

UNIVERSITY OF
LUCERNE

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

GLOBAL HISTORIES OF HAIR, C. 1500–2026

8–10 OCTOBER 2026



FUNDED BY



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Science Foundation

GLOBAL HISTORIES OF HAIR, C. 1500–2026

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE, ORGANIZED BY «MATTER OF DISTINCTION: HAIR, RACE, TRADE, AND MULTISPECIES HISTORY, 1650–1820» (SNSF STARTING GRANT)

Hyper-present on almost all heads and bodies, hair is a forceful matter of difference. It signals gender, class, sometimes religion or politics as well as racialized distinction. As such, hair connects and disconnects people and other species across the globe and through time. The conference «Global Histories of Hair, c. 1500–2026» brings together researchers working on hair as a matter of distinction around the early modern and modern world.

One of the conference's focuses lies on the early modern era, during which human and animal hair circulated widely as material, commodity and medium of distinction. Worldwide, hair was cut, collected, traded, worn, described and transformed. Hair practices became closely entangled with ideas of social hierarchy, race, gender, labour, and bodily difference.

A second focus concerns later and contemporary constellations in which hair continues to function as a marker of distinction and inequality. This includes the ongoing global trade in hair as an important resource, racialized regulations of hair, the experience of hairlessness, and unequal access to hair care that is shaped by structural conditions.

Programme

DAY 1: 8 OCTOBER 2026

13.30	Arrival
13.45–14.15	Introduction
14.15–16.00	Panel 1: Materiality «Scientific and Sanitary»: Black Women and the Formulation of Early Twentieth Century Haircare Ijeoma B. Kola (University of Notre Dame, USA) Combing the World: Hair, Grooming, and Global Commodity Chains in the Rural Industrial Territories of France (Pays d’Olmes, Ézy-sur-Eure, and Oyonnax, Sixteenth-Twentieth Centuries) Bruno Evans (University of Toulouse II–Jean Jaurès, France) Empire on the Scalp: Wigs, Borrowed Hair, and Colonial Personhood in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Drama Amitabh Vikram Dwivedi (Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University, India)
16.00–16.30	Coffee Break
16.30–17.45	Panel 2: Visuality Visualising Human Difference: Wild Hair and Indigenous Women in Sixteenth-Century Print Culture Lila Wickers-Levy (National Library of France, France) Mapping Digitized Race: Hair Texture and Colonial Visuality in AI Driss Faddouli (Chouaib Doukkali University, Morocco)
17.45–18.00	Break
18.00–19.00	Keynote: Close Encounters of a Hairy Kind: Insights from the Global Trade in Human Hair in the 21st Century Emma Tarlo (Goldsmiths University of London, UK)
19.30	Dinner

9:15	Arrival
9.30–10.45	Panel 3: Markets and Commerce «A Vast Transnational Arena»: The Global Human Hair Trade, Women’s Agency, and the Limits of the Archive, ca. 1850–1900 Elizabeth L. Block (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, USA) From Temple Tonsure to Woman’s Wig: Making Global Indian Hair Markets in the 1960s–70s Jason Petrusis (University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong)
10.45–11.15	Coffee Break
11.15–12.30	Panel 4: Shaving and Scalping The Holyday Barber: Repressions and Accommodations Concerning Beard Shaving and Hairstyling during Religious Feast Days in Late Medieval and Early Modern Catholic Europe François Léauté Colas (University Clermont Auvergne, France) «Cou Ouabouchou Ouichtoui, He is bearded like a Hare»: The Aesthetics and Politics of Hair in the Franco-Indigenous Encounter Jean-François Lozier (Canadian Museum of History, Canada)
12.30–14.00	Lunch Break
14.00–15.45	Panel 5: Hair Loss and Gender Narratives of Hair, Emotions and Resistance in Autobiographies of Orphanage Childhood, c. 1870–1939 Emily Cuming (Liverpool John Moores University, UK) What If There Is No Hair? Experiences of Baldness among Hairless Women in Twenty-First-Century Finland Johanna Latva (University of Turku, Finland) Life is Too Short to Have Boring Hair: Fashionable Haircuts, Social Change, and Resistance among Upper-Class Women in Pakistan Elisabetta Iob (Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, Italy)
15.45–16.15	Coffee Break
16.15–17.45	Roundtable: Working with Hair Helia Jamshidi (ETH Zurich), Annika Bärwald (University of Lucerne) in conversation with Tina Berner-Azigbo, Dania Albert Vázquez (Curl-ish, Zurich), Andrea Blick (Haarwerkstatt, Basel)
18.00	Apéro riche

