pretoria again invited Dr Dorian Haarhoff and Phaswane Mpe, a WISER Doctoral Fellow and acclaimed novelist, to facilitate a two-day writing workshop in the Limpopo Province as a follow-up from a two-day workshop that they facilitated in September 2002. In May, John Matshikiza gave two talks at the Nordic Africa Institute, one in Uppsala, Sweden, and the other in Oslo, Norway, on the topic of ‘Hunger and Politics in Southern Africa’, whilst Susan van Zyl presented a paper entitled ‘Subject, Citizen and the Space between: some ideas on psychoanalysis, biopolitics and citizenship’ at the Culture and State conference at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada. Detlev Krige presented a revised version of a paper on local knowledge at a seminar hosted by the Anthropology department at the University of Pretoria on 6 May 2003.
On 28 and 29 March WISER held a colloquium on a highly unfashionable topic — class. Under the title Class Acts: Is the Concept of Class Still Alive in the Social Sciences and Humanities?, the colloquium revisited a central issue in the history of South African social science.

The struggles against apartheid from the late 1960s into the 1980s were the formative experiences of a generation of South African social scientists now in their forties and fifties. For many, the intellectual accompaniment to that political experience was an interest in the renaissance of Marxism of that era. And the question of class was of course central to this intellectual development. Throughout that time, debates on the relationship between class and racial domination were at the centre of discussions both in the radical quarter of the academy and within political movements. The era saw the emergence of creative applications of thinking about class in the South African context in the structuralist Marxist school of philosophy and social theory, and in the school of social history influenced by E.P. Thompson and by British and American work in the field. On the more overtly political terrain, ferocious debates were conducted between those wanting to emphasize the significance of class and those more inclined to stress its intersection with racial domination.

The era of political transition in South Africa saw the fading of class analysis. In part this was a reflection of global trends, notably the rise of postmodernist thought. The impact of this shift was delayed in South Africa though, for the country’s isolation and the intensity of its political conflict meant that Marxist ideas remained powerfully influential here, long after they had begun to recede elsewhere. The crisis of Marxism finally impacted on South Africa at the beginning of the nineties. In intellectual life, there had been no serious attention paid to the Weberian sociology of class, so the weakening of Marxism became synonymous with a fading of interest in questions of class. Had the Weberian strand of Sociology had a stronger presence in the South African academy, class analysis may have remained alive to a greater extent.

Ten years later, the time seemed opportune to revisit the issue of class. The shifting patterns of social equality in South Africa (such as the rise of the black managerial, professional and business groupings and the widening economic differentials between urban employees and the rural and urban poor) suggests to many that class can no longer be ignored. The ideological turmoil of the past can now be examined with some distance.

Our discussions at the seminar suggest that issues about class were indeed troubling social thinkers. On the one hand, an analytical approach to material inequality seemed essential for discussing South African realities. Our participants were, with few exceptions, reluctant to give up on the concept of class. On the other hand most were sufficiently worried by the history of Marxist class analysis as to admit their doubts about it.

At the beginning of the colloquium, Jeremy Seekings (Sociology, University of Cape Town) made a trenchant contribution pointing out how South African social science had largely ignored the neo-Weberian tradition of class analysis, and arguing for the value of empirically-based studies of class structure in this vein. It is striking that although many of the participants expressed reservations about Marxist theory that pointed in a Weberian direction, none except Seekings was really willing to draw the conclusions and endorse a Weberian approach. In an extremely honest and thoughtful contribution, Sakhela Buhlungu (Sociology, Wits) pointed to the apparent indispensability of a notion of class in analysing such phenomena as the ascent of former trade union leaders into the new political and economic elite, but felt unable to endorse some of the political corollaries which South Afri-

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Long standing philosophical tradition has consistently identified the essence of sovereign power (imperium) with the state’s right to the death of its enemies and its citizens. The ‘state of exception’, on the other hand, has been defined as that which the sovereign each and every time decides. Sovereign power, said Carl Schmitt, is founded on the ability to decide on the state of exception, that is, that space in which the law is completely suspended and everything else becomes truly possible. The ‘state of exception’ takes place when, in the words of Agamben, ‘naked life is explicitly put into question and revoked as the ultimate foundation of political power’. As for ‘biopolitics’, it consists, according to Foucault, in the power to improve life, to prolong its duration, to improve its chances of avoiding accidents, and to compensate for its failings.

An international interdisciplinary workshop, entitled Biopolitics, States of Exception and the Politics of Sovereignty was held at WISER on February 6-7, 2003. The goal of this workshop was to reinterrogate these various traditions of thought in view of recent shifts in the practices of sovereignty by state and non-state actors. Various papers examined the new forms of regulation of mass death in the wake of wars and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the emergence of new modes of management, classification and control of populations, the transformation of citizenship practices, changing forms of punishment and relations between science, technology and governmentality.

The types of questions that were addressed during the workshop included the following: What is the relation between politics and human life? Under what practical conditions is the right to kill, to allow to live, or to expose to death exercised? Who is the subject of this right and what are its limits? What does the implementation of such a right tell us about the person (or the multitudes) that are thus put to death and about the relation of enmity that sets them against their murderer? Under what conditions can the sovereign be outsourced? Are the notions of ‘biopolitics’ or ‘necropolitics’ sufficient to account for the contemporary ways in which the political, under the guise of war, resistance, or the fight against terror, makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective?

Various and contradictory answers were provided to these questions. It was agreed that sovereignty could no longer be understood as purely an attribute of the state or an attribute of the citizenry. In many ways, sovereignty is an expression of specifically modern accounts of what it means to discriminate, how to discriminate and why. Modern forms of sovereignty — including those deriving from democratic principles — can be interpreted as intricate and intimately articulated systems of discrimination and inclusion. Modern forms of sovereignty work on the basis of constitutive distinctions and qualitative hierarchies the power and function of which is to discriminate between insiders and outsiders, citizens, foreigners and refugees, those who matter and those who do not, friends and enemies. In this sense, embedded in the idea of sovereignty is a constitutive exchange between violence and right.

