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UNIVERSITÄT  
BERN

## **The Temporalities of Capitalism: Time, Timing and the Formation of the World Economy**

Organisers: Christof Dejung (Bern), Moritz von Brescius (Harvard and Bern)

23 to 25 June 2022, Hotel Bad Murtensee

The history of capitalism has attracted ever growing interest among scholars in the last decade. Several studies aimed for exploring the role of violence and imperialism for the implementation of capitalist economies across the world and studied the relation between state policy and economic actors. Others have expounded on the role of consumption for the establishment of industrial production, the increased commodification of everyday life, or the social embeddedness of economic interaction. Due to the role of entrepreneurial competition and the reliance on credit, capitalism is characterized by a high degree of volatility. Time management and the evaluation of future developments are thus crucial for economic actors.

Yet, even though pioneering studies such as those of E. P. Thompson (1967) or Jacques Le Goff (1960) pointed out the role of temporal regimes in the implementation of capitalism, only few studies have picked out this topic as a central theme so far (Sewell 2008; Beckert 2016; Ogle 2019). This conference aims for breaking new ground by exploring the significance of temporal regimes for the breakthrough of capitalism globally. It will address the following themes in particular:

- 1) The contributions will explore whether capitalist economies are structured by a particular manner of time management and calculating the future and examine when, and why, such techniques were implemented.
- 2) Papers will examine the extent to which capitalist economies were confronted with the 'non-simultaneity of the simultaneous' across the world. Were there frictions between linear capitalist time orders and other temporalities (such as natural cycles) and how did actors cope with, or capitalize on, respectively, such challenges?
- 3) How can the temporalities of capitalism be linked to recent debates about the Anthropocene? Could it be that the economic capacity of capitalism, rendered possible, among other things, by an efficient time management, destroyed the very ecological basis on which it relied in the first place?

By linking the history of temporality, which has become a vibrant research field in the last few years, to the history of capitalism, the workshop aims for confirming that economic history in general, and the history of capitalism in particular, cannot be understood without investigating the cultural processes that accompanied, and often rendered possible, the implementation of specific economic structures.

The conference is funded by the Historical Institute and the Center for Global Studies of the University of Bern.

## **PROGRAMME**

### **THURSDAY, 23 JUNE**

13:00 Reception

13:30 Introduction: Christof Dejung (Bern) and Moritz von Brescius (Harvard and Bern)

#### **14:00 Panel 1: Investors and Economic Expectations**

Chair: Mischa Suter (Geneva)

Alexia Yates (Manchester): Investor Time: A View from Nineteenth-century Europe

Ekaterina Svetlova (Twente): Economic Expectations in an Age of Artificial Intelligence

*15:30 Coffee Break*

#### **16:00 Panel 2: Socialism and the Quest for Alternatives to Capitalism**

Chair: David Rentsch (Bern)

Claudia Roesch (GHI Washington): Temporal Alternatives to Capitalism: The Role of Temporal Concepts in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Early Socialist Reform Concepts

Marcus Colla (Cambridge): Time Clashes - Global Capitalism and the Crisis of State Socialism

#### **17:30 Keynote 1**

Prasannan Parthasarathi (Boston): The Temporalities of Nature and Agriculture in Colonial South India

Chair: Moritz von Brescius (Harvard und Bern)

*19:30 Dinner*

## **FRIDAY, 24 JUNE**

### **9:00 Panel 3: Time is Money**

Chair: David Rentsch (Bern)

Mischa Suter (Geneva): Beyond Futurity and Acceleration: Uneven Temporalities of Money in Imperialism

Aidan Collins (Sheffield): The Timing of Failure in Bankruptcy Proceedings, 1674-1750

*11:00 Coffee Break*

### **11:00 Panel 4: Capitalist Time and the Biological Rhythms of Agriculture**

Chair: Damien Clavel (Zurich)

Moritz von Brescius (Harvard and Bern): Rubber, Scarcity Imperialism, and the Timing of Commodity Frontiers in the Industrial Age

Andreas Bolte (Freiburg): Temporalities of Rubber Production in Late Colonial Malaysia and Indonesia (1900-1940)

*13:00 Lunch*

### **14:30 Panel 5: Commodity Frontiers and Multi-temporal Regimes**

Chair: Christof Dejung (Bern)

Francisco Rivera (Washington and Toronto): Capitalist Temporalities and Interrelations of Agropastoral and Industrial Spaces in Ollagüe, Northern Chile (1890-1992)

Javier Francisco (Freiburg): Multiple Temporal Regimes at Indigenous-Imperial Contact Zones in North America

*16:00 Coffee Break*

**16:30 Panel 6 Macro-Temporalities: Cycles and Rhythms of Global Trade**

Chair: Juri Auderset (Bern)

Mark Metzler (Washington): Macro-temporalities of Capitalism: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and “the Birth of the Business Cycle”

Lesley Nicola Braun (Basel), Rhythms of Trade and Siren Songs: Importation Practices in the Democratic Republic of Congo

*20:00 Dinner*

**SATURDAY, 25 JUNE**

**9:00 Panel 7 Infrastructure and Material Flows**

Chair: Alexander Engel (Basel)

Monika Dommann (Zurich): Just in Time. The Temporality of Material Flows and Warehouses

Juri Auderset (Bern): Filling Up the Pores of Farm Work: Time, Agriculture and Industrial Capitalism

*10:30 Coffee Break*

**11:00 Panel 8: Scholarly Accounts of Economic Temporality**

Chair: Moritz von Brescius (Harvard and Bern)

Alexander Engel (Basel): Bandits, Prophets, or Burros? Conceptualizing Speculators in Futures Markets

12:00 Concluding Discussion