



W.H.E.A.T.S

WORKSHOP FOR THE HISTORY OF THE ENVIRONMENT
AGRICULTURE, TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE

October 4-6, 2019
Old Horticulture, 506 E Circle Drive, Room 255

WHEATS is an intensive, cutting-edge conference for early career scholars—graduate students and recent PhDs—who study the environment, agriculture, technology or science from a historical perspective. WHEATS began in 2004 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Since then it has been hosted at the University of Western Ontario, the University of Virginia, the University of Georgia, Kansas State University, Mississippi State University, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Kansas, the University of Colorado-Boulder, Rutgers University, and SUNY Albany. In 2018, UC Riverside hosted WHEATS.

Michigan State University (MSU) will host WHEATS in 2019. MSU began as the Michigan Agricultural College in 1855 and an act of the Michigan Legislature converted the college into a University in 1955. MSU continues to foster a strong agricultural college.

WHEATS is being generously supported by

The Society for the History of Technology
The Graduate School at MSU
Department of History, MSU
Agricultural History Society
African Studies Center, MSU
Canadian Studies Center, MSU
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Science and Society Reading Group, MSU



WHEATS 2019
Co-organizers: John Vsetecka and Ramya Swayamprakash, doctoral students in the department
of History, MSU
Faculty mentor: Dr. Naoko Wake



Keynote Speaker: Dr. Hiromi Mizuno
“The Nitrogen Battle and Our Terrestrial Future”

Many of us are familiar with the Green Revolution, but we know little about another important war going on behind the Green Revolution -- a fierce international competition among fertilizer producers over the Asian market. By examining the "nitrogen battle," my talk critically highlights the complicit role of fertilizer and what I call Malthusian humanitarianism in our terrestrial future while attempting to historicize the nitrogen cycle.



October 4, 2019 at 5.30 pm
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SCHEDULE

Friday, October 4, 2019

2.30 pm: Welcome

3 pm: Biswajit Sarmah, Doctoral candidate at the Humanities and Social Sciences Department of the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, India
A game reserve in swamps and pastures: Early history of the Kaziranga National Park, India (1908-1928)

Commentator: Dr. Mark Axelrod, Associate Professor, James Madison College and the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, MSU

4-4.15 pm: Coffee Break

4.15 pm: William Fitzsimmons, PhD candidate in African history at Northwestern University
The language of climate change: reconstructing “collapse” and “resilience” in East African stateless societies from the African Humid Period to the Medieval Warm Period

Commentator: Dr. Jamie Monson, Professor, Department of History, MSU

5.30-6.30 pm: Keynote address by Dr. Hiromi Mizuno, Associate Professor of History, University of Minnesota.

7.15 pm- 9.15 pm: *Welcome Banquet*

Saturday, October 5, 2019

8.30 am: Breakfast

9.30 am: Sujeet George, PhD candidate at the Chair for the History of the Modern World, ETH Zurich

Cotton-breeding, Climate and Commerce in the Bombay Presidency, c.1900–40

Commentator: Dr. Sejuti Das Gupta, Assistant Professor, James Madison College, MSU

10.30 am: Gilberto Mazzoli, PhD Researcher at the Department of History and Civilization at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy
Portable Natures: Environmental Visions, Urban Practices, Migratory Flows. Urban Agriculture and the Italian Experience in North American Cities, 1898-1940

Commentator: Dr. Kirsten Fermaglich, Associate Professor, Department of History, MSU

11.30 am - 1 pm: Lunch



1 pm: Randall Janes, PhD candidate at the Department of History at Western Michigan University

Sugar Production, Power, and Claims to Expert Knowledge in the Ibero-American World, 1450 – 1650

Commentator: Dr. Edward Murphy, Associate Professor, Department of History, MSU

2 pm: Oliver Lazarus, M.A. student in the Animal Studies program at New York University

Capitalist Pigs: Animals and the Development of New York City

Commentator: Dr. Eleanor Louson, Instructor, Lyman Briggs College, MSU

3-3.30 pm: Coffee Break

3.30 pm – 5.30 pm: Putting it Out There: A Workshop on Publishing

Facilitators: Dr. Melissa Charenko, Dr. Naoko Wake, and Ramya Swayamprakash

6 pm: Dinner

Sunday, October 6, 2019

8.30 am: Breakfast

9.30 am: Jackson Perry, PhD candidate in environmental history at Georgetown University

“Eucalyptus Enthusiasm from the Ground Up: The Trees We Cannot See”

Commentator: Dr. Michael Stamm, Professor, Department of History, MSU

10.30 am -11 am: Coffee Break

11 am: Rachel Steely, PhD candidate in the History Department at Harvard University
The Failing Frontier: The Globalization of Soybean Cultivation in an Era of Ecological Crisis

Commentator: Dr. Helen Veit, Associate Professor, Department of History, MSU

12- 1.30 pm: Lunch and closing



Participants:

