



Contents

- » India-East Africa Relations Conference
- » Elections in Sudan
- » Profile of a graduate attachee
- » New BIEA facilities

Contemporary India-East Africa relations: shifting terrains of engagement

On 27-28 April 2009 BIEA inaugurated its new facilities with this two-day conference, which formed part of a British Academy funded project run by Dr Emma Mawdsley and Dr Gerard McCann from Cambridge University.



Opening address by Rob Macaire, British High Commissioner to Kenya

The two-day conference was opened by Mr. Rob Macaire, British High Commissioner and Dr. Ketan Shukla, Deputy Indian High Commissioner. Some 25 academics and activists from Kenya, India, South Africa, Zambia, Nigeria, Réunion and Europe, as well as a lively local audience, debated issues of geopolitics, Indian Ocean security, development cooperation, Indian trade and investment in East Africa, civil society interactions, diaspora and the racial politics of presence in Kenya. Both days were followed by convivial drinks receptions. A book, special journal editions and several articles will be forthcoming from the conference and wider research project in 2010.



Conference guests enjoying the new building

Elections in Sudan: learning from experience

From January to April, the Director was heavily involved in archival work in Khartoum, London and Juba as well as interviews with former election officials, candidates and party activists in greater Khartoum, Wad Medani, Shendi and Juba. The final report, authored by Dr Willis together with Professor Peter Woodward (University of Reading) and Dr Atta Battahani (University of Khartoum), was completed at the beginning of May, and was presented to the public in a series of launch meetings in Khartoum, Juba and London.



Dr Willis and Dr Atta el-Battahani with a group of informants in Shendi, northern Sudan

The research suggested that the legitimacy and inclusiveness of previous elections in Sudan have been limited, despite the enthusiasm and commitment of many of those

involved in organizing them. These weaknesses have sprung partly from deliberate cheating – especially in the referenda and elections held under authoritarian regimes – but more generally from procedural shortcomings. Sudan is a vast country, with poor communications and a diverse populace; the administrative capacities of the state have simply not been adequate to the task of running elections by secret ballot in these circumstances. A national election is planned for Sudan in 2010, as part of the peace process under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement; the research suggested that this election is likely to be significantly flawed unless urgent action is taken, both to prevent malpractice and to improve capacity. The research was funded by the Department for International Development.

Profile of a graduate attachee

Each year BIEA offers a number of attachments to recent graduates from the UK, Ireland and Eastern Africa. These attachments provide the graduates with a wide range of research experiences and help them to develop topics for further study. Graduate attachees also provide assistance for ongoing research projects and those wishing to make use of this scheme should visit our website for more information. In this issue we profile the experiences of a recent attachee, Miss Rachel Goodall.

“As a Graduate Attachee at the BIEA, I had a fantastic time in Kenya and beyond. The four months I spent at the Institute were varied, exciting, and instructive. It gave me a great taster for living and researching in Eastern Africa, helped me to plan my own future research and, I hope, allowed me to contribute to a number of projects in a meaningful way.



Rachel (right) sorting pottery at Vumba Kuu

I first joined Stephanie Wynne-Jones and helped excavate at Vumba Kuu, an important 17th–19th Century settlement on the Kenyan coast. The team stayed in a traditional Swahili house where fantastic coastal food was in plentiful supply. Vumba Kuu is reached by crossing a tidal creek and involved a precarious boat ride or a classic barefoot wade. Once at the site, snuggled into a forest on the Kenyan/Tanzanian border, the adventure continued. With constant surveillance for bees and baboons, in just under two weeks we opened three trenches. We excavated areas targeted for promising features as shown from a geophysics survey undertaken the previous year and we were not disappointed. We turned up brilliant and unexpected archae-



Travelling across Lake Bunyoni

ology, including ample evidence of iron slag. Moreover, I was able to work on the pottery from these excavations later on at BIEA and this has given me great experience of how to conduct large scale ceramic analysis.

After the adventures of the coast, I partook in a little relaxed archaeological reconnaissance on the edge of spectacular Lake Bunyoni, Uganda. I assisted in locating swamps with archaeological potential that would produce data to compliment existing paleobotanical data. I also indulged in a spot of tourism with a visit to the world heritage site of Kasubi tombs in Kampala. A fascinating royal enclosure where the kings of Buganda are buried, it remains a site of great importance to this day

Following my Ugandan excursion, I had a one-day turnaround before joining a BIEA team led by the Assistant Director to survey the stone circle cemetery site of Namoratung'a South in western Turkana. A team from



the National Museums of Kenya were excavating one of the burials whilst we conducted the survey. Turkana was unlike anything I had experienced before. It is an often hostile environment that I found to be unexpectedly heavily populated, and this provided for a fascinating tension between landscape and people. The stone circles were one of the most interesting and beautiful locations I had ever visited. On my return from Turkana, I took in a last mini trip with an itinerary of my own devising, which has given me heaps of confidence and experience to do my own thing in the future.

Squeezed in amongst all of this, I sorted and catalogued BIEA finds, ‘floated’ some soil samples, analyzed pottery and even helped at a conference (doing the most important job of all...manning the bar!). My personal highlight though, would definitely be my time spent in Turkana. In two weeks I experienced the hot, dusty, dirty, desert wilderness that is South Western Turkana and loved it. The archaeology was incredible and it gave me the focus for my own future research. What is special about being a graduate attachee is that you get the academic and field research experience crucial to a future in African archaeology. You are also able to have those experiences first hand and these help shape your own research interests and goals, whether you knew beforehand what they were, or not.”

Rachel Goodall



EDM survey at Ngamoratung'a, South Turkana

The New Face of BIEA

The new building on BIEA's compound was completed on schedule at the end of March, eleven months after work started. BIEA staff, and the library books, moved into the new building during April, and the office and library re-opened to the public on 27th April. The re-opening coincided with the start of the conference on ‘Contemporary India-East Africa relations’.



The new Nairobi office

Once the move to the new office was completed, we were able to convert the former office building back into accommodation; this was (just) ready for the first guests at the end of April; by the end of June five study bedrooms were available. Visiting researchers with queries about accommodation should contact guesthouse@biea.ac.uk.



The new library

The former guest house, much-loved by generations of visitors, has now been entirely renovated by IFRA, and is being used as office space. IFRA's staff and library moved in with BIEA in June; a formal celebration of the opening of the new building and the arrival of our French colleagues will be held in early September.



The new general office



The new guest house living room

As well as the revamped guest house and the new library, the new building offers vastly improved research facilities including a large seminar/lecture room, a computing and research room and wireless internet throughout. We think that all of the hard work has paid off and we would like to thank all our members for their patience during this time of transition. We are looking forward to hosting many of you in the near future!

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The old offices now offer excellent guest facilities, with a large communal living space, self-catering kitchen, five guest rooms and WiFi internet. The guest house will be managed by a newly appointed steward, Mr Godfrey Kalafa.



The gardens are currently being landscaped and will offer a pleasant space for both work and relaxation

For more details of our new facilities and general BIEA updates please visit our website www.biea.ac.uk.

Justin Willis, Director

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