Southern African Pasts before the Colonial Era, their Archives and Ongoing Present/Presence 16, 17, 18, July, 2015 Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative University of Cape Town

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Abridged Call for Paper Proposals

In the nineteenth century, many colonial intellectuals took the history of southern Africa before colonialism seriously enough to record and collect materials pertinent to it and to write its histories. In the post-conquest context of the twentieth century, the many eras of the long past, and indeed the history of indigenous people in the colonial and apartheid eras, were systematically ghetto-ised as the subject of the disciplines of archaeology, anthropology, linguistics and prehistory, and as requiring a specialist conceptual apparatus pertinent to the study of ‘tribal’ or ‘pre-modern’ societies. The conference seeks to unpack the legacies of this conceptual apparatus and to draw on comparative perspectives from across and beyond the continent that are attentive to the cross-genealogies of the tribal and the modern.

The conference rationale is founded in a long view of history, seeking to subvert persistent habits of treating the past before colonialism as another country, and the advent of colonialism as the history of the region’s starting point with only a passing nod to, or introductory paragraph on, what went before. What happens when histories of ideas, modes of thought, institutions and practices, and the changes which they have undergone, are traced across the early state, late independent, early colonial, apartheid, and even post-apartheid, eras? In the conference the latter, provisional, periodization would itself be open to debate and question.

Academic orthodoxy teaches researchers to approach pasts before the colonial era as an evacuated experience and as a domain of specialists. And yet, our everyday scenes are stamped by its untheorised proximity and its entangled lives in the contemporary. In a variety of different ways – imaginatively, expansively, subjectively, critically, affectively – contemporary artists, writers, family and clan historians, politicians and intellectuals engage the body of inherited materials that academics and lawyers use as “sources”, often with very different purposes, from the celebratory through the denunciatory to the parodic. All of these engagements with the eras of the past before European colonialism, and with the ways in which the colonial and apartheid eras dealt with the earlier periods, undertaken by historians and many others, contribute to contemporary understandings and meanings of the distant past and fall within the purview of the conference.

The Conference will be organised around four central themes:

- the nature and forms of archive, and indeed other forms of historical material, pertinent to these eras;
- the meanings of pasts designated “pre-colonial” in the present, and in past presents;

- innovations- conceptual, theoretical, methodological, technological, practical and creative - in enquiry into these eras

- the making and remaking of archives like the James Stuart Archive.

The full version of this conference proposal can be found at:

http://www.apc.uct.ac.za/apc/programme/conferences

The organisers invite exhibitions, events, performances, panels and paper proposals of about 500 words from those interested in participating, along with a few lines of biographical information about the proposed participants. The proposals should indicate clearly which conference theme (or themes) they are responding to and should highlight areas of innovation or fresh thinking. These should be sent to The Organising Committee, apc-admin@uct.ac.za, by 12 February 2015. Accepted proposals (revised where appropriate) and biographical information will be circulated and published on-line as part of the conference programme. Exhibition and performance synopses/catalogues and final papers need to be submitted one month in advance of the conference. They will be pre-circulated and taken as read when discussed at the conference. Exhibition and performance venues will be arranged in consultation with the presenters. The emphasis of the conference will be on in-depth discussion and engagement, and the organisers will endeavour to keep participant numbers at a level that this makes this feasible. The organisers plan to publish a selection of conference contributions afterwards.