

# International Workshop **Oceans disconnect**

**Place & date:** Munich, 21-22 November 2022

**Organisers:** David Armitage (Harvard),  
Sujit Sivasundaram (Cambridge), Roland  
Wenzlhuemer (LMU Munich)

**Venue:** Historisches Kolleg, Kaulbachstrasse  
15, 80539 München



# Programme

## Oceans Disconnect 21 & 22 November 2022

### 21 November 2022

13:00 - 13:30 Registration

13:30 - 14:00 Welcome & Introduction

14:00 - 15:30 Panel 1: Knowledges at Sea

Franziska Hermes (Free University Berlin): *Rumour has it: Shipwreck News and Oceanic Distances in the late 18th-Century British Empire*

Sarah Longair (University of Lincoln): *Disconnected knowledge: Indian Ocean islands, material culture and the limits of colonial collecting*

Kate Stevens (University of Waikato): *Down the wormholes of oceanic history: naval shipworms across the Pacific Ocean*

15:30 - 16:00 Coffee break

16:00 - 17:45 Panel 2: Bounding the Oceans

Joshua Ehrlich (University of Macau): *Port Cities and Their Boundaries*

Lasse Heerten (Ruhr-University Bochum): *Machines of Dis:Connectivity: the expansion of the port of Hamburg and river dredging in the Tidal Elbe, c. 1814-1910*

Jennifer Kain (University of Newcastle): *Otago Harbour, New Zealand, a public health 'chokepoint': merchant seamen, venereal disease, and contested legalities*

Aditya Ramesh (SOAS): *Oceanic disruptions food shortage and the remaking of an agrarian frontier: southern India c. 1880-1950*

18:30 Conference Dinner for panelists

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### 22 November 2022

09:00 - 10:30 Panel 3: Dire Straits?

Caroline Marris (Columbia): *“Wall of England:” Creating a Barrier of the Early Modern English Channel*

Fynn Holm (Harvard): *Dis:Connecting the Japanese Pelagic Empire: Magdalena Bay and the Failed Japanese Expansion Across the Pacific, 1900-1914*

Anjuli Webster (Emory): *Liquid stasis: How European empires used the ocean to enclose Maputo Bay*

10:30 - 11:00 Coffee break

11:00 - 12:30 Panel 4: Mare clausum/Mare liberum

Rohan Howitt (ANU): *From the Margins: The Southern Ocean World in Global History*

Tirza Meyer (Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm): *Historicizing the deepest parts of the ocean – “the Area” in histories and futures of ocean governance*

Taylor C. Zajicek (Princeton): *“The Sea Will Be Angry”: Cold War (Dis)integration and the Black Sea Dolphin Hunt*

12:30 - 14:00 Lunch break

14:00 - 15:30 Panel 5: Oceanic resistance

Kelvin Ng (Yale): *In the Wake of Disconnection: Labor Immobility and Political Thought in the Bay of Bengal, 1930–1950*

Jonas Rüegg (University of Zurich): *Business, State and Piracy: The Oceanic Frontier Triangle in the Making of Japan’s Pacific Empire*

Daniel Tödt (University of Konstanz): *Colonial Unrest Below Deck: Congolese Seafarers and Oceanic Disconnections in the Belgian Empire*

15:30 - 16:00 Concluding remarks

Martin Dusinberre (University of Zurich)

Tamara Fernando (IHR/LMU Munich)

# Abstracts

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## Panel 1: Knowledges at Sea

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### **Franziska Hermes (Free University Berlin): *Rumour has it: Shipwreck News and Oceanic Distances in the late 18th-Century British Empire***

**Abstract:** In the late 18th-century British empire, shipwrecks of East India Company vessels were rare but impactful events. They generated great public interest that was reflected particularly in the media coverage of these events. Contrary to what could be assumed following Benedict Anderson and others, consuming shipwreck news did not automatically have an integrative effect on readers by evoking a sense of synchronicity. As shipwreck took place in spaces out of reach, information was hard to access and verify, and by the time it reached Britain, it was outdated already, leaving room for rumours, misunderstandings, and anxieties to grow. By looking at the British news coverage of high-profile shipwrecked East Indiamen in the 1780s and 1790s, my paper argues that, albeit crossable, 18th-century oceanic distances still allowed for delayed, faulty, and possibly destabilising information, therewith exposing the British empire as a highly contingent and hard-to-manage construct to both contemporaries and historians.

