

63rd KUASS (Kyoto University African Studies Seminar)

Date and Time: February 7, 2017 (Thu) 15:00-16:30

Venue: #318, Inamori Memorial Foundation Building (3rd floor), Kyoto University

Title:

Does the study of individuals and their lives make a fruitful contribution to other fields of interest in African Studies?

Speaker: Dr. Jan Patrick Heiss (Department of Social Anthropology and Empirical Cultural Studies, University of Zurich)

Abstract:

As society and culture are in the centre of our interest, our focus of attention shifts away from individuals. This leaves a void exactly where the individual is. In my research, I try to explore this void, to ethnographically describe individuals and to raise the question of how to capture individuals theoretically. All this is very much in the beginning. However, the question arises what such an approach has to offer to other approaches and themes in African studies. I try to argue that a detailed and extended focus on individuals allows us to collect data which will otherwise go unnoticed and yet fruitfully contribute to our understanding of social phenomena in Africa. I try to exemplify this with respect to the study of decision-making and to the study of the interaction between Islam and the economic in Niger. In doing this, I will draw on my fieldwork in rural Niger which I carried out between 2006 and 2011 and which focused on the daily life of a Hausa peasant.