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“In the shadow of the great white queen: The Edendale Kholwa of colonial Natal 1850–1906.”

TIME
15H00

DATE
Tuesday, 27 October 2020

PLATFORM
Zoom

DISCUSSANT
Mr Mavuso Msimang

SPEAKER
Professor Sheila Meintjes

CLICK TO RSVP

ENQUIRIES ONLY
Xoliswa Zulu Email: Zulux@ukzn.ac.za

INSPIRING GREATNESS
Mr Mavuso Msimang has a BSc and an MBA from the US International University in California. He was a senior member of the African National Congress and served on the Military High Command of Umkonto we Sizwe. In 1977 he joined the United Nations, working in Zambia, Kenya and Ethiopia. He subsequently worked for the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) and CARE International as Country Director in Ethiopia and Kenya before being appointed Head of Emergency Planning for WUSC working out of Ottawa, Canada. He returned to South African in 1993 and served in a number of positions including Executive Director of SA Tourism, CEO of South African National Parks (SANParks) and a Visiting Professor in the Institute for Women and Gender studies at the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg in Germany.

MAVUSO MSIMANG’S EXTRACT FROM THE FOREWORD:

It is proper that I conclude by commending the meticulous research that went into the production of In the Shadow of the Great White Queen. A descendant of Edendale, the chasm of ignorance about my ancestral history, a mere two centuries old, has been rudely exposed. I fear that my contemporaries elsewhere in the country are in no better situation. How about anthropology or sociology departments in our universities stepping into the breach to remedy the anomaly? Failure to do this would result in the bestowal on future generations of a dire legacy of perpetual ignorance about their past. As Sheila Meintjes remarked the other day, ‘it is important to research these histories, for they enrich our lives.’

Sheila Meintjes taught Political Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand for 30 years. Her initial research interest in the historical transformations of independent pre-colonial polities to subordinate colonies during the nineteenth century transitioned to a focus on gender and women in both her research and teaching. She is an Honorary Research Associate Professor in the Department of Political Studies at Wits, and a Visiting Professor in the Institute for Women and Gender studies at the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg in Germany.

ABSTRACT

This history of one of the earliest nineteenth century mission stations in colonial Natal traces the transformation in the lives of a community that settled first at Indaleni near Richmond and later at Edendale a few miles from Pietermaritzburg, the capital. Initially an independent mission under the religious and educational tutelage of James Allison, who left the Methodist Church to pursue his mission work independently. Edendale was the first African community in Natal to experiment with freehold tenure. This had implications for the way that they were integrated into colonial society as educated, market orientated producers and as citizens. They sought equal recognition as settlers, no different from the British settlers. When this was denied, they founded an organisation in the 1880s to pursue their rights, the Funamalungelo, a forerunner of twentieth century African nationalism.

The concerns of this case study return to questions that dominated historical materialist debates in the 1980s, when the thesis on which this book is based, was written. How did social relations of production and reproduction of communal kinship society mesh with those of the colonial capitalist economy which in the nineteenth century was essentially a petty commodity economy within the beginnings of a plantation nexus? What were the mechanisms that led to the transformation of political and other social relations? How did ideological change occur in the context of religious conversion?

While the larger forces of imperial capitalism in the nineteenth century forms the backdrop to the study, it is to their translation in the lives of indigenous peoples that is of consequence. It is through the prism of a small, rather peripheral colony in the nineteenth century that we can see how they unfold and transform people’s lives at the level of mission village life. For those living in colonial Natal, it was the Victorian Imperial State represented by its small cohort of officials on the ground, that overshadowed social and political relationships. But at the local level, people reacted, adapted and opposed these forces to create their own existence. This history of the Edendale community shows this syncretic process very clearly.

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