

<b>Institution:</b>	<b>GOLDSMITHS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b>	<b>30: HISTORY</b>
<b>Title of case study:</b>	<b>Death in Africa: A History c.1800 to Present Day</b>
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)	

This project has had significant reach beyond the academy, through two main avenues. Through sustained relationships with NGOs, faith-based organisations and other members of civil society involved in the management of death in South Africa, the project has aided in the professional development of African staff, and shaped training and facilitation on responses to death, grief and loss. And, through public engagement with its research on the funeral industry – including very broad dissemination of the documentary film ‘The Price of Death’— the project has engaged local South African audiences in debates around the cost of death and the commodification of funerals.

<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)
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Dr Rebekah Lee has been a member of Goldsmiths’ Department of History since 2003, when she was appointed Lecturer. She became Senior Lecturer in 2010. *Death in Africa* was a long and detailed collaboration funded by the AHRC (01/10/06 – 28/02/12) with total funding of £323K, of which £175K was held at Goldsmiths.<sup>[1]</sup> Professor Megan Vaughan of the University of Cambridge’s History Dept was the principal investigator and Lee the co-investigator. The project sought to understand the changing meaning and management of death in Africa. Although death has long been a concern of social anthropological and religious scholarship on Africa, comparatively little attention has been paid to the *history* of death practices and beliefs in Africa in relation to forces such as demographic change, colonial and post-colonial interventions, globalization, urbanization and technological innovation. The aim was thus to produce a dynamic historical account of death in East, Central and Southern Africa from c1800 to the present day, to locate this account in a comparative perspective, and to generate new approaches to the subject. The collaboration further aimed to provide a much-needed historical context through which the current HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa could be viewed.

The project group, which included two postdoctoral fellows, conducted fieldwork in South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, Kenya and Tanzania. Our research outputs are listed on the project website: [www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/deathin africa](http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/deathin africa). They include one co-authored monograph (2013), eight articles in internationally recognized and peer-reviewed journals, a documentary film (2012), a chapter in an edited volume (2011), two international conferences (2007 and 2010), and two journal Special Issues— on Death in African History in the *Journal of African History* (Nov 2008)<sup>[2]</sup> and on Death and Loss in Africa in *African Studies* (2012),<sup>[3]</sup> both distinguished and peer-reviewed publications.

Lee’s research on this project has focused on exploring the transformation of perceptions and practices around death in South Africa in the transitional and post-apartheid periods. In the context of a devastating HIV/AIDS epidemic, rapid political and social transformation, and the impact of globalization and its attendant commoditizing culture, her research has sought to understand changing ‘ways of dying’ in South Africa and to locate contemporary dynamics within older, historical processes of contestation and change. Lee has brought a sustained interdisciplinarity to her research, combining oral historical approaches, ethnographic observation, and archival research alongside a critical historicisation of the large corpus of anthropological and historical material on southern African approaches to death. Lee’s research has introduced new categories of analysis (such as funeral entrepreneurs) and new theoretical paradigms (such as mobility), which have reshaped thinking about death and contributed to analyses of social and economic change in urban South Africa and beyond.

A primary concern of Lee’s research has been to understand the changing moral economy of death in South Africa. Lee has shown that the ‘death business’ is a key development in the landscape of urban informality in South Africa, with township undertakers emerging over the last two decades as central mediators and cultural innovators in a newly commoditized mourning process. In one published paper (2011)<sup>[4]</sup> Lee examines the ways in which the growing mobility of the African, and

