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 explicited 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 First 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).
Between theory and empiricism. The workshop promises to interrogate the legacies, histories employing culturally nuanced class analysis in the mode of the predicament necessitates the writing of theoretically ambitious comparativist Picketty’s Capital in the Twentieth First Century – that the contemporary global remains a nagging sense – underlined by the interest generated by Thomas analysis have been undermined by the effects of de-industrialisation. There challenges of writing social history in a world where many of the tenets of class Michigan share training and ongoing intellectual interests in the theoretical Africanist and South Africanist scholarly domains. Historians at Wits and genealogies and legacies of Thompsonian social history across Anglo-American, challenged for insufficiently addressing gender and race, and were subsequently ‘cultural turn’ in Anglo-American scholarship. facilitated by the kinds of anthropological influences that were important to the sensitivity to culture which South African social historians developed was not race and class formation than scholars a decade before. Curiously, the precocious about the relationships between capitalism, the state, coercive labour regimes, were much less likely to engage with larger theoretical and comparative debates generally hostile disposition towards theory. From the mid 1980s social historians while nurturing a common sense which was – and in many ways remains – of Thompson’s attack on Althusserian Marxism, The Poverty of Theory, helped fuel a and rural areas). This more comparativist moment did not last across the field. capitalist’ social forms (chieftaincy, oscillating migrant labour between urban social histories explicated the preservation, resilience and importance of ‘pre- in the light of literature on capitalist transformations globally. Early revisionist preoccupied with understanding the nature of South Africa’s capitalist transition character of the market, but structuralist revisionists in the 1970s were centrally origins of racial segregation in South Africa and claims about the colour-blind Revisionist scholars challenged liberal convictions about the pre-industrial by richly detailed explication of the experiences of the black working class. historical scholarship with recognisably Thompsonian characteristics defined history from the 1960s. In South Africa his influence was marked, reflected in E.P. Thompson was a hugely important figure in the global development of social history from the 1960s. In South ... of Thompsonian scholarship (and the relationship between theory and empiricism between the North and South).
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 Langalibalele and the Amahlubi Tribe Being Remarks Upon the Official Record
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

**Faeeza 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

**LUNCH**

12:45pm - 1:30pm

1:30pm - 2:30pm CLOSING REMARKS