

## **Summary Report – Pierre du Bois Workshop 2021**

The first Pierre du Bois Doctoral Workshop, titled “Modernizing Landscapes: New Histories of Development and the Environment between Europe and the World”, took place at the Graduate Institute on 22 October 2021. A group of four PhD researchers from the IHEID International History and Politics Department – Mona Bieling, Ahmad Fahoum, Simon Lobach, and Michele Sollai – organized the workshop, with the generous support of the Pierre du Bois Foundation.

Fifteen scholars participated in the workshop. Besides numerous participants from the Graduate Institute, the workshop organizers selected two outstanding papers of PhD researchers from Swiss Universities, and invited three senior scholars – among which two from UK-based prestigious institutions – to contribute in various forms to the workshop. Overall, more than thirty people attended and participated in the workshop in person.

The workshop featured a set of three panels, each including three speakers, a chair, and a discussant. Moreover, the workshop included an informal Q&A session on “Crafting a Career as a Scholar”, and a final roundtable on “Writing the History of Development and the Environment: Past, Present, and Future Approaches”.

After the introductory remarks, the first panel titled “More-than-Human Agents of Development” discussed the historical relationship between human and non-human actors, in an effort to understand and emphasize the role that the latter played not just as spectators or background but also as active agents of development and modernization. The papers presented reflected on the central role of animals in development policies drawn and enacted in the first half of the 20th century. Based on the case study of Palestine during the British mandate years (1917-1948), Mona Bieling shed light on the role played by the Middle Eastern goat in informing British colonial environmental thinking. Efrat Gilad looked at camel and pork meat production and consumption in Palestine during World War II. Joshua Thew introduced the livestock improvement program initiated by the Near East Foundation in Greece in the interwar and post-war period.

Panel 2, “Colonial (Infra)Structures of Development”, delved into the key issue of infrastructure in the context of plans and practices of colonial development, focusing particularly on the environmental logics and effects of such modernizing policies. The papers presented articulated modernization schemes in different places, which allowed for the examination of the similarities and the particularities of each case. Moe Omiya investigated the connections and continuities in the development of the port city of Tsingtao (China) and of its rural surroundings during German and then Japanese colonial rule (1898-1945). Amal Shahid examined the relationship between British colonial public works, famines,

agriculture, and climate in the North-Western Provinces of India in the late 19th century. Ahmad Fahoum concluded the panel with a paper on land reclamation projects and the fight against malaria in British-mandate Palestine.

Following the lunch break, workshop participants convened for a special session revolving around some of the key issues and opportunities that early career historians may encounter when pursuing a career in academia. Benefiting from the experience and advice of the senior scholars participating in the workshop, the conversation touched upon the questions of academic networking, publication strategies, choosing between different post-docs, and conventions in various national academic environments.

The third and last panel “Science, Expertise, and the Development Landscape” investigated the role of scientists and development experts in shaping colonial and post-colonial environments. Michele Sollai focused on the case of Italian-occupied Ethiopia (1936-1941), showing how Italian experts sought to integrate “local” agricultural and environmental knowledge within the scientific development framework of colonial rule. Nathalia Capellini examined the history of the construction of the Tucuruí hydroelectric dam in the Brazilian Amazon, focusing in particular on the developmentalist plans and narratives produced by Brazil’s military regime since the 1960s and their contrast with the implementation of this project in the following years. Last but not least, Simon Lobach concluded the panel with a paper on various attempts of modernization and resource exploitation of Suriname’s Amazon, with particular reference to the relationship between colonial experts and administrators and the Maroon communities inhabiting the rainforest.

The workshop ended with a roundtable centred on some of the key themes that have accompanied the past and present development of historiographies on development and the environment. Emily Brownell, Antoine Acker, Helen Curry, Shaila Seshia Galvin, and Susanna Hecht discussed together with the workshop participants relevant issues within both fields. Among the topics discussed during the roundtable, themes that figured prominently were the conceptualization and representation of the agency of non-human actors, problems and challenges in assessing the role and representation of “indigenous” knowledge, and how the historical study of development and the environment can contribute to contemporary debates on development and environmental policy.