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The influence of contemporary culture on young combatants in West Africa (1989–2003), explored through the archives of ‘trans-media’ journalist Tim Hetherington

AHRC PhD Studentship in collaboration with Imperial War Museums (IWM) and King’s College London

Applications are invited for an AHRC-funded PhD at the Department of War Studies, King’s College London: ‘The influence of contemporary culture on young combatants in West Africa (1989–2003), explored through the archives of ‘trans-media’ journalist Tim Hetherington’. This is offered under the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership programme. The partner institutions are King’s College London and the IWM. The studentship will be supervised by Dr Kieran Mitton at King’s College London and Greg Brockett of IWM. This full-time studentship, which is funded for three years at standard AHRC rates, will begin on 1 October 2019.

The Studentship

Award-winning conflict journalist Tim Hetherington was killed while covering the 2011 Libyan civil war. In 2021, IWM North in Salford, Greater Manchester will open an exhibition focusing on his work.

Tim Hetherington's time spent documenting conflict in West Africa has culminated in a huge amount of material, including photography, video, research documents, hand-written journals, correspondence and photographic equipment, that has yet to be researched and evaluated. Focusing on the young combatants featured in Hetherington's work, this studentship will provide greater understanding of the relationship between young combatants and different forms of culture (including films, music, news media and graffiti). The studentship will help establish and promote the archive as a major resource for future research.

Popular representations of conflict, rebellion and violence in 'youth culture' are often described as influencing the behaviour of young people in contexts of insecurity. In the conflicts of Sierra Leone and Liberia in the 1990s and early 2000s, journalistic and academic accounts often noted the influence of US gangster-rap music and iconography on the appearance, language, and even behaviour of young combatants. Groups like the violent 'West Side Boys' seemed to epitomise this convergence of gangsterism and civil war. Yet at the same time, many young combatants reinvented or adapted trans-Atlantic popular culture to their own context, drawing-upon local repertoires and histories, or framed their worldview in entirely 'local' terms. To what extent did 'external' cultural influences shape young people's behaviour during war in West Africa? Did the lenses applied by international researchers, journalists and war photographers, overstate or even encourage these expressions of rebellion in a global-lexicon?

This award offers the chance for a doctoral student to critically examine the relationship between conflict behaviour, popular culture, and the interaction of media representation with (mis)understandings of war. A topic with great contemporary relevance, the research will focus specifically on the civil wars of Sierra Leone (1991-2002) and Liberia (1989-2003). In addition to standard desk and archival research, the student will explore Hetherington's large collection of un-researched material held by the Imperial War Museum, and may also undertake supplementary fieldwork in West Africa. The studentship offers flexibility in allowing the student to define the research scope, but research must help to contextualise Hetherington's images through his journal-writing and discourse. The precise direction of the project will



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be developed by the student in partnership with IWM and HEI co-supervisors, but likely areas of research include:

- To what extent did trans-Atlantic 'rebel' culture influence young combatants during the civil conflicts in West Africa (1989 - 2003), particularly as expressed through rap music and iconic figures such as Tupac?
- How did combatants use graffiti and other visual media to communicate during these conflicts?
- How do Tim Hetherington's photographs, videos, journals and observations further advance our understanding of young combatants and their experiences?
- Drawing on Hetherington's work, to what extent do representations of war influence war actors, and vice-versa?

Subject to AHRC eligibility criteria, the scholarships cover tuition fees and a grant (stipend) towards living expenses. The national minimum doctoral stipend for 2019/20 has been set by Research Councils UK as £17,009 (including £2000 London Weighting Allowance) plus £550 additional payment for Collaborative Doctoral Students. For more information visit:

<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/skills/phdstudents/fundingandtraining>.

Students are also eligible to draw additional funding from a Student Development Fund to support the cost of training, work placements, and other development opportunities that will benefit the student's doctoral research and future career development.

In addition, the student is eligible to receive up to £1,000 a year from IWM and will be able to apply for internal funding at King's College London to support archival visits and the delivery of academic conference papers.

How to Apply

Applicants will need to satisfy AHRC eligibility requirements including Masters-level advanced research training or equivalent. They will be assessed on the basis of their academic record and research potential, the strength of their covering letter and fit with the overall studentship aims described above. Prospective candidates will have an excellent academic record at undergraduate level, plus a Master's degree, or relevant experience. The successful candidate will be required to apply directly to the Department of War Studies within King's College London for subsequent acceptance on to the PhD programme. All offers are subject to passing the university's admissions requirements.

Applicants must be a resident of the UK or European Economic Area (EEA). In general, full studentships are available to students who are settled in the UK and have been ordinarily resident for a period of at least three years before the start of postgraduate studies. Fees-only awards are generally available to EU nationals resident in the EEA. International applicants are normally not eligible to apply for this studentship.

Applicants should submit via email a curriculum vitae (no more than two pages), a sample of writing, a covering letter outlining their suitability for the studentship and how they would approach the research (maximum two pages), transcripts of undergraduate and masters qualifications, and two academic references to pgr-securitystudies@kcl.ac.uk by **no later than 5pm on Sunday 12 May**.

Please note it is the responsibility of applicants to request references from their referees and ensure that they have been received by the School of Security Studies (pgr-securitystudies@kcl.ac.uk) by this deadline. All documents should be submitted in either a MS Word or PDF format. Please ensure the subject line of your email appears as 'surname, first name – IWM/KCL studentship.'



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Interviews are scheduled to be held in London on **Thursday 30 May**.