

University  
of Basel

Department  
of History



Call for Papers | 9-10 November 2023 | Deadline 30 June 2023

## Reflections on the Past, Perspectives for the Future: The Role of Historians in Times of Societal Changes

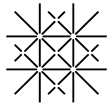
Swiss Conference for Early-Career Historians | University of Basel | 9-10 November 2023 | Basel Graduate School of History | Website: <https://dg.philhist.unibas.ch/de/doktorat/bgsh-reflections-2023/> | Organization: Séveric Yersin and Lars Kury

Financial crashes, pandemics, wars, environmental disasters, and social injustices related to gender, race, and class, among others, have sparked growing public interest in historical research. Historians are frequently asked to provide commentary or guidance, and to share their expertise with the public. They contextualize contemporary situations historically, engage in debates with representatives from politics, economics, and the media, and consistently remind us that many societal dynamics we face today are not unique to the twenty-first century.

As a result, historians often find themselves no longer merely in the role of interpreters of the past, but rather assume a responsible, sometimes even political, position. Balancing the need for scientific rigor in their arguments with the demands of shaping public discourse poses significant challenges especially regarding the complexities of the twenty-first-century world.

The Conference provides a platform for PhD and early-postdoc researchers in the field of (early-modern or modern) history or related disciplines to present their ongoing research projects and contribute to the scholarly discourse on the role of historians in shaping and informing present-day debates. We offer participants the opportunity, first, to present their research projects and, second, to bridge the gap between their research and the broader contemporary world.

We are particularly interested in the following questions: How can one's own research project (and historical sciences in general) provide illumination and understanding of current societal dynamics? How can historical research be effectively applied to address and inform the multifaceted challenges of the twenty-first century, such as social inequalities, environmental crises, and geopolitical tensions? How are historical narratives subject to reinterpretation, political utilization, or manipulation in times of societal tension? Furthermore, how does history get misused or appropriated for present-day debates, and what implications does this have for historical scholarship and the public understanding of the past?



We invite PhD and early-Post-Doc (PhD +3 y.) researchers active in the field of History or related sciences to present their research projects and critically examine these questions. Contributors will receive feedback on their project from renowned historians in their respective fields. Applicants can apply for one of the following five panels (see below for a more detailed description of the panels):

**Panel A:** Anthropocene, Capitalocene & Environment | Chair: Prof. Dr. Debjani Bhattacharyya (Zurich)

**Panel B:** Violence & War | Chair: Prof. Dr. F. Benjamin Schenk (Basel)

**Panel C:** Health & Pandemics | Chair: Prof. Dr. Laurence Monnais (Lausanne)

**Panel D:** Gender, Class and Social (In-)Equality | Chair: Prof. Dr. Caroline Arni (Basel)

**Panel E:** Global Economic Regimes | Chair: Prof. Dr. Matthieu Leimgruber (Zurich)

This event is organized by the Basel Graduate School of History. The conference will take place from November 9 (c. 1:00 p.m.) – 10 (c. 7.00 p.m.), 2023, in Basel. We are pleased to announce that the renowned historian Prof. Dr. Debjani Bhattacharyya (University of Zurich) has agreed to deliver the conference's keynote lecture.

**Keynote Lecture:** Prof. Dr. Debjani Bhattacharyya

Closing the Conference, a roundtable discussion will see historians currently active in academic or non-academic contexts debate on their role, the challenges they face as well as the future of our profession.

**Roundtable Discussion:** Prof. Dr. Corey Ross (Basel), Thanushiyah Korn, M.A. (Basel), Prof. Dr. Laurence Monnais (Lausanne), Monique Ligtenberg, M.A. (Zurich), Dr. Lea Haller (NZZ Geschichte).

## Participation

Please submit a paper title, an abstract (max 300 words) as well as the Panel of preference (A–E) to Marino Ferri ([marino.ferri@unibas.ch](mailto:marino.ferri@unibas.ch)) by **June 30, 2023**. Please specify your affiliation.

Decisions of acceptance will be announced by the beginning of August 2023. The Conference will take place as an in-person-event and will generally be held in English; however, participants may present in German or French. The attendance is free of charge. For those unable to obtain reimbursement from their home institution up to 40 CHF will be covered as



long as the travel fund allows. Accommodation will be provided upon request for participants living further than two hours away from Basel.

