



Department of History
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



African Studies Center
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Topic:

Cultural Resistance on Robben Island: Songs of Struggle and Liberation in South Africa: *Izingoma Zo Mzabalazo Esiqithini!*

Speaker: Dr. Neo Lekgotla laga Ramoupi

Date: March 26th, 2024

Time: 3:30-5PM

Place: Old Horticulture, Room 255



BIO

Dr. Neo Lekgotla laga Ramoupi is an Associate Professor in the History Department at the University of Free State (UFS) in Bloemfontein, Free State Province, in South Africa; and a Mellon Inclusive Professoriate Fellow: 2023 – 2024. Before joining UFS in 2022, Neo was a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Witwatersrand (WITS) in Johannesburg for five years, where he taught History of Education to future History teachers at undergraduate and graduate levels. Neo is the first editor of the co-edited 2021 publication, *Robben Island and Rainbow Dreams: The Making of Robben Island Museum, First Official Heritage Institution of Democratic South Africa* (Pretoria: HSRC Press/BestRed, 2021). He was the Project leader and Grant Recipient of this book, and all the contributors are former and current Robben Island Museum staff. Neo is currently serving as member of the Editorial Board of *African History Review*, a biannual peer-reviewed academic journal at the Department of History at UNISA; and serves as a member of the Advisory Board of America's Voices Against Apartheid (AVAA); whose exhibition was officially opened at the Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg, in May 2023. Professor Ramoupi's research and teaching interests and focuses are around the Decolonizing & Africanizing of (South) African History, Heritage, and History of Education.

ABSTRACT

The idea of the role of *izingoma zo mzabalazo* (struggle songs) in the African liberation struggle in South Africa that the book, *Cultural Resistance on Robben Island: Songs of Struggle and Liberation in South Africa*, addresses is to give attention to the 'songs-ical' and musical responses of the African and black people to the apartheid administrations between the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960 and the closure of Robben Island as political prison in 1991. Robben Island Maximum-Security Prison—Alcatraz of the apartheid state in South Africa—gives me the opportunity to write about all the African liberation movements and their members who were incarcerated on the Island. The community of political prisoners on Robben Island, regardless of their different and at times, confrontational ideologies, had to find (re)sources inside their humanity to survive the brutality of their circumstances. Culture, I argue throughout this book, became that bastion for them. In the wise words of Govan Mbeki, 'cultural activity was not provided by the authorities, we had to provide it ourselves.'