**Impact case study (REF3b): GOLDSMITHS - Lee**

specifically Xhosa-speaking, population from the mid-twentieth century has affected the changing management of death, particularly across what has been called the 'rural-urban' nexus. Lee shows that in the transitional and post-apartheid periods funeral entrepreneurs introduced key technological and bodily interventions, such as embalming and exhumations, which have encouraged the movement of both mourners and the deceased over long distances, and contributed to new subjectivities and a re-imagining of relations between the living and the dead. In a second published paper (2012)<sup>[5]</sup> Lee explores how both mourners and funeral entrepreneurs have responded to, and understood, the particular problems presented by death 'on the road'. She analyses narratives of fatal road accidents en route to funerals - called 'twice deaths' - and shows how blame for these accidents has tended to be spread across diverse material, physical, moral and spiritual registers. Lee describes mourners' attempt to mitigate the spiritual risks associated with these more mobile ways of dying, principally through an emergent language of 'talking to' the dead — a banal type of conversing with the body of the deceased occurring at mortuaries, road accident sites and en route to interment. Lee considers whether this form of communication represents a distinct departure from, or a continuation of, older forms of mediating with the dead.

In addition to writing two articles on the funeral economy in South Africa, Lee has directed a documentary entitled 'The Price of Death'.<sup>[6]</sup> The 30-minute film presents the intertwined stories of Dikela Funerals, a family-run funeral parlour based in a sprawling township in Cape Town, and of the grieving family who hire Dikela to organize a funeral in a remote town 1000kms away.

<b>3. References to the research</b> (indicative maximum of six references)
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**Evidence of the quality of the underpinning research:** All of the publications 2-5 below have appeared in highly selective international peer-reviewed journals.

1. Arts Humanities Research Council Major Research Project (119224/1): Death in Africa: A History c.1800 to present'. (1 Oct 2006- 28 Feb 2012). P.I. Megan Vaughan and C.I. Rebekah Lee. £322,998 total (£175,449 to Goldsmiths)
2. R. Lee and M. Vaughan. 2008. 'Death and dying in the history of Africa since 1800', Special Issue on Death in African History, *Journal of African History* 49 (3): 341-59.  
DOI: 10.1017/S0021853708003952 [A hard copy is available on request from Goldsmiths Research Office]  
  
[Note: The Special Issue is based on papers given at an international conference co-organised in 2007 by Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan].
3. R. Lee and M. Vaughan (guest eds). 2012. Special Issue on Death and Loss in Africa, *African Studies* 71 (2): ISSN 0002-0184 (Print), 1469-2872 (Online). [Submitted as REF output and available in REF2; hard copy available on request from Goldsmiths Research Office]
4. Lee R (2011) 'Death "on the move": funerals, entrepreneurs and the rural-urban nexus in South Africa'. *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute* 81 (2): 226-47.  
DOI: 10.1017/S0001972011000040 [Submitted as REF output and available in REF2]
5. Lee R (2012) 'Death in slow motion: Funerals, ritual practice and road danger in South Africa', *African Studies* 71 (2): 195-211.  
DOI: 10.1080/00020184.2012.702965 [Submitted as REF output and available in REF2]
6. Lee R (2012) '[The Price of Death](#)' (film; password: 'death'). This won the Richard Werbner Award for Visual Ethnography at the Royal Anthropological Institute's International Festival of Ethnographic Film, 13-16 June 2013

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

Lee co-organised two international conferences – 5/6 May 2007 at the University of Cambridge and 8-10 April 2010 at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa - that brought together researchers working in the field of 'death studies' with representatives working on the 'front-line' of death and its management in African society from the health care sector, NGOs and religious organisations. Participating organisations included Educo Africa, Children's Institute, Children's HIV/AIDS Network, African Mental Health Foundation, Masakhane Muslim Community, and Muizenberg Community Church.<sup>[7]</sup> These events generated engagement between academia and civil society, which fostered the transfer of ideas on how Africans have understood and coped with the dying process. Both conferences provided a useful historical perspective on the current AIDS crisis by situating the AIDS epidemic in a much longer history of African responses to death and dying.<sup>[8][9][10]</sup>

