

**Tariq Toffa (Tshwane University of Technology)**

*Tariq Toffa is a researcher, educator and architect. He has worked in academia and professional practice, and was manager and researcher for the South African chapter of the Dallant Networks / Ford Foundation project Urban Impact (URB.im), and manager and researcher for the Social Housing Focus Trust (SHiFT). His research interests include the socio-spatial and discursive histories of colonialism-apartheid, urbanisms in contemporary African cities and, more broadly, critical thinking around modernity and decoloniality in space, education and society.*

**Imagining South African landscape: three centuries of landscape and society in Cape Town**

'Landscape' is a term that has come to encapsulate and reference the symbolic, spatial, social dimensions of a territory, from its earlier usage largely within naturalistic landscape painting conventions. It is thus an interdisciplinary concept, potentially crossing the spatial and design disciplines, with themes and readings from cultural studies and the humanities. The concept has fully become part of mainstream architectural discourse in South Africa, although as a purely apolitical notion, whose discursive range is largely limited to metaphorical and formalistic references to natural land formations or bioclimatic considerations. Although this positioning is not as apolitical as it might first appear, it nonetheless stands in sharp contrast to histories of conquest, dispossession and removal – embedded in 'landscape' as much as they are in society.

The conference presentation traces major shifts in the imagining and shaping of the 'Cape' landscape (i.e. a general historical region covering much of the present Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Northern Cape provinces), from the seventeenth to twenty-first centuries, and from pre-colonial to (post)colonial / post-1994. The Dutch (VOC) trading empire of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought with it to South Africa not only the world of powerful merchant capitalism, but it would also construct a new imaginative geography and order of the land to that which had been known by its ancient inhabitants, wherein the very idea of the land would be rewritten. The British colonial and apartheid-colonial periods would both extend and shift notions of landscape within its own imperial and racial imagination. Finally, post-apartheid/colonial attempts to reimagine and reshape the city of Cape Town are explored.

The study reveals key historical moments where 'landscape' was radically reimagined. It argues that a similar radical imagining is necessary to transform an untransformed city landscape.

