

## **Joint Ferguson Centre-OpenSpace half-day seminar on ‘Non-Eurocentric approaches to environmental history’**

2 November 2016, 12.30-4.00 pm, The open University, Milton Keynes, Library seminar rooms 1-2

The field of environmental history emerged just a few decades ago but has established itself as one of the most important and innovative interdisciplinary approaches to studies of the past, one that bridges the humanities and the sciences as well as the human and natural worlds. Moreover, with the current trend towards global approaches in the humanities and social sciences, environmental history is uniquely positioned to studying subjects outside the nation-state framework and highlighting perspectives from regions and societies beyond Europe. Jointly organised by the Ferguson Centre for African and Asian Studies and the OpenSpace Research Centre, this half-day seminar will present current work in environmental history focussing on Africa and South Asia, highlighting the salience of traditional ecological knowledge in shaping how people experience and respond to their changing local environments. This event is envisaged as the first in a series of research conversations led by research centres in FASS.

Speakers:

**Philippa Ryan (British Museum)** Changing food crops and agricultural risk management in modern and ancient northern Sudan.

**Abstract:** Nubian agriculture is rapidly altering due to technological, environmental and social changes. This research is part of a project ‘Sustainability and subsistence systems in a changing Sudan’ (funded by the AHRC 2013-2016) which compares present-day and ancient crop choices to investigate risk management within agricultural strategies of Nile village settlements. This paper will focus on outlining some of the major changes in agricultural practices over the last century and the reasons behind these shifts. Several crops, and associated foods, that were important earlier in the twentieth century are increasingly underutilized today. Some of these more ‘traditional crops’ are present in the archaeological record, indicating their long term use in the region. Questioning what is ‘traditional’ and what is not ‘traditional’ is providing both new perspectives on what categories of information might be comparable with the recent and distant past, but also about the potential future importance of today’s forgotten crops.

**Shonil Bhagwat (OU, Geography)** Cultural and ecological responses to 7500 years of environmental change in Kodagu, Karnataka.

**Abstract:** How do long-term environmental changes shape forest landscapes and what role do humans play in these landscape-wide changes? This talk presents the cultural and ecological dynamics of a tropical forest landscape in the Western Ghats mountains in Kodagu, Karnataka, India. This region has a long history of human presence and is well-known for its nature conservation traditions such as sacred forest groves. The region is believed to have been under agriculture for several millennia and the tradition of sacred grove conservation is also held to be equally ancient. Based on paleo-environmental archives, archaeological evidence, and historical literature, the talk explores environmental and anthropogenic drivers of vegetation change. It portrays a complex picture of losses and gains

of forest cover and identifies ecological and cultural responses to 7500 years of environmental change.

**Programme:**

12.30: Lunch

1.15: Philippa Ryan (British Museum): Changing food crops and agricultural risk management in modern and ancient northern Sudan.

2.00: Shonil Bhagwat (OU, Geography): Cultural and ecological responses to 7500 years of environmental change in Kodagu, Karnataka.

2.45: Coffee break

3.00: Questions to speakers and discussion

4.00: End of seminar