

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](https://www.facebook.com/ivan.karp.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 <https://gs.emory.edu/guides/students/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 50,000. Awards support doctoral projects focused on topics such as institutions of public culture, museums and exhibitions, forms and practices of public scholarship, culture and communication, and 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:

2026



Lari Chanel Hallowes-Welman, a South African student studying in the History Department at Rhodes University, will do archival research in Cape Town for her project *Writing the Dead: Colonial Representations of Death and Cultural Identity on the Eastern Cape Frontier, 1760-1878*.

Project Abstract: *Writing the Dead* investigates how death, dying, and bereavement were represented in European colonial texts on the frontier from 1760 to the end of the Frontier Wars. It asks how colonial representations of death, burial, mourning, violence, and the treatment of the dead contributed to cultural knowledge about African communities.

Using death as an analytical lens, the project examines colonial texts not as neutral descriptions of African societies, but as sources produced within structures of imperial power. It considers how European travellers, missionaries, military officers, settlers, and colonial officials interpreted death and dying in ways that shaped ideas about cultural

identity, morality, and civilisation. In doing so, the project explores how partial observations came to be presented as authoritative knowledge about African communities on the frontier. *Writing the Dead* adopts a historiographical approach drawing on colonial archives to contribute to discussions on knowledge production, archival power, and the decolonisation of Death Studies. It argues that death and dying were not only historical experiences on the frontier, but also important sites through which colonial observers produced meanings about death and cultural identities.



Motselisi Edith Khabo's dissertation research challenges the myth of homogeneity that has long dominated historical narratives about Lesotho. She is studying History at Stellenbosch University and comes from Lesotho.

Project Abstract: *Margins of Belonging: Negotiating Memory and Identity among the Baphuthi in Lesotho, c. 1966 – 2025*, argues that homogeneity was emphasized at the expense of diversity in the context of Lesotho, largely silencing diversity and subjugating minority communities within the state, including Baphuthi living in southern Lesotho and South Africa's northern Eastern Cape. Post-colonial political changes and state-formation perpetuated this emphasis, with foundational laws that granted diversity no room, especially in educational and media spaces. It was also aggravated by

colonial borders which became fluid spaces for Baphuthi identity negotiation and places of language erosion due to intermixed languages. Imposed marginality forced minority communities to constantly negotiate their identity and belonging throughout the colonial and post-colonial period. A plurality of Baphuthi used various languages and degrees of negotiation in an attempt to openly or subtly negotiate their identity in order to preserve their culture and identity, eventually leading to their acknowledgment in Lesotho's constitution in 2025. *Margins of Belonging* aims to reconstruct the historical experiences of belonging and identity within the Baphuthi communities in Lesotho during the key period of 1966 to 2025. It uses negotiation of belonging as an analytical tool to explore whether post-colonial state-formation, political changes, and colonial borders shaped daily trajectories of the Baphuthi. The study draws from oral histories and archival research to decentre the orthodoxy of homogeneity that pervades scholarly accounts and centres on languages of negotiation that a plurality of Baphuthi might have used in their attempt to articulate, preserve, conceal, change, and negotiate their ethnic identity against the backdrop of Lesotho's post-colonial political and cultural landscape. The project also pays attention to Baphuthi women's historical role as frontliners in preserving SiPhuthi language and customs, thus substantiating their Phuthi identity.



Jackline Maina, a Kenyan student pursuing a PhD in Music at University of Cape Town, will do ethnographic research and artistic inquiry and also create a musical composition for her project, *Reframing Contemporary Rurality through Musical Insights and Practice from Migori County, Kenya*. Project Abstract: Maina's research interrogates rurality in

