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NEWSLETTER
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL HISTORY
OF THE GRADUATE INSTITUTE GENEVA

November 2020

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SPOTLIGHT

Myth and Misinformation, or the Historian as Semioclast

By Professor Carolyn Biltoft

In the preface to the 1970 edition of his classic text *Mythologies*, the French literary critic Roland Barthes invented a new term, namely semioclasm. Like its more well-known counterpart iconoclasm – the act of criticising cherished beliefs or institutions – semioclasm also constituted a form of canon-questioning. A semioclast was someone who turned their critical gaze upon the various “sign-systems” that Barthes called “collective representations,” which had acquired the status of myth.

Read the article

INSIGHT

International History Podcasts on the ICRC, the League of Nations and CERN

This applied research seminar aims to introduce Master students in International History to a broad range of historical and contemporary research and relevant methodologies. As means through which participants can communicate their research, students are invited to produce a podcast. These, along with other podcasts and interviews with members of the Graduate Institute's International History Department can be found on the Department's podcast page.

ANALYSIS

History, Law, Nation and the Indigenous Polity

By Jonathan Matthew Schmitt

Jonathan Matthew Schmitt is a recent Ph.D. in International History at the Graduate Institute, where his dissertation focused on U.S.-Native American relation in the context of American Empire and international law. He lives and teaches in the United States. He is presently at work on several feature documentaries, one of which deals with the history of the American Indian Movement, and another, in concert with University of Pennsylvania Political Scientist Robert Vitalis, dealing with racism in U.S. foreign policy, and how it contributes to a mythology of scarcity and existential security threats in the geopolitics of oil.

Listen to the Podcasts

Read the full article

INTERVIEW

Historicising the Financial Dimensions of Authoritarianism in Latin America

Carlo Edoardo Altamura is a Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) Ambizione Research Fellow at the Department of International History since March 2019. He is the Principal Investigator of the research project entitled Business with the Devil? Assessing the Financial Dimension of Authoritarian Regimes in Latin America, 1973-85 . The four-year project investigates the interactions between international financial institutions, Western commercial banks and authoritarian regimes in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico.

Read the interview

PARTNERSHIPS

Launch of the Pierre de Bois Doctoral Workshops

The Pierre du Bois Foundation for Current History (Fondation Pierre du Bois pour l'histoire du temps présent) is launching a series of Pierre du Bois Doctoral Workshops in partnership with the Department of International History at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva. The Pierre du Bois Doctoral Workshops offer an opportunity for doctoral students of the International History Department to organise annually a one-day workshop to further their research and deepen their knowledge of a theme or set of themes related to their work.

Read the article

DOCTORAL FOCUS

New International History Doctoral Graduates

The Department of International History warmly congratulates Ms. Paroma Ghose, Mr. Vassily Klimentov, Mr. Geoffroy Legentilhomme, Mr. Manuel Dorion-Soulié, Mr. Thomas Gidney and Ms. Maylis Avaro for successfully completing their doctoral journeys and extends to them its best wishes in their next projects.

Read the article

STUDENT NEWS

Graduate Institute Director Marie-Laure Salles, Paroma Ghose, Pierre du Bois Foundation President Irina du Bois and Professor Mahmoud Mohamedou

International History doctoral student Paroma Ghose won the 2020 Pierre du Bois Prize for Best Doctoral Dissertation in International History. Her outstanding thesis, entitled "'Silence…On est en France': A Rap History of the 'Other' in France, 1881- 2012", examines the writing of the history of otherness through music and lyrics.

Read the article

International History Doctoral candidate Shriya Patnaik will present her research at the Cambridge World History Workshop this year. The Cambridge World History Workshop is a series of seminars, reading groups and conferences held every year to provide Ph.D. students with the opportunity to present their research. In addition to historians, the workshop also has participation from related disciplines, dealing with historical, social, economic, anthropological theory and methodology that are of interest to a number of different fields. Shriya will be presenting her research findings on the historical genealogy of trafficking and prostitution laws in colonial and post-colonial India with a focus on oral histories and international humanitarian paradigms.