**Bio:** Franziska Hermes is a doctoral fellow at the Graduate School Global Intellectual History jointly run by Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität Berlin. She holds a bachelor's degree in History and Political Science (Freie Universität Berlin, 2016) and a master's degree in History (Freie Universität Berlin, 2019). Her research is interested in the cultural and maritime history of the eighteenth-century British Empire, and it specifically looks into how shipwrecks of East India Company vessels were debated and made sense of. From April to June 2022, she has been a research fellow at the German Historical Institute in London.

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**Sarah Longair (University of Lincoln): *Disconnected knowledge: Indian Ocean islands, material culture and the limits of colonial collecting***

**Abstract:** Island studies have, alongside oceanic histories, highlighted the connectedness of islands. The lens of connection, however, needs to be balanced with the impact of isolation and disconnection. To explore the 'disconnected knowledge' produced by colonial powers, this paper will examine the collecting practice of Europeans, who amassed objects from the islands of the western Indian Ocean in the late nineteenth century. Focusing on the Maldives, it will investigate European collectors' attempts to understand and collect the material culture of the archipelago to create comprehensive collections. This paper will demonstrate how the islands and islanders resisted the activities of the collectors. Numerous factors inhibited collecting practice, including oceanic weather systems, island ecologies, ignorance of local customs and, at times, political resistance. We will see how, in spite of the hundreds of objects collected and then displayed with fanfare at colonial exhibitions, often accompanied by publications, such visions of these islands and the knowledge accrued about them were partial, limited and disconnected.

**Bio:** Dr Sarah Longair is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Heritage at the University of Lincoln. Her research explores the British Empire in East Africa and the Indian Ocean world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through material and visual culture. Her publications include *Cracks in the Dome: Fractured histories of empire in the Zanzibar Museum, 1897 - 1964* (2015) and *History through Material Culture* (2017, co-authored with Leonie Hannan). She previously worked at the British Museum for 11 years in the Learning department and the Africa section. Her new monograph explores colonial collecting on islands in the western Indian Ocean.

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**Kate Stevens (University of Waikato): *Down the wormholes of oceanic history: naval shipworms across the Pacific Ocean***

**Abstract:** Following migrating marine species has enabled scholars to examine connected histories of the Pacific. However, histories of the Pacific's global integration have paid less attention to the disruptions that mobile oceanic species caused to economic, imperial, and environmental networks. This paper examines the disconnected environmental knowledges, and the disconnection of shipping infrastructure, caused by naval shipworm across Pacific in the 19th and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Shipworms such as *Teredo navalis* were unknowingly transported in the hulls of commercial and colonial vessels. They spread largely unseen until they had eaten away at the very foundations of the ships and ports that—often forcefully—sought to integrated Pacific species and peoples into global flows of energy and capital. Drawing on Indigenous, imperial, and environmental history, I explore the movement of shipworms, repetitive unsuccessful attempts to remove the invisible pest, and shipworms' 'chew-points' as a metaphor for the fragility of globalising oceanic networks and scientific knowledges.

**Bio:** I am a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Waikato, Aotearoa New Zealand, where I am a Pākehā/settler on Waikato-Tainui whenua. My research focuses on connected and comparative histories of cultural, environmental, and economic exchange in the colonial and postcolonial Pacific world. My first book *Gender, Violence and Criminal Justice in the Colonial Pacific 1880-1920* (Bloomsbury) examines sexual violence and the intersection of race and gender hierarchies in the colonial legal systems of Vanuatu, Fiji, and New Caledonia. In other research, I have examined the nexus of gender, environment, and colonialism, including women's roles and environmental knowledge in southern Aotearoa whaling worlds with Prof Angela Wanhalla, and how coconut commodities connected the Pacific to the global economy with Prof Judy Bennett. My current research includes an environmental history of Suva through its waters, and tracing the history of smell through oils and soaps from the Pacific to Europe.