contemporary Kenya, focusing on rural music practice as dynamic and hybrid rather than a static repository of “pure” traditions. It responds to prevailing academic and mainstream tropes in Kenya, rooted in colonial ideas about ethnicity and “tribal” fixity, that idealise rurality as genuine and nationalistic, or as the binary opposite of urban. While contemporary scholarship acknowledges rural dynamism, the idealisation of rural life and culture persists in Kenyan academia and popular discourse. Using Migori, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious county in the former Nyanza province, as a lens, Maina will examine how rural musicians reimagine rurality through their music as they negotiate cultural interactions and mobilities in practice. Additionally, Maina will collect compositional material to represent contemporary rural space and redefine how rural life is perceived locally. Grounding the study in hybridity and translocalism, Maina frames the rural region as a nexus interacting with various localities and transnational flows. This fosters cultural invention by musicians who negotiate face-to-face and mediated intercultural contacts shaping their realities. Consequently, their work contests romanticised notions of the rural. *Reframing Contemporary Rurality* draws on ethnographic methods and artistic inquiry to: a) study cultural flows impacting rural music; b) analyse performance techniques in contemporary Migori; c) describe creative processes involved in composing works reflecting rural practice; and d) create a musical work informed by Migori’s practice. Ultimately, *Reframing Contemporary Rurality* contributes to ethnomusicology and rural studies by offering a Kenyan African perspective on how translocal dynamics shape contemporary rural identity, creativity, and cultural expression.

2025



Maja Jakarasi, a Zimbabwean student in Anthropology doing his PhD at the University of the Western Cape will do ethnographic research in Rushinga District, Zimbabwe and across the border in Mozambique as well as archival work in Harare, Zimbabwe for his project, *Spiritual Transformation, Healing, and Mental Illness in Contemporary Zimbabwe*.

Project Abstract: Jakarasi’s project, *Spiritual Transformation, Healing, and Mental Illness in Contemporary Zimbabwe*, will address how healing practices have transformed from the Second Chimurenga to the political and socio-economic challenges that Zimbabwe is facing today. (The Second

Chimurenga (1964-79) was Zimbabwe’s War of Independence.) Jakarasi’s research will explore the transformations of practices, meanings, and rituals that are apprehended as traditional against the backdrop of the current socioeconomic crises bedeviling Zimbabwe, crises that are traced back to the 1990s when the Zimbabwean government adopted the market-oriented Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). ESAP liberalised, deregulated, and privatised the economy, which resulted in rapid and adverse sociocultural changes and inequalities. Through ethnographic work, Jakarasi will investigate traditional healing practices among the Shona people in Rushinga district, Mashonaland Central Province in Eastern Zimbabwe. What has been the significance of traditional healing practices to people on the ground and to society at large? How has this changed over the four decades since Zimbabwean independence

in 1980? Which forms of spiritual transformation have been relevant to healing practices in Zimbabwe? Historical and archival research will expand the ethnographic work in order to capture the trajectories of change in traditional healing from the time of the second *Chimurenga* to the 21st century. Jakarasi will draw insights on the forms and importance of spiritual transformations and healing practices by synthesizing theoretical frameworks related to indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), explanatory models of illness, and comparative work on spiritual transformation and healing.

2024



Sasha Rai, a South African student doing her PhD in History at the University of the Witwatersrand, will do archival work and interviews in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Pietermaritzburg for her project, *What We Do in the Shadows: A History and Culture of Kink in South Africa*.

Project Abstract: From the early utterances of vice and nefariousness in the colonial era to the politicisation of sexual freedom and expression during high apartheid, the history of kink comes to be located at the nexus of legal frameworks, cultural expectations, political motivation, and individual desire. South Africa has a long history of policing sexualities to better control populations and maintain the values and authority of ruling parties. *What We Do in the Shadows: A History and Culture of Kink in South Africa* contends with state understandings of sex and sexuality through the lens of kink and contributes to and extends

scholarship on race, gender, and sexuality. It also speaks to the challenges faced by minority communities whose struggles are based in historical oppression. By tracing the political, legal, and social values within the colonial era, apartheid era, and in the new democratic South Africa, *What We Do in the Shadows* explores an underdeveloped area of sexuality studies in the Global South. Tracing how kink practices evolved during these three periods will create deeper insights into subversive and counter-culture sexualities, and shed light on how intimacies were formed and negotiated under different political systems. The policing of sexuality and intimacy has been a mechanism of control by oppressive regimes, but they have always been and remain sites of resistance. Kink culture is one of these historical sites that has yet to be meaningfully examined. This project not only substantially develops understanding of a unique and underexplored community, it also enriches South African and Global South discourses around sexuality, gender, resistance, and development.

