

# Organising the first Regional History Symposium in South Africa

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I have no doubt that the dream to consolidate research on regions in South Africa in some way as part of their activities, is what the Regional Division of the Institute for Historical Studies had in mind when they started their research in 1975-1976. The establishment of the Journal *Contree* in 1977 was but one of the first steps as part of several goals that the researchers of the Regional Division at the Human Science and Research Council (HSRC) had in mind. Eventually, however, financial restraints and internal transformations and whatever else may have been part of the many reasons for closure did not allow for such a dream to germinate.

The 27 November 2015 Symposium on Regional History was and remains an effort to pick up some of the intentions that researchers of regional history studies had some 40 years ago; yet, this time, in a re-demarcated space (geographic area) and a changed spirit of place (internalised home) and its people, as well as a host of new dimensions of thoughts with regard to ways of approaching historical research, such as the social history dimension in regional history studies.

Doing structured and constructive historical research on local areas and broader districts and nationally declared regions at some stage seems to have weighed far less than researching specific phenomena from a favoured paradigm: phenomena like violence, poverty, racism, class distortions and capitalism. It does not imply that research in all of these respects was and still is not necessary, but the history of regions involves more than that. For this reason, a recording of the full spectrum of the development of a region cannot be overlooked, since all form part of the soul of any region (whether from an inevitable demarcated border area or a borderless paradigm. I firmly believe that both ways should be appreciated for their research methodologies and findings which can be different). And as such it requires the attention of historians together with several other layers of histories associated with regions that contribute to the regional make-up.

Furthermore, the mere possibility of doing all-inclusive research on spaces and places in any specific field of interest, or a required research necessity of the day and done by a multiple selection of disciplines, also got some researchers excited. However, exploring theories and methodologies in integrative disciplinary forms

of research on a regional and micro level still has some way to go to be properly approached and academically appreciated. In recent times, research with regard to people's sense of home ("homeyness") has also received some research attention during the 1<sup>st</sup> Regional History symposium. The Finnish historian, Prof. Sulevi Riukulehto was invited to South Africa in 2015 to share his experiences concerning the concept of "homeyness" and to theoretically deliberate on his 2015 publication *Between time and space*, in which the importance of space in regional historical research is contemplated on. As a result of all these fascinating trends and in addition to the long-standing need to pick up some past discussions on regional histories (especially on a national level, yet certainly not exclusively so), it was decided to organise a symposium for regional history in South Africa (see programme below). The impressions of Prof Riukulehto on the symposium papers and the thought-provoking paper of Prof Albert Grundlingh are also included lower down. A revised version of Prof Riukulehto's keynote address forms part of the articles peer reviewed for publication in the December 2015 issue of *New Contree*.

**PROGRAMME**

**1<sup>st</sup> SYMPOSIUM ON REGIONAL HISTORY STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

**DATE: 27 November 2015**

EMERALD HOTEL, VANDERBIJLPARK, GAUTENG (South Africa)  
Venue: Kilimanjaro 1&2



08:30 – 09:00	Registration Tea, coffee and refreshments
09:00 – 09:05	Symposium facilitator: Dr Pieter Möller
09:05 – 09:15	Welcoming: Prof Hans van Deventer (Chair, Subject Group Theology, North-West University, Vaal Triangle Campus, Vanderbijlpark) (On behalf of the Director, Christopher Rabali, School of Basic Sciences, Vaal Triangle Campus (North-West University))
09:15 – 09:45	Introducing Sedibeng and the broader Emfuleni region as a space in history Councillor Mayor Mahole S Mofokeng (Emfuleni Local Municipality) Session Chair: Prof Elize S van Eeden
09:45 - 10:30	Regional history between time and space Prof Sulevi Riukulehto (Research Director, University of Helsinki, Ruralia Institute, Seinäjoki, Finland and Associate Professor of Economic History in the University of Jyväskylä)
10:30 – 10:45	Discussion
10:45 – 11:05	Tea break Session Chair: Mr Charl Blyngaert
11:05 – 11:25	Exploring the workability of space/place as a research paradigm towards the regional histories of South Africa Prof Elize S van Eeden (Chair, Subject Group History, North-West University, Vaal Triangle Campus, Vanderbijlpark)
11:25 – 11:45	The work done in Local Histories Present Realities and arguing place as research focus Prof Noor Nieftagodien (South African Research Chair (SARChI) : Local Histories, Present Realities, Head of History Workshop, School of Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand)
11:45 – 12:00	Discussion
12:00 – 12:20	Studying the Far West Rand as disciplinary integrative and transnational dimensions of regional history: Projects Carletonville and Bekkersdal Prof Elize S van Eeden Ms Busi Khaba (Political Science, North-West University, Vaal Triangle Campus, Vanderbijlpark) Ms Amo Moses (Hons Student, Public Management, North-West University, Vaal Triangle Campus, Vanderbijlpark)
12:20 – 12:40	Gentrifying spaces in the inner city of Johannesburg: the case of Maboneng Precinct Mrs Delia Ah Goo (Geography, North-West University, Vaal Triangle Campus, Vanderbijlpark)
12:40 – 13:00	A historical investigation of the forgotten freehold township: Evaton 1905 to 1950 Mr Vusumuzi Khumalo (PhD-Student, History, University of the Witwatersrand)
13:00 – 13:15	Discussion
13:15 – 14:15	LUNCH Session Chair: Prof Johann Tempelhoff
14:15 – 14:45	The economic dimension of social history and its implications for regional history Prof Albert Grundlingh (Chair, Subject Group History, University of Stellenbosch, Cape Town)
14:45 – 15:00	Discussion
15:00 – 15:15	Recapping: General impressions, future ideas and initiatives – Prof Sulevi Riukulehto
15:15	TEA, refreshments and networking

To the esteemed speakers such as Professors Riukulehto, Grundlingh and Noor Nieftagodien, I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation for their having made time to attend the 1<sup>st</sup> Regional History symposium and to share their experiences and opinions. I sincerely hope that more discussions of this nature will be possible in the years to come.