

## **BURCH SEMINAR PROPOSAL**

### **BURCH SEMINAR IN KENYA: ORAL HISTORY & PERFORMANCE IN RURAL SETTINGS**

**SUMMER 2011: MAY 14 - JULY 1, 2011 (6 WEEKS)**

**Della Pollock, Professor, Performance and Cultural Studies  
Department of Communication Studies, UNC**

**Peter Wasamba, Senior Lecturer and Chair  
Department of Literature, University of Nairobi**

**David Cline, Associate Director, Southern Oral History Program  
Center for the Study of the American South, UNC**

#### **I. PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

This program will focus on potential uses of oral literature, oral history, and performance in community settings. Through a dialogue that is transnational, cross-cultural, and cross-disciplinary, this Burch Seminar will look at the power and possibilities of oral records and performance as an aspect of creating social change and informing public policy.

This Burch Seminar grows out of an ongoing intellectual collaboration between scholars at the University of Nairobi and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Peter Wasamba of the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi specializes in the study of African oral literature. In recent years he has been analyzing oral traditions among several regional and ethnic groups in Kenya in order to understand how poverty affects these communities and how in turn the communities respond to current public policy. As in most countries, in Kenya there is often a disconnection between those who create public policies and those whom it affects on a daily level. Dr. Wasamba and his team gather oral testimonies about such topics as work issues, ethnic clashes, and the effects of mining and agriculture on indigenous peoples. The local people with whom he works have a wealth of knowledge that is not usually utilized in policy development and that, if not for the recordings, would otherwise be lost. These oral testimonies provide invaluable information about the efficacy of certain policies, why those that worked did so, and where others broke down along the way.

Through the gathering of oral testimonies, Dr. Wasamba and his team of researchers are building a record of how the working poor in Kenya are affected by and in turn affect policy. Using oral literature and anthropological methods he and his team both collect oral testimonies and bring them back to the communities of origin in the form of performances in order to provide another layer of reflection and an opportunity for further agency on the part of local people. In this way the oral testimonies operate in several directions at once: they provide information to academics and policy makers; and also, they provide a platform for the locals to express satisfaction, frustration, and specific outcomes of policy, all with the hopes of improving conditions. The oral testimonies and performances also function on a therapeutic level, allowing community members to express themselves and to build further cohesiveness around social issues.

Dr. Wasamba has twice visited the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to speak with colleagues who use oral history methods in similar and, in some cases, strikingly different ways. Topics of interest and discussion have ranged from the logistics of interview gathering and archiving, to the nitty gritty of technical recording issues, to larger methodological and ethical concerns. These conversations have resulted in the blossoming of a collaborative relationship that has the power and potential to help scholars in both North Carolina and Nairobi re-envision, interpret, and enhance their current approaches and uses of oral histories and testimonies. Moreover, the collaboration occurs at an exhilarating middle ground between the gathering of history and the use of history. Stories about the past exist in the context of the present and have extraordinary power of influence in the present and future.

During 2011, Dr. Wasamba and his team of postgraduate researchers will be working in the Kwale and Kinango Districts of Coast Province, Kenya. The University of Nairobi maintains a research station in this area and the team has been using this as a base from which to gather oral narratives of a variety of types, ranging from verbal arts to life histories. During the period of the Burch Seminar, we will be working with the team to conduct oral histories with local people about cultural and geographical displacement arising from ethnic clashes, and increases in mining activities and sugarcane production in the area. In addition to Dr. Wasamba, the Kenyan team includes: lead research assistant Mrs. Kauchi Chivumba, a respected community organizer in Kwale and an advocate for girls' education; Mr. Omari Mazuri, a local community elder and a long time research assistant; Prof. Binti Lax, an American-born researcher who has conducted oral literature research among the Giriama of Coast Province and is currently writing a book on the same; and Dr. Joseph Muleka, a professor in the oral literature research program at the University of Nairobi.

Dr. Della Pollock specializes in performance and cultural studies, and has written extensively on the intersections between oral history and performance and performance scholarship. As she writes in her 2005 book, *Remembering: Oral History Performance*, oral historians and performers and performance scholars are “increasingly discovering shared and complementary investments in orality, dialogue, life stories, and community-building or what might more generally be called *living* history.” This proposed Burch seminar has the potential to deepen this discussion by incorporating oral literature scholars and different methodological approaches and, especially, by placing these conversations in a trans-national and trans-cultural context.