Phindile Tabata is working on her PhD in African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand, building on her background in Publishing Studies. With her award, Tabata will interview authors, publishers, book sellers, book club members, and literary organisations in Gauteng province for her project *Black Women's Self-published Literature and the Publishing Ecosystem in South Africa, 2010-2020*.

Project abstract: Tabata's project will investigate the extent to which self-publishing, with the assistance of digital technology, as an independent means of book production,



has reconfigured the publishing ecosystem in South Africa. The study is specifically interested in the processes of book production and marketing and the ways that self-publishing and digital technology have redefined the conventional roles of author, publisher, distributor, and reader in the publishing ecosystem. Using the complex system approach as a theoretical framework, the research will look at how different elements of the publishing ecosystem interact with each other in order to meet the objectives of the whole system and explore how the ecosystem and the roles within the system have changed with the rise of self-publishing. The essence of the publishing ecosystem is that it illustrates the long-standing role of various stakeholders in the book production process. Using a qualitative approach, the

research will include semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to explore the experiences of key stakeholders in the self-publishing landscape, including self-published authors, mainstream and independent book sellers, literary organisations like professional associations and book festivals, and book club members.

2023



Nina Barnett, a South African PhD student in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Johannesburg, did research, site visits, and collect materials for the art work that was part of her doctoral project, *The Intra-active Vaal Dam: Tracing Water to Landlocked Johannesburg*. Nina completed her PhD in 2025.

Project abstract: *The Intra-active Vaal Daam* examines the political and material implications of Johannesburg's water and uses Barnett's art-making practice to centre the role of

water within past and present human stories of Johannesburg. The Vaal Dam – the major resource and repository of water for this landlocked city – is her primary site and focal point, connected to the city which drinks from it as well as the sources of water that flow into it. Its connections via a hydrological system are somewhat controlled (via pipes, reservoirs, drains, and waste treatment plants) yet also operate outside of these human-oriented barriers (via leaks, floods, evaporation, saturation). The water that is brought to and exits from Johannesburg via this system is valued in terms of its quantity and its usefulness in human and industrial consumption. The creative process of this research is intended to encourage alternatives to this narrow mode of understanding. Johannesburg water, collected from sites along the trajectory to the city from the dam, and from the dam itself, will be used in artistic experimentation which feeds back into the creative practice and academic research in an ongoing cycle. This creates a body of written and visual work that mirrors the fluid nature of the watery subject. Through this material engagement, Barnett will think through the water politics in a city experiencing the impact of the Anthropocene. New ways of imagining water are, and will continue to be, essential as climate change associated with the Anthropocene alters weather patterns on which the water system relies.



Tendai Ganduri, a Zimbabwean student in Media Studies pursuing her PhD at the University of the Witwatersrand, will conduct fieldwork in Zimbabwe and South Africa for her project *Communicating and Contesting Climate Change: The Zimbabwean and South African Twitterspheres*. Tendai completed her PhD in 2026.

Project abstract: Ganduri's study examines how climate change is communicated and contested on Twitter in the Global South with Zimbabwe and South Africa as case countries. The reality of climate change is urgent and the Global South crisis is mounting. Impacts such as the El Niño droughts and cyclones are being experienced with devastating consequences. These experiences have been captured on social media by different stakeholders as climate change conversations unfold with digital platforms acting as a kind of public sphere. Ganduri will examine the

nature, quality, and characteristics of such exchanges on Twitter by focusing on conversations revolving around two international gatherings – the Conference of Parties (COP) to the UN Conventions on Climate Change 26 and 27 – and two localised disasters that occurred in the last five years – Cyclone Idai of 2019 for Zimbabwe and the KwaZulu Natal floods of 2022 for South Africa. Twitter data was collected through a computational social sciences approach using Python and Academic twitterR. Online data will be complemented by in-depth and key informant interviews as well as transect walks at disaster sites to gather local stories about the events. Through discourse analysis and using Chantal Mouffe's notion of democracy as agonistic pluralism, Ganduri will explore the plurality, permeability, and antagonisms within human communities in relation to how they shape communicative contexts for the climate conversations. The study will also compare how citizens critique and/or support their governments in relation to national and international events and platforms.