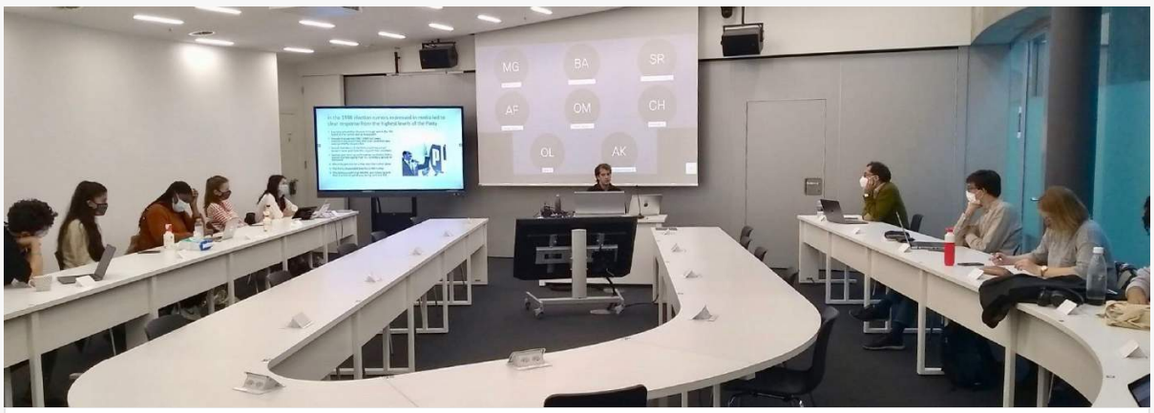
Ph.D. student Michele Sollai participated in the international online workshop "Global Histories of Colonialism" organised by the Global History Initiative at Queen's University, Canada . He presented a paper entitled "From a Transnational to an Imperial Seed Network: The Quest for Wheat Autarky in Ethiopia (1930s-1950s)". The paper – part of his ongoing doctoral dissertation – examines the history of food self-sufficiency and wheat development in Ethiopia from the Italian occupation to post-World War II international technical assistance. He has also written a review of the new book by African History Professor Felicitas Becker (University of Ghent, Belgium) *The Politics of Poverty – Policy-Making and Development in Rural Tanzania* (Cambridge University Press, 2020). The review has been published in the online journal *Connections – A Journal for Historians and Area Specialists* , and on the online platform H-Soz-Kult.

International History doctoral candidate Alessandro Ambrosino, was invited once again to take part in *Passato e Presente* (Past and Present), a television programme on the Italian channel RAI3. Mr Ambrosino contributed his analysis as a 'young historian' in two episodes of the programme.

HISTORY BRUNCHES

The History Brunches are a series of gatherings by members of the International History Department . The concept of the Brunches is as simple as it is effective: professors, visiting researchers and students are invited to present their projects in front of a small audience. Taking place about 3-4 times per semester since 2015, the brunches have become a forum for intellectual exchange that offer presenters an opportunity to test their ideas in a friendly environment.

The Use of Rumor by the State in the Presidential Succession under the PRI in Mexico



The first History Brunch of the academic year 2020/2021 took place on 12 October, following the Graduate Institute's new hybrid format due to Covid-19. During this session, students explored the Mexican political sphere, as Master's candidate Octavio Figueroa presented his paper on "Secretism and Rumour in the Presidential Succession under the PRI". The talk focused on the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), which is one of the most important political parties in Mexico (uninterruptedly holding power from the 1930s to the 2000s). Historians have described this controversial and long-lasting rule as "the perfect dictatorship," an epithet indicative of the party's uncommon capacity to maintain absolute hegemony in a country constantly swaying between democracy and authoritarianism.

Read the Full Event Summary

The Rise and Fall of Bauxite Mining and Aluminium Production in Suriname

Doctoral candidate Simon Lobach and Head of the Anthropology and Sociology Department Professor Patricia Spyer

The second session of the History Brunches took place Wednesday on the 4th of November, following the Institute's online format. In this session, students travelled to Suriname, as PhD's candidate Simon Lobach presented his research on "Aluminium Landscapes: The Rise and Fall of Bauxite Mining and Aluminium Production in Suriname, and the Lasting Impacts on its Society and Environment." During the colonial period, the Dutch discovered bauxite in the inner areas of Suriname and begun exploiting it for the production of aluminium. This new discovery fueled hopes for the rapid development and independence of the country. However, the "bauxite boom" was not long-lasting, and today, Suriname's aluminium production has completely stopped. Today, aluminium production is completely stopped in the country and its legacy is a polluted landscape that profoundly changed the livelihood of the local Maroon populations.

