Diamonds and Gold: Family and other letter-writing in New Rush (later Kimberley) and Johannesburg, South Africa 1868 and after

ESRC PhD Studentship

A sociologist or working elsewhere in the social sciences? Interested in how society is organised and how particular societies change over time? Also interested in social hierarchies and inequalities, how these come into being, and take different shape in different contexts? An ESRC funded Studentship concerned with these key questions and issues of central concern for social science is available.

A 3 year ESRC funded +3 PhD Studentship is available on ‘Diamonds and gold: Family and other letter-writing in New Rush (later Kimberley) and Johannesburg, South Africa 1868 and after’. The Studentship is attached to the Whites Writing Whiteness project led by Prof Liz Stanley, Sociology, University of Edinburgh. Applicants should already have, or else be in process of completing, an ESRC-recognised Research Training Masters degree in Sociology or one of its related areas.

The Whites Writing Whiteness Project and the +3 ESRC PhD Studentship

The occurrence of rapid and profound social, economic and political change in South Africa in a relatively short time-period enables absolutely fundamental sociological questions about social change, imperialism, colonialism, local forms of capitalism, class, labour, gender and ‘race’ to be explored. It is a truism that sociology came into existence to investigate and understand the processes of social change. While terms such as globalisation, late modernity and postmodernity operate something of a closure on the ‘what’ of social change, the Whites Writing Whiteness (www.whiteswritingwhiteness.ed.ac.uk) project is concerned with the ‘how’ of what happened, where and when it happened, and how people wrote about this from within the ferment of change occurring.

Consequently the Whites Writing Whiteness project is exploring how change occurred more generally in South Africa over the 200 year period from the 1770s to the 1970s. The PhD Studentship will be concerned with researching one particular – and especially important – aspect of this – diamonds and gold!

When first diamonds in the 1860s in New Rush and then gold in the 1880s on the Witwatersrand were discovered, what has been referred to as a ‘mineral revolution’ occurred. Erupting into the midst of a largely pastoral economy, highly capital intensive economic developments took place in what rapidly become enclave economies centring on these two places. The availability of paid work attracted a migrant black labour force wanting to purchase specific kinds of goods and so working away from home for short-run periods of time; and the increasingly intensive use of labour, with technological and organisational developments leading to workers living in compounds and the confinement and close regulation of labour. Huge numbers of white miners (and initially black miners too, until they
were excluded) were attracted from many different parts of the world, and also from within southern Africa.

Soon the quintessentially modern cities of Kimberly and Johannesburg mushroomed, characterised by mobilities, the comings and goings of diverse people from many different parts of the world including different parts of southern Africa, and flows of money including in international transfers to European money markers, and they also experienced equally rapid growth of populations. Most people – white as much as black – who were living there were migrants from an ‘elsewhere’ that could be southern Africa, St Petersburg, Dundee, New Zealand, California, Manchester and many many other places. The need to keep in touch with family and friends, also to make and seal business transactions, issue promissory notes and a wide variety of other everyday forms of letter-writing, expanded as the population did so. Often aware of the extraordinary events unfolding, people’s different kinds of letter-writing could sometimes go hand-in-hand with writing a diary or journal, penning maps and plans, sending postcards, painting or sketching, photography…

It is a truism that the character of ‘race’ as it became under the rigidities and binary hierarchies of apartheid and as it presently exists in post-transition South Africa was slowly and piecemeal constructed from what had in an earlier period been the much freer interrelationships of whites and black people. The above changes set in motion by the mineral revolution played a part in this, by positioning first black men as labour ‘hands’ and then black women as also labouring ‘hands’ and subsequently as also suppliers of (often covert) sexual services.

But how did these changes take place, and how did the people living through them comment on them as they were happening? Was it as straightforward as the truisms suggest, or were ethnicity, gender and class also at work in giving particular meanings to ‘race’ as skin-colour? Did all people of European descent share the same kinds of views about ethnicity, ‘race’ and hierarchy or where there important differences about this? How did gender map onto ideas about ‘race’ and separate spheres?

