

It is with the deepest sadness that the ASC announces the death of Professor Gerti Hesseling on 21 March 2009.

GERTI HESSELING

1946 - 2009



Gerti Hesseling joined the African Studies Centre (ASC) on 1st November 1979 as a young researcher on constitutional jurisprudence. She became a member of the newly created Department of Political and Historical Studies and began to do research in Senegal, a country that would hold a special place in her heart for the rest of her life. In 1982 she was awarded her PhD at the University of Amsterdam on Senegalese constitutional law and political developments in the country.



Gerti during fieldwork in the Casamance, Senegal, 1980

She did not, however, limit her research to Senegal but extended it to cover all of the Sahel and thematically included macro-level research on constitutional affairs and, at micro level, issues such as land rights. In the early 1990s she was seconded to the *Club du Sahel* where she coordinated a large multidisciplinary research project looking into the relationship between land rights and sustainable development, gaining the respect of many of her African colleagues during this period.



Gerti during the celebration of the installment of the Curatorium, September 1997

The most important period in Gerti's career for both her and the ASC was her time as Director of the African Studies Centre from 1996 to 2004. Under her inspiring leadership, a major reorganization was undertaken introducing a whole new management structure with, for the first time, a director with full responsibility for the daily running of the institute, a Curatorium, a Scientific Advisory Board, a general as well as a scientific management team, and research theme groups. She also improved the institute's internal management system and introduced formal job descriptions and performance appraisals. It was thanks to Gerti's enthusiasm and skill that the whole process was so comparatively effortless and the new Curatorium was installed in May 1997 amid much celebration.

During Gerti's period as director, the ASC's ties with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs were strengthened and the Centre adopted a more prominent position in the field of African Studies in general. To mark the ASC's 50th anniversary, a day of festivities was organized in Amsterdam for a wide group of academics, policy makers, Africans living in the Netherlands and people with an affinity for the continent to launch a new research theme on Africans in the Netherlands. Gerti's success at the ASC resulted in her being invited to chair the prestigious RAWOO, an advisory body that oversaw Dutch scientific research in developing countries, a position she held from September 2003 until December 2005.

Gerti stepped down as Director of the ASC in 2004 so that she could devote more time to the academic work she so enjoyed. Recognition of her academic achievements came with her appointment as professor extraordinary to the Koningsberger Chair of Peace Building and the Rule of Law at Utrecht University in 2004. It was the icing on the cake for Gerti. And up until the time of her death, she was still busy finishing off a number of articles for publication.

Gerti devoted a large part of her life to the African Studies Centre, and to African Studies, and will be greatly missed in Dutch academia and by the many whose (academic) lives she touched. Her colleagues past and present at the ASC will never forget her enthusiasm, sense of social justice, deep interest in both her subject and the people she met and her cheerful and outgoing personality. And many of the ASC's visiting fellows will remember the warm hospitality that Gerti and her husband Gerard extended to them at their home in Amsterdam.