9.15	Arrival
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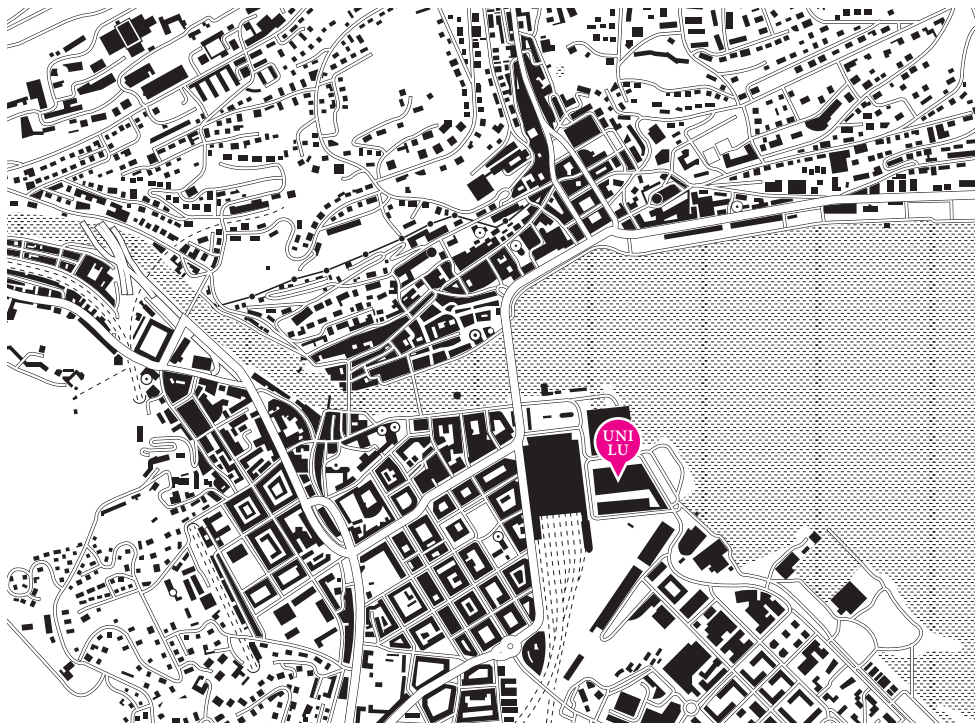
9.30–10.45	Panel 6: Colonial Embodiment
	The Colonial Semiotics of Hair in Early Modern Ireland and England Florian Klaeger (University of Bayreuth, Germany)
	Parted, Pomaded, and Contested: Hair, Racialized Embodiment, and Swadeshi Selfhood in Bengal, c. 1820–1920 Paromita Das Gupta (Mahindra University, India)

10.45–11.15	Coffee Break
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11.15–12.30	Panel 7: Narrating Enslavement
	Hair in the Contact Zone: Equiano and Racialized Distinction Oge Samuel Okonkwo (University of Ghana, Ghana)
	I am Not My Hair: Enslaved Africans and Freedmen Speak for Themselves Lisa Bratton (Tuskegee University, USA)

12.30–13.00	Closing Comment
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13.00	Lunch
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REGISTRATION AND INFORMATION

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ORGANIZATION TEAM

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SNSF Starting Grant Project:
«Matter of Distinction: Hair,
Race, Trade, and
Multispecies History,
1650–1820»

VENUE

University of Lucerne,
Froburgstrasse 3,
Room: 4.B55, 4th Floor