

Workshop: “The Claims of Descent: Science, Representation, Race and Redress in 21st Century South Africa”

Halle, 14th-16th June, 2014

Program and Abstracts



Bard College Berlin
A LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

PROGRAM

SATURDAY, JUNE 14

4:00 pm Welcome and Introductory Remarks

Katharina Schramm and Kerry Bystrom

4:30pm Opening Keynote Address

Himla Soodyall: Genetic heritage: where science intersects with the journey of descendant communities

19.30 DINNER

SUNDAY, JUNE 15

Session I: 10.15 – 11:00: CLASSIFICATION, IDENTIFICATION AND THE INVENTION OF “DESCENT”

Keith Breckenridge: The Book of Life: Population registration and the invention of racial descent under High Apartheid

Discussant: Achille Mbembe

11.00 – 11.30: COFFEE

Session II: 11.30 – 13.00: HOW TO GO ABOUT SCIENTIFIC CLASSIFICATION TODAY – VIEWS FROM SCIENCE

Alan Morris: A failure to communicate: lay perceptions of race and the use of racial categories in forensic science.

Chiara Barbieri: The use of the “ethnolinguistic” unit in genetic and linguistic research: from the study design to the outcome interpretation

Discussant: Susanne Bauer

13.00 – 14.00: LUNCH

Session III: 14.00 – 16.00: IDENTIFYING “DESCENDANT COMMUNITIES” IN POLITICAL AND SCIENTIFIC PRACTICE – PERSPECTIVES FROM SOCIAL SCIENCES

Zimitri Erasmus: Populations: ‘The Blood of Government’

Katharina Schramm: Bones, DNA and the Trouble of Descent

Discussant: Lindsey Reynolds

16.00-16.30: COFFEE

Session IV: 16.30 – 18.00: HUMAN ORIGINS, RACE AND THE CRADLE OF HUMANKIND

Eric Worby: And a Little (White) Child Shall Lead Them: Suturing a Pre-Racial Human Family to a Post-Racial National Fantasy through the ‘Discovery’ of *Australopithecus sediba*

Kerry Bystrom: Rethinking the ‘Family of Man’? Ancestral Sites and South African Belonging in Julia Martin's *A Millimetre of Dust*

Discussant: Antina von Schnitzler

19.30 DINNER

MONDAY, JUNE 16

Session V: 9.30 – 11.00: MISSING PERSONS / MEMORY & DESCENT

Anne Fleckstein: Freedom bones. Symbolic, spiritual and material re-appropriation of freedom fighters' human remains in post-Apartheid South Africa

Jay Aronson: Identifying South Africa's Missing Anti-Apartheid Activists

Discussant: Stefanie Bognitz

COFFEE: 11.00 – 11.30

Session VI: 11.30 – 13.00: DESCENT BASED CLAIMS

Amanda Esterhuysen: Mining the Tribe

Larissa Förster: Doing kinship with bones: restitution, ethnicity and discourses of descent in Namibia

Discussant: Kerry Bystrom

13.00 – 14.00: LUNCH

Session VII: 14.00 – 15.30: GLOBALIZED PERSPECTIVES

Emma Kowal (via Skype): Descentism in three acts (Australia)

Kim Tallbear (via Skype): Genomic Articulations of Indigeneity in the US

Discussant: Katharina Schramm

15.30 – 16.30 Final Discussion

Saul Dubow Commentary

ABSTRACTS (IN THE ORDER OF THE PROGRAM)

Keith Breckenridge

WITS Institute for Social and Economic Research
University of Witwatersrand
keith@breckenridge.org.za

The Book of Life : Population registration and the invention of racial descent under High Apartheid.

