

## **2<sup>ND</sup> WORKSHOP ON POPULAR ECONOMIES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

**LSE, 24<sup>TH</sup>-25<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2010**

### **“Tata ma chance”: On contingency and the Lottery in post-apartheid South Africa**

*Ilana van Wyk*

Since its inception in March 2000, the South African National Lottery has been treated as both a developmental boon and as a dangerously exploitative new consumer product. In both discourses the poor feature prominently; as recipients of Lotto largess and as its most frequent victims. Scholars have recently suggested that the irrationalities that mark the flow of capital post-1971 has influenced the ways in which poor people behave 'economically'. The poor have been accused of falling prey to a variety of millennial schemes and extraordinary hopes as they use increasingly magical means to achieve material ends. The Lottery, with its promises of enormous riches and its twin industry of muthi- sellers and number diviners seem to exemplify this trend. In this paper, I will put paid to such interpretations by looking at the modest investments that poor lottery players make in the Lottery, both financially and in terms of hope. I suggest that interpretations of risky economic behaviour stem from myopically Western and middle-class perceptions and fail to take account of the multiple contingencies that mark the economic lives of 'the poor'.