

**NOV
16-18**

WRITING HISTORY AFTER E.P. THOMPSON

1014 TISCH HALL, 435 STATE ST., ANN ARBOR

E.P. Thompson was a hugely important figure in the global development of social history from the 1960s. In South Africa his influence was marked, reflected in historical scholarship with recognisably Thompsonian characteristics defined by richly detailed explication of the experiences of the black working class. Revisionist scholars challenged liberal convictions about the pre-industrial origins of racial segregation in South Africa and claims about the colour-blind character of the market, but structuralist revisionists in the 1970s were centrally preoccupied with understanding the nature of South Africa's capitalist transition in the light of literature on capitalist transformations globally. Early revisionist social histories explicated the preservation, resilience and importance of 'pre-capitalist' social forms (chieftaincy, oscillating migrant labour between urban and rural areas). This more comparativist moment did not last across the field.

Thompson's attack on Althusserian Marxism, *The Poverty of Theory*, helped fuel a reaction against structuralist accounts of racial capitalism in South Africa which took the form of social history emphasising the agency of the black working class in inauspicious circumstances. With retrospect this was both a productive and unproductive development. As elsewhere, the Thompsonian legacy in South African historiography and historical practice now appears inherently paradoxical: encouraging sensitivity towards culture and the analysis of class as process, while nurturing a common sense which was – and in many ways remains – of generally hostile disposition towards theory. From the mid 1980s social historians were much less likely to engage with larger theoretical and comparative debates about the relationships between capitalism, the state, coercive labour regimes, race and class formation than scholars a decade before. Curiously, the precocious sensitivity to culture which South African social historians developed was not facilitated by the kinds of anthropological influences that were important to the 'cultural turn' in Anglo-American scholarship.

Like Thompson, the leftist historians whom he inspired in South Africa were challenged for insufficiently addressing gender and race, and were subsequently assailed by post-structuralists for alleged commitment to teleological Marxist meta-narratives and naïve empiricism. This workshop aims to explore the genealogies and legacies of Thompsonian social history across Anglo-American, Africanist and South Africanist scholarly domains. Historians at Wits and Michigan share training and ongoing intellectual interests in the theoretical challenges of writing social history in a world where many of the tenets of class analysis have been undermined by the effects of de-industrialisation. There remains a nagging sense – underlined by the interest generated by Thomas Picketty's *Capital in the Twentieth Century* – that the contemporary global predicament necessitates the writing of theoretically ambitious comparativist histories employing culturally nuanced class analysis in the mode of the Thompsonian tradition. The workshop promises to interrogate the legacies, limits and possibilities of Thompsonian scholarship (and the relationship between theory and empiricism between the North and South).

Session 1: What Has Been Lost? What Has Been Gained?

10am - 12pm

JIM OAKES, City University of New York

No Such Thing as a Disloyal Slave: Rethinking E. P. Thompson's Legacy for the American Civil War

LYNN THOMAS, University of Washington
Agency

KATHLEEN CANNING, University of Michigan
The Social in the Cultural: Critical Reflections on Experience, Consciousness, and Subjectivity

LUISE WHITE, University of Florida
Whigs and Hunters: The Path Not Taken

Discussants: **KEITH BRECKENRIDGE**, University of the Witwatersrand; **GEOFF ELEY**, University of Michigan

LUNCH

Session 2: Thompson and African History

1pm - 3pm

PETER DELIUS, University of the Witwatersrand

Thompson's Child or a Remote Relative from the Colonies?
A Footnote from a Foot Soldier in South Africa's History Wars, 1970-1990

HLONIPHA MOKOENA, University of the Witwatersrand
The Hardness of the Times and the Dearness of All the Necessaries of Life: Class and Consumption in Bilingual Nineteenth-Century Newspapers

DEREK PETERSON, University of Michigan
Nonconformity in Africa's Cultural History

CLIVE GLASER, University of the Witwatersrand
Thompson on the Highveld: Social History and Humanist Socialism

Discussants: **JACK TAYLOR**, University of Michigan; **STEPHEN SPARKS**, University of Johannesburg

Session 3: Thompson and Empire

3pm - 4:30pm

BRIDGET KENNY, University of the Witwatersrand

The 'Lift Girls' Lament: Sex and Race in Johannesburg Department Stores, 1950s & 1960s

JUAN COLE, University of Michigan
Crowds, Workers, and Millenarians: Thompsonian Historiographies of the Middle East