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## Panel 2: Bounding the Oceans

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### **Joshua Ehrlich (University of Macau): *Port Cities and Their Boundaries***

**Abstract:** A vast body of scholarship portrays port cities as global centers, crossroads, and sites of exchange. In addition to being highly connected places, however, such cities have often been highly bounded ones. To illustrate this phenomenon and suggest how it might be studied, this paper turns to Calcutta and its longstanding boundary, the Maratha Ditch. It shows how the ditch separated the capital of British India from the Indian mainland in an evolving fusion of concrete and abstract ways. Furthermore, it proposes other examples of port city boundaries whose layered meanings might be fruitfully excavated. It points to the potential for a new historical geography of the urban world attentive to boundaries and connections alike.

**Bio:** Joshua Ehrlich is an assistant professor in the Department of History at the University of Macau. He was educated at the University of Chicago (BA) and Harvard University (MA, PhD). Ehrlich's first book, *The East India Company and the Politics of Knowledge* (under review), traces the history of knowledge debates involving the Company in the decades around 1800. It reveals that the most powerful corporation in history sought legitimacy by portraying itself as the most enlightened one too. Ehrlich's other work, on subjects including the histories of cities, political thought, knowledge, and the British Empire in South and Southeast Asia has appeared in journals including *Past & Present*, *Historical Research*, *The Historical Journal*, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, *Modern Asian Studies*, and *Modern Intellectual History*.

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Lasse Heerten (Ruhr-University Bochum): *Machines of Dis:Connectivity: The Expansion of the Port of Hamburg and River Dredging in the Tidal Elbe, c. 1814-1910*

**Abstract:** In the early nineteenth century, engineering measures to ‘correct’ the Elbe and enhance its navigable lane began to transform the river fundamentally, re-imagining a complex fluvial ecosystem as a waterway. These efforts were confronted with unintended effects. As far upriver as Hamburg, the Elbe is part of the tidal system of the Atlantic Ocean. The deepening of the riverbed enhanced the velocity of the river current – and of the oceanic waters that flowed into the estuary from the North Sea. This increased the masses of sand and sediment flushed upstream with the flood and downstream with the current at ebb. In effect, dredging helped create a riverscape constantly threatened by siltation, and hence the demand for perpetual dredging: engineering simultaneously facilitated *and* endangered Hamburg’s oceanic connections. The paper analyzes the ambivalences of dis:connectivity that these practices created in an oceanic-riverine setting against the background of recent discussions about the Anthropocene.

**Bio:** Lasse Heerten is lecturer in transnational history at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum and head of the project “Imperial Gateway: Hamburg, the German Empire, and the Making of a Global Port”, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation). A historian of Europe and the world, he has authored *The Biafran War and Postcolonial Humanitarianism: Spectacles of Suffering* (Cambridge University Press, 2017) and articles published in, among others, *The American Historical Review*, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* and the *Journal of Historical Sociology*. He is currently writing his second book, tentatively titled *Water and Stone: The Port of Hamburg and the German Empire in a Global Age*.

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**Jennifer Kain (University of Newcastle): *Otago Harbour, New Zealand, a public health ‘chokepoint’: merchant seamen, venereal disease, and contested legalities***

**Abstract:** During the First World War, the quarantine station on the island of *Kamau Taurua* in Otago Harbour, New Zealand was used to contain and treat servicemen presenting with venereal disease. Using sources from the New Zealand National Archives I show how crew from the same returning troopships were also forcefully quarantined in this locale, albeit on an ad-hoc basis. This paper considers the medical and legal conditions which created these multiple sites of ‘medical transit’ at the southern terminus of this global shipping route. It uses case studies to suggest that there was a disconnect between the responses of border, medical and military authorities to this public health anxiety, one based on financial, practical, and altruistic considerations.