Also, how did this change over time, from the 1860s and 70s, through the South African War of 1899 to 1902and its aftermath, through Union on 1910, through the 1920s and the rise of the National Party, through the 1930s and the Afrikaner Broederbond’s links with Nazi Germany, through the 1948 National Party election victory and subsequent rapid institutionalisation of apartheid, through to 1960 and Sharpeville and ensuing states of emergency, through the 1980s period of transition to the 1994 democratic elections and the ANC Government. How was the occurrence of these changes experienced at local levels, by people living and working in Kimberley and Johannesburg? And was it the same or different in these two cities?

The focus for exploring these things is the minority white population, and how whiteness and its ‘Others’ was represented in their ordinary everyday writings, in personal, family, friendship, business and other kinds of letter-writing. How did differently situated white people understand and represent the increasingly racially binary social, economic and political circumstances they lived in? Exploring this via family collections (rather than organisations or businesses) puts emphasis on the everyday and ordinary, and, because many such collections span three, four or more generations, it also enables changes over time to be explored.
The Studentship Research

The Studentship-holder will research the extensive and extremely rich South African archive collections that exist regarding Kimberley and Johannesburg as enclave economies which mushroomed and became commanding presences shaping the South African economy and the dynamics of its internal labour market. These collections include letters and personal papers, diaries, journals and memoirs, and also company records and related documents.

Investigating these sources will enable the construction and complexities of the racial order and how it changed over time to be explored at close detail. The focus of the Studentship research will be on how whiteness and related ethnic and racial categories are represented in people’s letter-writing and changes in this over time and how this affected not only labour markets but also relationships between groups of people. The research will cover the period from mineral discoveries up to and key political events in 1948 and the institutionalisation of apartheid. However, the final cut-off point could certainly be beyond this date, depending on the Studentship-holder’s particular interests. The wider project encompasses the years of Sharpeville and the Soweto uprising and so runs through to the 1970s.

The exact choice of collections for research will depend on the Studentship-holder’s particular interests, and also of course what they discover as their research unfolds. However, fieldwork will be carried out on relevant South African collections, and in particular those held in:

- the Kimberley Africana Library
- the Cullen Library at the University of Witwatersrand (nb. many of the inventories for its collections are available online)
- the Johannesburg Public Library Harold Strange Africana Collection

Please note that there will be two required periods of extended (each of around 6 to 8 weeks) archival fieldwork on selected collections in the Kimberley and Johannesburg archives noted above, with funding for these fieldwork periods built into the Studentship.

Studentship Requirements

Applicants must already have, or else be in the process of completing, an ESRC-recognised Research Training Masters degree in Sociology and/or one of its related areas, such as social and cultural history, social and cultural geography, political studies etc.

Please note that only UK citizens and EU citizens with full residency are eligible to hold ESRC Studentships. Also the broad topic area of the Studentship around documentary sources regarding the occurrence and effects of the so-called ‘mineral revolution’ starting in Kimberley and Johannesburg, and concerned with reconfigurations of ‘race’, is non-negotiable. However, the Studentship-holder’s particular interests can also be incorporated in the research design.

The PhD Studentship-holder will, if needed, receive additional training in archival research, as well as specific training in use of the Project’s Virtual Research Environment (see the Whites Writing Whiteness project’s webpages at www.whiteswritingwhiteness.ed.ac.uk for further information). Practical methodology in the field will involve designing a framework for selecting materials from the large archive collections being worked on, gaining
proficiency in producing detailed and accurate transcriptions, and contributing to the Project’s publications and other activities.

**Outline Timetable for the Studentship**

*Year 1* – Any additional training, library-based research, first South African fieldwork period, literature and methodology draft chapters;

*Year 2* – second South African fieldwork period, draft chapters on South African research; preliminary analysis of collections data.

*Year 3* – complete collections data analysis and draft chapters; finalise and submit thesis.

**Inquiries and Applications**

For inquiries about the ESRC Studentship, please contact Prof Liz Stanley as soon as possible by emailing liz.stanley@ed.ac.uk and, if necessary, an email can later be followed by a phone conversation.

