

African Critical Inquiry Programme Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards

Founded in 2012, the African Critical Inquiry Programme (ACIP) is a partnership between the Centre for Humanities Research at University of the Western Cape in Cape Town and the Laney Graduate School of Emory University in Atlanta. Supported by donations to the [Ivan Karp and Corinne Kratz Fund](#), the ACIP fosters thinking and working across public cultural institutions, across disciplines and fields, and across generations. It seeks to advance inquiry and debate about the roles and practice of public culture, public cultural institutions and public scholarship in shaping identities and society in Africa through an annual ACIP workshop and through the Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards, which support African doctoral students in the humanities and humanistic social sciences enrolled at South African universities. For further information, see <http://www.gs.emory.edu/about/special/acip.html> and <https://www.facebook.com/ivan.karp.corinne.kratz.fund>.

Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards

Each year, ACIP's Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards support African students (regardless of citizenship) who are registered in PhD programs in the humanities and humanistic social sciences in South Africa and conducting dissertation research on relevant topics. Grant amounts vary depending on research plans, with a maximum award of ZAR 40,000. Awards support doctoral research projects focused on topics such as institutions of public culture, museums and exhibitions, forms and practices of public scholarship, culture and communication, and the theories, histories and systems of thought that shape and illuminate public culture and public scholarship. Projects may work with a range of methodologies, including research in archives and collections, fieldwork, interviews, surveys, and quantitative data collection. The following student scholars' research has been supported by Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards:

2018

Mary Mbewe is a Zambian student pursuing her PhD in the Department of History at the University of the Western Cape. Support from ACIP's Ivan Karp Award will allow her to do research in London, Lusaka, and Mbala, Zambia for her dissertation project, *From Chisungu to the Museum: a Historical Ethnography of the Images, Objects, and Anthropological Texts of the Chisungu Female Initiation Ceremony in the Moto Moto Museum in Zambia, 1931 to 2016*.



Project Abstract: Mbewe's project examines and reconstructs the histories of the photographs and objects of the *chisungu* female initiation ceremony of northern Zambia that were collected between 1931 and 1934 by the British anthropologist Audrey Richards and by the French Canadian missionary ethnographer Jean Jacques Corbeil in the 1950s. It tracks

these items through the key moments of collection, circulation, archiving, accession, display and consumption, simultaneously seeing these photographs and things as objects, as records, and as containers of histories. This project is therefore a history of a hitherto unexplored instance of interrelated ethnographic research and a study of ethnography and histories of collection on a particular subject. It involves a renewed look at the work of an anthropologist and a missionary at different periods, each culminating in renowned publications, and whose photographs and objects have become iconic representations of the *chisungu* ceremony at the [Moto Moto Museum](#) in Zambia. This research project is conceived not only as a biographic study of these collections and histories, but also as a study of processes of meaning-making in a museum, which had its origins in particular colonial contexts and was formalised as a national museum in the post-colonial period. The research engages with how the photographs and objects have come to be constituted by the histories, museum and archival processes around them. It will contribute to debates around representing African culture, anthropological photographs, ethnographic objects, and museums in Africa, and more generally to museum studies, visual history, material culture studies, and the history of anthropology.

2017

Eric Sunu Doe is a Ghanaian student studying Applied Ethnomusicology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Music Department. His dissertation project will focus on *Ghanaian Palmwine Music: Revitalizing a Tradition and Maintaining a Community*.



Project Abstract: Since the 1980s the preservation of intangible cultural heritage has attracted the attention of policy makers, cultural workers, and scholars because of the rapid rate at which cultural practices and traditions are being lost, abandoned, or radically transformed. UNESCO's policies on safeguarding cultural heritage – the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) and the Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) – are recent strategies in protecting intangible cultural heritage. In Ghana one performance

tradition on the brink of fading is palmwine music, which emerged along the coast of West Africa in the 20th century as a result of a fusion of guitar traditions and indigenous musical resources. A unique and rich musical tradition, it has been declining in practice and its current status and recent history have been less studied by scholars. This project on *Ghanaian Palmwine Music: Revitalizing a Tradition and Maintaining a Community* proposes a comprehensive study of the tradition of palmwine music, exploring strategies for its revitalization and sustenance. Framed within the context of applied ethnomusicology and through the theoretical lens of resilience, adaptive management, and music revitalization, the research will explore how revitalization of palmwine music which is developed in communal musical expressions can enhance its sustenance in the midst of societal change within contemporary contexts. Through interviews and participant observation in performance circles and workshops, Sunu Doe will document the performance praxis of palmwine music in Ghana (in Accra and Kumasi) and investigate whether/how the music currently resonates with the

community, and how it might form the basis of a contemporary local music rooted in local experiences and histories. The project will bring fresh perspectives to ways in which community engagement facilitates revitalization and sustenance of hybrid traditions in an African context.