**Bio:** Dr Jennifer Kain is a Lecturer in History at Newcastle University, UK. By specialising in health-related borders controls in the nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries, her research encompasses migration, maritime, legal and medical histories. Jen has held research fellowships at the Institute of Historical Research, London and the Centre for Global History, LMU Munich. Her first monograph, *Insanity and Immigration Control in New Zealand and Australia, 1860-1930* published in 2019, was shortlisted by the New Zealand Historical Association in their ‘best first book by an author on any aspect of New Zealand History’ category.

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**Aditya Ramesh (SOAS): *Oceanic disruptions food shortage and the remaking of an agrarian frontier: southern India c. 1880-1950***

**Abstract:** 1939, the south-eastern coast of India waited with bated breath on news of a possible outbreak of war across the world. Historically a rice producing region which increasingly became dependent on the Burmese rice frontier in the 19th century for its staple food, the south-eastern coast was a hub of movement, migration, and interdependencies that spanned across the Bay of Bengal into Burma, Malaya, Singapore, and Ceylon, as Sunil Amrith has argued. This paper asks what happens when war disrupts what constituted centuries of oceanic movement? With the Japanese advance into Burma, the Bay of Bengal system was severely disrupted. The paper follows the story of food in the Madras Presidency (a large British administrative territory in southern India), on the eve and through the Second World War. The paper suggests that the war, and the disconnection of oceanic interdependencies through networks of empire, kinship and finance, heralded a new moment of infrastructure and property. Particularly, the disruption of the oceanic frontier led to new a terrestrial moment of large dams and canals and new emergent property relations, loosening the grip of traditional land-holding castes.

**Bio:** Aditya is currently Presidential fellow in environmental history at the University of Manchester. He is working on completing a monograph tentatively titled *Water Province: River, Reservoir and Delta in Southern India*. The monograph excavates the origins of the multipurpose reservoir and technocratic governance through tracing everyday engagements with natural resources, finance, government and politics. Previously, Aditya held postdoctoral fellowships at the Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine, University of Manchester and the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, Bengaluru. Aditya's next project explores the relationship between ecology, disease, and habitat in colonial and postcolonial South Asian cities.

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## Panel 3: Dire Straits?

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### **Caroline Marris (Columbia): “Wall of England:” Creating a Barrier of the Early Modern English Channel**

**Abstract:** The later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were a time of consolidation for northwestern European nation-states, and English actors, in particular, began after the Armada year of 1588 to consistently and determinedly describe the waters of the region as ‘theirs’ and as ‘English’ or British. This presentation will lay out these efforts and examine whether there was any practical basis or evidence to these claims. It will also explore how the idea of ‘domestic’ waters infiltrated English cultural production – from maps, charts, and atlases to Shakespeare – and ask whether this impulse to appropriate the sea is of a workable piece with other literature that traces the history of English, anti-Continental xenophobia and of the development of the law of nations as regarded the sea. By the end of the seventeenth century, this process of English definition had transformed the free-for-all environment of the Channel into a place of straitening, restriction, and legal conflict.

**Bio:** Caroline Marris is currently a Lecturer in the Core Curriculum at Columbia University, where she earned her PhD in early modern European history in 2021. Her work focuses on the nexus of politics, cartography, environment, and human life of the English Channel in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. She has worked for the career diversity-focused program History in Action, served on the American Historical Association’s Graduate and Early Career Committee, and is an editor of H-Maritime. Her research has been supported by the Huntington Library, the New York Public Library, Royal Museums Greenwich, and the British Library. She can be found on Twitter @cazmarris.