Dr. David Cline is the Associate Director of the Southern Oral History Program (SOHP), which has been collecting oral histories of the American South since 1973, building a collection of well over 4,000 interviews from Southerners of all walks of life. The program's work is grounded in traditional historical research methods as well as oral history methodologies that have developed and progressed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As does Dr. Wasamba and Dr. Pollock, the scholars at the SOHP have a strong interest in understanding and analyzing how culture and history looks and works for those at the “bottom rungs” of society. A large part of the SOHP's work has been devoted to collecting the stories of agency from the urban and rural working poor and from grassroots participants in efforts to create social, cultural, and economic change. David Cline will represent the Southern Oral History program in the Burch seminar collaboration. He is the current Acting Director of the Southern Oral History Program and an historian of the American South who has taught and published about oral history, praxis and methodology, and community activism. He is an Instructor in the Department of Communication Studies.

## II. PROGRAM GOALS

The goals of this program are to teach students about the history, culture, and challenges facing the rural poor in Kenya while also teaching and exploring the basic methodologies and practice of field interviewing. Students will learn about these topics through reading and studying about them, as well as by being exposed to contemporary Kenyan culture and institutions and to their Kenyan student counterparts at the University of Nairobi. The primary objectives of this program are to:

- a. Provide training in ethnographic oral history techniques, ethics, and vision
- b. Engage in discussion of methodological and practical intersections and points of departure within the approaches used by University of Nairobi and University of North Carolina researchers and across disciplines.
- c. Provide UNC students with a unique service learning experience in East Africa.
- d. Engage in a trans-national and trans-cultural dialogue about oral history and oral literature methodologies and techniques.
- e. Train and inspire future oral historians and oral literature scholars
- f. Explore varying uses and meanings of oral history performance in different cultural settings
- g. Further cement and encourage an exciting collaborative relationship between the Universities of Nairobi and North Carolina and their respective students and professors.
- h. Provide introduction to rural issues, research sites, and normative practice by University of Nairobi oral literature research teams
- i. Engage assets-based approach to development per Gibson-Graham, *Post-Capitalist Politics*, Slim and Thompson, and Kristof
- j. Engage in collaborative literary, historical, and political research review of contemporary Kenya, specifying oral history sites
- k. Develop research protocol in collaboration with U Nairobi teams
- l. Conduct original oral history/oral literature research in Kenyan field sites.

The program goals will be met by two academic courses, oral history fieldwork, homestays, and educational field visits. The courses are (1) Oral History in Practice and Performance, taught by Della Pollock and David Cline (2) Contemporary Africa: Culture, History, and Challenges of Kenya taught by Peter Wasamba. The second course will include a major focus on Kenyan history and culture, especially recent ethnic clashes and the effects of a changing economy, in

order to provide students with the historical and cultural frameworks needed for understanding contemporary issues facing those at our field sites. Students will attend three hours of classes each morning and take on three hours of fieldwork – interviewing, translating, transcribing, and research – each afternoon.

In addition to these two courses, students will experience Kenyan culture and society through a two-week living-learning homestay with a family in Kwale or Kinango District of Coast Province; by interacting with university students; and through field visits at cultural, historical, and agricultural sites. Students will keep a journal of their observations, home stays, and conversations, and they will use that journal, along with their course readings, as the foundation for a seminar paper.

### III. ACADEMICS

Students on this program will be enrolled in the following two academic courses (three credits each):

- a. ***Oral History in Practice and Performance***  
HNRS 356, major credit in Communication Studies

*Oral history certainly can be a means for transforming both the content and the purpose of history. It can be used to change the focus of history itself, and open up new areas of inquiry; it can break down barriers between teachers and students, between generations, between educational institutions and the world outside; and in the writing of history – whether in books, or museums, or radio and film – it can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place.*

—Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*

This course has two goals: It will introduce students to the field of oral history, preparing them to conduct original fieldwork in Coast Province, Kenya, and will explore how oral historians and performers and performance scholars use oral histories and public performance as part of creating a “living history” as a means of understanding and responding to contemporary issues. This course puts oral history in conversation with oral literature and performance studies within a trans-national and trans-cultural context.

This course will require and build a wide range of skills: active listening, close reading, analytic thinking, self-awareness, and teamwork. Beyond that, it will ask students to develop responsible, respectful, and mutually productive relationships with local people and research partners. Students will work with community members in Coast Province to record and translate original oral histories pertaining to local labor work issues, ethnic clashes, and the effects of mining and agriculture on indigenous peoples. Through the gathering of oral testimonies, the students will contribute to efforts to create a record of how the working poor in Kenya are affected by and in turn affect policy.