See here for a [brief overview of palmwine music](#) and here for an [example performed by Koo Nimo Palmwine Quartet](#).

2016

Candice Jansen is a South African student pursuing her PhD in History of Art at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her dissertation project is *BINNEGOED: Coloured and South African Photography*.



Project Abstract: Jansen's project, *BINNEGOED*, argues that the conceptual and historical parallels between the medium of photography and the identity of 'coloured' can open renewed ways of engaging colouredness and theorising visual histories in South Africa. Naming her project with an Afrikaans word for innards or intestines, Jansen considers the racial identity of coloured through the history of South African photography. She takes up W.J.T. Mitchell's provocation -- 'what if race was a medium?' -- by using the medium of photography to see into the ways in which word, image and biography mask deeper historical realities of race. What happened to the intellectual project on colouredness and what does any of this have to do with photography? *BINNEGOED* locates and examines coloured moments in the history of photography to analyse the ways in which race and image intersect over time and to propose alternative ways of thinking coloured identity today. Thus, Jansen will use colonial photographs to locate forgotten identities of the 19th century that eventually became assimilated into coloured categorisation. She will read the history of coloured representation in contemporary photography through a particular focus on coloured prison culture. Finally, she will study colouredness as creative practice through the lives of coloured photographers and coloured life writing. Drawing on interviews as well as archives, collections and libraries in South Africa, Sweden and the United States, Jansen will consider the works and lives of photographers Cedric Nunn, Ernest Cole, George Hallett, David Lurie, Mikhael Subotkzy, Gordon Clark, Luke Daniel, Pieter Hugo, and Araminta da Clermont, as well as unidentified 19th century photographers whose work was archived. In this way her project will help reimagine the entwined histories of race and visibility in South Africa.

Nothemba Kate Luckett is a South African student studying Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her dissertation research is on *Hope and Utopianism in the Everyday Lives of Metalworkers and their Communities*.



Project Abstract: The National Union of Metalworkers South Africa (NUMSA) resolved to build a political alternative in opposition to the status quo in 2013 in the context of the [Marikana Massacre](#) and changing political landscape in South Africa.¹ Workers taking action and refusing to “tolerate a dog’s life” (Bloch, 1986) is not something new in South Africa. The struggles of workers, communities and youth were critical in bringing down the apartheid regime and continue to be at the forefront of pushing against and beyond an oppressive and exploitative society. Processes of hope and utopianism do not only happen during the big moments of struggle or through overtly political practices, but are part of everyday lives, concretely manifesting in multiple ways that in turn shape the social world. Lockett’s

dissertation, *Hope and Utopianism in the Everyday Lives of Metalworkers and their Communities*, contends that utopian thinking is part of being human: its ontological basis is that the material world is in process. Hope as a political necessity galvanizes action because it is more than the critique of what is but an imagining beyond the present. Through participant observation, oral histories, and research with documents and local archives, Lockett will explore the everyday lives of metalworkers, and the communities in which they live, through the lens of hope and utopianism and the concrete manifestations thereof. She will further explore the ambiguities and contradictions of utopianism and practices of co-option of hope into the status quo. Her research will focus on Eskom workers and communities in Lephalale, Limpopo, a site that contains many of the contradictions of post-apartheid South Africa. The topic of hope is of particular importance in the current context of alienation and disaffection of millions of working class South Africans, a context that is simultaneously a period of renewed searching, questioning and dreaming.

¹. The South African Police Service opened fire on a crowd of striking mineworkers at Marikana in August 2012, resulting in 34 dead, 78 wounded, and hundreds arrested.

Ajumeze Henry Obi is a Nigerian scholar doing his PhD in African Studies and Theatre Studies through the University of Cape Town. His project examines *The ‘Theatre of the Bloody Metaphor’: The Biopolitics of Violence in the Theatre of the Niger Delta*.