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**Fynn Holm (Harvard): *Dis:Connecting the Japanese Pelagic Empire: Magdalena Bay and the Failed Japanese Expansion Across the Pacific, 1900-1914***

**Abstract:** In April 1912, an American newspaper reported about an alleged Japanese “monster” colony at Magdalena Bay in Mexico. While the Magdalena Bay Incident is today remembered as a hoax and anti-Japanese propaganda, it turns out that the Japanese whaling company Tōyō Hogeï did indeed intent to secure fishing rights and planned to build fishing coastal stations in Mexico. These stations would have been the first Japanese attempt of connecting the Pacific and build colonial fishing outposts on the American continent. This essay investigates the Magdalena Bay Incident and asks what the Japanese plans originally entailed and why the project failed early on. It is argued that Tōyō Hogeï’s planned coastal stations would have been Japan’s first serious attempt of building what William Tsutsui has called an “pelagic empire.” However, due to the limited technology of the time it was not yet possible to operate freely on the oceans.

**Bio:** Fynn Holm is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Bern. Between 2022 and 2023, he was an associate researcher at the History Department at Harvard University. As a global environmental historian, he investigates the human relationship with oceans and mountains in Japan and Europe. A revised manuscript of his dissertation, which he defended in 2019 at the University of Zurich, is scheduled to be published in the Cambridge Oceanic Histories Series by Cambridge University Press under the title “The Gods of the Sea: Whales and Coastal Communities in Northeast Japan, c. 1600-2019” in 2023.

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**Anjali Webster (Emory): *Liquid stasis: How European empires used the ocean to enclose Maputo Bay***

**Abstract:** In Maputo, southeast Africa, the nineteenth century was a time of unprecedented transformation. The slave trade along the east African coast swelled following acts of abolition across the Atlantic World. Closer at hand, indigenous state formation, warfare, and violence wracked the southern African hinterland. Finally, inter-imperial conflict in the region accelerated as European empires sought out new colonial territories in Africa. In this paper I analyse how the British and Portuguese, both with sights set on the possession of Maputo Bay as a prospective strategic port in southern Africa, used the ocean to dispossess land and construct imperial borders. The enclosure of Maputo Bay did not simply constitute bounding and privatisation. It also interrupted networks of indigenous relation, movement, and exchange, curtailing flexible modes of access to land and water for seasonal planting and pastoral needs. I argue that this process was an important antecedent to the conquest of the region in the unjust wars of colonisation in the 1890s.

**Bio:** I am currently a PhD candidate and Mellon Sawyer Dissertation Fellow in African History at Emory University. I have trained and taught in history and anthropology in South Africa, Tanzania, and the United States. My research and teaching centre southern Africa as a world-historical location in regional and global processes and networks of imperialism, colonialism, and resistance between 1700-1900.

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## Panel 4: Mare clausum/Mare liberum

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### **Rohan Howitt (ANU): *From the Margins: The Southern Ocean World in Global History***

**Abstract:** The first wave of oceanic histories generated fresh perspectives by reframing world history around the earth's major water bodies, but it is notable that the world's southernmost ocean remained on the periphery of this scholarship. Yet just as the Southern Ocean physically connects the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans and profoundly shapes global climate, so too is the Southern Ocean World deeply entangled in historical events and processes at a global scale. This paper draws and reflects on my ongoing research into the Southern Ocean's subantarctic islands from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries. Focusing on the complex dynamics of settlement, government, mobility, and trade in this region, the paper considers how histories of the Southern Ocean World can contribute to the fields of global, world, and oceanic history. I argue that writing global history from the geographical margins provides one hitherto neglected way to view the history of global interconnection and mobility as uneven, contested, and interrupted.

**Bio:** Dr Rohan Howitt is the inaugural Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Centre for Environmental History at the Australian National University. His research is primarily concerned with the intersections of global, environmental, and imperial history in Australia, Antarctica, and the Southern Ocean. He is currently completing a book project, *The Southern Frontier: Australia, Antarctica, and Empire in the Southern Ocean World*, whilst commencing a new project that situates the subantarctic islands bioregion in global history. His articles have appeared in *History Workshop Journal* and *Australian Historical Studies*.