Between 1967 and 1983, the Book of Life was an internationally precocious project, managed by IBM to build a centralised population register, housed in the forbidding black glass tower called Civitas in Pretoria. Where Africans were subject to the bureaucratic ordeals of the Dompas and the Bewysburo, everyone else was allocated to one of the basic Verwoerdian racial categories by the Book of Life. Much of this racial classification was done at birth (and invisibly) in the 1970s, based on the answers that the individual's parents had given to the 1951 census. For two decades Verwoerd was told by liberal critics that allocating all South Africans to one of his four basic races was impossible. But the Book of Life gave his races reality, inventing racial boundaries on the basis of often arbitrary answers to forms provided by the Census and the Department of the Interior. Yet the contemporary power of these arbitrary and thoroughly unscientific South African racial categories dates from the project. The Book of Life was designed as a surveillance scheme, to equip the state with controls over the movement of every individual, and especially over gun, marriage and driver's licensing. But it was an administrative disaster, one which failed (wrecking the licensing of drivers, apparently permanently). The racial classifications have endured, however, in ways that might astonish and delight Verwoerd.

Alan G. Morris

Department of Human Biology
University of Cape Town
Alan.Morris@uct.ac.za

A failure to communicate: lay perceptions of race and the use of racial categories in forensic science.

The primary classification of unknown human skeletal remains into sex, age and race is standard practice in forensic anthropology. The object of the categorisation is to reduce the search categories in trying to link missing person data to the unidentified human remains.

The two active forensic anthropology units in Cape Town and Pretoria have taken very different approaches to the identification of race from skeletal material. The

Cape Town lab has tended to use an informal approach in which the unknown is seen only in terms of consistency or inconsistency with racial categories, while the Pretoria group has made use of the statistical programme FORDISC to make more formal racial identifications. The argument from Pretoria states that FORDISC meets the 'Daubert' criteria for scientific repeatability and therefore is more acceptable as evidence in court. The argument from Cape Town is that the range of variability in South African populations is so great that any strict categorisation is unrealistic.

Forensic anthropology technical reports are written for State Pathology and the investigative branch of the SAPS, but there is a recurring problem in the communication of these results. The reports are couched in statistical terms of probability of membership of the unknown skull to a range of variation in the reference samples. SAPS investigators and State Pathologists on the other hand still use the four 'race' categories from the apartheid years [White, Black, Coloured and Indian] and have an understanding of the average appearance of members of each group based on their own life experience and popular bias. Although this has been the situation for many years, the problem has become exacerbated because of the 'CSI effect' in which the public perceives the workings of forensic science to be as uncomplicated as seen on television. The result is that the scientific identifications on the investigation documents are recorded in a rigid racial format and understood by the investigative practitioners in quite different terms than were intended.

Chiara Barbieri

Department of Biological, Geological and Environmental Sciences
University of Bologna
barbieri.chiara@gmail.com

The use of the “ethnolinguistic” unit in genetic and linguistic research: from study design to outcome interpretation

Recent developments in reconstructing the prehistory of our species point to the multidisciplinary approach as an indispensable premise. *Homo sapiens* is characterized by a dual biological/cultural nature shaped by the same demographic events; however, the transmission of features within the two domains is subject to different dynamics. As a consequence, integrating scientific and cultural perspectives poses unavoidable methodological challenges. It is therefore important to “think multidisciplinary” not only when merging the final results, but also when building methods and defining starting points.

Genetic research on human populations, for instance, sometimes deals with its primary subject with ambiguity; geneticists have extensively proved that populations do not correspond to distinct human “races”, but they often lack a cohesive description of what is actually a “population”. The combined use of Genetics and Linguistics proposes to fill this gap with a supposedly neutral and practical definition of population – the ethnolinguistic identity – which serves both domains. The Kalahari Basin Project is here proposed as a case study for a genetic

approach to the ethnolinguistic unit. From the level of individual DNA data to the abstract concept of a population gene pool, we will see how geneticists strive to trace back prehistorical events of migration and contact.