After acceptance, panelists will be asked to submit an extended paper (max. 5 pages) two weeks before the conference. Panelists will then give a talk based on the pre-circulated paper (max. 10 minutes), followed by a commentary by the discussants, and an open discussion.

More information will be available on the website of the conference <https://dg.philhist.unibas.ch/de/doktorat/bgsh-reflections-2023/> For questions, please contact the organizers at [lars.kury@unibas.ch](mailto:lars.kury@unibas.ch) or [severic.yersin@unibas.ch](mailto:severic.yersin@unibas.ch).

## Panel Description

### ***Panel A: Anthropocene, Capitalocene & Environment***

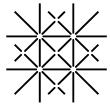
Chair: Prof. Dr. Debjani Bhattacharyya

At the dawn of the Anthropocene, the study of environmental change and its various causes, processes, and consequences is no longer confined solely to the natural sciences. The humanities and social sciences have recently integrated environmental issues into their own domains, with a focus on various thematic areas such as on non-human agency and rights, the environmental impact of capitalism, the economic use of resource imperialism, or the political impact of nature preservation movements. Such developments have produced a vibrant and dynamic field of research, especially in the discipline of environmental history. This panel aims to provide a platform for contributors to present their research in the field of environmental history and the Anthropocene while addressing the question of how historians can become (politically) engaged regarding the 21st century's climate crisis. We invite scholars working on such or a similar topic while exploring the role of historians and historical narratives in contemporary environmental policy discourses.

### ***Panel B: Violence & War***

Chair: Prof. Dr. F. Benjamin Schenk

In times of war and violence, historians face a delicate balance between their roles as analytical interpreters of the past and their responsibility to contribute to political public discourse. This panel seeks to explore the various approaches and narratives that historians can utilize to shed light on and contextualize current war situations. We invite scholars working on a research project related to war and violence in the early modern or modern era and encourage to study how their work can offer diverse perspectives on contemporary



conflicts. We are especially interested in examining the potential of reflecting on the historical origins and legacies of past conflicts to contribute to a more informed and nuanced public discourse.

### ***Panel C: Health & Pandemics***

Chair: Prof. Dr. Laurence Monnais

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has, perhaps more than any other recent event, highlighted the complex economic, social, political and cultural ramifications of global diseases and health crises. Historians have repeatedly pointed out that responses to infectious diseases, institutional crises within healthcare systems, or other health-related challenges are not specific to the twenty-first century, but rather have deep-rooted histories that extend way back to antiquity. This panel offers researchers an opportunity to present their studies on the history of health and medicine, while examining how historians can analyze both local and global health crises and pandemics in light of current health emergencies. We invite scholars working on the history of health, medicine or pandemics to present their research project and discuss ways in which the historical sciences can leverage political and institutional opportunities to shape public discourse on pandemics and health issues.

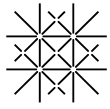
### ***Panel D: Gender, Class and Social (In-)Equality***

Chair: Prof. Dr. Caroline Arni

The field of gender history has emerged as a vital area of investigation in recent decades, examining how gender roles and relationships have shaped historical societies and cultures. Historians have often responded to and reflected upon contemporary discourses, including discussions of workplace equality, sexual harassment, or LGBTQ+ rights. This panel aims to address these issues and explores how historians can engage with the broader public on matters of gender and social justice. We invite contributions on various topics related to gender histories, such as the history of women's rights movements, the construction of masculinity and femininity, or the intersections of gender with race, class, and sexuality. Panelists are especially encouraged to reflect on how their research can contribute to present-day debates around gender and social equality.

### ***Panel E: Global Economic Regimes***

Chair: Prof. Dr. Matthieu Leimgruber



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In the post-globalizing twenty-first-century world, energy and resource issues have become highly contested topics in public and political discourse. Questions of energy scarcity, financial pressures for households and businesses, and the economic approach of Northern countries towards those in the global South are currently closely intertwined with the rise of authoritarian states and multi-polar tendencies in international politics. This panel seeks to explore how historical perspectives can shed light on current debates in the fields of energy, finance, or international trade. We invite scholars with a research project in the discipline of economic history, finance, or trade, while attempting to establish links to the economic and financial challenges of the twenty-first century. Additionally, the panel is interested in exploring how economic issues of our time have developed historically and how historians can reflect on current economic crises.