2022



Vanessa Chen, a South African student in Historical Studies at University of Cape Town, will go to the Netherlands to do archival work for her dissertation, *Collecting and Convening the Visual and Material Cultural History of Chinese Convicts, Exiles and "Free Blacks" at the Cape (circa 1654-1838)*.

Project abstract: Despite the documentary record of the early history of Chinese convicts, exiles, and 'free blacks' at the Cape (1654 – 1838) being fragmentary and scattered in multiple places, it is and should be seen as significant in the making of South Africa's social history. Researchers have undertaken the task of bringing the stories of this subaltern group to the forefront, however, they have not reckoned with the making of this collection of documentary sources.

Collecting and Convening the Visual and Material Cultural History of Chinese Convicts, Exiles, and "Free Blacks" at the Cape (circa 1654-1838)

works to do so, and to re-curate these sources as an archive in and of itself. Chen's dissertation examines the history of the extant documentary archival slivers that speak of Chinese presence at the colony alongside non-documentary materials, tracing and accounting for their presence and absence. She has already worked with archival sources in South Africa, and next will do on-site research at the National Archives of the Netherlands. Her final archival work will be in Indonesia. In the Netherlands, she will locate and collate records for document analyses, consult with archivists regarding the records' biographies – their movement and reshaping to and from different repositories across time – copyright regulations and accessibility and negotiate permission to digitise and include the records in an eventual digital curation. Chen's dissertation will enable a more comprehensive understanding of the nature and extent of the Cape Chinese archive, address deficiencies of colonial archiving, and underscore both the importance of representation and what can be made despite of the lack thereof.



Min'enhle Ncube is a Zimbabwean student in Social Anthropology at University of Cape Town. With support from her Ivan Karp award she will conduct fieldwork in Zambia for her dissertation project, *Mapping the Ethics of Care Associated with Artificial Intelligence Technologies in Healthcare Infrastructures in Zambia*.

Project abstract: *Mapping the Ethics of Care* will be the first in-depth ethnographic study on the ethics of care associated with artificial intelligence adopted in healthcare infrastructures in Zambia. Artificial intelligence software is increasingly being adopted to support healthcare

infrastructure, raising issues underscored by postcolonial quandaries, neoliberalism from Copperbelt mining, and other developmental paradigms. Through eighteen months of research in Zambia, Ncube will investigate the creation of AI tools, the implications of adopting these into the healthcare infrastructures, and how this contributes towards the ethics of care in the area. The project will examine whether machine learning, its inputs of big data, and software development support or challenge the diversity and inequalities in southern Africa. Ncube's project is a part of a larger strategic programme, [Future Hospitals: 4IR and Ethics of Care in Africa](#), at the Institute for Humanities in Africa that reflects critically on data and AI's implications for care infrastructures on the continent. Ncube will use epistemic disobedience (Mignolo 2011) as a framework to interrogate technology infrastructures, their epistemology, the fundamentals of 'intelligence' and its relevance in a post/neo-colonial landscape of care. With a dearth of literature on ethics associated with AI in the Global South, Ncube's research addresses this gap in the context of broader anthropological inquiry in Zambia, which includes works from colonial-era and postcolonial Zambia (or Northern Rhodesia). It builds on scholarship regarding the anthropology of ethics and technology while fostering connections with past anthropological work to further the development of anthropology and social science in the region. The research also advances anthropology's relevance in innovation praxis on the African continent.