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**Tirza Meyer (Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm):**  
*Historicizing the deepest parts of the ocean – “the Area” in histories and futures of ocean governance*

**Abstract:** In the late twentieth century, as the United Nations struggled to come up with a new legal system for the oceans, radical new ideas of justice and internationalism were proposed by some delegates at the negotiations. Ocean governance expert Elisabeth Mann Borgese (1918–2002) spent decades working with the United Nations Law of the Sea Convention. Throughout this sprawling series of global conferences, she navigated allegiances, intrigues and setbacks, fighting determinedly to develop a just ocean order. This paper explores timeless questions of justice and international collaboration and asks whether the history of ocean governance can help face current challenges. The paper ponders recent challenges of governing the world’s oceans by casting a light on the original ideas that were discussed during UNCLOS III. The delegates were not blind to the uncertainty of future developments. The International Seabed Authority governing “the Area” was set up in a flexible way with a Preparation Committee as an insurance against an uncertain future. Initial visions for ocean governance were much more ‘holistic’ and internationalist than those that later went into the Law of the Sea Treaty. Some delegates at UNCLOS III were convinced that everything in the ocean and in the world at large is interconnected – and that only a governance system that encompassed the entire planet could meet the challenges the world faced. Yet, the treaty fractured the ocean and left the seabed outside national jurisdiction as a last remnant of the idea of a common area. The paper seeks to examine the original ideas to see whether history can help solve present and future problems with the current fragmented ocean governance system that was inspired by resource distribution and promises of deep sea mining.

**Bio:** Tirza Meyer is a postdoctoral researcher at the division of history at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. She is a contemporary historian and writer currently working on environmental history, media and the history of underwater technology and she is affiliated with the project *The Mediated Planet: Claiming Data for Environmental SDG’s*. She holds a PhD from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim where she has conducted research on the history of the Law of the Sea and transnational governance concepts like the common heritage of humankind applied to the area outside national jurisdiction in the deep ocean. She is currently a visiting scholar at the Oslo School of Environmental Humanities (OSEH) in Oslo and a participant in the international Collaboratory *Medias Seas of the High North Atlantic*.

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**Taylor C. Zajicek (Princeton): “The Sea Will Be Angry”: Cold War (Dis)integration and the Black Sea Dolphin Hunt**

**Abstract:** This paper analyzes the history of dolphin hunting in the Black Sea, as a case study in the contingency of modern environmental diplomacy. In 1966, the Soviet Union issued a moratorium on the sea’s cetacean hunt, in response to popular sentiment and the sector’s plummeting profitability. Three decades of industrial extraction had pushed dolphin and porpoise populations to a breaking point. Moscow leveraged the Black Sea Fishing Commission (est. 1959) to urge Bucharest and Sofia to follow suit. Yet Turkish fishers continued to hunt for another 17 years, driving the animals to endangerment and transforming the marine ecosystem. This paper argues that the Cold War—the latest of the Black Sea’s geopolitical disconnects—played an ambivalent role in this outcome. On the one hand, bloc mentality emboldened Soviet regulators to discipline the region’s socialist fishers; on the other, it disincentivized Turkey’s (a NATO ally) participation in regionwide restraint.

**Bio:** Taylor Zajicek is a Ph.D. candidate in Modern Russian and Near Eastern History at Princeton University. Taylor’s dissertation is an environmental history of the greater Black Sea region, from 1933 to 1993. The project explores the intersection of geopolitics, science, and environmental change along a key Cold War fault line, with research support from the Social Science Research Council, Fulbright-Hays Program, and Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. Prior to Princeton, Taylor earned an MA in Eurasian Studies at the University of Washington, interned at the US Embassy in Uzbekistan, and taught English in Turkey as a Fulbright grantee.

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## Panel 5: Oceanic resistance

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**Kelvin Ng (Yale): *In the Wake of Disconnection: Labor Immobility and Political Thought in the Bay of Bengal, 1930–1950***

**Abstract:** The middle decades of the twentieth century witnessed an unprecedented period of closure and disconnection in the eastern Indian Ocean. Earlier flows of labor migration between South and Southeast Asia broke down beginning with the global economic depression of the 1930s, through to the intensification of warfare in the 1940s, and onward to the enforcement of new national boundaries in the 1950s. This paper examines the intellectual transformation of Tamil political thought in the context of colonial Malaya across these three tumultuous decades, reinterpreting the closure of the Bay of Bengal as productive of unexpected political openings. It argues that the turn toward labor as a modality of claims-making—organized around the solidarities formed between Tamil and Chinese workers—emerged from the sundering of political and familial links between South India and Malaya, lending a particular urgency to the project of reimagining the boundaries of political community.

