**Mandela Round Table: Nelson Mandela and the Legacies of Liberation**

24 April 2017, 2pm - 5pm

Room T102, School of Oriental and African Studies, 21-22 Russell Square

Speakers: Thula Simpson (University of Pretoria); Elizabeth Williams (Goldsmiths); Timothy Gibbs (UCL); Robert Skinner (University of Bristol)

Discussant: Martin Plaut (Institute of Commonwealth Studies)

**ABSTRACTS**

**Decoding the Pimpernel: locating the evasive Mandela in international context (Rob Skinner, University of Bristol)**

This paper will examine two unconnected episodes in the Mandela life story - first, the period in the early 1960s during which, travelling as David Motsamayi, Mandela toured Africa and visited Britain; and second, the memorialisation of and absent Mandela in Britain during the 1980s. In both cases, Mandela's own life and personal biography was interwoven with those of disparate individual, national and global historical narratives. Unravelling these narratives, and making sense of the international 'meanings of Mandela' is a necessary task if we are to make sense of the historical contexts that shaped his life - and to set that life within the broader context of South African and global history.

**Nelson Mandela and the Genesis of the ANC's Armed Struggle: Notes on Method (Thula Simpson, University of Pretoria)**

In recent years the circumstances surrounding the ANC’s turn to armed struggle have been the subject of much controversy amongst historians. The debate has been fuelled by scholars determined to overturn what they see as years of historical fabrication propagated by South Africa’s ruling party. Particular attention has been paid to the period leading to the formation of what became the ANC’s military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). The literature has been enlivened by the fact that Nelson Mandela is the ANC leader who stands accused of having distorted the history of the struggle and his role in it. The charges are that he lied repeatedly during his lifetime in denying that he had ever been a South African Communist Party (SACP) member; that he was dishonest in not revealing that it was the SACP rather than the ANC that was responsible for the formation of MK; that he committed an act of gross insubordination – violating an ANC policy directive in the process – in  proceeding from the formation to the launch of MK; and that as part of this insubordination he effectively marginalised ANC president Albert Luthuli, who remained steadfastly opposed till his death to the use of violence as a method in the South African struggle. These are serious charges against Mandela’s integrity both as an activist and as a chronicler of events. In each case, the charge is based either on newly available archival material or on fresh interpretations of existing sources. This presentation will discuss all the charges, weighing the arguments of the protagonists against the evidence they have been able to provide in support of them.

**Mandela & Matanzima attorneys-at-law: lawyers, the legal field and liberation (Tim Gibbs, University College London)**

As elsewhere in the colonial world, South Africa’s legal profession produced many of the leading anti-apartheid politicians – famously Mandela and Tambo, attorneys-at-law (est. 1952). Mid-century Johannesburg was the hub of the interlocking networks of lawyers-cum-politicians who would play a leading role in “the struggle”. Many histories also stress the importance of the object of “the law” in opposing apartheid. These narratives lie at the heart of Mandela’s Long Walk to Freedom, as well as accounts such as George Bizos’ Odyssey to Freedom: a memoir by the world renowned human rights advocate, friend and lawyer to Nelson Mandela. Yet the majority of black lawyers who have sat in the post-apartheid constitutional court took another route, receiving their education and early professional training in the Bantustans. In the mid-1970s there were more African lawyers in the Transkei Bantustan – ruthlessly ruled by Kaiser Matanzima, a trained attorney who had once offered a legal partnership in Umtata to his close kinsman, Mandela – than Durban and Johannesburg combined. How do the professional and political trajectories of lawyers inside the Bantustans mesh with the better known struggle historiography? And what might be the broader significance of these narratives at a time when the judiciary and legal profession has become a battleground for controversies concerning professional formation, elite accountability and the “rule of law”?

**"Pulling the branch of a tree"  "troublemaker" the legacies of "inconvenient truths" - Nelson Mandela, Bernie Grant & Raising the Black Voice in Britain (Elizabeth Williams, Goldsmiths, University of London)**

While he lived and in death Nelson Mandela was admired and eulogised arguably more than any other man of his generation. Bernard Grant never reached the same level of adulation as Mandela and in some quarters he was pilloried, a hate figure because of his stance and campaigns he undertook to represent the grievances of his constituents. Unlike Mandela before he died, Grant was never able to gain acceptance in the mainstream white ruling establishment and translate his pariah-hood into the symbolic "sainthood" of Mandela.

The lives of Mandela & Grant were forged and shaped by the legacies of British economic, political, cultural and social imperialism. Moreover, their lives and subsequent voice of uncompromising justice and the reaction to their polemic demonstrate the way in which historically the Black male voice and presence in British society has been viewed and refracted through negative and pejorative opinion and analyses. Mandela and Grant may seem polar opposites in the popular imagination but to the ruling classes at different points in their lives they represented trouble with a capital 'T' attempting to challenge how business was conducted and the way society worked with its entrenched inequalities. The lack of Black British representation and power within the agencies of the state, meant strident Black voices such as Mandela and Grant "calling out" and shining a critical light on the powerful and their governance (which fell short in the service of sections of the population), did not endear to the powerful.

This paper a harbinger of a continuing project, will look at the lives of these two men, examining the parallels and how their lives epitomised the way in which Black lives and voices in British public life continue to be shaped by forces within the society determined to maintain the status quo and to nullify the inconvenient truths of the lived Black experience within British society.