One important site of discrimination in the contemporary world is in matters concerning the relationship between freedom and inequality. In fact, it is the relationship between claims of freedom and claims of equality that still poses one of the central problems of modern politics. The prevailing tendency in the world today is to define equality in narrowly conceived political terms — as embedded in various mechanisms of democratic representation (a good constitution, a good bill of rights, a parliament, the right to vote, freedom of expression and so on). In many ways, this emphasis on political equality narrowly defined has resulted in a de facto legitimization of greater degrees of economic inequality. In other words, we can have freedom, but we seem to not be able to get rid of inequalities. These inequalities are more and more perceived as, if

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I have something of a funny relationship with the University of the Witwatersrand. In all those long struggle and exile years we always thought of Wits as a bastion of white privilege — all the things we were fighting against. And yet some of my closest struggle buddies had been among the few black students to benefit from what Wits had to offer. So I guess part of the struggle was about making institutions like Wits available to all — which, technically at least, is now the case.

When I was planning my uncertain return to South Africa in 1991, a thespian colleague who I met in London suggested that I try for a teaching post in the drama department. It was an interesting idea, but ultimately came to nothing. That was a time of incredible tension, anyway. It was still a time of great distrust, black against white, ANC versus Inkatha, right versus left. People from the struggle I bumped into on the Wits campus muttered bitterly about lack of transformation, and told me I was better off not being there. It was a strange time. Nothing was real. It was still up to us to bring reality into existence.

So that was Wits back then. In fact, my whole journey into South Africa was fraught with the same issues. If Wits was a bastion of liberalism, so was the Market Theatre, which is where I was offered my first full-time job. But that was no easy walk either. There I found suspicion and resistance to transformation of a different kind — the hotbed of struggle theatre struggling to find direction after the struggle was (technically, again) over. To my astonishment, I discovered I represented something uncomfortable, foreign — and so I moved on.

So it was quite a surprise to come full circle and be located at Wits eleven years on from all of that. This time I found myself in the position of Writing Fellow at the Wits Institute of Social and Economic Research, trying to complete the task of writing a biography of my father, Todd Tozama Matshikiza. Of course being at WISER is a privileged location from which to look, literally and metaphorically, upon both the seething new life of the campus and the seething transformation of the city of Johannesburg — my old home town.

There has been excellent intellectual camaraderie at WISER, and the experience of being on the campus has been stimulating — not just having access to fine libraries with extensive databases, but also tumbling into extraordinary conversations with a variety of people from the academic world. For a non-academic, of course, the seminar series are sometimes fascinating, often daunting. To begin with, someone who spends his whole life in the outside world wrestling with issues of communicating in a variety of formats can frequently be baffled by the type of English favoured by the academy. As an outsider, how do you deal with this? The fatal mistake is to try and talk the same language, because you only end up tying yourself in mental knots that make no sense even to yourself. The trick, then, is to find a way of speaking in your own voice, and make your own point in a manner that is clear to you — hoping that it will become clear to your colleagues in the seminar room as well.

Then there is the world of Wits that exists outside of the seminar room. It is fascinating to observe undergraduate life, not as a student this time, but as a grey-bearded fly on the wall. The excitement and carelessness of youth, exposed in the concentrated space of a university campus, is always interesting to watch. This is where transformation is most evident, I suppose. The demography of the student population has surely changed dramatically over the last ten years — but not without seriously challenging internal issues raising their heads. It is not so long ago that we on the outside would read incredulously of large numbers of students trashng their own campus amid cries of ‘racism’ and ‘lack of transformation.’ The post-1990 influx of black students
(meaning young people of Indian and ‘Coloured’ origin as well as large numbers of graduates from the remnants of the appalling Bantu Education system) brought tensions into this institution struggling to find its way into a new dispensation. Like other institutions, Wits found itself grappling with how to deal with the fact that the apartheid chickens were coming home to roost — whether it liked it or not.

The photographs on the walls of the Post Graduate Club (known as the Blind Pig) alone tell their own story. Just as the old boys’ and old girls’ gallery and the past headmasters’ and mistresses’ gallery at one of the old white schools will speak volumes about how the past worked, so the PIG gallery shows ranks of white faces peering out in their awkward 1970s finery, trying to look relaxed and cool as an undeclared war rages around them. Apart from the obligatory Malawian barman, there are no black faces whatsoever on display even now, as we approach the tenth anniversary of our first democratic election. But at least they didn’t try to tear them all down and pretend that the space we have inherited is anything other than an enigmatic one.

At the Blind Pig and other spaces one has the opportunity to dip into conversations one just would not find in the outside world — a political argument segueing into a discussion of Darwinism vs. Marxism, for example, which is a refreshing way of being persuaded to find alternative ways of looking at the way the world works, and our part in it. Or a professor from the architecture department, who has spent many hours talking about the difficulty of getting young people who still come from essentially Bantu Education schools, especially in the rural areas, into the mainstream of an academic and urban life for which they have never been prepared. These are other challenges of transformation which we do not necessarily think about in our day to day lives.

Naturally the most important thing about this time at WISER is having the space to focus on the biographical project that has been on the back burner for so many years, and to begin to see how the end of that road might look — although the process of actually putting the bits and pieces in their place is a much longer one than I anticipated. But the challenges of the WISER environment are certainly encouraging to the processes of research, enquiry, and sheer dogged writing that the task demands, and would not have been available in the same way in my complicated professional life in the outside world.

It’s been a great experience.

CLASS ACTS
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can labour had, historically, attached to class analysis. Peter Alexander (Sociology, RAU) provided an engaging defence of classical Marxism.

In the second panel of the colloquium, Phil Bonner (History, Wits) made a convincing argument for a revival of the study of the class structure of pre-colonial social formations as an essential prerequisite for better understanding of contemporary South Africa. Noor Nieftagodien (Wits History Workshop) asserted the continuing importance of the emancipatory project attached to Marxist class analysis. Peter Hudson (Political Studies, Wits) delivered a powerful philosophical critique of the Marxist conception of exploitation.