Working with University of Nairobi teams, the students will explore the development of appropriate performance for policy development based on ideas of reflexive listening and participatory problem-solving workshops. Students will also develop a script for public reading by stakeholders (including primary interviewees and neighbor/peers as well as town/village councils, district and national policy-makers, university members, potential donor groups, NGOs, and aid programs).

Evaluation:

*Participation* 25%

Demonstrate ethical responsibility in all aspects of seminar, including culturally appropriate behavior, confidentiality, and disposition of respect towards all colleagues and field partners

Actively engage all readings in discussion and practice

Meet and exceed the highest possible standards for team research

*Fieldwork* 25%

Master and exchange techniques for interview listening

Determine and fulfill collaborative field roles

Provide digital support for recording and archiving all interviews

Maintain complete field and reading notebooks

*Performance research* 30%

1. Practice reflexive listening or “listening out loud” with seminar participants and research teams.

2. Develop and participate in forum theatre workshops with seminar participants, possibly research teams, and field partners as possible.

3. In small groups, prepare short scripts, using verbatim interview texts, showing problems and possibilities for change from grassroots perspective, for use in public readings by stakeholders.

*Final Paper* 20%

Written as a long letter to one seminar/research colleague or field partner, carefully integrating reflections on the assigned readings and field notes as relevant:



1. Develop the significance of one short portion of one interview event in precise detail and in the context of others; after 6 weeks in seminar and in the field, *what do you see/hear/feel/realize now?*

2. Define the issues and quandaries raised by the selected interview.

3. Consider how performance did and/or might illuminate those issues for *assets-based policy change at the field site. How might the “re-performance” of primary oral histories build on existing resources to contribute to understanding and mobilizing possibilities for change marked by your field partner?*

4. In conclusion, focus/develop/explicate just one question or concern that remains for you. Given the wide range of your experience (including reading, fieldwork, and performance research), *what continues to nag or bother you? What point of complexity or curiosity do you feel compelled to address?*

Suggested reading list:

- Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979).
- Dwight Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance," *The Community Performance Reader*, ed. Petra Kuppers and Gwen Robertson (2007).
- Dwight Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," *TDR: The Drama Review* 46.2 (2002): 145-156.
- Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (2009).
- D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (2005).
- Meja Mwangi *Going Down River Road* (1976); *Kill Me Quick* (2009).
- Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (2006)
- Della Pollock, *Remembering: Oral History Performance* (2005).
- Della Pollock, "Introduction" and "Memory, Remembering and Histories of Change," in *Sage Handbook of Performance Studies*, D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera, eds. (2006).
- Hugo Slim, Paul Thompson, Olivia Bennett, and Nigel Cross, *Listening for a Change: Oral Testimony and Community Development* (1994).
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child* (1987)

b. ***Contemporary Africa: Culture, History, and Challenges of Kenya***

HNRS 353 / AFRI 520, 3 credits

Instructors: Peter Wasamba, University of Nairobi

*Course overview*

Faculty members at the University of Nairobi will organize this course as a lecture series. The course is designed to provide students with a deeper understanding of contemporary Kenya: its people, culture and development challenges. Through interactions with Kenya-based scholars, University students and community leaders in the research location, the course will prepare students for their field visits in the Coastal region of Kenya.

The goal of the course will be achieved through presentations and discussions on issues related to culture, development studies, politics, gender, environment, ethnicity, HIV/AIDS and regional cooperation. These topics will be offered by a team of selected professors from the relevant units within the university of Nairobi such as: The Institute of African Studies, Gender and Anthropology, The Departments of Literature, History, Political Science and Public Administration, The Institute of Diplomacy and International Relations, The Institute of Development Studies and The School of Economics. Community resource persons will also be invited during the field visits to make presentations about language, religion, tourism and intangible heritage in their community.

a. *Suggested Readings (Revised 10-18-10)*

Allen, Tim and Allan Thomas, *Poverty and Development into the 21st Century*, Oxford University Press (2000).

Baron, R & Nick Spitzer. *Public Folklore*, (eds), Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007.

Belousov, K. *et al.* 2007. Any port in a storm: Fieldwork difficulties in dangerous and crisis-ridden settings. *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 7(2) 155–175, Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Cowen, M.P. and R. W. Shenton, *Doctrines of Development*, Routledge (2003).

Kothari, U and D. Hulme.2003. “Narratives, Stories and Tales: Understanding Poverty Dynamics through Life History.” Institute for Development \Policy Management, University of Manchester.