Zimitri Erasmus

Department of Sociology
University of Witwatersrand
Zimitri.Erasmus@wits.ac.za

Populations: 'The Blood of Government'

I question population genetics as an epistemic place from which to do history, politics, social identification and meanings of belonging. To this end, I examine genetic ancestry tracing as a site illustrative of deeply problematic conceptions, generated by scientists, about the relationship between genes, 'populations', 'race', geography, nations and social identification. I start by problematizing the category 'population' and suggest a fitting trope would be to think of 'population' as 'the blood of government' (Kramer 2006). I proceed by reading selected genetic genealogical studies of communities considered 'KhoiSan', 'Coloured' and 'Lemba' in South Africa against concerns expressed in recent literature about the use of genetic ancestry tests in similar studies and for personal consumption in North America and Britain, and against concerns voiced from parts of South America about the political implications of recent genetic studies.

Given the weight of inferences made in the selected studies from what would otherwise be considered insignificant statistical data, I argue first, that these genealogies work much like 'throwing the bones' for a divine reading of primal forces that might shape how one sees oneself. Second, I argue that conceptions of race as biological are re-animated in the conflation of genes, 'populations', 'race', place, nation and social identifications. In their critique of Rose and Rabinow's suggestion of a shift from the molar to the molecular, Raman and Tutton (2010) convincingly argue that 'molecules' have not replaced 'populations' in the fields of genetics and biopower. Instead, they argue a more productive conception lies in showing the interpellation of 'old' and 'new' genetics (Raman and Tutton 2010: 717, 727). Consequently, choice of social identifications is cast in a 'population' mould of genetically traced 'ancestral origins'. Hope for a better future and political struggles are cast in rights of genetically confirmed 'indigenous', 'aboriginal' or 'related' 'peoples'. This amounts to doing history, politics and belonging through genetics.

Katharina Schramm

Seminar of Ethnology

Martin Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg

katharina.schramm@ethnologie.uni-halle.de

Bones, DNA and the Troubles of Descent

The background for my paper concerns the question of how to study the troubling and multidimensional presence of race as a contemporary technology of belonging. Through the notion of “troubles of descent” I aim to show how race is performed as a relational object in a topological sense. This implies that race cannot be pinpointed as “residing” in a body, DNA-marker, group classification, scientific measurement or a practice of self-identification, but that it is assembled from various such elements which in their combination may produce racial effects.

I focus on South Africa as a special “site of cognition” (Anderson 2012, Santos, Lindee & Souza 2014) for two reasons. First, Southern Africa was, and continues to be, a highly significant site for the study of the history of humanity as a whole through physical anthropology and human genetics of indigenous populations. I am interested in changes and continuities in the conceptualization of indigeneity in these scientific projects. Second, the history of South African apartheid has shaped people’s common understandings of race, their claims of descent and their relationship to past and present scientific practices in significant ways. Many authors have argued that the racial classification of apartheid was based on a “cultural” and bureaucratic model and therefore disconnected from the scientific debates on race as a biological fact or fiction. While I agree to this call for historical specificity, I argue that in order to understand the ongoing trouble with race it is important to bring these dimensions together. I will do so by looking at the difficult relationship between human remains, DNA and the contemporary self-identifications of so-called descendant communities through the lens of what I call classificatory violence. I am interested in the ways in which descent is performed differently in relation to the materiality of casts, bones, blood and DNA and how disciplinary and political histories translate into one another.

Eric Worby

Graduate Center for the Humanities

University of Witwatersrand

Eric.Worby@wits.ac.za

And a Little (White) Child Shall Lead Them: Suturing a Pre-Racial Human Family to a Post-Racial National Fantasy through the ‘Discovery’ of *Australopithecus sediba*

