

The Centre for Contemporary Islam (Department of Religious Studies)
The Centre for African Studies (UCT)
The Tombouctou Manuscripts Project (Huma, UCT)

Religious Leaders and Knowledge Transmission in Central Africa: Muslim '*Ulama*' in the Intellectual History of Chad

Project Leader: Dr. Andrea Brigaglia

Funded by an Oppenheimer Africa Project award, the present project wants to investigate the structural connection between Muslim religious authority and practices of knowledge transmission in Africa. Through the lenses of social and intellectual history, the project will look at the activities of Chadian Muslim religious leaders as those of intellectuals who operate within a religiously sanctioned universe of ideas for the transmission and the on-going reconfiguration of a cumulative corpus of doctrines and practices.

The project will span the disciplinary boundaries of religious studies, social history and manuscript studies, working with the team of researchers of the Tombouctou Manuscripts Project (HUMA) as well as with Prof. Mohammed Saleh Ayoub, a historian of Islam in Ouaddaï (eastern Chad) and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Ndjamena.

A special focus will be given to discussing the manuscript resources of the town of Abéché, which constitute one of the largest reservoirs of documentation for the social, political and intellectual history of Eastern Chad and Western Sudan, but which remain largely unexplored. Many sources that could help reconstruct the social, political and intellectual history of Abéché in the late nineteenth and twentieth century are preserved in the form of manuscripts or locally printed editions by families of scholars and descendants of the political elites (Sultans and the aristocracy). Content of the manuscripts include poetry, legal treatises, *fatwas* (answers to specific legal questions), Sufi books, biographical notes, correspondence etc.

The project will commence in conjunction with a four day intensive workshop, taking place in Cape Town in November 2014 (dates to be confirmed).