



INTERVENTIONS IN CRITICAL KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

TRANSFORMATION

2023 SEMINAR SERIES

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African Franchise and the making of anti-colonial Blackness in colonial South Africa, 1874-1890

This paper examines the shifting ideas of collective identity which shaped debates of the emerging African Nationalist movement in South Africa and focuses on the surprising role that African voter rights played in building a shared Black identity in early 'proto-nationalism'. I follow a 16-year period, from 1874 to 1890, and use computational text analysis and historical analysis to follow identity language in the isiXhosa press; Isigidimi sama-Xosa and Imvo Zabantsundu.



This analysis shows a diverse and still forming ideological landscape where notions of Ethnicity, Nationhood, and Race all ebbed and flowed as the focal conceptions of the political self. Focusing in on isiXhosa conceptions of 'Blackness'—Ntsundu and Mnyama—I examine the surprising shifts in identity language, and show how the struggle against disenfranchisement led to the collective consolidation of shared language around Abantsundu identity. This analysis shows that rather than merely adopting racial logics of colonialism, intellectuals were drawing on Xhosa epistemological frameworks to forge isiXhosa conceptions of race. These ideas could escape the Black-White binary while at the same time supporting a collective movement to fight for African political rights.



Thursday 30 March, 13:00-14:30 (SAST)

Room 401, Arts and Social Sciences

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