The discovery of *Australopithecus sediba* by paleoanthropologist Lee Berger in the “Cradle of Humankind” just north of Johannesburg was publicized in the media on 8 April 2010, just one day before it appeared as the cover article in the flagship

academic journal *Science*. Yet the dominant public narrative generated by the announcement was more appropriate to the genre of a Boy's Own adventure story than to that of sober academic inquiry: Berger's 9-year old son Matthew was revealed to have spotted the first evidence of two sets of skeletal remains, one of which was said to have derived from a "boy" roughly his own age. In this paper, I address a series of questions about the *Australopithecus sediba* discovery and about the work done by its narrative representations at the border of science and the public sphere. These questions begin with the sentimental pairing of the bones of a proto-human child who died nearly two million years old with his 21st century counterpart. Why, and for whom, does this image, with its invocation of a transcendent "family of humankind", bear such strong affective traction? How, and for whom, is a trans-epochal identification of "families" produced, made convincing and sustained? After discussing the material potentiality of the bones themselves, I reflect on the event of "discovery", the enduring preoccupation with "origins", the work of classifying and naming the fossils, and the status of those fossils as contested property. I conclude by exploring how tensions over intellectual property in the bones—and the income and reputational streams that such property rights promise to deliver—might be tied to the longstanding quest for human origins as well as nationalist claims to fossil patrimony and descent that run from late 19th century colonial science through contemporary paleoanthropology. I suggest that two decades after the end of apartheid, it is Anglophone whites that have the most at stake in drawing an unbroken line between pre-racialized human forbearers and the post-racial citizens of a future national utopia, once vividly imagined through the metaphor of the rainbow nation, but now perhaps receding below the horizon.

Kerry Bystrom

English and Human Rights
Bard College Berlin
k.bystrom@berlin.bard.edu

**Rethinking the 'Family of Man'? Ancestral Sites and South African Belonging in
Julia Martin's *A Millimetre of Dust***

Writing as part of a wider reconsideration evident in the 1990s and early 2000s of the proto-human fossil record, KhoiSan "heritage," and South Africa's place in the global evolutionary narrative, Julia Martin in her creative non-fiction travelogue *A Millimetre of Dust: Visiting Ancestral Sites* (2008) provides a moving and lyric vision of how reconnecting with what she terms "ancestral sites" can lead to understandings of more ethical and democratic ways to inhabit South African soil in the present. This paper aims to tease out the complexities of this vision, asking both what can be gained through the kind of descent community that she imaginatively constructs in this book and what the pitfalls of her vision might be. Can contemporary efforts by (white) South Africans to connect themselves to the country's diverse population and its landscape by claiming a widely shared human

genetic and artistic "heritage" escape the pitfalls of the "family of man" narrative of an earlier era, critiqued savagely by Roland Barthes among others? If so, how would the "family of man" as a concept need rethinking?

Anne Fleckstein

LOST-Group, Martin Luther University of Halle
Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle
fleckstein@eth.mpg.de

Freedom bones. Symbolic, spiritual and material re-appropriation of freedom fighters' human remains in post-Apartheid South Africa

In 2005, the National Prosecution Authority (NPA) in South Africa established a Missing Persons Task Team (MPTT). This unit was to locate, exhume and identify the remains of victims of the Apartheid regime who had disappeared during the Apartheid era. It was a consequence of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1996-2002), during which exhumations had already started to take place. These exhumations present themselves as key events in which political, historiographical, psychological, spiritual and juridical discourses converge and the recovered bones gain a significant momentum. The bones are of utmost importance to the victims' families, the official authorities and the political community to which the victims belonged. They become the object of forensic and juridical inquiry, they represent the certainty of death and the fate of a political hero who acquires his place in a political historiography, however, they can also call the victims into existence as ancestors. Depending on the cultural context, the bones allow the families to undergo the necessary proceedings (burial, home-bringing), so that the victims can move over to the realm of ancestry and take their place in the family hierarchy and cosmology.

The paper examines these different discourses and seeks to point out how they locate the bones as an intermediate in the centre of a network of persons, things and discourses.