In the final panel of the event, Sekibakiba Lekgoathi (History, Wits) made a case for class as a situational analytical advice, useful in explaining some phenomena but not others. Deborah Posel pointed out how the history of Marxism and class analysis in the apartheid era needed to be understood in terms of their role as emblems of opposition. She made a case for a notion of class that took a transcendental realist position, avoiding the extremes of positivist naivety and postmodern scepticism. Ran Greenstein’s (Sociology, Wits) thoughtful contribution placed class analysis as one amongst a variety of conceptual tools rather than as one having any privileged status.

Stimulating comments on the presentations were made by Sarah Nuttall (WISER), Ivor Chipkin (WISER) and Eddie Webster (Sociology, Wits). The colloquium seems to point to the conclusion that a conception of class remains indispensable in social enquiry, but that what that conception might be continues to be elusive.

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One of the most iconic images of the way apartheid stripped black South Africans of their dignity is a photograph of the notorious ‘Tauza’, taken by Bob Gosani, a Drum photographer, from the roof of a Hillbrow apartment block into a courtyard of the Johannesburg Jail at the Old Fort in the late 1950s. Using a zoom lens, Gosani captures a group of naked African men who are being forced to perform the humiliating dance of thrusting their anuses up into the air for inspection by warders.

A couple of years later, in 1960, a gay Communist theatre director named Cecil Williams was detained during the Emergency, and held with dozens of others at the Old Fort. Williams, who would later be arrested posing as Nelson Mandela’s boss when the two were driving back from Durban in 1962, recalls being in a Fort courtyard one evening, and looking up at one of Hillbrow’s apartment blocks towering above: in a top floor flat, friends of his were having a wild party on the balcony, literally looking down at him — but seeing neither him nor the ‘Tauza’, of course.

Today, the flat is occupied not by a swinging gay bachelor, but by illegal Zimbabwean immigrants; twelve people to three rooms. Asked if they are interested in what is happening beneath them — where South Africa’s new Constitutional Court and a public ‘heritage precinct’ is being built on the site of the Old Fort’s prisons — they look blank: they do not know, and, so deep is their alienation from the urban environment in which they live, they do not wish to know. They keep their heads down, earn their rands where they can, and hope they don’t land up in Lindela deportation centre.

The site of the Old Fort is ‘overlooked’ in both senses of the word: despite the fact that we Johannesburgers look down on it from both sides — from Hillbrow’s apartment blocks to the east and Metro Centre, the edifice of city government, to the west — it is a neglected vacuum in the middle of the city, largely derelict since 1983. And yet it is a place through which an entire century of South African of prisoners have passed; not only the 1914 Boer Rebels and the 1922 Strikers and the 1956 Treason Trialists and the children of 1976, but tens of thousands of common criminals too — rapists and murderers certainly (from Nongoloza to Daisy de Melker), but mainly people who were criminalized by South Africa’s race laws: pass-offenders, curfew-breakers, beer-brewers, Immorality Act offenders.

The Fort was built by the Boers in the 1890s on the highest point of the Witwatersrand, as a sentinel against encroaching British imperialism following the Jameson Raid. It fell to the British in 1900, and became a major site of Boer humiliation — the place where guns had to be surrendered and where Cape Rebels were executed. It reverted to being a place of incarceration — its original function — after the Anglo-Boer War, and four prisons were ultimately established on the site. Three remain: the Old Fort itself, for white men; the Women’s Gaol, and Section 4/5 (the old ‘Native Gaol’). The fourth prison on the site, the Awaiting Trial Block built in the 1920s, has been demolished, quite controversially, to make way for the Constitutional Court; it is to be commemorated through remnants that have been conserved and integrated into the design of the court and Constitution Square.

Given this site’s history, and given its place in volatile downtown Johannesburg, the Constitutional Court’s decision to build its permanent home here is inspired. It makes tangible and physical the unique energy of the South African Constitution, by showing how the possibilities of the future are built on the difficulties of the past. And it also offers an opening for inner-city regeneration, by creating a ‘Campus for Human Rights’ around the Court, a place which brings the Constitution alive through its exhibitions, its programmes, its activities, and its tenant-mix.

For these objectives to be attained, Constitution Hill needs to become a place of pilgrimage for South Africans and international tourists alike; a destination where the story of the South African transition is not only told but experienced. Because of the intense juxtaposition of the past
and the future at Constitution Hill, it becomes an ideal place at which to reflect on our transition. As one walks along the ramparts of the Old Fort, looking back at the difficulty of the old prison buildings and forward to the possibility embodied by the Constitutional Court, one is struck by the experience of being suspended, in the present, between a past that is derelict and misunderstood and a future that is still under construction. Constitution Hill aims to create a campus where we in the present can understand our own agency in helping reach the promise of the future by understanding the lessons of past. This will be done through an extensive programme of exhibitions, public debates, town meetings and debates at Constitution Hill, linked not only to the site’s history, but to Constitutional issues of the day.

As its most important academic neighbour, the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) obviously has a major interest in the development, and has been a partner in the project since its inception. But as well as being involved in the project’s development, Wits has another role to play, and this is to provide a critical space in which to engage with the process of the development of Constitution Hill itself. Given WISER’s growing focus on Johannesburg and urbanism and its multidisciplinary approach, the Institute provides an ideal space for such engagement, and so we have set up a Constitution Hill Series of debates, discussions, symposia and events.

In early March, Ralph Appelbaum and Gail Lord — two of the world’s leading museum developers and designers — came to Wits as WISER’s guests, to offer ‘international lessons for Constitution Hill’. Appelbaum has designed museums all over the world; his chef d’oeuvre is the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. Lord is a museum developer based in Toronto; her company is the global leader in the field. Both are consultants to Constitution Hill. Later this year, Constitution Hill’s own developers will come to Wits, as WISER’s guests, to talk about their vision for the site. WISER will also hold a symposium on “Memorializing the Past and Envisioning the Future”. The symposium will look at the different ways the profusion of heritage developments in Gauteng — from the Apartheid Museum to Freedom Park to Constitution Hill — are addressing this issue, and representatives from these developments will hopefully participate in the discussion. WISER is also planning to hold a symposium on ‘incarceration’, which will examine this theme as it relates to Constitution Hill.