Read the Full Event Summary

Upcoming History Brunches

Tuesday 1 December 2020
11:15 - 12:00
Cold War Era Public Diplomacy: Soviet Professors of Russian in Indian Universities in the 1960s
Severyan Dyakonov, PhD candidate
comments by Professor Professor Cyrus Schayegh

PUBLICATIONS

Capitalism: A Journal of History and Economics
Decoding the Balance Sheet: Gifts, Goodwill, and the Liquidation of the League of Nations

Carolyn Biltoft

Spring 2020
Read the article

A Violent Peace:
Media, Truth, and Power at the League of Nations

Carolyn Biltoft

April 2021
Read the book

História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos
The Meaning(s) of Global Public Health History

Nicole Bourbonnais, Davide Rodogno, and Marcos Cueto

September 2020
Read the article

100 ans de multilatéralisme à Genève.
De la SdN à l'ONU
Birth of The United Nations
The United Nations and the Cold War
Major Ad Hoc Meetings

Jussi Hanhimäki

2020
Read the chapters

Pax Transatlantica
America and Europe in the post-Cold War Era

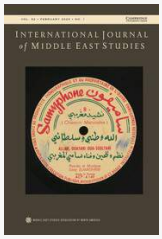
Jussi Hanhimäki

Forthcoming
Read the book

Africa
Histories of Authority in the African Great Lakes: Trajectories and Transactions

Aidan Russell

November 2020
Read the article



International Journal of Middle East Studies
Why Decolonization?

Cyrus Schayegh
co-edited with Yoav Di-Capua

February 2020
Read the chapter

Journal of Levantine Studies
Regions and Global History: An Arab-Iranian Case Study and Three Observations

Cyrus Schayegh

Summer 2020
Read the Book

EVENTS

Faculty Activities

On 30 June, Professor Nicole Bourbonnais participated in a collaborative event between the International History Department and the Global Health Centre of the Graduate Institute entitled "Covid-19 and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Crisis or Opportunity?". This event analysed how although there have been cuts to the funding of international health, new opportunities for more efficient practices can and have been adopted. On 13 October, Professor Bourbonnais also led a research seminar on the geographic and ideological landscape of the mid-twentieth century transnational family planning movement through analysis of a ten-year run (1952-1962) of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)'s Around the World newsletter.

This year, Professor Jussi Hanhimäki has been serving in the Robert H. Ferrell Book Prize committee for the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR). Professor Hanhimäki has also started a Swiss National Foundation funded project entitled The CSCE Follow-up Meeting in Vienna (1986-1989). Struggling for Human Rights and European security at the End of the Cold War.

Professor Susanna Hecht has been working with the Scientific panel on the Amazon to address the questions of Amazonia in science, including development dynamics and potential trajectories. On 25 October, she delivered a lecture before Oxford University and on 20 October a distinguished lecture at Duke University. In December, she will give a plenary address to the American Geophysical Union , and a keynote lecture on Political Ecology and Latin America at the Sorbonne University.

This autumn semester, Professor Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou was a Visiting Professor at the University of St. Gallen. He was the first Visiting Professor elected by the school's student body. On 15 September, he delivered a lecture on "Searching for the Non-Western State: Beyond Westphalia" for the Research Seminar of the School of Political Science and Economics (SEPS-HSG), and on 15 October delivered the Guest Lecture on "Contending the State of the State" hosted by Professor Christoph Frei. On 16 October, he delivered a talk on "The Racism of International Relations" before the Harvard Law School Global Justice Workshop. On 25 November, he will address the Assembly of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on the issue of racism today and yesterday.

As part of his podcast series on utopia3.ch, Professor Davide Rodogno has most recently interviewed the German-British composer and pianist Max Richter and the current president of the Navajo Nation President Jon Nez. Professor Rodogno also appeared on Swiss Radio and was interviewed for Swissinfo concerning the UN. Earlier, Professor David Rodogno, along with post-doctoral researcher Emmanuel Dalle Mulle and PhD Candidate Mona Bieling, organised a workshop entitled Sovereignty, Nationalism and Homogeneity in Europe between the Two World Wars. Bringing together historians with different geographical and methodological specialisations, the event aimed to draw the main lines of a comparative international history of majority-minority relations in Europe between 1919 and 1939. The workshop was organised within the framework of the SNSF-funded research project The Myth of Homogeneity.

Recent and Upcoming Events

Tuesday 17 November 2020
16:15 - 18:00
Iron Lady of the Caribbean? Eugenia Charles and Postcolonial Dominica
Imaobong Umoren, London School of Economics and Political Science

Tuesday 01 December 2020
16:15 - 18:00
Bringing Politics and Economics Together: A New Perspective on the 1931 German Crisis
Tobias Straumann, University of Zurich

Thursday 10 December 2020
12:30 - 13:30
Is Europe Late? The Place and Future of Europe in a Non-Eurocentric World
Adam Bence Balazs, Fellow researcher at the Centre for Social and Political Change (LCSP, Université de Paris)

Tuesday 15 December 2020
12:30 - 13:30
Iran's Soviet-Afghan War: Revolutions, Diasporas, and Diplomacy, 1970s–1990s
Timothy Nunan, Free University of Berlin

Uniquely located to study the making of international policies and the global history that stands behind it, the International History Department of the Graduate Institute researches and teaches the contemporary world through its different histories and from a multiplicity of perspectives.

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