

SEMINAR SERIES 2007

WORK-IN-PROGRESS SEMINAR

FRIDAY 12 OCTOBER - 1.00 TO 2.30

PROFESSOR ROBERT ROSS

African History, Leiden University and HRC Visiting Fellow

"Why write a history of the Kat River Settlement? on the heuristic value of studying social and political borderlands"

In 1829, the British army expelled the Xhosa from the Kat River valley in the Eastern Cape, and in the subsequent years the colonial Government settled several thousand Khoekhoe in the valley, to form an (ineffective) bulwark against subsequent Xhosa attacks. I am currently engaged in writing a community biography of the Khoekhoe settlement, up to the moment in the early 1850s when a proportion of the settlers joined the Xhosa in war against the colony, giving an excuse for the original plan of an ethnically homogenous settlement to be abandoned.

In this presentation I will attempt to expound on the value of such a study (aside from the pleasures of narrative) for broader South African, and I would hope imperial, history. These lie in three main areas: first, the importance of border conflicts for colonial expansion, and the understanding that these conflicts were never as simply polarised as might at first sight appear - in general the Khoekhoe fought with the British against the Xhosa; secondly, the relevance for the understanding of racial stratification of investigating those groups which fulfilled most of the criteria for acceptance - Christianity, prosperity and so forth - but failed in the crucial test of skin-colour; and thirdly the role of the Kat River Settlement at the origins of the specific forms of South African elite black nationalism

Biographical information

Robert Ross (1949) was born in Sidcup, near London, and went to school in London. After a short period teaching in Botswana, he studied history in Cambridge, both for a BA (1970) and a Ph.D. (1974), on the history of the Griquas in South Africa. Since then he has worked in Leiden in the Netherlands, on a variety of subjects primarily in the history of South Africa, in particular the colonial Cape. He has written a number of books on the subject, and is also editing the *Cambridge History of South Africa*, in two volumes, which will appear in 2007 and 2008. He is also completing a book entitled *Clothing: a global history; or the imperialists' new clothes*, which will also appear in 2007.

ALL WELCOME

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