UCL African Studies lunchtime seminar series

Autumn term 2019

Seminars will take place some Thursdays this term, **12.30 – 2 pm** in the IAS Forum, ground floor of the Wilkins building, South Wing, with the exception of the 24th October seminar which will be held in Room 305, Pearson Building, Main UCL site on Gower Street.

[www.ucl.ac.uk/african-studies/events/lunchtime-seminar-series](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/african-studies/events/lunchtime-seminar-series)
[www.ucl.ac.uk/institute-of-advanced-studies/events](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/institute-of-advanced-studies/events)

10th October  
**Carli Coetzee** (Oxford University/Editor of Journal of African Cultural Studies) – IAS Forum

Reading the bloods: Zanele Muholi’s bloody thumbprint and activist forms of care

Resisting tropes of “emergence” through which Black South African artists and writers are often understood, I read some influential novels and visual artworks not as works by new-blood bornfrees but instead as part of a trend in which artists and writers turn their gaze to intimately configured scenes of care. The bloods in these works, I argue, are not the bloods that mark emergence or rites of passage (despite the presence of circumcision and menstrual bloods that seem to confirm the emergence narrative) but instead are to be read as the bloods of intergenerational care.

This presentation uses as its focus a small prototype from visual artist Zanele Muholi’s menstrual project *Isilumo Siyaluma*, the image that has been used as the cover of my monograph *Written Under the Skin*. Muholi’s thumbprint, from which she has created a series of kaleidoscope-like art works, is a bloody record of identity rather than a forensic marker left at a crime scene. In Muholi’s own reflections on her photographic and creative work, she describes her work as a form of activism: documenting lives and remembering and marking where one has come from. But a crucial part of this project of documenting Black women’s lives is also documenting the violence done to Black women’s bodies. The argument made in this presentation is that Muholi’s powerful blood archive draws together bloods that have remained largely invisible and crucially have remained unconnected - menstrual blood, the blood of child-bearing and the blood of sexual violence directed at women’s bodies – an urgent issue facing women in South Africa today.

Bio

**CARLI COETZEE** is the editor of *Negotiating the Past* and *Afropolitanism: Reboot*, and the author of *Accented Futures: Language Activism and the Ending of Apartheid* and many articles on African literature and on the ethics of north-south interactions. Her monograph *Written Under the Skin: Blood and Transgenerational Memory in South Africa* was published in 2019 in the African Articulations Series (Boydell & Brewer/James Currey). In early 2019 the *Routledge Handbook of African Literature* was published, which she co-edited with Moradewun Adejunmobi. She is an Honorary Research Fellow in the School of Literature, Language and Media at Wits University, a Research Associate at SOAS, University of London and teaches a course on Contemporary African Culture at
Oxford University. Her work as the editor of the *Journal of African Cultural Studies* is part of a larger activist project that seeks to change publishing patterns that privilege northern-based scholars and institutions. She frequently takes part in research and early career mentoring workshops hosted by African universities and organisations.
This lecture will explore the legacy of Patrice Lumumba, the first democratically elected Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo who was assassinated in 1961, through the Congolese artist Georges Senga’s series of photographic diptychs, *Une vie après la mort* (2012). For the series, Senga collaborated with Kayembe Kilobo, an elderly schoolteacher in Lubumbashi whose clothing, lifestyle and opinions had been self-consciously styled on Lumumba since the 1950s. In the photographs, the artist re-staged scenes of the young Lumumba from archival images and documents situated on the left-side of the diptych through the elderly schoolteacher. I argue that *Une vie après la mort* complicates the story of forgetting around Lumumba constructed within Belgium, the official rhetoric of Mobutu-era Congo, and by scholars in the 1990s. I juxtapose colonial and postcolonial authoritative accounts with popular on the ground experience, and, in doing so, I align Senga’s series with urban art forms in Congo. By foregrounding visual and material culture, this paper challenges the way in which independence movements are chronicled through singular heroes. Senga’s *Une vie après la mort* turns our attention to the people who lived in hope of the liberated state.

Bio

Gabriella Nugent is PhD candidate in History of Art at University College London. Her research explores the legacy of Belgian colonialism in contemporary lens-based art on, of and from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Current and forthcoming publications include *African Arts, Oxford Art Journal* and *Object*. She is a Teaching Fellow in History of Art and Archaeology at SOAS. She also teaches at UCL in the History of Art Department and Slade School of Fine Art.

Georges Senga, *Une vie après la mort*, 2012
21st November  Chege Githiora (SOAS Languages, Cultures and Linguistics) – IAS Forum
Language and State Identity: The Case of Swahili in Kenya and Tanzania

The different ideological paths taken by the two principal Swahili speaking countries -- Kenya and Tanzania – strongly influenced state and identity formation. The political philosophy of *Ujamaa* promoted by Tanzania's founding president, Mwalimu Nyerere, placed Swahili at the centre of development and nation building (Arusha Declaration, 1967), while Kenya's 'African socialism' -- a conservative political and economic model (Maloba 1989), placed English at the centre. Fifty years later, I will discuss the linguistic consequences of these ideological trajectories, while reflecting on the importance of language in state and identity formation processes.

Bio
Chege Githiora is Professor of Linguistics and African Languages at SOAS. He is author of *Sheng: Rise of a Kenyan Swahili Vernacular* (James Currey, 2018), and *Afro-Mexicans: Discourse of Race and Identity in the African Diaspora* (AWP 2008), among other publications.
In this talk, which draws on a contribution to a global history of socialism, I will explore African socialist thought in the 1950s to 1970s and situate it in the context of decolonization, the aftermath of the global depression of the 1930s, and the Second World War. In this context, a number of African political leaders, as well as trade unionists, writers, journalists and engaged citizens, drew on global critiques of capitalism and developed new and distinctive analyses. Building on their own readings of Africa's past and its present, they also engaged with socialist and anti-colonial thinkers from Africa and around the world, and with the moral and social thought of world religions, as they sought to repair the fractures wrought by colonialism and build a new society. Yet the same legacies of colonialism and pressures of post-colonial state building in a Cold War world which made African socialist thought attractive both internally and externally also proved its undoing by the end of the 1970s.

Bio

Emma Hunter is Professor of Global and African History at the University of Edinburgh. She is currently Principal Investigator for the Leverhulme Trust research project ‘Another World? East Africa and the Global 1960s’ and is writing A Modern History of Tanzania for Cambridge University Press.