Suzana Sousa is an Angolan student in History and a doctoral fellow at the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape. Her Ivan Karp award supports her research in Angolan for her dissertation "*Angola Avante?*" *Making and*



Contesting Political Narratives of the Nation through Art and Visual Culture.

Project abstract: “*Angola Avante?*” is concerned with the nation-building process in Angola after its independence in 1975, a process that occurred through arts and culture. It examines the history of cultural nationalism in the country and the political narrative that has engaged this history to legitimise the nation. This also involves exchanges between politics and visual culture in the context of civil war and the construction of national identity. The process of making the nation was enacted through cultural policy, national arts organisations, and museums that maintained an affinity with colonial ethnography. Sousa engages with the development of visual arts and the making of museums in the aftermath of

the civil war. She argues that the policies and practices promoted by the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) have continued to be entrenched in colonial categories and distinctions. Her research seeks to understand these complexities and contradictions through fieldwork in two museums in Angola, the Dundo Museum and the National Anthropology Museum. The latter was founded a year after independence in the country’s capital and the former is a colonial enterprise from 1936 located in the east of the country, in an area administered by the mining company Diamang. The museums’ locations, Luanda and Dundo, are also an entry point to the diverse constructions of identity within the nation.

2021



Bongiwe Hlekiso is studying for her PhD in History at the University of the Western Cape. A South African student, Hlekiso will conduct research for her dissertation, *Becoming a Hidden Treasure: A Biography of Umbhaco and its Interrupted Trajectories*, including work on collections and display histories at the Amathole Museum and East London Museum in the Eastern Cape.

Project abstract: *Becoming a Hidden Treasure* will trace biographies of *umbhaco*, a skirt that is worn by Xhosa-speaking women when getting married, attending ceremonies and on other special celebratory occasions. It is mainly - although not always - identified through its off-white colour, floor length span and horizontal black lines in the bottom half of the skirt. Yet, the pattern, colour and length

continually change as it undergoes different processes of production, circulation and consumption. This has led me into tracing the different spaces through which *umbhaco* moves, including shops in the Woodstock area in Cape Town, small trading shops in Voortrekker road and Bellville, museums and art galleries. *Umbhaco* has also been repurposed in the fashion industry by designers such as Stoned Cherrie and many more in clothing lines for women and men.

The project starts with locating *umbhaco* within Iziko South African National Gallery (ISANG), where it was displayed in the *Hidden Treasures* exhibition from August 2017 to January 2020. Yet the garment is far from being merely a museum

object, sometimes portrayed there as fixed in meaning for what is often incorrectly referred to as Xhosa culture and tradition. I will examine the multifaceted use of *umbhaco* in and beyond the spaces of the museum and these other imaginations of tradition, examining the making of *umbhaco* by different producers and what stories are told through its making. The project will include working with collections, accession records and histories of *umbhaco* display at the Amathole Museum and East London Museum in the Eastern Cape, as well as at ISANG and the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum. I will also interview producers, distributors and wearers of *umbhaco* to analyse the various narratives around its diverse uses. *Becoming a Hidden Treasure* will interrogate the garment as a cultural commodity and how different and changing meanings and values are placed on it.



Robert Benjamin Uys is a South African student in History at University of the Western Cape. Uys will use his Ivan Karp Award support to pursue research in uMgungundlovu (Zululand), Ulundi and Pietermaritzburg for his project *The Place Where the Elephants Meet: Nationalist Myth-making at uMgungundlovu and Dingaanstat, 1838-2020*. He submitted his dissertation and completed his PhD in 2026. Project abstract: *The Place Where the Elephants Meet* is concerned with the stories of uMgungundlovu (the

