

# ERIN TORKELSON

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## EDUCATION

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- PhD**      **University of California, Berkeley, Geography, 2020**  
Dissertation: *Taken for Granted: Geographies of Debt and Social Welfare in South Africa*  
Committee: Gillian Hart (Geography, chair), Michael Watts (Geography), Sharad Chari (Geography), Donald Moore (Anthropology), Michael Burawoy (Sociology).
- MPhil**     **Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, Department of English, 2005**
- BA**        **Arizona State University, Department of English and Barrett Honors College, 2003**

## ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

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**Hunt Postdoctoral Fellow**, Wenner-Gren, Cape Town, South Africa 2021.

**Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow**, Department of Geography, Environment Studies and Tourism, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa 2020-2021.

**Lecturer**, Department of Geography, Environment Studies and Tourism, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa, Spring 2020 & 2021.

**Lecturer**, Department of Geography, University of California, Berkeley, Summer Session 2019 & 2020.

## PUBLICATIONS

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### Refereed Journal Articles

- ND**        “Sophia’s Choice: Debt, Social Welfare and Racial Finance Capitalism.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. (Accepted)
- 2020**      “Taken for Granted: Cash Transfers as Debt Transfers.” *World Development* 126: 104711, 1-11.

### Manuscripts Under Review

- ND**        “The State Financing of Racial Finance Capital: South Africa and Social Welfare.” *Journal of Southern African Studies*. (Submitted)

### Edited Collections

ND with Deborah James, Erin Torkelson and David Neves, "Savings, Investment, Borrowing: A South African Perspective on Thrift." In *Thrift*. Ed. Catherine Alexander and Daniel Sosna. Forthcoming.

### Newspaper Articles, Documentary Films, Radio Interviews, Podcasts

- 2020 with Deborah James and David Neves. "Legal but Reckless: Debt and Social Grant Recipients." *GroundUp*. 29 October.  
"Social Grants: Challenging Reckless Lending." *The Burning Issue*, Voice of the Cape. Cape Town. Air Date: 29 September.
- 2018 with Esley Philander, Colleen Crawford-Cousins, and Johan Abrahams. "Grant Grabs: Social Grants and the Green Card." *Cutting Edge*. South African Broadcasting Company. 27 March.
- 2017 with GroundUp Staff. "Social Grants: Has Belamant Answered His Critics?" *Ground Up*. 9 May.  
"The World Bank's Role in SA's Social Grant Payment System." *GroundUp*, 23 March. *Republished by Mail & Guardian, Huffington Post, Daily Maverick, News24, TimesLive*.  
"Sophia's Choice: Farm Worker has to Decide which Child to Feed." *GroundUp*, 15 March. *Republished by Daily Maverick, TimesLive, Independent Online*.  
"Deductions from Social Grants: How it All Works." *Daily Maverick Podcast*, Cliff Central Radio, Johannesburg. Air Date: 7 March.  
"Deductions from Social Grants: How it All Works." *GroundUp*, 3 March. *Republished by Huffington Post, Business Day, and Independent Online*.
- 2015 with Michael Watts, Camilla Hawthorne, Brittany Meche and Erin Torkelson. "What we Learn from the Film 'Concerning Violence' about Franz Fanon's Ideas. Africa is a Country, 8 April.

