



Presentation 5

Weaving Calico, Crafting the Ciskei:

Isishweshwe, Industrial Development,
and Native Affairs in mid-20th Century
South Africa

1 November 2023 | 3-4:30pm

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Abstract

The paper attends to the paradox of an established and largely unquestioned indigeneity discourse surrounding the isishweshwe textile and its global and local history in the wake of British cotton's diminishing profitability, the industry's search for new markets and cotton-growing sites, and the pre-apartheid rudiments for the homeland system. Through a detailed exploration of the establishment of The Good Hope Textile Corporation (GHTC), the sole manufacturer of the isishweshwe textile, this paper recovers the confluence of two seemingly unrelated questions, namely: attempts by the British cotton industry - with the support of the British political establishment - to salvage an ailing industry and the Union government's experiment with answering the Native Question, thereby laying the foundation for the creation of the Ciskei Homeland.

Presenter

Lebogang Mokwena is a NIHSS postdoctoral fellow at UWC's Centre for Humanities Research. Her work lies at the intersection of cultural and historical sociology with a special focus on material and visual culture. She is currently working on her first book, provisionally titled "Fabrications: Isishweshwe and the Visual Politics of Africanity after Apartheid". She holds degrees from The New School, the University of Sussex, and Wits University.

Discussant

Stephen Sparks teaches in the Department of History at the University of Johannesburg and is a historian of 20th century South Africa. He is nearing completion of a manuscript on the history of the SASOL project and Sasolburg.