

TOPELIA AFRICAN STUDIES SEMINAR SERIES

• TUULIKKI PIETILÄ and JEREMY GOULD •

Topelia is a complex on the University of Helsinki downtown campus that houses most of the 'non-European' research areas in the Humanities and Social Sciences faculties. The idea for an African Studies Seminar was hatched in the spring of 2007. The initiative was prompted by the news that a lecturer's position in African Studies at the Institute for Asian and African Studies, one of the Topelia departments, was to be scrapped. Reflecting on the declining institutional situation against the relatively high number of researchers working on Africa, we felt that there was a need to strengthen the network of Africanists. One step in this direction was to establish a forum where Africanists can meet regularly and discuss their on-going work.

The first seminar series was planned and organized by Jeremy Gould (Development Studies) and Tuulikki Pietilä (Social and Cultural Anthropology). The seminar met five times during the spring term of 2008. Each session showcased presentations of their latest work by two researchers, followed by a short commentary by a discussant and open discussion. The meetings were arranged thematically to cover the following topics: The music industry in Africa; Traditional and modern politics; White Africa; People vs. AIDS; and Aid, partnerships and Africa. Combining two presentations in the same session brought out a diversity of results and perspectives, as sometimes researchers with a similar topic had a very divergent theoretical approach to it, while at other times the two presentations complemented and added to each other's views in unexpected ways.

Each seminar attracted a good audience, composed of researchers, students and some journalists. Most sessions ran out of time as the general discussions became quite lively. This will be taken into account in forthcoming seminars, in which more time will be reserved for public discussion—the seminar series continues with monthly meetings to which everyone is warmly welcome. For the programme see:

<http://blogs.helsinki.fi/africanstudiesseminar/programme>

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