But WISER also has an interest in understanding how such heritage developments engage with both social policy and with life in the city. In April, Grace Khunou, a WISER Doctoral Fellow, conducted a round-table discussion with stakeholders at the Hector Petersen Museum in Soweto. The intention was to glean some lessons for Constitution Hill by discovering what the local community felt about this heritage site established in its midst, and to ascertain why they were not using it more. Khunou plans to continue her research in this area and WISER also plans to set up forums in the Constitution Hill ‘neighbourhood’ to enable the Hill’s neighbours — from Wits students and faculty to Hillbrow residents — to engage with both the judges of the Constitutional Court and the developers of the Hill. These discussions will not only focus on how the Hill should be developed, but will also investigate the way the Constitution lives and breathes in the contemporary everyday life of a range of South Africans. The research will be vital in assuring Constitution Hill’s relevance in our city.

Mark Gevisser is a WISER Writing Fellow and one of the team developing the Heritage, Education and Tourism components of Constitution Hill for the Johannesburg Development Agency.
The problem with academic studies is that of self-consciousness. As I entered Mumbai, then, I was determined not to find there an orientalist fantasy, to be resistant to the temptations of yoga or meditation, and mindful of the relationship between Empire and culture. I was determined, I suppose, to be underwhelmed. At 2:00 in the morning it was unspectacular and not a little familiar: views on deserted streets from a multi-laned concrete highway, past the Hilton and other hotels. I was in Mumbai at the invitation of the Partners for Urban Knowledge, Action and Research to give a series of guest lectures on the legacy of the Apartheid City. PUKAR is substantially an initiative of Professor Arjun Appadurai at Yale and my visit was an exploratory exchange to help deepen links between WISER and research institutes in the geographically imprecise 'South'. In particular, PUKAR and WISER share a growing interest in questions of the city.

I was staying in Chembur, a suburb in the North-East of the City at the mother of a dear friend and colleague, Vyjayanthi Rao. Indeed, V had organised everything. Despite my efforts, I was overwhelmed. Chembur, like the rest of the city, is growing up. Literally. The combination of rent control, a (tentatively) growing middle class and a shortage of space has seen the burgeoning of sky-high residential tower blocks all over the city. Gaudy, Flashy. Unscrupulous private developers scramble for the rights to build. Whole parts of the city are de-industrialised to make way for these Asian-tiger look-alikes, their working class neighbourhoods forced either into penury or exile. Huge textile mills made redundant, the value of their land today more than the value of their product. Chambers of heavy industrial machines (German, made in 1965) lie derelict, preserved in cobwebs or broken and limp. Concrete 'flyovers' leap over the city, futurist passageways for private cars. I can imagine the plans and the discussions. Sleek cars on space-age concrete ribbons. Mumbai meets Singapore or Korea. That is the model. New business districts arise in perfect American grids. Corporate headquarters glazed in opaque blue and white. But it is not merely the slums of Bombay that the new modernism seeks to rise above. Mumbai is not simply about poverty, about the contorted bodies of beggars, about stinking slums and stagnant water. It is also about models of pleasure that are neither capitalist nor Western.

If Johannesburg is a city of spirits, of the ghosts of apartheid victims, of AIDS deaths, of crime, Mumbai is a city of deities. Everywhere. In pavement prayer rooms, in temples, in the hollows of trees, in temples and in mosques. Even in synagogues. Perhaps if a city is composed of a divine substance there is less need to preserve its physical properties. Maybe this is what it means to live in messianic time.

There is an extraordinary indifference to things and people in Mumbai. Buildings, even when new, are in decay. What is said to be one of the most important concentrations of Art Deco in the world has been gradually stripped of its qualities. Renovations and/or repairs usually plaster and paint over the stylised racing lines, the art deco text. More dramatically ancient ruins are mostly neglected or left to further ruin.
Yet this indifference, or perhaps it is ambivalence, is the condition of an extraordinary tolerance of diversity. A diversity of cuisine that is simply astonishing to the uninitiated. Of religious and social practices. Of men wearing saris and eunuchs. Homosexuality is an outrage. But men having sex with other men, that is far more acceptable — provided they are not gays. Of English and Hindi translations of fifteenth century Chinese novels available for sale on street corners. It is what allows drivers calmly to swerve, cut-in, force out, drive-off others on the road. There are few accidents. And no signs of road rage. Perhaps it is the only way of coping with the scale of numbers.

Every morning in Mumbai five million people travel to work on the public trains. And return in the evenings. That is nearly the population of Johannesburg — simply on the trains. Of course, the metro rail system was ignored in the rush to high urban modernity. Mumbai also gives lie to the claim that poverty produces crime. In a city of nearly twenty million people it is generally safe to be anywhere at most hours — including the slums. I am less sure that is true for a single woman. People explain this in terms of karma and the poor being habituated to their station. I don’t buy that. There is no shortage of violence in Indian society. In Uttar Pradesh peasants have been waging war against landlords since before Independence. Then there is the extraordinary violence against Muslims. In 2002 in Gujarat, state sponsored pogroms produced scenes of horror too ghastly to contemplate. Therein lies an extraordinary paradox. Indian authorities speak openly of nuclear war with Pakistan. It is not far-fetched to describe the current BJP government as fascist. Under the banner of Hindutva, it equates being Indian with being Hindu, reduces Hinduism to a dogma, stigmatises Muslims as dangerous foreigners (the enemy within) and has invented an extraordinary Hindu past for India.

What is certainly true is that the violence is not an organic product of religious rivalry. Indian nationalism is deeply implicated. What of the ambivalence that is the condition of extraordinary difference and diversity? Might it not be a product of a principle that finds pleasure not in objects, but in less tangible things? It is a warning to the new modernists: that in premising ‘progress’ on a new middle class, in valorising the consumption of goods, one is threatening the very conditions of Indian pluralism: the quality of indifference to people and things.

_ I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Seetha Rao for her generosity and hospitality._

BIOPOLITICS & SOVEREIGNTY

continued from page 13

not a necessary, at least an inevitable aspect of social life under globalized capitalist conditions. That freedom and equality might be possible, or that one cannot exist without the other, is receding from the horizon.

