

## Call for application

### Reading Autobiographical Sources: Potentials and Challenges in Human and Social Sciences

by Dr. Roberto ZAUGG

*Faculty of Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, 8th of November, 2017*



**On the 8th of November**, the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA) and the Faculty of Arts of the Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife are pleased to organise the seminar «**Reading Autobiographical Sources: Potentials and Challenges in Human Social Sciences**». It will take place at the **Faculty of Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Humanity Block II, Board Room 402**. The seminar will begin at **10 am**, and will last approximately 4 hours plus a lunch break. It will be supervised by **Dr. Roberto Zaugg**, Historian and Lecturer at the University of Lausanne (Switzerland). Dr. Zaugg has worked extensively on the **history of migrations**, more particularly between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. This interest has led him to research the history of judicial institutions, Mediterranean merchant diasporas, diplomatic relations as well as the changing nature of citizenship across West Africa and Europe. More recently, he has engaged into a biographical project focusing on



Johann Peter Oettinger (1682-1696), a barber-surgeon travelling across the Holy Roman Empire, the Dutch Republic and in trans-Atlantic slave ships.

Registration for this seminar is **compulsory**. It is open to **postgraduate students** (Masters and Phd students) and **early careers scholars** (Phd holders).

Interested participants are requested to send an email at [info@ifra-nigeria.org](mailto:info@ifra-nigeria.org) for registration and copy it to **Dr. Titus Olusegun** ([segungeneral@gmail.com](mailto:segungeneral@gmail.com)). Due to spatial constraints, we will register **only 20 participants**. You are therefore encouraged to register as soon as possible and **not later than Wednesday, 1st of November, 2017**.

Please note that participants who are not yet IFRA fellows **will be requested to register in the fellowship programme** by filling the form [available here](#) and send it to [info@ifra-nigeria.org](mailto:info@ifra-nigeria.org).

A **series of readings** is included (see below). The texts will be circulated once the registration process is complete and guidelines will be given to the participants.

## About the seminar

What can we learn about the Atlantic slave trade from the journal of slave merchant? What do the memoirs of a humble French artisan teach us about eighteenth-century France? How are religious identities reflected in diaries? Are authors sincere when they write about themselves or do they tend to fabricate manipulated images? Over the last decades, historical research has devoted much attention to so-called 'autobiographical texts' (also called 'first-person writings' or 'ego-documents'). On the one hand, historians have used them as sources to get an actor-centred access to the past of human societies.

On the other, they have debated over their trustworthiness, asking if we can actually consider them as a genuine expression of individual experience or if we should rather regard them as narrative constructions made up by assembling more or less standardized discourses. The problems that historians face when dealing with autobiographical texts such as memoirs, diaries or travel accounts raise questions which are relevant to social and human sciences in general. How can we grasp individual experience and to what extent can (and should) scholars integrate such subjective data in their analyses? What are autobiographical sources and what critical methods can we use when investigating them? Focusing on a historical perspective, this workshop will examine scholarly potentials and methodological challenges associated with such texts and provide analytical tools to examine them. To this end, it will include discussions based on methodological/theoretical articles as well as practical exercises with autobiographical sources.



### **Readings:**

#### Methodology:

- 1) Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography. A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Minneapolis 2010, chapter 1.

#### Sources:

- 2) John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, London 1666, (short excerpt).
- 3) Antera Duke, *The Diary of Antera Duke. An Eighteenth-Century African Slave Trader*, edited by Stephen D. Behrendt, A.J.H. Latham and David Northrup, Oxford 2010, (short excerpt).
- 4) Jacques-Louis Ménétra, *Journal of My Life*, New York 1986, (short excerpt).