



Gender Talks Series

Gendered (in)securities and the memorialisation of struggle in postliberation Africa



Speaker: Dr Stephanie Cawood

Date: 26 August 2022

Time: 12:30 – 14:00

Moderator: Dr N Lake

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Stephanie Cawood (Senior Lecturer) is the Director of the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies at the University of the Free State. As scholar, she is interested in the interdisciplinary spaces between Africa and Gender Studies with particular interest in matters of culture, heritage memory, rhetoric and gender. She teaches in the Africa and Gender Studies programmes where she is involved in the supervision of postgraduate students at Honours, Master's and Doctoral levels. In 2013, she went to the University of Bologna on a staff exchange (EUROSA) and, in 2016, took up a visiting research fellowship at the African Studies Centre Leiden. In 2016, she was awarded a Newton Advanced Fellowship from the British Academy in collaboration with Dr Jonathan Fisher from the University of Birmingham to pursue research on the memorialising of struggle and the dynamics of memory, space and power in post-liberation Africa.

Conventional wisdom dictates that revolutionary parties that have been in power for a long time sustain their domestic legitimacy through resource distribution and patronage, service delivery and/or intimidation. However, intangible incentives of a more ideological nature can be equally important for revolutionary regimes to sustain their legitimacy to govern. Across the African continent, revolutionary regimes are aging with Uganda's NRM at 32 years and South Africa's ANC at 24 years, while post-liberation populations are becoming younger and younger. This means that revolutionary regimes have to find alternative ways to direct how liberation struggles are remembered and memorialised so as to maintain their own legitimacy. In this way, mythical constructions of collective memory often come to underpin narratives of liberation that serve as political capital for younger generations.

Monuments/memorials/museums commemorating liberation struggles are places where space is inscribed with meaningful and persuasive narratives of liberation related to events, people or deliberate acts. This paper considers what happens to women's experiences and contributions in these collective memory narratives and the making of places. The central question is: In what ways are places and rituals of memorialisation gendered and what does it mean for difficult liberation heritage such as sexually-based violence experienced by women during liberation struggles? In attempting to answer this question, South African cases will be considered in comparison to examples from across the African continent.