Makumi, Mwangiri. *Diplomacy, Documents, Methods and Practice* (Nairobi: IDIS, 2004)

Okombo, O. and J. Nandwa. 1992. *Reflections on theories and methods in oral literature*. Nairobi: Kenya Oral Literature Association.

Nyong'o A. *Regional Cooperation in Africa: Unfinished Agenda* (Nairobi: African Cooperation and Integration Academy of Sciences, 1990)

Ochieng, W. A. *Modern History of Kenya*.

Ochieng, W. A. *Themes in Kenyan History*. Nairobi, East African Educational Publishers, 1990.  
Wasamba P. “The Concept of Heroism in Samburu Moran Ethos”. *Journal of African Languages and Cultural Studies*. Vol. 21, No. 2, December 2009, 145 – 158.

Wasamba P. “Centring the De-Voiced: Rethinking Personhood in Oral Literature Field Research.” *The Nairobi Journal of Literature*, No. 6 , July 2010, 99 – 114.

Additional texts will be determined by the University of Nairobi faculty and by the program director. Students will also be assigned readings prior to the beginning of the program.

b. *Evaluation*

The evaluation for this course will be based on a series of weekly response papers, an essay examination at the end of the field visit, a field research report based on the agreed collection and documentation protocol, and an in-class presentation on their research.

c. *Field Work*

Immediately upon arrival in the fieldwork location, students will be taken on a familiarization tour to introduce them to the local administration and opinion leaders, including women and youth leaders and organizers. The visits will also introduce the students to potential artists/respondents. The actual fieldwork will entail participation in and documentation of group performances of oral poetry (mainly healing poetry and other forms of *shairi*), listening to narratives, and conducting original oral history interviews on displacement. Interviewees will

be selected by Dr. Wasamba and team leaders based on project priorities. Approximately fifty percent of interviewees will have not been previously interviewed by Dr. Wasamba's team. In order to aid with handling sensitive interview material and cross-cultural relations, interviewers will work in teams of three, two UNC students together with a Kenyan graduate student from the University of Nairobi, to record performances and testimonies, and students will also discuss these situations later in class-based reflections. Students will work in the same teams and with their homestay families to translate and transcribe the interviews. We expect that it will take approximately three hours to translate and transcribe one hour of recording, and that each team will be able to do three interviews, allowing each team member at least one chance to be the interviewer. Each student will make a presentation based on the fieldwork report.

A note on local languages and oral history: The official languages of Kenya are English and Swahili. Both languages predominate in the coast region, the native area for Swahili speakers. The students will be working with people from the Digo and Duruma ethnic groups who speak Kidigo or Kiduruma in addition to, and occasionally instead of, the official languages. However, according to Dr. Wasamba who has worked extensively in the area, most respondents prefer to communicate in English or Swahili. During their four weeks on the coast, the UNC students will receive an hour of Swahili instruction each day of their Kenyan culture class, enough to introduce basic greetings and an understanding of language structure. In the field, students will be working alongside local assistants who will act as cultural guides and language interpreters. The students will also work with members of their homestay families to translate field recordings from Swahili, Kidigo, and Kiduruma. For everyday life in Nairobi, Mombasa, and the Diani area, English will be sufficient.

## **Course Schedule and Program Structure**

### a. All Accommodations

- Week 1: Nairobi, Central YMCA Guest House, shared rooms, apartments
- Week 2: Diani, University of Nairobi Research Station Hostels (field visits)
- Week 3 & 4: Home Stay with Kenyan Families
- Week 5: Diani, University of Nairobi Research Station Hostels
- Week 6: Nairobi, Central YMCA Guest House, shared rooms, apartments

### b. Course Schedule Weeks 1 and 6: Nairobi, Kenya

Accommodations: Nairobi Central YMCA Guest House

**M-Th:** 9 am–12 noon: Oral History in Practice and Performance  
1 pm–3:30 pm: Culture, History, and Challenges of Kenya

**Fri:** Field Visits to schools, courts, museums, villages, NGOs and government agencies, farms

**Sat-Sun:** Free



c. Course Schedule

Week 1: Nairobi

Orientation to Nairobi and Kenya, including tour of Nairobi, half-day visit with Carolina for Kibera, daily lectures at University, cultural outings

Week 2-5: Kwale, Coast Province, Kenya

Accommodations: National University of Nairobi Field Station, Hostels in Diani, and home stays with families

**Mon-Fri:** 8:30–10:00 am: Culture, History, and Challenges of Kenya  
10:30 am – 12:00 pm: Oral History in Practice and Performance  
1:00 – 3:00 pm: interviewing, translating, transcribing, research  
Evenings: cultural events, performances, translation work with host families