Lee's sustained relationships with some of these cross-sector colleagues has enhanced their professional development as well as improved their organisations' programme delivery. Lee's focused research on South African NGO Educo Africa's Living and Dying Workshop (a programme which aims to facilitate an understanding and acceptance of death and the dying process, and to support carers and volunteers who work in the HIV/AIDS sector) — and in particular the collection of interviews of former participants of this workshop— have been fed back to Educo to improve this programme's provision and reach.<sup>[10]</sup> The *Death in Africa* project has aided the professional development of NGO staff such as the Sisonke Programme Manager of Educo Africa and the Leader of Church Partnerships at The Warehouse (a faith based organisation), through exposure to and participation in the project's academic research and conferences, and through dialogue with the project's investigators on the management of death, grief and loss in South Africa.<sup>[9][10]</sup>

Lee's research on the commoditization of death and the funeral industry in South Africa was presented in a public talk at Goldsmiths in February 2013, which was followed by a question and answer session led by Henry Bonsu, a noted broadcast journalist and co-founder of the radio station Colourful Radio. In March 2013 she was invited to discuss her documentary film on the funeral business in South Africa with Henry Bonsu on the television programme 'Shoot the Messenger' (Vox Africa station, part of Sky television).<sup>[11]</sup> Goldsmiths hosted an online screening of her documentary film and a webchat with the director in May 2013. Rebekah Lee's blog on the Huffington Post is another media outlet through which her research on death in South Africa is conveyed to the general public.<sup>[12]</sup>

Lee's documentary film 'The Price of Death' has received the Richard Werbner Prize for Visual Ethnography at the Royal Anthropological Institute's International Festival of Ethnographic Film (June 2013). The film was screened in South Africa, at the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University, in June 2013. The film was the main feature at a community event in Khayelitsha township, Cape Town, in June 2013 and members of the local community were invited to attend. The screening was organised alongside a panel discussion which included a local pastor, the programme director of a local HIV/AIDS advocacy organisation (Yabonga), and two African undertakers. The film generated heated debate and discussion between members of the public and the undertakers, largely around how best to manage the unscrupulous practices of some township funeral parlours, which were seen as taking advantage of widespread mortality and increased consumerism. Both audience members and panellists agreed that the film deserved further community screenings, as the issue of the spiralling cost of funerals is a pressing concern for most township residents.<sup>[9]</sup>

The film has been shown to NGOs such as Educo Africa and The Warehouse, and has become part of their outreach activities, in particular to augment staff training and facilitation around issues such as grief and loss.<sup>[9][10]</sup> The co-founder of the US-based organisation *The School of Lost Borders*, has brought a copy of the film back with her to the United States to increase awareness of the South African context of death and dying, and as preparation for the organisation's workshops and courses on death and the dying process.<sup>[13]</sup>

**Impact case study (REF3b): GOLDSMITHS - Lee**

Lee is the coordinator and curator of an online public archive of photographic images and video content related to death and loss in Africa.<sup>[7]</sup> The website includes several photo-essays and short videos on various themes related to funerals, death practices and mourning rites in the regions covered by the *Death in Africa* project. This site has enabled the public and research community to engage visually with issues of death, loss, mourning, memory and heritage.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

7. Online visual archive and death project conferences: [www.gold.ac.uk/deathinafrica](http://www.gold.ac.uk/deathinafrica)
8. Corroboration available on request from Senior Lecturer at Primary Health Care Directorate, Groote Schuur Hospital, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town [*contact details given separately*]
9. Corroboration available on request from Leader of Church Partnerships at The Warehouse NGO and formerly pastor of Muizenberg Community Church, Cape Town [*contact details given separately*]
10. Corroboration available on request from Sisonke Programme Manager at Educo Africa NGO [*contact details given separately*]
11. Corroboration can be given on request by the co-founder of Colourful Radio [*contact details provided separately*]
12. Huffington Post [Blog](#)
13. Corroboration available on request from Co-founder of School of Lost Borders and currently Director of the Practice of Living and Dying, Lost Borders International and Lost Borders Press Town [*contact details given separately*]