**Bio:** Kelvin Ng is a PhD candidate at the Department of History at Yale University. His research work brings together the social history of migration and the intellectual history of internationalism in four linked Indian Ocean spaces: British India, Republican China, British Malaya, and the Dutch East Indies. His dissertation examines three intertwined strands of anti-imperial thought—communist internationalism, pan-Islamism, and anti-caste radicalism—in relation to an oceanic political economy of unfree labor and uneven development.

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**Jonas Rüegg (University of Zurich): *Business, State and Piracy: The Oceanic Frontier Triangle in the Making of Japan's Pacific Empire***

**Abstract:** Japan holds a unique position in world history as a Pacific archipelago turned continental empire. Its ambiguous position between the island Pacific and its continental rims is metaphorical of the way colonizing remote islands figured as an overture to the empire's landing on the continent. This contribution studies how frontier migrants and frontier businesses blurred the boundaries of business, state, and piracy. The incorporation first of the Bonin Islands, and later of island colonies set up by Japanese rogue businessmen, inspired strategies such as purchasing territory, naturalizing foreign subjects, or out-populating "foreign" settlers. In a manner reminiscent of chartered company states in Europe's "Scramble for Africa," island colonies in the oceanic frontier kept challenging state rule. Thus, subsequent debates over the relationship between state and business in the oceanic frontier informed the way Japan defined its colonial ambitions and its subsequent mode of expansion.

**Bio:** Jonas Rüegg is an environmental historian interested in Japan, East Asia, and the Pacific since the early modern period. His prospective book "The Kuroshio Frontier: Business, State, and Environment in the Making of Japan's Pacific" investigates Japan's role in the making of the modern Pacific, and the role of oceanic environments and maritime technologies in the making of modern Japan. Jonas' previous publications discussed the Tokugawa shogunate's colonization of the Bonin or "Ogasawara" Islands in the 1860s, and the cultural and economic changes Pacific expansionism wrought on the eve of Asia's first industrial transformations. After eight years at Harvard University and extensive fieldwork periods in East Asia, Jonas joined the History Department at the University of Zurich last summer, as a Senior Research and Teaching Assistant (Oberassistent) in Global History.

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**Daniel Tödt (University of Konstanz): *Colonial Unrest Below Deck: Congolese Seafarers and Oceanic Disconnections in the Belgian Empire***

**Abstract:** This paper sounds out the possibilities and conditions for Congolese seafarers in the inter-war period to determine their work and free time. As global historians have foregrounded, instead of simply connecting two shores, the ship voyages created specific interactions with transformative potential (Dusinberre/Wenzlhuemer 2016). Contrary to the intentions of the colonial authorities and management, the working and living conditions of Congolese seafarers empowered them to stage a series of collective unrests. By taking into account the spatiality of their workplace and the regular stays on shore, it will be argued that an explanation for the Congolese workers' ability to protest can be found in the labour processes on board. Laying bare the *practices of disconnecting* in colonial oceanic history, this paper makes clear that Congolese seafarers sailed far from the "radical African Atlantic" (Weiss 2014) but pushed the frontiers of the "narrow sea" (Sivasundaram/Bashford/Armitage 2018) in the Belgian empire.

**Bio:** Daniel Tödt is currently postdoctoral fellow (awarded with the DAAD PRIME grant) at the University Konstanz and visiting scholar at the Institut des mondes Africaines (IMAf) in Aix-en-Provence. From 2018-2022, he was assistant professor of African history at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Before he held a fellowship at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg „Work and Human Lifecycle in Global History“ at the same university and a postdoctoral position at the International Graduate Research Program Berlin-New York-Toronto “The World in the City: Metropolitanism and Globalization from the 19th Century to the Present” based at the Center for Metropolitan Studies, Technical University Berlin. He published on imperial port cities, colonial maritime labour, African elite formation and postcolonial Marseille. His award-winning dissertation on the making on the African Bourgeoisie in the Belgian Congo was recently translated in English and published as “The Lumumba Generation” with De Gruyter.