### Policy Briefs, Working Papers, Reports

- 2020 with Deborah James and David Neves. "Social Grants: Challenging Reckless Lending in South Africa." Cape Town: Black Sash.  
"Scoping Study on Corruption and Covid in South Africa," *Open Secrets Policy Brief*, Cape Town, RSA: Open Secrets.
- 2019 "Debt and Cash Transfers: Port Elizabeth, Limehill, Botshabelo, Delft." *Black Sash Policy Brief*, Cape Town, RSA: Black Sash.
- 2017 "EasyPay Card Recourse: Port Elizabeth, Limehill, Delft." *Black Sash Policy Brief*, Cape Town, RSA: Black Sash.  
"Five Country Survey of Social Grant Payment Arrangements." *Black Sash Policy Brief*, Cape Town, RSA: Black Sash.
- 2012 with Mark Eshbaugh, Greg Maly, and Jonathan Moyer. "Putting the Breaks on Road Traffic Fatalities in Africa," *African Futures Brief No 3*, Pretoria, RSA: The Institute for Security Studies.
- 2011 with Keith Gehring, Patrick McLennan, Jonathan Moyer, and Hopolang Selebalo. "Knowledge Empowers Africa: The benefits of increased investment in education," *African Futures Brief No 2*. Pretoria, RSA: The Institute for Security Studies.  
with Eric Firnhaber, Patrick McLennan, Jonathan Moyer "Taps & Toilets: How access can radically improve Africa's future," *African Futures Brief No 1*, 25 August. Pretoria, RSA: The Institute for Security Studies.  
with Tonkin, Anzabeth. "Considering Affordability for End Users," *Urban Land Matters*, 1(12), 1 May. Cape Town, RSA: Development Action Group.  
with Tonkin, Anzabeth. "Land Use for Sustainable Housing," *Urban Land Matters*, 1(11), 1 April. Cape Town, RSA: Development Action Group.  
with Tonkin, Anzabeth. "Good Design and Construction," *Urban Land Matters*, 1(10), 1 March. Cape Town, RSA: Development Action Group.  
with Tonkin, Anzabeth. "Housing Typologies," *Urban Land Matters*, 1(9), 1 February. Cape Town, RSA: Development Action Group.

- with Tonkin, Anzabeth. "Tenure Options," *Urban Land Matters*, 1(8), 1 January. Cape Town, RSA: Development Action Group.
- with Tonkin, Anzabeth. "Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable People," *Urban Land Matters*, 1(7), 1 December. Cape Town, RSA: Development Action Group.
- 2010** with Tonkin, Anzabeth. "Community Participation and Leadership," *Urban Land Matters*, 1(6), 1 November. Cape Town, RSA: Development Action Group.
- with Tonkin, Anzabeth. "Considering Livelihoods," *Urban Land Matters*, 1(5), 1 October. Cape Town, RSA: Development Action Group.
- with Tonkin, Anzabeth. "An Integrated Approach to Development," *Urban Land Matters*, 1(4), 1 September. Cape Town, RSA: Development Action Group.
- with Tonkin, Anzabeth. "Good Location," *Urban Land Matters*, 1(3), 1 August. Cape Town, RSA: Development Action Group.
- with Tonkin, Anzabeth. "South African Housing Policy," *Urban Land Matters*, 1(2), 1 July. Cape Town, RSA: Development Action Group.
- with Tonkin, Anzabeth. "Sustainable Urban Development," *Urban Land Matters*, 1(1), 1 June. Cape Town, RSA: Development Action Group.
- "Netreg Housing Project: Remaking City and Vernacular Economy According to Communal Needs and Desires," *Inclusive Housing Case Studies*. Cape Town, RSA: Development Action Group.
- 2006** with Ndashe, Sibongile. *Know Your Relationship Rights*, Cape Town, RSA: Women's Legal Centre.
- with Ndashe, Sibongile. *Know Your Inheritance Rights*, Cape Town, RSA: Women's Legal Centre.

## GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS

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### National Awards

- 2020** Hunt Postdoctoral Fellowship, Wenner Gren Anthropology Foundation  
Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship, University of the Western Cape
- 2017** Charlotte Newcombe Dissertation Completion Award, Woodrow Wilson Foundation
- 2015** Wenner Gren Dissertation Fieldwork Award, Wenner Gren Anthropology Foundation
- 2014** Foreign Language and Area Studies Award (isiXhosa), US Department of Education
- 2006** Fulbright Fellowship, International Institute of Education, US Department of State

### Institutional Awards

- 2018** Graduate Division Summer Fellowship, Graduate Division, UC Berkeley  
International Conference Travel Award, Graduate Division, UC Berkeley
- 2016** Rocca Dissertation Scholarship in African Studies, Center for African Studies, UC Berkeley
- 2015** John L. Simpson Memorial Research Fellowship, International and Area Studies, UC Berkeley  
Rocca Scholarship in African Studies, Center for African Studies, UC Berkeley  
Summer Language Scholarship, Center for African Studies, UC Berkeley  
Conference Grant, UC Humanities Research Institute, University of California  
Conference Grant, Townsend Humanities Center, UC Berkeley  
Outstanding Graduate Instructor Award, Center for Teaching Excellence, UC Berkeley
- 2014** Graduate Division Summer Fellowship, Graduate Division, UC Berkeley  
Geography Department Summer Fellowship, Geography Department, UC Berkeley
- 2013** Rocca Pre-Dissertation Award, Center for African Studies, UC Berkeley
- 2012-18** Geography Department Grant, Geography Department, UC Berkeley

## EXPERT SUBMISSIONS

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- 2020 with the Black Sash, “Debt and the Post Office Payment System,” South African National Credit Regulator, Pretoria, RSA, 6 March.
- 2019 with the Black Sash, “From Private to Public Welfare,” South African Social Security Agency, Johannesburg, RSA, 15 July.
- 2018 with the Black Sash, “Is Recourse Possible?,” Panel of Experts, South African Constitutional Court Johannesburg, RSA, 16 March.  
with the Black Sash, “The Techno-optimism of Cash Transfer: Financial Technologies in Welfare,” The Banking Association of South Africa, Cape Town, RSA, 28 February.
- 2017 with the Black Sash, “Debt and Net1’s Payment System,” South African Social Security Agency and National Treasury, Cape Town, RSA, 15 September.  
with the Black Sash, “Black Sash Monitoring Report,” South African Social Security Agency, Johannesburg, RSA, 15 September.
- 2012 with the Pardee Centre, Denver University, “African Futures and South African Presents,” South African Departments of International Relations and Cooperation, Trade and Industry, and Defense Pretoria, RSA, 14 February.  
with the Pardee Centre, Denver University, “African Futures,” African Union, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and UN Habitat, Pretoria, RSA, 13 February.  
with Hennie van Vuuren, “African Futures and Cape Town’s Presents,” Western Cape Department of Economic Development, Cape Town, RSA, 26 July.
- 2011 “Effective Responses to Organized Crime in Southern Africa,” Kenyan Office of the Presidency Mombasa, Kenya, 29 August - 2 September.
- 2009 with the Development Action Group, “The N2 Gateway Project,” South African Parliament, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Cape Town, RSA, 27 October.
- 2008 with the Namibian Slum Dwellers Federation, “Namibia’s Country-Wide Slum Upgrading,” UN Commission on Sustainable Development, New York, USA, 5 - 16 May.

## RECENT INVITED PRESENTATIONS

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- 2020 “Bantustan Banking: The Deep Structures of Racial Financial Capitalism,” Department of Anthropology, University of Cape Town, Cape Town RSA (postponed coronavirus).
- 2019 “Collateral Damage: Cash Transfer and Debt Transfer in South Africa,” South African Labor and Development Research Unit, University of Cape Town, Cape Town RSA, 20 November.  
“Poverty Finance: Techno-Finance for the Poor from Apartheid to the Present,” Department of Geography, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, RSA, 19 September.  
“Household Debt and Dispossession through Social Welfare,” Rethinking Economics for Africa Festival, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, RSA, 6 September.
- 2017 “Living the Lottery: Social Grants and the Politics of Development Discourse,” Institute for Poverty Land and Agrarian Studies, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, RSA, 16 June.  
“Sophia’s Choice: Do Social Grants (Really) Work?” Social Grants and Intergenerational Relations Conference, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, RSA, 10 April.

