

Personal Profile

Carola Lentz is Senior Research Professor at the Department of Anthropology and African Studies, Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz. Her research focuses on West Africa, and she is particularly interested in the relations between ethnicity and nationalism, the symbolic construction of nations, the politics of memory, elite biographies, and the emergence of African middle classes. After conducting PhD fieldwork in Ecuador, on Indian labour migration and ethnicity, she has been engaged, since 1987, in research in Ghana and Burkina Faso on ethnicity, the history of chieftaincy and colonial history, land rights, labour migration, the politics of belonging, and middle-class and elite biographies.

She was a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study in Berlin (Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin) in 2017-18, leading the focus group “Family history and social change in Africa”; together with Isidore Lobnibe, she wrote a book on changing memories in a Ghanaian extended family of which both authors are members (*Imagining Futures: Memory and Belonging in an African Family*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022). Furthermore, she directed a research project on “Early-career funding in German African science co-operations”, financed by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (2019-21). Since 2009, she has conducted research on African independence jubilees and national celebrations. She supervised a doctoral research group as well as numerous fieldwork projects by Master students, and headed the research project “Performing the nation and sub-national differences in African national days” (2013-19) in the context of the interdisciplinary research group “Un/doing differences: practices of human differentiation” at JGU Mainz. This research has resulted in an extensive online archive based at ifeas with numerous photos, newspaper articles and documents on the independence celebrations in twelve African countries (<https://www.blogs.uni-mainz.de/fb07-ifeas-eng/departmental-archives/online-archive-african-independence-days/>).

Since 2014, she is member of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. She served as Secretary of the Academy’s Social Science Class (2016-18) and as Vice President of the Academy from 2018 to 2020. Since 2020, she is a member of the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina. From 2011 to 2015, she has been president of the German Anthropological Association; 2023, she was awarded honorary membership of the DGSKA. From 2020 to 2024, she has been president of the Goethe-Institut. She is also a member of various advisory boards and boards of trustees, including the Bildungsstätte Anne Frank, the German Academy for Language and Poetry and the Friedenstein Foundation Gotha.

Her recent publications include a history of the Goethe-Institut, *The Goethe-Institut: A History from 1951 to the Present* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2024); the anthology *Life Course, Work and Labour in Global History* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), edited with Josef Ehmer, and the co-authored monograph *Remembering Independence* (London: Routledge 2018, with David Lowe). For her study *Land, Mobility and Belonging in West Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013) she received the Melville J. Herskovits Award from the African Studies Association for the best English-language scholarly work on Africa published in 2013. [For further publications see list of publications.] For many years, Carola Lentz was co-editor of the ‘African Social Studies’ series published by Brill and a member of the editorial board of *Africa* and other international journals.

Before coming to Mainz in 2002, Carola Lentz held assignments at Free University Berlin (1987-93) and Goethe University Frankfurt/Main (1995-2002). She was awarded fellowships at the Institute for Advanced Study and Research in the African Humanities at Northwestern University (1993), the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (2000-1), and the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research at Harvard University (2008-9). In 2012–13 and again in 2019-20 she was a fellow of the International Research Centre “Work and Human Life Cycle in Global History“ at Humboldt University (Berlin); in 2015, she had a fellowship at the Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg/Hanse Institute for Advanced Study in Delmenhorst (Germany); in 2017-18 she was fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, and in 2019 fellow at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (South Africa). Furthermore, as part of the ERASMUS Programme, she taught at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Marseille and at Roskilde University.

Carola Lentz received her PhD in sociology from the University of Hannover in 1987 and completed her habilitation in social anthropology in 1996 at the Free University of Berlin.