

Brown University Department of Comparative Literature



The Andrea Rosenthal Memorial Lecture

Professor Isabel Hofmeyr

African Literature, University of the Witwatersrand;

Department of English, NYU

“Shore-shaped Story: How Coast, Colony, and Custom House Conduct Literature”

**Monday,
October 15th, 2018
6:00 pm**

**The Watson Institute
Joukowsky Forum
11 Thayer St**

**Free & open to the public.
Reception to follow.**

Isabel Hofmeyr is Professor of African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and Global Distinguished Professor in the English Department of New York University. Her most recent book is *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading* (2013). Along with Antoinette Burton she edited *Ten Books That Shaped the British Empire: Creating an Imperial Commons* (2014). She currently heads up a Mellon-funded project “Oceanic Humanities for the Global South” with partners from South Africa, Mozambique, Mauritius, India, Jamaica and Barbados.

Much colonial print culture originated outside the colony and had to pass through a port city to reach its readers. In the precinct of the port, Customs and Excise officials examined print material to determine that it was not suspect in some way – pirated, seditious or obscene. Customs officials hence came to oversee colonial copyright policy as well as the protocols of censorship. This paper examines the shaping of literary institutions in the port city, arguing that we need to pay attention both to processes on land but also to the larger ecology of the port and how this shaped the functioning of departments like Customs and Excise. In exploring this shore-shaped story, the book offers a hydrocolonial model of literary studies that is material, ecological, oceanic, amphibious and centered on objects as much as people.



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