## CONFERENCES AND PANELS ORGANIZED

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- 2020 Conference organizer with Deborah James, "Life in Debt: Social Grants as Collateral in South Africa," Black Sash, Cape Town, RSA, 26 August.
- 2019 Panel organizer with Stephen McIsaac and Meredith Palmer, "Health as Fix: Geographies of the Biopolitical in Settler and Post Colonies," Association of American Geographers Annual Meeting, Washington DC, USA, 4 April.
- 2015 Conference organizer with Camilla Hawthorne, Andrea Marston, Meredith Palmer, and Brittany Meche, "Race, Space, Violence," University of California Graduate Student Conference, Omni Commons, Oakland, USA, 3-5 June.

## RECENT CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

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- 2020 "Hellish Home Economics: Social Grants and the Gendering of a Pandemic," African Studies Association, Virtual, 20 November.  
 "Sophia's Choice: Moral Economies of Race and Racism in South Africa's Welfare Program," Association of American Geographers, Denver CO, USA (postponed coronavirus).
- 2019 "Collateral Damages: South Africa's Techno-spatial Fix," Association of American Geographers, Washington DC, USA, 4 April.
- 2018 "Life on an Instalment Plan: Debt, Social Grants and South Africa," Africa in the World, American Anthropology Association and African Studies Association, Johannesburg, RSA, 26 May.
- 2016 "isiXhosa Articulations of Home: Thinking Alongside Gillian Hart," Association of American Geographers, San Francisco, California, USA, 1 April.

## IN THE NEWS

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- 2020 Ho, Ufrieda. "The Vicious Cycle of the Debt Trap Fallen into by Social Grant Recipients." *Daily Maverick*, 22 October 2020.  
 Githathu, Mwangi. "Loan Sharks Feasting on the Poorest by Charging 50-112% Interest." *Cape Argus*, 20 September 2020.  
 Stent, James. "Report Shows How Lenders Pay on Social Grant Recipients." *GroundUp*, 16 September 2020.  
 Rees, Malcolm. "The Human Cost of the Unsecured Lending Explosion." *GroundUp*, 13 February 2020.
- 2019 Gentilini, Ugo. "Social Protection Papers of the Year." *World Bank Blogs*. 19 December 2020.
- 2017 Webb, Chris. "The Roots of the Current Crisis in South Africa." *Africa is a Country*. 14 March 2017.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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### Lecturer

*Global Environmental Politics*, Department of Geography, University of California, Berkeley, Summer 2020  
*Critical Geographies of Nature and Land*, Department of Geography, University of the Western Cape, Fall 2020  
*Nature, Culture, Power*, Department of Geography, University of California, Berkeley, Summer 2019

### Graduate Student Instructor

*Introduction to Geography*, Jake Kosek, Department of Geography, University of California, Berkeley, Fall 2017  
*Development Theory and Practice*, Gill Hart, Global Studies, University of California, Berkeley, Spring 2013, 2014  
*Introduction to Development*, Michael Watts, Global Studies, University of California, Berkeley, Fall 2013  
*South Africa Study Abroad*, Social Justice & Transformation, Arizona State University, Summer 2006/07

### **High School Teacher**

*English as a Second Language & Freshman English Literature*, McClintock High School, Tempe Union High School District, Arizona, 2004-2005.