In order to apply for the Studentship, please send the following to Liz by email and file-attachment by the closing date:

- A letter of application explaining why you are interested in carrying out the research programme involved and how your qualifications and interests fit the specification for the Studentship.
- Your contact information: postal address, phone number and email address. Please make sure a phone number is provided, to contact you should you be shortlisted; thank you.
- A CV, which should set out your academic achievements to date as well as other relevant experience and qualifications.
- The names, academic positions, work addresses and also the email addresses of two referees who are able to comment on your academic performance (including in your ESRC-recognised Research Training Masters degree if you already have this).
- A pdf or Word file of your Masters dissertation if you already have an MRes or similar research Masters.
- A draft research outline for how you would like to put the Studentship research as outlined above into practice. This must be no longer than 4 typed A4 pages in Times New Roman font size 12 single-line spacing. Please organise your proposal under the following headings, all four of which should be used, although in an order and to a length which best fits how you see your particular approach to the Studentship research being shaped.

(i) Outline what you see as the key relevant theory and research: what combination of work on archive research, historical sociology, letter-writing, social change, imperialism, South Africa in transition, the racial and gender order and so on, would you propose to draw on? and which approaches or theoretical ideas from this you are most interested in? This is to show how you relate to the relevant key literature/s.
(ii) Discuss what themes, issues and questions you think it would be useful to explore in carrying out this research. This is to show what particular research questions and ideas you would like to take forward and what your broad methodology or perspective is.

(iii) The Studentship research will be both substantive and theoretical, and the basic method will be using documentary methods to analyse the archival documentary sources you will be working with. Within this framework, how will you analyse these documents to explore issues about change and the racial order? This is to show how you think it would be most helpful to operationalize the analysis of archival and documentary sources and data.

(iv) Indicate any ethical issues you think might arise from the research (ethics can be interpreted in a broad sense, for instance regarding legitimacy and responsibility, as well as more narrowly, for example concerning matters of access and consent).

**Closing Date, Interviews**

The closing date for proposals and applications to be received is **28 February 2013**. Please make sure your proposal etc is sent to liz.stanley@ed.ac.uk – thank you! A short informal interview may be held as appropriate.

The person who is awarded the Studentship will then be required (if they haven’t already) to make an immediate application for a place in the Graduate School of Social and Political Science/Sociology, and also for the ESRC Studentship (nb. these will be formalities for the successful applicant). However, the Studentship has already been awarded to the project, so the award will be certain once the formalities are completed.

The Studentship will commence at the start of the University of Edinburgh academic year, on 9 September 2013.

Applicants must already have an ESRC-recognised Research Training Masters degree in Sociology and/or one of its cognate areas, such as social and cultural history, social geography, political studies etc. Please note that only UK citizens and EU citizens with full residency are eligible to hold ESRC Studentships, and that the topic area of the Studentship is non-negotiable.

**Reading List**

For those presently unfamiliar with this field of research, some useful beginning sources are as follows:

**Background reading**


Rodney Davenport & Christopher Saunders (5th edition 2000, or later) *South Africa: A Modern History* Basingstoke: Macmillan (for broad reference purposes)
Alan Lester, Etienne Nel & Tony Binns (2000) *South Africa Past, Present and Future* Harlow: Pearson Education (Introduction, Conclusion, but overall an important starting point)

Kimberley and Johannesburg, Labour & the 'Mineral Revolution’


Shula Marks & Anthony Atmore (eds, 1980) *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa* London: Longman. (some important chapters in this)

Shula Marks & Richard Rathbone (eds, 1982) *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* London: Longman. (some important chapters in this)

T. Dunbar Moodie (1994) *Going For Gold: Men, Mines and Migration* Berkeley: University of California Press. (as the title indicates)

*Brian Roberts (1976) *Kimberley, Turbulent City* Cape Town: David Philip. (a very good read)


Robert V. Turrell (1987) *Capital and Labour on the Kimberley Diamond Fields 1871-1890* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (as it says)


William Worger (1987) *South Africa’s City of Diamonds* Yale University Press. (Kimberley, with the focus on the details of labour organisation)

David Yudelman (1984) *The Emergence of Modern South Africa* Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball. (overview of economy and state over long period; Marxist, a good read, largely convincing)

Some useful journals

*J African Studies*
*J Commonwealth & Imperial History*
*J Southern African Studies*
*South African Historical Journal*