Jay Aronson

Department of History
Carnegie Mellon University
aronson@andrew.cmu.edu

Identifying South Africa's Missing Anti-Apartheid Activists

My talk will examine efforts to account for missing persons from the apartheid era in South Africa by family members, civil society organizations and the current government's Missing Persons Task Team, which emerged out of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process. It will focus on: how missing persons have been officially defined in the South African context; the use of forensic science and DNA

profiling to locate and identify the missing; and the extent to which the South African government is able to address the current needs and desires of relatives of the missing. In this story, DNA is not being used to define the boundaries of race, or to trace the origins of a particular group of people, but rather to ameliorate past injustices to a historically marginalized group defined entirely by race. I argue that the families of the missing in South Africa, and especially those whose loved ones were affiliated with the armed struggle against apartheid, are seeking to recover more than just mortal remains in their quest to locate and rebury their missing loved ones. They are also seeking to restore the social, political, and historical identity of their loved ones. In other words, the process of post-conflict DNA identification involves multiple forms of recognition—biological, social, and collective.

Amanda Esterhuysen

School of Geography, Archaeology, and Environmental Studies
University of the Witwatersrand
Amanda.esterhuysen@wits.ac.za

Mining the Tribe

This paper traces the unique and multiple processes that have shaped the administrative boundaries of the 'northern Ndebele' chiefdoms in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. It moves away from a culture history approach, adopted by both archaeological researchers and heritage practitioners (contract archaeologists) in this area, to tease out social processes and mechanisms that bolstered or subverted the hierarchical scaffolding of the chiefdom at different points in time. In doing so it reveals the complex nature of social membership, and the varied and strategic responses to the social spaces that opened and closed from the mid-nineteenth century to the present.

In unravelling these historical moments the paper takes a reflective look at the role of the ethnologists and archaeologists in analysing, classifying and fixing the identities of the 'northern Ndebele', first in a way that served the segregationist and capitalist ideals of the *apartheid* government, and secondly the neoliberal imperatives of the ANC government. It argues that the once heated debate around the creation of 'tribes' and 'traditions' became a muted and muddled terrain when the ANC formalised these structures within government. And that the artifice of the tribe, a convenient vehicle to relocate people and access mineral resources, is being uncritically supported and perpetuated by heritage practitioners who are ill-equipped to cope with a contested past, and discern the role and rights of the individual.

Larissa Förster

International Center for Advanced Studies

University of Cologne

larissa.foerster@uni-koeln.de

›Doing kinship‹ with bones: discourses of descent in the Namibian debate about repatriation, reparation and reconciliation

Post-independence Namibia has, different from South Africa, neither installed a legislation that facilitates the restitution of ancestral lands nor an instrument of reconciliation like the TRC. Claims for restitution and restorative justice have rather emerged in the debate about Namibia's relationship with its ex-colonial power Germany. The most recent occasions on which this relation has been re-negotiated have been the returns of Namibian human remains of colonial origin from German university collections to the National Museum of Namibia in 2011 and 2014. On both occasions demands for material compensation for colonial atrocities in the war/genocide of 1904-1908 have been made by Namibians NGOs who consider themselves as representing the then affected communities of the Herero and the Nama.

The majority of skulls that were returned in 2011 had indeed been purloined by German military doctors in Namibian prisoner-of-war camps between 1905 and 1908 and described as 'Herero' and 'Nama'. As a consequence, the remains not only turned into martyrs of the early liberation struggle when they were repatriated to Namibia, but were increasingly regarded by the 'affected communities' and the NGOs as key evidence for the genocide committed against them – and were therefore not buried, but kept accessible in the National Museum of Namibia. Their ethnic provenance was foregrounded not the least because they could *not* be identified individually, neither through historical nor through anthropological provenance research.

While the situation was rather unambiguous 2011, it became more complex in 2014 during the second German-Namibian repatriation, when human remains not only of Herero and Nama victims of the genocide were returned, but also the remains of Ovambo, Damara and San which had been deported before and after the war of 1904-1908. In particular Damara-speaking Namibians, who, in the view of many, have been marginalised in Namibian history as well as in Namibian historiography, used the opportunity for pointing to *their* suffering from colonialism and consequently also their contribution to the early struggle of anti-colonial resistance and to Namibian independence. However, these 'claims of descent' were not only made verbally, but also ritually: various Damara-speaking groups enacted mourning and funerary rituals on the occasion of the public reception and laying-in-state of the human remains in Namibia. Their 'doing kinship' with the restituted bones can be seen as a means of re-inscribing Damara-speaking Namibians into the national narrative of liberation, in particular since the repatriation was carried out in the run-up to the opening of the new Independence Memorial Museum in Windhoek which commemorates the Namibian liberation struggle and also features a monument for the colonial genocide.

