

**2022 African Critical Inquiry Workshops:
Unsettling the Single Society and
*1985! People's Parks, Sites of Struggle and the Politics of Plants***



Organisers of the 2022 ACIP Workshops (from top left:): *Unsettling the Single Society* – Andre Goodrich, Pia Bombardella, Amohelang Mohajane, and Chris Holdridge; *1985! Peoples' Parks, Sites of Struggle & the Politics of Plants* – Sinethemba Twalo and Jonathan Cane.

The African Critical Inquiry Programme (ACIP) is pleased to announce that there will be two ACIP Workshops in 2022! The first, *Unsettling the Single Society*, was proposed by organisers Andre Goodrich (Social Anthropology), Pia Bombardella (Social Anthropology), Chris Holdridge (History), and Amohelang Mohajane (Curator, NWU Gallery) at North-West University in Potchefstroom, South Africa and will be held in late March 2022. The second workshop, *1985! People's Parks, Sites of Struggle and the Politics of Plants*, will take place in Pretoria, South Africa in April 2022 and was proposed by Sinethemba Twalo (Curator of Public Engagement, Javett Art Centre) and Jonathan Cane (Postdoctoral Fellow with the Research Chair in Humanities (Prof. Noëleen Murray)), both at the University of Pretoria.



Image from the 1938 bridge opening at Malungwana drift analysed in Max Gluckman's famous article. Photo by Max Gluckman.

Unsettling the Single Society

Anthropologist Max Gluckman's seminal "bridge paper" (1940) analysed the dedication ceremony for the Malugwana bridge in Zululand as demonstrating a complex "African-White community" with crosscutting relations and interactions. This stood in stark contrast to the dominant anthropological approach at the time, where the units of analysis were conceptualised as distinct cultures via the problematic frame of tribalism. Contemporaneously, historians W. M. Macmillan and C. W. De Kiewiet were among the first to criticise the academic portrayal and production of South Africa as a set of separate societies rather than a single society.

Decades later, the first post-apartheid democratic elections in 1994 marked the country's formal political unity. The workshop *Unsettling the Single Society* will challenge the myth that settler colonialism and the attendant idea of separate societies ended in 1994. By returning to Gluckman, it will encourage questions around how settler colonialism was and still is a structure of domination that continues into the present. South African society has been built materially and symbolically upon racial difference naturalised through legal regimes of segregation, statecraft guarding minority rule, and economies of racialised labour extraction. Settler colonialism thus has a genealogy caught between the materiality of claims to labour and private property, and the affective claiming and practicing of home.

By bringing together debates in the fields of history and social anthropology, this workshop will encourage critique of the idea of separate societies. It will do so through themes that structure the historical and ongoing composition of our settler colonial world: themes of belonging and unbelonging; symbolic and material labour; land and landscape; structural and direct violence; and contested knowledges. Such critique will bring new insights to contemporary concerns over how institutions of public culture might work to redefine the terms of integration. The three-day workshop, held in Potchefstroom, will begin with a public roundtable discussion, be coordinated with an exhibition at NWU Gallery, and later result in a special thematic journal issue.

1985! People's Parks, Sites of Struggle and the Politics of Plants



'Freedom in our lifetime', Soweto. Peter Setuke, *City Press*, 03.01.1986, People's Parks Archive, courtesy of Steven Sack.

1985! The People's Parks, Sites of Struggle and the Politics of Plants is a hybrid scholarly-curatorial project which connects Gauteng Province-focused academics, activists, artists, students, and curators to look back at the botanical and spatial power of 1985, which saw radical parks emerging as political and artistic responses to apartheid. The People's Parks, sometimes known as Peace Parks, were a short-lived phenomenon that occurred in 1985 in the South African 'townships' located within what was then known as the PWV (Pretoria, Witwatersrand, Vereeniging). In Oukasie, Atteridgeville, Mamelodi,

Alexandra, Soweto, Mohlakeng, Tembisa, and Kagiso, participatory political processes (variously attributed to the African National Congress, the United Democratic Front, 'yard committees', and independent youth-led groups) resulted in a multitude of small-scale place-making activities. These radical sites of struggle were called People's Parks by the activists, photographers, and academics who witnessed and documented the grassroots activity.

The workshop is part of a longer-term programme of research, art practice, and public activities aimed at critically activating the 'People's Parks Archive', a collection of documentation compiled primarily in the 1980s. In the months leading to the workshop, this will involve reading groups, archival working groups, artists' commissions, research, and working with activists, gardeners, and cultural practitioners through the Nothing Gets Organised platform in downtown Johannesburg, Mamelodi and Brits. Through this range of engagements, the workshop seeks to:

- ◆ Revisit and re-theorise modes of popular resistance in the 1980s and conceptualise alternatives to the established visual cultures of 'Resistance Art'
- ◆ Generate plural narratives of the struggle against apartheid and challenge dominant nationalist discourses
- ◆ Conceptualise ephemeral archives, scavenger methodologies, and strategies for digital archiving, and
- ◆ Explore contemporary approaches to political ecology through engagement with critical plant studies and botanical and landscape humanities.

The three-day workshop, to be held in April 2022 at the University of Pretoria, will include academic papers, artist talks, performances and practice-based sessions. It will result in two journal special issues, an exhibition at Javett-UP, and submission of a significant research grant application for support to continue and expand the project. The interdisciplinary, cross-institutional collaboration of *1985! The People's Parks, Sites of Struggle and the Politics of Plants* will build an ambitious digital humanities project and exhibition programme that develops avenues for new research, artistic production, and curatorial work.

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.

Information about applying to organize the 2023 ACIP workshop and for the 2022 Ivan Karp Doctoral Research Awards will be available in November 2021. The deadline for both workshop applications and student applications is 2 May 2022.

For further information, see <http://www.gs.emory.edu/about/special/acip.html> and <https://www.facebook.com/ivan.karp.corinne.kratz.fund>.