Africa, 60 years of independence
30 January 2020
Stadsgehoorzaal, Breestraat 60 Leiden (Aalmarktzaal)

Preliminary programme

8.30-9.30 Registration

9.30-9.35 Word of welcome

9.35-11.00 Key note lecture by Professor Lungisile Ntsebeza
African Studies in Africa: challenging colonial hangovers and disciplinary myopia
Discussant: Professor Mirjam de Bruijn

11.00-11.30 Coffee/tea break

11.30-13.00 Key note lecture by Professor Birgit Meyer
What is “Religion” in Africa? Relational Dynamics in an Entangled World
Discussant: Professor Rijk van Dijk

13.00-14.00 Lunchbreak

14.00-15.30 Key note lecture Professor Carolyn Hamilton
Inherited Concepts in Motion: Vernacular Pasts and the Future Precolonial
Discussant: Professor Jan-Bart Gewald

15.30-16.00 Coffee/tea break

16.00-17.30 Key note lecture Professor Jan Abbink (to be confirmed)
Discussant: to be confirmed

17.30-18.30 Drinks
Abstracts

Professor Lungisile Ntsebeza
African Studies in Africa: challenging colonial hangovers and disciplinary myopia
Abstract forthcoming.

Professor Birgit Meyer
What is “Religion” in Africa? Relational Dynamics in an Entangled World
Tracking the social, economic, political and cultural implications of introduction of the category of religion to Africa by missions, scholars and colonial administrations, this lecture approaches religion from a relational angle that takes into account the connections between Africa and Europe. Much can be learned about the complexity and power dynamics of these connections by studying religion not simply in but also from Africa. The lecture will mainly refer to historical and current materials from Ghana, from the dismissal of indigenous deities as “fetishes” to the rise of Pentecostalism. Doing so, my concern is not to offer a history of religion in Ghana, but rather to show how a focus on religion can serve as a productive entry point into the longstanding relational dynamics through which Africans and Europeans are entangled with each other. This is a necessary step in decolonizing scholarly knowledge production about (religion in) Africa.

Professor Carolyn Hamilton
Inherited Concepts in Motion: Vernacular Pasts and the Future Precolonial
The lecture will lay out an argument for recognising the depth and extent of the available discursive archive, much of it in isiZulu, capable of illuminating the conceptual world of Africans in the region that is today KwaZulu-Natal in the first instance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and through careful methodological work, in the eras before that. The focus in the lecture is on inherited concepts in motion in eras across the precolonial/colonial divide. I argue that in the face of this extended archive it is no longer possible, if it ever was, to rely on the ethnographies of the same period for insight into the conceptual world of that time of Zulu speakers, and to assume people in previous eras had much the same "worldview". Scholars can no longer valorise the brokerage and syntheses of the ethnographers at the expense of paying attention to the brokerage and syntheses that we can see in the many texts of much the same period produce by Zulu-speaking thinkers. To make these points is not to wish simply to supplant the ethnographic texts with these ones. Rather it is to recognise that each of these kinds of text - ethnographic as much as the literary or recorded oral - is a particular production that is worth investigating as a production.

The lecture will also engages critically with the way in which history produced by black intellectuals, typically operating in urban settings, was consigned out of the field of historiography as literature and politics, while the oral productions of history by black thinkers, typically in rural settings, were in turn, positioned as sources. This double manoeuver not only denied historical authority to both of these forms of history production, but favoured the narratives of the rural informant as historically more authentic than the writings of the urban intellectual, thereby lancing both forms of historical production of their
discursive potency. The lecture will offer thus an historical perspective on the pressures on the academies today to grapple with the limits of the existing disciplines and the weight of what Bheki Petersen has termed the Black Humanities (2017) developed over the last century by intellectuals and thinkers outside those disciplines.

Professor Jan Abbink (to be confirmed)
Title and abstract forthcoming.