More radically, the capacity to discriminate is nowadays akin to the power over life and death. This power over life and death assumes different forms. It can be simply the power to perform capital punishment on a mass scale, as in the case of the United States of America. It can also take the form of the physical killing of human beings and the destruction of the infrastructural means for their survival in times of war. Or it can reside in the power to refer to, appeal to, and produce a state of emergency — a situation in which entire populations are exposed to death because, say, they are not protected against these endemics that are difficult to eradicate (HIV/AIDS). In such contexts, the contradiction between modern liberal theories of democracy and justice (centred exclusively on formal rights, abstract moral principles) and the reality of massive degradation only serve to reveal the limitations in the state’s ability to care.

It was highlighted that a non-state and non-juridical approach to sovereign power is the most likely to open the way for a rethinking of the relation between politics and human life. In this respect, it was argued that sovereignty is not simply about the power to discriminate or to kill, but it is also about the duty to protect and to care. Indeed, it can be said that the very justification of the constitution of ‘sovereignty’ and ‘democracy’ is the protection of lives. It is in order to live that we constitute a ‘sovereign’.

This being the case, one of the most critical challenges of today’s world is how to make it such that death itself becomes the end of power, is beyond the reach of power because the latter’s raison d’etre is to make life and not to take it.

Papers were presented by Susan van Zyl (WISER), Achille Mbembe (WISER), Ulrike Kirstner (University of the Witwatersrand), Steven Robins (University of Stellenbosch), Thomas Blom Hansen (University of the Witwatersrand), Lindsay Bremner (University of the Witwatersrand), Lars Buur (Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen).
Robert Muponde: Tom, your name is almost synonymous with the PHD Forum here at Wits.

Tom Odhiambo: Well, not really. I should say that the PhD Forum was a collective initiative. I suppose that the rest of the group that was involved in founding the Forum prefers staying in the background. Or maybe I talk too much — acting as a kind of PR for the group — and so people assume that I founded the group.

RM: What do you ‘talk too much’ about at the PhD Forum?

TO: The PhD Forum is a necessary component of the university research system. We have many doctoral candidates in the faculty, I suppose over 100, who do not seem to be able to meet and share what they are researching. Yet interdisciplinary interaction is being discussed and encouraged all over the campus. So whenever I meet anybody who cares to listen, I make a point of emphasising that I am involved with the PhD Forum. You never know when you will need to call on the same person for assistance.

RM: Tell me, what brings you here to WISER?

TO: I don't really have a definite answer to that now, but I would say many things bring me to WISER: starting a career in the academy has always been a dream since childhood; establishing myself as a researcher; and doing work that would carve a place for Africa on the world academic map, and so forth. Ambitious, you may say, but that is what I dream of, or as you prefer to put it, that is what brings me to WISER.

RM: I am sure it is not too early for you to talk us through some of the items on your research agenda?

TO: Briefly, I am interested right now in researching what I would call ‘micro-cultures’ for lack of a better term. For instance, I have been thinking about the role played by popular cultures in African politics and governance in the postcolonial era; and presently an idea that has been exciting me is how trans-national cultural practices and products influence cross-border movements of people such as the migration of Kenyans to South Africa.

RM: You have an interesting background in literature/arts. How do you see yourself in a social and economic research environment?

TO: Another difficult question. But let me say that I am a product of interdisciplinary training. I should say that my three years’ stay here at Wits — now running into four — have all been like a new baptism. In my undergraduate studies I was immersed in Economics, History and many other disciplines that are linked to pedagogy such as Sociology, Psychology, Economics, and Philosophy. And my study of lit-
erature at the University of the Witwatersrand has inevitably made me crisscross those boundaries again. But I would add that I am a ready and willing learner and I believe that I will fit in snugly at WISER in the long run.

**RM**: You are known to have very passionate views about marginalized knowledges.

**TO**: That is stretching it. The problem as I see it is that almost everywhere you look you see something that is marginalized in one sense or the other. Look at it this way. African studies has been in existence for so many years. But when I read the arguments put forward by Gavin Kitching in 2000 on why he ‘abandoned African Studies’, I almost lost faith in what I have been doing as a prospective African scholar. I don't want to be involved right now in arguments about what is marginalized and what is not, but I am afraid that at times the African academy has not paid enough attention to the continent itself. One consequence is that the African academy struggles to even produce home-based — or say home-baked — scholars, which naturally leads to the marginalization of so many ‘knowledges’ on the continent because we don't have people who can empathetically dedicate their energies to studying these areas. And here is where I think that WISER is making a fundamental intervention.

**RM**: Is there not too much attention, instead, on Africa?

**TO**: Perhaps, yes, but maybe for me the attention is not being directed at what I think is crucial when attempting to study the continent.

**RM**: There are certainly some African scholars who have time for Africa, but are not necessarily based in Africa. How then do you talk about ‘home’ in a world that is increasingly questioning, or uncertain about, this idea, especially the way you seem to use it?

**TO**: You are right about the uncertainty that now attends such categories as ‘home’, ‘native’, and so forth. I did not mean to be simplistic about the idea of home. You are also right that there are scholars dedicated to the study of Africa who live outside the continent. Maybe what I would wish to see is a situation in which these scholars actively train people who are willing to remain on the continent and continue their work. For instance, if Terence Ranger, John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman — to name three historians whose work focuses on the continent — should retire, we may be hard-pressed to find local scholars who would continue in their vein, with the same kind of dedication and attention that they have given the continent.

**RM**: How do you intend to spread your vision? For instance, what sort of facilities and networks would enable this vision to take off?

**TO**: I must say that Wits and WISER are blessed with internationally recognised scholars and working with them will be a great advantage to me. With the connection that Wits and WISER have with other institutions in the rest of the world, my desire is to see networks and working relations established with research institutions and individuals in universities across the continent.

**RM**: I have heard you speak about the need for renewal of ‘mentorship’ in academia.

**TO**: I think that this is one of the things that drew me to WISER, considering that its doctoral programme seems to be founded on the mentorship ‘philosophy’. Before I embarked on graduate studies a former teacher of mine during my undergraduate days had drummed into me the belief that I should be willing to be a ‘pupil of’ somebody. I believe that mentorship is quite invaluable in nurturing future scholars simply because unlike ‘straightforward’ supervision, the ‘pupil’ develops confidence and a sense of security during the course of the training. For instance, my supervisors for the past three years here at Wits have been more of ‘mentors’ than just supervisors. I see in mentorship the ideal conditions of increasing the numbers of young scholars and researchers at universities in South Africa.

