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NSF grant to fund human rights research

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CONTRIBUTING REPORTER
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A grant recently awarded to a Yale anthropology professor will fund research intended to expand previous human rights work in Africa.

In late Aug., Kamari Maxine Clarke received a competitive grant of \$260,000 from the National Science Foundation to further her previous studies in human rights and international law. Her project, which is titled “The International Criminal Court, Africa, and the Pursuit of Justice,” will investigate ethnographic studies and effective structures of international rule of law, she said.

Her project will focus on countries — such as Sudan, Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia — where the International Criminal Court is seeking warrants of arrest for leaders such as Sudan’s Omar al-Bashir.

“Many of the African leaders who once supported the Court are no longer supporting the Court, at least in terms of the public positions they are taking,” she added.

Clarke said she believes her work will advance scientific understandings of international law and justice, especially in anthropology and interdisciplinary studies of law. She added that she hopes to answer the question of what justice really is, and how politicians and victims in these countries view the notion of human rights.

Even with the grant, the project will face difficulties: Clarke plans to conduct 300 interviews with victims and warlords, some of whom will be difficult to contact.

“The most controversial figures will be difficult,” she said. “I will pursue it and see what kind of access I will get.”

Despite the opportunities this grant opens for her work, Clarke said she has been frustrated by the diminishing support Yale has provided for the University’s studies in Africa.

Clarke, who recently served as chair of Yale’s Council on African Studies, said she decided not to renew her term because she did not believe the University was doing enough to support studies in Africa. Yale’s African Studies program suffers from limited class options and a dwindling number of faculty members, said professor Ann Biersteker, the Director of Undergraduate Studies for the African studies major.

“It’s getting to be almost a crisis situation,” Biersteker said. “So many people have left that haven’t been replaced — we end up with just hardly anyone.”

With support of the Yale MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies, the African studies program at Yale recently underwent internal review, Clarke said, adding that the faculty and CAS are currently waiting to see if the University will commit to expanding the major. Despite the University’s strong language program, its unique offering of joint master’s and bachelor’s degrees in African Studies and the large amount of student interest, Biersteker said she does not see any solid plans in place to replace faculty members who have left.

Both Yale and other university professors stressed the importance of supporting research focused on Africa.

“How incomplete would international law and ethics be if people do not understand the places in which laws are going to be implemented?” said Johns Hopkins political science professor Siba Grovogui. “There is a poverty of knowledge if you do not study this area.”

Benson Olugbuo, a visiting research assistant for Yale’s CAS, said research in Africa is especially important in

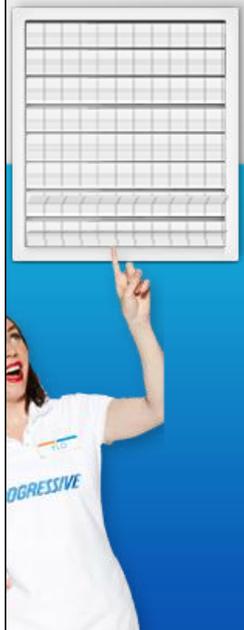
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the fields of international law and human rights. Such research, he added, can be used to understand the potential of using law as an instrument of change in developing economies.

Yale first introduced African language classes into its curriculum in the 18th century.

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