



# MIASA

Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa

## MIASA Public Lecture Series

Tuesday, 29 March 2022

3:00pm-4:30pm (UTC)

Please register in advance for this lecture:

<https://uni-freiburg.zoom.us/meeting/register/u5Mudeqspj0jGtBd8LqCQfIA5F0buAUasNV9>

MIASA Public Lecture Series features fellows in residence at MIASA. The lectures are free and open to the public.

### Julia Tischler

## The Kingdom of Mealies – Agriculture, rural reform, and the «race question» in South Africa, c. 1900-1940s

Simultaneous to the rise of industrial capitalism, agriculture underwent dramatic changes. Starting in the late nineteenth century, many settler economies were transformed by the rise of a large-scale, commercial agricultural sector, while scores of struggling rural producers were squeezed off the land. The same period saw the rise of a global “color line,” which the prominent black American historian W. E. B. DuBois predicted would become the defining problem of the twentieth century. The talk investigates agricultural education as a lens through which to analyze the ways in which the “agrarian question” and the “color question” were interlinked. It focuses on South Africa, an extreme case of both rapid agrarian change and state racism, as an example that holds important insights into concurrent global transformations. I argue that attempts to improve agriculture through science – manifested in agricultural colleges, extension services, shows and competitions – lent themselves to radically different agendas. Black farmers championed the ideal of independent, market-oriented farming along scientific lines as a Pan-Africanist path to emancipation, adopting models from the southern United States. At the same time, improved farming also fed into settler colonialism and transnational white supremacist movements. Moreover, the South African state increasingly used agricultural education as a form of segregationist socio-environmental engineering in an attempt to control and spatially fix black people and lower-class whites to the land.

**Julia Tischler** is associate professor of African History in Basel, Switzerland, and currently a fellow at MIASA. Focusing on the history of southern Africa, she has published on questions of development, settler colonialism, environmental history, race, and agriculture.



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