**RM**: Have I left out a question you always want asked about you?

**TO**: Thank the ancestors you didn’t ask me whether I am from ‘Africa’ or not.
Mapping 2003
WISE R SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

BIOPOLITICS, STATES OF EXCEPTION AND THE POLITICS OF SOVERN ECTY
6 – 7 February
This international interdisciplinary workshop, entitled ‘Biopolitics, States of Exception and the Politics of Sovereignty’ was held on February 6-7, 2003. It was initiated and organised by Achille Mbembe. An article on the event appears on page 13 of this edition of WISER in BRIEF.

INTERNATIONAL VISITORS SEMINAR SERIES
September 2001 –
This ad hoc series profiles the research of visitors to WISER and the University. So far in 2003, this series has featured Elleke Boehmer, Marcia Wright and Rita Barnard.

ON THE SUBJECT OF SEX SEMINAR SERIES
August 2002 – June 2003
The seminar series ‘On the Subject of Sex’ is the first of its kind at the University of the Witwatersrand and attempts to constitute a site of interdisciplinary discussion on sex and sexuality. The series is presented in collaboration with the Graduate School for the Humanities and Social Sciences and articulates closely with the WISER project on ‘the body’. Graeme Reid and Liz Walker, both from WISER, are the series coordinators.

THE STATE WE ARE IN SEMINAR SERIES
August 2002 –
Since 1994, there has been important analysis and debate about the South African state, principally as the organ of policy-making and implementation. This bi-weekly seminar series, co-hosted by the Wits School for Public and Development Management (P&DM), aims to build on this work and take it in new directions, opening up further avenues of inquiry and debate that engage the institutional, cultural and discursive dimensions of state practice. The series is coordinated by Ivor Chipkin from WISER.

WITS INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH SEMINAR
February 2002 –
The Wits Interdisciplinary Research Seminar, a joint project of WISER and the Wits History Workshop, profiles research with an interdisciplinary focus. It aims to provide a cross-disciplinary forum for current research. In doing so it carries on the tradition of the old African Studies seminars, which had been running at Wits for over twenty years. The series is coordinated by Jonathan Hyslop from WISER and Noor Nieftagodien from the History Workshop.

THEORY SEMINAR FOR PHD FELLOWS: PART I
March
In response to a request from our doctoral fellows, WISER is organising and hosting a three-year theory seminar, which is open to senior students and staff from the faculty. This seminar, which takes the form of guided readings of the works of a number of key theorists since the Enlightenment, aims to introduce the ideas of these theorists to people who may not have had the opportunity of reading their work in the original and in so doing also hopes to provide experience in the reading of theoretical texts.

The first session of the seminar, which was devoted to the works of Kant and Hegel, was very positively received. These sessions were lead by members of WISER as well as staff from the departments of political studies, philosophy and psychology. The next session will focus on Marx, Weber and Nietzsche, and thereafter the seminar will run in March, June and November of 2004 and 2005. Subsequent sessions will be devoted to work in phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Existentialism, Structuralism, Semiotics, Feminism, Post-modernism, Deconstruction, Post-colonialism, and Global studies. The first year of the series is coordinated by Susan van Zyl.

CLASS ACTS COLLOQUIUM
28 – 29 March
WISER held a colloquium on the topic of Class under the title Class Acts: Is the concept of Class Still Alive in the Social Sciences and Humanities? The colloquium revisited a central issue in the history of South African social science. The colloquium was organised in three parts. The event was organised by Jonathon Hyslop. A short summary of the event is published on page 12 of this edition of WISER in BRIEF.

CONSTITUTION HILL SEMINAR SERIES
March – November 2003
The Constitution Hill Series is an occasional series of lectures, debates and discussions leading up to the opening of the new Constitutional Court and the Constitution Hill heritage precinct, on the site of the Old Fort, in early 2004. The first event, on 13 March, was presented in collaboration with the Johannesburg Development Agency. Ralph Appelbaum and Gail Lord spoke on ‘Making Sense Of The Past, Designing The Future: International Lessons For Constitution Hill’. Mark Gevisser is the series coordinator. The Constitution Hill heritage site and WISER’s contribution to this project is discussed on page 16 of this edition of WISER in BRIEF.

THE WITS WRITERS’ SERIES
August 2002 –
The Wits Writers Series, launched in 2002, is a high-profile public writers’ forum aimed at showcasing and engaging creative writing as a powerful intellectual force
in our society. It is co-hosted by WISER, the School of Literature and Language and the Wits Writing Centre. So far the Series has hosted Phaswane Mpe and Sello Duiker, two of South Africa’s most talented writers of the post-apartheid generation, Yvonne Vera, acclaimed Zimbabwean writer, and Mia Couto, foremost among Mozambican writers. The series is coordinated by Sarah Nuttall (WISER), Pippa Stein (Applied English Language Studies), Pam Nichols (Wits Writing Centre) and Isabel Hofmeyr (African Languages).

LIFE/WRITING: A COLLOQUIUM ON BIOGRAPHY
31 May
On the 31st of May WISER hosted a colloquium on biography that sought to explore the nature of life-writing and its impact and possibilities in the South African context. The colloquium was convened by Jonathan Hyslop, WISER’s deputy director.

FIVE LECTURES ON LATE MODERNITY AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF BLACKNESS
3, 4, 5 & 9 & 11 June
In an event co-hosted by The PhD Forum, WISER, the Department of African Literature and The Department of English, Achille Mbembe, David Attwell and James Ogude presented five lectures on Late Modernity and the Cultural Politics of Blackness. The objective of these lectures was to foster a reflection on the present-day value of some of the last century’s most compelling African imaginations and critiques of identity, modernity and universality. Achille Mbembe presented lectures on 3, 4 and 5 June, entitled ‘Africa and the Idea of Modernity’, ‘Imagining Freedom’ and ‘Afro-Cosmopolitanism’. On June 9th, David Atwell presented a lecture on ‘Modernism and Black South African Fiction’. James Ogude delivered a lecture, entitled ‘The Ghost of Cultural Unconscious in Africa’s Modernity’ on June 11th.