# Discussants

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## Martin Dusinberre (University of Zurich)

**Bio:** Martin Dusinberre is Professor for Global History and Director of the Department of History at the University of Zurich. His research focuses on the history of modern Japan and global history, in particular Japanese migration and imperialism in and across the Asia-Pacific region. His latest monograph, *Mooring the Global Archive: A Japanese Ship and its Migrant Histories* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), explores archival epistemologies in global history through the case study of a Japanese migrant ship in the late-nineteenth century. In recent years he has co-edited special issues of *Historical Journal* (on “Uses of the Past between Europe and East Asia”, 2021), *Historische Anthropologie* (on “Transplantation: Sugar and Imperial Practice in Japan’s Pacific”, 2019), and *The Journal of Global History* (on “Being in Transit”, 2016). His first book, *Hard Times in the Hometown: A History of Community Survival in Modern Japan* (2012), was a microhistory of a “nuclear village” in Japan’s Inland Sea region. Since 2020 he has been on the Editorial Board of *Past & Present*.

## Tamara Fernando (IHR/LMU Munich)

**Bio:** Tamara Fernando is an incoming assistant professor at SUNY Stony Brook, New York (Fall ‘23) and a Past & Present postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Historical Research in London. Her research has three main focal points: the construction of scientific knowledge about the ocean, the connected intellectual, scientific, and labour histories of the Indian Ocean between the Middle East, South Asia and Southeast Asia, and the question of how the scientific archive addresses histories of the non-human. Her research has been published in *Past & Present* (“Seeing like the Sea”) and *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (“Mapping Oysters and Making Oceans”). Her present book project is a multi-sited history of pearling in the Indian Ocean.

# Conveners

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## David Armitage (Harvard University)

**Bio:** David Armitage is the Lloyd C. Blankfein Professor of History at Harvard University and an Affiliated Faculty Member at Harvard Law School. He is the author or editor of eighteen books, among them *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge UP, 2000), (co-ed.) *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Palgrave, 2009), (co-ed.) *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People* (Palgrave, 2014), (co-ed.), *Oceanic Histories* (Cambridge UP, 2017) and *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas* (Knopf, 2017). He is currently completing an edition of John Locke's colonial writings and starting work on two books, a global history of treaty-making (and treaty-breaking) and a study of opera and international law. Along with Alison Bashford and Sujit Sivasundaram, he edits the Cambridge University Press series 'Cambridge Oceanic Histories'.

## Sujit Sivasundaram (University of Cambridge)

**Bio:** Sujit Sivasundaram is Professor of World History at the University of Cambridge and Fellow in History at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. 'Waves Across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire' is his third book. It was awarded the British Academy Book Prize in 2021 and the Bentley Book Prize for World History 2022. He has also served as Sackler Caird Fellow at the National Maritime Museum and is currently President of the Pacific Circle, a group of scholars devoted to the study of knowledge and environment across the Indian and Pacific Oceans. He was editor of 'The Historical Journal' and serves on various editorial boards, including 'Past and Present.' Together with David Armitage and Alison Bashford he co-edits the book series, 'Cambridge Oceanic Histories.'

## Roland Wenzlhuemer (LMU Munich)

**Bio:** Roland Wenzlhuemer is Professor of Modern History and Co-Director of the Kaete Hamburger Research Centre *global dis:connect* at LMU. His research focuses primarily on colonial and global history. He investigated the socio-cultural transformation of colonial agrarian economies (Ceylon), researches the emergence and significance of global infrastructures (telegraphy), is interested in transitions and transits in global connections (intercontinental shipping) and deals with the theory and method of global history.

# Credits

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