Project Abstract: Since the discovery of huge deposits of crude oil in Nigeria in 1956, the creeks of the Niger Delta have metamorphosed into a volatile space of tripartite conflicts between armed youths of the region and the Nigerian military forces in collaboration with multinational oil corporations. The local agitation against ecological pollution and degradation in the region is not only indicative of the collective struggle for survival of the oil-producing communities, but also of environmental insecurity in the region. *The ‘Theatre of the Bloody Metaphor’: The Biopolitics of Violence in the Theatre of the Niger Delta* will explore the subjectivities of these bio-political conflicts by

examining how the insurgency is culturally represented in six Nigerian plays. It considers how this representation captures the material contribution of non-human nature in the history of the resistance, from pre-oil to oil-modernity in the region. Analysis will focus on works by J. P. Clark-Bekeremo, W. Soyinka, Eni Jologho Umuko, B. Binebai and A. Yerima. The texts selected register the topography of the region in a manner that draws on site-specific and geomorphic forces in the performance of insurgency. They point to ways in which nature and the human subject are collectively embedded within the “pluriverse” of the Delta. Interviews conducted in the Warri area of the Niger Delta region will help interpret aspects of the creeks, mangroves and rivers and the relations between geography and supernatural power that figure in the plays. Obi will examine the texts from the standpoint of what Bruno Latour describes as “relational epistemology”, in which political agency is mapped on both sides of the human/nature dualism. In this way, his research will interrogate the dominance of the anthropocentric character of insurgency in the region, while foregrounding the spatial configuration of the geography of the Delta as co-combatant in the historical contestation against global oil capital. Obi’s work will bring a fresh perspective to Nigerian writing and understandings of the insurgencies by tracing the shifting contours of geopolitics and biopolitics in the cultural and dramatic imaginations of the region.

2015

George Emeka Agbo, a Nigerian doctoral student in Visual History at the University of the Western Cape, pursued research on *Photography, Facebook and Virtualisation of Resistance in Nigeria*. He completed his PhD in 2016.



Project Abstract: Social media has changed the ways citizens relate with the state, impacting everything from electoral practices to the organisation of mass actions against governments. Agbo’s research examines how Nigerian involvement in this cyberculture has created alternative forms of resistance against poor governance and social injustice through the photographic practice of image production and circulation on Facebook. He looks at this in relation to the history of photography in civil struggle in Nigeria and studies how the boundary between professional and amateur photography is broken to challenge a sociopolitical order amidst a dearth of fundamental facilities, such as electricity, internet and

digital resources. Agbo focuses on Facebook groups such as the *Nigerian Global Awakening Day Protest* and the *Nationwide Anti-Fuel Subsidy Removal: Strategies and Protests*, both of which emerged as part of protests against the Nigerian government’s fuel subsidy removal. Through interviews, archival research and participant observation, he documents the circulation of politically-charged images on Facebook and conversations around them and analyses the changing ways photographic images play as sites of resistance and critique.

Ruth Sacks is a South African student who pursued her degree through the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER) at the University of the

Witwatersrand. Sacks traveled to Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, to complete work for her dissertation on *Style Congo, Art Nouveau: Links and Ruptures between Early Belgian Modernism, the African Colony and Postcolonial Zaïre*. She completed her PhD in 2017.



Project Abstract: Sack's dissertation examines the complicated role of African aesthetics in shaping modernist forms still present in the public cultures of Brussels and Kinshasa. Starting in late 19th century Belgium, she describes the entanglement of the proto-modernist Art Nouveau movement with King Leopold II's colonial regime in the Congo. She then traces the display of Congolese objects from the colonial exhibition into the modernist museum, in order to follow them to post-independence Zaïre, addressing how modernity was articulated through aesthetics in the postcolony. Sack's project is based on archival research in Belgium and archival work, interviews and visual documentation in Kinshasa. Her first-hand research in Kinshasa provides ways to contextualize her arguments in Africa, recasting the European frame and

orientation usually brought to Art Nouveau. At the same time, her work offers an in-depth perspective on how public art projects, entertainment sites and exhibitions constructed a theatre of modern Africanity and explores the idea of monumental sites, like *l'Echangeur* (1974, today a contemporary art museum) and the Mont Ngaliema museum complex (1970s), as futuristic structures encasing interiors whose logics rely on recourse to generalized notions of tribal Africa.

2014

Genevieve Wood, a South African doctoral student in the Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, spent several months doing research in Amsterdam for her project *On "Intolerance" by Willem De Rooij*. The exhibition *Intolerance*, her central case study, was shown at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin in 2010. De Rooij's *Intolerance* combined an installation and catalogue raisonné of Hawaiian featherwork and 17th century Dutch genre paintings, presenting them together in an art museum.



The artist raises questions related to interpretation and representation in the larger contexts of Dutch colonialism, global trade, and contemporary Dutch art and politics. For more on the installation see

<http://www.intolerance-berlin.de/en/installation.html>.

Project Abstract: Wood has refused to make her final project abstract available for circulation. Please contact her directly for more information. ACIP will provide her email address on request. She has not yet completed her PhD.

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