SEX & SECRECY CONFERENCE
22 – 25 June
WISER, the Graduate School for the Humanities and Social Sciences and the Gay and Lesbian Archives will be hosting the 4th conference of the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society (IASSCS) from 22 – 25 June 2003. An article on the conference appears on page 9 of this edition of WISER in BRIEF.

SEXUALITY AND POWER IN SOUTH AFRICA MA/ HONOURS COURSE
A new MA course, offered by WISER and the Graduate School for the Humanities and Social Sciences, will be introduced in July 2003. The course will engage the following key social questions of immediate relevance to South Africa: Why is sex the site of routinised violence and brutalisation? Why have rates of sexual violence been so high in South Africa? How is sex represented in various media? How has AIDS reshaped codes of privacy and intimacy? How effective have feminist and gay and lesbian movements been in popularizing alternative discourses on sexuality? The course was designed by Graeme Reid and Liz Walker from WISER.

CRISIS STATES
17-18 July
Working with the Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP) and the Wits School of Social Sciences, WISER has been a partner in the Crisis States Project based at the London School of Economics. A conference on State and Society in South Africa - Faultlines of Crisis and Sites of Stabilisation that falls under the auspices of the project will take place on 17-18 July at the University of the Witwatersrand.

PUBLIC POSITIONS SEMINAR SERIES
August 2003 –
Public Positions is a new seminar series aimed at opening up public intellectual debate at Wits University. The series, hosted by WISER, will draw high profile public figures from a wide range of public sectors who will be invited to reflect on key issues in the emerging South African contemporary public sphere. The series aims to attract audiences from both within and well beyond the academy. Invited speakers so far include William Kentridge, Cheryl Carolus, Rhoda Kadali, Isaac Shongwe, Jonny Steinberg, Steve Mokoena, Mark Gevisser and John Matshikiza. The series is coordinated by Deborah Posel, Sarah Nuttall and Irma du Plessis.

NEW ACOUSTIC REGIMES: RETHINKING MUSIC AND SOUND
30 August
WISER, in collaboration with the Wits School of Arts, will host a one-day symposium on ‘New Acoustic Regimes: Rethinking Music and Sound’ on Saturday 30th August from 9am to 6pm. The programme will include keynote addresses by Achille Mbembe on Congolese music and Livio Sansone on Brazilian music, as well as panels on jazz and kwaito. A programme will be available on our website soon.

RETHINKING THE TOWNSHIP
September
Over the past few decades numerous and sophisticated studies on this specifically Southern African social and urban formation called the ‘township’ have been produced. Yet, almost ten years after the end of apartheid, we have very few post-liberation ethnographies of everyday life in the township. We have even fewer academic or theoretical reflections on the place of the township in the city, its rhythms and its senses. The objective of this seminar is to open a small window on post-liberation township life and experience in the context of the splintering urbanism so characteristic of the contemporary world. In the process, we hope to form a new way of looking at the city-form and the type of fragmenting of urban space engendered by processes of regionalisation and globalization. The symposium will assess the extent to which, although invented by the apartheid state, the township is being produced beyond the temporal and geographical boundaries of the apartheid moment.

THEORY SEMINAR FOR PHD FELLOWS: PART II
The second part of this series will run in the second and third weeks of November, and will be devoted to the work of Marx, Weber and Nietzsche.
Over recent months, WISER has welcomed three new members of our research team, a postdoctoral research fellow, and a senior administrator and a secretary who hold the whole show together. The new appointments enable WISER to extend and deepen our interdisciplinary research focus, to bolster our organisational functioning, and to strengthen our expertise in particular areas of inquiry.

Jonathan Hyslop, who was seconded to WISER from Sociology during 2002, joined WISER as a senior researcher and deputy director from 2003. An Associate Professor in Sociology, Jon’s early academic career took him into the sociology of education. His PhD was a pioneering and influential study of Bantu Education, and was published as a book *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa 1940-1990* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1999). Since then, Jon has become one of South Africa’s foremost historical sociologists. Widely published in many international journals, he edited *African Democracy in the Era of Globalisation* (Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand Press, 1999). More recently, he has been honing his skills as a biographer — at the same time as exploring the contribution of biographical research to the social sciences. He is currently completing a biography of the Scottish/South African trade unionist, James Thompson Bain, which is scheduled to appear in print towards the end of 2003. His new WISER project will be a study of patronage politics in contemporary Southern Africa, which promises to debunk some of the more conventional approaches to the problem of ‘corruption’ in the country.

Pending a work permit, the appointment of Tom Odhiambo, who is currently registered for a PhD in African Literature in the School of Literature and Language Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, as a researcher in WISER constitutes an attempt to further pursue our interests in the domain of literary studies, but has also presented an opportunity to strengthen our links on the continent. Tom’s current research interest is in the area of popular culture and literature in Africa, with a focus on Kenyan popular literature. The title of his doctoral thesis, which is scheduled for completion in 2003, is ‘The (Un)Popularity of Kenyan Popular Fiction: The Case of David Mailu’. He obtained a masters degree in African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2001. For the MA he researched Kenyan fiction by women writers. Before coming to the University of the Witwatersrand, he had graduated with a Bachelor of Education at Moi University in Kenya, in 1998, after which he taught English language and literature at secondary school level for two years.