gathering place of elephants) – a mythically and narratively textured site in Zululand, KwaZulu-Natal. uMgungundlovu is historically charged and the site of origin for some of South Africa's most salient nationalist myths. It's located near the Zulu Valley of the Kings and was the site of the royal enclosure and capital built by Dingane Senzangakhona Zulu after he assassinated his half-brother Shaka and became king in 1828. It is a site ingrained within the mythic consciousness of what would become known as the Zulu people. Simultaneously, uMgungundlovu has a central role in Afrikaner nationalist myth – this is the place where Voortrekker Piet Retief and the seventy Burgers who sought Zulu land were massacred at Dingane's order. This research will consider the intersecting nationalist mythologies of uMgungundlovu. It will consider how these myths were created, propelled and rebelled against through the different sets of structures built at the site: Retief's grave and a monument erected in 1922, a Dutch Reformed Church mission station inaugurated in 1949 (and burned down in 1989), a replica of Dingane's royal enclosure dating from the 1980s, and a new Multimedia Centre with displays on Zulu history built in 2008. I will explore some of the fallacies of the myths affiliated with these structures. However, the point of convergence will be on how myth was utilized as a positive force, something that brought depth and meaning to people's lives living in and around uMgungundlovu.

2020

Nsima Udo is a Nigerian student studying at the University of the Western Cape for his PhD in History. With support from his Ivan Karp Award, Udo will do significant research in Calabar, Nigeria for his project, *The Politics of Aesthetics and Performance: Visuality and the Remaking of Culture in the Calabar Festival and Carnival, 2004 -2019*. He finished his PhD in 2024.



Project Abstract: The Calabar Festival and Carnival (CFC) recently became an annual event in Cross River State, Nigeria that blends elements of local cultural festivals with aspects of Caribbean carnival, which dates back to the second half of the 18th century and combines indigenous, European, and African performance traditions. When the Calabar Festival and Carnival began in 2004, some of these influences ‘returned’ to Africa and were remade at a time of political-economic change that demanded revenue diversification and the creation of a tourist economy in Nigeria. Udo’s study uses the convergence of festival performances, visuality, and local sensibilities to tease out different forms of aesthetics – relationships between festival

and its cultural and artistic expressions – and to analyse their historical resonance in the ongoing Calabar Festival and Carnival. It engages with diverse performance traditions -- dance, music, masquerades, floats, puppetry, street parades, and revelry during the carnival – and with photographs as “social griots” (Keller 2003) to articulate and historicize the changing sociocultural topography of an ongoing African festival.

Recent literature has mainly seen the CFC in relation to the politics and cultural symbolisms in Nigeria at the time, ignoring the multifocal photographic practices that pervade the festival. This elaborate festival should not simply be reduced to the political. This project will interrogate the CFC as a platform for the expression of multilayered aesthetics – in traditions and practice. Relying on film footage and photographs in government archives, online repositories, and personal albums, it will examine the festival through analysis of archival material, imagery, and through ethnographic research, focusing on questions around carnival performance, participation, forms of dissonance, photographic practices and image analysis, and the African aspects of the carnival. By exploring the politics of provenance, sociocultural dynamics, and the political economics of carnival festival, it will map a history of the Calabar Festival and Carnival between 2004 and 2019. How has festival become a framework through which strands of global popular cultures interweave with indigenous philosophies and performance to promote the local economy and politics? What do visual depictions do to the performance traditions of a remade carnival that has traveled from Africa to the Caribbean and back to Calabar? This project will help to understand the “carnivalization of festival,” where indigenous festivals across Africa are being repackaged as carnival festivals in the past two decades.

2019

Bronwyn Kotzen, a South African student pursuing her PhD in Human Geography at the University of Cape Town will do research for her dissertation project, *Abstracting the Concrete: Tracing the Political Economy of Infrastructure in Africa Through a Study of Cement*. The Ivan Karp Award will support research in Johannesburg, South Africa and Lagos, Nigeria. She completed her PhD in 2026.

Project Abstract: For the first time since post-WWII industrial modernisation, the significance of infrastructure has emerged as a point of broad consensus for critiques of untenable models of current economic growth. This has marked a radical global policy shift to development at the urban-scale, which Africa has only recently begun to mirror.



