New Approaches to Swiss Colonial & Global History
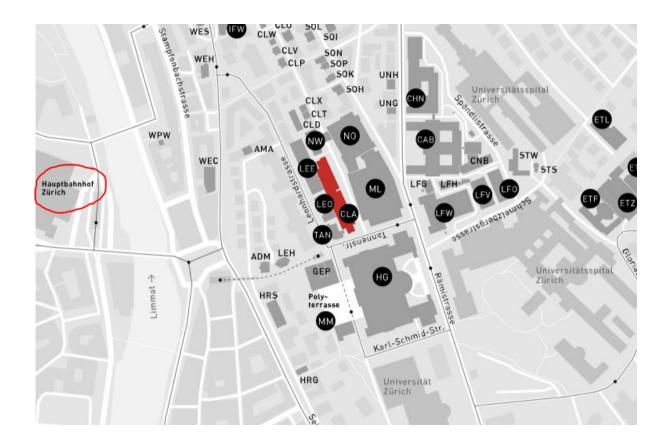
Workshop
@ 'History of the Modern World',
ETH Zürich

Friday, 16th of November 2018

Venue

CLA J 1, Tannenstrasse 3, 8092 Zürich

Registration

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Program

9.15   Bernhard C. Schär & Philipp Krauer, Zürich

Welcome & Introduction

9.30   Tomás Bartoletti, Erfurt

"Constructing Andean Indigeneity from the Alps: Johann Jakob Tschudi's voyages and Swiss colonial entanglements in nineteenth century's Latin America"

This paper will introduce my postdoctoral research on the Glarus-born naturalist Johann Jakob von Tschudi (1818-1889) and Swiss participation in Central Europe's quasi-colonial enterprises in Latin America. The "entangled" biography of Tschudi that this project intends to reconstruct pinpoints the multiple diplomatic, scientific and economic networks and hubs operating transversally between Central Europe and Latin America during the mid-nineteenth century. As a result of his voyages in Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina and Chile, Tschudi's output includes not only a wide range of publications (five volumes of his travel diary, books on Inca archaeology and Peruvian fauna, a Quechua grammar, articles on guano, meteorology and coca) but also the trafficking of epistemic objects (indigenous relics, human and animal fossils) for natural and ethnological Swiss collections. So it is that by analyzing Tschudi's "entangled" biography through flows of knowledge and its "hybridization", "pidginization" or "vernacularization" processes, this project will enable a reconsideration of Swiss influence in creating a "new" landscape of Latin America after Spanish rule, calling into question the extent to which the notion of "Amerindian indigeneity", far from being merely a product of national and native identity, was an attempt to reorder older colonial and epistemic entanglements by other means.

10.30   Sebastian Dorsch, Erfurt

"*Producing Globality and Neutrality - Switzerland and Science in the Guyana-boundary dispute between France and Brazil (around 1900)"*

My paper looks at techniques of producing globality and neutrality by different actors involved in the Guyana-boundary dispute between France and Brazil (around 1900) as well as at the role "Switzerland" played in these discussions. After centuries of conflict, intensified in the 1890s, the Brazilian and French governments asked in 1897 the Swiss Federal Council (Bundesrat) to find a final solution by defining the exact borderline between Brazil and French Guyana. This line should be drawn by interpreting the "sens precis", the precise intention of article 8 within the treaty of

Utrecht (1713). After having accepted, the Swiss Federal Council decided to use "scientific" methods, especially those of history and geography/cartography. Why Switzerland, why science? What does neutrality and globality mean in this context – "modern Western" concepts which some deciding actors linked with science and with Switzerland? And how?

11.30 Coffee

11.45   Denise Bertschi, Lausanne

"Helvécia, Brazil"

One of the 19th century's largest coffee plantations, located in northeastern Brazil (Bahia), was squarely in Swiss hands. Today's quilombo Helvécia bears almost no traces of the forms of life and community it once gave rise to while the encounter between European migrants and African slaves or their freed progeny remains to be properly understood and digested. My research in Helvécia focuses on forms of community that emerge from migrant destinies, slavery, demand for goods, working conditions and utopian fantasies. It sheds light on a key chapter in the history of Swiss colonialism and global interconnections. The Swiss Federal Council founded a vice-council on the ground of the colony and accompanying the Swiss settler's lives, including their possessions of slaves used as working force in the coffee production. Revisiting this territory and history by the means of art raises questions about visibilities and invisibilities and slipperiness of visual representation.

12.45 Lunch

14.00   Noémie Etienne, Claire Brizon, Chonja Lee, Bern

"Faire une Colonie suisse pour peupler quelque Terre inhabitée." Material Reminiscences of Global Entanglement during the Early Modern Period

In this paper, we will present aspects of a SNSF-research project and a forthcoming exhibition (Une Suisse exotique? Une histoire globale des Lumières) about Switzerland during the 17th and 18th Century (see more on www.theexotic.ch). In this context, we aim to use the term "exotic" critically, in order to explore questions related to the circulation of material culture and actors in a time of early globalization, scientific development, and colonization. We will underline the entanglement of things and people in the present-day territory of Switzerland in commercial, scientific and artistic networks within Europe, as well as Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Pacific Islands. Unfolding these narratives through objects will allow to understand the complexity of the movements that shaped the early modern world in an era of enforced geopolitical, economic and social exchanges.

15.00   Marisa Fois, Geneva

 "Vous êtes profondément attachés à la terre qui vous a accueillis". The Swiss of Algeria: colonisation without decolonisation?

The paper aims to shed light on Switzerland's role in decolonisation by looking at the Swiss community in Algeria, focusing on the Association des Suisses spoliés d'Algèrie ou d'outre-mer (ASSAOM). This organisation was established in 1967 in Geneva, five years after Algerian independence, in order to seek compensation for the loss of property in Algeria and pensions due for years working overseas. The postcolonial Swiss migration represents a good example of the country's refusal to face its implications in the colonial project.

16.00   **Final Discussion**