Another researcher equally at home in an interdisciplinary milieu is Susan van Zyl, who joined WISER in the beginning of the year on a one year secondment. Susan started her academic life as a literary scholar, in the Department of English Literature at Wits in 1968. After several years in the Division of Communication Studies in the Department of Linguistics, where she extended her research interests into the study of communication, she joined the newly established Department of Applied English Language Studies in 1992. She was awarded a PhD in Comparative Literature in 1993, for an innovative study of the role of narrative in medical and psychoanalytic case histories and its relation to that in the realist novel. She has since become a leading figure in psychoanalytic scholarship in the country. Before being seconded to WISER, she had a joint appointment in the School of Language and Literature Studies and in the discipline of psychology in the School of Human and Community Development. Her recent research is concerned with the relationship between psychoanalysis and biology.
WISER has been enormously fortunate in securing the services of an excellent senior administrator and events coordinator. Clair Harrison joined the WISER team in November 2002 to take up the reigns of WISER office management, financial recordkeeping and events coordination. Previously, Clair worked as Programme Manager of the certificate programmes at the Gordon Institute of Business Science and administered the Bankers Development Programmes at Damelin School of Banking. Clair is currently completing her BCom Accounting degree through RAU. Also joining the WISER team is Najibha Deshmukh, who came to WISER first in September 2002 on a temporary basis. We immediately realised that her previous experience at Wits, strong people’s skills and broad range of capabilities were indispensable to WISER and persuaded her to accept a contract position as secretary. Before joining WISER, Najibha worked in a number of positions at the University, including at Wits TV, the Faculty of Humanities, the School of Human and Community Development and, for a short period, the office of the Dean. She has completed courses in computer software support and PC engineering.

POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOW

Mellon Foundation funding to the University has created a number postdoctoral fellowships. Tina Sideris, whose application was supported by WISER, will be located in WISER for the duration of her fellowship. Tina completed a degree in Industrial Sociology and was awarded a British Council Bursary to study at Essex University, under Paul Thompson, where she completed a research paper on recording living memory in South Africa. Her PhD research, conducted through RAU, examined the psycho-social sequelae of war for Mozambican women survivors who fled to border villages in the Nkomazi region. Whilst doing fieldwork, it became evident to Tina that domestic violence and rape were dominant features of life for local women living in the Nkomazi. In 1994, Tina and a colleague from the Nkomazi, Rachel Nsimbini Nkosi, founded the Masukumeni Women’s Crisis Centre. From its humble beginnings, Masukumeni now employs 14 local women who provide counseling and medico-legal assistance to an average of 1 300 survivors of gender specific violence a year. The questions of how men come to contemplate non-violent gender relations and how they sustain non-violent practices — in communities where levels of domestic violence are alarmingly high and are justified by prevailing notions of gender and masculinity — form the subject of Tina’s theoretical and field work as a postdoctoral fellow at WISER.

Funding from the Andrew W Mellon Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies has enabled the award of two Writing Fellowships. These are intended for people who are directly engaged in social commentary and analysis during the course of their work in this country (e.g. as journalists, trade unionists, public servants or in NGOs) and who would value the opportunity to write and reflect in a more academic environment. Fellows will be accommodated at WISER and will be expected to play an active role in its intellectual life. Writing Fellows will be expected to situate their own writing projects in relation to WISER’s intellectual project, details of which could be found on WISER’s website at www.wits.ac.za/wiser.

One fellowship will be awarded jointly in WISER and the new Journalism Programme at Wits. Applicants should be experienced journalists, and will be expected to contribute to the MA in Journalism, in addition to writing and other commitments at WISER. The other fellowship is located wholly in WISER. Each fellowship will be awarded for 3-12 months, depending on the scope of the writing project proposed. The award comprises a monthly stipend of up to R9 000 (depending on the fellow’s experience and standing) as well as a research and writing grant. Fellows will also have access to an office, telephone, the Internet, and university library privileges.

To apply, please submit the following:
1. A detailed motivation, setting out your interest in the fellowship and a proposal for a writing project while based in WISER. In the case of applications for the joint fellowship, you should also indicate your possible contributions to the MA in Journalism.
2. A full and updated CV.
3. Two recent pieces of written work.
4. Names and email contact details of 3 referees.

The closing date for applications is 15 July 2003. Application details and more information are available at www.wits.ac.za/wiser
**Selected Publications**

2001 - 2003

**BOOKS**


**JOURNAL ARTICLES**


CHAPTERS IN BOOKS


WISER is the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) and is located in the University of the Witwatersrand. WISER offers a space for independent, critical inquiry into the complexities of change in South Africa, while drawing upon comparative research from the rest of Africa and elsewhere in the world, and foregrounding the wider historical and theoretical significance of this research agenda.

**STAFF (2003)**

**Director**
Deborah Posel (poseld@wiser.wits.ac.za)

**Senior Researchers**
Jonathan Hyslop (hyslopj@wiser.wits.ac.za)
Achille Mbembe (mbembea@wiser.wits.ac.za)
Sarah Nuttall (nuttalis@wiser.wits.ac.za)
Liz Walker (walkere@wiser.wits.ac.za)

**Researchers**
Marks Chabedi (chabedim@wiser.wits.ac.za)
Ivor Chipkin (chipkini@wiser.wits.ac.za)
Irma du Plessis (duplessisi@wiser.wits.ac.za)
Graeme Reid (reidg@wiser.wits.ac.za)

**Senior Administrator and Events Coordinator**
Clair Harrison (admin@wiser.wits.ac.za)

**Administrative Secretary**
Najibha Deshmukh (admin2@wiser.wits.ac.za)

**POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOW**
Tina Sideris (siderist@wiser.wits.ac.za)

**DOCTORAL FELLOWS**
Nsizwa Dlamini (daminin@wiser.wits.ac.za)
Jeremy du Venage (duvenagej@wiser.wits.ac.za)
Grace Khunou (khunoug@wiser.wits.ac.za)
Kgamadi Kometsi (kometsik@wiser.wits.ac.za)
Detlev Krige (kriged@wiser.wits.ac.za)
Tlou Makhura (makhurat@wiser.wits.ac.za)
Abueng Matlapeng (matlapenga@wiser.wits.ac.za)
Phaswane Mpe (mpep@wiser.wits.ac.za)
Rubert Muponde (muponder@wiser.wits.ac.za)
Dominique Wooldridge (wooldridged@wiser.wits.ac.za)
France Bourgouin (bourgouinf@wiser.wits.ac.za)

**WRITING FELLOWS**
Mark Gevisser (gevisserm@wiser.wits.ac.za)
John Matshikiza (matshikizaj@wiser.wits.ac.za)