

Session 4: Of Nido Cans and Taka Notes

20th May: 15.00 n

KUM

Mythri Jegathesan, Chinara Shah

Session 1: Of Matchp

19th May: 16.00–17.30 GMT

Session 3: Of MaConertions of South

Timothyf

Session 2:
Of Fezzes and China Root

6th May: 15.00–16.30 GMT

Shamara Wettimuny, Shireen Hamza

Session 5: Of Hooks and Handkerchiefs

27th May: 15.00–16.30 GMT

Luke Heslop, Adhitya Dhanapal

Can a matchbook contain and displace known histories of worker struggles in the Sri Lankan hill country? What might the traces of the china root in Persian pharmacopeia suggest to us about 18th century patients across the Indian Ocean? How does a butter yellow can of milk powder illuminate mobilities between the southern Indian state of Kerala and the Arabian Gulf? What does the journey

Mythri Jegathesan

Object
Matchbook

This talk is about an election campaign matchbook that a Tamil tea estate woman worker gave me ahead of Sri Lanka's August 2015 Parliamentary Elections. I take this matchbook as an entry point to “watch” (Campt 2017) how a sensorium of plantation paternalisms nests in the materialities of Sri Lanka's South-Central tea plantations. From generations of Indo-Lankan diplomatic encounters to ongoing struggles for labor justice, I consider

Session 2: Of Fezzes and China Root

Thursday, 6th May
15.00 – Geodcastoot

Shamara Wettimuny

Object
Fez cap

In December 1905, around 30,000 Muslims gathered in the grounds of the Maradana mosque in Colombo in the most significant episode of pan-Islamic solidarity during British rule in Ceylon. What had triggered this ‘monster meeting’ as it was dubbed in the press? In this talk, I analyse a British colonial decision that threatened Muslim identity in Ceylon: the prohibition of the ‘fez cap’ in Courts in 1905. The fez cap had only been introduced to Ceylon as a symbol of Islamic religiosity as recently as 1883. How and why had it come to be termed the Muslims’ ‘national headgear’ in just two decades? I investigate the value placed on material, bodily markers of identity in the context of an Islamic revival, and explore the relationship between the Ottoman Sultan, who was considered by many Sunni Muslims the ‘Caliph of Islam’, and the Muslims of Ceylon.

Bio

Shamara Wettimuny is a doctoral candidate in History at the University of Oxford, researching identity formation and religious conflict in British colonial Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). She has a MSc and a BSc in International Relations and History from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Shireen Hamza

Object
ch b ch n , China root

The seventeenth century explosion of commodified materia medica has been studied by historians of European empire – including china root, known as a treatment for syphilis. But how were these medical commodities understood by practitioners of non-European medicine? I followed the traces of ch b ch n , or china root, across Persian medical treatises and pharmacopeia, and found a keen interest in the origin, properties and applications of this root among practitioners of “Islamic medicine”, or tibb. Their interest manifested differently than those of their European contemporaries, though they mostly shared a Galenic medical paradigm. Decentering the (European-language) documents that attest to the purchase, cultivation or circulation of concrete quantities of china root, I highlight the affective and epistemic aspects of ch b ch n ’s histories in Persianate contexts. Through video and prose, I hope to share these resonances, for a hakim in eighteenth-century Murshidabad, patients across the Indian Ocean ecumene, and for researchers today.

Bio

Shireen Hamza is a doctoral student at Harvard University researching the history of science and medicine in the medieval Islamic world, with a focus on the Indian Ocean littoral. She is also managing editor of the Ottoman History Podcast.

Timothy Cooper

Object

Master-copy

The object examined is an audiocassette of popular music from north-western Pakistan whose circuitous routes took it from Afghanistan to the United Arab Emirates. No longer sold to the public, the cassette is now used as a master-copy by an Afghan store-holder in the Emirate of Sharjah who has traded in Pashto-language film and music for the last three decades. A master-copy is a print made in close proximity to a particular carrier— such as a celluloid film, an audiocassette, or a vinyl record — considered to be the earliest or most unblemished recording extant. It plays a central role in the preservation of audio-visual media through its dispersal across platforms and carriers. By building a repertoire of master-copies traders also established successful businesses in the Gulf,

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Register here:
[Zoom-Link](#)

Mohamed Shafeeq Karinkurayil

Object
Nido can

The butter-yellow Nido can of powdered milk is one of the ubiquitous signs of the Arabian Gulf in the households of the south Indian state of Kerala. Its content, the powdered milk, signifies the giant leaps of technology while the end product of the milk powder – milk – also transcodes itself into local significations of material prosperity and respectability. A metal can with a plastic lid, the Nido can far outlive its original use and continues in the household as a container for various other materials, and as a signifier of the foreign. This talk will look at the instance of a singular Nido can as it tells us of the migrant lives of the late 1970s in the Arabian Gulf.

Bio
Mohamed Shafeeq Karinkurayil works at Manipal Centre for Humanities, Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE), Karnataka, India. His current research looks at the cultural dimensions of migration from Kerala to the Arabian Gulf.

Saif Osmani

Object
500 taka note from East Pakistan

In marking a 50 year milestone for Bangladesh, Saif presents an account of receiving a 500 taka note from East Pakistan (1947–1971) that contains both Urdu and Bengali script. Saif speaks about gaps in remembering, on forgetting and the complexities faced by the Bangladeshi diaspora in inner London and their shifting relationship with their home country as told through the objects that hold personal memories. He asks: what is remembered and what falls from collective memory?

50 years of Bangladesh through 50 objects forms part of the wider Migrant Memory and the Post-colonial Imagination research project (MMPI) funded by the Leverhulme Trust at Loughborough University (www.memoriesofpartition.co.uk). Using arts-based ethnographic methods, MMPI explores memories of the Partition of India and wider processes of decolonisation, and examines their role in contemporary British Asian identities and communities.

Bio
Saif is a visual artist and spatial designer of Sylheti-Bengali background who works as a Researcher on the MMPI project. He has a socially-engaged arts practice and was recently a visiting fellow/artist-in-residence at Loughborough University's new campus in East London.

Luke Heslop

Object

Longshoreman's Hook

A cylindrical piece of wood is cut to measure almost perfectly the width of a man's hand across the knuckle. When placed in a labourer's hand with his fist clenched, his fingers will envelop it tightly, and satisfyingly, save for a length of steel protruding from the wood between the middle and index finger. This steel will travel straight for a few inches before curling into a hook forming a near perfect extension of the carriers' body. With this hook a labourer can almost double the load he might ordinarily be able to carry. This simple tool of wood and steel is a material object ubiquitous across South Asian geographies of labour. Attached to the hands of stevedores, emancipated slaves, and 'coolies' in ports and labour sites across the subcontinent, the longshoreman's hook, has had an historical hand in the movement of goods and the extraction of value from labour under capital. The hook has also played an informal role in the physical protection of workers. Though at one level a commonplace tool, it has been personalised by labourers.