

**CALL FOR PAPERS for a multi-panel discussion to form part of the  
Southern African Historical Society Biennial Conference  
21-23 June 2017, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg**

**POOR, PRECARIOUS, WHITE? RETHINKING WHITE SOCIETIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, 1930s-1990s**

South Africa boasts a rich literature on white workers and the white poor. Since the 1970s, historians working in revisionist, social history, new labour history and gender history traditions have expanded and enriched our understanding of the ideological, economic and political role of white subalterns in the formation and maintenance of a racially segregated society.

Yet this scholarship is also plagued by a number of interrelated limitations. Chronologically, it is largely concentrated on the first half of the twentieth century – that is, the context of the mineral revolution and associated processes of industrialisation and urbanisation. In South Africa, the scholarship's neglect of white labour and the white poor as historical subject in the second half of the century may be attributed to popular and scholarly perceptions surrounding the 'solving' of the poor white problem, and the success of the National Party's apartheid policies in bringing about the embourgeoisement of the white population after 1948. Similarly, elsewhere in the region, it is assumed that state intervention and the post-war economic boom caused 'poor whiteism' to disappear and removed class as a salient issue. Thus, scholars of the apartheid and late colonial era have mainly concentrated on high politics or on nationalist resistance to white minority rule. As a result, there is little attention to ordinary white lives in these societies. Meanwhile, since the 1990s, politicised discourses around the so-called 're-emergence' of white poverty – particularly in South Africa, but also in Zimbabwe – demands the historicisation of white precarity, and the probing of the fragility of race-based privilege vis-à-vis class structure in the course of the century.

Crucially, the scholarship also displays distinct geographical limitations. The overwhelming focus falls on the Union of South Africa with little acknowledgement of the commonalities of historical experience across different white societies. Aside from a few isolated studies, white communities in colonial Zimbabwe, Zambia, Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, and Katanga have received little attention. This panel takes a regional perspective, drawing the experiences of white subalterns in Southern Africa into conversation in order to rethink the dynamics animating these white societies and uncover common historical experiences. In this way, we seek to move towards a regional history of white subalterns in the twentieth century.

Finally, these chronological and geographical limitations result in an absence of engagement with the divisions, conflicts and contradictions within white societies. For the purpose of probing connections and comparisons, we therefore invite submissions on white labour and the white poor in Southern Africa from the Great Depression onwards, which deal with:

- Social histories of white labour and the white poor in a period of ostensible white embourgeoisement
- Existing assumptions that white identity equalled material security under systems of white supremacy
- Changing ideas and anxieties surrounding precarity and poor whiteism, and the consequences for social and political imaginaries

- White labour movements
- White subaltern migration and unsettlement
- How class position coloured racial standing
- The nature of white subalterns' state dependence – material, social, psychological – and the political ramifications thereof
- State policies and efforts at intervention, discipline and control of white subalterns, and how these were negotiated
- The impact of processes of decolonisation and the dismantling of the racial state on white class structure, and subalterns' material and social position
- The shifting fortunes of white subalterns vis-à-vis changes in the structure of capitalism during this period

Paper submissions should include an abstract (200 words) and brief author CV (100 words). These should be submitted by **9 December 2016** to Danelle van Zyl-Hermann, [vanzyl-hermann@ufs.ac.za](mailto:vanzyl-hermann@ufs.ac.za) and Duncan Money, [moneydj@ufs.ac.za](mailto:moneydj@ufs.ac.za).

Further details regarding the **Southern African Historical Society Biennial Conference** may be found here: <https://networks.h-net.org/node/73374/announcements/140156/cfp-southern-african-historical-society-biennial-conference-21>