

iMpuma-Koloni / Eastern Cape

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The project from which this special issue emerges began in 2019 in a workshop at Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape, entitled, *iMpuma-Koloni Bearings: An Other Cape?* The call to this workshop brought together a group of scholars from various universities and locations in southern Africa who had a commitment to critical history, to reconsidering the implications of the discipline in the colonial and apartheid project, and to addressing a continued reluctance of the discipline to engage with the critique of history.

Locked down in 2020, but pursuing, if warily, lines of flight enabled by necessity and by the possibilities of digital technologies, a smaller grouping of participants developed and presented *Sounding the Land* for the 2020 Makhanda virtual National Arts Festival. *Sounding the Land* is now an ongoing project of interdisciplinary multimedia collaboration between the History Department and the Cory Library for Historical Research at Rhodes University, and the SARChI Chair in Social Change at the University of Fort Hare. It draws together a combined team of scholars and artists to reinvigorate and reassess debates on the impact and legacy of the settler colonial project in South Africa's Eastern Cape through discussions of the historical certainties that define the debates on, and the meanings of settler colonialism over time. *Sounding the Land* in 2020 also coincided with the planned bicentennial commemorations and celebrations – they were cancelled – of the year we call '1820', when, two centuries ago, the British colonial government initiated one of the most ambitious plans in South African history to quarantine, contain and control populations. In a series of engagements that cumulatively do the work of *Sounding the Land* and ungrounding 1820, this project addressed the complex auditions between subject, land and space, and the work of place, home, belonging, and its dispossessions from the past into the present.

The special issue emerges, then, out of *iMpuma-Koloni Bearings: An Other Cape?* and *Sounding the Land*, both of which aim to think critically about Eastern Cape History, and to think History critically from the Eastern Cape.

The Eastern Cape is an intriguing problem space, a fault line: a remarkable physical, material, geographical, ecological space that can also be considered a conceptual space, a political space, a space that looms large in the historical imagination. Here, several lines intersect and clash, become faults, seize time and space: different climatological and ecological zones; different geological formations, oceans and coastlines; colonialism and conquest; a settler frontier; apartheid social engineering; and, as Crain Soudien has written, 'there was and continued to be resistance' to the pillage and plunder.¹ The Eastern Cape is a landscape of colonial containment and destruction, of aesthetic beauty and contradiction, of settlement, and of discursive possibility. The long and tenacious history of resistance meant the violent imposition of colonial power, land appropriations and settlement, but also a rescripting of 'how the *people* inhabiting the social landscape of the country should be as human subjects.'² The Eastern Cape, we propose, enables a way of thinking with and at the limit, thinking from the limit, the margin, the 'frontier', but also from the limit that this fault line, this space, this place, this territory posed for apartheid, and poses for the post-apartheid. From the Eastern Cape, one might consider what Arundhati Roy, in the context of the pandemic, calls 'dead ideas', and the conceits and certainties of History, particularly African History, despite its commitment to justice and transformation.³

The papers in this first part of the Special Edition, under the broader heading of *iMpuma Koloni: An Other Cape?*, together with the subsequent papers in Part 2 reflect attempts to think and rethink the problem space of the Eastern Cape as 'an other cape' in various ways. Somewhat idiosyncratically alongside this brief introduction simply entitled '*iMpuma Koloni/ Eastern Cape*', a much more substantial editors' introduction, with the full title of '*iMpuma Koloni: An Other Cape?*' will appear in Part 2 in 2022.

1 C. Soudien, 'New Accents on the Social: Thinking on South Africa's history at UWC', *South African Historical Journal*, 2018, 4.

2 Soudien, 'New Accents', 4.

3 A. Roy, 'The Pandemic is a Portal', *Financial Times*, 3 April 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>.