The paper examines the complex political dynamics and discourses that the German-Namibian repatriations of 2011 and 2014 were embedded in and/or set off

Emma Kowal

Department of Anthropology
Deakin University
e.kowal@unimelb.edu.au

Descentism in Three Acts

On 28th April 2011, Justice Bromberg of the Australian Federal Court ruled that Andrew Bolt, Australia's most prominent conservative commentator, had breached section 18C of the Australian Racial Discrimination Act (1975). In articles in the Murdoch-owned national newspaper and on his popular blog, he stated that nine self-described 'light-skinned Aborigines' were not 'real' Aboriginal people and had obtained Indigenous-specific benefits and opportunities for personal gain. His comments were found to have been discriminatory, made in bad faith and factually erroneous. The case was lauded by Indigenous advocates as a victory for anti-racism, and criticised by free speech activists.

This case is taken as a point of departure to explore how indigeneity is constructed in contemporary Australia. Pan-Aboriginal activist movements from the late 1960s onwards reacted against the blood quantum of the assimilation era and considered indigeneity to be a combination of self-identification, descent and community acceptance, a definition later adopted by Australian governments. This mode of indigeneity has been termed 'descentism', referring to the use of biological ancestry (in this case, the presence of Indigenous Australian ancestry) as the only 'fixed' factor constituting indigeneity. These practices of indigenous identification are the inverse of 'hypodescent' imposed on African Americans by certain US states in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This new form of descentism has led to a diverse Indigenous population in comparison with other countries. A significant proportion of the diverse Indigenous polity are vulnerable to attacks on their authenticity because they do not fit phenotypic (or genotypic) stereotypes.

The success of the case against Bolt has bolstered this model of indigeneity and suggests a further meaning of 'descentism'. I argue that through this case, the term has come to describe a new form of racial injury stemming from a new right recognised in the Bromberg judgment: the right to not have one's racial identity questioned. This is a unique form of racial vilification that applies only to those Aboriginal people whose visual appearance departs from stereotypical notions of Aboriginality.

Kim Tallbear

Department of Anthropology
The University of Texas at Austin
kim.tallbear@austin.utexas.edu

Genomic Articulations of Indigeneity

Indigenous peoples' and genome scientists' respective definitions and practices of making 'indigeneity' illustrate their competing notions of identity, origins, and futures. This talk explores these genomic and indigenous 'articulations' of indigeneity, both their similarities and profound differences. Scientists who study ancient global human migrations and human genome diversity draw on an understanding of 'indigeneity' that appears to overlap with, but fundamentally contradicts, the use of this concept by the global indigenous movement. Genomic articulations privilege genetic ancestry as defining indigenous 'populations'. In contrast, indigenous articulations of indigeneity emphasize political status and biological and cultural kinship constituted in dynamic, long-standing relations with each other and with living landscapes. To demonstrate how differences in definitions matter, I draw examples from several scientific and indigenous projects that entangle DNA knowledge with judgments about indigenous identities, and I note resulting policy implications. I first examine two key narratives of indigeneity and race that underlie the genomic articulation of indigeneity: 'indigenous peoples are vanishing' and 'we are all related/all African'. I then explore two cases where genomic and indigenous articulations clash and overlap – the 'Kennewick Man' case and the use of DNA testing for tribal enrollment. Yet genomic articulations, with their greater truth-governing power, may inadvertently reconfigure indigeneity in ways that can undermine tribal and First Nations' self-determination and the global indigenous anticolonial movement. Indeed, some indigenous peoples have recently adopted genomic articulations of identity, perhaps to their own detriment.