CHRISTOPHER LEE, University of the Witwatersrand
Histories Without Groups: Thompson's "Average" Working Man and Colonial Life

Discussants: **LYNN THOMAS**, University of Washington; **PRINISHA BADASSY**, University of the Witwatersrand

5pm - 6:30pm

Seminar by DILIP MENON, University of the Witwatersrand
(1636 School of Social Work Building)

Writing History in Colonial Times: The Space and Time of Religious Polemic in Late 19th and Early 20th Century Southern India

Session 4: Capitalist Transformation and the Commons

10am - 11:30am

GREGORY DOWD, University of Michigan
Jacksonian Democrats and Hunters, 1836-1837: Customary Rights, Property in Land, and Law

FEDERICO HELFGOTT, Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos/Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya
Mining Labor, Communal Land, Rent, and Moral Economy in the Central Highlands of Peru

KHUMISHO MOGUERANE, Oxford University
Class, Culture, and Segregation: The Pattern of Landholding in Colonial Bechuanaland

Discussants: PETER DELIUS, University of the Witwatersrand;
ALEX LICHTENSTEIN, Indiana University

LUNCH

Session 5: The Influence of Anthropology: E.P. Thompson as Geertzian Proxy?

1pm - 2:30pm

ADAM ASHFORTH, University of Michigan
Revisiting the Xhosa Cattle Killing

ROBERT BLUNT, Lafayette College
Old Age and Money: The General Numismatics of Independent Kenya

BERNARD DUBBELD, Stellenbosch University
Scales of Studying Historical Transformations: Divergent Roads Out of Thompson in African Studies

Discussants: DAVID WILLIAM COHEN, University of Michigan;
NANCY ROSE HUNT, University of Michigan

COFFEE BREAK

Session 6: Religion and Moral Economies

3pm - 4:30pm

DILIP MENON, University of the Witwatersrand
Religion, Identity, and Community in EP Thompson's Oeuvre

LESLIE HEMPSON, University of Michigan
The Moral and Political Economy of Measurement in Twentieth Century India

DUNBAR MOODIE, Hobart and William Smith Colleges/University of the Witwatersrand
Using E.P. Thompson to Think About South African History: Notes on a Personal Journey

Discussants: SEKIBAKIBA LEKGOATHI, University of the Witwatersrand;
PAMILA GUPTA, University of the Witwatersrand

5pm - 6:30pm

Seminar by HLONIPHA MOKOENA, University of the Witwatersrand (4701 Haven Hall)
Zuluness on Trial: Re-reading John W. Colenso's 1874 Langelibalele and the Amahlubi Tribe Being Remarks Upon the Official Record

CO-SPONSORS Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa
ASC African Heritage Initiative
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

To register and view complete workshop schedule, go to ii.umich.edu/asc

WED
11.18

Session 7: Space, Property, and the Environment

9am - 11am ROSALIE KINGWILL, University of the Western Cape
Kinship, Custom, and Class: Property Relations Among African Freeholders in the Eastern Cape

ANNE BERG, University of Michigan
Green Capital, the Aesthetics of Poverty, and the Feel-Good Politics of Recycling

ROBYN D'AVIGNON, University of Michigan
Ancient Indexes: Colonial Geology and West African Gold Prospecting

KEITH BRECKENRIDGE, University of the Witwatersrand
Plaatje's Native Life in South Africa, the Commons, and the Racial Limits of Colonial Progressivism

Discussants: DARIO GAGGIO, University of Michigan; SARAH EMILY DUFF, University of the Witwatersrand

COFFEE BREAK

Session 8: Class and Capitalism Now

11:15am - 12:45pm JOSHUA COENE, University of Michigan
What Can Capitalism and Class Reveal in the Recent History of Imprisonment?: Thoughts from New South Wales and Pennsylvania

ANDREA WRIGHT, University of Michigan
Managing Unruly Workers: Worker Strikes, Oil Companies, and the Development of Labor Policies in the Arabian Sea

FEEZZA BALLIM, University of Witwatersrand
Capital Beyond the Minerals-Energy Complex: The Un-making of the Working Class in Twentieth Century South African Agriculture

Discussants: GEORGE STEINMETZ, University of Michigan; BERNARD DUBBELD, Stellenbosch University

12:45pm - 1:30pm LUNCH

1:30pm - 2:30pm CLOSING REMARKS