



ASC Master's Thesis Award for 2003
to Riekje Pelgrim for her thesis entitled
'Witchcraft and Policing: Attitudes of the
South African Police Forces Towards the Belief in
Witchcraft and Towards Witchcraft-related Crime
in the Northern Province'

Report by the Jury

The ASC Master's Thesis Award, which aims to encourage student research and writing on Africa and to promote the study of African cultures and societies, is to be presented in 2003 for the first time. The prize will be awarded annually to a student whose Master's thesis, in Dutch, English or French, has been completed on the basis of independent empirical research connected with Africa. The thesis must be thematically related to socio-geographical, economic, political, historical, juridical or anthropological issues or focus on the humanities. The award consists of a prize of €1,000 and a stipend of €3,000, the latter to be spent on follow-up research.

The Jury received 38 theses this year. Of these, six did not fulfil the stated criteria: they were too old, were not accompanied by the required documentation or the subject matter did not fall within the above-mentioned disciplines. Of the remaining 32 theses, eleven were submitted by African students living in Africa, nine by Africans studying in the Netherlands, and the remaining twelve were submitted by Dutch students.

The theses covered a wide range of subjects including micro-credit, conflict resolution, community radio, female circumcision, poverty, food security, land titles, ritual practices, house-building processes, irrigation and gender, community forestry planning, the self-image of ethnic groups, hip hop music, the role of urban sub-centres, the migration of AIDS victims back to rural areas, witchcraft, morality and ethnicity, gender, pregnancy problems, human-rights violations among female refugees, the Internet at a rural level, transactional advocacy networks, initiation rituals, Islam, trade-union education, and new technologies.

In accordance with the rules and regulations, the Chairman of the Jury and three committee members met to review the 32 theses. It was concluded that the call for theses for this first ASC Master's Thesis Award had resulted in an impressive number of theses and, after a long discussion, a short list of seven names (listed below in alphabetical order) was drawn up.

Nynke Douma *Beyond Broadcasting: The Role of Community Radio in Conflict Transformation and Peace-building Processes*

Abdoulaye Niang *Etude Interdisciplinaire du Rap à Dakar à Travers Une Approche de la Complexité: entre Mouvement Social et Groupe Primaire*

Akachi Odoemen *The Management of the Aguleri-Umuleri Communal Conflict in Nigeria, 1914 - 1999*

Riekje Pelgrim *Witchcraft and Policing: Attitudes of the South African Police Forces Towards the Belief in Witchcraft and Towards Witchcraft-related Crime in the Northern Province*

Lucy Schalkwijk *De Moraal van het Verhaal: Moraliteit, Etniciteit, en Gender in Rwandese en Burundese Diasporagemeenschappen in Kenia en Nederland*

Ancella Voets *La Lutte Continue: Het Transnational Advocacy Network van de Mauritaanse Diaspora*

Robbert Woltering *Ugandan Muslims: History, Identity and Integration*

To be short-listed for the award, a student and his/her thesis had to have several outstanding qualities. The short-listed researchers had all studied very relevant subjects, their concepts and methodologies had been well worked out and some of them had shown their abilities in their original approach. All the theses had been well written and their subject matter was significant with regard to development-related issues and interesting for the general public.

On 26 August, the Jury discussed the nominated theses. After extensive deliberations, it decided to present the 2003 ASC Master's Thesis Award to Riekje Pelgrim for her thesis *Witchcraft and Policing: Attitudes of the South African Police Forces Towards the Belief in Witchcraft and Towards Witchcraft-related Crime in the Northern Province*. The thesis considers how South Africa's Northern Province is being increasingly confronted with so-called witch attacks – violent assaults on individuals or groups who are believed to be practicing witchcraft. In *Witchcraft and Policing*, Riekje Pelgrim discusses this subject from the point of view of the police. She investigates the dynamics between (a) the views and beliefs of the local community with its witchcraft discourse, (b) the stipulations of the national witchcraft legislation, and (c) the dilemmas facing the police with regard to local views (which they often share) and the national legislation. She successfully combines a literature study with participant observation, including open-ended interviews both in local communities and among policemen, and a study of primary sources such as police files and local historical documents. The reasons for the Jury's decision to present the 2003 ASC Master's Thesis Award to Riekje Pelgrim were the following:

1. The subject of the thesis is highly relevant. To write about such a sensitive and complicated issue from the point of view of the police is an original and innovative approach.
2. In spite of the fact that studying witchcraft in African societies from the perspective of North-Atlantic academia tends to give rise to many complexities and sensitivities, Riekje Pelgrim succeeds in providing a finely tuned analysis of the subject matter. Her thesis offers a convincing description and analysis of witchcraft as an ongoing social, political and theoretical dilemma.
3. The researcher applies an impressive mix of methodologies. The thesis contains fascinating case studies and much interesting ethnographic information.
4. The thesis is well written and coherent.
5. The author makes the problem of witchcraft and policing accessible to policy makers and other interested parties beyond the confines of academia.

The thesis is part of a larger research programme entitled 'Crossing Witchcraft Barriers in South Africa' that is being organized by the University of the North in South Africa and Utrecht University in the Netherlands.

In conclusion, the Jury would like to congratulate Riekje Pelgrim on her excellent work and is very pleased to be able to present her with the 2003 ASC Master's Thesis Award. The Director of the African Studies Centre, Dr G.S.C.M. Hesseling, will present the award to Ms Pelgrim during a ceremony on 2 October 2003.

Chairman of the Jury
Jos van Beurden

Members of the Jury
Dr Rijk van Dijk
Prof. Sjaak van der Geest
Mindanda Mohogu
Prof. Mohamed Salih
Dr Klaas Walraven
Marieke van Winden (secretary)