## **TEACHING AREAS**

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### **Political Economy/Development Studies**

Development in Theory and Practice  
Race, Gender and Development  
Poverty and Inequality  
Cultural Politics of Political Economies  
Racial Capitalism  
Debt, Reparation, Repair  
Neoliberalism and Financialization

### **Postcolonial/Critical Race Theory**

Postcolonial and Decolonial Geographies  
Critical Geographies of Race and Racism  
African Memoir, Placemaking, and Belonging  
Epistemologies and Africas  
Feminism, Kinship and Care in Africa  
The Imperative of Abolition  
Race and Technology

### **Environmental Politics**

Nature, Culture, Power  
Global Environmental Justice  
The Anthropocene  
Food and the Environment  
Political Ecology

### **Research Methodologies**

Ethnographic Research Methods  
Geographic Writing and Research

## **FIELDWORK EXPERIENCE**

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- 2020** Black Sash and South African Medical Science Research Council (3 months)  
Researched "Social Welfare in a time of Covid."
- 2020** Open Secrets Fieldwork, RSA (1 month)  
Produced "Scoping Study on Opportunities for Corruption and Covid."
- 2019** London School of Economics (LSE) Funded Fieldwork, RSA (3 months)  
Researched debt and social grants under the Post Office payment system in 9 cities for the Black Sash with Deborah James and David Neves.
- 2017-18** Intermittent Fieldwork, Black Sash, Cape Town, RSA (6 months)  
Researched debt and the EasyPay card in 4 cities for the Black Sash and National Credit Regulator.
- 2016-17** John L Simpson Funded Dissertation Fieldwork, Black Sash, Cape Town, RSA (14 months)  
Researched deductions from social grants in 4 cities for the Black Sash and Constitutional Court; researched social welfare as collateral in five countries; participated in quarterly surveys at social grant distribution points.
- 2015-16** Wenner Gren Funded Dissertation Fieldwork, Siyakhathala, Cape Town, Cala, RSA (12 months)  
Conducted over one hundred interviews on household budgeting practices, livelihood strategies and social grant payments.

- 2014** Rocca Funded Pre-Dissertation Research, Cape Town and Cala, RSA (3 months)  
Researched the politics of home making between the urban township of Khayelitsha and the rural village of Cala; studied intermediate Xhosa.
- 2013** FLAS Funded Pre-Dissertation Research, Cape Town and Cala, RSA (3 months)  
Researched the politics of home making between the urban township of Khayelitsha and the rural village of Cala; studied beginning Xhosa.

## **RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE**

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- 2010-12** Researcher, Corruption & Governance Program, Institute for Security Studies, Cape Town, RSA  
Managed multi-country research project on urban areas governed by gangs and sustained by criminal economies (CIDA funded); managed multi-country futures modeling project on development in Africa; contributed to research projects on economic crime, environmental crime, and corporate tax evasion.
- 2009-10** Researcher, Land & Housing Program, Development Action Group, Cape Town, RSA  
Researched and wrote submissions to Parliament on the N2 Gateway Housing project; researched and wrote case studies on medium density urban development projects; wrote and designed twelve periodicals on medium density urban upgrading to undo apartheid spatial planning.
- 2006-08** Researcher, Urban Poverty Program, Shack Dwellers International, Cape Town, RSA  
Researched and reported on housing policy and social movements in Kenya, Namibia, Malawi, Philippines, India and Sri Lanka; built and mentored grassroots research team to collect data on tenure security and housing projects in 20 countries.
- 2005-06** Researcher, Legal Education Program, Women's Legal Centre, Cape Town, RSA  
Wrote popular education materials on women's inheritance and marriage rights.

## **SERVICE EXPERIENCE**

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### **Ad Hoc Reviewer**

Society and Space, World Development, African Geographical Review, Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers.

### **Departmental Service**

Graduate Student Representative to Faculty, Berkeley (2017 – 2018)

Graduate Student Representative for Colloquium Speaker Series, Berkeley (2014 – 2015)

## **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

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Member, American Association of Geographers, USA

Member, African Studies Association, USA

Member, American Anthropological Association, USA

Member, Society of South African Geographers Association, South Africa

Member, UAW Local 2865, Graduate Student Union, Berkeley

## REFERENCES

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Gillian Hart  
Professor of Geography  
505 McCone Hall #4470  
University of California, Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA 94702  
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