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:

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 visuality 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. 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 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, Luckett 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.

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 is a Nigerian doctoral student in Visual History at the University of the Western Cape. Agbo is pursuing research on Photography, Facebook and Virtualisation of Resistance in Nigeria.

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 cybertulture 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 pursuing her degree through the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER) at the University of the Witwatersrand. Sacks is traveling 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*.

**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*.

**Project Abstract:** Wood’s research sought to build a contextual understanding for analysis of the critical oeuvre of Dutch artist Willem De Rooij, especially his exhibition *Intolerance*, held at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin in 2010. A combined installation
and catalogue raisonné of Hawaiian featherwork and 17th century Dutch genre paintings presented together in an art museum, De Rooij’s work brings into critical view the powerful interrelation between the modes of interpretation and representation. This includes considering historical and contemporary consequences of what Intolerance suggests, such as that: a) the Dutch Golden Age brought about not only a new relation between art and capital, but also a new kind of civil discourse, attended by the operational socio-economic concept of ‘tolerance’, the historical complexities of which hold implications for contemporary discourses of aesthetic ‘exchange’; b) the traces of Dutch trade routes are marked by the symbolic translation of objects and images accumulating in the Netherlands as a colonial centre; and c) that the viewer is ‘looking’ and ‘looking out’ at symbolic images, being invited to risk standing amidst the advance and retreat, or ebb and flow, of the colonial threshold itself. In Amsterdam Wood collected pertinent documents, did interviews, and worked in museums and archives.

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