Yet, the complex and interconnected geo-political and economic forces that drive Africa's urban development and produce its infrastructures remain largely obscured. This project seeks to read contemporary processes of infrastructural development in Africa through the material lens of cement in order to formulate a much-needed post-neoliberal interrogation of African urban development. Second only to water, concrete is the most widely consumed substance on earth. As concrete's raw material, cement is the foundation of modern development and is therefore the project's primary site of investigation. The research moves beyond individual localised sites and cases to draw out generalisable patterns of development at a regional level, outside of the particularities of place and time. Pan-African cement flows are traced as a 'matter' of the political economy of infrastructure. This offers a reading of the continent not as a bounded geographical location but rather as series of spatio-temporal interconnections that make visible the myriad of global influences, relations, and shifting formations of development hierarchies. Combining politics and economics with geography and materiality reveals the far-reaching and connected places and powers of which Africa is composed. Working across disciplines and registers, *Abstracting the Concrete* attempts to advance the theory, method, and critique of infrastructure in the postcolonial world, toward recalibrating a meaningful African urban studies agenda.



Ngozi May Okafor is a Nigerian student doing her degree at the Centre for Visual Art at University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her project, *Performing Liminality: Ceramic Processes as Rites of Passage* includes research with Zulu potters in South Africa and Ushafa potters in Nigeria, as well as her own creative ceramic work. She finished her PhD in 2020. Project Abstract: In many societies, the practices of pottery-making and initiation rites seem to be in decline. Researchers of both rites of passage and pottery (with its broader category, ceramics), therefore, continually seek new ways of interpreting the practices in order to sustain

and enliven them. My interest in the processes of pottery making among indigenous potters has led me to go beyond the finished product to reconsider the performative 'art' and 'act' of creating potteries. In several native cultures, the process of creating pottery is likened to childbirth; it can also suggest a people's state of being. Furthermore, pottery wares are seen as having humanoid qualities. What relationships exist between pottery and rites of passage? With the growing need to creatively design rites that mark individual and group transitions from one state of being to another, how can those relationships inform creativity in passage rituals? Moreover, what creative ideas might those relationships stimulate for self-expressions through installation and performance? Combining my practice as a ceramic artist and research with Zulu potters in South Africa and Ushafa potters in Nigeria (both of whom also practice initiation rites), this study will explore possible parallels between pottery/ceramics and rites of passage, with a focus on their transitional phases – firing and liminality, respectively. Contextual and documentary reviews, fieldwork, and studio experiments will be the methods of data

collection. Deploying rites of passage theories, *Performing Liminality: Ceramic Processes as Rites of Passage* will bring fresh perspectives to the ways in which ceramics practice can be viewed, re-interpreted, and also present broader narratives for self-expressions. The project resulted in both a written dissertation as well as an exhibition and catalogue of visual art works from the study's creative explorations.

2018



Mary Mbewe is a Zambian PhD student in the Department of History at the University of the Western Cape. Her ACIP 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*. She finished her PhD. in 2024.

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 focuses on *Ghanaian Palmwine Music: Revitalising a Tradition and Maintaining a Community*. He finished his PhD. in 2020.

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: Revitalising a Tradition and Maintaining a Community* proposes a comprehensive study of the tradition of palmwine music, exploring strategies for its revitalisation and sustenance. Framed within the context of applied ethnomusicology and through the theoretical lens of resilience, adaptive management, and music revitalisation, the research will explore how revitalisation 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 revitalisation 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*. She completed her PhD in 2020.

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*. She completed her PhD in 2021.

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. Luckett’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 galvanises 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, Luckett will explore the everyday lives of metalworkers, and the communities in which they live, through the lens of hope and utopianism and their concrete manifestations. She will further explore 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, a Nigerian scholar doing his PhD in African Studies and Theatre Studies through the University of Cape Town, did research on *The 'Theatre of the Bloody Metaphor': The Biopolitics of Violence in the Theatre of the Niger Delta*. He completed his dissertation and graduated in 2018.

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 contextualise 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 generalised 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.

~~~~~