Sujeet George is a PhD candidate at the Chair for the History of the Modern World, ETH Zurich. His PhD project *The Making of a Global Agriculture in British India, c 1890s–1940s* examines the global linkages and histories of agrarian science and rural reconstruction in British India in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Biswajit Sarmah is a doctoral candidate at the Humanities and Social Sciences Department of the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, India. Currently he is a Fulbright Nehru Doctoral Fellow 2019-20 at the Department of History, State University of New York, Binghamton, NY. In 2014, he completed Master of Arts, Development from Azim Premji University, Bangalore, India. His doctoral dissertation is titled as *Park, People and Politics: An Environmental History of the Kaziranga National Park, India*. His Fulbright project tries to understand the global transmission of national park management and wildlife conservation practices. His research interests are: floodplain ecology, environmental politics, wildlife conservation and agrarian history.

Oliver Lazarus is a second year M.A. student in the Animal Studies program at New York University. He's interested in the intersection of technology and human/non-human animals, the historical role of animals in economic growth, and the shifting roles of animals under climate change. His M.A. thesis focuses on the quantification and contextualization of animals in the development of New York City at the turn of the twentieth century. Prior to the M.A. program, he was a journalist for The Takeaway at WNYC, and continues to work as a journalist and in audio production. He lives and studies in New York, and will be applying to PhD programs in sociology in the fall.

Jackson Perry is a PhD candidate in environmental history at Georgetown University. His research examines the spread of the eucalyptus tree genus to the Mediterranean region in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, based on European, Algerian, American and Australian archival sources. Jackson's forthcoming dissertation, "The Gospel of the Gum: Eucalyptus and the Modern Mediterranean, 1848-1896," explores the trans-imperial and trans-regional scientific networks and institutions that promoted the tree's spread from Australia to Mediterranean and beyond, and the local and regional environmental, political and social contexts in which eucalyptography, as both a science and popular obsession, found fertile ground. His research has been supported by fellowships from the Council of American Overseas Research Centers and the Forest History Society. Jackson also has a master's degree in Near Eastern Studies from New York University.

Gilberto Mazzoli is a PhD Researcher at the Department of History and Civilization at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. His dissertation is provisionally titled "Portable Natures: Environmental Visions, Urban Practices, Migratory Flows. Urban Agriculture and the Italian Experience in North American Cities, 1890-1940". This research aims to explore the practice of Italian migrants' urban gardening through the framework of Environmental History of Migrations. Gilberto holds a Master in Contemporary History and a Bachelor in Communication and Media Studies both from the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy. He also worked as a graphic and exhibition designer at the National Museum of Contemporary History in Ljubljana, Slovenia. His recent publications include: "Urban Horticulture in Modena, Italy, 1980–2015" on the online peer-reviewed journal *Arcadia*,



managed by the Rachel Carson Center of Munich, Germany (<https://doi.org/10.5282/rcc/7749>). He is a member of the ESEH (European Society of Environmental History) since 2015.

Randall Janes is a PhD candidate at the Department of History at Western Michigan University. His research interests include Renaissance and early modern Spain, agricultural history, and issues of science, technology, and society in the Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds. His current research engages the emergence of empirical science in the early Ibero-American world and its influence on skilled and technical labor in the Ibero-American sugar industry, and in particular, the *maestros de azúcar* whose expertise in the complex processes of refining sugar was central to the manufacture of this quintessential colonial commodity. This focus on the creation of knowledge and expertise highlights the recursive nature of the advent of empirical science in the Ibero-American world and the expansion and maintenance of the Spanish empire.

Rachel Steely is a PhD candidate in the History Department at Harvard University. Her dissertation is tentatively titled: “The Golden Revolution: The Geopolitics of Global Soy Frontiers in the Twentieth Century.” Drawing on archival sources from multiple continents and literatures from both humanistic and scientific disciplines, this work explores how shifts in international trade relationships and environmental challenges prompted farmers, policymakers, and researchers to take up interest in the soybean, to invite its spread into new regions, and to develop and implement technological innovations that would facilitate its production. Rachel is a Graduate Student Associate with the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs for the 2019-20 academic year.

William Fitzsimons is a PhD candidate in African history at Northwestern University. His research utilizes a broad range of sources - primarily historical linguistics, but also oral traditions, archival documents, paleoclimatic data, archaeology, and anthropological genetics – to reconstruct the historical development of decentralized political institutions in eastern Africa over the past two millennia. His current project examines how the linguistic ancestors of Ateker-speaking populations living in today’s Uganda-Kenya-Ethiopia-South Sudan borderlands responded to historical climate change by innovating geographically-dispersed decentralized governance structures, migrating into new regions, and incorporating immigrant communities through initiations into age-sets. William earned his BA in history and philosophy at Union College, NY and Master’s degrees in African history from Tufts University, MA and Northwestern University. He has received numerous grants for his research, including the Social Science Research Council’s International Dissertation Research Fellowship and the N. D. Quinn Dissertation Writing Fellowship from the Chabreja Center for Historical Studies.