Week 6: Nairobi

Final cultural excursions, lectures at University of Nairobi, wrap-up and evaluation.

d. Contact Hours

- Oral History: 45 academic hours, including fieldwork
- Culture, History, and Challenges of Kenya: 30 academic hours and 15 (30 actual hours) cultural excursions

#### IV. CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

Students will attend and experience a number of cultural events, museums, a two-day safari, and other events. They will get to know Kenyan students and faculty on a personal basis. In addition to experiencing the cities of Nairobi and Mombasa, they will have the relatively unique experience of living in village Kenya, staying with local families, and learning to live as they live.

#### V. PROGRAM LOGISTICS

1. *University Affiliation*

The program will be affiliated with the University of Nairobi, Department of Literature, Dr. Peter Wasamba, Chair.

2. *Student Housing*

During the first week, in Nairobi, students will stay at the Central YMCA Guesthouse on State House Road. The Guest House is in a safe part of town, features shared rooms and apartments, full dining facilities, and a swimming pool. Two to three students will share a room. The YMCA guest house is a five-minute walk to the campus library and lecture halls at the University of Nairobi and is within easy access of central Nairobi via public transport. In Kwale, students will

stay a) at the University of Nairobi field station hostel that is on a beach less than 30 minutes south of Mombasa in Diani Beach, and b) in homestays with local families in Kwale and Kinango Districts.

### *3. Student Services*

The Office for International Links and Programmes and the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi will provide orientations, as well as general support during the program. In Coast Province, local research team leaders will provide orientation and general support during this portion of the program. Students who are U.S. citizens do need visas for Kenya, and student visas are preferred, although may not be necessary. Before the program begins, we will acquire a list of physicians in all 3 cities from the U.S. Embassies and U.S. AID offices in those countries.

### *4. Classroom Space and Equipment*

In Nairobi, we will use the classroom and library facilities of the University of Nairobi. In Coast Province, we will use the classroom space at the University of Nairobi research station. Students should bring their own lap top computers. The program will provide digital field recorders.

### *5. Transportation and Communication*

Travel in Nairobi after dark will be via hired transport and with accompaniment. Travel from Nairobi to Mombasa will be via rail and from Mombasa to the field sites by hired vans with experienced drivers. Staff with vans will provide transport within Coast Province during that portion of the program.

International cell phones will work in most parts of Kenya. Phone service is readily accessible in Nairobi and there is a dedicated phone line at the research station.

The official languages in Kenya are Kiswahili and English; homestay families will speak at least one local language in addition. All classes taught by local faculty will be in English. During the four weeks on the coast, students will have one hour per class day of instruction in Kiswahili, and will be assisted in the field by local guides and translators.

### *6. Safety and Security*

The U.S. State Department currently has a Travel Warning in place for Kenya, although it highlights areas in Northeast Kenya, far from where we will be located. There has been no security concern in the Coast Region since 1997, and the University of Nairobi has conducted research in the area up to four times a year since 2002. The University of Nairobi has not encountered any incident in that time. Additionally, a tourist police unit in South Coast gives special attention to visitors. In Nairobi, the program will provide students with a safety orientation upon their arrival so that they know where to visit and what precautions to take.

### *7. Medical Care*

Prior to leaving, the program will obtain the names of doctors and clinics in Kenya, recommended by the U.S. Embassy and US AID. The program director will make contact with those physicians and clinics. The students will also be covered by medical and evacuation insurance through the UNC Study Abroad Office. Students will be advised to bring all prescription medicines with them.

#### 8. *Graduate Student Assistant*

The program will employ one graduate student assistant, who has a research interest in Africa and, if possible, travel experience in this part of the world.

#### 9. *Institutional Review Board*

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UNC is a committee established to review and approve research involving human subjects. Oral history projects at UNC are reviewed by the Behavioral IRB, which will assess and approve questions to be asked in the field. Since this project falls under the category of research, we will seek full approval of question protocols, will use consent forms written in all relevant languages, and will require all students to participate in an online training in human research ethics.

### **VI. ELIGIBILITY AND ENROLLMENT**

All UNC undergraduate students with at least sophomore status and a 3.0 or higher GPA are eligible to participate. No courses are required as prerequisites. This seminar seeks to enroll at least 10, but no more than 20, UNC undergraduate students.

### **VII. FACULTY DIRECTORS**

Peter Wasamba, Della Pollock, and David Cline. See Program Overview, above.