



Call for Papers

On the edges: Autodidacts, forgotten thinkers, silenced women in
20th-century South Africa

23 – 24 April 2019

Centre for African Studies

University of Cape Town

We invite papers for this conference to be held in Cape Town on 23-24 April 2019.

Although South African historiography has been dominated by university-based intellectuals, many intellectuals operated outside universities, only to be marginalized and hidden from history. This conference places those marginalized intellectuals centre stage, exploring their hitherto neglected work in all its originality and variety. Intellectuals active outside universities ranged from socialist autodidacts to participants in workers' night schools and radical discussion groups to women sitting silently at political conferences to political activists and trade unionists. Often organic intellectuals from working-class backgrounds, they produced remarkable creative and critical work in many different genres – newspaper articles, political manifestos, popular histories, letters, literature, memoirs, songs and art work.

The conference invites papers addressing the activities and achievements of twentieth-century marginalized intellectuals (both individuals and groups). It will consider the following questions:

- How did twentieth-century South African universities define and constitute intellectuals?
- What individuals were identified as 'intellectuals', and what credentials did they require?
- Who was denied the identity and status of 'intellectual' and what formal and informal processes excluded them from this status?

- Sidelining and silencing – what were the processes, who were the individuals and how were they affected?
- What constituencies did marginalized intellectuals engage with – political parties, civic organizations, popular movements?
- What was the role of discussion clubs, fellowships, forums, societies and study groups as alternative sites of intellectual development? What types of knowledge and intellectual cultures did they create?
- What was the relationship between university-based intellectuals and intellectuals beyond the academy during the last century?
- What has been the impact of this marginalization on our understanding of intellectual work and the relationship between intellectuals and institutions?
- How do the histories of intellectuals active outside universities illuminate current debates about access to universities?

The recent unrest and ferment at South African universities has highlighted the theme of decolonization. The marginalized intellectuals that the conference will discuss were decolonizing South African history and culture long ago. The conference will broaden the understanding of intellectual work and of the relationship between intellectuals, institutions and society and will illuminate the possibilities offered when historically marginalized intellectuals are brought into the mainstream.

Interested participants should send paper title and abstracts of 250 words by the deadline of **15 February 2019** to the conference conveners Allison Drew and Lungisile Ntsebeza at **ontheedges2019@gmail.com**. We encourage contributions from independent scholars, postgraduate students, academics and activists.