

## **CfP Subaltern political knowledges, ca. 1770- ca. 1950**

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### **Subaltern political knowledges, ca. 1770- ca. 1950**

#### ***International conference - call for papers***

*University of Antwerp - Power in History. Center for Political History*

*18-20 October 2017*

During the last decades, political historians have increasingly focused on the evolution of political consciousness among the “common people” during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In that process they have often made use of all-encompassing notions such as politicization, democratization and nationalization. These have in common that they suggest an increasing commitment of a growing number of citizens in the political life of the nation, but because these concepts are so general and linear, they are hard to grapple with. Do they refer to an increase in consciousness and/or agency? Apart from the difficulty of measuring these processes, one can also ask whether they necessarily occur in parallel. A more active participation in electoral processes, for example, does not necessarily entail a greater commitment to political values, and membership of political associations can be inspired as much by individual calculations as by concern for the common good.

The conference “Subaltern political knowledges” intends to take one step back and ask a question which should precede all discussion of politicization, democratization and nationalization of the masses: what did people actually know about politics? In our quest for an answer, we will primarily focus on ‘subaltern’ groups in society, i.e. on people that neither occupied a position of formal or informal power in society nor were able to make their voice heard in public debates. We aim at discovering the knowledge these people expressed about political institutions, personalities, values and ideologies. While doing so, we pay attention to both the temporal and the spatial framework of this knowledge. Was it situated primarily at a local or national level, or did it extend to international politics? And did people only refer to politics of their own time, or did they evoke politicians and/or political systems of the past? Did they engage in comparisons between the past and the present?

Apart from the contents of the political knowledge of the subalterns, this conference also investigates its sources. Did these subalterns refer to the newspapers and other mass media, were they informed by electoral campaigns, were they inspired by informal talk with neighbors or relatives, was

membership of associations a decisive factor?

Thirdly and finally, the conference intends to address the question how people acted upon their political knowledge. Did they use it in order to further their personal interests, or to support institutional or societal change?

The challenge of this conference will be to bring together a broad range of papers in which these questions are addressed empirically, preferably on the basis of sources created by subalterns (whether or not addressing members of elite groups). The geographical scope of the conference is emphatically global, and we invite scholars to submit proposals on cases from all over the world. They should be situated, however, in contexts where some form of institutionalized democratic politics was taking shape, but where the distribution of political knowledge was not yet facilitated by a powerful mass media such as television. The focus of the conference, therefore, will be on the period between the last decades of the eighteenth century and the 1950s.

Rather than offering grand narratives about the increase or decrease of political knowledge, we aim to historicize the theme, investigating how in diverse historical contexts certain types of political knowledge correlated with categories such as gender, age, ethnicity, urbanity, profession, literacy, sociability and electoral status (voter vs. non-voter). By juxtaposing and comparing these micro-historical investigations, we hope to be able to assess the relative strength and recurrence of these correlations. In the process, we will build a strong empirical foundation for nuanced discussions of politicization, democratization and nationalization.

Keynote speakers include: Rachel Jean-Baptiste (UCDavis), Eduardo Elena (University of Miami), Maartje Janse (Universiteit Leiden), Harm Kaal (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen), Michaela Fenske (Humboldt-Universität Berlin) and Frédéric Monier (Université d'Avignon).

Scientific committee: Marnix Beyen (Universiteit Antwerpen), Jon Lawrence (Cambridge University), Harm Kaal (Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen), Martin Kohlrausch (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), Karen Lauwers (Universiteit Antwerpen), Frédéric Monier (Université d'Avignon).

Please submit a 500-word paper abstract and a 200-word biography to Karen Lauwers ([karen.lauwers@uantwerpen.be](mailto:karen.lauwers@uantwerpen.be)) and/or Marnix Beyen ([marnix.beyen@uantwerpen.be](mailto:marnix.beyen@uantwerpen.be)) by **May 7, 2017**. You will be notified of the result of the selection procedure by May 15 at the latest.